



Reducing Health Inequality by Increasing Children's Education: A Two-Generation and Life Course Approach

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Recent research indicates that adult children's education may influence their parents' health at older ages. However, empirical evidence about this upstream effect from children to parents is mixed likely due in part to differing methodological approaches. Moreover, a critical question remains understudied: Would increasing children's education increase or reduce observed educational inequalities in health among parents? To answer this cross-generation question, we first explicate a two-generation upstream framework that accounts for intergenerational selection and interdependent pathways. We then use multilevel marginal structural models to analyze longitudinal data from the Health and Retirement Study. We find that educational disparities in five health conditions at the population level would be significantly reduced if younger generations obtained more education. While the health advantages for college completing parents would remain unchanged, disadvantages for the least educated parents (less than 12 years of schooling) would decrease by 27 to 43 percent. This reduction in inequality is evident when education increases for the least, the most educated, or a randomly chosen child.



Liying LUO is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Demography and Associate Director of the Center for Social Data Analytics at the Pennsylvania State University. With support from the National Institutes of Health, she studies (1) how demographic (e.g., cohort and generational) processes and social forces influence health disparities and socioeconomic inequality, and (2) the distinct patterns and trends in social, demographic, and health outcomes among sociodemographic (e.g., gender, racial/ethnic) groups. Her work has appeared in *American Sociological Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Demography*, *Sociological Methods & Research*, and *Sociological Methodology*.