

Exploring Variations in Parental Concerns about Children's Education in Iraq: The Role of Education Level and Income

Aziza Kavlu ¹ , and Sultana Begum ² 

¹ English Language Teaching Department, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University, KRG, Iraq.

² Department of Business and Management, Faculty of Admirative Sciences and Economics, Tishk International University, KRG, Iraq

Correspondence: Aziza Kavlu, English Language Teaching Department, Faculty of Education, Tishk International University, KRG, Iraq.

Email: aziza.kavlu@tiu.edu.iq

DOI: 10.23918/ijsses.v11i2p49

Abstract: Education serves as a cornerstone for the progress of a nation and is a fundamental entitlement for every child. The objective of this study is to explore the intersection of education, income and the worries related to children's education is of paramount importance. This study aims to explore the differences in worries across diverse education levels and income levels and secondly to contribute insights to academic literature. Utilizing the data of the country Iraq (N=1200) among which (50.3% are Males and 49.7% are Females) from the Seventh Wave of the World Values Survey. The findings reveal that there is statistically significant variance based on the Education level of the respondents, but no variance based on the income level. The study, recommends an urgent need to address educational disparities in Iraq and suggests that the policymakers make policies to cater to the needs of the specific groups and increase the investment on Education and promote income and education equity initiatives.

Keywords: Education, Income, Worries, Iraq, Parental Concerns

1. Introduction

Education is a cornerstone of national development. It is crucial in breaking the cycle of poverty and is a fundamental right for all children around the world. However, education in Iraq was damaged by decades of conflict and underfunding, which severely limited Iraqi children's access to high-quality education (UNICEF, 2017). War and displacement affect individuals cognitively (Ghazi et al., 2012), emotionally, and socially. According to a recent UNICEF-supported survey in Iraq, 54% of children from lower-income families do not complete secondary education, and many of them end up in the unofficial labor market vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Lasseko, 2019). In Iraq, as everywhere else, being educated is considered one of the key conditions for getting rid of unfavorable living circumstances. Therefore, parents want their children to be educated and express their concerns regarding children's access to education.

There are numerous theoretical explanations and research studies that show a positive correlation between parents' educational background and their children's education (Fengliang, Longlong, & Dongmao, 2015).

Received: March 12, 2024

Accepted: April 15, 2024

Kavlu, A., & Begum, S. (2024). Exploring Variations in Parental Concerns about Children's Education in Iraq: The Role of Education Level and Income. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 11(2), 49-61.

However, the studies have not touched on the aspects of the parent's concerns regarding whether their children will be able to get an education or not. According to Cornay (1995), regardless of their own education, all parents aspire for their children to have as much as education possible and receive the best education. Based on Maccoby's (1994) study parents with less education stress more due to their socioeconomic status than higher educated parents. However, educated parents have more experience and are more familiar with academic context and environment which make them more confident and knowledgeable in supporting and guiding their children.

Davis-Kean (2005) study hypothesized that both factors of mother's and father's education and family income impact parents' educational expectations for their children. Families with low SES (Social Economic Status) have limited access to economic resources, which creates barriers to children's educational achievement. Moreover, having an unstable, low-paying, and stressful job can negatively affect parents' mental health which may also affect parents' emotional states, feelings, and concerns.

Sirin (2005)'s research indicates the effect of students' home environments as one of education's most constant and frequently documented phenomena. Students whose parents have greater income, a higher level of education, or a more prestigious occupation tend to have better academic achievement than students whose parents have a lower socioeconomic position. In addition, the study carried out in Bagdad showed that there is a significant correlation between family monthly income and a child's IQ, this study also is in agreement with other studies that have found significant effects of poverty on children's verbal and cognitive skills (Ghazi et al., 2012). Low income affects the order of priorities of parents, these types of families tend to worry more about basic needs, employment, and making ends meet. Therefore, concerns about their children's education, better educational opportunities, or school and learning environment fall lower in their list of priorities.

Studies have consistently reported that parents with high status show higher educational aspirations for their children (Kim & Sherraden, 2011). Although high-status parents may not be worried about whether their children will receive a good education or not, these parents' concerns may be more about whether their children can study in better universities or prestigious departments. On the other hand, studies show that parents who have financial situation difficulties are more pessimistic about their children's education and future professions (McLoyd, 1998).

