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RESEARCH

Access to Social Capital and Educational Returns for Children of Immigrants: Evidence from Three Swedish Studies

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In this article, we study whether social capital contributes to ethnic inequality in education or whether there is evidence of counter-stratification. We use data from three surveys of Swedish ninth-graders in different contexts to fit regression models for access to social capital and educational returns. Our results show that students with parents from Asia or Southeast Europe had equal or better access to social capital, compared to children with at least one parent born in Sweden. Results for children with African background were mixed. Regarding educational outcomes, we found similar rates of returns from social capital across groups. Better access to social capital thus seems to buffer against disadvantages for some, but not all, groups.

Keywords: Counter-stratification; Social capital; Education; Immigrant background; Youth

Introduction

Over the past decades, studies have established that better access to social capital – or resources embedded in one's social networks (Bourdieu 1986) – is associated with positive outcomes in education (Rogošić & Baranović 2016) and in the labour market (Chen & Völker 2016). Since access to social capital is, in turn, dependent on class position (Lin 2001), this makes social capital contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities.

While there is general consensus on the association between class and social capital, the link between immigrant background and social capital is contested. Many studies report that people with immigrant background have lower access than people with non-immigrant background (e.g. Côté et al. 2019; Majerski 2019; Pena-López & Sánchez-Santos 2017; Seghers, Boone & Van Avermaet 2019). Others, however, report equal – or even better – access among those with immigrant background. This is particularly interesting, since social capital has been proposed as a resource for counter-stratification for groups such as 'low-status youth' (Stanton-Salazar 2001, 2011).

The counter-stratification effect of social capital has been empirically examined in ethnic enclaves in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) (Lee & Zhou 2015; Shah, Dwyer & Modood 2010; Stanton-Salazar 2001). However, many countries lack similar clustering in single-ethnic enclaves. This is for example the case in Sweden, where segregation is largely between white-Swedish neighbourhoods and ethnically heterogeneous counterparts. This makes it interesting to see whether there is evidence of counter-stratification even in the absence of ethnic enclaves. Despite this, most previous studies of social capital have taken only a secondary interest in its association with ethnicity (but see Andersson, Edling & Rydgren 2018).

In this article, we address this research gap. Drawing on data from three Swedish surveys (N = 967, 1386 and 1867, respectively) covering youth from different backgrounds and in different settings, we study access to social capital and educational returns among children of immigrants. Concretely, we answer the following research questions:

1. Do children of immigrants have better access to social capital than children of non-immigrants?
2. If so, does access to social capital among children of immigrants vary depending on their parents' region of origin?
3. Considering educational attainment, do children of immigrants and children of non-immigrants have similar returns from social capital?

The Swedish Context

The Swedish education system is comprehensive. During the period under study (2012–2016), compulsory education (*grundskola*) spanned grades one through nine. In addition, all children were guaranteed a place in a 'preschool year' (*förskoleklass*) in the autumn semester of the year they turned six years of age. At the time, the 'preschool year' was not compulsory. Still, almost all children attended it. After graduating from compulsory school, most students continued to upper secondary education. Upper secondary education is optional and separated into a variety of academic and vocational programmes, which open up different possibilities after completion. There are also introductory programmes for those not meeting the requirements for entry into the standard programmes.

The options available in the transition between compulsory school and upper secondary school are heavily dependent on a student's grades. Grades are given in the final years of compulsory education. In year nine, students receive a final grade at the end of the spring term. This final grade is then used as the qualification for access to secondary education, as well as in competition for more prestigious schools and programmes at schools.

Swedish education is free, and schools are not allowed to charge tuition fees. Despite this, the Swedish system is marred by high degrees of socioeconomical and ethnic segregation, exacerbated by school choice (Brandén & Bygren 2018; Söderström & Uusitalo 2010). For-profit companies are allowed to function as providers of education and are supported by a voucher system that grants a set amount of money per student, irrespective of provider. This leads to schools competing for students who achieve good grades and do not require extra support but also for students who improve the school's reputation, which in turn attracts more students (Voyer 2018).

