The correlation between health and socioeconomic status; Methods to improve socioeconomic status

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**Abstract:**

Citizens with a low socioeconomic status view life as unfair or unbalanced. They experience a feeling of inequality because of their income, education, and occupation. And because of their lower status, the living conditions and lifestyle that come with it result in worse physical and mental health. when they look to people of higher social status and aspire to have the life they are living. Without realizing it, they themselves are the ones to act and change their situation to get to that aspiring social position and everything that comes with it. We want to find out what it is that these people with lower status are experiencing in terms of their living conditions and the risks that come with having a lower social status.

We investigated medical literature to answer the questions we had on what someone's social status does for their physical and mental health. And how this can have an impact on someone's life expectancy and even their proclivity to develop chronic illnesses.

Having a lower socioeconomic status result in having worse mental and physical health at shorter notices, and in the future, lower social status individuals will require more care the older they grow. And they are also more likely to develop chronic illnesses in combination with mental illnesses.

Improving an individual's health and/or social status will improve their respected counterparts. Finding solutions to one or both factors will relieve the pressure on the health care system on short notice and will also influence the future of the system because the likelihood of developing chronic or mental illnesses is drastically reduced.

Based on the solutions that have been found, further research is required to determine which methods would work best to improve the most impactful factors.

**Keywords:** Health; Socioeconomic status

1. Introduction

The changing society and the expanding lifespan of the population are putting pressure on the healthcare system. The aging population is resulting in an increase in many different morbidities [[1](#_Bibliography)], while improved medical treatment is extending the life span of these individuals with these conditions [[2](#_Bibliography)]. In the coming years, the health care costs in the Netherlands are predicted to grow twice as fast. Households that require special care or support often bring specialists in too late resulting in the required healthcare being more drastic or influential than the original issue of the patient [[2](#_Bibliography)]. Studies showed that in western countries, health appears to progressively increase with socioeconomic position and seems to decrease with higher social inequality [[3](#_Bibliography)]. To support this research and possibly find solutions, this paper looks at the connection between a person's social status and their respective mental and physical health. To see if improvements at either end can influence a person's health in the longer term. Traditionally there are three main factors to determine if a person has a high, medium, or low socioeconomic position. These factors are a person’s income, education, and occupation. Based on those factors, one can identify someone’s position on the social ladder. Since this is based on three very broad subjects more specific identifiers have been added which describe someone's situation in more depth which are gender, religion, education, ethnicity, race, and place of residence [[4](#_Bibliography)].

Because of the possible influence of socioeconomic status on citizens’ mental and/or physical health, this research paper also aims to find out that when an individual's position remains unchanged, What the deciding factors are that impact them on their lives [[5](#_Bibliography_1)]. And how and why these individuals remain in their respective social positions.

For citizens higher up on the social ladder the risks of developing mental illnesses or possibly chronic illness are supposedly drastically lower. This is why it is beneficiary to look at possibilities to improve someone’s socioeconomic status. According to [[5](#_Bibliography_1)], the amount of care that is needed in the later stages of life is much lower than someone with a higher social status in comparison to someone with a lower social status. That's why the purpose of this research paper was to find out the extent to which a person's lifestyle and social status affect their health. If there is a correlation between these subjects, improving someone's social status could result in lower pressure on the healthcare system and medical institutions.

This research was initiated by the municipality of Zoetermeer in The Netherlands. The aim is to relieve the predicted pressure on the healthcare system and solve future problems with the availability of healthcare. Therefore, this article focuses on finding the influence of a person's Socioeconomic status on their mental and physical health focusing on the EU in general with a focus on The Netherlands.

In cooperation with the municipality of Zoetermeer the following research questions have been defined to narrow the contents of the Research.

Main question

How does the quality of life influence a low Socioeconomic status citizen in Zoetermeer?

Sub Questions

1. What defines a low socioeconomic status?
2. How does bad health influence your socioeconomic status?
3. What are the risks of lower socioeconomic status?
4. What are methods to improve the lifestyle of low socioeconomic status citizens?
5. Results and analysis

**2.1 What defines a low socioeconomic status?**

In the Netherlands, low socioeconomic status generally refers to individuals or families with a relatively low income, low levels of education, and/or low levels of occupational status. It's a concept that encompasses multiple dimensions of social inequality [[6](#_Bibliography_1)]. There are four main indicators that display the level of socioeconomic status to which a person belongs to, these are listed below:

1. The first one is income, low income is one of the key indicators of low socioeconomic status, and in the Netherlands, the threshold for low-income households is defined by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) as households with an income that is less than 60% of the median household income. the Central Bureau of Statistics came up with the low-income border. In 2020 this border for a single household was €1.100 per month (this is the amount after taxes and premiums), for a couple with no children €1.550 and for a couple with two underage children €2.110. [[7](#_Bibliography_1)]
2. The second indicator is education. In the Netherlands, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, there are three levels of education. Figure X shows the Dutch educational system.

