

VIOLENCE & SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status (SES) is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. It is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. When viewed through a social class lens, privilege, power, and control are emphasized. Furthermore, an examination of SES as a gradient or continuous variable reveals inequities in access to and distribution of resources. 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: our physical and mental health, the neighborhoods in which we live, our daily activities, and our access to resources. Its effects can be observed across the life span. Variance in socioeconomic status, such as disparities in the distribution of wealth, income, and access to resources, mitigate social problems. Low SES and its correlates, such as lower education, poverty, and poor health, ultimately affect our society as a whole. Society benefits from an increased focus on the foundations of socioeconomic inequalities and efforts to reduce the deep gaps in socioeconomic status currently observed 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.

SES AND VIOLENCE

Exposure to violence transcends socioeconomic status, affecting all levels of income, education, and occupation. Some research documents increased exposure to and severity of violence among lower socioeconomic groups; however, much of this research focused on associations

between violent offenders and SES. The aim of the current fact sheet is to emphasize how socioeconomic factors, such as employment and education, are affected by exposure to violence.

COMMUNITY RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

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 opportunities and community participation; poor housing conditions; and a lack of access to services (APA, 2009; Department of Healthy and Human Services, 2001; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Resnick, Ireland, & Borowsky, 2004; World Health Organization, 2002). 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, and rewards for prosocial community involvement (Arthur, Hawkins, Pollard, Catalano, & Baglioni, 2002; Hawkins, Van Horn, & Arthur et al., 2004; Kegler et al., 2005).

DISCREPANCIES IN THE INCIDENCE OF VIOLENCE

Although exposure to violence affects all SES groups, lower SES individuals and families appear to have increased exposure.



- Browne, Salomon, & Bassuk (1999) found that women who resided in households that earned less than \$10,000 annually had a 4-times-greater risk of experiencing violence than women in wealthier households.
- Bassuk et al. (1996) found that homeless mothers reported significantly more severe instances of physical and sexual assault over their lifetime than low-income housed mothers.
- Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle, & Felton, (2001) found youths from low-income neighborhoods witnessed significantly more severe violence (viz., murders and stabbings) than youths from middle- and upper-income neighborhoods.

EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE IMPACTS EMPLOYMENT

Research on postviolence consequences finds that exposure to violence can negatively affect the ability to sustain employment.

- Intimate partner violence causes U.S. women to miss about 8 million days of work and lose about \$727 million in wages each year (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2003).
- After experiencing a violent incident, low-income women who worked 40-hour work weeks had only one-fifth odds of maintaining that full-time status for 6 or more months than women who did not experience violent incidents (Browne et al., 1999).
- Low-income women who experienced intimate partner violence or aggression had only one-third odds of maintaining a 30-hour work week for 6 or more months than women who did not experience violence (Browne et al., 1999).

SES AND PTSD

Research finds that PTSD, a common product of exposure to violence, has negative consequences for income and employment.

- Individuals with untreated PTSD had significantly lower long-term income and employment rates than those receiving treatment (Murdoch, 2006; Savoca & Rosenheck, 2000).
- Veterans with PTSD were 3 times more likely to be unemployed (Zatzick et al., 1997).
- A lifetime diagnosis of PTSD was associated with a nearly 50% lower probability of current employment (Savoca & Rosenheck, 2000).
- Individuals with more severe PTSD symptoms were less likely to have full- or part-time employment (Smith, Schnurr, & Rosenheck, 2005).

EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE IMPACTS ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT

Research finds that declines in academic attainment are common after exposure to or experience of violence.

- Abused and neglected children showed significantly lower levels of academic attainment in adulthood (Perez & Widom, 1994).
- Elementary schools that participated in bully and violence prevention programs had significantly higher student achievement scores than schools that did not incorporate such programs (Fonagy, Twemlow, Vernberg, Sacco, & Little, 2005).
- Community violence was moderately associated with poor academic achievement in children. (Schwartz & Gorman, 2003).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Include SES in your research, practice, educational, and advocacy endeavors.

- Measure, report, and control for SES in all research and published work with in the area of violence.
- Contribute to the body of research on the societal barriers experienced by victims of violence, particularly of low-SES backgrounds, and the impact of these barriers on health and positive well-being.
- Practice proactive screening of psychological and physical distress in clients at-risk for violence; educate clients on safety and the effects of violence.
- Ensure that trainees are sensitive to violence disparities and its implications on persons at risk for violent experiences. Provide trainees with exposure to victimized populations and specialized training on the screening, education, and treatment of persons at risk for violent experiences.

Get involved.

- Support 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/>.
- Become an SES Key Contact! As an expert, advocate for SES related issues.
- Join APA's SES Network to contribute and stay abreast of current developments in SES-related activities.
- Visit APA's Office on Socioeconomic Status (OSES) website: www.apa.org/pi/ses.
- Visit APA's Violence Prevention Office website: <http://www.apa.org/pi/preventviolence/>.

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