



## OP 231

### **SOCIOECONOMIC INEQUALITIES AND SCHOOL READINESS IN LOW AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES: DOES ACCESS TO EARLY YEARS EDUCATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

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**Background and Aims:** Studies from high, low and middle-income countries suggest significant associations between poverty and children's school readiness outcomes (Bornstein et al., 2012). While consistent evidence, mostly from high income countries, indicate that parental income influences school readiness through ability to afford educational resources as well as parenting behaviours (Sosu & Schmidt, 2017), our understanding of these mechanisms in low and middle income countries is poor (Wolf, & McCoy, 2019). Additionally, we know little about the extent to which current educational policies such as the introduction of universal early years education moderate the poverty and school readiness gap. In this ongoing study, we draw on family investment models to shed light on the relationship between poverty and school readiness outcomes. Further, we investigate the extent to which access to early childhood education moderate the relationship between poverty and school readiness.

**Methods:** We used data from the UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). Samples from a middle and a low-income country in sub-Saharan Africa were used (n= 9984). Predictors (SES), mediators (resources; parenting behaviours), and outcome variables (literacy and numeracy; social, emotional and behavioural; learning school readiness) were selected based on theoretical hypothesis. We controlled for several background variables (child age, gender, physical growth). Analyses were undertaken within the structural equation modelling framework.

**Results and Conclusions:** Preliminary results suggest significant SES differences in school readiness outcomes. Parental SES influences children's school readiness through educational resources and parenting behaviours. There were significant inequalities in access to early years education with high SES children having greater access. It appears that the moderating effect of early years education on the poverty school readiness gap may depend on the quality of early years experience. The policy and practice implications will be explored.