***Figure 1: The Dutch educational system***



In Figure 1 primary school is at the bottom in green. After this comes secondary education, there are three directions that students can follow, these are: VMBO (preparing secondary vocational training, lasts four years), Havo (general secondary education, lasts five years) and VWO (pre-university education, lasts six years). The assistent-opleiding (MBO-Level 1) is part of secondary vocational education.

Everything that falls under the first and lowest level of education is: “Primary school, VMBO, Assistent-opleiding (MBO-Level 1) And the first three years of Havo and VWO”.

Everything that falls under the secondary level education is: “The superstructure of HAVO (the last two years), the superstructure of VWO (the last three years), the basic vocational training (MBO-Level 2), the vocational training (MBO-Level 3), the middle management and specialist training courses (MBO-Level 4). In Figure 1 all the secondary vocational education is everything within the yellow squares.

Everything that falls under High level education is HBO (higher professional education) and WO (university). In Figure 1 high level education falls under HBO and WO are the blue and red squares in the top right. People in the Netherlands who have degrees from low and secondary education levels tend to have a lower socioeconomic status according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS).

1. Occupational status is also an indicator of socioeconomic status. The occupational status reflects the educational attainment required to obtain a job and income levels that vary with different jobs and within ranks of occupations. In the Netherlands, individuals in lower-status occupations (such as jobs involvingmanual labor) tend to have lower levels of socioeconomic status.
2. Finally, housing conditions are also related to socioeconomic status, and in the Netherlands, individuals living in overcrowded or substandard housing tend to have lower levels of socioeconomic status.

**2.2 How does bad health influence your socioeconomic status?**

When looking at health, perceptions vary among individuals according to [[8](#_Bibliography_1)]. We can all identify something that we might call a symptom, but we don’t go to a professional with these symptoms. And this is normal; it is highly abnormal to never feel sick, dysfunctional, or have pain in a body part. It starts becoming abnormal if this sickness or pain does not go away in a normal amount of time or follows a pattern.

According to this [[9](#_Bibliography_1)], when measuring health, "social, psychological, and physical factors" should all be considered. There is an assumption that only the physical attributes of an individual are important for calculating a person's health, but this is not how you should judge an individual's health. You need to know the social, psychological, and physical status of an individual to know if the individual is healthy. To do this, you have multiple areas to research, such as an individual's social network, functional disability, and general health measures. According to [[9](#_Bibliography_1)], this is a consistent way to know if a person is healthy.

What both articles agree on is that a person's physical and social wellbeing are important for calculating an individual's health. What they disagree on is the importance of psychological variables for calculating a person's health. [[8](#_Bibliography_1)] contends that psychological is irrelevant because there are numerous examples of mental illnesses that have no impact on an individual's well-being. In their studies, they have found patients with mental illnesses that had zero impact on their health. [[9](#_Bibliography_1)] agrees that long-term psychological illness is not relevant. But it does seem that short-term psychological status is a key factor in calculating a person's health.

Health can be defined as bad if the social, psychological, and physical conditions of an individual are bad. The reason psychological is included is because [[9](#_Bibliography_1)] finds that short-term psychological status has effects on health. [[8](#_Bibliography_1)] does not state anything specific about short-term psychological status but does mention subjects like feeling dysfunctional for a short period of time and how it can affect you. [[9](#_Bibliography_1)] would classify feeling dysfunctional for a short period of time as a perfect example of a bad short-term psychological status.

How does bad health influence your socioeconomic status? Bergen, A. V. P. L. [1], had two hypotheses about bad health being closely connected to low household income and lower social status, or worse. The hypotheses they made were confirmed by the research they did in the Netherlands.

According to the data gathered by the researchers, having diabetes increases your chances of having a lower education by 3,83 times, feeling socially excluded by 2,25 times, and having a lower household income by 1,41 times. Diabetes had the highest risk factor connected to low education. Obesity increases your chances of having a lower education by 2.45 times, of feeling socially excluded by 1.34 times, and of having a lower household income by 1,41 times.

Low personal control increases your chances of having a lower education by 3.17 times, of feeling socially excluded by 6.36 times, and of having a lower household income by 2,08 times.

What both articles agree on is that a person's physical and social wellbeing are important for calculating an individual's health. What they disagree on is the importance of psychological variables for calculating a person's health [[9](#_Bibliography_1)]. contends that psychological is irrelevant because there are numerous examples of mental illnesses that have no impact on an individual's well-being. In their studies, they have found patients with mental illnesses that had zero impact on their health. [[8](#_Bibliography_1)] agrees that long-term psychological illness is not relevant. But it does seem that short-term psychological status is a key factor in calculating a person's health. What confirms this is the data from article [[1](#_Bibliography_1)], which shows that short-term illnesses produce the same numbers or worse than physical illnesses.

**2.3. What are the risks of lower socioeconomic status?**

lower socioeconomic status can lead to several negative outcomes in countries/cities, such as poor health, limited access to education and job opportunities, higher crime rates, poor housing conditions, food insecurity and higher stress levels.

