

Childs future life chances



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Your life chances and opportunities depend on the social circumstances of the family you were born into. discuss drawing upon academic literature and research examples

The likelihood of a child succeeding in life is still largely determined by their family's income and social position. This essay will begin by introducing the debates which centre around this topic. It will then go on to examine four key domains which affect a Childs future life chances: family income, education, class status and family background.

The concept of life chances was originally introduced by Max Weber who believed that factors such as low, economic position, status and power were interlinked and together presented the problem of poorer life chances in the future. In current literature life chances signifies the opportunities which are available for people to improve there quality of life in the future for example access to quality education. Some of these influences are likely to be affected by the social circumstances of the family to which they are born into. This could be directly: well educated parents, all things being equal, will probably provide a more intellectually stimulating home-life than those parents who left school early. Other influences will be indirect: better-educated parents may have higher than average incomes and hence be able to finance educational excursions, or in other ways to provide life enhancing experiences for their offspring. some of these additional opportunities will be cumulative, reinforcing other positive characteristics, while others may serve to compensate for some forms of disadvantage.

Some people believe that it is strictly genes that affect our opportunities in life. Research focusing on the causal relationship between genes and

subsequent IQ, range from 0 to 80% this provides inconsistent results.

Recent research, has suggested that genetic and environmental factors are not distinct determinants of intelligence and life chances. Instead it is the interaction between these two factors which gives rise to a child's intelligence levels. The role that nurture has to play in developing intelligence is clearly demonstrated from data published by Inequality in the early cognitive development of British children. The data suggested that the social circumstances of the family influenced future educational attainment. Those children brought up in families with low Socio-economic Status (SES) with attainment levels ranked as low, at 22 months, were also prone to have low attainment at age ten. On the other hand those children from a high SES background were as likely to show high attainment at age ten, even if their attainment was ranked low at 22 months. This data suggests that it is nurture and the social circumstances of the family which influences the future chances of these children and not their initial genetic abilities.

Mayer notes that children who are born into low income parents also seem to have less success than those parents who have more money. Children from low income families also tend to score lower on measures of cognitive ability, more likely to drop out of school, to have behavioural problems and essentially earn less in later life. This is drastically demonstrated in a 1970 British cohort survey showing that at age 26 young adults experience an earnings penalty of 9% if they were brought up in a household with an income below half the average (after controlling for educational attainment) therefore this suggests that young people from poor backgrounds are disproportionately observed at the lower end of the earnings distribution

when they are in work. Further research in the US by Isaac (2007) which focused on the intergenerational aspect of income focusing on families economic position and how this is influenced by that of their parents: He found that 42 percent of children born to parents in the bottom fifth of the economic distribution remain in this section as adults with only 23 percent rising to the second fifth, meanwhile 39 percent of children born to parents at the top of the income distribution remain at the top, with only 23 percent moving downwards to the second fifth.

From this research alone it is clear to see that a parents income is influencing their children's future income opportunities. One possible reason for this difference is that of social class. The role of SES is well-documented in the literature concerning life chances. Using the National Child Development Study and the British Cohort study, Carneiro et al (2007) and Blanden et al (2006) illustrated that there is clearly a strong relationship between a child's social and cognitive abilities and their parents' SES.

This has been demonstrated by Fienstein (2003) who found that those children who were originally brought up in low socio economic status background who scored poorly on cognitive tests at an early age were more likely to remain with low scores as they grew through the life course, however those children from a higher socio economic status with low scores were much more likely to catch up. These results from the NCDS and the BCS do allow for informative feedback. However in order to test the validity of these findings it is very important that these relationships are tested throughout generations. This recent research has been carried out by Sylva et al (2007) who analysed data from a recent programme the Effective Pre-
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School and Primary Education (EPPE) programme which aimed to test children's cognitive attainment (reading and mathematics) from that age of three to the end of Key Stage 2.