

The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Social Trust

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Research Questions

- Do those with lower socioeconomic status (SES) differ from those with higher SES in social trust?
- Does the association vary by gender?

Significance

- Social trust refers to the belief in the honesty, integrity, and reliability of others (Pew Research Center, 2007).
- Social trust is a factor for how well a society functions (Hastings, 2018).
- Social integration can blossom when people have trust in one another, which can lead to efficiency in many aspects of a society (Hastings, 2018).

Background

- Americans with low SES are less likely than those with high SES to trust people due to social fractionalization, exploitation and resentment, and status anxiety (Hastings, 2018).
- In the United States, people are less trusting in states that have greater levels of income inequality (Fairbrother & Martin, 2012).
- Those who describe their household as professional class have higher levels of social trust than those who describe themselves as working class (Pew Research Center, 2007).

Hypotheses

- Lower family income will correlate with less social trust.
- Family income is related to social trust for men as well as for women.

Data

- General Social Survey 2018 (N=2,348)
- U.S. adults aged 18+

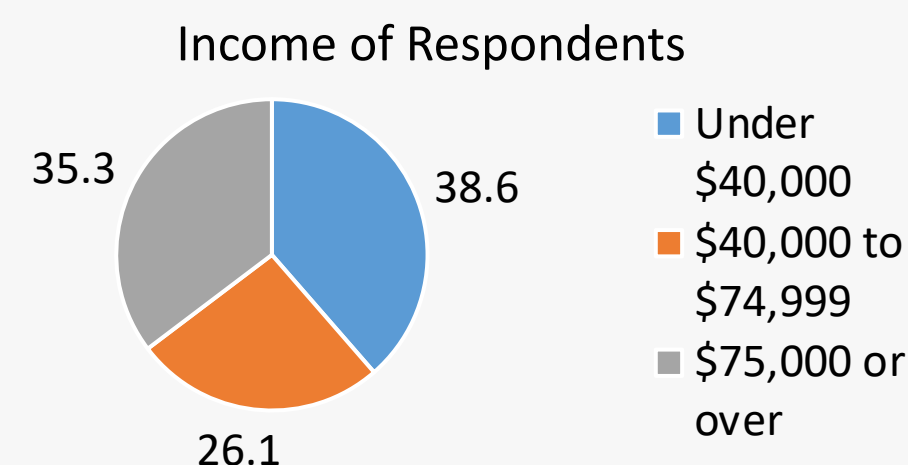
Dependent Variable

Social Trust Scale (0-6): sum of 3 items:
 $M = 2.75$ ($SD = 2.18$)

- “Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful, or they are mostly looking out for themselves?”
- “Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?”
- “Would you say that people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”
- 0 = Lookout for self, Take advantage, Cannot trust
- 1 = Depends (for all)
- 2 = Helpful, Fair, Can trust