Through extensive immigration after World War II, Sweden has become a multi-ethnic society. In 2016, approximately 14% of Swedish youth younger than 18 years of age had two foreign-born parents, while almost 10% were foreign born (Statistics Sweden 2017). Among the most common countries of origins for foreign-born parents were Syria, Somalia and Iraq, but also countries belonging to the former Yugoslavia.

Children of immigrants are a heterogeneous group, with heterogeneous educational outcomes (Behtoui et al. 2019). On studying youth graduating between 1998 and 2003, Jonsson

& Rudolphi (2011) found that children of immigrants from Nordic countries and South America had lower average grades than native-born children with two native-born parents, and that children of immigrants from Western, Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as from Iran, Africa and Asia, had higher average grades. By contrast, Engzell (2019) found that among youth completing compulsory school in 2011 and 2012, students with both parents from Nordic, South European, East European, African and Latin American countries had lower average grades than students with two Swedish-born parents.

Children of immigrants from non-Western countries are at a much higher risk of growing up in poverty (Gustafsson & Österberg 2018). In 2010, the likelihood of living in relative poverty was over 50% for children with parents from Somalia, Iraq and Lebanon, compared with a likelihood of 10% for children with Swedish-born parents. As a consequence, these children are more likely to grow up in resource-poor neighbourhoods. Still, there are generally no equivalents to a China Town or Little Italy in Sweden. Instead, segregation is largely between white-Swedish neighbourhoods, schools and workplaces on the one hand and ethnically heterogeneous counterparts on the other. This creates an interesting contrast to research from the USA and Great Britain, where scholars, sometimes using the concept of ethnic capital, often point to geographically clustered, single-ethnic communities as sources for constraints and possibilities (Lee & Zhou 2015; Shah, Dwyer & Modood 2010).

Social Capital, Stratification and Counter-Stratification

The dominant pattern in education is shaped by stratification forces, reproducing inequalities across generations. However, there are also countervailing forces in families, communities and networks, which can empower individuals or buffer against the full burden of oppression. These processes can be described as counter-stratification (Stanton-Salazar 2001). Counter-stratification can happen when subordinate groups – for instance, the working class, women or ethnic minorities – organise themselves, construct a common identity and pool collective resources (Portes 1998). Such collective resources are social capital. We define social capital as *resources embedded in a person's social network, which become available through interactions with others and which can be converted to other forms of capital across social space* (see also Bourdieu 1986; Lin 2001). This includes norms, values and information, but also cultural and economic capital, help and emotional support.

A central idea in social capital research is that the social position of a contact can be used as a proxy for the information and resources they control (Lin, Fu & Hsung 2001). Prestigious positions are associated with high income, but also with power and influence over organisational resources. However, having heterogeneous contacts is also beneficial. Greater heterogeneity results in more variation and less redundancy in the resources available through the network.

Normally, inequality in social capital arises from different patterns in socialisation. The composition of a person's network is, to a large extent, shaped by the 'homophily principle'. This means that interactions usually occur between actors with similar resources and lifestyles (Lin 2001). A middle-class person can, therefore, be expected to have more middle-class acquaintances than a person from the working class, allowing the former better access to resources and information through his/her network. But social capital can also be created through collective effort, for example in a community or organisation. In such situations, social capital can assist in counter-stratification because it entails lending and borrowing resources from a relatively more resource-rich collective or individual (Lin 1999). This can introduce heterodoxic norms and information – for example concerning higher education for working-class youth – and transfer cultural capital, which results in more positive educational trajectories (Atkinson 2012).

Social Capital among Children of Immigrants

Persons with immigrant background hold more precarious positions in the Swedish labour market (Myrberg 2010; Sjögren 2005; Statistics Sweden 2013) and are at higher risk of discrimination (Ahmadi, Palm & Ahmadi 2016; Verkuyten & Thijs 2010; Zschirnt & Didier 2016). Combined, these factors would suggest that immigrants and their children have lower access to social capital. However, ethnic communities are sometimes suggested as a source of social capital (Zhou 2005; Zhou & Kim 2006). Shared identities and norms of reciprocity within an ethnic group can facilitate access to valuable contacts. Migration is also often path dependent, meaning that established connections facilitate future movements and establishment (Kalter & Kogan 2014; Tilly 2005).

