

The Intergenerational Elasticity of Earnings: Exploring the Mechanisms

Uta Bolt, Eric French, Jamie Hentall Maccuish, and Cormac
O'Dea

UCL, IFS, Cambridge, and Yale

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Why do high income parents have high income children?

Potential explanations: Children of high income families ...

... attain more **years of schooling**

... have higher **cognitive skills**

... receive more **investments**: parental time & school quality

... face different **family environment**: more educated parents,
fewer siblings

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What we do in this paper:

⇒ We **quantify** the importance of these explanations

⇒ We analyse **how these different explanations are related**

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1. Potential mechanisms:

- Schooling: Carneiro & Heckman (2002), Caucutt & Lochner (2020)
- Cognition: Dahl & Lochner (2012), Agostinelli & Sorrenti (2018)
- Parental Investments: Cunha & Heckman (2008), Cunha et al. (2010), Attanasio et al. (2020), Dearden et al. (2002)
- Family background: Meghir & Palme (2005), Heckman & Karapakula (2019), Bhalotra & Clarke (2020)

2. Decomposition: Blanden, Gregg, Macmillan (2007)

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Our contribution

- Understand **how** these channels operate and interact
- Mediation analysis - Large number of **direct** and **indirect** effects of each channel on lifetime income:
 - School quality \rightarrow lifetime income
 - School quality \rightarrow schooling \rightarrow lifetime income
 - School quality \rightarrow cognition \rightarrow schooling \rightarrow lifetime income
- Solving this would be very difficult with a structural model (just think of the no. of states you'd have to keep track of....)
- Use of data that links early life circumstances to outcomes across the lifecycle for the **same sample** of individuals

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Outline

Introduction

Data & Key Facts

Approach

Results

Data - National Child Development Study (NCDS)

- Population born in one week in Britain in 1958
- Followed at ages 0, 7, 11, 16, 23, 26, 33, 37, 42, 49, 55, (60)
- Data on:
 - Parental income
 - Individual's earnings over the lifecycle
 - Potential drivers of the Intergenerational Elasticity of Earnings (IGE)

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Key Facts: Children from high income families ...

1. ... grow up in a different **family environment**: [Details](#)
 - More educated parents, less siblings
2. ... receive more **investments**: [Details](#)
 - **At home**: reading to child, outings with child, interest in child's education
 - **At school**: student-teacher ratios, PTA, fraction that continues education
3. ... have better **outcomes**: [Details](#)
 - **Cognitive skills** at age 16: reading score, maths score, teacher-assessed ability
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Key Fact 3:

Child outcomes differ by parental income

	Parental Income Tertile			P-value:
	Bottom	Middle	Top	Bottom vs Top
Cognition				
Reading at age 16	-0.11	0.01	0.10	0.00
Math at age 16	-0.08	-0.02	0.10	0.00
Education				
Age left education	17.9	17.9	18.1	0.02

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Summary of our approach

1. Predict latent factor scores for cognition, time investments and school quality
2. Estimate the IGE
3. Decompose IGE into multiple channels, allowing for increasing degrees of mediation

Latent Factors and Measurement Error

- We do not directly observe cognition, time investments, and school quality
- Instead: Multiple **noisy measures** for each $\omega = C, inv_t, sq_t$

$$\underbrace{Z_{\omega,m}}_{\text{Measure}} = \underbrace{\lambda_{\omega,m}}_{\text{Loading Parameter}} \underbrace{\omega}_{\text{Latent factor}} + \underbrace{\epsilon_{\omega,m}}_{\text{Measurement error}}$$

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- Key estimation steps :
 1. Estimate measurement system parameters ($\lambda_{\omega,m}, \text{Var}(\epsilon_{\omega,m})$)
[More Details 1](#) .
 2. Create weighted avg of measures—noisy measure of the latent factor [More Details 2](#) .
 3. Correct for measurement error using errors-in-variables correction:
 - Read appendix of Heckman et al. 2013.
 - Recall OLS measurement error bias.
 - Key trick: We know the variance of measurement error - can be used to correct for measurement error.

