

Social class, social mobility, and mental health

Vanzella-Yang, A., & Veenstra, G. (2025). Social class, social mobility, and mental health. *CRDCN Research-Policy Snapshots*, 4(1).
<http://hdl.handle.net/11375/30921>

Context

This study investigated the relationship between intergenerational mobility and mental health in Canada, a country with mobility rates higher than those of the United States but lower than those of Nordic countries. This study used uncommonly accurate income data for respondents and their parents and deployed advanced statistical methods to distinguish the effects of mobility from those of social positions of origin and destination. The analysis focused on intergenerational mobility in income and in education, two key dimensions of social class. The Kessler (K-10) scale of psychological distress was used to assess mental health.

Key finding(s) from the research

Downward educational mobility is associated with greater psychological distress among men.

Population(s) studied: Canadian adults aged 25 years or older

Research dataset(s) used: Longitudinal and International Study of Adults (LISA) linked with T1 Family Files from Canada Revenue Agency

Policy implications for this research

Individuals in the study with consistently low incomes over their lifetimes experienced relatively high levels of psychological distress, as did men who experienced downward educational mobility. In this context, it is imperative to provide mental health resources and support for individuals who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, with consideration paid to the life course stage in which the socioeconomic circumstances arose. Given the links between psychological distress and other health outcomes, such support could additionally prevent the onset of more serious health problems, promote social and health equity, and reduce costs to individuals and society.

Policy area(s) this research can inform: Education, training and learning; Health; Income, pensions, spending and wealth; Population and demography; Society and community

Read the full article

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