

Gendered Resource Dilution

Matthijs Kalmijn and Herman G. van de Werfhorst

University of Amsterdam, Department of Sociology and Amsterdam Centre for Inequality Studies

[First full draft; ISOL, December 3, 2014]

Introduction

A large literature has studied the negative impact of the number of siblings on children's educational achievement and attainment. Children's cognitive development and educational attainment suffer from growing up with larger numbers of siblings because the resources parents offer to their children have to be shared with more offspring (Blake, 1989; Downey, 1995, 2001; Jacob, 2011; Steelman, Powell, Werum, & Carter, 2002; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 2005; Van Bavel, Moreels, Van de Putte, & Matthijs, 2011; Vandezande, Matthijs, & Kok, 2011), and because the cognitive climate deteriorates if new children enter the family (Jaeger, 2009; Steelman & Mercy, 1980).

Most of the current literature has assumed that the gender of siblings is unimportant for understanding how family size affects educational and cognitive outcomes. Only a few studies have investigated the separate influence of the number of brothers and sisters, with mixed evidence so far (Butcher & Case, 1994; Conley, 2000; Hauser & Kuo, 1998; Jacob, 2011; Powell & Steelman, 1989). Some studies find negative effects of a larger number of brothers for women, while others find no effect of the specific gender configuration. Several contrasting hypotheses have been formulated on the gender configuration of siblings, including a theory from economics on household specialization which would lead to preferential treatment of sons' education because they will reap greater benefits from it (Becker, 1981; Powell & Steelman, 1989), and 'cultural' theories of how men and women are affected by the achievement climate in the family (Butcher & Case, 1994; Conley, 2000).

The link between sibling's gender configuration and children's educational outcomes is relevant because it provides new evidence on gender inequality in contemporary western societies. Most studies on gender inequality focus on differences