

LIFELONGMOVE Workshop

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Moving Homes, Changing Perspectives

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LIFELONGMOVE

*Understanding spatial mobility from
early life into adulthood*

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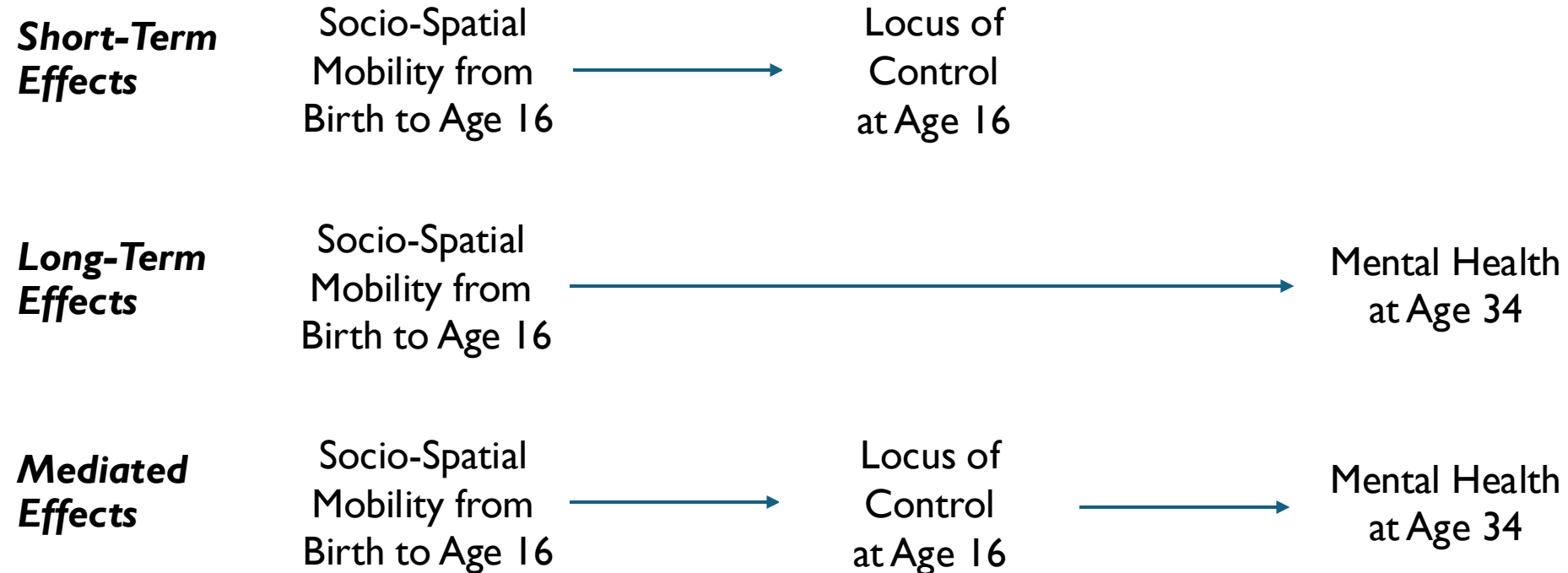
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Moving Homes, Changing Perspectives:

How Residential and Social Mobility in Childhood Shape Locus of Control and Adult Mental Health



Residential Mobility

Social Mobility

Locus of Control

Adult Mental Health

The total **number of residential moves** (i.e., changes of address) reported **between ages 0 and 16**, categorising them into:

- '0 moves'
- '1-2 moves'
- '3 or more moves' to reflect increasing levels of **housing instability**

Residential Mobility

Social Mobility

Locus of Control

Adult Mental Health

Social classes in the BCS70 are demarcated according to parents' or caregivers' occupational statuses (Goldthorpe and McKnight, 2006). Four-category NS-SEC schema based on the scheme proposed by Rose, Pevalin, and O'Reilly (2005):

- 'low (unskilled and partly skilled)'
- 'lower-middle (skilled manual and non-manual)'
- 'upper-middle (managerial/technical)'
- 'high (professional)'

