

The missing piece of the puzzle in the intergenerational transmission of Socioeconomic Health Gradients: Childhood cultural capital and long-term health consequences

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Abstract:

The influence of cultural capital on health outcomes has often been eclipsed by more conventional determinants of social class, such as Socioeconomic Status (SES). However, cultural capital encompassing a diverse array of knowledge, experiences, tastes, and predispositions that are key to understanding the process of habit formation, holds a great potential as an explanation of SES-driven health inequalities. We employ longitudinal data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the interplay of childhood cultural capital, health, and other relevant social determinants of health.

Simultaneously controlling for different processes of Social Causation and Health Selection we compute the direct and indirect effects of all these determinants on elder health and compare their magnitudes to those of childhood cultural capital. These findings carry significant implications, emphasizing early-life socialization's role in shaping adult health trajectories. Consequently, it suggests that policy interventions should prioritize pre-formal education stages.