There are three theoretical grounds for hypothesising that immigrant families have better access to social capital than non-immigrant families.

First, immigrants tend to be positively selected from their countries of origin (Engzell 2019; Feliciano 2005a, 2005b; Feliciano & Lanuza 2017; Ichou 2014). In the country of destination, many migrants face downward social mobility. This happens for example because foreign credentials are not trusted by employers (Tibajev & Hellgren 2019) or because of differences in class structure (Ichou 2014). Immigrants are also likely to be negatively affected by discrimination (Zschirnt & Didier 2016).

However, while their original class position might be lost, the accrued social network is often not (Andersson, Edling & Rydgren 2018). While such transnational ties are not very helpful in country-specific situations such as the local labour market, they can still be a source of information, aspirations and support in less country-specific situations. Moreover, transnational ties can also facilitate the development of local networks, for example through activating relations with distant relatives and formerly peripheral contacts (Kelly & Lusis 2006). In this way, pre-migration networks can help in the accumulation of social capital relevant to the country of destination.

Second, immigrant families tend to have more transnational ties (Andersson, Edling & Rydgren 2018). This means that social capital is not necessarily lost in migration, and that social capital may in fact be a factor facilitating migration (Kalter 2010). The geographical dispersion of contacts means that they are situated in different contexts. This increases the chances of different career and life trajectories, leading to greater heterogeneity among contacts. Transnational or geographically distant contacts can be just as instrumental in promoting aspirations and providing educational support, even if they are less useful than local contacts for adults in the labour market.

Third, bonds of solidarity among immigrants can shape networks that bridge the social classes (Lee & Zhou 2015; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). This can also happen if pre-migration social positions are more important than the current positions to members of the network or if ethnicity or language supplants class as a basis for inclusion and exclusion. An example of this comes from the Asian American communities studied by Lee & Zhou (2015). These communities provided supplementary education, contained high-achieving role models, and shared information on, for instance, school rankings. The resources made available by these communities were shaped by a strong middle-class presence but were not gated by any class-based exclusionary practices. Because of that, they benefitted all members irrespective of class background.

As previously mentioned, Sweden has few counterparts to these Asian American enclaves. Studies of neighbourhood effects have, nonetheless, shown that there exists some clustering, and that this may affect educational outcomes (see for example Åslund et al. 2011). In addition, there is no theoretical reason why networks must be constrained to a specific location or a single ethnic group (Ryan 2011). Exclusionary practices from white Swedes can also mean

that upwardly mobile immigrants are more likely to retain pre-existing connections. This could result in networks that have a greater heterogeneity of class positions, than if ties were formed, lost and reformed more freely.

To the extent that immigrant families have better access to social capital, it can play a role in counter-stratification for their children (Stanton-Salazar 2011). Drawing on pooled resources, enlisting help from friends and relatives and accessing valuable information through extensive networks are some examples of social capital being used. Norms, positive examples and role models can also be circulated in the social networks, creating a shared sense of what is desirable and what is not, which guides the members of the community (Lee & Zhou 2015).

However, the context-dependent nature of social capital means that availability of contacts and network resources might differ between situations (Cohen 1999). Particularly, the social capital helpful for education may not be equally beneficial in the labour market, and vice versa. This is important to consider when studying social capital accessible to children of immigrants. Previous research has indicated that immigrants and children of immigrants may have less resources in their social network (Verhaeghe, Li & Van de Putte 2013). This makes it important to also consider the possibility of return deficits (Lin 2000).

Previous Research

Research on access to social capital among immigrants and ethnic minorities is inconclusive. Many studies have found that immigrants and ethnic minorities have access to less social capital (Behtoui & Neergaard 2010; Lin 2000; Moren Cross & Lin 2008; Völker, Pinkster & Flap 2008). For example, using data from a British survey, Li, Savage & Warde (2008) found that members of ethnic minority groups, relative to the white British majority, had smaller circles of contacts, which resulted in less social capital. Studies have also found that immigrants had lower access to social capital in Spain (Pena-López & Sánchez-Santos 2017) and Belgium (Seghers, Boone & Van Avermaet 2019). In Australia, immigrants from most, but not all, countries were found to have less occupational diversity in their social networks (Côté et al. 2019). Lower occupational heterogeneity in the local networks of immigrants, compared to non-immigrants, has also been found in Canada (Majerski 2019).