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Signal-to-Noise Ratios

$$Z_{\omega,m} = \lambda_{\omega,m}\omega + \epsilon_{\omega,m}$$

$$s_{\omega,m} = \frac{(\lambda_{\omega,m}^2) \text{Var}(\omega)}{(\lambda_{\omega,m}^2) \text{Var}(\omega) + \text{Var}(\epsilon_{\omega,m})}$$

Cognition at 16		Time Inv 16		School Quality 16	
Reading Score	0.56	P:Supportive	0.32	School Type	0.08
Math Score	0.62	M:Interest in ed	0.90	%Cnt School	0.35
Teacher: Math	0.80	F: Interest in ed	0.75	%FT degree	0.82
Teacher: English	0.72			%Passed A-levels	0.93
				%Studying towards A-levels	0.45
				Teacher Student Ratio	0.20

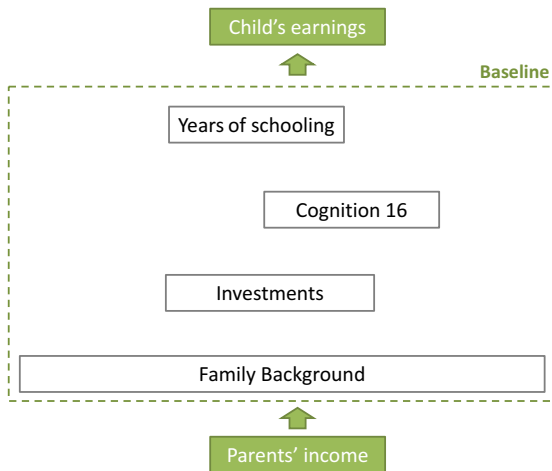
Estimating the IGE

$$\ln Y_i = \rho \ln Y_{Parent,i} + u_i$$

where:

- Y is (demeaned) lifetime earnings
- $Y_{Parent,i}$ (demeaned) lifetime income of parent
- ρ is the Intergenerational Elasticity of Earnings (IGE)

Baseline - Decomposition of IGE



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1. Lifetime earnings regression:

$$\ln Y_i = \alpha_S S_i + \alpha_C C_i + \alpha_I I_i + \alpha_F F_i + \alpha_{Y_P} \ln Y_{Parent,i} + u_i^Y$$

$$I = [inv_7, inv_{11}, inv_{16}, sq_7, sq_{11}, sq_{16}]$$

$$F = [ed_m, ed_f, sib]$$

⇒ Can test restrictions, e.g. $\alpha_{sq_7} = \alpha_{sq_{11}} = \alpha_{sq_{16}} = 0$

2. Association between parental income and covariates:

$$C_i = \kappa_C \ln Y_{Parent,i} + v_i^C$$

3. Share of IGE explained by age 16 cognition: $\frac{\alpha_C \kappa_C}{\rho}$

⇒ Only considers **direct** effect of cognition on lifetime earnings

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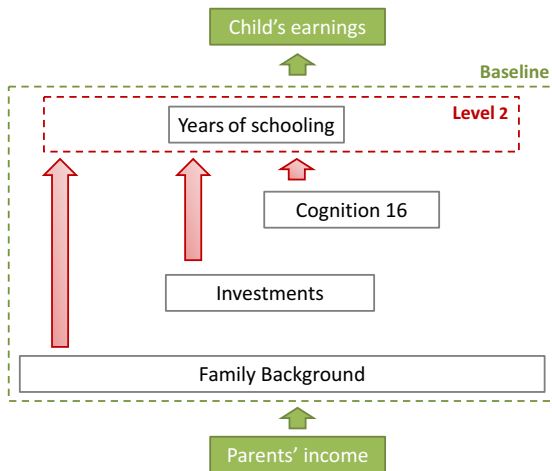
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Level 2 - Indirect effects via years of schooling



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Determinants of years of schooling:

$$S_i = \beta_C C_i + \beta_I I_i + \beta_F F_i + \beta_{Y_P} \ln Y_{Parent,i} + u_i^S$$

