The Poverty attainment gap: Insights for the early years context

Dr Edward Sosu
School of Education, University of Strathclyde
edward.sosu@strath.ac.uk
Twitter: @emsosu

SUII Seminar- Conversations about Language and Literacy
Patterns of Early Attainment Gap

Several longitudinal studies suggests gap starts before formal schooling
Gap between children from richest and poorest background at age 5

6-13 months in problem solving
11-18 months in expressive vocabulary
- **Average income** predicted change in domain specific and composite cognitive ability

- **Upward volatility** (gaining) marginally predicted increases in expressive vocabulary ability
Affects other developmental outcomes

Higher prevalence of
- Emotional and behavioural difficulties
- Additional support needs/SEN
- Stress & depression
- Somatic complaints
- Pervasive negative thinking

These problems can reinforce or are reinforced by poor cognitive outcomes (e.g. Sosu & Schmidt, 2017, Frontiers in Psych)
Why/how does poverty influence outcomes?

Individual and structural mechanisms
Family Stress Mechanisms - Average Income
Investment Mechanisms- Average Income

Diagram:
- Average Income
- Upward Volatility
- Parental Mental Health
- Parent Child Conflict
- Educational Investment
- Cognitive Ability

Relationships:
- Average Income to Parental Mental Health: 0.14***
- Average Income to Parent Child Conflict: 0.06**
- Educational Investment to Cognitive Ability

Time Scale:
- Age 1-3
- Age 3
- Age 4
- Age 5
Pathway via age 3 cognitive ability
CHILD Stress:
(Blaire et al, 2011, child dvt)

- Chn in poverty - Higher stress hormones
- Stress hormones associated with executive function/prefrontal context/hippocampus
- Associated with information processing and decisions about how to cope with new situations
Is this fatalistic? – not necessarily

- Not all children in poverty perform poorly
  - We need to know more about protective factors

- Concept of ‘plasticity’ suggests that enriched experiences can reverse even severe negative effects *(Sonuga-Barke et al, The Lancet, 2017)*

- EPPE study suggests buffering effect of quality early years education *(Sammons et al., 2007)*
...parents are optimistic

Maternal educational aspiration that their children obtain degree and above (GUS Sweep 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mothers Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>% of Mothers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never worked</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-routine and routine</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower supervisory and technical</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small employers and own account workers</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial and professional</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Policy implications?

• High quality years experiences with focus on developing language, pre-reading, non-verbal reasoning
  
  (Fricke et al., 2013; 2017; Sammons et al., 2007)

• Funding to reduce poverty
  
  (Hutchings et al., 2012; Hampden-Thompson, 2013)
Thank You

Dr Edward Sosu
edward.sosu@strath.ac.uk
Twitter: @emdosu