Other studies find no difference (Lannoo et al. 2012) or give mixed results. Studying labour market re-entry among unemployed people in Switzerland, Bonoli & Turtschi (2015) found that immigrants from Portugal, Italy, Spain and former Yugoslavia had more contacts among former colleagues but – similar to immigrants from non-European countries – fewer contacts in managerial positions. Van Tubergen & Völker (2015) used survey data to study access to social capital in a Dutch population aged 15–45 years. Contrasting respondents with Turkish, Moroccan and other foreign-born parents to those with at least one Dutch-born parent, their results showed that having Moroccan background was associated with less social capital than the reference population, whereas having Turkish or 'Other' foreign background was not. In a study from Singapore, Chua, Mathews & Loh (2016) found that Malays – especially Malay men – had lower access to social capital than other ethnic groups, while Behtoui (2013) found that immigrants to Sweden had lower access to social capital than non-immigrants, but that there was no difference in this context among their children.

There is also a growing body of research reporting the opposite results. Using data on Swedish ninth-graders, Behtoui & Neergaard (2016) found that students with a non-Western background had better access to social capital than others. Another study (Behtoui 2017), using data from a survey covering students in the final year of compulsory school or first year of upper secondary school, found that youth born in Asia had better access to social capital than youth with two Swedish-born parents, as did all Swedish-born students with foreign-born parents.

In another study, Hällsten, Edling & Rydgren (2017) used data from telephone interviews with 18- and 19-year-old youth in Sweden, with parents from Iran, former Yugoslavia or Sweden. Their results showed that both groups with foreign-born parents had better average access to social capital than those with Swedish-born parents. Using the same dataset, Andersson, Edling & Rydgren (2018) showed that the difference in access to social capital between youth with a foreign background and those with a Swedish background was largely due to a higher presence of transnational ties among the former.

There is also some evidence from outside Sweden. Using peer composition as a proxy for social capital, Bankston, Caldas & Zhou (1997) found that having Vietnamese friends was associated with higher grades for Vietnamese students in two schools in Louisiana, USA. The authors argue that this reflects the higher concentration of social capital within the ethnic group. A wealth of research in this tradition has since found ethnic social capital, or 'ethnic capital', to be associated with higher educational aspirations for children of immigrants in the USA – particularly among youth with Asian background (Khachikian & Bandelj 2019; Zhou & Gonzales 2019). However, much of this research has been qualitative or has compared migrants with different legal statuses from the same region of origin. This makes generalisations problematic.

More direct evidence comes from the Social Capital USA Survey (Benton 2016). This study found that black Americans had more diverse contacts than white Americans, but that the association disappeared when controlling for civic participation. Latinos, by contrast, had higher status reachability among contacts even after controlling for civic participation. In Belgium, Verhaeghe et al. (2015) used data from a longitudinal survey on labour market entry and social capital among young people. After controlling for socioeconomic and other background factors, their results showed that children of immigrants from Turkey, Morocco and the Balkans had access to more contacts in high-status occupations than children of Belgians.

Data

The data used in this study come from three surveys, presented in **Table 1**. The first was conducted in 2012, focussing on access to social capital and educational achievements of ninth-graders. Responses were collected from students in schools with the highest, lowest and middling grade point averages (GPAs) from the previous year in three major Swedish cities.[1]

The second survey was undertaken as part of the RESL.eu project investigating the risk of and preventive factors for early school leaving. Included were also questions on social capital.

Table 1: Details of the three data sets used.

Year of Survey	N (with missing)	Classes	Population
2012	967 (1268)	65	9th-graders in lowest, medium and highest-GPA schools (Stockholm, Linköping and Norrköping), based on results from previous year.
2014	1386 (2033)	50	9th-graders in lowest-GPA schools (national), based on results from previous year.
2016	1867 (2607)	42	9th-graders in lowest-GPA schools (Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö), lowest-GPA schools (small towns), and highest-GPA schools (national) based on results from previous year.

