

Sibling similarity in socioeconomic status attainment over the early life course

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How does the influence of family background on socioeconomic status change over the early life course? To answer this question, I study the similarity of siblings' socioeconomic status over the early life course. Sibling similarity is treated as an estimate of the total influence of the family on status attainment. The main intent of the paper is to assess whether siblings converge or diverge in their level of socioeconomic status attainment. Sibling similarity is estimated as the intra-class correlation, taken from a multilevel decomposition of the variance of different measures of status attainment of siblings nested in families.

I use 30 waves (1984 to 2013) from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP), including a total of 12,206 siblings in 5,887 families. Socioeconomic status is measured as level of education, occupational status, labor market earnings and job hierarchy position between age 17 and 45.

Results show that the total influence of family background varies between different outcomes of status attainment. Educational attainment shows higher levels of sibling similarity (between 0.3 and 0.7) than labor market outcomes like earnings, job hierarchy, and occupational status (similarity between 0.1 and 0.5). Also, siblings are clearly converging in their similarity of educational attainment with higher age. For labor market outcomes, results are mixed. Similarity in earnings is reduced with age, while it increases in occupational status and remains stable in job hierarchy position.

The results indicate that family influence on siblings' socioeconomic status varies, depending on the age it is evaluated. When analyzing family influence on status attainment, it is therefore important to interpret siblings' status similarity within the context of their respective life course stage.