Different studies show parents' education and income level affect on children's school performance (Raudenská & Hamplová, 2022; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). However, there are almost no studies showing parental concerns regarding children's education that examine the variances in worries due to the education level and income level of the parents.

2. Methods

The data source for this study is extracted from the World Values Survey, Seventh Wave Data for the country Iraq (Haerpfher, 2022) focusing on security-related variables. The most recent wave of the world values survey is the seventh wave which was initiated in the year 2017 and ended in the year 2022. The main data collection method in the WVS is face to face interviews at the respondent's home or residence. The variable taken for this study is "Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education".

Cross tabulations were conducted to explore the association with key sociodemographic factors, including gender, age, education level, and income level of the respondent, utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. (SPSS). The minimum acceptable sample size for a country like Iraq is 1200, by utilizing the data of the country Iraq (N=1200) among which (50.3% are Males and 49.7% are Females) from the Seventh Wave of the World Values Survey. The Likert Scale from not at all to Very much is used for the question taken for this article. This particular scale is used by the world-renowned Dr. David Burns in his Burns Depression Checklist (BDC) (Wiechman, Kalpakjian, & Johnson, 2016).

For the variable, “Worries not being able to give one’s children a good education”, the item is scaled on a scale of 1 to 4. 1 indicates the severity and 4 indicates the absence of the symptom. For example, the respondent responded as very much then it is coded with the numeric number 1 and if the respondent responded as not at all then it is coded as 4.

This data from WVS is apt for this research because, as the technique used by the World Values Survey is representative of the whole population of the country, and it is helpful to have such type of representative sample to make generalizable findings and conclusions about a territory like Iraq.

Normality assessment via the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated non-normal data distribution, leading to the selection of the Kruskal-Willi’s test for variance analysis based on education level and income level. Ethical considerations prioritized the respondent’s anonymity and confidentiality, as the data is from a world-renowned source. This comprehensive methodology emphasizes the systematic approach applied to extract meaningful findings from the world values survey.

The following hypotheses were drawn.

Null Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant variance in the worries about not being able to give children a good education based on the education level of the parents.

H02: There is no significant variance in the worries about not being able to give children a good education based on the income level of the parents.

Alternative Hypothesis:

HA1: There is significant variance in the worries about not being able to give children a good education based on the education level of the parents.

HA2: There is significant variance in the worries about not being able to give children a good education based on the income level of the parents.

Objectives:

1. To contribute to the academic literature by providing detailed insights into the intersection of education, income, and concerns related to educational provision for children in Iraq.

2. To explore the differences across diverse education levels about the worries related to the ability to provide a quality education for children in the context of Iraq.
3. To determine the extent to which parents' education levels influence worries about children's education in Iraq.
4. To explore the potential role of income disparities in shaping concerns related to children's education in Iraq.

3. Result and Discussion

The insights of this analysis will help to seek discussions and interventions. In the following sections, present descriptive statistics are presented that offer a comprehensive overview of key variables. Secondly, building upon the descriptive statistics, the study delves into cross-tabulation to explore relationship between the parental worries and education levels and income levels, which helps to identify potential patterns and associations between the variables.

Descriptive Statistics:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Gender, Age, Education Level, and Income Level

Descriptive Statistics					
Gender:		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Male	608	50.7	50.7	50.7
	Female	592	49.3	49.3	100.0
	Total	1200	100.0	100.0	
Age of the Respondent					
	18-29 years	467	38.9	38.9	38.9
	30-49 years	496	41.3	41.3	80.3
	50 and more years	237	19.8	19.8	100
	Total	1200	100	100	
Education Level					
	Lower	623	51.9	52	52
	Middle	264	22	22.1	74.1
	Higher	310	25.8	25.9	100

	Total	1197	99.8	100	
Missing	No answer	3	0.3		
Total		1200	100		
Income level					
	Low	358	29.8	29.8	29.8
	Medium	747	62.3	62.3	92.1
	High	95	7.9	7.9	100
	Total	1200	100	100	

