

Measuring Family Background: Conceptual Issues and Methodological Challenges

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June 30, 2003

Why Measure Family Background?

- To control for family influences, so that we can examine school effects net of family background effects.

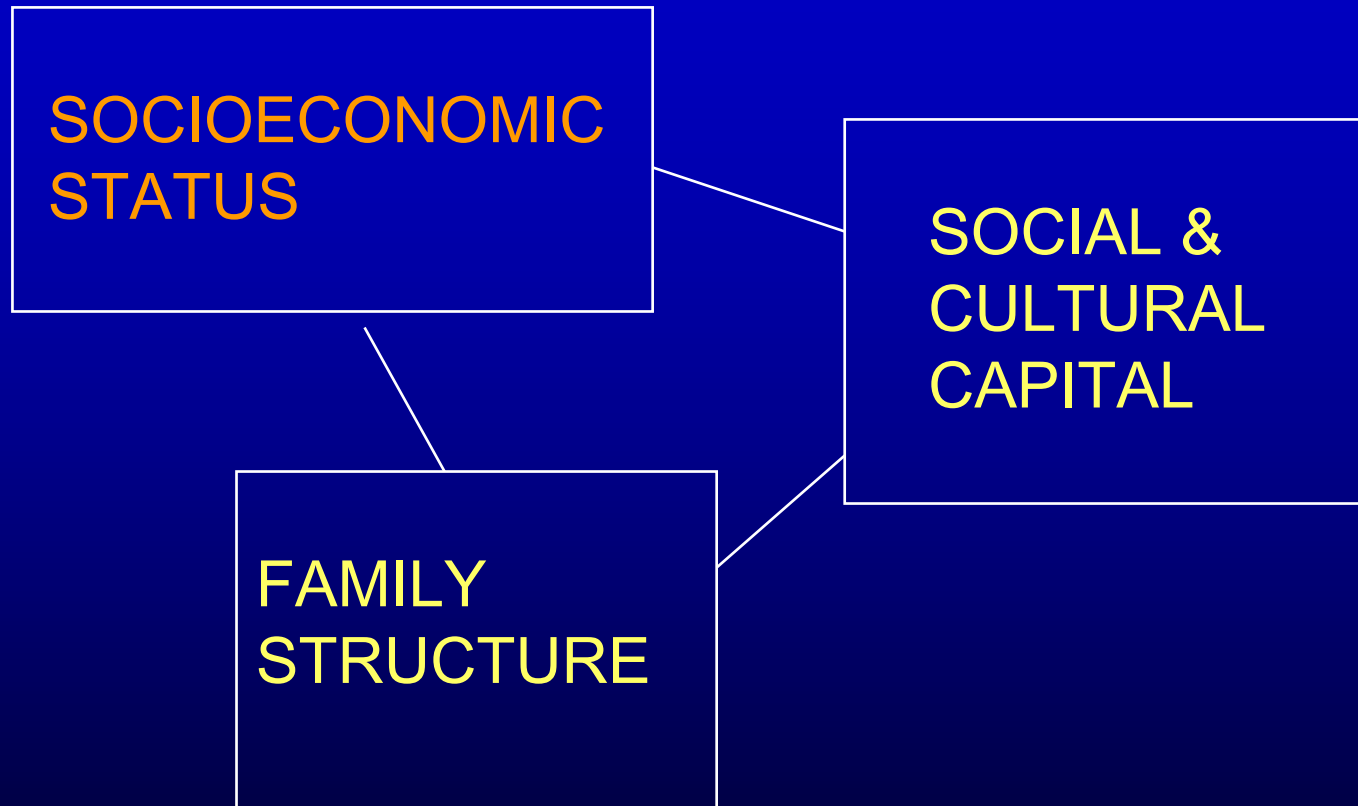
“In the attempt to discover effects of school factors on achievement, perhaps the principal villain is the fact that student populations in different schools differ at the outset...it is not possible merely to judge the quality of a school by the achievements of the students leaving it. It is necessary to control...for the variations in student input with which the teachers and staff of the school are confronted.”

James S. Coleman 1975:359

Why Measure Family Background?

- To control for family influences, so that we can examine school effects net of family background effects.
- To improve knowledge of the ways that the family affects children's ability and motivation to learn and their academic achievement.

The concept of family background has grown increasingly complex over time:



SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

- Parental Education
- Parental Occupation
- Family Income

Standard Measures of Family SES across Four Major U.S. Datasets

Model Variable	Dataset	Measure	Year
Mother's Education	NELS	Highest level of education of mother	1992
	HSB	Highest level of education mother completed	1980
	NLS-72	Mother's level of education	1972
	TALENT	Mother's highest level of education	1960
Father's Education	NELS	Highest level of education of father	1992
	HSB	Highest level of education father completed	1980
	NLS-72	Father's education level	1972
	TALENT	Father's highest level of education	1960
Mother's Occupation	NELS	Mother's occupational type (19 categories)	1992
	HSB	Mother's current or most recent occupation (19 categories)	1982
	NLS-72	Mother's current or most recent occupation (14 categories)	1972
	TALENT	Mother's occupation type (16 categories)	1960
Father's Occupation	NELS	Father's occupational type (19 categories)	1992
	HSB	Father's current or most recent occupation (19 categories)	1980
	NLS-72	Father's occupation (14 categories)	1972
	TALENT	Father's occupation type (16 categories)	1960
Family Income	NELS	Annual family income (15 categories)	1992
	HSB	Annual family income (7 categories)	1980
	NLS-72	Before tax household income (10 categories)	1972
	TALENT	Current family income (5 categories)	1960

