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Author

Leon Fernandez, Miguel A

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS AND SOCIAL
MOBILITY

By

Miguel Á. León Fernández

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APPROVED

Dr. Wesley Sims
School Psychology Program

Dr. Richard Cardullo, Howard H Hays Jr. Chair
University Honors

ABSTRACT

In this study, we will be recording the significant impacts that social status and consequently social mobility have on a person's mental health. Practicing social mobility is the goal for every family to give the next generation a better starting point in life. Having financial stability along with financial support can do an awful lot for an individual's mental state. Existing research shows how difficult it is to be a minority in the US but fails to look deeper into why minorities continue to have high rates of untreated mental health issues while being on the lower end of the social ladder. The purpose of this study is to highlight the importance of social mobility and mental health which can go hand in hand with one another. This is not always the case but studies have shown that practicing social mobility has a positive impact on mental health which in return allows you to live a psychologically healthier lifestyle.

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INTRODUCTION

Social mobility is a topic that I grew passionate about when I transferred to the University of California, Riverside, and found the importance of social mobility on students in the surrounding communities. Immediately the question that came to mind was how social mobility was affecting students and their mental well-being. This also came after realizing that there are lots of underrepresented minorities in this region that surrounds UCR. Psychological disorders are more common in urban areas and in low-income homes that house families who are immigrants and marginalized groups. An example of this is Latino immigrants who, “exhibit health declines with increasing duration in the United States, which some attribute to a loss in social status after migration.” (Alcantara, et al., 2014). Being a high-risk group to develop disorders may impede how long your educational pathway may be without you having much control over it. This may limit the opportunities presented in life because access to higher education, or career opportunities will not be as accessible which can increase your risk of developing stress, anxiety, depression, etc. This is not true for everyone but a significant portion of society. It is as if it were a cycle that especially low-income communities cannot escape because it shuts off all possibilities to better their lives and the lives of future generations. A study states, “Latinos, of all sub-ethnic backgrounds, disproportionately lack access to health care and are less likely to have a regular source of health care than other groups.” (Mendoza, 2018). Although this study is not collecting ethnic background information it is still significant to note that minorities lack access to simple resources like health care which is most likely due to cost. This shows how even if people who are suffering from mental health problems want to seek help, it will be difficult to accomplish.

Upward social mobility is the goal for most individuals and families because of the financial security, comfortability, and the counter effect it has on stress levels. It allows self-sustainment which must increase confidence but most importantly allows all basic needs to be met to live a healthy, and comfortable life. On the other hand, downward social mobility does the opposite for families and individuals which surely leads to stress, anxiety, and even depressive-like symptoms which can make it difficult to overcome hardships when mental health is not intact. We need to analyze the impact it has on UCR students and how that relates to the rest of society as students are the next generation of leaders.

Financial support and stability are desirable situations that come with lots of benefits when they are in line with family or individual goals. They have a positive effect on mental health and the ability to practice upward social mobility. Financial stress and burdens are and can be detrimental to an individual's mental health, and ability to practice upward social mobility. It will be interesting to see how these different variables correlate to one another and the conclusions that can be drawn. Completing this project will show the correlation that exists between social mobility and psychological disorders which can impede upward mobility and cause economic, and psychological distress.

BACKGROUND

Social mobility is the opportunity to climb the social ladder in terms of socioeconomic status which can depend on workforce and educational opportunities amongst many other factors. Individuals who have a psychological disorder suffer from the stigma that comes with it which can collide with their upward social mobility. There is a negative assumption that people who are diagnosed with psychological disorders such as ADHD, anxiety, and depression,

amongst other disorders, are mentally unstable. This is not the case for many individuals whose conditions are not as severe but still suffer the consequences. Studies have shown that 47.3% of the lowest social class developed some time of psychological disorder while only 12.5% of psychological disorders affected the highest social class (Hudson, 1988). Individuals who have a lower socioeconomic status are more likely to suffer from mental health problems because of all the different stressors they have in their lives. This affects their interest in education for example since their only objective is to feed and provide for their families. This shows how important it is to practice upward social mobility to better the quality of life which can generate economic stability for the current and future generations..