Source: Own Computation data from WVS.org

From Table 1 above, it can be observed that, for the survey taken in Iraq, (50.7%) were male and 49.3% were female which is an equal representation of the Gender. For the Age category of the respondents, 38.9% are between the ages of 18 to 29 years, 41.3% are between 30 to 49 years and 19.8% are from the age group of 50 years and above. For the education level, 51.9% are from the group of Lower education, 22% from Middle Level education, and 25.9% are Higher education level respondents. Additionally, for the Income level, 29.8% are from the low-income group, 62.3% are from the medium-income group and only 7.9% are from the high-income group. The World Values Survey uses samples representing all the people in the age group of 18 and above and applies the technique of Probability Sampling wherein the samples are gathered in a process that gives all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Variable taken for the study

Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very much	585	48.8	50.0	50.0
	A great deal	309	25.8	26.4	76.4
	Not much	191	15.9	16.3	92.7
	Not at all	85	7.1	7.3	100.0
	Total	1170	97.5	100.0	
Missing	No answer	8	.7		

	Don't know	22	1.8		
	Total	30	2.5		
Total		1200	100.0		

Source: Own Computation data from WVS.org

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of the respondents from Iraq for the question of worries, about not being able to give one's children a good education. A majority of respondents, (48.8%) expressed being "very much" worried about not being able to give their children a good education. A significant portion (25.8%) indicated a worrying level of "A great deal". Relatively, fewer respondents reported worries at the levels of "Not much" (15.9%) and "Not at all" (7.1%).

Table 3: Worries Versus Education Level Crosstabulation

			Education Level of the Respondent			Total
			Lower	Middle	Higher	
Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	Very much	Count	329	111	143	583
		% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	56.4%	19.0%	24.5%	100.0%
	A great deal	Count	141	75	92	308
		% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	45.8%	24.4%	29.9%	100.0%
	Not much	Count	86	50	55	191
		% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	45.0%	26.2%	28.8%	100.0%
	Not at all	Count	51	19	15	85

		% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	60.0%	22.4%	17.6%	100.0%
Total	Count		607	255	305	1167
	% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education		52.0%	21.9%	26.1%	100.0%

Source: Own Computation data from WVS.org

Table 3 reveals the cross-tabulation between worries about not being able to provide a good education for one’s children and the education level of the respondent revealing distinct patterns in concerns across different education strata. Notably, a substantial number of respondents with lower education levels express, heightened worries, with 56% reporting “Very Much” concern, compared to 19% in the middle education group and 24.5% in the higher education groups. The “Not at All” worry, however, exhibits an inverse trend, with the highest percentage reported in the lower education group. There is a need for targeted interventions for different education groups.