Share of the IGE explained by age 16 cognition:

$$\left(\underbrace{\alpha_C \cdot \kappa_C}_{\text{Direct Effect}} + \underbrace{\alpha_S \cdot \beta_C \cdot \kappa_C}_{\text{Indirect Effect via schooling}} \right) / \rho.$$

Level 2 - Indirect effects via years of schooling

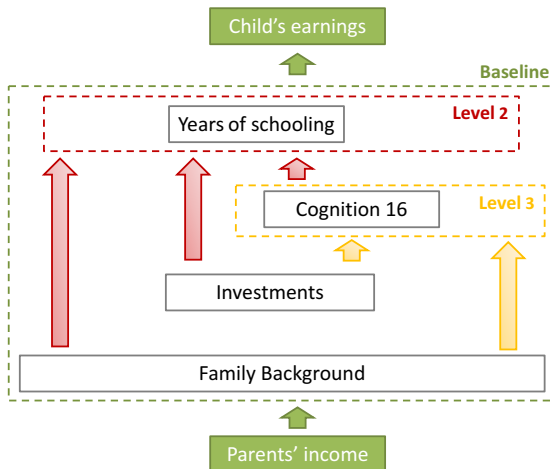
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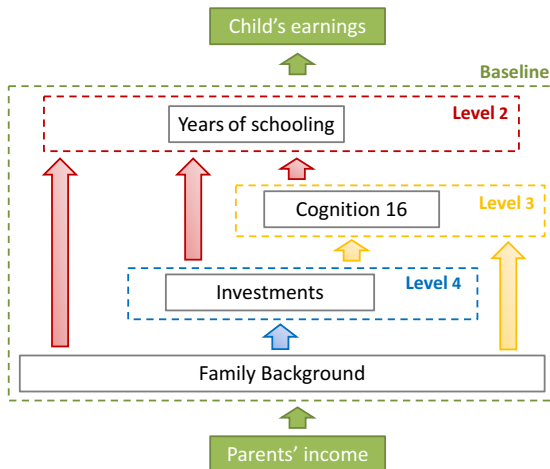
Share of the IGE explained by age 16 cognition:

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Level 3 - Indirect effects via years of schooling



Level 4- Indirect effects via years of schooling



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IGE Estimates

with and without measurement error corrections

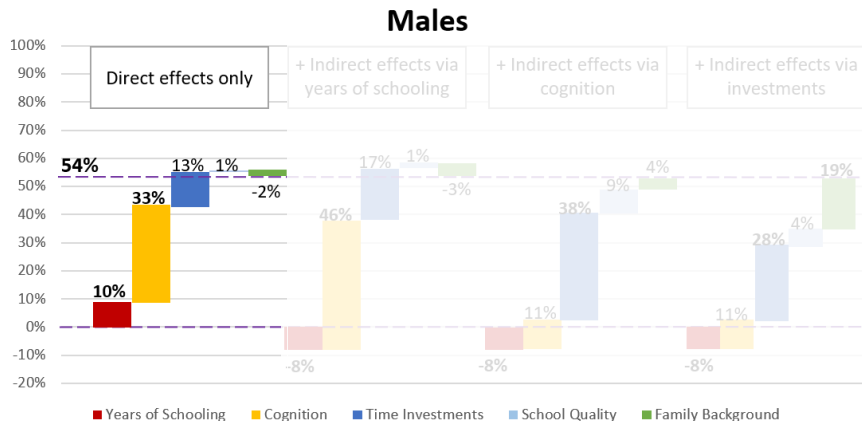
$$\ln Y_i = \rho \ln Y_{Parent,i} + u_i$$

where ρ = Intergenerational Elasticity of Earnings (IGE)

Table: IGE estimates

	Male	Female	Male uncorrected	Female uncorrected
IGE	0.317 (0.097)	0.236 (0.105)	0.155 (0.045)	0.115 (0.050)
<i>N</i>	1350	1347	1350	1347