The data used in this study were collected during the spring of 2014, covering ninth-grade students in 50 schools with the lowest average GPAs from the previous year.

The third survey was administered in 2016 to ninth-graders in schools with the highest GPAs, as well as in schools with low GPAs in both urban and rural settings. The purpose was to study the differences and similarities in terms of factors associated with grades and educational aspirations in these three contexts. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to the surveys by year as follows: 2012, 2014 and 2016.

All three studies contained similar sections on social capital – including identical questions on friends of the family – and similar, registry-based measures of grades. This allows for identical models that use consistent measures across the three datasets. Meanwhile, each survey sampled a different subset of Swedish ninth-graders. Use of the same models and side-by-side presentation of the results thus allows for a comprehensive and more robust examination of the access to and rates of returns from social capital for children of immigrants than previously undertaken.

As the outcome variable, we used data on grades. These data were taken from administrative records and reflected the final grades in the 2014 and 2016 surveys but represented the preliminary grades in the 2012 survey. The actual grade points (ranging between zero and 320 or 340 in the later surveys) were converted to percentages for a more intuitive understanding.

Across the surveys, access to social capital was measured with a position generator method (Lin, Fu & Hsung 2001). Each survey provided identical lists of well-known occupations, and respondents answered whether anyone among the friends of their family held this occupation. From these responses, four indicators of social capital were calculated: contact heterogeneity, or the number of different positions among contacts; highest prestige among contacts; range in prestige; and the mean prestige present in the network. These indicators were in turn collapsed into a single index, using factor analysis.

To control for class background, we included a dichotomous variable for having a parent with an occupation classified as manager or professional occupation in the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08) scheme. We also included parents' education, measured as the minimum years required to reach that level. For both measures, we used the dominant approach, which means that the most advantageous position of either parent was used. Data on family income were available only for the 2016 survey. Including this variable did not alter the results or substantially affect model fit, and therefore it was used only to test robustness. As living with both parents enables more support, higher family income and access to more friends of the parents, we also included a dichotomous variable for living with both parents.

Using data on parents' region of birth, we created four categories for immigrant background. All youth with at least one parent born in Sweden were coded as having a Swedish background. Following Feliciano (2006), the remaining students were categorised based on the mother's region of birth, or the father's if the mother's region of birth was unknown (or own if both parents were unknown). In the 2012 data, 3% of the final sample had missing data on mothers, 5% had missing data on fathers. In the 2014 data, the corresponding numbers were 4% and 18% for mothers and fathers, respectively. Disaggregated data on parents' region of origin were not available for the 2016 survey. Thus, with the exception of absent fathers in the 2014 survey, data missing on either parent's origin were rare. To test whether it affected the results, sensitivity analyses were performed using a sample restricted by either parent, or both. Results (available upon request) showed no substantial difference in the association between origin and access to social capital or in the association between access to social capital and returns. The significance levels were also unaffected. As the three surveys used different categorisations for parents' origin, we were forced to use the coarsest. This

procedure resulted in four categories for immigrant background: parents from Southeast Europe, Asia, Africa and Sweden. Children of immigrants from Northwestern Europe, America and Oceania were excluded due to a small number of observations.

Method

Data were analysed in three steps. First, we used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to estimate the predictors of access to social capital in the datasets. Second, we used OLS regression to estimate the association between social capital and final grades from compulsory school. Finally, we reran the same latter model but without social capital to examine how this affected the estimates. To further test the possibility of return deficits, we also fitted models with interactions between social capital and immigrant background. As this did not substantially affect estimates, the interaction results are not shown.

The three datasets sample different populations – low-, medium- and high-GPA schools; low-GPA schools; and low- and high-GPA schools, respectively. Therefore, we fitted separate but identical models for each dataset in all steps. To account for the high degree of school segregation, standard errors were clustered by schools in all models.

Results

As seen in **Table 2**, the proportions of children of immigrants varied greatly between the surveys. However, the composition of the regions of origin was largely consistent. In all three surveys, Asia (mainly Western Asia based on immigration to Sweden) was, by far, the most common region of origin for youth with immigrant background, followed by Africa and Southeast Europe.

