

CHILDREN, YOUTH, FAMILIES & SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses not just income but also educational attainment, occupational prestige, and subjective perceptions of social status and social class. Socioeconomic status can encompass quality of life attributes as well as the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society. Poverty, specifically, is not a single factor but rather is characterized by multiple physical and psychosocial stressors. Further, SES is a consistent and reliable predictor of a vast array of outcomes across the life span, including physical and psychological health. Thus, SES is relevant to all realms of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, education, and advocacy.

SES AFFECTS OUR SOCIETY

SES affects overall human functioning, including our physical and mental health. Low SES and its correlates, such as lower educational achievement, poverty, and poor health, ultimately affect our society. Inequities in health distribution, resource distribution, and quality of life are increasing in the United States and globally. Society benefits from an increased focus on the foundations of socioeconomic inequities and efforts to reduce the deep gaps in socioeconomic status in the United States and abroad.

SES IMPACTS THE LIVES OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Research indicates that SES is a key factor influencing quality of life, across the life span, for children, youth, and families (CYF).

Psychological Health

Increasing evidence supports the link between lower SES and negative psychological health outcomes, while more positive psychological outcomes such as optimism, self-esteem, and

perceived control have been linked to higher levels of SES for youth

Lower levels of SES have been found to be associated with the following:

- Higher levels of emotional and behavioral difficulties, including social problems, delinquent behavior symptoms, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder among adolescents (DeCarlo Santiago, Wadsworth, & Stump, 2011; Russell, Ford, Williams, & Russell, 2016; Spencer, Kohn, & Woods, 2002).
- Higher rates of depression, anxiety, attempted suicide, cigarette dependence, illicit drug use, and episodic heavy drinking among adolescents (Newacheck, Hung, Park, Brindis, & Irwin, 2003).
- Higher levels of aggression (Molnar, Cerda, Roberts, & Buka, 2008), hostility, perceived threat, and discrimination for youth (Chen & Paterson, 2006).
- Higher incidence of Alzheimer's disease later in life (Evans et al., 1997; Fratiglioni & Roca, 2001; Fratiglioni, Winblad, & von Strauss, 2007; Karp et al., 2004). However, socioeconomic disparities in cell aging are evident in early life, long before the onset of age-related diseases (Needham, Fernández, Lin, Epel, & Blackburn, 2012).
- Elevated rates of morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases later in life (Miller, Chen, & Parker, 2011).

Physical Health

Research continues to link lower SES to a variety of negative health outcomes at birth and throughout the life span.

Lower levels of SES have been found to be associated with the following:

- Higher infant mortality. In the United States, babies born to White mothers have an expected mortality rate of 5.35 per 1,000 births. In comparison, babies born to Black mothers had a mortality rate of 12.35 per 1,000 births (Haider, 2014).



- Higher likelihood of being sedentary (Newacheck et al., 2003) and higher body mass index for adolescents (Chen & Paterson, 2006), possibly because of a lack of neighborhood resources—such as playgrounds and accessible healthy food options.
- Higher levels of obesity. U.S. counties with poverty rates of >35% had obesity rates 145% greater than wealthy counties (Levine, 2011).
- Higher physiological markers of chronic stressful experiences for adolescents (Chen & Paterson, 2006).
- Higher rates of cardiovascular disease for adults (Colhoun, Hemingway, & Poulter, 1998; Kaplan & Keil, 1993; Steptoe & Marmot, 2004).

Education

Increasing evidence supports the link between SES and educational outcomes.

- Low SES and exposure to adversity are linked to decreased educational success (Sheridan & McLaughlin, 2016). Early experiences and environmental influences can have a lasting impact on learning (linguistic, cognitive and socioemotional skills), behavior, and health (Shonkoff & Garner, 2012).
- Children from low-SES families often begin kindergarten with significantly less linguistic knowledge (Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, & Freppon, 1995). As such, children from low-Children from less-advantaged homes score at least 10% lower than the national average on national achievement scores in mathematics and reading (Hochschild, 2003).
- Children from less-advantaged homes score at least 10% lower than the national average on national achievement scores in mathematics and reading (Hochschild, 2003)
- Children in impoverished settings are much more likely to be absent from school throughout their educational experiences (Zhang, 2003), further increasing the learning gap between them and their wealthier peers.
- While national high school dropout rates have steadily declined, dropout rates for children living in poverty have steadily increased. Low-income students fail to graduate at 5 times the rate of middle-income families and 6 times that of higher income youth (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016)

Family Well-Being

Evidence indicates that socioeconomic status affects family stability, including parenting practices and developmental outcomes for children (Trickett, Aber, Carlson, & Cicchetti, 1991).

- Resilience is optimized when protective factors are strengthened at all socioecological levels, including individual, family, and community levels (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009).

- Poverty is a reliable predictor of child abuse and neglect. Among low-income families, those with family exposure to substance use exhibit the highest rates of child abuse and neglect (Ondersma, 2002).
- Lower SES has been linked to domestic crowding, a condition that has negative consequences for adults and children, including higher psychological stress and poor health outcomes (Melki, Beydoun, Khogali, Tamim, & Yunis, 2004).
- Seven in 10 children living with a single mother are low income, compared to less than a third (32%) of children living in other types of family structures (Shriberg, 2013).
- All family members living in poverty are more likely to be victims of violence. Racial and ethnic minorities who are also of lower SES are at an increased risk of victimization (Pearlman, Zierler, Gjelsvik, & Verhoek-Oftedahl, 2004).
- Maintaining a strong parent–child bond helps promote healthy child development, particularly for children of low SES (Milteer, Ginsburg, & Mulligan, 2012).

GET INVOLVED

- Support parents and caregivers in combating environmental stressors by using the Resilience Booster: Parent Tip Tool, available at: <http://www.apa.org/topics/parenting/resilience-tip-tool.aspx>
- Join the ACT Raising Safe Kids Program that teaches positive parenting skills to parents and caregivers. For more information, visit <http://www.apa.org/act/about/index.aspx>
- Consider SES in your education, practice, and research efforts.
- Stay up to date on legislation and policies that explore and work to eliminate socioeconomic disparities. Visit the Office on Government Relations for more details: <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/pi/>
- Visit APA's Office on Socioeconomic Status (OSES) website: www.apa.org/pi/ses
- Visit APA's Office on CYF website: <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/>

References can be found at <http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/fact-sheet-references.aspx>.