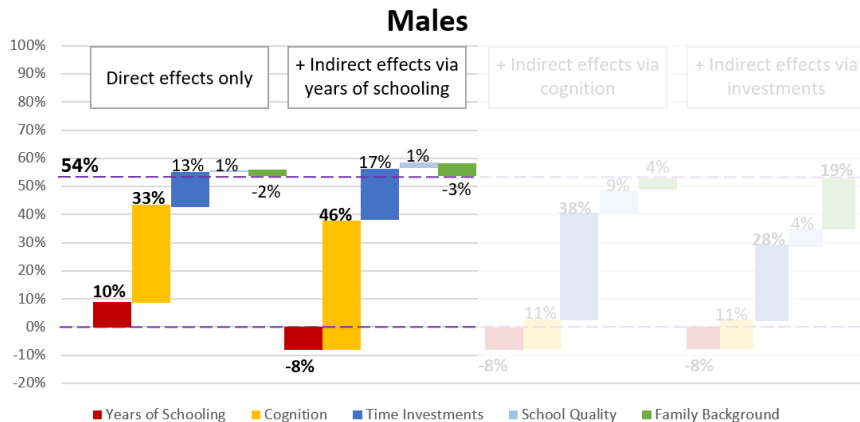
Results: Mediation Analysis - Males



⇒ 54% of IGE is explained by our channels

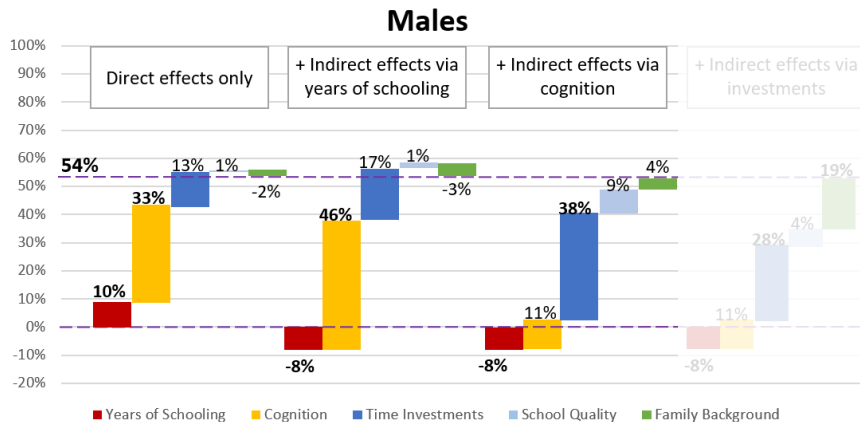
⇒ Cognitive skills and schooling significantly affect IGE

Results: Mediation Analysis - Males



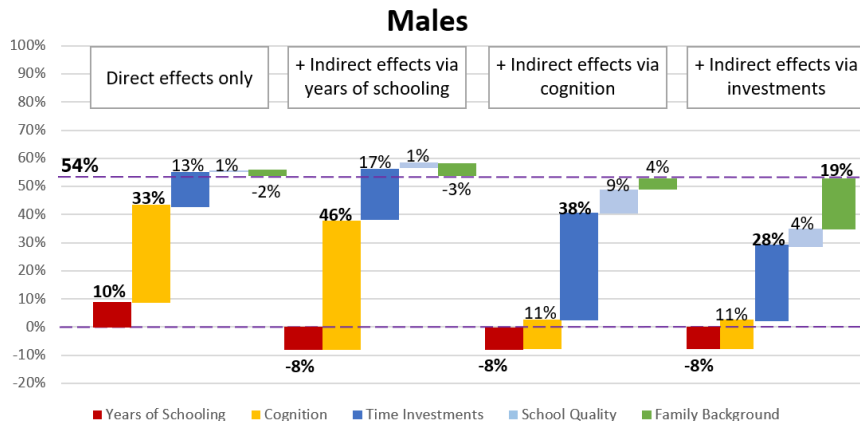
⇒ Effect of schooling is completely mediated by cognitive skills

Results: Mediation Analysis - Males



⇒ Most differences in cognition are explained by differences in time investments and school quality

