ACCESS TO CHILDCARE QUALITY IN A UNIVERSAL CONTEXT: THE ROLE OF PARENTAL EDUCATION AND INCOME

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Background and aims: There is consensus about the positive effects of high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on children’s development, particularly for children from lower socioeconomic background. However, limited knowledge exists on potential selection/inequalities in the access to high quality ECEC in universal contexts, such as Norway. This study aims at investigating family and child-level factors that predict access into ECEC of higher quality (i.e. structural quality and child-teacher relationship quality), taking into account accessibility of information on different quality aspects.

Methods: We use data from the Norwegian Mother and Child Cohort Study (MoBa) linked with teachers reports on ECEC quality and Medical Birth Register of Norway (MBRN) (N=6900). We employed a structural equation modeling (robust Weighted Least Squares estimator WLSMV) to analyze selection/access to ECEC of higher quality by family level characteristics. We focus on socioeconomic status and control for other parental and child level factors (i.e. parents’ cultural background, mother’s age and mothers’ depression/anxiety, child’s biological and early developmental risk, child’s temperament and birth month) to account for complexity of selection mechanisms into ECEC.

Results: We found indications of socioeconomic selection/inequalities in the access to higher quality ECEC for both structural and process quality (child-teacher relationship measured by the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale) in the context of universal access in Norway. Higher parental socioeconomic status was associated with higher teachers rating on developmental material, staff competence and stability and lower rating on child-teacher conflict.

Conclusion: The results suggest more efforts might be needed to ensure equal access to higher quality ECEC.