

Trajectories of Health and Human Capital from Adolescence into Adulthood

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ABSTRACT

Social inequalities in both health and human capital have been core concerns of sociologists for generations, but new data and statistical methods allow for the identification of their trajectories within an influential life-course stage, the transition to adulthood. This study uses rich, longitudinal, contemporary data to operationalize trajectories of health and human capital accumulation from adolescence to adulthood, using multiple time-varying instrumental variables to address the endogeneity of both factors. We then estimate an autoregressive cross-lagged structural equation model of health and human capital trajectories in predicting metabolic syndrome—the leading risk factor of cardiovascular disease in the U.S.—to assess social inequalities in health. Results demonstrate path dependence, and interdependence, of health and human capital across the transition to adulthood and important impacts on cardiovascular health in adulthood.