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The Impact of Childhood Experience on Educational Attainment

There are many factors that explain the variation in the levels of educational attainment across individuals, such as parents' educational level and living conditions in childhood. For instance, some children who are raised in wealthy households attain high levels of education; while others who grow up in a single-parent household may attain lower levels of education.¹ In traditional societies, girls may not have the same opportunities for education relative to boys.² Additionally, family-specific factors such as income and educational background as well as living conditions could have direct impacts on children's education. There also tends to be significant variation in access to education across similar socio-economic groups due to differences in parent specific characteristics.³ Therefore, this research project focuses on how the impact of childhood experience on an individual's experiences in his/her childhood. This research is interesting as it could have policy implications as the government could institute programs to assist children to overcome constraints imposed by household conditions and parent choices.

Individual-level survey data for this research project is obtained from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics of the University of Michigan for the period 2005 to 2011. I propose to use Panel Data Analysis to test for and explain the impact of childhood experience on educational attainment. My main explained variable of interest is educational attainment, which is measured

¹ Sheila and Andrea (1988), "Educational Attainment of Children from Single-Parent Families: Differences by Exposure, Gender, and Race." *Demography*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 221-234. Haveman & Wolfe (1995), "The determinants of children's attainments: A review of methods and findings." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 33, 1829-1878.

² Buchmann & DiPrete & McDaniel (2008), "Childhood Emotional and Behavioral Problems and Educational Attainment." *American Sociological Review* 69, 5; ProQuest, pg. 636.

³ Haveman & Wolfe (1995), "The determinants of children's attainments: A review of methods and findings." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 33, 1829-1878.

as the total number of years of education. This is a continuous variable. The explanatory variables that capture childhood experience are separated into two types of variables. The first group consists of individual-specific factors related to childhood experience such as gender and race of the individual. The second group includes family characteristics such as region, parent's income, mother's education, number of siblings and family structure (single versus married versus cohabiting heads of household).

I expect that a higher number of siblings will result in lower levels of educational attainment, as family resources need to be divided between many children. I also expect to find that parents' educational attainment has a positive impact on the person's level of educational achievement as less educated parents may be less effective in developing their children's human capital.⁴ Hence, parents who have higher educational level will be more likely to encourage their children to obtain more education. Studies have shown that the mother has a greater impact on her child's educational attainment than the father. Therefore, I expect to find that mother's education positively predicts the educational attainment of her children.⁵ Family structure also can affect children's educational achievement, especially parent's marriage status. In general, a happy and two-parent family can give a positive effect on children's educational achievement.⁶ Since "limited family income may affect the child's educational attainment by reducing financial support for further schooling and by necessitating early entrance into the labor force" (Sheila and Andrea 223), I also expect that parent's income has positive impact.

⁴ Haveman & Wolfe (1995), "The determinants of children's attainments: A review of methods and findings." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 33, 1829-1878.

⁵ Fleisher, B. M. (1977). "Mother's home time and the production of child quality." *Demography*, 14:197-212.

⁶ Krein, S. F. (1986). "Growing up in a single parent family: The effect on education and earnings of young men." *Family Relations* 35:161-168.