

Relationship between poverty and educational outcomes



Children in Poverty: Addressing Inequalities in Educational Outcomes

- Jodie Somerville

The American Psychological Association (2007) asserts that socioeconomic factors and social class are fundamental determinants of human functioning across the lifespan including development. Levels of parental education, occupation and income are factors used to quantify socio-economic status and classify social class (Duchesne, McMaugh, Bochner & Krause, 2013). Socioeconomic status (SES) is a recognition of the economic, environmental and education factors in the lives of parents, which affect educational outcomes of children. Often the relationship between SES and education focuses on those individuals living in poverty, the lowest tranche of economic privilege. Boston (2013) asserts that there are disparities evident in educational achievement between children from advantaged backgrounds and those experiencing deprivation. Students with higher family SES have higher educational achievement than students with lower family SES with a wide gap evidenced between the two (Thrupp, as cited in Boston, 2013). Those disparities and the inherent causes thereof will be outlined herein. Changes that may alleviate the effect of poverty on educational outcomes in New Zealand will also be highlighted. In particular, the need for a multi-faceted approach towards addressing inequalities in educational outcomes arising from poverty and SES.

In 2012, 285, 000 children in this country aged 0–17 years lived in poverty equating 27% of all New Zealand children (Craig, Reddington, Wicken, Oben & Simpson, 2013). It is important to note that poverty rates for Māori and Pasifika children are around double those for Pākehā/European children <https://assignbuster.com/relationship-between-poverty-and-educational-outcomes/>

with evidence suggesting that Māori and Pasifika children are almost twice as likely to be living in severe poverty and face a higher risk of remaining in poverty for extended periods of time (Boston, 2013). Major influences on the overall level of child poverty are changes in demographics, family structure, unemployment rates, benefit and retraining levels, childcare services and housing costs, all of which are influenced in broad terms by social policy and legislation to some degree (Davies, Crothers, & Hanna, 2010). These factors have led to a rise in the cost of living particularly housing affordability, food and medical care (Boston, 2013). The changes have also seen low wages and relatively high taxes for low income families with family assistance programmes not sufficient to meet shortfalls for those in poverty (Every Child Counts, 2010). These aforementioned factors that give rise to poverty and low SES have subsequent health, cognitive and socio emotional outcomes which affect child development (Duchesene et al., 2013). The development of the child then in turn affects his or her educational achievement.

The relationship between SES and educational attainment of children is evidenced in a New Zealand study by Fergusson and Woodward (2000). That study noted that children from higher SES backgrounds achieved university entrance rates five times higher (57%) than those of children from families of a lower SES (11%). Further, there is a statistically significant relationship between family income during the early years of a child's life and subsequent school completion rates and adults income with children from poorer families having worse outcomes (Gibb, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2012). Boston (2013) cautions that although there is evidence of a strong

correlation between the socio economic status of children and their education achievement, socio economic status in itself is not the only cause of poor educational outcomes. He asserts there other interlinking factors associated with SES, particularly factors prevalent in situations of poverty, that contribute to the educational attainment gap.

The first aspect affecting educational achievement is family SES and income. Duchesne et al. (2013) state that children of low SES backgrounds often have poor nutrition, are exposed to environmental hazards and have inadequate access to healthcare. Boston (2013) highlights that limited finances place constraints on choices and opportunities for those living in poverty. This includes being able to afford nutritious food, access to primary healthcare and quality early childhood education, accommodation choices and providing for a stimulating home environment. The effects of poverty on educational outcomes are wide reaching. Poor nutrition can effect physical and mental growth and development and cognitive function. It can also result in lethargy and resultant decreased motivation to learn. Boston (2013) states that children from low SES backgrounds are likely to eat fewer healthy foods and have higher cholesterol intake than their peers in elevated socioeconomic circumstances. They are also much more likely to start the school day hungry and have little or no lunch. This reduces the child's ability to concentrate and learn and generates negative behaviours. In New Zealand lack of access to health care for children living in poverty is linked to the high rates of otitis media, an infection of the middle ear particularly prevalent in Māori children, which leads to hearing loss (Duchesne et al., 2013). Boston (2013) also notes that during their early school years

economically disadvantaged children typically have less access to a variety of important learning resources such as books, newspapers and the internet.