An additional piece of research that I found linked social mobility and psychological disorders in the sense that the ability to practice social mobility in the first place can cause someone to develop or begin to have psychological stress/disorders. The research shows how important upward mobility can be for mental well-being and how devastating downward mobility is for someone's mental state. The study that I analyzed was conducted in South Australia where people were asked about their psychological distress and disorders in their adulthood along with their ability to practice social mobility. The results of this study concluded, "People with low SEP in adulthood have poor mental health outcomes regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances in childhood." (Dal Grande, 2015). Their socioeconomic position in society is what was deemed as most important in terms of mental health since it is the position in society that everyone is predisposed to. This shows that this is a worldwide problem that affects people from all parts of the world and should be addressed in the United States since it is a nation that has large socioeconomic and healthcare disparities.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize the impact that social mobility can have on psychological disorders. Various studies have shown that social class and the availability to practice social mobility may define how psychologically healthy someone may be. Studies have shown that lots of low-income communities are the ones who seek psychological help the most when compared to different communities who are in a higher socioeconomic class. Immigrants and minority groups are still battling for the opportunity to practice upward social mobility through each generation. It is often difficult because they must first assimilate to a culture that is not theirs which is not acknowledged enough. In a recent study, it was concluded that “these social status measures help describe where Latinos integrate into the hierarchy of US society and consequently can be used as proxies for the risk of psychiatric illness.” (Alegria, et al., 2007). Assimilation causes lots of stress, anxiety, and even depression as these marginalized communities do not see the opportunity to better their quality of life. In an additional study, it stated, “Predictors showed that lower origin SSS was associated with higher odds of depression.” (Nicklett, 2009). The lack of social status stability can cause depression amongst many other mental health problems. This can be due to being evicted, loss of job/income, or deprivation of food, water, and basic needs that a human needs to survive. This is what can occur when we look at the relationship between social mobility and psychological disorders from this perspective.

METHODS

Participants

Students were recruited via flyers and classroom announcements at the University of California, Riverside. Participants were allowed to participate in a short survey that took no longer than twenty minutes. All students were eligible to participate in the study as long as they were 18 years or older. It is also worth noting that more than half of the participants completed the survey with the incentive of receiving extra credit towards their grade while less than a fourth completed the survey without any incentive.

Participants who agreed to participate in the study completed the survey with fourteen questions. There were no participants who withdrew from the survey but were informed before consenting to participate that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Fifty-six participants completed the survey. The data for one participant was removed because they completed the survey more than once and because they were not a UCR student. The final data set contained fifty-four students from the University of California, Riverside.

Measures

This study was reviewed and approved by the IRB in February after various adjustments. Although it was a lengthy process it only made the study and results much more meaningful while always putting the safety and well-being of the participants first. Participant recruitment started in March 2024 with a flier that had the survey link attached being sent out and by word of mouth was completed by more than fifty students. A fourteen-question survey with a Likert scale was used in the study regarding college optimism, financial support, mental health, financial stability, and financial stress variables to understand how they all affected one another, especially an individual's mental health state. The Likert scale included nine different answers ranging from

very strongly to very strongly disagree. If participants did not want to agree or disagree they had that neutral option available to them on the Likert scale.

Data Analysis

The survey for this study was completed on Qualtrics where all data was collected and recorded before being transferred to a Word document. It was then formatted into a data sheet to analyze the results. All possible answers from the survey were converted to numbers to be able to plug in and see on a graph. Regression analysis was used to determine if any variables such as college optimism, financial support, mental health, financial stability, and financial stress correlated with mental health. We also looked at the correlations that each of these variables have with each other. For example, analyzing the relationship between financial support and college optimism, while also taking into account the questions of “upward social mobility is good”, and “upward social mobility is obtainable for me.” We wanted to know how the student participants viewed upward social mobility along with how obtainable it is while taking into account their financial situation. We predicted the participants who were more stressed about their financial situation were more likely to find upward social mobility much more difficult to achieve since they have limited resources and do not have the time nor luxury to invest in themselves but rather in surviving. This is why we predicted that financial support and stability would play a role in mental health whether it was for the good or bad and financial stress usually results in negative emotions.

RESULTS

After grouping the questions into a single variable we began to see significant correlations. Data showed that financial stability was a significant predictor of financial stress. The variable financial stability also included the financial stability of their family and

community. The data table showed a .558 correlation with financial stress which may seem self-explanatory but is not the case since there were questions such as “Currently I feel financially stable”, “I am not worried about food, transportation, or housing”, “My immediate family has a financial situation that is stable.” There are lots of factors that go into financial stability which makes it difficult to pinpoint what exactly is causing the financial stress to begin with but these results still did prove our hypothesis correct. We predicted that financial stability is correlated to stress, and anxiety because of how exhausting hardship can be.

Additionally, financial support also was a significant predictor of financial stress. The data table showed a .675 correlation with financial stress. This included whether participants had the support of their direct and extended family for any circumstances even if they were unexpected situations. We had predicted that there would be a correlation between these two variables but did not realize that it would be this significant.

