

Family conditions may have more of an impact on upward social mobility than gender inequality

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Family conditions—specifically, how similar one's social status and background is to one's parents' status—may play a bigger role in determining how easily an individual can shift into a wealthier

socioeconomic class than gender inequality, according to a study of 153 countries published June 20, 2024 in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Khanh Duong from Maynooth University, Ireland.

As global inequality increases, researchers have found that countries with higher levels of income inequality tend to experience lower rates of class mobility (in other words, individuals in a lower socioeconomic class find it more difficult to move into a wealthier class).

In this study, Duong analyzed how education, [gender inequality](#), and family conditions (specifically, how similar children are to their parents, also known in this context as parental dependency) interact and affect class mobility. He used data from the Global Database on Intergenerational Mobility for 153 countries worldwide (of which 115 are classified as "developing economies"), further split into generational cohorts for each decade from the 1940s–1980s to build his model.

Duong's preliminary analyses showed a [positive relationship](#) between education expansion and mobility, and a [negative relationship](#) between education inequality and mobility. Parental dependency showed only a weak positive correlation with mobility. However, following the application of estimation techniques to address confounding issues between parental dependency and other factors, the final model showed that parental dependency had the largest, negative effect on upward [social mobility](#) (with an effect size of 0.1).

Though increases in education promoted social mobility, the model showed this was a weak effect and was potentially ineffective when parental dependency existed at a high level. His model also showed that the gender inequality effect on mobility (as seen in the outcomes of families with daughters and sons) was significantly smaller (effect size of 0.005) than the parental [dependency](#) effect, although still present.

Duong suggests that policymakers promoting social mobility should focus on shifting traditions such as "like father, like son."

He adds, "The study shows that while gender inequality in intergenerational mobility persists, it has significantly decreased across generations and is less important than parental influence. Thus, reassessing the roles of parental influence and gender bias is necessary, as the former is currently underestimated and the latter overemphasized."

More information: What really matters for global intergenerational mobility?, *PLoS ONE* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0302173](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0302173)

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