The differences in sampling techniques in the three surveys is clearly shown in the distribution of manager/professional backgrounds in each survey. In the first survey, which involved a random sample of classes, 65% of youth with a Swedish background and 40% of youth with a foreign background had a manager/professional background. In the other two surveys, which oversampled schools with low GPAs, the percentages were much lower. This is especially the case for the 2014 survey. In this survey, which targeted only schools with the lowest GPAs, about 8% of youth with immigrant background had a parent working in a managerial or professional occupation. Notably, this is substantially lower than the corresponding figure for youth with Swedish background in the same survey. Although not surprising, this clearly shows how class and ethnicity interact in the segregation of Swedish schools.

Despite the differences in the samples, children of immigrants reported somewhat better access to prestigious contacts in all three surveys. They also had higher network heterogeneity than youth with Swedish-born parents. Combined, these two factors mean better access to social capital. In the next section, we discuss the factors associated with social capital to see whether this better access applies equally to all three regions of origin and whether it persists after controlling for other background factors.

Access to Social Capital among Children of Immigrants

The descriptive statistics presented in **Table 2** showed that children of immigrants had better average access to social capital than children of Swedish-born parents. To see whether this was true for all regions of origin or for just some, we fitted OLS models predicting access to social capital. Unlike in the descriptive data, for this analysis, we followed the common practice of using a combined measure for social capital based on factor analysis (Lin 2005). **Table 3** shows the results from the three surveys.

Across the board, we found that having more well-educated parents was associated with better access to social capital. Surprisingly, we however found no general association between

Table 2: Descriptive data by survey: youth with Swedish and immigrant backgrounds compared. Means; standard deviation in parentheses.

	2012 survey		2014 survey		2016 survey	
	Swedish background	**Immigrant background**	**Swedish background**	**Immigrant background**	**Swedish background**	**Immigrant background**
Grades (%)	67.69	60.56	65.93	60.46	79.71	69.89
	(16.24)	(20.08)	(16.16)	(19.75)	(14.11)	(19.32)
Max contact prestige	68.71	70.25	67.50	69.44	68.49	69.67
	(11.40)	(11.62)	(12.54)	(12.52)	(11.77)	(13.06)
Contact heterogeneity	7.85	8.90	7.64	9.04	6.80	8.47
	(4.69)	(5.24)	(4.83)	(5.32)	(4.37)	(5.60)
Both parents	0.67	0.80	0.69	0.65	0.77	0.73
	(0.47)	(0.40)	(0.46)	(0.48)	(0.42)	(0.44)
Parents' education (years)	13.93	13.31	13.43	12.08	14.07	12.43
	(1.50)	(1.88)	(2.10)	(2.24)	(1.68)	(2.84)
Manager/professional	0.65	0.40	0.43	0.08	0.54	0.13
	(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.50)	(0.28)	(0.50)	(0.34)
Parents' origin						
South-east Europe		0.17		0.31		0.27
		(0.38)		(0.46)		(0.44)
Asia		0.69		0.52		0.48
		(0.47)		(0.50)		(0.50)
Africa		0.15		0.16		0.25
		(0.35)		(0.37)		(0.44)
Observations	843	124	707	679	1460	407

Table 3: Ordinary least squares regression, predictors of access to social capital in each survey. Results are controlled for school type when applicable. Unstandardized coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses, clustered by school.

	2012 survey	2014 survey	2016 survey
Parents' education (years)	0.06**	0.05**	0.07***
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Managerial/professional	0.07	0.05	0.05
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Both parents	0.02	0.21***	0.01
	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Parents' origin (ref: Sweden)			
South-east Europe	0.11	0.40***	0.31**
	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.12)
Asia	0.50***	0.39***	0.42***
	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Africa	–0.57*	0.16	0.60***
	(0.21)	(0.13)	(0.15)
Constant	–1.03**	–0.85***	–1.05***
	(0.31)	(0.18)	(0.22)
Observations	967	1386	1867
Adjusted R^2	0.033	0.043	0.039

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

parents' occupation and access to social capital. Further investigations (results not shown, available on request) revealed two possible explanations for this. First, parents' occupation and/or family income was only associated with having high-prestige contacts but not greater network heterogeneity. Second, associations were stronger and more positive for children of Swedish-born parents. Thus, there was no general association for all groups. Living with both parents was associated with better social capital in the 2014 survey – sampling only low-GPA schools – but not in the other two surveys.