Results: Mediation Analysis - Males

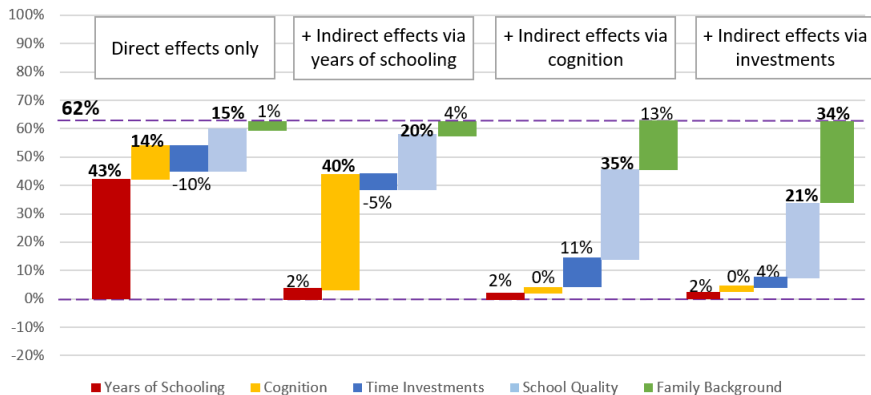


⇒ Family background-related differences explain 19% of IGE.

⇒ Even if we control for family background, the income gradient in investments persists

Results: Mediation Analysis - Females

Females



Key Results - Summary

For both, men and women:

- **Years of schooling** and **cognition** explain the large shares of the IGE

- But: Effect of years of schooling is entirely mediated by cognition ...

... and cognition is largely mediated by investments

⇒ Differences in **investments** between rich and poor families really matter for the IGE...

... and not all of them can be explained by family background

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For both, men and women:

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Testing Restrictions

Do time investments, school quality, and family background have direct effects on lifetime earnings?

	Lifetime Earnings		Years of Schooling		Cognition	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
<u>P-values for joint significance:</u>						
Time Investments	0.708	0.842	0.490	0.315	0.096	0.031
School Quality	0.501	0.285	0.424	0.183	0.017	0.009
Family Background	0.291	0.276	0.218	0.408	0.012	0.020
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⇒ Only jointly significant for explaining cognition!

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Importance of Correcting for Measurement Error

- We combine **multiple measures** and correct for measurement error in predicted factors.
- What happens if we used a **single measure** instead?

⇒ under-estimate the importance of cognition by up to 35%

⇒ fraction explained by parental investment attenuated by 45%

	Predicted factor + ME correction				Single measure			
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L1	L2	L3	L4
	Direct	+via years of schooling	+via cognition	+via investments	Direct	+via years of schooling	+via cognition	+via investments
Years of Schooling	10%	-8%	-8%	-8%	18%	1%	1%	1%
Cognition	33%	46%	11%	11%	18%	29%	12%	12%
Investments	14%	19%	47%	33%	13%	18%	29%	18%
Family Background	-2%	-3%	4%	19%	2%	3%	9%	19%

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Cognition	33%	46%	11%	11%	18%	29%	12%	12%
Investments	14%	19%	47%	33%	13%	18%	29%	18%
Family Background	-2%	-3%	4%	19%	2%	3%	9%	19%

Importance of Correcting for Measurement Error

- We combine **multiple measures** and correct for measurement error in predicted factors.
- What happens if we used a **single measure** instead?

⇒ under-estimate the importance of cognition by up to 35%

⇒ fraction explained by parental investment attenuated by 45%

	Predicted factor + ME correction				Single measure			
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L1	L2	L3	L4
	Direct	+via years of schooling	+via cognition	+via investments	Direct	+via years of schooling	+via cognition	+via investments
Years of Schooling	10%	-8%	-8%	-8%	18%	1%	1%	1%
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Robustness

Our results are robust to:

- Accounting for non-cognitive skills [see table](#)
- Complementarity between years of schooling and cognition [see table](#)
- Including other common family background variables [see table](#)

Conclusions

- **More than half** of the intergenerational elasticity in earnings (IGE) is explained by differences in:
 - years of schooling
 - cognition
 - parental investments
 - family circumstances during childhood.
- Main driver of the IGE
 - **Parental investments** received early in life
 - ..which leads to **higher cognitive development** and earnings.

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 - family circumstances during childhood.
- Main driver of the IGE
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 - ..which leads to higher cognitive development and earnings.