The results showed that there is a significant correlation between financial support and whether participants believe that social mobility is obtainable for them. Financial support is a predictor of whether an individual believes that they can practice upward social mobility. There was a .429 correlation between the two which only proves what past research has shown. Previous research has shown that financial support can be thought of as a jumpstart for many to begin their education or work-related careers since the majority of young adults do not have a financially stable lifestyle.

Another significant finding from the results was the correlation between financial stress and how obtainable participants believed social mobility was for them. There was a .326 correlation between the two variables which can mean that they can both interfere with one another. Some level of financial stress can increase the motivation to pursue upward social

mobility but the majority of the time becomes overwhelming quickly which only makes upward social mobility seem impossible to obtain. This leads to lots of issues for families such as “In heterosexual couples, women reported higher levels of stress and anxiety than their partners in anticipation of having conversations about money.” (Friedline, T., Chen, Z. & Morrow, S., 2021). Although we did not capture data from families or couples, it is evident that economic hardships take a toll on a family and can even create animosity between family members. Previous research demonstrates, “Continuously high levels of economic hardship over time elevated the risk of intimate partner violence, implying that ongoing economic hardship can be an additive stressor that subjects women to intimate partner violence.” (Friedline, T., Chen, Z. & Morrow, S., 2021). These are some of the results of not being able to see a clear pathway toward upward social mobility when families or couples do not see a solution to the financial burdens that they carry with them. These of course are experiences that children live and intake at a young age which can alter their perception of their financial stability in the future.

Lastly, there was a significant relationship between financial stability and mental health. The data showed a .349 correlation which makes financial stability a significant predictor of positive or negative mental health. Participants who reported feeling less financially stable were more likely to report feelings of anxiety or depression. There are many other variables at play but the data shows that a change in financial stability can cause a change in mental health. Although we predicted that there would be a much stronger correlation between maintaining financial stability and mental health the data still showed a significant enough correlation.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship that exists between an individual's financial status and their mental health. Through the results, we were able to see how important it was to have financial stability and support. We were also able to see what the positive and negative effects of not having a financially stable life do to mental health. Financial stability was a significant predictor of stress and anxiety. This included whether or not the participant felt like their basic needs were being met and if they had the financial resources to continue with their daily lives. Although our sample size was limited to University of California, Riverside students, and the majority female, we feel like this study can be replicable to many communities who struggle through financial hardships.

Another significant finding from the data was that financial support was a significant predictor of whether the participants believed that social mobility was obtainable for them. This is significant because having the financial support of your immediate family and extended family even during unexpected circumstances can impact how obtainable it is for you to achieve social mobility. financial support and the socioeconomic starting point for every individual is different. This is a factor that cannot be controlled since it depends on intergenerational socioeconomic status. Our data set showed a significant correlation between financial support and whether the participants believed that upward social mobility was obtainable for them. This relationship is significant because it serves as a reminder that not every individual has the same socioeconomic status/starting point which can influence what resources and opportunities are presented to them. If an individual is born into a wealthier family their perspective on gaining socioeconomic status is much different from another individual who has never experienced financial stability. On the other hand, it can also be said that lacking financial support from family can impact an

individual's chances of actually achieving social mobility since that belief is no longer. An example of an economic crisis is the recession in 2008 where "several studies in different countries agree that during the economic crisis, the prevalence of major depressive episodes and major depressive syndromes increased in the general population" (Volkos P, Symvoulakis EK, 2021) even years after the crisis. Although this evidence is from a much larger scale including different countries, and a worldwide issue, our results similarly showed that not having the financial stability to comfortably continue with life is a clear indicator of stress and anxiety which can lead to other mental health issues and disorders over time.

Having financial stability which includes many factors such as having a stable job is important to highlight as previous research indicates that "individuals who were experiencing cash-flow problems and deprivation (as these generally occurred simultaneously) had 5.4 times the odds of mental health problems relative to those who never reported either deprivation or cash-flow problems." (Kiely, K.M., Leach, L.S., Olesen, S.C. et al., 2015). This undoubtedly makes sense since financial hardships can include missing bill payments, having to sell personal items, and missing meals because of the lack of socioeconomic stability. Deprivation according to research is the most devastating factor of financial instability that leads to mental health problems. On the other hand, "a natural experiment in the USA found that children in families who received an income supplement had better mental health in adolescence and adulthood." (Kiely, K.M., Leach, L.S., Olesen, S.C. et al., 2015). This piece of evidence shows the importance of having basic needs met to prosper not only through hardship but years and decades after.

