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The Long-lasting Impact of Inequality of Educational Opportunities on Later-life Cognitive Functioning

Anja K. Leist¹, Eyal Bar-Haim¹, and Louis Chauvel¹

¹University of Luxembourg

Short abstract

Later-life cognitive function is partly determined by educational attainment, presumably by length and quality of schooling increasing cognitive reserve. Early-life inequalities of educational opportunities (IEO) may prevent some children from lower socio-economic backgrounds to be adequately educated and reach their full cognitive potential, which could result in lower cognitive performance at later ages. This study tested the link between IEO and later-life cognitive functioning and aging. We used age-matched respondents' education and that of their parents in EU-SILC as country-level IEO, and cognitive assessments across five waves of SHARE of a total of 18,029 respondents aged 50-59 years from 16 European countries and Israel. Longitudinal mixed (random-effects) models controlled for country-level health development and individual confounders. Country-level IEO was negatively associated with later-life cognitive levels (Coef. -0.904, SE 0.402), but not with cognitive aging. We discuss potential mechanisms, affected subgroups, and possible study limitations.

Themes: Education; Health and well-being; Intergenerational mobility

Keywords: Life course; inequality of educational opportunities; comparative studies; older age; cognitive reserve

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Corresponding Author

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anja Leist, University of Luxembourg, Institute for Research on Socio-Economic Inequality, Campus Belval, 11, Porte des Sciences, L-4366 Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg. Phone: +352 46 66 44 9581, e-mail: anja.leist@uni.lu