Looking at the different backgrounds, we found that children of immigrants from Asia had better access to social capital in all three surveys. For children of immigrants from Southeast Europe, the associations were positive in the 2014 and 2016 data but non- significant in the 2012 survey. Children of immigrants from Africa were found to have better access to social capital in the 2016 survey but worse in the 2012 survey. Based on these three studies, we conclude that children of immigrants from Asia and Southeast Europe tend to have equal or better access to social capital than children of Swedish-born parents, and access to social capital is more mixed among children of immigrants from Africa.

Returns from Social Capital for Children of Immigrants

The position generator technique used in these surveys measures potential social capital. But as noted earlier, social capital is context dependent. If contacts are geographically dispersed and their resources are location specific or not generally recognised, it can limit their ability to become mobilised. In a final step, we therefore fitted OLS regressions estimating the association between final grades and social capital. To better show the relation between social capital and outcomes, we ran two models for each survey: one with and one without social capital. Since nothing else is changed between the models, any differences in estimates reflect the associations between social capital and the other variables. Interaction models were also fitted for robustness, and the interactions (available on request) did not substantially alter the estimates.

The results, presented in **Table 4**, show that children of well-educated parents received higher final grades. Surprisingly, having parents in managerial or professional occupations

Table 4: OLS regression: grade returns from social capital, by survey. Results are controlled for school type when applicable. Unstandardized coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses, clustered by schools.

	2012 survey		2014 survey		2016 survey	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Parents' education (years)	3.13***	3.05***	2.14***	2.07***	1.87***	1.76***
	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.22)
Managerial/professional	0.89	0.77	4.57**	4.50**	4.16***	4.09***
	(0.82)	(0.79)	(1.29)	(1.29)	(0.75)	(0.76)
Both parents	4.31***	4.28***	5.80***	5.48***	3.64***	3.62***
	(1.13)	(1.14)	(0.95)	(0.92)	(0.73)	(0.70)
Boy	−3.67**	−3.38**	−5.96***	−5.73***	−6.45***	−6.19***
	(1.18)	(1.22)	(1.26)	(1.25)	(0.68)	(0.69)
Parents' origin (ref: Sweden)						
South-east Europe	−3.36	−3.52	1.08	0.48	−5.32***	−5.81***
	(2.70)	(2.77)	(1.62)	(1.65)	(1.18)	(1.19)
Asia	−5.55*	−6.32*	−1.02	−1.60	−2.66	−3.30
	(2.50)	(2.54)	(1.66)	(1.64)	(1.77)	(1.70)
Africa	−9.89	−9.09	−6.49*	−6.71*	−6.08**	−6.98***
	(4.96)	(5.12)	(2.58)	(2.57)	(2.01)	(1.92)
Family Social Capital		1.50**		1.54**		1.53***
		(0.42)		(0.55)		(0.33)
Constant	25.00***	26.35***	34.42***	35.61***	50.82***	52.32***
	(5.32)	(5.39)	(3.46)	(3.32)	(3.48)	(3.38)
Observations	967	967	1386	1386	1867	1867
Adjusted R^2	0.168	0.175	0.191	0.198	0.301	0.309

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

was not associated with higher grades in the first survey. In contrast, in the other two surveys, the estimate was strong and substantial. This difference is possibly due to parents' occupations being estimated by children in the first survey but being taken from registry data in the other two surveys. Across the surveys, students living with both parents had higher grades. Thus, results were much in line with expectations from previous studies in terms of socioeconomic background factors.

After controlling for socioeconomic background, children of immigrants from Southeast Europe were found to have significantly and substantially lower final grades in the 2016 survey but not in the first two surveys. Having Asian background was in turn associated with lower grades in the 2012 survey, but not in the later surveys. African background, finally, was associated with lower grades in the 2014 and 2016 surveys, but not in the 2012 survey. This points to a considerable heterogeneity.

