

BMI Fellow Progress Report - First Semester/Atalia Regev

This research project aims to examine the different trajectories in which childhood socioeconomic status (cSES) shapes older adults' expected lifespan. During the first semester, I developed the research question and wrote my research proposal. Thus, I focused mainly on searching and reading articles empirically or theoretically relevant to the proposed study. I learned that subjective survival expectations may influence consumer behaviors (Mittal et al., 2020) and investments in health and healthy lifestyles (Bertoni et al., 2019; Rappange et al., 2016), and can contribute to our understanding of mortality trends and patterns because individuals hold private information on their particular environment, behaviors, family background, and health status that remain unobserved in vital statistics (Peracchi & Perotti, 2014; Perozek, 2008).

Although the relationship between cSES and morbidity (Belloni et al., 2019) or mortality (Hayward & Gorman, 2004) is well documented, and even though previous research has shown that individuals in the low socioeconomic strata express shorter longevity expectations (Dormont et al., 2018; Hurd & McGarry, 1995; Mirowsky & Ross, 2000; Peracchi & Perotti, 2014), little is known about the possible association between childhood SES and subjective survival expectations among older adults. Following the scant existing evidence (Mittal et al., 2020; Popham & Mitchell, 2007) and the literature on the subject at hand, two preliminary theoretical points of departure for understanding subjective survival expectations were identified. The psychologically biased Bayesian learning model for non-additive beliefs (Ludwig & Zimmer, 2013) emphasizes the role of tendencies and emotions in understanding how people learn and update objective information. In contrast, Mirowsky and Ross' two nonexclusive hypotheses (2000)- the concurrent problems and the projected risks- underscore the social context of actual data and dispositions. In other words, they suggest that individuals from lower social positions may anticipate more life-threatening incidents or fewer chances to overcome them, irrespective of their current health condition.

Finally, I examined possible statistical models and databases through which the research question could be studied. I intend to analyze data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), a representative longitudinal panel study of United States adults aged 50 and over. The different pathways in which cSES may shape perceptions of the risk of mortality over the life course will be assessed using nested discrete-time hazard models (Hayward & Gorman, 2004), regressing subjective life expectancy (Perozek 2008) on Vable and colleagues' cSES index (Vable et al., 2017).

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