

Parental Education and Skill Indicators of Children: An Intergenerational Mobility Study

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Introduction:

This study explores the extent of the association between parental education and economic and educational outcomes of the adults in the form of intergenerational mobility in the United States for the population as a whole, as well as differentiated by gender and race/ethnicity. Study of intergenerational mobility is important because it shows whether individuals can prosper in a society independent of their socioeconomic circumstances. Using parental education as a proxy of socioeconomic status, this research studies the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of the association between parental education and outcomes of adults, including education, employment status, occupational skill classification, earnings, and cognitive skills (literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving scores) in the U.S.?
2. Is parental education associated with the propensity to study in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields?
3. Does the association between parental education and outcomes of adults mentioned in research questions 1 and 2 vary across different segments of the population including racial/ethnic and gender groups in the U.S.?

Findings:

This study finds that adults with higher educated parents are more likely to have higher cognitive skills (literacy, numeracy, and problem solving), achieve college degrees, be employed, engage in skilled occupations, and receive higher quartiles of earnings than adults with less parental education. Findings show the existence of gender gap in skilled occupation (with advantages for females), earnings (with advantages for males), and employment status (with advantages for males). Gender gap in earnings and skilled occupations tend to decrease among adults with higher parental education. Results indicate that racial gaps in the outcomes of the adults, including education, earnings, and employment status disappear among adults with high parental education. Results also indicate a persistent gender gap, which is independent of parental education, in STEM (higher probability to study among males than females).

Policy Implications:

The highly influential role that parental education plays in the education and economic outcomes of adults throughout life highlight the importance of the policies promoting adult literacy and education. Such policies will help parents better reach their full potentials in upbringing the next generation. The recommended policies will also help reducing racial gaps in the economic and education outcomes of the adults since racial gaps tend to disappear among adults with high-educated parents.

Besides policies promoting adult education, there is need for policies to compensate inadequate parenting skills or/and financial abilities, in the form of redistributive policies and social assistance programs (e.g. Head Start). Such policies, with the purpose of shaping equal opportunities for all children, help to reduce the impact of low socio-economic background on individual's life chances. This study did not find any significant relationship between parental education and propensity to study in STEM. Based on the literature review, policies promoting higher parental involvement through education system as well as ensuring high standards in learning, classroom size and student teacher ratio across all classrooms and neighborhoods are effective in reducing gender gap in STEM (Kugler et al. 2017).