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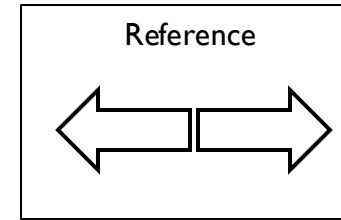
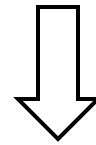
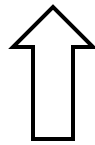
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Combined Indicator

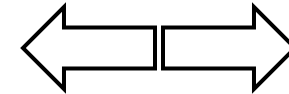
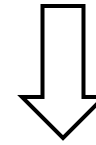
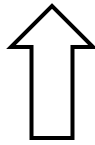
The Social Meaning of Mobility



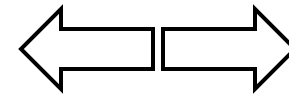
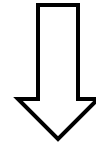
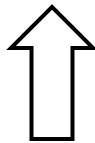
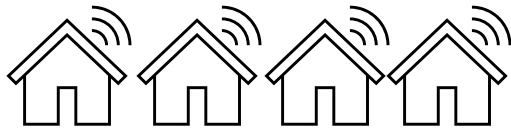
Residential stability (0 moves)



Occasional mobility (1-2 moves)



Frequent mobility (3+ moves)



Upward
mobility

Downward
mobility

Lateral
mobility

Residential Mobility

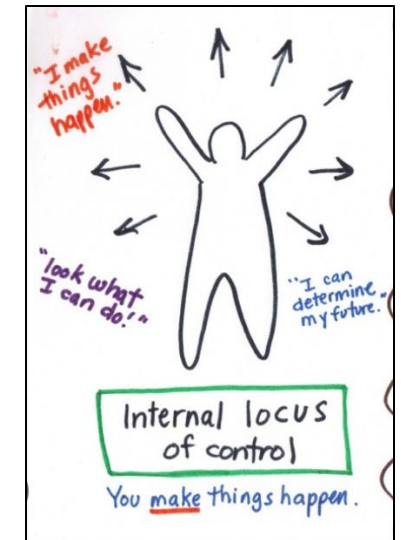
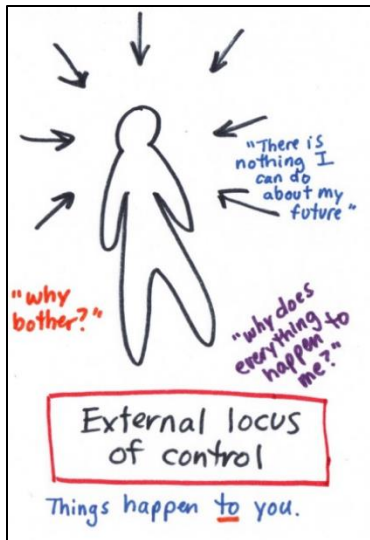
Social Mobility

Locus of Control

Adult Mental Health

The locus of control scale at age 16 in BCS70 consists of 19 (yes/no) items.
Examples include:

- “most of the time it is not worth trying hard because things never turn out right anyway”
- “when bad things happen to you, is it usually someone else's fault”
- “a high mark is just a matter of luck for me”
- “when nice things happen to you is it only good luck”
- “are you surprised when your teacher says you've done well”
- “studying for tests is a waste of time”
- “wishing can make good things happen”



Locus of Control
Continuum



Psychological perspective

- Moving often disrupts stable community ties and group affiliations, which otherwise serve as anchors for self-definition
- As a result, mobile individuals place more weight on individual traits, such as personal abilities or preferences, instead of family roles or social belonging
- Oishi and Talhelm (2012) suggests that, over time, frequent moves in childhood are associated with lower subjective well-being and even higher mortality risk, but only among introverts. Extraverts appear to be more resilient to the psychological toll of mobility. The authors suggest that this resilience results from extroverts' greater social assertiveness and ability to form new connections, facilitating the reconstruction of their social networks after each relocation

