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BIOLOGICAL AND HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF HUMAN MOBILITY

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INTRODUCTION

Social mobility may be of two kinds. Vertical mobility occurs in socially stratified societies and involves a shift of a person’s position (up or down) on a scale of attained education or wealth or power or prestige; such scales are often, though not necessarily, interrelated. Vertical mobility may occur between generations, when the shift is measured relative to the position of the subject’s parents, or within a single generation, when the subject moves up or down the scale during his/her adult lifetime.

Horizontal mobility, in contrast, involves movement either to a different place of residence (e.g. rural-urban, different geographical region, or ethnic group) or to a new marital category. Horizontal mobility does not have to cause a shift in the person’s position on any vertical social scale. It is widely recognized that social mobility in one of the factors having a significant indirect impact on a society’s biological well-being and health status (Heller et al. 2002).

In Poland an abrupt transition from a socialist command economy to a free-market system has occurred during the early 1990s. It had a profound impact on virtually all aspects of the society’s occupational, educational and demographic structure. More specifically, it has been hypothesized that the recently observed increasing incidence of cardiovascular diseases among younger people in Poland may in part be due to the new patterns of social mobility generated by the country’s systemic transformation.

INFLUENCE OF HEIGHT ON ATTAINED LEVEL OF EDUCATION

The fact that children and adults from upper social strata tend to be taller than their age-mates from lower strata is usually regarded as a phenotypic manifestation of social disparities in living standards (Malina & Bouchard, 1991). However, the possibility has also been contemplated that in modern industrial societies upward social mobility may be selective with regard to body height, in which case statural differences between social classes might also have a genetic component, even in an ethnically homogenous society. More precisely, the hypothesis postulates that taller individuals are for some reason more likely to move up the scale of educational and/or occupational status than are their shorter peers coming from the same social background.

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