

# Failing to match parents' educational achievements among men can be as distressing as being divorced

April 10 2018, by Tony Trueman

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Failing to match the educational achievements of one's parents can be as distressing for men as having ethnic minority status or being divorced, new research says.

University of Oxford researchers analysed survey data on over 50,000 people in the UK and 27 other European countries to compare their [psychological state](#) with their educational achievements.

Dr. Alexi Gugushvili told the British Sociological Association's annual conference in Newcastle today [Tuesday 10 April] that while exceeding [parents'](#) education was linked to decreased psychological distress in men, falling short was linked to an increase.

The researchers also found that women were not affected by failing to keep up with their parents' [educational attainment](#).

The researchers divided parents' and their children's educational attainment into three categories of attainment, and compared this with an overall score for their psychological distressed based on their feelings of being depressed, lonely, or sad. In Britain the top level equated to a degree, the middle to A-levels and the bottom to GCSE or lower.

- Men whose [educational level](#) was at the bottom level, and whose parents were in the top, were more than twice as likely to be

among the top 10 percent most psychologically distressed group of individuals than those whose educational level matched their parents'. This effect was comparable to the gap between those who were divorced and those who were not, and the gap between those in an [ethnic minority](#) group with the ethnic majority.

- Men whose educational level was in middle category when their parents were in the top level were 75 percent more likely to be psychologically distressed than those whose level was the same as their parents.
- Men whose educational level was at the top level, and whose parents were educated at the bottom level, were 50 percent less likely to be psychologically distressed than men whose level was the same as their parents.

Dr. Gugushvili, who worked with Dr. Yizhang Zhao and Dr. Erzsébet Bukodi, told the conference: "Getting a higher educational achievement than one's parents is associated with a reduced level of [psychological distress](#), even after the direct effect of individuals' and their parents' education and other conventional explanations of distress are accounted for.

"On the contrary, falling short of one's parents' education tends to raise the distress level, and a big disparity is especially harmful for men's psychological health status.

"For men, parents' educational achievement and intergenerational mobility retain an important influence on their psychological health after accounting for individuals' social class and other explanations of distress, but no effect is observed for women's [distress](#).

"The reason for this could be that men are more likely than women to attribute success and failure by pointing to their own merits, abilities and effort, rather than factors they have no control over."

He said that the findings had contradicted earlier research suggesting that surpassing one's parents' education did not make people happier.

The researchers analysed data from the 2012-14 waves of the European Social Survey on 52,773 people aged 25-65 in 27 European countries and in Israel and used the cutting edge statistical methods to explain how the psychological state of individuals is affected by a discrepancy between their own and parental educational attainment.

Provided by British Sociological Association

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