People of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to experience chronic health conditions, the most common ones are heart disease and diabetes. They also have a higher risk of premature death [[10](#_Bibliography_1)]. Low socioeconomic status can also negatively influence student's educational performances, resulting in limited access to higher education and well-paying job opportunities [[11](#_Bibliography_1)]. Higher crime rates are also associated with lower socioeconomic status population according to [[12](#_Bibliography_1)]. Earlier in this article it was confirmed that low income is one of the key indicators of having a low socioeconomic status. Poor housing conditions, food insecurity and higher stress levels are direct consequences of having a low income. This is because people who experience a low monthly income simply don’t have the money to afford a house in a relatively "good" neighbourhood, and to buy healthy food [[13](#_Bibliography_1)]. Higher stress levels are also a direct consequence of these problems. [[13](#_Bibliography_1)]

**3 What are methods to improve the lifestyle of low socioeconomic status citizens?**

Low socioeconomic status citizens generally experience a low income and therefore have trouble maintaining healthy lifestyles. Governments can help low socioeconomic status citizens to improve their lifestyles in multiple ways, the most common and effective ways are listed below:

1. **Creating access to good quality education and job training programs:** by providing good quality education in combination with job training programs for low socioeconomic status citizens them to gain the skills they need in order to obtain higher-paying jobs, which will improve their financial stability. [[14](#_Bibliography_1)]
2. **Affordable housing and health care:** Affordable housing and health care are essential for low socioeconomic status citizens to maintain a decent standard of living. Access to affordable housing reduces the burden of rent and mortgage payments, leaving more income for other necessities, while access to quality health care ensures that people stay healthy and able to work. [[15](#_Bibliography_1)]
3. **Increased minimum wage:** Increasing the minimum wage can help low socioeconomic status citizens earn a living wage that meets their basic needs, reducing poverty and increasing economic stability. [[16,17](#_Bibliography_1)]
4. **Tax benefits for low socioeconomic status families:** Tax benefits for low socioeconomic status families can provide them with extra income to pay for essential expenses, such as food, clothing, and housing. [[17](#_Bibliography_1)]
5. **Food assistance and nutrition programs:** Food assistance and nutrition programs can help low socioeconomic status citizens access the nutritious food they need to stay healthy and active, reducing food insecurity and improving overall well-being. [[18](#_Bibliography_1),[19](#_Bibliography_1)]
6. **Provision of recreational and community facilities:** Providing recreational and community facilities can improve the quality of life for low socioeconomic status citizens by offering them safe and accessible places to engage in leisure activities, socialize with others, and participate in community events. [[20](#_Bibliography_1),[21](#_Bibliography_1)]
7. **Strengthening of safety net programs:** Strengthening safety net programs, such as unemployment insurance, can provide low socioeconomic status citizens with a source of income during difficult times, reducing poverty and improving economic stability. [[22](#_Bibliography_1)]
8. **Reduction of poverty through job creation and income generation programs:** Implementing job creation and income generation programs can help low socioeconomic status citizens acquire the skills and training they need to secure stable and well-paying jobs, reducing poverty and improving their overall quality of life. [[23](#_Bibliography_1)]

Improving the lifestyle of low-socioeconomic-status citizens with these methods will result in an overall healthier population because people will have more money to spend on healthy food options and forms of exercise. Implementing these methods will also reduce a lot of the stress that low-socioeconomic-status citizens experience, which will increase their mental well-being.

1. Conclusions

Concluding our research, we have found that people with a lower socio-economic status are indeed experiencing worse overall health compared to those with a higher socio-economic status, and they are also more likely to experience premature death. Having a low socioeconomic status result in several negative influences on someone's health and living conditions. They are more prone to developing chronic illnesses, and some might even view life as unfair or unbalanced. This is because, compared to the other side of the spectrum, they have it considerably worse than they do. Yet they cannot manage to push themselves to climb to a higher position on the social ladder. And they remain in the life they deem unfair or unbalanced because they don't know how to get out of it.

Living in a lower socioeconomic status is associated with inadequate housing, food insecurity, and increased stress. All these conditions will negatively impact a person's health. An individual's health is closely connected to their socioeconomic status. If an individual's health is declining, this individual's socioeconomic status will also decrease. The same applies if an individual's socioeconomic status decreases their health will also decrease. This is a negative spiral in both cases. By increasing an individual's health, this individual's socioeconomic status will also improve.

We examined various strategies for improving the lifestyle of low-socioeconomic-status citizens based on scientific articles and research from around the world. The best methods that were found are: creating access to good quality education and job training programs, affordable housing and health care; an increased minimum wage; tax benefits for low socioeconomic status families; food assistance and nutrition programs; the provision of recreational and community facilities; the strengthening of safety net programs; and the reduction of poverty through job creation and income generation programs. Because these solutions have worked in different parts of the world, that does not mean that they are universal. The best approach to improving citizens' socioeconomic status varies by country or government. We suggest that Zoetermeer 2025 investigate the best usable methods for their government.

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