The second link between poverty and educational achievement are parenting factors. Bradley & Corwyn (as cited in Duchesne et al., 2013) highlight a strong association between poverty, low levels of parental education and lower levels of school achievement for children. Parental education has an effect on interactions at home and the ways in which parents interact with their children (Duchesne et al., 2013). Children whose parents, especially mothers, have higher levels of education were more likely to be supported in ways that encouraged engagement in education including better resources. Overall experience in homes with lower levels of parental education was likely to be less with lower parental input (Duchesne et al., 2013). This is evidenced in activity levels and language use with parents in poorest families using only one third of the spoken language of other families when conversing with their children (Hart & Risley as cited in Duchesne et al., 2013). Language is important to learning and displaying knowledge at school. Parents' own experience of education affects interactions with children including their ability to prepare children for school, their expectations and attitudes towards education. Parents from lower SES groups may value education but have little expectation for their children to excel. They may have little or no relationship or trust towards the school or teachers. This low level of expectation is linked with a negative orientation towards school, a sense of indifference and alienation from education and influences the attendance and participation patterns of children (Boston, 2013) making further schooling beyond what is compulsory less likely

(Duchesne et al., 2013). Parents with low educational achievement were also less likely to provide cognitively stimulating enrichment such as trips to libraries or specialist classes such as music lessons for their children (Duchesne et al., 2013).

The third link between poverty and educational achievement is stress. Families living in poverty encounter employment uncertainty, poor financial stability, transience and often live in substandard overcrowded accommodation in neighbourhoods where violence is prevalent (Duchesne et al., 2013). These conditions of hardship are contributors to parental stress, relationship difficulties and mental health issues (Boston, 2013). Both Duchesne et al. (2013) and Boston (2013) assert a correlation between stress and maladaptive parenting behaviours (including a higher incidence of neglect and maltreatment) and lower levels of warmth and responsiveness in familial relationships. This situation undermines a child's sense of security and self-esteem, identified as factors that may provide some resilience for children at risk from poverty (Duchesne et al., 2013). Stress also contributes to learnt helplessness and feelings of powerlessness. Children living in stressful environments, particularly substandard accommodation and more likely to suffer illness that impacts on learning. The transient nature of low socio economic households also has damaging educational outcomes.

A fourth connection can be made between school factors and educational achievement. In the same way that a child's school outcomes are not purely as a result of their individual characteristics but subject to wider family and environmental influences, there are influential factors within schools

themselves and their interactions with families that affect educational
<https://assignbuster.com/relationship-between-poverty-and-educational-outcomes/>

achievement for low SES children (Duchesne et al., 2013). McLloyd, 1998 (as cited in Duchesne et al., 2013) suggests that teachers often perceive students' ability and behaviour more negatively for those from lower SES circumstances. Children from poverty were less likely to receive positive attention and reinforcement for academic achievement possibly attributable to lower teacher expectation for those students. Duchesne et al. (2013) highlights that there are a number of ways in which the relationship between schools and their families and communities contribute to educational disadvantage. Firstly, children whose home experiences fit the "style" of the school experience better educational outcomes than those who don't. Secondly, a division may exist and be maintained between home and school where the values of the school and home differ with home values of lower SES families, particularly ethnic minorities, perceived as less valuable. In line with that, differing communication styles of home and school also serve to create a barrier for lower SES children with misunderstandings and conflict between the two environments. Lastly the perceptions of and about minority groups, who are often over represented in lower SES families, may be stereotypically based in wider societal beliefs. This can be exacerbated by practices within schools that reject or marginalise those students. Overall, these school factors can lead to withdrawal and alienation from the education system and poor outcomes for disadvantaged children.

It is clear that children from lower SES backgrounds experience poor educational outcomes. The challenge of policy makers and educators is to work together collaboratively to mitigate the effects of child poverty on the education of our most vulnerable citizens. A 2014 report by the Child Poverty

Action Group entitled “ Our Children, Our Choice” sets out a number of measures which it asserts will alleviate some of the effects of poverty on children’s education. Its first recommendation is to develop culturally appropriate measures of the cognitive, affective, behavioural and developmental needs of new entrants. This data could then be used to make funding allocations to ensure children in poverty receive meaningful, enjoyable and empowering experiences to address their disadvantage, not a narrow focus on standards. In line with that, the report’s second recommendation was to abandon national standards as they have been found ineffective, disadvantaging poor children’s learning and teaching in low decile schools. The third recommendation is the provision a 100% government subsidy to the lowest decile secondary schools for NCEA and scholarship examination fees. It also recommends providing NCEA subject pathway guidance to tertiary study on entry to secondary school for all students. In particular, academic counselling and target setting to improve outcomes for Pasifika students and extension of kura kaupapa Māori and wharekura to more communities.

