

Parental Welfare Status and Children's Educational Attainment among the Urban Poor

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ABSTRACT

There have been myriad studies on the effect of poverty on a child's development where findings have been solid and quite consistent on how they have an inverse relationship. Children from welfare recipient families were known to have lower academic achievement and development levels because of poverty. This paper intends to examine empirically the link between parental welfare receipt and children's educational outcomes. While previous studies focused on years of schooling and school completion as a measure for educational success, this study looks into a more detailed outcome: we captured the children's test scores for a standardized national examination at the age of 15. Our sample consists of adolescents living in the Kuala Lumpur area who have taken the exam the previous year. The study found that increases in parental income are associated with increased test scores, but the effect of welfare status is negative. The impact of changes in income among welfare recipients, however, is more prevalent than the nonrecipients. A mother's education has a strong association with children's attainment. Children who have scored well in the previous standardized test at the age of 12 also scored well when they are 15. Sibling size has a negative impact especially when they are larger than five. The proportion of children from the welfare recipient families taking STEM subjects is lower than non-recipient families. In general, we showed that parental welfare status negatively affects children's educational outcome, however, this should not be used as a basis to reduce welfare access. More delicate studies need to be done on the net effectiveness of welfare among those who are in vulnerable situations.

Keywords: cognitive development; inclusive education; poverty; STEM subjects; urban poor.