

# **Intergenerational Transmission of Lifespan in the US**

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## **Abstract**

We examine the transmission of lifespan across generations using a unique dataset containing more than 26 million individuals born between 1880 and 1920. We document new facts about the transmission of lifespan using both absolute and relative mobility measures. Absolute mobility was high: between 45 and 55 percent of individuals lived longer than their parents. It was much higher for women than men and varied over time. Relative measures show high mobility as well but with substantially less variation across time and subpopulations. The intergenerational correlation in lifespan (a measure of persistence rather than mobility) is about 0.09 for both sexes – this low correlation is observed across races, education groups, cohorts, and birth states. Finally, we document that the intergenerational persistence of lifespan is much smaller than the persistence in socio-economic status. Moreover, correlations in lifespan and in education are largely independent of each other, suggesting that mobility in well-being was larger than measures of income alone suggest.