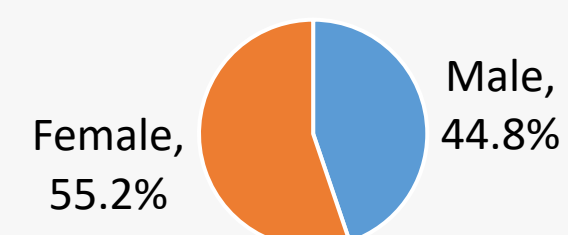
Independent Variable

Figure 1. % Distribution for Family Income of Respondents



Control Variable

Figure 2: Gender of Respondents

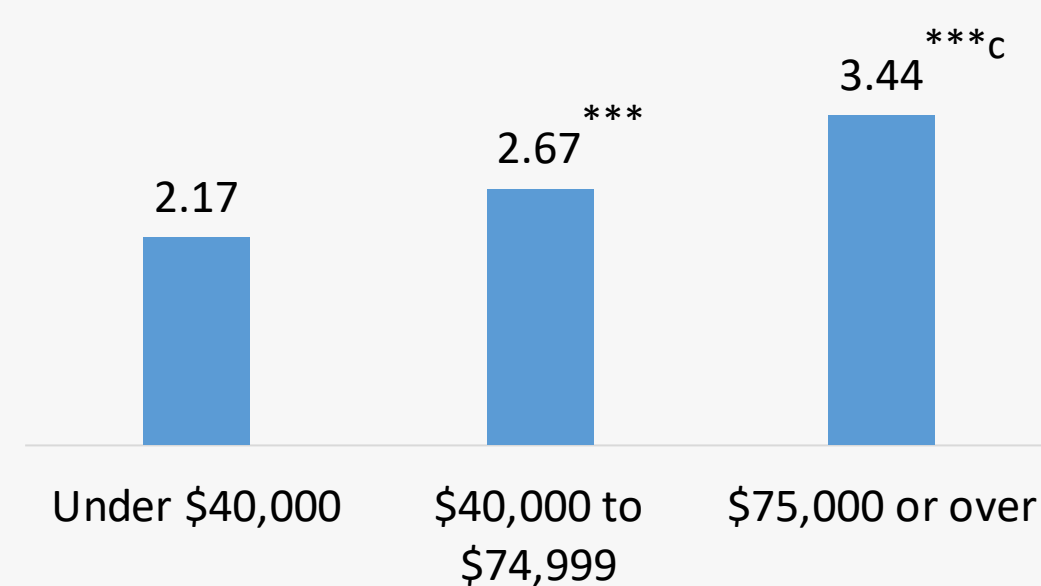


Analysis

Differences in means compared using t-tests in SPSS

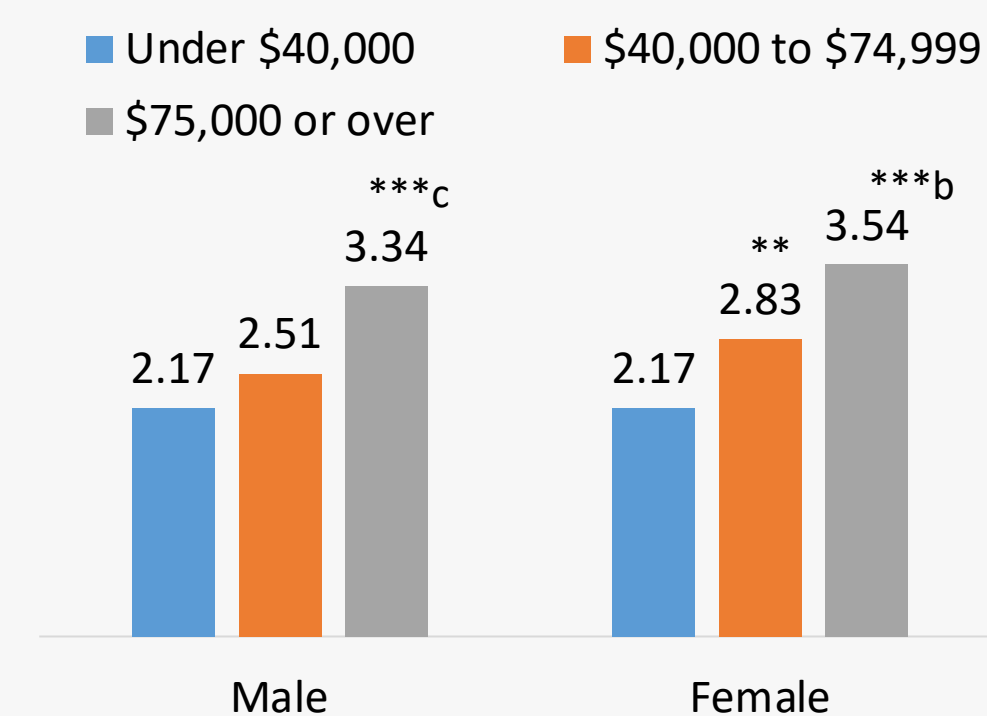
Results

Figure 3: Mean Social Trust Scores By Family Income



Differences from <\$40,000 are significant at ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.
Differences from \$40,000-\$74,999 are significant at ^b $p < .01$, ^c $p < .001$.

Figure 4: Mean Social Trust Score By Family Income and Gender



Differences from <\$40,000 are significant at ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.
Differences from \$40,000-\$74,999 are significant at ^b $p < .01$, ^c $p < .001$.

Summary of Findings

- Americans with low SES are less likely than those with higher SES to trust people.
- Social trust was highest for those with a family income of \$75,000 or over, and lowest for those with a family income of less than \$40,000.
- This held true for both men and women, except for men with \$40,000-\$74,999 who did not significantly differ from men with less than \$40,000.

Future Research

- Social trust may be a mediator between income inequality and other important social problems (Hastings, 2018).
- It is crucial that further research be done to evaluate broader consequences of income inequality.

References

- Fairbrother, M. and Martin, I. W. (2012). Does inequality erode social trust? Results from multilevel models of US States and counties. *Social Science Research*, 42(2), 347-360.
- Hastings, O. P. (2018) Less equal, less trusting? Longitudinal and cross-sectional effects of income inequality on trust in US States, 1973–2012. *Social Science Research*, 74, 77-95.
- Pew Research Center (2007) Americans and Social Trust: Who, Where and Why. Retrieved on March 5, 2020.