Sociological perspective

- Classic theories of class socialization posit that working-class environments tend to emphasize external control, compliance, and constraint, while middle- and upper-class environments cultivate internal control, autonomy, and future planning (Kohn, 1977; Lareau, 2003)
- These differences reflect the material and institutional realities of class position
- Social class also structures access to institutional contexts that reinforce or undermine internal control (e.g., schools)
- Locus of control is not merely a reflection of class-based advantage, but a dynamic psychological resource shaped by lived exposure to (in)stability and adaptation across time and space (Liu, 2020)

Residential Mobility

Social Mobility

Locus of Control

Adult Mental Health

Adult mental health is assessed at age 34 using a **9-item malaise inventory score** derived from the Cornell Medical Index Health Questionnaire:

- “Do you feel tired most of the time?”
- “Do you often feel depressed?”
- “Do you often get worried about things?”
- “Do you often get into a violent rage?”
- “Do you suddenly become scared for no good reason?”
- “Are you easily upset or irritated?”
- “Are you constantly keyed up and jittery?”
- “Does every little thing get on your nerves and wear you out?”
- “Does your heart often race like mad?”

The final score is the sum of the individual variables, centred at 4 (cut-off for **depressive symptoms**).





How does moving in childhood affect later health?

- The **stress process model** (Pearlin et al., 1981): childhood mobility as a stressor that undermines a child's sense of stability and security, which may lead to psychological strain and poorer mental health
- The **ecological model** (Bronfenbrenner, 1979): frequent relocations disrupt these vital environments, making it difficult for children to build stable relationships and access supportive networks
- The **life course perspective** (Elder, 1998): the impact of early instability can compound over time, affecting psychological health

How does the locus of control affect later health?

- It **mediates the effects of childhood IQ** on adult health (Gale et al., 2008)
- It was found to be associated with positive lifetime outcomes, especially for female and socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals (Elkins and Schurer, 2020)
- Locus of control is a component of 'personality hardness', which **mitigates stress** (Brown and Siegel, 1988; Murasko, 2007) and fosters **emotional resilience** (Moffitt et al., 2011)

Data Source



- Babies born in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the week of April 5-11, 1970
- Most recent sweep in 2021 with cohort members aged 51
- Focus on the original birth cohort (1970), three childhood surveys at **ages 5, 10 and 16** (1975, 1980, and 1986) and a fifth follow-up in adulthood at **age 34** (2004)
- **Analytical sample (N=9,325)**

Analytical strategy

Delta-Adjusted Inverse Probability Weighted (IPW) regressions to handle MNAR data:

- **Step 1.** Reweight observed cases based on the likelihood of having valid data at age 16
- **Step 2.** Delta adjustment grid

