

Twin correlations and social background - descriptive evidence for Germany.

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Abstract:

This paper examines whether similarity of twins in educational achievements varies depending on the social class position of the family. Outcomes of interest refer to cognitive skills and upper secondary track attendance. Social class is indicated with parent's level of education as well as occupational status differentiating between lower, intermediate and higher levels of social background. Empirical analyses are based on the newly collected data from the TwinLife study which surveys twins and their families residing in Germany on an annual basis. Exploiting this data source provides the unique opportunity to examine correlations among monozygotic (MZ) twins in Germany. The study of monozygotic twins improves estimations of the total impact of family background as MZ twins share by far more family influences than ordinary siblings do. MZ twins grew up under almost the same environmental conditions and are genetically alike. Thus, MZ twin correlations are less prone to omitted variable bias and provide more accurate estimations of shared and non-shared familial influences. Preliminary results indicate that intergenerational transmission processes are dependent on families' social class position but also differ with respect to the outcome under study: correlations in cognitive skills are high among twins from lower and higher social background. However, inequality for MZ twins from lower social backgrounds increases when looking at upper secondary track attendance as correlations for MZ twins from less advantaged social backgrounds are the lowest. This finding indicates that parents from lower social backgrounds may direct parental inputs –due to the lack of resources– differently in children with similar cognitive ability.