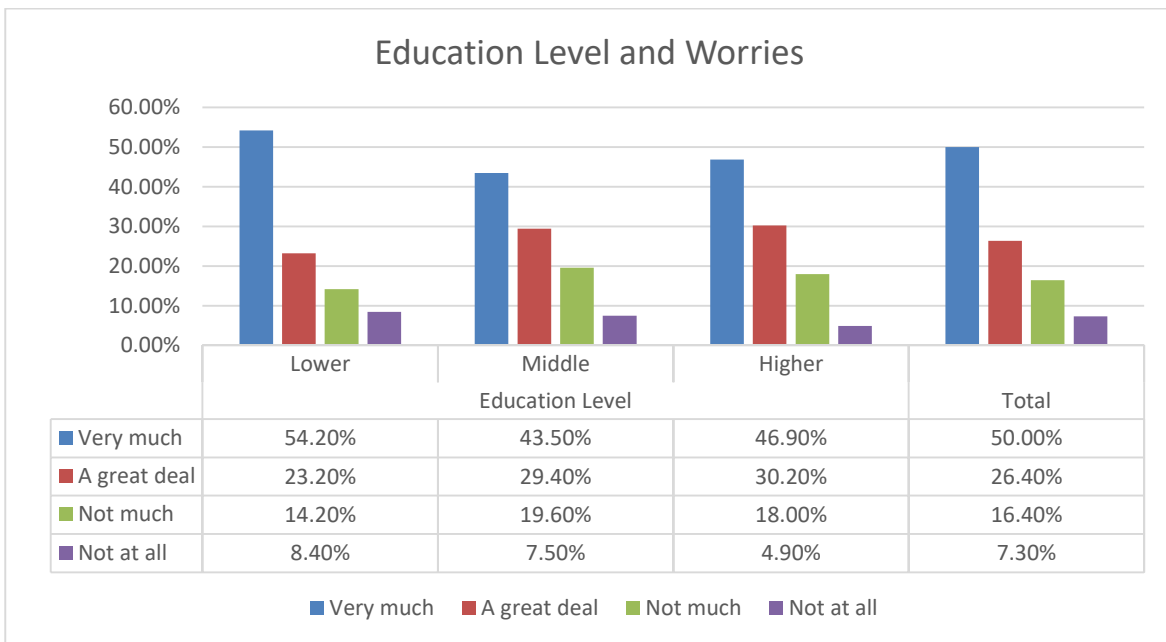


Figure 1: Education and Worries based on Education Level

Source: Own Computation data from WVS.org

From figure 1 it can be observed that all the education groups worry for their children's education. The data reveals worrying trends regarding the ability to provide children with a quality education across different education levels. The highest percentage of respondents expressing significant worry (Very Much) is among those with lower education levels. Surprisingly, even among the respondents from the higher education level, a substantial portion expresses worry, indicating systematic issues in educational provision. This shows the importance of addressing educational inequalities and ensuring equitable access to quality for all children, regardless of their parent's educational background.

Table: 4 Worries and Income Level Cross Tabulation

			Income Level			Total	
			Low	Medium	High		
Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	Very much	Count	191	345	49	585	
		% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	32.6%	59.0%	8.4%	100.0%	
	A great deal	Count	77	213	19	309	
		% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	24.9%	68.9%	6.1%	100.0%	
	Not much	Count	61	112	18	191	
		% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	31.9%	58.6%	9.4%	100.0%	
	Not at all	Count	24	54	7	85	
		% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	28.2%	63.5%	8.2%	100.0%	
	Total		Count	353	724	93	1170

	% within Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education	30.2%	61.9%	7.9%	100.0%
--	---	-------	-------	------	--------

Notably, most respondents from the low-income levels express heightened worries, constituting 32.6% for “Very Much” and 24.9 for “A great deal”. While medium income respondents exhibit the highest worries (68%) for a great deal. High-income respondents report the lowest worries. These disparities highlight the need for specific actions, programs, or policies designed to address the unique needs across income levels.

