

Doctors and lawyers less likely to live in prosperous areas if from working class families, says research

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Doctors, lawyers, and senior managers from working class families are less likely to live in prosperous areas than their counterparts from well-

off backgrounds, new research shows.

Family background could mean the difference between living in economically mixed areas such as Portsmouth and well-heeled ones like Brentwood in Greater London, the study found.

Two researchers analyzed [census data](#) on 8,118 people born between 1965 and 1981 who were working in higher managerial and professional occupations when aged 30 to 36, looking at their [family background](#) and whether they had moved around.

The researchers, Dr. Katharina Hecht, of Northeastern University, U.S., and Dr. Daniel McArthur, of the University of York, carried out the first longitudinal analysis of social and geographic mobility of people in higher managerial and professional occupations in England and Wales. Dr. Hecht was based at the "Politics of Inequality" research center at the University of Konstanz, Germany, during the research.

In an article published in the journal *Sociology*, the researchers say that people in professional and managerial occupations were more likely to move areas, and ended up in richer areas when they did move, if they came from a prosperous background.

While the study was not able to explore the reason for this, the researchers believe it is likely that wealthy parents are more able to help out their children put down deposits for homes in expensive areas.

The ability to move to richer areas brings people advantages such as living within commuting range of well paid jobs and better schools for their children.

The researchers say that "among higher managers and professionals, those with advantaged backgrounds lived in more affluent areas as

children than those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

"This area gap persists during adulthood: when the upwardly mobile move, they are unable to close the gap to their peers with privileged backgrounds in terms of the affluence of the areas they live in—they face a [moving target](#).

"Therefore even when the upwardly socially mobile—who grew up in less advantaged places and are less likely to move [long-distance](#)—do move area, they are unable to close the gap to their intergenerationally stable peers who started out in more affluent areas."

The researchers say that for women in higher professions, differences in family background correspond, for example, to the difference between "living in economically mixed areas on the south coast, such as Portsmouth, and living in affluent areas of the London commuter belt, such as Brentwood." The difference was less dramatic for men.

"There are individual and familial benefits to moving. For instance, internal migration may offer employment and wage gain opportunities. Geography shapes access to opportunities to accumulate wealth including the highest paying jobs, higher house prices, and opportunities for entrepreneurship.

"Affluent parents will be better able to facilitate ... moves to high cost but opportunity-rich areas such as London or the South-East. London is especially relevant because its [labor market](#) provides risky and initially low-paid opportunities such as internships, especially in industries, such as law, media, and creative industries, that may later lead to opportunities for high status and highly paid employment.

"Parental wealth plays an important role in determining transitions to homeownership, and the children of higher managers and professionals

are likely to have wealthier parents and hence receive larger transfers of wealth. They will be able to afford houses in more expensive areas, net of income, than their counterparts from less advantaged backgrounds. As a result, wealth is likely to play an important role in explaining why those from advantaged backgrounds move to more affluent areas than the upwardly mobile."

The researchers used data from the Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study, which tracks the Census records of a 1 percent sample of people in England and Wales. They looked at whether people from two cohorts, born from 1965 to 1971, and 1975 to 1981, had moved home over a distance of at least 28 kilometers from when they were aged 10 to 16, to when they were aged 30 to 36. The researchers were able to see the occupations of the participants' parents, and compare how many moves, and to how affluent a Local Authority District that higher professionals from working class and from a higher professional background made.

"Higher managerial and professional" occupations are those in Class 1 of the widely-used National Statistics Socio-economic Classification system. The researchers used data on how wealthy an area was by looking at the proportion of people in higher managerial and professional occupations in that area—this varied more than four-fold from the richest to the poorest places.

Of those with higher managerial and professional parents, around 60% made at least one long-distance move, contrasting with those whose parents had semi-routine or routine occupations, where almost 70% did not move long-distance between any two censuses. The majority of higher managers and professionals with disadvantaged backgrounds are observed living in the same local authority aged 30–36 as the one in which they were observed aged 10–16.

More information: Moving on up? How social origins shape geographic mobility within Britain's higher managerial and professional occupations, *Sociology* (2022).

Provided by British Sociological Association

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