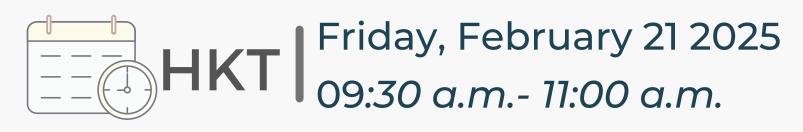
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Absolute Income Mobility Obscures Marginalized Children's Disadvantages

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Intergenerational mobility captures the socioeconomic distance between the positions of parents versus their adult children. Researchers measure this distance in absolute and relative units, such as absolute dollars and relative ranks. Absolute and relative mobility often diverge. For example, absolute mobility can rise while relative mobility declines. How should scholars and policymakers understand this divergence? We conclude that they should understand it as follows: absolute mobility is less reflective than relative mobility of marginalized children's socioeconomic disadvantages. We base this conclusion on analyses of survey, administrative, and simulated data on income mobility in the contemporary United States. We analyze multiple points of difference in mobility, which facilitates the recognition of several asymmetries. First, high-income children's experiences weigh more heavily in absolute-mobility trends than low-income children's experiences, particularly when economic growth is positive. Second, this asymmetry is more characteristic of absolutethan relative-mobility trends. Third, absolutemobility differences across demographic groups are more prone than relative- mobility differences to obscure marginalized groups' socioeconomic disadvantages. These asymmetries have policy implications: We caution that focusing on absolute mobility as a policy target can divert attention away from society's most disadvantaged children.



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Upcoming talk from "Intergenerational Mobility Webinar Series"

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