

# Parenting practices and children's education outcomes

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the effects of parenting practices on children's education. Our empirical analyses are based on household data from Taiwan. More specifically, we investigate the influence of parents' child-rearing practices (i.e., encouragement and punishment) on their children's education attainments and aspirations. We also explore the association between parents' socioeconomic background and their child-rearing practices. The empirical results help explain the relationship between family background and education attainments.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper pertains to the determinants of a youth's education outcomes (as proxied by education expectations and aspirations). The determinants of a youth's outcomes have been widely studied, with the literature containing contributions from economists and other social scientists, e.g., sociologists and psychologists. See Haveman and Wolfe (1995) for a review. A major finding is that parents' socioeconomic status and behavior have significant bearings on their children's education outcomes. See, for example, Sewell and Shah (1968), Teachman (1987), Kodde and Ritzen (1988), Kane (1994), Astone and McLanahan (1991), Seltzer (1994), Blau (1999), O'Brien and Jones (1999), and

Weinberg (2001). However, the channels that relate parents' characteristics to children's education outcomes are still not very clear. The connection is seldom elaborated on, with only a few exceptions, e.g., Becker (1964, 1981), Becker and Tome (1979), Leibowitz (1974), Astone and McLanahan (1991), and Weinberg (2001).

In the economic models of Becker (1964, 1981) and Becker and Tome (1979) it is postulated that the connection between parents' characteristics (especially income and education) and their children's education arises from the parents' genetic endowment and their human capital investment. Leibowitz (1974) conjectures that the influence of parents' education on children's education outcomes could be through heredity or through the effect of parents' education/income on the quality and quantity of home investment in their children's human capital (e.g., time input and education resources). His conjecture is supported by his empirical results.

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The more recent study by [Astone and McLanahan \(1991\)](#) empirically shows that children living with single parents or step-parents during adolescence receive less encouragement and less help with school work than those who live with both parents. They also obtain evidence that parental involvement has a positive impact on children's school achievement. The focus of [Weinberg \(2001\)](#) is on the connection between family income and children's outcomes. His hypothesis is that the positive connection between the former and the latter is through the limited use of pecuniary incentives by low income parents. He demonstrates this connection by a behavioral model, and his empirical results confirm this hypothesis.

The current study's focus is the connection between parents' socioeconomic characteristics (especially education) and children's education outcomes. We use children's education aspirations and expectations as a measure of their education outcomes. Similar to [Leibowitz \(1974\)](#) and [Astone and McLanahan \(1991\)](#), our purpose is to investigate the channels through which parents' socioeconomic characteristics affect children's education outcomes. This paper explores the hypothesis that parents of different socioeconomic status (especially pertaining to parents' education level) use different parenting practices. It is through differences in parenting style that parental characteristics, at least partially, influence the children's education outcomes.

In the social science literature, there is sufficient evidence showing that parenting styles are correlated with children's school performance. For example, [Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, and Fraleigh \(1987\)](#) find that inconsistent and mixed parenting styles are associated with lower grades for adolescents. [Steinberg, Brown, Cazmarek, Cider, and Lazarro \(1988\)](#) obtain evidence that authoritative parenting facilitates school success. The empirical results of [Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, and Darling \(1992\)](#) show that authoritative parenting and parents' involvement in schooling are positively correlated with adolescent school achievement, while parental encouragement to succeed is negatively correlated with adolescent school achievement.

Our analysis departs from previous studies by focusing on two instruments of parenting, namely positive and negative reinforcements, whose effects on adolescents' education outcomes are rarely investigated. We also examine the association between parents' socioeconomic status, especially income and education, and their use of these parenting methods. By doing so, we attempt to illustrate the connection between family background and children's education outcomes, with parenting methods as a mediating factor.

We use adolescents' education expectations (i.e., the level of education that they expect to attain conditional on all circumstantial factors) and education aspirations

(i.e., the level of education that they desire to attain ignoring circumstantial constraints) as the measures of education outcomes. The reason why we use a child's education expectation and aspiration rather than his/her actual education outcomes (e.g., high school completion, college attendance, test scores, grades, etc.) is that we do not have this information. Most of the adolescents in our sample are still in school.

Since the expected/aspired education level rather than the expected/aspired number of years of education is a meaningful measurement unit, we econometrically model the expected and aspired education levels as ordinal discrete variables via ordered probit models. In the literature on the determinants of education outcomes, the ordinary linear regression model is often used to model education outcomes. The drawback of the ordinary linear regression model is that the ordinal nature of education levels is ignored.

A special feature of the current study is the use of econometric techniques which take account of the possibility that parenting practices are endogenous. The endogeneity of parenting practices occurs when there are common unobservable factors which affect both the education outcomes of adolescents and the choice of parenting practices. For example, an adolescent's unobservable ability<sup>1</sup> may affect both his/her education outcomes and the way his/her parents interact with him/her. See, for example, [Maccoby and Martin \(1983\)](#). However, in the education outcomes literature in explaining adolescents' education outcomes, the endogeneity of parenting practices is seldom accounted for.

To allow for the endogeneity of parenting practices, we adopt a generalized method of moments approach. By exploiting the ordered probit model's orthogonality conditions, our GMM procedure follows that of [Avery, Hansen, and Hotz \(1983\)](#) and [Poirier and Ruud \(1988\)](#). We also follow the guidelines of [Wooldridge \(1996\)](#), who expounds upon the instrumental variable approach to a general class of non-linear models.

Based on household data from Taiwan, our results show that parenting practices are important determinants of adolescents' education outcomes. Moreover, a father's education and an adolescents health status are important determinants of the education outcomes of adolescents, both numerically and statistically. This confirms our conjecture that parenting practices are an important channel through which family background affects an adolescent's education outcomes.

The remaining part of the paper is as follows. Section 2 describes the data. Section 3 presents the econometric method. Section 4 discusses the empirical results. Section 5 contains a conclusion of the current study.

<sup>1</sup>This is unobservable to the econometrician, but observable to the adolescent and parents.

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