Robustness Check 1

Accounting for non-cognitive skills

	Males				Females			
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Years of Schooling	0.104	-0.078	-0.078	-0.078	0.420	0.039	0.039	0.039
	[0.031, 0.266]	[-0.274, -0.012]	[-0.274, -0.012]	[-0.274, -0.012]	[0.194, 1.127]	[-0.171, 0.329]	[-0.171, 0.329]	[-0.171, 0.329]
Cognition	0.338	0.474	0.107	0.107	0.135	0.394	0.012	0.012
	[0.181, 0.759]	[0.296, 1.007]	[-0.096, 0.378]	[-0.096, 0.378]	[-0.016, 0.400]	[0.161, 1.071]	[-0.297, 0.212]	[-0.297, 0.212]
Non-cognitive skills	-0.004	-0.005	-0.046	-0.046	0.000	0.000	-0.022	-0.022
	[-0.079, 0.042]	[-0.082, 0.043]	[-0.169, 0.007]	[-0.169, 0.007]	[-0.047, 0.039]	[-0.073, 0.061]	[-0.151, 0.022]	[-0.151, 0.022]
Investments	0.123	0.178	0.517	0.354	0.033	0.128	0.444	0.239
	[-0.133, 0.454]	[-0.063, 0.623]	[0.212, 1.346]	[0.112, 0.974]	[-0.306, 0.351]	[-0.142, 0.525]	[0.158, 1.278]	[-0.038, 0.745]
Family Background	-0.008	-0.018	0.051	0.214	-0.006	0.020	0.108	0.314
	[-0.173, 0.109]	[-0.194, 0.103]	[-0.093, 0.188]	[0.092, 0.558]	[-0.238, 0.215]	[-0.189, 0.303]	[-0.066, 0.504]	[0.089, 0.997]
<i>N</i>	1339	1339	1339	1339	1336	1336	1336	1336

Notes: 95% Confidence intervals in brackets. Coefficients that are significant at the 5% level are **bold**.

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Robustness Check 2

Complementarity between schools and cognition

	Males			Females		
	EIV	GMM	GMM	EIV	GMM	GMM
Years of Schooling	0.093	0.165	0.162	0.425	0.452	0.487
	[0.019, 0.228]	[0.073, 0.325]	[0.066, 0.310]	[0.158, 1.337]	[0.231, 1.083]	[0.265, 1.206]
Cognition	0.333	0.368	0.365	0.135	0.094	0.078
	[0.193, 0.729]	[0.173, 0.646]	[0.184, 0.625]	[-0.008, 0.502]	[-0.058, 0.268]	[-0.081, 0.229]
Years of Schooling × Cognition			-0.016			0.003
			[-0.066, 0.017]			[-0.054, 0.070]
Investments	0.163	0.137	0.122	0.057	0.149	0.122
	[-0.060, 0.456]	[-0.112, 0.428]	[-0.119, 0.392]	[-0.266, 0.437]	[-0.140, 0.554]	[-0.124, 0.513]
Family Background	-0.012	-0.055	-0.053	0.022	0.055	0.102
	[-0.150, 0.112]	[-0.232, 0.074]	[-0.215, 0.077]	[-0.233, 0.302]	[-0.164, 0.297]	[-0.136, 0.374]

Notes: 95% Confidence intervals in brackets. Coefficients that are significant at the 5% level are **bold**.