The Child Poverty Action Group report from 2014 also highlighted some social measures to mitigate some of the environmental disadvantage experienced by children from low SES homes. Its first recommendation in that regard was to provide free breakfast and lunch for children in decile 1-4 schools. It extrapolated on that with an assertion that low decile schools have multi-agency services on site which would include social workers, health workers, alternative education programmes and providers and teen parent units. The Child Poverty Action Group (2014) highlight the

recommendations of the Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty which suggest solutions also include expansion of the positive behaviour plans and extension of school-local community collaboration initiatives. The report also recommended a reduction in class sizes in lower decile primary schools and providing salary incentives to encourage quality teachers into schools in areas of low SES. Its final recommendation was to retain the decile funding system principles currently in place, which are based on need and equality of outcome.

In conclusion, there is substantial evidence of the correlation between socio economic deprivation and low levels of educational achievement. Boston (2013) asserts that child poverty, especially when experienced in early childhood and/or when persistent and severe, has damaging effects which are twofold – firstly to the individual child but secondly the wider society. Child poverty contributes to the large educational achievement gaps between children with different SES backgrounds. The Child Poverty Action Group's measures target investment of resources and interventions towards those of highest need. Boston (2013) notes that the goal of such interventions is not merely to assist the children and families currently experiencing situations of disadvantage, but also to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and its effect on educational achievement. By ensuring that more of the children from current low-income families achieve educational success, this will translate to improved outcomes for the next generation. Children whose material circumstances, quality of life and experiences are improved through a multifaceted approach aimed at

reducing child poverty will enjoy greater choices, opportunities and success and have more favourable educational outcomes.

REFERENCES:

American Psychological Association Task Force on Socioeconomic Status. (2007). *Report of the APA Task Force on Socioeconomic Status*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/task-force-2006.pdf>

Boston, J. (2013, May). *Improving educational performance: why tackling child poverty must be part of the solution*. Symposium conducted at the Poverty Impacts on Learning Conference, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand. Retrieved from [http://igps.victoria.ac.nz/staff/team/Education and child poverty V4.pdf](http://igps.victoria.ac.nz/staff/team/Education%20and%20child%20poverty/V4.pdf)

Child Poverty Action Group (2014). *Our children, our choice: Priorities for policy*. Retrieved from [http://www.cpag.org.nz/assets/Publications/1-0 Our Children Our Choice Part 3.pdf](http://www.cpag.org.nz/assets/Publications/1-0%20Our%20Children%20Our%20Choice%20Part%203.pdf)

Craig, E., Reddington, A., Wicken, A., Oben, G., & Simpson, J. (2013). *Child Poverty Monitor 2013 Technical Report* (Updated 2014). Dunedin. New Zealand: Child & Youth Epidemiology Service, University of Otago. Retrieved from [http://nzchildren.co.nz/document_downloads/2013 Child Poverty Monitor Technical Report MASTER.pdf](http://nzchildren.co.nz/document_downloads/2013%20Child%20Poverty%20Monitor%20Technical%20Report%20MASTER.pdf)

Davies, E., Crothers, C., & Hanna, K. (2010). Preventing child poverty: barriers and solutions. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*. 39 (2) 20-31.

Duchesne, S., McMaugh, A., Bochner, S., & Krause, K.-L. D. (2013). Educational psychology : for learning and teaching(4th ed.). South Melbourne, Vic.: Cengage Learning

Every Child Counts (2010). *Eradicating child poverty in New Zealand* . Retrieved from [http://www. everychildcounts. org. nz/resources/child-poverty/](http://www.everychildcounts.org.nz/resources/child-poverty/)

Fergusson, D. M., and Woodward, L. J. (2000). Family socioeconomic status at birth and rates of university participation. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, (1), 25.

Gibb, S. J., Fergusson, D. M., & Horwood, L. J. (2012). Childhood family income and life outcomes in adulthood: Findings from a 30-year longitudinal study in New Zealand. *Social Science & Medicine* (12), 1979. doi: 10. 1016/j. socscimed. 2012. 02. 028