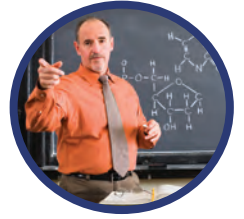


EDUCATION & SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status (SES) is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. It is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. When viewed through a social class lens, privilege, power, and control are emphasized. Furthermore, an examination of SES as a gradient or continuous variable reveals inequities in access to and distribution of resources. SES is relevant to all realms of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, education, and advocacy.

SES AFFECTS OUR SOCIETY

Low SES and its correlates, such as lower education, poverty, and poor health, ultimately affect our society as a whole. Inequities in wealth distribution, resource distribution, and quality of life are increasing in the United States and globally. Society benefits from an increased focus on the foundations of socioeconomic inequities and efforts to reduce the deep gaps in socioeconomic status in the United States and abroad. Behavioral and other social science professionals possess the tools necessary to study and identify strategies that could alleviate these disparities at both individual and societal levels.

SES AND EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

Research indicates that children from low-SES households and communities develop academic skills more slowly compared to children from higher SES groups (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). Initial academic skills are correlated with the home environment, where low-literacy environments and chronic stress negatively affect a child's preacademic skills. The school systems in low-SES communities are often underresourced, negatively affecting students' academic progress (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008).

Inadequate education and increased dropout rates affect children's academic achievement, perpetuating the low-SES status of the community. Improving school systems and early intervention programs may help to reduce these risk factors, and thus increased research on the correlation between SES and education is essential.

SES and Family Resources

Families from low-SES communities are less likely to have the financial resources or time availability to provide children with academic support.

- Children's initial reading competence is correlated with the home literacy environment, number of books owned, and parent distress (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). However, parents from low-SES communities may be unable to afford resources such as books, computers, or tutors to create this positive literacy environment (Orr, 2003).
- In a nationwide study of American kindergarten children, 36% of parents in the lowest-income quintile read to their children on a daily basis, compared with 62% of parents from the highest-income quintile (Coley, 2002).
- When enrolled in a program that encouraged adult support, students from low-SES groups reported higher levels of effort towards academics (Kaylor & Flores, 2008).

SES and the School Environment

Research indicates that school conditions contribute more to SES differences in learning rates than family characteristics (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008).

- Schools in low-SES communities suffer from high levels of unemployment, migration of the best qualified teachers, and low educational achievement (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, & Russ, 2009).



- A teacher's years of experience and quality of training is correlated with children's academic achievement (Gimbert, Bol, & Wallace, 2007). Yet, children in low-income schools are less likely to have well-qualified teachers. In fact, of high school math teachers in low-income school districts 27% majored in mathematics in college as compared to 43% of teachers who did so in more affluent school districts (Ingersoll, 1999).
- The following factors have been found to improve the quality of schools in low-SES neighborhoods: a focus on improving teaching and learning, creation of an information-rich environment, building of a learning community, continuous professional development, involvement of parents, and increased funding and resources (Muijis et al., 2009).

SES and Academic Achievement

Research continues to link lower SES to lower academic achievement and slower rates of academic progress as compared with higher SES communities.

- Children from low-SES environments acquire language skills more slowly, exhibit delayed letter recognition and phonological awareness, and are at risk for reading difficulties (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008).
- Children with higher SES backgrounds were more likely to be proficient on tasks of addition, subtraction, ordinal sequencing, and math word problems than children with lower SES backgrounds (Coley, 2002).
- Students from low-SES schools entered high school 3.3 grade levels behind students from higher SES schools. In addition, students from the low-SES groups learned less over 4 years than children from higher SES groups, graduating 4.3 grade levels behind those of higher SES groups (Palardy, 2008).
- In 2007, the high school dropout rate among persons 16-24 years old was highest in low-income families (16.7%) as compared to high-income families (3.2%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

Psychological Health

Increasing evidence supports the link between lower SES and learning disabilities or other negative psychological outcomes that affect academic achievement.

- Children from lower SES households are about twice as likely as those from high-SES households to display learning-related behavior problems. A mother's SES was also related to her child's inattention, disinterest, and lack of cooperation in school (Morgan et al., 2009).
- Identifying as part of a lower/working class in college has been associated with feelings of not belonging in school and intentions to drop out of school before graduation (Langhout, Drake, & Rosselli, 2009).

- Perception of family economic stress and personal financial constraints affected emotional distress/depression in students and their academic outcomes (Mistry, Benner, Tan, & Kim, 2009).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Include SES in your research, practice, and educational endeavors.

- Measure, report, and control for SES in research activities related to education support and academic achievement.
- Take SES into consideration in all published work. Report participant characteristics related to SES.
- Contribute to the body of research on the educational and societal barriers experienced by students from low-SES communities and the impact of these barriers on academic achievement and psychological well-being.
- Establish practice opportunities in community settings where students have access to diverse social class populations.

Get involved.

- Support legislation and policies that explore and work to eliminate socioeconomic disparities in education. Visit the Office on Government Relations for more details: <http://www.apa.org/about/gr/pi/>
- Become an SES Key Contact! As an expert, advocate for SES-related issues.
- Join APA's SES Network to contribute to and stay abreast of current developments in SES-related activities.
- Visit APA's Office on Socioeconomic Status (OSES) website: www.apa.org/pi/ses.
- Visit APA's Children, Youth, and Families office website: <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/>.

References can be found at <http://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/fact-sheet-references.aspx>.