

# Connecting the biology of stress, allostatic load and epigenetics to social structures and processes

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## Abstract

How do sociology and stress biology connect in efforts to understand the impact of early childhood adversity on health and life chances? This memorial article describes the collaboration between Bruce and Craig McEwen in bringing stress neurobiology to sociologists. It attempts, in turn, to bring sociology to stress neurobiologists, the second goal of this collaboration. It frames the social sources of human stress in terms of the social determinants of health as well as more proximal childhood adversities. It also underlines the importance of supportive adult and community relationships in preventing toxic stress. Bruce was hopeful that stress biology research could inform public health efforts aimed at improving population health and more equitable life trajectories. To strengthen our understanding of stress and to contribute to that goal, stress neurobiologists can help tease out the complex social causes of stress by expanding the range of variables employed to identify its sources as well as the protections against it in human populations.

**Keywords:** Toxic stress, Allostatic load, Early childhood, Poverty, Social determinants of health