Comparing Three Measures of SES in Families of Children with Developmental Disabilities

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Abstract

Socioeconomic Status (SES) is an important variable in health and psychosocial research generally. Emerson and colleagues (2006) showed that families supporting children with Developmental Disabilities (DD) were found to have lower SES than families with typically developing children, and this was related to lower levels of wellbeing. The Barratt Simplified Measure of Social Status (BSMSS) is an updated measure of SES, based on Hollingshead’s (1975) research that utilizes a record of occupations (Barratt, 2012). This measure was originally intended for use with young adults and takes into account the education and occupation of the participant and his/her mother, father, and spouse. The BSMSS has been adapted for this study for use with parents of children with DD by utilizing only the parent scores. To our knowledge, no one has examined this measure in relation to other indicators of SES, such as income. Although the BSMSS includes a more up to date list of occupations, subjective judgments are required during scoring. This poster aims to examine the BSMSS, by looking at its components, and comparing it to other measures of SES: Hollingshead and Median Income. As immigrant families have made a transition to a new society, and indicators of SES may not hold the same meaning (Fuligni & Yoshikawa, 2010), we will also examine whether the relationship is different for immigrant families, and those in rural and suburban areas of Canada.

Background

Socioeconomic Status (SES) is an important variable in health and psychosocial research generally. Emerson and colleagues (1993) and is related to mental health problems (Dohrenwend et al., 1992). Families of children with Developmental Disabilities (DD) report lower SES than families of typically developing children (Emerson, 2003). There are a number of ways of operationalizing SES:

- Traditional Four-Factor Hollingshead scale (Hollingshead, 1975), based on research conducted in 1960’s, calculated SES using:
  - Marital Status
  - Occupation
  - Education
  - Income

- BSMSS, updated measure of SES based on Hollingshead’s (1975) research
  - Originally intended for older individuals; we have adapted it for use with children and their families
  - Calculates scores based on education and occupation of parents (calculated for one or two parent households)
  - Scores can range from 8 to 66

- Median household income of residential area (using the initial 3 digits of Canadian postal code)
  - Median income for the people residing in a geographic area can be obtained from census data

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Results

- Adapted version of The Barratt Simplified Measure of Social Status (Barratt, 2012)
  - Updated measure of SES based on Hollingshead’s (1975) research
  - Originally intended for older individuals; we have adapted it for use with children and their families
  - Calculates scores based on education and occupation of parents (calculated for one or two parent households)
  - Scores can range from 8 to 66

- Household income of residential area (Statistics Canada, 2006)
  - Uses Forward Sortation Area of postal code (first 3 digits of Canadian postal code)

- Median income for the people residing in a geographic area can be obtained from census data

- Traditional Four-Factor Hollingshead scale (Hollingshead, 1975)
  - Score based on marital status, gender, educational attainment and occupational prestige

measure has advantage of being a continuous variable as opposed to a categorical score, more useful for statistical purposes

Method

- Sample of 33 cases were independently coded by raters
- Some judgment is required in categorizing occupations
- Sample of 33 cases were independently coded by the first author
- Some scores have been coded by different raters

Participants

- N = 475
- Child with DD age: 2-21 years (N=7.7, SD=3.9), 384 boys (81%), 89 girls (19%), 2 unreported
- 395 diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (83%)

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Discussion

- The two components of the Barratt, education and occupation, are moderately correlated with each other (r=.43)
- Occupation is more strongly correlated with the total than Education (r=.97 vs. r=.61)

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