

Opinion

Volume 14 Issue 4 - September 2026
DOI: 10.19080/JOJNHC.2026.14.555891

JOJ Nurse Health Care

Copyright © All rights are reserved by Jaewon Lee

Drinking Patterns and the Vicious Cycle of Intergenerational Economic Mobility



Jaewon Lee*

Inha University, Incheon, South Korea

Submission: September 19, 2026; **Published:** September 29, 2026

***Corresponding author:** Jaewon Lee, Inha University, Incheon, South Korea

Abstract

Intergenerational economic mobility may provide an important perspective for understanding socioeconomic differences in alcohol use. Individuals who experience persistent socioeconomic disadvantage or downward mobility may face greater financial stress and psychological distress, which can contribute to harmful drinking patterns. At the same time, harmful alcohol use may worsen physical and mental health, reduce work performance, and increase employment instability, making upward economic mobility more difficult. This relationship may therefore operate as a continuing cycle in which limited mobility contributes to harmful drinking, while harmful drinking further reinforces economic disadvantages. These processes may also extend across generations by reducing household resources and opportunities available to children. Future research should examine mobility trajectories, drinking motives, and longitudinal changes in alcohol use to better understand this reciprocal relationship. Considering alcohol use together with intergenerational economic mobility may help explain how socioeconomic disadvantage is maintained over the life course and across generations.

Keywords: Intergenerational Economic Mobility; Socioeconomic Status; Drinking Behaviors; Psychological; Alcohol; Physical and Mental health; Harmful Drinking

Drinking Patterns and the Vicious Cycle of Intergenerational Economic Mobility

Alcohol use has often been examined in relation to socioeconomic status (SES) [1]. People with low SES are more likely to experience financial problems, unstable employment, and other difficulties in their daily lives. These problems can increase stress and negatively affect mental health. However, current SES may not fully explain drinking behaviors. It may also be important to consider where individuals started economically and whether their socioeconomic position improved or declined over time. In this regard, intergenerational economic mobility may provide a useful way to understand why some individuals are more vulnerable to harmful drinking patterns.

Intergenerational economic mobility generally refers to changes in socioeconomic position between parents and their children [2]. Some individuals who grow up in low-income households may move upward and achieve a better economic position than their parents. Others may remain in a similar position or experience further economic difficulties [3]. People who experience downward mobility may also end up in a lower

socioeconomic position than the household in which they were raised. These different experiences may influence how individuals feel about their current economic situation. For example, people who remain in low SES throughout childhood and adulthood may experience continued financial stress and may feel that it is difficult to improve their circumstances [4]. Those who experience downward mobility may also suffer from stress because their current situation is worse than what they experienced earlier in life. Therefore, individuals with similar current income or employment status may not necessarily have similar experiences. A person who moved from a low-income household into a middle-income position may view the current situation differently from someone who moved downward from a high-income household into the same middle-income position.

Although their current SES may look similar, one individual experienced upward mobility while the other experienced downward mobility. These differences may be important because perceptions of success, failure, opportunity, and future economic security can influence psychological well-being. Economic

difficulties related to limited mobility may also affect drinking behaviors. Individuals who have persistent financial problems may experience stress, anxiety, frustration, or hopelessness [5]. Some may seek professional help, but access to mental health services can be difficult for people with fewer economic resources. Costs of treatment, limited insurance coverage, waiting times, and limited availability of services may make it harder to receive appropriate care. Alcohol, on the other hand, is relatively easy to obtain and its effects are immediate. For some individuals, drinking may therefore become a simple and accessible way to temporarily reduce stress or escape from negative feelings.

This does not mean that people with low SES always drink more than people with high SES. Alcohol use is affected by many different factors, and higher-income individuals also consume alcohol. The important issue may be the pattern and reason for drinking rather than simply the amount consumed [6]. For example, drinking to reduce stress or negative emotions may be more harmful than drinking in social situations. Individuals experiencing economic difficulties may also be more vulnerable to binge drinking, drinking alone, or drinking more frequently in response to stress. Thus, intergenerational economic mobility may help explain not only who drinks, but also why and how people drink.

At the same time, alcohol use may further worsen economic conditions. Harmful drinking can negatively influence physical and mental health [7], and these health problems can make it more difficult to work or remain employed. Excessive drinking may also reduce work performance, increase absenteeism, and make it harder to maintain stable relationships in the workplace. As a result, individuals who are already struggling economically may have even fewer opportunities to improve their socioeconomic position. In other words, alcohol may initially be used as a way to deal with stress caused by limited economic mobility, but it can later become another factor that makes upward mobility more difficult. This can create a vicious cycle. Individuals who grow up in disadvantaged households may already have fewer opportunities for education, employment, or financial improvement [8]. If they are not able to move upward economically, they may continue to experience stress and dissatisfaction with their situation. Alcohol may provide temporary relief from these feelings. However, if drinking becomes frequent or harmful, it can lead to poorer health, weaker work performance, and greater employment instability. These problems can then reduce the chances of upward mobility even further. Continued economic difficulties may again increase stress and lead to more drinking.