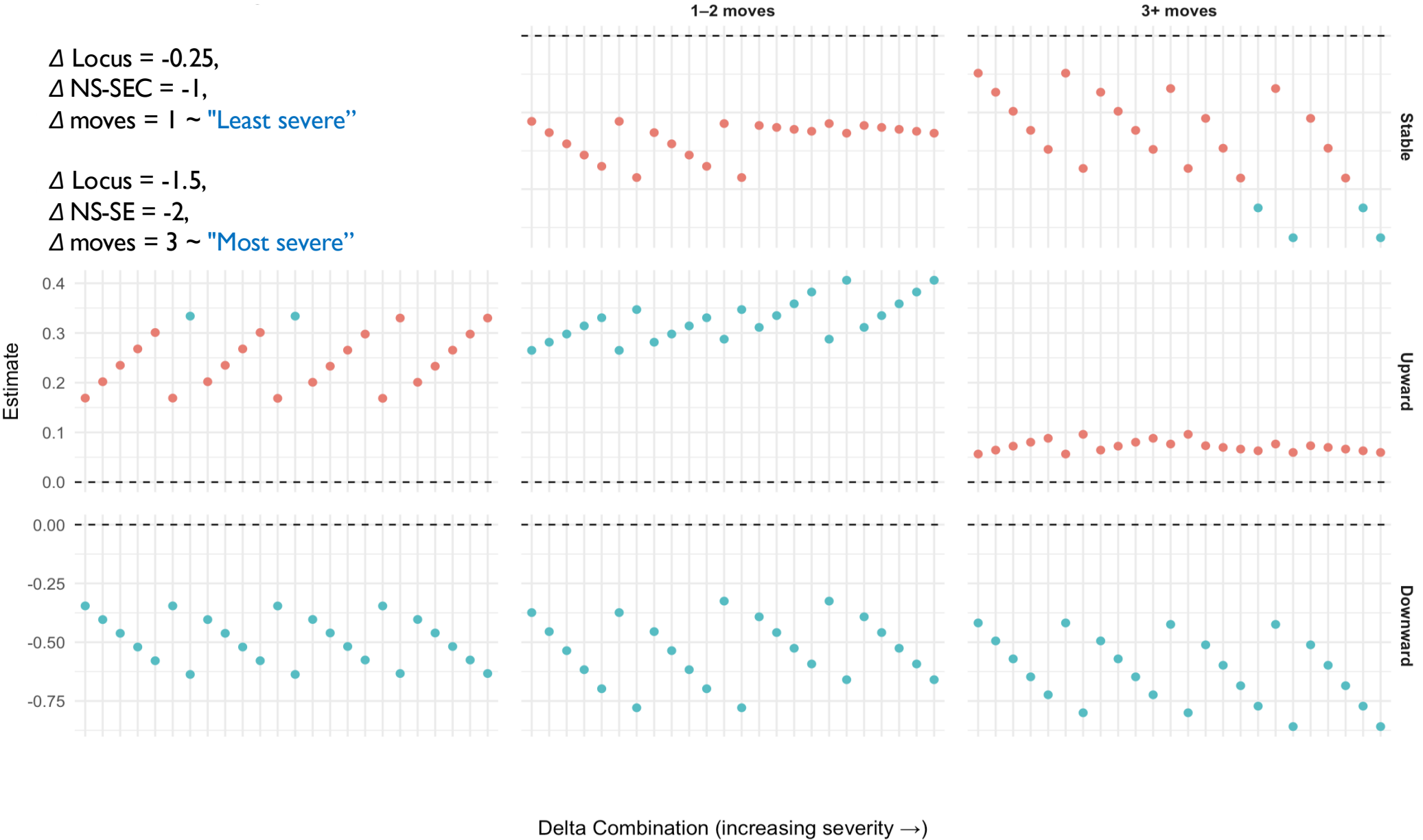
Confounders

- Mother's age at CM's birth
- Family structure
- Household educational deprivation
- Parental ethnic background
- Social class at birth
- % of time in lower social classes during childhood
- CM's sex
- Conceptual maturity at age 5 (proxy IQ)

Delta grid. Effects on Locus of Control by Socio-Spatial Mobility Category

Δ Locus = -0.25,
 Δ NS-SEC = -1,
 Δ moves = 1 ~ "Least severe"

Δ Locus = -1.5,
 Δ NS-SEC = -2,
 Δ moves = 3 ~ "Most severe"



Significance (p < 0.05) Not Significant Significant

Stable social class	1-2 moves
	3+ moves
Downward social class	No moves
	1-2 moves
	3+ moves
Upward social class	No moves
	1-2 moves
	3+ moves

