

FAQ 26: How can I measure children's socio-economic background?

What's the issue?

The socio-economic and socio-ecological backgrounds of children and their families are very complex: they are constituted by an interaction of the different aspects and settings of families' daily lives (e.g. neighbourhood, family styles such as single-parent families, interrelation between family members, family income, and so on) (Paus-Hasebrink & Bichler 2008).

It is clear that children's access to, and use of, the internet and online technologies differs according to their socio-economic status (SES). Yet this is difficult to measure and, as so often, varies by country, academic discipline, and research method (especially whether interviewing parents or children). Since inequalities are crucial to internet research, it is important that researchers undertake this task and do not omit measuring SES in their research design.

Common practice

Several approaches are possible:

In the UK, market researchers ask a standard series of questions in order to classify people thus: A – Upper middle class (Higher managerial administrative or professional occupations, top level civil servants), B – Middle class (Intermediate managerial administrative or professional people, senior officers in local government and civil service), C1 – Lower middle class (Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial administrative or professional occupations), C2 – Skilled working class (Skilled manual workers), D – Working class (Semi and unskilled manual workers), E – Those at lowest levels of subsistence (all those entirely dependent on the state: long term, casual workers, those without regular income). SES is strongly correlated with measures of parental occupation, education and income. In the UK Children Go Online research, parents were asked these questions when recruiting children. (Sonia Livingstone, UK)

References and further resources

- Paus-Hasebrink, I. & Bichler, M. (2008). Analyse des Wandels von Sozialisation. Veränderung von Kindheit in sozial schwächeren bzw. anregungsärmeren Milieus im Kontext des Wandels der Medien (Analysis of the change in socialization. The change of childhood of children from less advantaged homes in the context of the change of media). Endbericht an den Jubiläumsfonds der Österreichischen Nationalbank (*Final report for the Jubilee Fund of the Austrian National Bank*). Unveröffentlichtes Manuskript (Unpublished manuscript).
- Torney-Purta, J., Lehmann, R., Oswald, H., & Schulz, W. (2001). *Citizenship and education in twenty-eight countries: Civic knowledge and engagement at age fourteen*. Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.