

An inquiry into the relationship between education and health and social capital.

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Abstract

Recent studies indicate that years of formal schooling are strongly correlated with health outcomes such as mortality and self-reported health. Additional years of schooling also appear to have an effect on health behaviours such as smoking. Few empirical studies examine directly the relationship between education and community engagement and social capital and they indicate that education might have a primary importance in promoting community involvement.

We use data from countries participating in the CERI/SOL phase 2 project – Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and Korea – to examine the relationship between educational attainment and health and social capital outcomes. We examine the following health benefits of education in our analysis: reductions in obesity rates, mental health problems and alcohol consumption. In our analysis of social capital and community engagement we concentrate on formal volunteering, trust and tolerance and political interest.

More specifically we focus on two issues touched upon by existing literature but that deserve further empirical analysis: 1) whether underlying relationships between education and health and social capital can be considered to be causal and 2) whether the relationship between education and health and social capital is linear or there are threshold effects. Understanding whether observed relationships are causal is a fundamental step in the development of educational policies that consider the full benefits of educational investments – labour market performance, health status and community involvement. We will employ changes in minimum school leaving age requirements in CERI/SOL 2 countries to investigate the causal nature of the link between education and health and social capital. We will investigate the presence of threshold effects with respect to health and social capital, to examine whether the marginal benefit of educational investments are constant or not.