

# Women from privileged backgrounds pursue prestigious professions over lucrative ones, finds study

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Women from elite backgrounds are much less likely than men to end up in the most economically rewarding jobs, but they are no less likely to

hold prestigious jobs that are respected in society.

New research from Kent found that women from advantaged families were much more likely to enter creative or caring careers that are socially respected—such as teaching—but are less rewarded economically. By contrast, men from privileged backgrounds were much more likely to focus specifically on financial rewards.

The research, conducted by Dr. Robert de Vries at the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, shows that women from the most advantaged backgrounds are up to 40% less likely than their male peers to land those roles which have the best pay and prospects. However, women from these backgrounds have the same chance as men of gaining jobs which command high levels of respect in society.

About 40% of both men and women from the most advantaged backgrounds are in prestigious jobs by aged 30. Men therefore have lower overall downward mobility rates than women because they are more likely to gain the best paying jobs, while being just as likely to gain the highest status jobs.

The research examined men and women's occupational trajectories in detail—showing that a typical career path for men from privileged backgrounds would see them enter a highly paid role in, for example, business or finance. In comparison, women from these backgrounds were much more likely to go into teaching, or a creative profession—jobs which are well respected but substantially less financially rewarding.

These results show that, while the resources available to the daughters of affluent families may support them to enter high-status, sought-after roles; those same resources help sons to achieve both prestige and financial success. This contributes to the ongoing gender pay gap, even

among the children of privilege.

Furthermore, this gendered pattern of downward mobility shows how stereotyped beliefs, which tend to see caring or creative professions as more "feminine," and technical and business professions—and the aspiration for economic rewards in general—as more "masculine," may affect [career choices](#).

Dr. de Vries' [findings](#), posted as a working paper to the *SSRN Electronic Journal* are based on an analysis of data from more than 94,000 respondents to the UK Labor Force Survey—the UK's largest representative household survey.

Dr. de Vries, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology, said, "This research shows that the experiences and [career paths](#) of those from top backgrounds are still very strongly gendered. This is likely due to a combination of the home environment and the [labor market](#)."

"The sons and daughters of privileged families may be raised in subtly (and not-so-subtly) different ways, encouraging the development of straightforwardly economic aspirations for sons, but more creative, social, and family-oriented aspirations for daughters. These aspirations interact with a job market that still substantially disadvantages [women](#)."

**More information:** Robert de Vries, Falling sideways? Social status and the true nature of elite downward mobility in Britain, *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2023). [DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.4636394](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4636394)

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