

Upward Socioeconomic Mobility, Psychological Stress, and Physical Health

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Background

- Low childhood socioeconomic status (SES) increases the risk of chronic inflammatory illness and poor cardiovascular health in adulthood (Cohen et al., 2010; Milaniak & Jaffe, 2019).
- It is commonly assumed that transitioning from low SES to high SES by achieving upward socioeconomic mobility should improve a range of life outcomes.
- Upward mobility has been found to have a surprising toll on physical health. Upwardly mobile adults have higher chronic inflammation and worse cardiovascular function than adults with stably high or stably low SES (Chen et al., 2022).
- People who have experienced upward socioeconomic mobility report experiencing distress from challenges that are specific to ascending social class (Hudson et al., 2020).
- Unique financial stressors faced by people with low childhood SES in high SES environments may explain the connection between upward mobility and negative health outcomes.

References

- Chen, E., Brody, G. H., & Miller, G. E. (2022). What are the health consequences of upward mobility? *Annual Review of Psychology*, 73(1), 599–628.
- Cohen, S., Janicki-Deverts, D., Chen, E., & Matthews, K. A. (2010). Childhood socioeconomic status and adult health. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1186(1), 37–55.
- Hudson, D., Sacks, T., Irani, K., & Asher, A. (2020). The price of the ticket: Health costs of upward mobility. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(4), 1179.
- Milaniak, I., & Jaffe, S. R. (2019). Childhood socioeconomic status and inflammation: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*, 78, 161–176.

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For adults with low childhood SES, expecting greater socioeconomic mobility will be associated with heightened stress from financial insecurity and pressure to financially support family.

Hypotheses

Greater financial stress experienced by upwardly mobile adults with low childhood SES will predict greater inflammatory and cardiovascular reactivity.

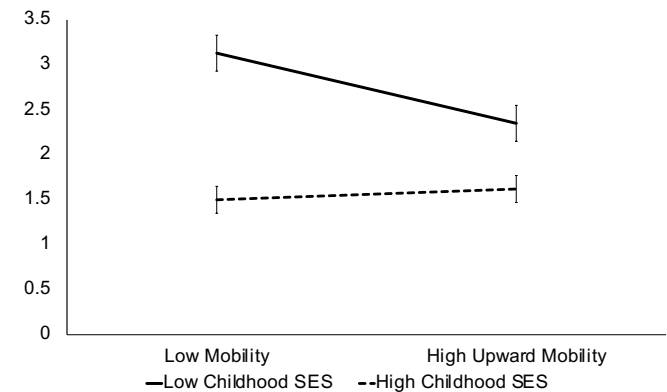
Method

- 167 undergraduate students (61.1% female; $M_{age} = 19.03$; $SD = 1.32$) completed a guided writing task about their childhood, current, and expected future environment.
- Participants reported their perceived future financial insecurity and anticipated financial obligation to family.
- Saliva samples were collected before the writing task and 45-60 minutes after the writing task to measure the inflammatory stress response (IL-1 β , IL-6, and TNF- α).
- Cardiovascular measures were taken before the writing task and immediately after the writing task to measure the cardiovascular stress response (heart rate, systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure).

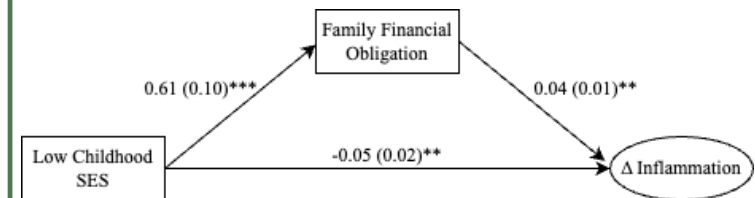
Conclusions

- Adults in the early stages of upward socioeconomic mobility may be optimistic about the social and financial implications of their future high SES.
- Some psychological stressors faced by adults from low SES backgrounds may have tangible, physiological effects on health.

Financial Insecurity



Financial Strain and Inflammation



Summary of Results

- For adults with high childhood SES, expected upward mobility was not related to financial insecurity.
- Adults with low childhood SES reported feeling more financially secure when they expected to have higher SES in the future.
- Adults with lower childhood SES anticipated a greater obligation to provide financial support for their families of origin than adults from higher SES backgrounds.
- Greater family financial obligation was associated with a greater increase in inflammation.