College optimism was also found to be a significant predictor of whether upward social mobility is obtainable for them. Although this may seem biased since all participants are college

students, a significant amount of them believe that a college education to some degree will assist with financial stability which can snowball into upward social mobility for the next generation. Previous research studies have proven that the economic background of each individual is significant in achieving educational goals which affects their college optimism. This is significant because, “Higher-income parents make enormous efforts to ensure their children's academic success, while children of poor parents begin the "college education game" later and with fewer resources. Students in poor and minority neighborhoods are less well prepared academically; ill-prepared to select colleges, apply for admission, and secure acceptance; and poorly informed about the cost of attending college.” (Haveman, R., & Smeeding, T., 2006). These findings show that students with higher income families have an advantage over those students who do not have this same financial stability. It not only affects their chances of applying for college, but also being admitted, understanding the finances, and what specific routes to take to reach their dream career. It has a snowball effect on low-income students because, at every new stage that they get to in the world of academia, they are left to figure it out without any previous knowledge or family members who can closely guide them. All these barriers that are placed in the way of low-income students who are most likely the first generation to attend college are what directly affect college optimism. This creates a cycle that makes it difficult for low-income families to have their students succeed in college since at every turn there is a new barrier. Consequently, optimism drops which according to our results has an impact on how obtainable they see upward social mobility.

One of the questions in the financial support variable was financial stability and how specifically economically stable the people are in their communities or neighborhoods. Living in certain neighborhoods or communities makes it more difficult to access all types of resources to

be academically successful and maintain good mental health. This study states, “Public elementary and high schools with a majority of students from marginalized backgrounds are significantly underfunded compared to predominantly white school districts (White, 2015). Studies have also shown that regardless of a district's socio-economic standing, predominantly white schools receive more government funding (White, 2015), (Havens, T. 2021). This in a way eliminated one of my predictions before conducting the study because this piece of evidence shows that the district's socioeconomic standing does not matter because predominantly white schools will receive greater funding. My prediction was that marginalized ethnic groups that live in low-income communities suffer because of redlining which is true but evidence shows that even higher socioeconomic districts will prioritize white schools. This demonstrates how broken the educational system is especially in the US and how this affects financial stability, support, and college optimism which keeps minorities oppressed.

Similarly, I also predicted that mental health issues can also arise because of an individual's inability to practice upward social mobility. The results from our data show lots of correlation between financial stability, support, and stress with mental health but it is also interesting to analyze how detrimental it is to lose socioeconomic status. “The loss of income in families from low socioeconomic status is detrimental and may lead to depressive symptoms” (Oyenubi, A., Kollamparambil, U., 2023). This research study showed how a loss of a job or income can be detrimental and put these individuals at risk for developing mental health problems which can in turn increase the risk of them staying in poverty. This affects their physical health as well since they are most likely depriving themselves of food. Unfortunately, the loss of income can be lost without having any control over it such as governmental issues or

pandemics such as COVID-19 but it is a cycle that must be broken to save the current and future generations.

Overall, this study showed the importance of financial support and stability in achieving upward social mobility. It is not necessary to come from a wealthy family to be able to practice social mobility but there are advantages to having more resources and information available. Financial stress can be detrimental and lead to downward social mobility which can create a vicious cycle that is difficult to break. College optimism also showed a significant correlation with belief in upward social mobility. This reflected the idea that most participants in this study believed that a college education could facilitate financial stability for not only themselves but also their families. Various factors go into achieving upward social mobility and how that affects mental health is crucial to better understand those individuals and families with burdens but also those that are thriving to spread awareness on how to achieve upward mobility while bettering mental health in the process.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A limitation of this study was the low number of participants. A higher number of participants would not only make it more applicable to other populations but also reduce the margin of error by getting rid of any possible outliers. It is also noteworthy to mention that there were much more female participants in this study which makes it lack diversity in that category. Based on the results and the few significant results that we were able to collect, the low number of questions for the survey was another limitation of this study. Although we utilized a regression analysis which made the results much more significant by grouping similar questions into a single variable, it would have been much more concrete and interesting data if we asked for

ethnicity, demographics, age, and major. Asking a greater number of questions about demographics would be important to incorporate since I predicted that demographics would be an important factor that would impact the ability to practice social mobility. It also would have been interesting to see the differences between ethnic groups since existing research has shown that there is a large disparity in educational/career development resources and opportunities. Moving forward, recruiting a larger, and more diverse number of participants should produce results that apply to a larger population of young adults including those who are not college students, and taking into account what implications that has for their ability to practice social mobility.

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