In this sense, the relationship between intergenerational economic mobility and alcohol use may work more like a continuing cycle than a simple one-directional relationship. Limited mobility may contribute to harmful drinking, while harmful drinking may make mobility more difficult. It may be difficult to identify where the process begins and where it

ends. This relationship can be viewed as a type of Möbius strip, in which the cause and consequence continue to turn into each other. Economic disadvantages can lead to harmful drinking, but harmful drinking can also help maintain economic disadvantages. This problem may also continue in the next generation. Harmful drinking can affect household income, employment stability, and family relationships. It may also reduce the amount of time and resources that parents can provide for their children. For example, alcohol-related health or employment problems may reduce household income and make it more difficult to invest in children's education or other opportunities. Children growing up in these environments may then have fewer chances to achieve upward mobility in adulthood. Therefore, alcohol use may not only affect the economic position of one individual but may also contribute to the continuation of disadvantages across generations.

From this perspective, it may be important to move beyond current SES when examining drinking patterns. Future studies should consider whether individuals experienced upward mobility, downward mobility, or persistent socioeconomic disadvantages. These mobility patterns may have different effects on psychological stress and drinking behaviors. It may also be useful to examine whether drinking motives differ depending on mobility experiences. For example, individuals experiencing persistent disadvantages or downward mobility may be more likely to drink in order to cope with stress, while individuals experiencing upward mobility may have different patterns of alcohol use. Longitudinal studies may be particularly important because both economic mobility and drinking behaviors change over time. Cross-sectional studies may show whether low SES and alcohol use are related at one point in time, but they may not explain how one process influences the other over the life course. Following individuals over time could help identify whether limited economic mobility leads to harmful drinking and whether harmful drinking later reduces the chance of upward mobility.

Interventions should also consider the economic conditions surrounding harmful drinking. Programs that focus only on reducing alcohol consumption may not fully address the reasons why individuals drink. If people continue to experience unemployment, financial hardship, poor access to healthcare, or limited opportunities for economic advancement, they may remain at risk for harmful coping behaviors. Therefore, improving access to mental health services may be important, but broader economic support may also be necessary. Stable employment, educational opportunities, and financial security may reduce some of the stress that contributes to harmful drinking. Intergenerational economic mobility may therefore be an important factor in understanding socioeconomic differences in drinking patterns. Limited or downward mobility may increase stress and contribute to harmful alcohol use. At the same time, alcohol-related health and employment problems may make upward mobility even more difficult. This relationship may continue across the life course

and potentially across generations. Considering drinking and economic mobility together may help explain why socioeconomic disadvantage can become difficult to escape and why alcohol use may be both a result of disadvantage and one of the factors that helps continue it.

References

1. Probst C, Kilian C, Sanchez S, Lange S, Rehm J, et al. (2020) The role of alcohol use and drinking patterns in socioeconomic inequalities in mortality: a systematic review. *Lancet Public Health* 5(6): e324-e332.
2. Lee J, Sun F (2020) Intergenerational Economic Mobility Between Mothers and Children: Racial and Ethnic Disparities. *Fam Relat* 69(5): 921-933.
3. Lee J, Allen J (2022) Inequality in the intergenerational economic mobility in single mother-headed households. *Child Youth Serv Rev* 139: 106566.
4. Morrissey K, Kinderman P (2020) The impact of financial hardship in childhood on depression and anxiety in adult life: Testing the accumulation, critical period and social mobility hypotheses. *SSM Popul Health* 11: 100592.
5. Ahnquist J, Wamala SP (2011) Economic hardships in adulthood and mental health in Sweden: The Swedish National Public Health Survey 2009. *BMC Public Health* 11: 788.
6. Bresin K, Mekawi Y (2021) The "Why" of Drinking Matters: A Meta-Analysis of the Association Between Drinking Motives and Drinking Outcomes. *Alcohol Clin Exp Res* 45(1): 38-50.
7. Rehm J, Mathers C, Popova S, Thavorncharoensap M, Teerawattananon Y, et al. (2009) Global burden of disease and injury and economic cost attributable to alcohol use and alcohol-use disorders. *Lancet* 373(9682): 2223-2233.
8. Suglia SF, Saelee R, Guzmán IA, Elsenburg LK, Clark CJ, et al. (2022) Child socioeconomic status, childhood adversity and adult socioeconomic status in a nationally representative sample of young adults. *SSM Popul Health* 18: 101094.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License
DOI: [10.19080/JOJNHC.2026.14.555891](https://doi.org/10.19080/JOJNHC.2026.14.555891)

Your next submission with Juniper Publishers will reach you the below assets

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats
(Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission
<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>