

Parental socioeconomic status and the quality of early childhood education and care: Evidence from Germany

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Abstract

With growing maternal labour force participation and increasing provision and acceptance of formal child care, children spend more and more time in early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions. Given that quality represents a crucial moderator of beneficial effects of ECEC on child wellbeing, we examine whether children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, assessed by parental education, migration background, and household income, face less favourable conditions when starting their educational career by attending ECEC centres of lower quality compared to more advantaged children. By combining the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP; wave 2013) with information from the 2014 K2ID-SOEP extension study, we analyse 727 children who attend 669 day-care groups in 618 ECEC facilities across Germany.

The findings provide some evidence of children with less qualified mothers experiencing lower quality than their more advantaged peers mainly in terms of ECEC quality characteristics which are easy to observe or enquire about for parents. We find hardly any significant differences by parental migration background or household income. Children of mothers who work long part-time or full-time hours partly attend ECEC centres of higher quality than children whose mothers are not employed. We conclude that the existence of systematic differences in the experienced quality of ECEC may contribute to the intergenerational transmission of low levels of education and hence the reproduction of social inequalities. Measures intended to increase transparency with regard to the quality provided

by ECEC institutions should be developed with great care because, depending on their complexity and accessibility, they can either reduce or further strengthen links with family socioeconomic status.