

Your life chances and opportunities



The likelihood of a child succeeding in life is still largely determined by their family's income and social position. The social circumstances that children are born into can still have major effects on future outcomes and these must be identified in order to enhance Britain's goal of equality for all. This essay will begin by introducing the debates which centre on this topic. It will then go on to examine four key domains which affect a Child's future life chances: family income, education, class status and family background and the impact these have on future life chances and outcome before concluding on the topic.

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 their quality of life in the future for example access to quality education. The importance of parents' influences on their child's subsequent achievements and therefore their life chances is illustrated by Keane and Wolpin (1997) who found that 90% of the variation in lifetime chances and welfare can be attributed to the inequality in skills at age 16, which suggests that a child's life chances is mostly related to the social circumstances and decisions of their parents from birth to the age of 16

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 of the children born to parents in the bottom fifth of the economic distribution, 42 percent remain in this section as adults with only 23 percent rising to the second fifth, meanwhile 32% 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 parent's 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 Studies 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 progressed 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-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. This study illustrated that even in recent times the socio economic status of parents is still having huge influences on their children's mathematics and reading skills from the age of three to the end of key stage 2.

This data shows that there is a clear relationship between the SES of parents and the subsequent development and life outcome of their children.

Families with a low socioeconomic status very often lack the required social, financial and educational supports that typify families with high socioeconomic status's. Those families from poor backgrounds are also likely to have inadequate access to resources within the community that promote and support children's development and school readiness. Education plays a major role in helping children to acquire the skills required for acquiring jobs, at the same time as introducing specific virtues that stratify people from high SES to lower SES. It is one of the most influential factors in demolishing intergenerational characteristics and there are strong patterns between socio economic status and educational achievement. The study by the Sutton trust report (2002) found that of the richest fifth of the population 44% of young people had a degree, compared with only 10% from the poorest fifth.

Those from high income groups are still over four times as likely to graduate as those from low income groups. These inequalities in degree acquirement persist across diverse income groups,

The social economic status of a family can affect children in various one way in which it affects the future outcomes of children is that of social capital, this refers to the social connections and attendant norms and values, including aspirations

Families are a key foundation for social capital. Those middle class families are likely to have greater access to social capital than working class families:

- the social networks of the middle class tend to be more diverse than those of the working class. In particular the middle class have more extensive weak ties with e. g. former colleagues, acquaintances and friends of friends. middle class parents can give their children access to these networks of weak ties and associated information and other support. middle class children have further opportunities to develop social networks at university and elsewhere

Students from low SES backgrounds who attend poorly funded schools do not perform as well as those from a high SES. Seyfried (1998) stated that low SES students tend to score up to 10% lower on the national assessment of educational programs than those students from Higher SES. This difference has been explained by Eamon (2005) as the low SES of these families prevents access to quality and essential resources which subsequently leads to stress and conflicts within the home this inevitably affects a Childs ability to perform well in educational settings.

The relationship between educational attainment and SES also holds for secondary school students. Bradley and Taylor (2004) analyse Youth Cohort Studies data and find that young people whose parents are in highly skilled (particularly professional) occupations are more likely to obtain good exam results than young people whose parents have lower skill levels.

The role models and influences of the home are significant and Berliner (2005) attempts to point out that SES is a much larger problem than people like to think. Arguing that socio economic status is just one aspects of a long list of integrated and intergenerational effects this can have on the family and the individual. The social circumstances at home are a huge predictor of later life chances.

One key factor which is influencing achievements is the huge changes in family structure over recent years. Increasing numbers of children are being brought up in step families or in lone parent families. And although the key factor in developing to the best potential is the family loving environment, this increase in lone parents is increasing the likelihood of poverty in the future. (Cabinet Office) In the United Kingdom, there are 5.9 million single parents as of 2005, with 3.1 million children 'At-home good parenting' has a bigger effect on children's achievement at primary level than differences in quality of schools, evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups. Evidence from Demo and Acock (1991) suggests that children from mother only families seem to experience various disadvantages such as higher truancy rates, lower levels of education and more delinquent activity. All of these factors are likely to effect them in the short term and more problematically in the long term effecting there life long chances

Emrish and Francesconi carried out a study into the affect of single parenthoods on future outcomes. Almost two in five of the young adults had spent a period of time in a single-parent family. These children tended to obtain poorer educational attainments especially young men. The study found that among men, the probability of children from single parent families is 18% compared to that of a 22% chance for those living in an in tact family. One of the most influential reasons for this was that single-parent-families tended to have fewer economic resources available. This difference wasn't as high for females and this identifies the differences which need to be considered.

A further social circumstance of those who live in high SES backgrounds is that they are more likely to have parents who themselves went through to higher education. There exists considerable evidence for the inter-generational effects of parents' education on children. Feinstein (1999) stratifies children based on their parents' educational qualifications and assesses their progress over time. He uses the BCS and finds that:

Children whose parents both have at least A-levels are 14 percentage points higher in the distribution of test outcomes measured at the age of 22 months than those whose parents have no qualifications, and seven percentage points higher than those whose parents are in the middle education group (who have some qualifications, but do not both have A-Levels or higher).

Although it seems as though social circumstances of the family have a huge impact on the life course and life chances of an individual. It is important to understand that Individuals do have the freedom to act on their own choices and free will. It is true that people can make a decision to do something whatever way there societal circumstances have been guiding them.

One very interesting concept is how some individuals react to the adversity that they face in social circumstances from birth. Resilience' means the strategies that people use to cope with adversities, such as income poverty, violent conflict, class differences and education inequalities. There has been a range of research investigating whether these poor social circumstances that children are born into can be overcome in the future. Research into resilience has identified a range of individual attributes and social contexts associated with high levels of resilience in children throughout their life course with various levels including individual level, level of relationships and community resources. Although there are social circumstances which can put children at high risk of certain life outcomes at birth it can be argued that with the correct relationships and support these can be overcome to intervene in the intergenerational concept. (Masten 1994; Masten, Best and Garmezy 1990). Some individuals appear to thrive despite sharing the characteristics and conditions of high risk inequalities (e. g., Anthony 1987; Rutter 1985; Werner and Smith 2001

Bernard (2004) analysed research into this matter looking at both qualitative and quantitative research and found that children consistently manage to overcome the social adversities they are presented with in the family and go on to lead positive lives. Most research into this area suggests that on

<https://assignbuster.com/your-life-chances-and-opportunities/>

average 70 to 75% of children who seem at risk of intergenerational affects tackle these and go on to lead healthy and positive lives. (Bernard 2004).

One study by Werner and Smith (1982) followed a group of 700 children born in Kauai (Hawaii) in 1995 using a longitudinal study. With data collected at six different ages, showed that despite having been challenged with a variety of high risk factors as they grow up they still went on to achieve positive outcomes in adulthood.

From the research in this area it is important to understand that there are always individual differences in the way people go on to lead there life course, independent of the social circumstances to which they were born into. Therefore life chances are in part affected by the social circumstances to which you are born into and these circumstances are likely to present risk factors for future achievement however there is always a degree of choice and independence in overcoming the intergenerational affects.

McCall, R. B., & Owens, E. B. (1996). Resilient children: Factors that protect against psychosocial stressors. *Developments*, 10, 4 (December 1996), 5-10.
University

of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development.

J Ermisch and M Francesconi, ' Family Matters', Discussion Paper No. 1591, February 1997 single parenbthoss