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Robustness Check 3

Including other common family background variables

	Males				Females			
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Years of Schooling	0.095	-0.096	-0.096	-0.096	0.423	0.093	0.093	0.093
Cognition	0.323	0.454	0.149	0.149	0.129	0.396	-0.021	-0.021
Investments	0.134	0.187	0.469	0.306	0.049	0.150	0.449	0.277
<i>Time Investments</i>	0.132	0.178	0.388	0.281	-0.093	-0.038	0.116	-0.070
Age 7	0.135	0.156	0.152	0.084	0.149	0.167	0.181	-0.018
Age 11	-0.057	-0.030	0.075	0.066	-0.180	-0.176	-0.133	-0.053
Age 16	0.054	0.052	0.162	0.131	-0.062	-0.028	0.067	0.002
<i>School Quality</i>	0.002	0.010	0.081	0.024	0.142	0.188	0.333	0.347
Age 7	-0.001	-0.001	0.000	0.001	0.047	0.044	0.047	0.062
Age 11	-0.030	-0.028	-0.051	-0.056	0.017	0.019	0.012	0.005
Age 16	0.033	0.038	0.132	0.080	0.078	0.125	0.274	0.280
Family Background	-0.205	-0.197	-0.174	-0.011	-0.264	-0.302	-0.183	-0.012
<i>Mother's education</i>	-0.045	-0.044	-0.021	0.031	-0.027	-0.009	0.043	0.147
<i>Father's education</i>	0.012	0.004	0.032	0.084	0.055	0.066	0.113	0.209
<i>Number of Siblings</i>	0.013	0.012	0.028	0.077	-0.020	-0.021	-0.011	0.004
<i>Stable</i>	-0.145	-0.133	-0.150	-0.103	-0.189	-0.243	-0.178	-0.155
<i>Mum's age</i>	-0.032	-0.028	-0.038	-0.037	-0.099	-0.087	-0.155	-0.213
<i>Dad's age</i>	-0.008	-0.007	-0.025	-0.063	0.017	-0.008	0.004	-0.004
N	1350	1350	1350	1350	1347	1347	1347	1347

Notes: 95% Confidence intervals in brackets. Coefficients that are significant at the 5% level are **bold**.

Mediation Analysis: Share of IGE Explained

	Males				Females			
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Years of Schooling	0.095	-0.079	-0.079	-0.079	0.425	0.024	0.024	0.024
Cognition	0.327	0.456	0.106	0.106	0.135	0.402	0.002	0.002
Investments	0.135	0.187	0.473	0.325	0.050	0.151	0.463	0.251
<i>Time Investments</i>	0.127	0.173	0.384	0.284	-0.100	-0.046	0.114	0.039
... Age 7	0.126	0.147	0.143	0.111	0.143	0.157	0.176	0.105
... Age 11	-0.054	-0.027	0.076	0.066	-0.180	-0.175	-0.133	-0.083
... Age 16	0.056	0.053	0.166	0.108	-0.062	-0.029	0.070	0.016
<i>School Quality</i>	0.008	0.014	0.089	0.041	0.150	0.198	0.349	0.212
... Age 7	-0.001	-0.001	0.000	-0.000	0.047	0.044	0.046	0.032
... Age 11	-0.024	-0.023	-0.044	-0.030	0.019	0.022	0.016	-0.010
... Age 16	0.033	0.038	0.133	0.072	0.084	0.132	0.287	0.191
Family Background	-0.019	-0.027	0.037	0.185	0.006	0.039	0.128	0.340
<i>Mother's education</i>	-0.051	-0.049	-0.029	0.020	-0.043	-0.024	0.010	0.104
<i>Father's education</i>	0.016	0.008	0.035	0.084	0.068	0.081	0.126	0.227
<i>Number of Siblings</i>	0.016	0.014	0.031	0.081	-0.019	-0.019	-0.008	0.009
Total	0.538	0.538	0.538	0.538	0.616	0.616	0.616	0.616
N	1350	1350	1350	1350	1347	1347	1347	1347

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Key Fact 1:

Family environment differs by parental income

	Parental Income Tertile:			
	Bottom	Middle	Top	P-val
Family Background				
Number of siblings	2.13	1.93	2.05	0.01
Father's age left school	14.9	14.8	15.2	0.00
Mother's age left school	15.0	15.1	15.3	0.00

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Key Fact 2:

Parental investments differ by parental income

	Parental Income Tertile:			
	Bottom	Middle	Top	P-val
Time investment				
% of fathers go on outings w child 7	65.2	72.5	71.5	0.00
% of parents want child to go to uni 11	81.2	82.8	85.2	0.08
% of mothers very interested at age 16	31.5	32.8	35.6	0.19
School quality				
% whose PTA holds meetings 7	56.8	57.6	58.7	0.71
Student-teacher ratio 11	24.8	24.7	24.3	0.06
% from child's class studying for GCEs 16	44.0	44.4	50.5	0.00

