

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND THE ESTIMATED FINANCIAL STATUS OF STUDENTS WHO ARE PERCEIVED BY THEIR CLASSROOM TEACHERS TO HAVE BEHAVIORAL DIFFICULTIES

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## Abstract

Earlier research findings indicate a significant association between students' low socioeconomic status and conduct problems. This study aimed to determine the relationship between the academic achievement expressed in overall grades and the estimated financial status of elementary school students who are suspected of having behavioral difficulties, as perceived by their teachers. In 125 elementary schools across Croatia, classroom teachers assessed 1345 students suspected of having behavioral difficulties, either in the classroom or during out-of-classroom activities (e.g., vacations, extracurricular activities, field trips). On average, the teachers indicated that 1 to 3 students per class, of whom 4/5 were boys, are suspected of having behavioral difficulties. In addition to academic achievement determined by the student's overall grades, classroom teachers rated students' financial status on a three-level ordinal scale (below average, average, and above average). The study findings indicate that parents of students with very good and excellent overall grades and behavioral difficulties have better financial status in comparison to parents of students with behavioral difficulties who have inadequate, adequate, and good overall grades. This study's findings contribute to a better understanding of students with behavioral difficulties and may help plan the prevention of further adverse psychosocial development and school failure.

Keywords: behavioral difficulties, school failure, prevention, the financial status of parents.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Analyzing the associations between parental income and students' academic performance increases the understanding of how family background impacts students' life chances. Numerous factors influence the school performance of students with behavioral disorders in an inclusive educational environment. Recent research indicates that teachers' inclusive beliefs significantly predict teaching practices with students with behavioral disorders [1]. Furthermore, cooperation and partnership between teachers and parents are essential components of inclusive education. Students' school performance is related to the regularity with which parents attend parent-teacher conferences [2].

In this paper, the focus will be on elementary school students who are suspected of having behavioral difficulties, as perceived by their teachers. The aim is to determine the relationship between the student's academic achievement expressed in overall grades and their estimated financial (material) status.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Parents experiencing financial hardship may be preoccupied with the negative effects of economic disadvantage and may be less sensitive to their children's problem behaviors. In order to pose a theoretical framework for the study of the association between students' financial status and conduct problems, it is necessary to analyze earlier research studies. The findings of earlier research indicate that having a low socioeconomic status has a negative impact on a child's development. The majority of analyzed studies used parent-based measures of the financial situation (i.e., [3], [4], [5], [6], [7]), while several studies emphasized the importance of children's perceptions of social position (i.e., [8], [9]).

According to research on children in early childhood, the general idea is that socioeconomic status affects children's development. Hosokawa and Katsura's study [5] focuses on the development of preschoolers from families with lower socioeconomic status. The findings indicate that lower family income consistently predicted higher scores on all emotional/behavioral issue categories. Specifically, lower family income consistently predicted higher scores across all emotional/behavioral issue domains,

and higher family income consistently predicted higher social competence. Altafim [6] investigated the relationships between socioeconomic status, parenting practices, and internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in 3- to 8-year-old children. In the communication and positive discipline domains, lower socioeconomic status was directly related to higher levels of child internalizing behavior problems and more negative parenting practices.

In research focusing on school-aged children, Grätz and Bernardi [4] emphasize that unfavorable family background has a more substantial negative impact on students from socioeconomically disadvantaged families than those from advantaged families. Ma et al. [9] study findings indicate that low family income is significantly related to adolescent behavioral problems while fostering feelings of inferiority, negative thoughts, and low self-esteem in this group of children. As a result, the findings of this study supported the notion that unsatisfying, unpleasant, or socially impoverished conditions contributed to the development of internalizing problems in adolescents. Frojd et al. [8] sought to determine whether there is a link between adolescents' perceived financial difficulties in the family and adolescent maladjustment. The adolescent perception of their family's economic challenges was associated with known risk factors for poverty, as well as depression and harmful drinking patterns among 15-16-year-old students.

In the study by Guerrero et al. [3], the researchers aimed to see whether lower socioeconomic status is positively or negatively associated with poor school performance, aggressive behavior, substance use, anxiety, and depression in minority children. According to the survey results, low socioeconomic status was associated with poor academic performance and behavioral and emotional issues. Furthermore, family support was a protective factor in the full sample, including adolescents from different socioeconomic backgrounds and the sub-sample of adolescents with lower socioeconomic status. In the study by Wiborg and Grätz [7], the findings indicate a declining correlation between children's academic performance and parental wealth and income over the range of school grade levels, which supports the idea that parents make up for their children's poor academic achievement.