Fig. 1a. Cumulative structural mobility

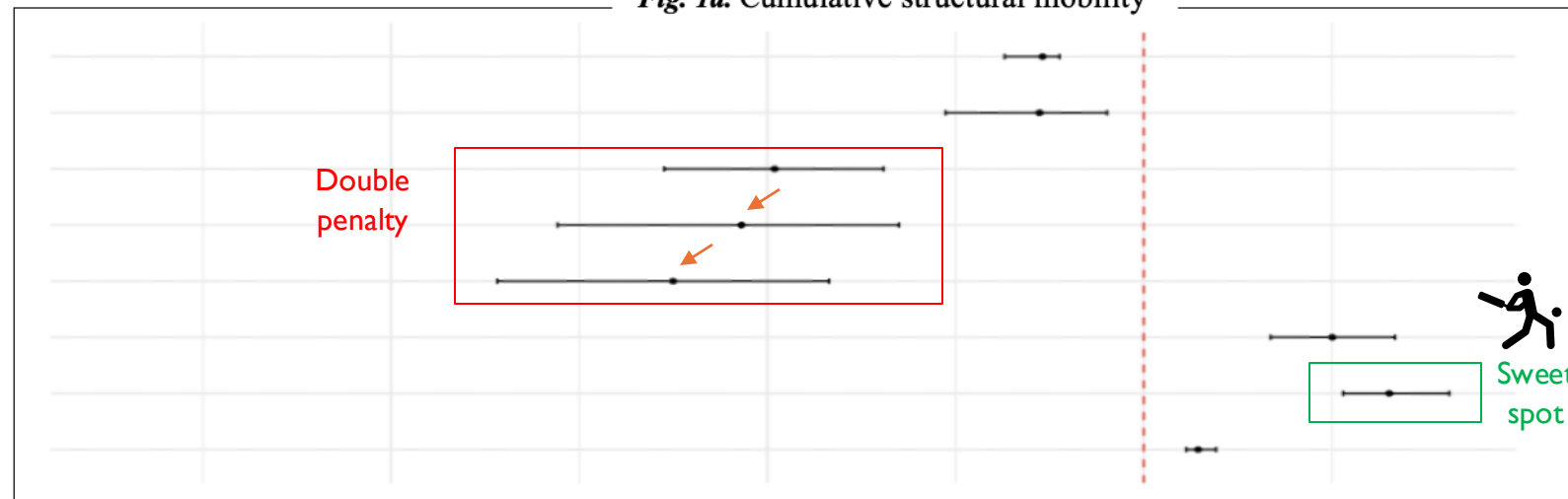


Fig. 1b. Other predictors

Social class at birth (low)
 Social class at birth (lower-middle)
 Social class at birth (upper-middle)
 Proportion of time in lower class
 Family structure
 Household education deprivation
 Age of the mother at the cohort member's birth
 Family ethnic minority background
 Sex
 Conceptual maturity at age 5