The full models (columns 2, 4 and 6) included social capital, in addition to the background factors. This returned positive associations with grades across all three studies. As could be expected from the unequal distribution of social capital, including it in the model affected the other estimates. Most importantly, there were increases in the negative associations (i) between having Asian-born parents and grades in the 2012 survey and (ii) between having African-born parents and grades in the latter two surveys. This suggests that better access to social capital does indeed help the educational attainments of children of immigrants. Nonetheless, the magnitude of associations was modest. The estimates show that one standard deviation more social capital was associated with 1.5 percentage points higher grades. This makes the better access to social capital an incomplete buffer against disadvantage.

Discussion and Conclusion

We have studied access to social capital and educational returns for children of immigrants in Sweden. Children of immigrants face more discrimination and exclusionary practices and are more at risk of growing up in relative poverty and attending disadvantaged schools. If they have greater access to social capital, and if this access is associated with greater returns, there is potential for counter-stratification. Since labour market inequalities are often legitimised by educational credentials, education is key to reproducing stratification. This makes potential counter-stratification within education important.

Using data from three surveys, our results indicate that children of immigrants in Sweden often have equal or better access to social capital than their peers with Swedish-born parents. For youth with Asian background, we found consistently better access to social capital across all three datasets. For youth with Southeast European background, the results showed better access to social capital in two of the three datasets. Results for children of immigrants from Africa were inconclusive. This highlights that there is considerable heterogeneity within the categories. Our answer to questions one and two is that children of some immigrant groups, but not all, have better access to social capital than children of non-immigrants. Access to social capital was especially high among children of immigrants from Asia. As the categories are broad, more detailed studies are needed to investigate the heterogeneity within and between groups.

To answer the question of unequal returns from social capital, we fitted OLS regression models estimating the association between social capital and grades. Results showed that social capital was positively associated with educational outcomes, and that students benefitted equally regardless of their parents' origin. The magnitude of the associations was modest, meaning that the better access to social capital should be seen as an incomplete buffer rather than as a levelling factor. However, both qualitative (Thapar-Björkert & Sanghera 2010) and quantitative (Behtoui 2017; Nygård 2017) studies have previously shown that access to social capital is also associated with educational aspirations. This means that social capital is likely to be more beneficial for education than our results suggest if outcomes are considered more broadly.

The three datasets included here are not nationally representative. All relied on stratified samples based on the schools' average GPAs from the previous year. Studies sampling different populations are needed to test whether the results also apply in other contexts. Nevertheless, our analysis showed that children of immigrants had equal or better access to social capital, compared to children with non-immigrant parents, in a multitude of settings. An indication that this could be the case more generally is that our results were in line with findings from contemporary Swedish (Andersson, Edling & Rydgren 2018; Hällsten, Edling & Rydgren 2017) and international (Verhaeghe, Van der Bracht & Van de Putte 2015) research.

The results were also in line with theoretical expectations. Immigrant families tend to be positively selected from their countries of origin (Engzell 2019). They also maintain more transnational ties (Andersson, Edling & Rydgren 2018). In addition, the declassing often associated with migration, the formation of ethnic communities and the uneven integration in the country of destination makes class homophily less salient in the formation and maintenance of ties (Lee & Zhou 2015).

The better access to and equal returns from social capital means that it can be a factor in counter-stratification for some groups, also when there are no ethnic enclaves. That said, the social networks helpful for education may not be equally helpful in the labour market. Middle- or upper-class contacts in the local labour market are often more important than transnational ties for finding a job. And due to discrimination, the compositions of the social networks of children of non-immigrants and children of immigrants are likely to change at different paces. Longitudinal research is therefore needed to better understand the role of social capital over the life course of children of immigrants, especially in the transition from education to employment. Further research is also needed to examine whether the better access to social capital is a lasting phenomenon or whether it will diminish over time. Policy initiatives that promote the transformation of already-existing social networks into civil society organisations for youth from subordinate groups could help institutionalise support and make it more helpful for social development, academic performance and preparation for adulthood.

Note

[1] Located about 200km from the capital, Norrköping and Linköping are medium-sized cities with traditionally more numerous working-class (Norrköping) and more numerous middle-class (Linköping) populations.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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