

# VIOLENCE & SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



## SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses not just income but also educational attainment, financial security, 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 as a whole. 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. Behavioral and other social science professionals possess the tools necessary to study and identify strategies that could alleviate these disparities at both individual and societal levels.

## INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

Exposure to violence transcends age and SES, affecting all levels of income, education, and occupation. Although exposure to violence affects all SES groups, youth from lower SES backgrounds tend to have increased exposure and likelihood of suffering from detrimental future outcomes.

## Childhood

- Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments are essential to prevent child maltreatment and to assure that children reach their full potential (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Child maltreatment takes a large economic toll on our society through child welfare costs, physical and mental health costs, special education costs, and legal system costs (Fang, Brown, Florence, & Mercy, 2012).
- Research shows that childhood experiences, both positive and negative, have an impact on the lifelong health and opportunity of individuals. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have been associated with risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016).
- Low-SES children are more than twice as likely as their higher SES peers to have had three or more adverse experiences (Child Trends, 2013).

## Adolescents

- Exposure to violence during youth has long-term life consequences. For example, adolescents who were physically abused have decreased odds of getting married, reduced educational attainment, and reduced income and net worth in adulthood (Covey, Menard, & Franzese, 2013).
- Observing violence and family conflict is correlated with increased depressive symptoms during high school (Eisman, Stoddard, Heinze, Caldwell, & Zimmerman, 2015).
- Adolescents' exposure to community violence is correlated with lower high school grade point averages and decreased enjoyment and interest in school (Borofsky, Kellerman, Baucom, Oliver, & Margolin, 2013).



- Students who attend schools with high incidences of bullying have lower grades than students at schools with less bullying (Strom, Thoresen, Wentzel-Larsen, & Dyb, 2013).
- Neighborhood violence has a negative impact on children's math and reading scores on standardized tests (Milam, Furr-Holden, & Leaf, 2010).

## Adults

- A significant portion of urban American adolescents residing in violent neighborhoods perceive they will die before age 35. Adolescents' perceived mortality expectations of an early death are correlated with low SES status as an adult (Nguyen et al., 2012).
- Research on postviolence consequences finds that exposure to violence can negatively affect the ability to sustain employment. Women who are physically assaulted are significantly more likely to have unstable employment than women who do not experience intimate partner violence (IPV; Crowne et al., 2011).
- Women in abusive relationships frequently lose their jobs, experience high job turnover, are forced to quit, or are fired (Crowne et al., 2011).
- IPV has long-term negative effects on women's job stability. For example, IPV has immediate consequences on women's ability to remain employed but also inhibits their ability to maintain a job for some time after the abuse ends (Adams, Tolman, Bybee, Sullivan, & Kennedy, 2013).
- Seventeen percent of cities cited domestic violence as the primary cause of family homelessness (The United States Conference of Mayors, 2015).
- Nearly 40% of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are living in poverty (Davis et al., 2012).
- Individuals with untreated PTSD had significantly lower long-term income and employment rates than those receiving treatment (Leonard et al., 2011; Murdoch, 2006; Savoca & Rosenheck, 2000).

## Older Adults

- Every year, an estimated 4 million older Americans are victims of physical, psychological, or other forms of abuse and neglect (American Psychological Association, 2012).
- One in 20 older adults indicate that they have experienced some form of perceived financial mistreatment. The financial exploitation by family members and by strangers increased among more physically disabled adults (Acierno, Hernandez-Tejada, Muzzy, & Steve, 2009).

- At times, the financial burdens of multigenerational households or living in overcrowded quarters can lead to stress that can trigger elder abuse (American Psychological Association, 2012). Low income, poor health, and low social support all independently predict neglect (Acierno et al., 2009).

## Community Violence

Assessing and targeting violence at the community level is especially useful because adjustments at this level often affect a large number of individuals. Factors of SES play an important role in this area because communities are often segregated by SES, race, and ethnicity. Targeting the risk and protective factors of violence at the community level will likely engender the greatest change. Community level risk factors for violence include increased levels of unemployment, poverty, and transiency; decreased levels of economic opportunity and community participation; poor housing conditions; gang activity, emotional distress, and a lack of access to services (Chen, Voisin, & Jacobson, 2016; McMahon et al., 2013; Voisin & Neilands, 2010). In contrast, protective factors buffer individuals and communities from these risks. In communities, these buffers include a stable economy, positive social norms, abundant resources, high levels of social cohesion, family support, and rewards for prosocial community involvement (Jain, Buka, Subramanian, & Molnar, 2012; Jain & Cohen, 2013; Hardaway et al., 2012).

## GET INVOLVED

- 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](http://www.apa.org/pi/ses)
- Visit APA's Violence Prevention Office website: <http://www.apa.org/pi/prevent-violence/>

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