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Breaking down the components of the SES–health gradient with sibling comparisons

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ABSTRACT:

Although the SES-health gradient is well-established (Adler, 1994), the relationship of different factors of SES with health is not. Often, the components of SES are used interchangeably without investigation and may not be explicitly stated. Further, SES-health research typically ignores familial confounding as well as intergenerational effects. To address these limitations, we compare two methodological approaches. Specifically, we examined each component of SES and its consequences in health, and compared the results from the classic regression approach with the sibling comparison method. Data is from the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth; we quantified SES as income, wealth, education levels, and occupation to predict mental and physical health at ages 40, 50, and 60. First, we conducted regression analyses to see how SES components related to health outcomes. Then, we replicated this regression using a discordant-kinship model (Garrison & Rogers, 2016), to distinguish within- and between-family variance. We compared the results of each approach and found that results differed. The covariate approach suggested that all numerous components were predictive of health, whereas the sibling comparisons found results that differed across components and measures of health. Further implications and limitations are discussed.

References

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