Abstract

Educational and Ethnic Inequalities in Preterm Birth
(Working Title)

Newborn’s health strongly depends on social and ethnic characteristics. Particularly poor are the health chances of children from mothers with low education and migration history, who frequently deliver their babies too early (<37 gestational weeks). Being born premature, in turn, is associated both with lower postnatal survival rates and increased health risks in later life (WHO 2005). Though recent research is increasingly studying social conditions of early health, the effects of mother’s education and ethnic origin on pregnancy outcomes are yet widely unknown.

In this paper, we examine the “missing” link between parent’s educational and ethnic background on the one side, and preterm delivery on the other. By following Pierre Bourdieu (1974), we make a theoretical and empirical contribution to our understanding of the emergence of social patterns in early childhood health. More specifically, we ask to what extent economic, social and cultural capital can be held responsible for the observed inequality relations. According to reproduction theory, we first and foremost expect health related knowledge, with its strong implications for mother’s health promoting behavior, to be of primary relevance for explaining social and ethnic inequalities in pregnancy outcomes.

For testing our hypothesis, we estimate multiple logistic regression models based on SOEP data from the newborn questionnaire 2003 to 2010 („bioage01“). By making use of the data’s longitudinal nature, we control for central variables on mother’s health related behavior during pregnancy (e.g. smoking and utilization of prenatal care). Our findings reveal the primary relevance of parental resources and health behavior during pregnancy for explaining educational and ethnic disparities in preterm birth. Finally, we observed significant effects of medical factors, such as multiple pregnancies and mother’s health conditions.