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### **The role of social capital for children's health and for participation in preventive health care programs**

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#### **A b s t r a c t**

It is well known that there is strong association between health status and socioeconomic position. However, while this link is well documented, it is still poorly understood. The social capital concept might help to explain this association. Indeed, new research reveals the explanatory potential of social capital for explaining the health status of adults. However, we still know surprisingly little about the role of social capital for children's health. This paper raises the question to what extent socioeconomic differences in early childhood health can be explained by social capital characteristics, namely by social integration and social support within the family.

Using SOEP data from the newborn questionnaire 2003 to 2008, we estimate multiple logistic regressions to determine a) the role of social capital in rating the child health as excellent and b) the effect of social capital on parental child health investments using the example of preventive health programs for children (U-Untersuchungen). Furthermore, the models incorporate maternal health conditions that are expected to be crucial for the offspring's health formation.

Our findings reveal that a given form of social capital can be either beneficial or useless or even detrimental, depending on the health criteria considered. For example, while emotionally supported mothers rate child health significantly better, this source of social capital is irrelevant for facilitating health behavior. According to Coleman (1988), these heterogeneous effects might reflect that social capital is rather specific for certain actions than of uniform value. All in all, our analyses show that social relationships as well as maternal health resources play an important role as determinants for early childhood health. But, concerning the contribution of social capital to explaining the social disparities in children's health, the social capital indicators play only a minor role.

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