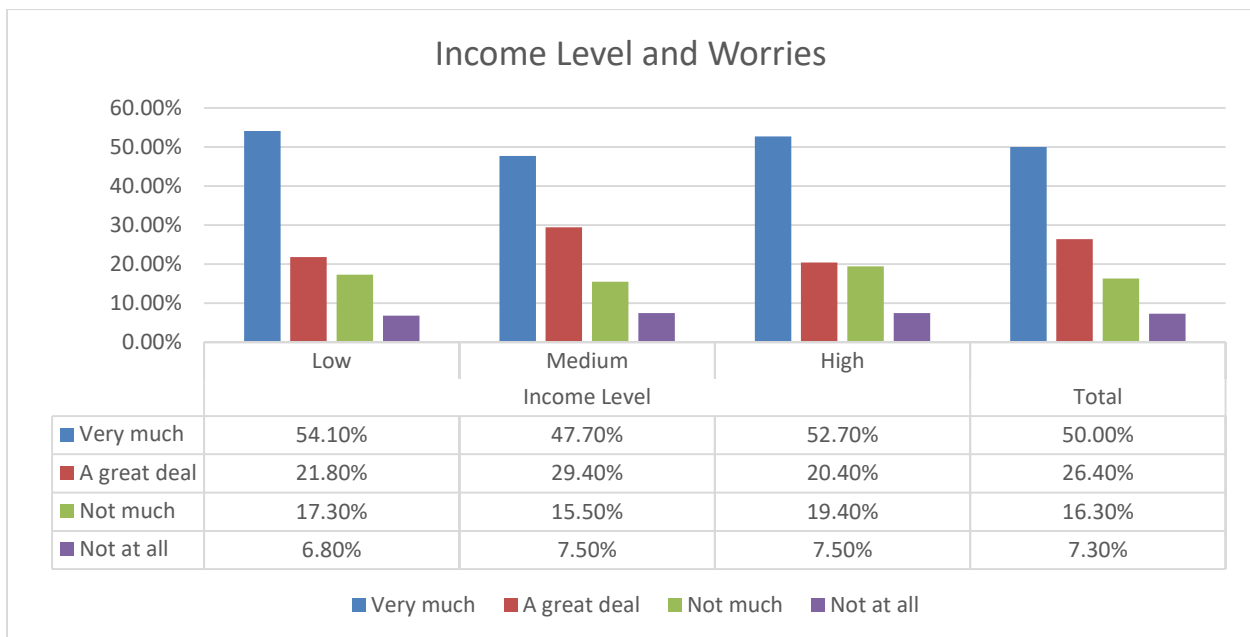


Figure 2: Income Levels and Worries

From figure 2, it can be observed that, concerns surrounding the ability to provide children with a quality education across different income levels. Strikingly, a significant percentage of respondents across all income groups express substantial worry (Very Much) about this issue, with slightly higher percentages among those with low and high incomes. Moreover, worries persist even among those with medium incomes, challenging assumptions about financial security and educational concerns. These findings reveal the pervasive nature of worries regarding educational provision, irrespective of income level, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies to address systematic barriers and ensure equitable access to quality education for all children, regardless of their family’s income level.

Table 5: Mean Values of Worries based on Education Level and Income Level

		Mean	N	SD
Education Level of the Respondent	Lower	1.77	607	0.984
	Middle	1.91	255	0.962
	Higher	1.81	305	0.901
	Total	1.81	1167	0.959
Income Level of the Respondent	Low	1.77	353	0.967
	Medium	1.83	724	0.949
	High	1.82	93	0.999
	Total	1.81	1170	0.958

Source: own Computation data from WVS.org

Table 5 illustrates worries about providing a good education for children, with lower mean values indicating higher concern. Respondents with lower education express higher concerns and the respondents of higher education level show relatively lower worry. Similarly, lower income group respondents exhibit elevated concern, contrasting with decreasing worries in higher income groups. The data shows an inverse relationship between the mean values and concern.

Table 6: Hypothesis Test

SL. No	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education is the same across categories of Education Level	Independent Sample: Kruskal Wallis Test	(0.000)	Reject the Null Hypothesis
2	Worries: Not being able to give one's children a good education is the same across categories of Income Level	Independent Sample: Kruskal Wallis Test	(0.411)	Accept the null Hypothesis

Source: Authors' own computation, data from WVS.org

From Table 6, the results of the independent sample Kruskal Wallis Test reveal a statistically significant difference in worries about not being able to provide children a good education among different education level groups ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that the levels of concern vary significantly across these education strata. The low p-value indicates that the observed differences are unlikely to be due to chance alone. As a result, the Kruskal Wallis Test emphasizes the importance of education level as a significant factor influencing individuals' worries about the quality of education they can provide for their children. In contrast, the results of the independent sample Kruskal Wall Test for the income level groups show a non-significant result ($P = 0.411$). This implies that the levels of concern in this context do not exhibit a statistically significant variation based on income levels. The higher p-value suggests that any observed differences are likely due to random variability rather than a systematic association with income. Therefore, the influence of income level on worries about children's education does not appear to be statistically significant according to the result of the Kruskal Wallis Test, from the data related to Iraq. These findings are in support of what is presented here and conversely, some of the studies differ in the findings.

Some studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between parents' socioeconomic status (SES) and children's schooling outcomes (Duncan, Morris, & Rodrigues, 2011; Morrissey, Hutchison, & Winsler, 2014). On the other hand, some other research showed the indirect effect of parent's SES (Park & Holloway, 2017; Raudenská & Hamplová, 2022). Indirect socioeconomic effect in education connects parents' income and education to their children's academic success through the impact of factors parental behavior, skills, and attitudes. Highly educated parents have more positive attitudes towards education and are more engaged with their children's education than less educated parents (Kirk, Lewis-Moss, Nilsen, & Colvin, 2011; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009).