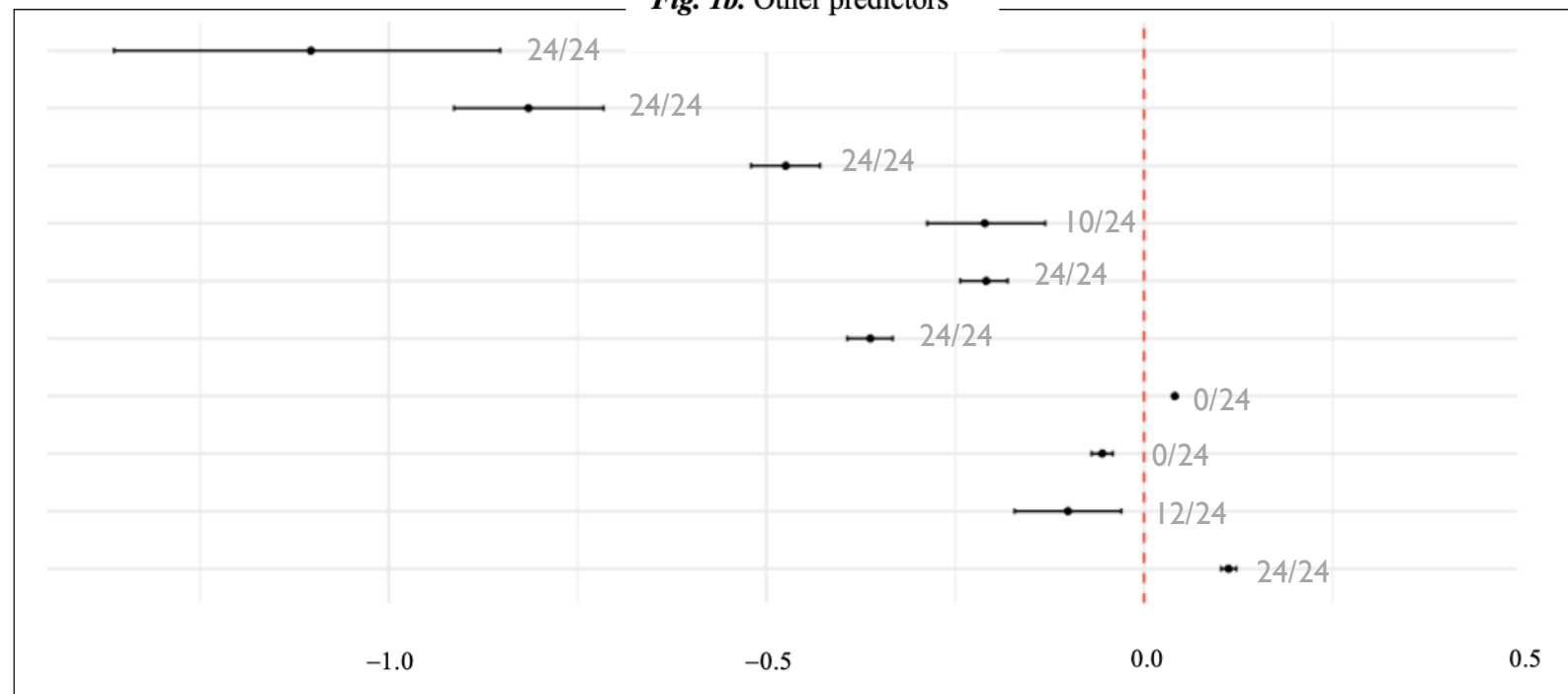




Table 3. Summary of the direct and indirect effects of cumulative structural mobility during childhood on mental health in adulthood at age 34, across 24 delta adjustments. Two models are included, estimating direct effects (including locus of control) and indirect effects (mediated via locus of control).

	Mean Direct Effects (with Mediator)	No. of p<0.05 (n=24)	Mean Indirect Effects	No. of p<0.05 (n=24)
Cumulative structural mobility (<i>ref.=0 moves, stable class</i>)				
Residential stability (0 moves), downward	0.06	0	0.05	24
Residential stability (0 moves), upward	0.16	0	-0.02	0
Occasional mobility (1-2 moves), stable	0.07	0	0.01	0
Occasional mobility (1-2 moves), downward	0.11	0	0.05	24
Occasional mobility (1-2 moves), upward	0.01	0	-0.03	24
Frequent mobility (3 moves), stable	0.15	0	0.01	4
Frequent mobility (3 moves), downward	0.17	8	0.06	24
Frequent mobility (3 moves), upward	0.07	0	-0.00	0

The erosion of perceived personal agency plays a key role in shaping long-term outcomes

