

# ***Research on the Relationship Between Family Economic Capital and Students' Psychological Development***

Ziyi Shi<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University College London, London, WC1E 7HU, The United Kingdom

a. stnzhb@ucl.ac.uk

\*corresponding author

**Abstract:** This study investigates the influence of family economic capital on students' psychological development, with a particular focus on families from high and low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. With rising rates of mental health issues among students, including depression, family capital has become a crucial factor influencing psychological well-being and academic performance. While previous studies highlight the impact of SES on student development, this research delves deeper into the mechanisms through which family economic capital affects students' mental health. Using data from the *China National Mental Health Development Report (2019-2020)* and existing literature, this study analyzes the psychological development of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The study employs theoretical frameworks such as psychological capital, growth mindset, parental involvement, and the family stress model. It further draws on the Abecedarian Project as a case study to evaluate the effectiveness of early interventions for students from low-SES families, providing empirical evidence on the role of family economic capital in shaping socio-emotional skills. The results indicate that high-SES families foster greater self-efficacy, resilience, and socio-emotional abilities in students, while low-SES students face challenges due to limited resources. However, targeted interventions, such as parental involvement and educational support, can significantly mitigate these disadvantages and promote equitable psychological development.

**Keywords:** Family economic capital, Socioeconomic status (SES), Psychological development, Parental involvement, Abecedarian Project.

## **1. Introduction**

Family capital can be divided into cultural and economic capital. Studies show that family capital significantly impacts students' psychological and academic development, particularly in specific regions. Mental health, a crucial aspect of overall well-being, is influenced by various factors, including family. According to the *China National Mental Health Development Report (2019-2020)* by the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, depression rates among primary, middle, and high school students are 10%, 30%, and 40%, respectively, with severe depression rates ranging from 1.9-3.3%, 7.6-8.6%, and 10.9-12.6%.

This study aims to explore the influence of family economic capital on the psychological development of middle school students and the underlying mechanisms. While previous research indicates that socioeconomic status (SES) significantly affects students' mental health, the specific

mechanisms remain to be fully examined. By integrating theories such as psychological capital, growth mindset, parental involvement, and the family stress model, this research further elucidates how low-SES families impact student psychological development. This study fills a gap in the current literature by highlighting the mediating roles of psychological capital and parental involvement, providing new empirical evidence that expands these theoretical frameworks. Ultimately, this research offers targeted intervention strategies for educational policymakers to enhance the mental health of low-SES students, contributing to educational equity and societal harmony.

## **2. Theoretical Foundation**

### **2.1. Theoretical Basis of Family Economic Capital and Psychological Development**

Family socioeconomic status (SES) serves as a critical social and structural foundation for individuals, typically measured by parental education level, occupational status, and family income [1]. Family economic capital not only affects students' academic performance but also significantly shapes psychological capital and career adaptability. High-SES families provide children with greater educational resources and emotional support, which promotes both cognitive and emotional development. Psychological capital, including self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and hope, forms the core of career adaptability. High-SES families foster the development of psychological capital, equipping students to better cope with life's challenges. Although low-SES families lack sufficient resources, effective interventions can still enhance their psychological capital, narrowing the gap in career adaptability between low- and high- SES students.

### **2.2. Mechanisms by Which Family Economic Capital Affects Student Psychological Development**

Family economic capital influences students' psychological development through several mechanisms. First, high-SES families can provide abundant material resources and a conducive learning environment, directly promoting students' cognitive and socio-emotional development. Liu et al found a significant positive correlation between family economic status and students' socio-emotional abilities [2]. Families with better economic conditions are more likely to focus on fostering their children's emotional regulation and social interaction skills, which enhance their competitiveness both in school and the labor market. In contrast, although parents in low-SES families strive to support their children, financial pressures often prevent them from providing sufficient socio-emotional support, leading to deficiencies in emotional regulation and social skills.

Second, a growth mindset plays a crucial role in the development of students from low-SES families. Liu et al. noted that students with a growth mindset are better able to alleviate the stress stemming from low SES, exhibiting greater resilience and emotional regulation when facing adversity[2].

Gao Ru-han's research highlights that family economic status not only correlates with non-cognitive skill development but also influences children's psychological development through parental involvement [3]. Parents from high-SES families are more able to actively engage in their children's education and upbringing, fostering children's non-cognitive abilities such as emotional stability, openness, and conscientiousness. For low-SES families, enhancing parental involvement can mitigate the negative impacts on their children's psychological development.

Furthermore, the family stress model provides another important mechanism. Lee argues that financial difficulties in low-SES families increase family stress, which affects parents' emotions and behaviors, leading to poor parenting practices [4]. These parents are more likely to exhibit negative emotions, which impairs children's emotional development, resulting in lower self-control and weaker social skills. These issues can be mitigated through community-level interventions, such as

parent support groups and efforts to improve parent-child relationships, helping to reduce the negative impact of low SES on students' psychological development.

In the context of university students, Luvria et al. found that financial difficulties significantly impact the mental health of university students, particularly in friendships and social interactions [5]. Students from economically disadvantaged families often feel inferior and anxious due to their inability to share the same lifestyle as their wealthier peers, negatively affecting their mental health and social lives.

In conclusion, SES influences student psychological development through various mechanisms, including direct resource support, parental involvement, growth mindset, and the family stress model. These mechanisms collectively explain the positive impact of high-SES families on student psychological development, while also highlighting the challenges faced by students from low-SES families and potential solutions. Future research should further explore the complex interactions between these mechanisms and validate their broad applicability with more diverse samples.

