

Learning after School – the Impacts of Parents’ Education and Social Economic Status on Children’s Learning Attitudes and Activities

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Child Poverty is one of the key topics of American welfare policy discussions. According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s report (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Mills, 2004), the poverty rate of children under 18 is 17.6% and the number is 12.9 million in 2003. Child poverty problem not only reflects in the amount of poor children, but also in the high percentage of long term poverty and the high rate of returning poverty. The significance of child poverty attracts broad interdisciplinary attentions to explore the causations of child poverty and the effective interventions in eliminating child poverty. Discussions focus on children’s resource attainment and the quality of the interactions with parents, school and community. Furthermore, researchers concern intrafamily allocation of resources, the sibling composition effects, gender bias in schools and labor market, as well as the interaction effects on children’s education attainment between family, school and labor market(Butcher & Case, 1994).

Among the researches on child poverty, human capital theory, social capital accumulation and social stratification theory, and the developmental psychology are three mainstream frameworks. According to human capital theory, resource constraints, children’s educational achievements, parents’ expectations of the return of human capital in labor market and parental preference for children with a particular sex determine parents’ resource allocation and investment in children’s human capital, which affects children’s future labor market status (Becker, 1988; Kaestner, 1997). Meanwhile, sociology concerns children’s resource attainment by emphasizing the investment in social capital and children’s socialization(Coleman, 1988;

England & Farkas, 1986). In short, both human capital theory and the social stratification theory focus on two concepts: resources and interactions. Furthermore, the developmental psychology explore on what are pivotal to children's development through examining into different age groups.

Currently, most studies focus on the intergenerational material resources transmission. Studies focus on the impacts of parents' education and social economic status on family income, family structure, and the ability to provide children the material resources or social participation opportunities. However, fewer studies explore the intergenerational transmission of the non material resources such as the attitudes toward study and work. This study aims to fill up this gap.

Nowadays, the generally increasing working hours among low-skill workers not only affect parents' earnings and time that can be with children, but also lengthen parents' learning time in working. Meanwhile, the stratification among different occupations that was led by the development of economy as well as the restructure of industry not only influence parents' earnings, but also their knowledge accumulation in labor market such as the relation between a specific academic major and a particular occupation – as well as how to find working opportunities. Parents' educational achievements, work status (hours and occupational types) – as well as their attitudes to study and work will shape their expectations on children's academic achievements and will transmit to children through their disciplinary on children's learning activities.

In detail, I hypothesize that parents with higher education level and better social economic status are more likely to make human and social capital investment on their children in the forms of stricter disciplinary on children's learning behaviors, more encouraging children's after school learning activities, and more communications on children's education and work plans. Besides, I

also take parents' marital status and resident status as the parent-level independent variables; for child level independent variables, I examine their age, gender, race, education level, birth order, sibling compositions and residence.

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79) provides me an ideal data to examine the above hypotheses. NLSY79 has been investigating 12,686 respondents about their education level, labor market status and family compositions since 1979. It over-samples the disadvantaged women such as blacks, Hispanics and the economically disadvantaged non-black/non-Hispanics. Meanwhile, NLSY79 has also collected the information of children who lived with NLSY79 mother respondents since 1986 and investigated children's personalities, behaviors in and out school, academic achievements, interactions with other family members (parents, siblings and relatives) and peer groups. For children who were older than 14 years old, NLSY79 child cohort also investigates these young adults' attitudes and plans toward further education as well as labor market participation.

Hypotheses are tested by using child and household level data with children 10 to 21 from NLSY79 waves 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000 and 2002. 2700 children were investigated at least once and analyses are on the basis of 22680 child-year observations. Meanwhile, 1825 households were examined in total.

Preliminary results suggest that parents who have higher education level are more likely to discuss with children on learning behaviors and future academic plans. Married couples are more likely to discuss on children's learning activities than single parents such as never married, divorced and widowed parents. The social economic status, especially family income has no

statistically significant impact on the communications. Meanwhile, older siblings are more likely to communicate with parents on learning. There were more discussions with parents as children grew up; furthermore, girls are more likely to discuss their learning activities with parents.

By examining the other scale – children's after school activities, the preliminary findings suggest that children who are older siblings in families, or, whose parents have higher education are more likely to participate the after school learning activities such as reading, going to library, going to school care and doing homework. Meanwhile, as children grew up, they are more likely to participate in these activities. However, parents' marital and economic status has no statistically significant relation with the above activities. On the other side, children are more likely to work after school, do chores and take care of siblings at home if their parents have higher education degree, or, have lower incomes. For married families, children are less likely to take care of their siblings at home.

This research is related to the investigator's work on a larger project on resource allocation in families (Dr. Jennifer Romich, PI; Dr. Shelly Lundberg, Investigator).

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