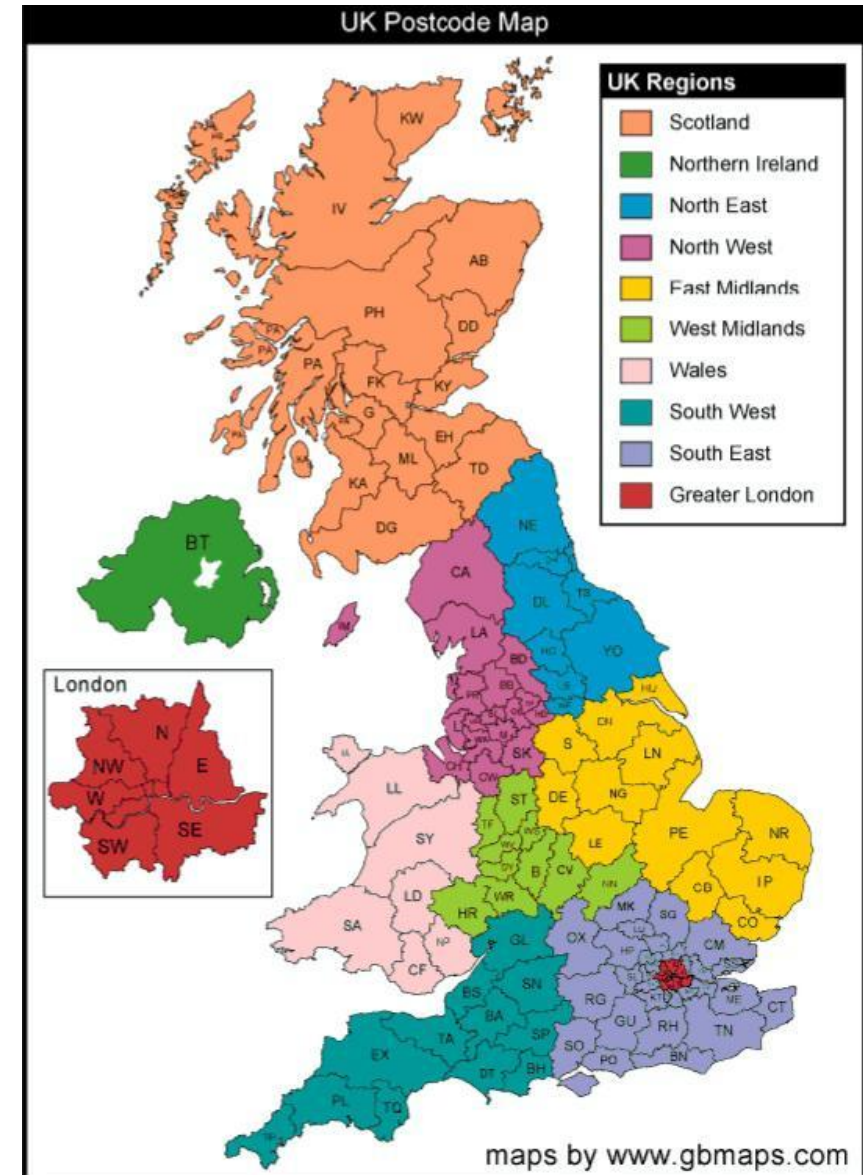
26% of the total effect is explained by a psychological mechanism formed during adolescence

Follow-up modeling

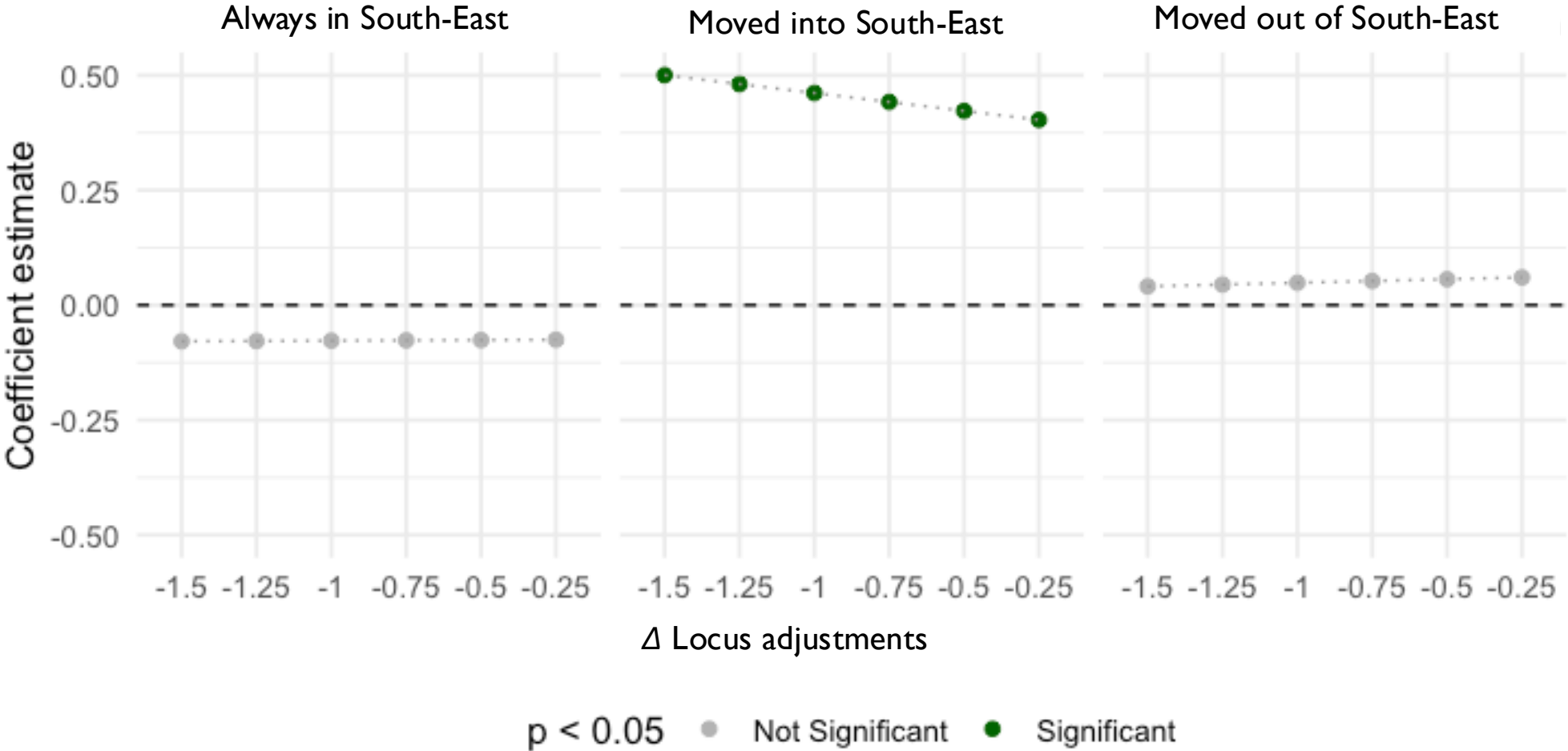
A measure of **regional opportunity mobility** by identifying whether children moved into an 'escalator region' during childhood. Categorical indicator based on whether and when the child's household lived in the South-East of England, defined as **Greater London and twelve surrounding counties**, between birth and age 16.