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Level 4 - Indirect effects via investments

Determinants of cognition:

$$inv_{16,i} = \delta_F F_i + \delta_{Y_P} \ln Y_{Parent,i} + u_i^{inv_{16}}$$

Share of the IGE explained by maternal education:

$$\left\{ \underbrace{\alpha_{ed_m}}_{\text{Direct Effect of mum ed on Earnings}} + \underbrace{\alpha_S \beta_{ed_m}}_{\text{Indirect Effect of mum ed via Schooling}} + \underbrace{(\alpha_C + \beta_C \alpha_S) \gamma_{ed_m}}_{\text{Indirect Effect of mum ed via Cognition}} + \right. \\ \left. \underbrace{\left[\underbrace{\alpha_{inv_{16}}}_{\text{Direct Effect of } inv_{16} \text{ on Earnings}} + \underbrace{\beta_{inv_{16}} \alpha_S}_{\text{Indirect Effect of } inv_{16} \text{ via schooling}} + \underbrace{(\alpha_C + \beta_C \alpha_S) \gamma_{inv_{16}}}_{\text{Indirect Effect of } inv_{16} \text{ via cognition}} \right] \delta_{ed_m, inv_{16}}}_{\text{Indirect effect via } inv_{16}} \right\} \cdot \kappa_{ed_m} / \rho$$

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Indirect effect via inv_{16}

1. Family environment differs by parental income

	Parental Income Tertile			
Variable	Bottom	Middle	Top	P-val
Family Background				
Number of siblings	2.13	1.93	2.05	0.01
Father's age left school	14.9	14.8	15.2	0.00
Mother's age left school	15.0	15.1	15.3	0.00

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Determinants of lifetime earnings

$$\ln Y_i = \alpha_S S_i + \alpha_C C_i + \alpha_I I_i + \alpha_F F_i + \alpha_{Y_P} \ln Y_{Parent,i} + u_i^Y$$

$$I = [inv_7, inv_{11}, inv_{16}, sq_7, sq_{11}, sq_{16}]$$

$$F = [ed_m, ed_f, sib]$$

Test potentially relevant [restrictions](#):

- time investments, $\alpha_{inv_7} = \alpha_{inv_{11}} = \alpha_{inv_{16}} = 0$
- school quality, $\alpha_{sq_7} = \alpha_{sq_{11}} = \alpha_{sq_{16}} = 0$
- family background $\alpha_{ed_m} = \alpha_{ed_f} = \alpha_{sib} = 0$
- parental income $\alpha_{Y_P} = 0$

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Identification of measurement parameters

$$Z_{C,i,m} = \lambda_{C,m} C_i + \epsilon_{C,i,m}$$

Scaling parameter λ :

- Take 3 measures at age 16: Reading score, maths score, teacher rated ability
- We normalized $\text{Var}(C) = 1$
- Then: $\text{Cov}(Z_{\text{read}}, Z_{\text{maths}}) = \lambda_{\text{read}} \lambda_{\text{maths}} \text{Var}(C)$
 $\text{Cov}(Z_{\text{read}}, Z_{\text{teacher}}) = \lambda_{\text{read}} \lambda_{\text{teacher}} \text{Var}(C)$
 $\text{Cov}(Z_{\text{teacher}}, Z_{\text{maths}}) = \lambda_{\text{teacher}} \lambda_{\text{maths}} \text{Var}(C)$

⇒ 3 equations in 3 unknowns

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Predicting latent factor scores

$$Z_{C,i,m} = \lambda_{C,m} C_i + \epsilon_{C,i,m}$$

- We want to predict latent cognition for each individual in our sample
- Easy method: Bartlett scores (Heckman, Pinto, Savelyev, 2013)
- Basic idea: Run GLS of measures on factor loadings for each individual, where weights are inverse of variance of measurement error.

$$\hat{C}_i = (\lambda' \Omega^{-1} \lambda)^{-1} \lambda \Omega^{-1} \mathbf{Z}_i'$$

where Ω is a matrix that has the variances of the measurement errors $\text{Var}(\epsilon_{C,i,m})$ on the diagonal

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