### **3 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Recent studies have identified a relationship between the estimated financial status and the academic achievement of students with behavioral difficulties. While the estimated financial status of students is a more complex concept of socioeconomic status, its estimation is used to gain information on its impact on the school performance of students with behavioral difficulties. Accordingly, academic achievement expressed in school grades serves only as a starting point for further research on students with behavioral difficulties' school performance. According to the previous findings from this research area, we can hypothesize that students with behavioral difficulties whose parents have a better economic status achieve better academic results when compared to students whose parents have a lower financial status. The obtained results are observed in the context of the theoretical framework on risk and protective factors, which are often used for creating preschool and elementary school children preventive programs [10].

### **4 RESEARCH METHOD**

This paper is a part of a larger research project; in the earlier research publication, Vlah and Gribić [11] provide a detailed description of the data collection method. In 125 elementary schools across Croatia, classroom teachers assessed 1345 students who are suspected of having behavioral difficulties, either in the classroom or during out-of-classroom activities (e.g., vacations, extracurricular activities, field trips). On average, per class, 1 to 3 students were assessed as suspected of having behavioral difficulties, 4/5 of whom were boys. Academic achievements were recorded in the form of final grades. Homeroom teachers assessed student characteristics such as material status by assessing it on a three-level ordinal scale (below average, average, and above average). 39.2% of students have good overall grades, 38.8% have very good overall grades, 12.6% have excellent overall grades, 7.4% have adequate overall grades, and 2% have unsatisfactory overall grades. The participation of teachers in data collection was anonymous and entirely voluntary. The results are analyzed and presented using frequencies in contingency tables and chi-square tests of relationships among observed variables.

### **5 RESULTS**

According to the results in Table 1, the majority of the elementary school students in Croatia which are classified by their class teachers as having behavioral problems have average material status (67%). In

comparison, 18% of students have better than average material status, and 14% of the students from the sample have worse than average material status. There are proportionally more students with insufficient, sufficient, and good academic results among students with behavioral difficulties whose parents have worse than average financial (material) status. At the same time, there are proportionally more very good and excellent students among students with behavioral difficulties whose parents have better than average financial (material) status. Also, it is shown that there are proportionally more, good and very good academic results among students with behavior difficulties whose parents have average financial (material) status. The association between the estimated financial (material) status and the overall academic performance of students is statistically significant  $\chi^2(8, 1332)=164.7, p < .001$ .

Table 1. Contingency table of relations between the estimated financial (material) status and the overall academic achievement of students

Academic achievement	Estimated financial (material) status			
	Worse than Average	Average	Better than Average	Total
Insufficient	10	17	0	27
	<b>37,0%</b>	63,0%	0,0%	100,0%
Sufficient	38	49	12	99
	<b>38,4%</b>	49,5%	12,1%	100,0%
Good	105	361	55	521
	<b>20,2%</b>	<b>69,3%</b>	10,6%	100,0%
Very good	35	363	119	517
	6,8%	<b>70,2%</b>	<b>23,0%</b>	100,0%
Excellent	4	103	61	168
	2,4%	61,3%	<b>36,3%</b>	100,0%
Total	192	893	247	1332
	14,4%	67,0%	18,5%	100,0%

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

This research confirms that when it comes to students with behavioral difficulties, students whose parents have better financial (material) status achieve higher academic results than their peers whose parents have a lower economic status. More specifically, this study's findings indicate that students perceived by their classroom teachers to have behavioral difficulties and lower economic status tend to have weaker academic performance. These findings confirmed that findings of the relevant research studies from other countries, implying that low family income may influence lower academic achievement, feelings of inferiority, bad emotions, and low self-esteem. They can be used as guidelines for designing prevention programs in teacher education, schools, and the local community. In addition, these results lead to recommendations for improvement of the overall quality of life for students with lower socioeconomic status, particularly those with behavioral problems.

Since this sample includes 125 elementary schools in Croatia, it is possible to talk about the implications of these results in the context of other indicators related to students with behavioral difficulties. Considering the methodological limitations of this work, further research should include objective assessment of students with behavioral difficulties and later multivariate measurement to explore relationships within data sets.

In the framework of the theory of risk and protection of psychosocial development of students at an early developmental age [12], it is necessary to consider preventive socio-educational school programs. It is necessary to plan and implement protective measures for students to reduce and/or eliminate certain risk factors from the family environment. Such efforts certainly require the political will of decision-makers at the local and national levels and the allocation of financial resources for high-quality and evidence-based prevention programs. Elements of preventive programs can address all areas of life in which parents with lower socioeconomic status need additional support, such as extra help in developing children's reading and math skills, extra help in meeting basic existential needs (e.g., food, clothes),

cultural needs (e.g., theater, cinema, museums), and participation in sports clubs and other activities in the local community.

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