Four groups:

1. children who always lived outside the South-East (reference group),
2. those who always lived within the region,
3. those who moved out of the South-East, and
4. those who moved into the South-East during childhood



Effect of Geographical Opportunities on the Locus of Control at Age 16





Highlights

- Downward mobility emerges not only as a material decline but also as a psychologically disempowering process
- If it is undertaken in the framework of an upward social class spiral, residential mobility is challenging but can also foster a greater sense of agency
- Residential instability (3+ moves) increases the negative effect of downward social class trajectories on locus of control ('double penalty') and shrinks the positive effects of upward mobility ('sweet spot')
- Through the locus of control, the combined measure of social and spatial mobility exerts long-term (small but significant) effects on mental health outcomes almost two decades later (at age 34)
- Regional perspective (escalator region): it is not just mobility but a geographical re-positioning within the frameworks of opportunity





*Is it Social Class
in Disguise?*



Robustness check with residualised locus of control.

This approach removes the portion of variation in the locus of control that is predictable from social background (i.e., exposure to low social class since birth, household educational deprivation, family structure, mother's age at birth, ethnic minority background, and sex), allowing us to isolate the component of perceived control that varies independently of class origin.

Results from this robustness check closely mirror the original findings, lending greater confidence that they are not simply a reflection of early-life class background.



Limitations

- Unmeasured variables (e.g., [motivation](#) for moving)
- No info on [school changes](#) (without relocation)
- Our measure of socio-spatial mobility captures [accumulation, not temporal sequencing or interdependence](#)
- [Childhood \(1970-1986\) in the UK](#): rising housing instability, widening regional inequality, [shifting pattern of class mobility](#) amid economic restructuring

Implications

[Agency](#) is one of Glen Elder's [key principles of life course analysis](#) (Elder, 1998: 961–962; Elder and Johnson, 2003). Two significant problems, one methodological and one theoretical:

- While agency is frequently invoked, [it is assumed to be operative and rarely measured](#)
- Current formulations fail to apprehend [the dialectical interrelation of structure and agency](#)

[Interventions to support children's sense of agency and lessen the psychological impact of residential mobility](#)



Thanks!

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