Family SES in International Assessments of Educational Achievement STUDY	SES
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First International Mathematics Study (IEA 1967)	father's education mother's education father's occupation mother's empl. status
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First International Science Study (IEA 1973)	father's education mother's education father's occupation
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Second International Mathematics Study (IEA 1985)	father's education mother's education father's occupation mother's occupation
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Second International Science Study (IEA 1987)	father's education mother's education father's occupation mother's occupation
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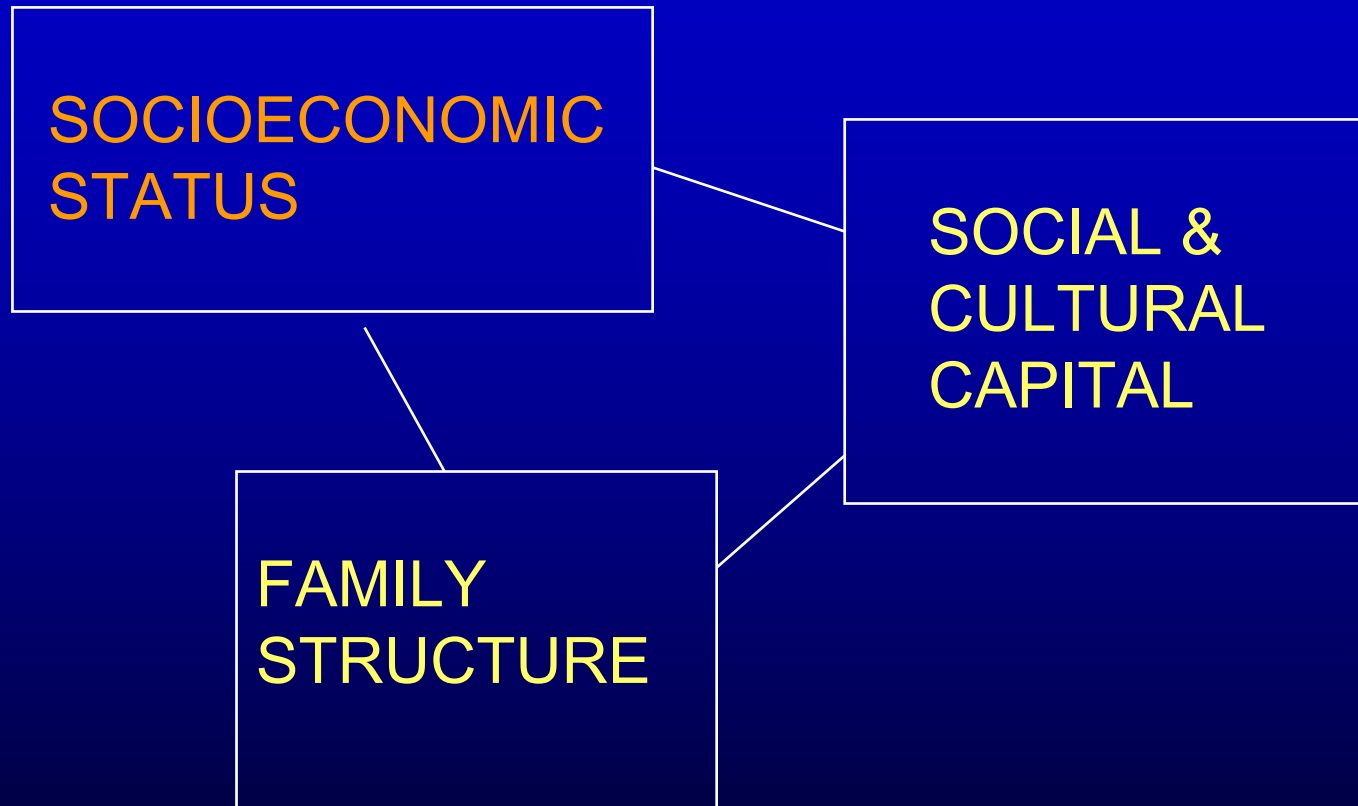
Third International Math and Science Study (IEA 1995)	father's education mother's education home possessions
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Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD 2000)	father's education mother's education father's occupation mother's occupation home possessions
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What do we know about SES and educational outcomes?

- SES has a substantial impact on educational attainment in diverse contexts.
- Father's education has stronger impact than occupational status or mother's education.
- SES is more important at earlier than later stages of student life course.

The concept of family background has grown increasingly complex over time:



Family Structure

- Family Size (number of children)
- Two-parent vs. Single-parent vs. Step-parent

STUDY	FAMILY STRUCTURE
First International Mathematics Study (IEA 1967)	
First International Science Study (IEA 1973)	number of siblings student's birth order
Second International Mathematics Study (IEA 1985)	
Second International Science Study (IEA 1987)	number of siblings student's birth order
Third International Math and Science Study (IEA 1995)	who lives at home w/you? total people in home
Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD 2000)	number of siblings student's birth order who lives at home w/you?

- **SOCIAL CAPITAL**

capital that inheres in social relationships

- **CULTURAL CAPITAL**

knowledge of socially-valued cultural cues

STUDY	Social Capital (Parental Involvement)	Cultural Capital
First International Science Study (IEA 1973)	help with homework check spelling encourage reading ask about school	
Second International Math Study (IEA 1985)	help with homework parental perceptions of math	
Third International Math and Science Study (IEA 1995)		how often: visit museum attend concert go to theatre go to movies watch educational t.v. read a book
Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD 2000)	help with homework parental involvement: time talking eating main meal together discuss social, political, and cultural issues	how often in past year: visit museum attend concert go to theatre go to movies go to sporting events

Challenges in Establishing Uniform Definitions of Family Background

- Research can only be as good as the survey design
- Balance between standardizing measures and sensitivity to context
- Definitions of “family” and “household”