### **3. Influence of Different SES on Students' Psychological Development**

#### **3.1. Psychological Development of High-SES Students**

Students from high-SES families benefit from the extensive support of family resources, particularly from parents who prioritize education and mental health. According to the research of Li et al., family SES indirectly enhances students' academic compliance and adherence by boosting their self-esteem [6]. These students tend to exhibit greater independence and critical thinking skills, allowing them to navigate academic tasks with more flexibility and less external constraint. Parents from high-SES families are often well-educated, providing rich intellectual stimulation and emotional support, which helps their children adapt to the complex academic environment. Additionally, these parents create a conducive home learning environment by encouraging independent learning, facilitating discussions, and providing opportunities for extracurricular activities, further promoting their children's academic achievement and socio-emotional abilities.

The Abecedarian Project reinforces this perspective, demonstrating that high-risk children who receive enhanced parental involvement and family interaction during early childhood show significant improvements in language, cognitive skills, and socio-emotional abilities. This suggests that even children from low-SES families can achieve psychological development comparable to their high-SES peers through effective educational interventions. This underscores the importance of family resources, educational attitudes, and parental involvement in children's psychological development.

However, the advantages of high-SES families do not mean their children are free from psychological challenges. As noted by Xiao, adolescents from high-SES families may develop self-centered traits due to over-reliance on family resources and parental protection, as they believe that they are entitled to everything [7]. During the critical period of identity formation in adolescence, this can lead to negative psychological tendencies that may hinder future social interactions and emotional development.

#### **3.2. Psychological Development of Low-SES Students—The Abecedarian Project**

Students from low-SES families often face significant psychological development challenges, particularly when resources are scarce and parental involvement in education is insufficient. However, the Abecedarian Project offers an effective case of intervention for the psychological development of such students. Initiated in 1972, this long-term education and socio-emotional intervention program aimed to improve the life skills and psychological development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds through early care and education plans.

As noted by Sparling et al., the Abecedarian Project utilized personalized adult-child interactions, focusing on four core elements: language priority, dialogic reading, interactive games, and individualized learning plans. This helped children from low-SES families overcome the developmental limitations caused by environmental resource deficits [8]. The intervention not only emphasized academic education but also integrated the development of socio-emotional abilities into daily care routines, enhancing the children's self-efficacy and social interaction skills.

The results of the Abecedarian Project indicate a significant improvement in the psychological development of children from low-SES families. The project not only enhanced their language skills and self-control, but also reduced behavioral problems. Early intervention through personalized learning plans and socio-emotional support led to long-term benefits, including reduced risk behaviors and depression, as well as improved health outcomes in adulthood. The project also increased employment rates and job stability in later life, demonstrating the profound and lasting impact of early childhood interventions on both the psychological and socio-economic development of disadvantaged children.

#### **4. Comparative Analysis**

There are clear differences in the psychological development of students from high-SES and low-SES families. Children from high-SES families typically exhibit greater confidence and independence, as their families provide ample educational resources and emotional support to foster their socio-emotional development. However, over-reliance on these resources can sometimes lead to the development of self-centered traits. In contrast, children from low-SES families often lack sufficient parental support due to economic pressures, which can result in delayed socio-emotional development, weaker self-control, and a higher likelihood of both internalizing and externalizing behavioral issues.

Despite these differences, research shows that effective intervention measures, such as parental involvement and community support, can significantly mitigate the disadvantages faced by students from low-SES families. These measures help them develop stronger psychological resilience and socio-emotional skills. Ultimately, family SES is not the sole determinant of students' psychological development; appropriate educational and social support systems can create a more equitable environment for the psychological development of all students.

#### **5. Recommendations**

To enhance the psychological capital of students from low-SES families, policy recommendations should focus on strengthening educational interventions and community support. Specific measures include introducing mental health education programs to help students improve their self-efficacy and emotional regulation skills. Additionally, providing growth mindset training can empower students to better cope with stress and challenges. Community support initiatives should encourage greater parental involvement in students' academic and emotional development, compensating for the resource limitations in low-SES households. The feasibility of policy implementation lies in the integration of educational and social service systems, while the effectiveness of interventions can be evaluated through regular psychological assessments and behavioral evaluations to ensure the sustainability and improvement of these measures [9]. Beside from a social perspective, community-based support networks can offer parenting workshops, mental health services, and peer support, helping families develop better coping strategies. At the family level, fostering emotional support and open communication can build resilience and a growth mindset, even with limited financial resources.

## 6. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of family economic capital on the psychological development of students, particularly focusing on the differences between high-SES and low-SES families. The findings highlight that family SES exerts significant influences on students' psychological well-being, shaping their cognitive and emotional development. High-SES families, with their abundant resources and supportive environments, foster greater self-efficacy, resilience, and socio-emotional abilities in children. In contrast, low-SES students often face developmental challenges due to economic stress, insufficient parental involvement, and limited access to resources. However, interventions like the Abecedarian Project demonstrate that early educational and emotional support can significantly mitigate these disadvantages, improving long-term psychological outcomes for disadvantaged students.

While this research provides valuable insights into the mechanisms through which family economic capital affects student psychological development, it is limited by its focus on specific variables. Future research could benefit from integrating additional factors, such as cultural and environmental influences, to produce more comprehensive and accurate conclusions.

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