4. Conclusion

The current study found that in Iraq low-educated parents are more concerned than middle and higher-educated parents. There are statistically significant variances among the respondents of different education levels regarding their children's education. Among the income levels also there are variances in the mean values but they are not statistically significant. While higher education and income levels may offer some degree of respite, significant concerns persist across all segments of society in Iraq. The study concludes that all the education level and income level groups are equally concerned for their children's education in Iraq with a small level of variance.

5. Recommendations

The following are some recommendations based on the analysis and observations:

1. **Specific Group Initiatives:** The study, recommends an urgent need to address educational disparities in Iraq and suggests that the policymakers make policies to cater to the needs of the specific groups.
2. **Education Equity Initiatives:** It is recommended that the government of Iraq, implement initiatives that promote improving access to education and educational opportunities for all individuals across all educational levels. This can include targeted scholarship programs, educational support services, mentorship initiatives for parents and so on.

3. **Income Equality Measures:** It is recommended that the government of Iraq should implement some policies and programs aimed at reducing income inequality and improving economic opportunities for individuals across all income levels. For example, minimum wage increase, skill development programs, economic development initiatives for underserved communities, and so on.
4. **Increase Investment in Education:** According to World Bank Reports the education expenditure compared to Peers is very low in Iraq. Only (9.7) percent of the Government Budget was allocated for Education in 2019, compared to other peers like Syria (19.2) percent, Jordan (11.6) percent, and Iran (21.1) percent. It is strongly recommended to increase the investment in the Education sector in Iraq (Hamad, Zaidan, Al-Majma'i, & Kamil Abdullah, 2022) . It is recommended that the government of Iraq should increase investment in education at all levels, including nursery level, early childhood level, K-12 education as well as higher education. This is to ensure that individuals have access to quality educational opportunities regardless of their socioeconomic background.

6. Limitations

This study's limitation is that the data which is only related to Iraq was analyzed. Hence, the finding cannot be generalized in a wider range.

7. Acknowledgment

All the data were extracted from the 7th waves World Value Surveys. Therefore, the Researchers express their heartfelt thanks to the World Value Survey team for their efforts in providing reliable data for individual researchers like us.

References

- Duncan, G. J., Morris, P. A., & Rodrigues, C. (2011). Does money really matter? Estimating impacts of family income on young children's achievement with data from random-assignment experiments. *Developmental psychology*, 47(5), 1263.
- Hamad, K. M., Zaidan, H., Al-Majma'i, K., & Kamil Abdullah, M. (2022). The Impact of Public Spending (Expenditures) on Economic Growth in Iraq for the Period 2004-2019. *Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 4(2), 483-491.
- Kirk, C. M., Lewis-Moss, R. K., Nilsen, C., & Colvin, D. Q. (2011). The role of parent expectations on adolescent educational aspirations. *Educational Studies*, 37(1), 89-99.
- Lasseko, H. (2019). Parents and Teachers Can Save Iraq's Ailing Education System, So Let Them Education system in Iraq. *UNICEF for every Child, Iraq*. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/iraq/stories/parents-and-teachers-can-save-iraqs-ailing-education-system-so-let-them>
- Morrissey, T. W., Hutchison, L., & Winsler, A. (2014). Family income, school attendance, and academic achievement in elementary school. *Developmental psychology*, 50(3), 741.
- Park, S., & Holloway, S. D. (2017). The effects of school-based parental involvement on academic achievement at the child and elementary school level: A longitudinal study. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 110(1), 1-16.

- Raudenská, P., & Hamplová, D. (2022). The Effect of Parents' Education and Income on Children's School Performance: the Mediating Role of the Family Environment and Children's Characteristics, and Gender Differences. *Polish Sociological Review*(218), 247-271.
- Spera, C., Wentzel, K. R., & Matto, H. C. (2009). Parental aspirations for their children's educational attainment: Relations to ethnicity, parental education, children's academic performance, and parental perceptions of school climate. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 38, 1140-1152.
- UNICEF. (2017). What we do: Education. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/iraq/what-we-do/education>
- Wiechman, S., Kalpakjian, C. Z., & Johnson, K. L. (2016). Measuring depression in adults with burn injury: a systematic review. *Journal of Burn Care & Research*, 37(5), e415-e426.