



The Relationship Between Socioeconomic Status and Parental Mental-State Language

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Background

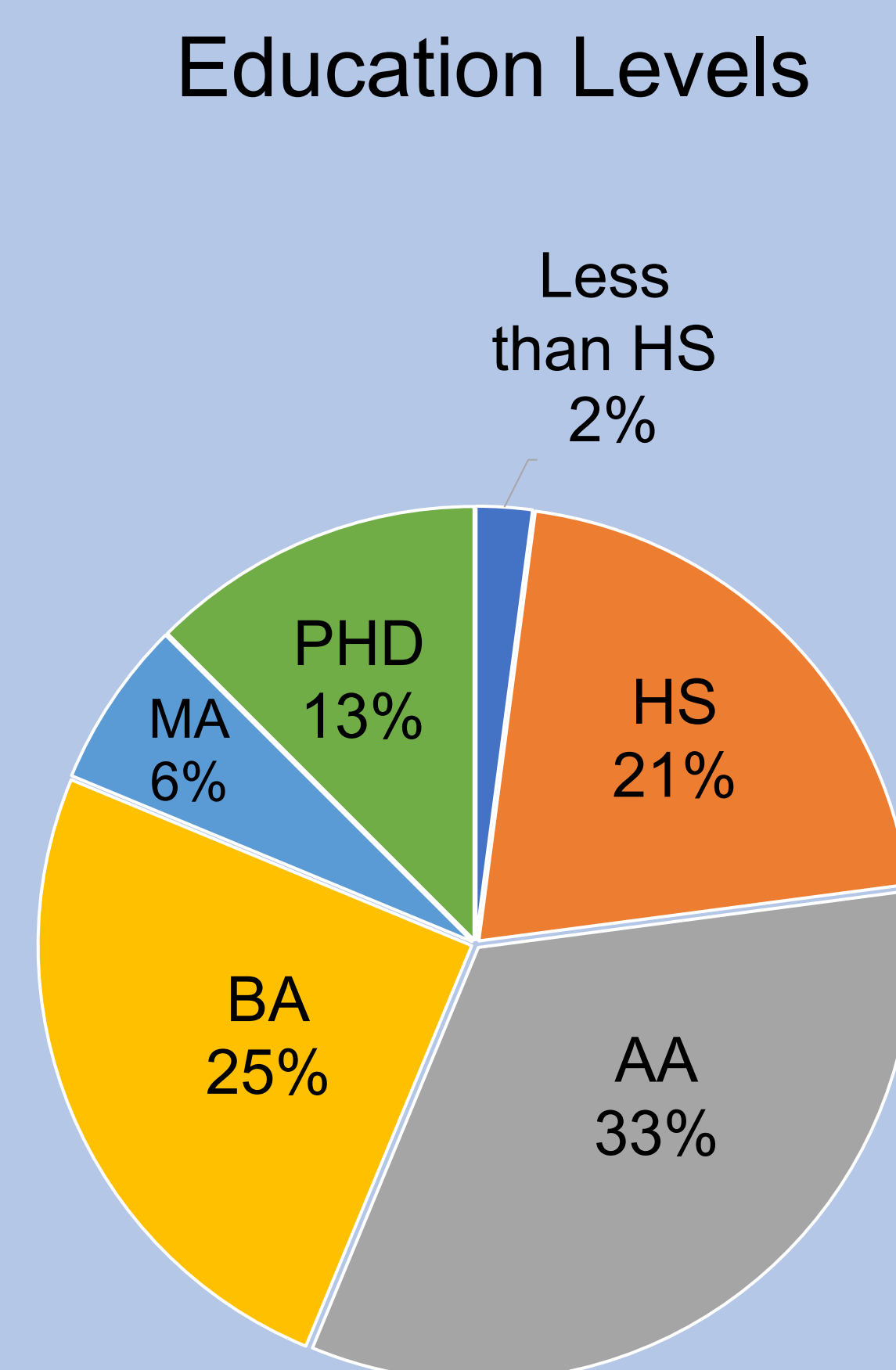
- False-belief understanding is the cognitive ability to recognize that others can be mistaken.
- Previous studies have confirmed that there is a positive relationship between a family's SES and their child's performance on several types of false-belief tasks (Devine & Hughes, 2018).
- One possible reason for the correlation between SES and children's performance on false-belief tasks is differences in parental mental-state talk.
- Mental-state language has been shown to predict children's performance on different false-belief tasks (Roby & Scott, 2018).
- Previous research has primarily focused on parents of higher-SES, making it unclear if similar language patterns emerge in lower-SES families.

Are there any SES-related differences in parental mental-state talk?

Methods

Participants

- 48 children
 - $M = 32.1$ months.
 - Range: 27.0 – 39.1 months
- 24 males & 24 females
- One parent participated with each child.
 - 39 mothers, 9 fathers
- SES was measured by the highest education of either parent of the child.



Procedure

Parent-child dyads viewed a picture-book that depicted everyday situations (Taumoepeau & Ruffman, 2006).

Sample Pictures



Sample Parental Utterances

"She looks **sad**."



"He doesn't **want** to eat."

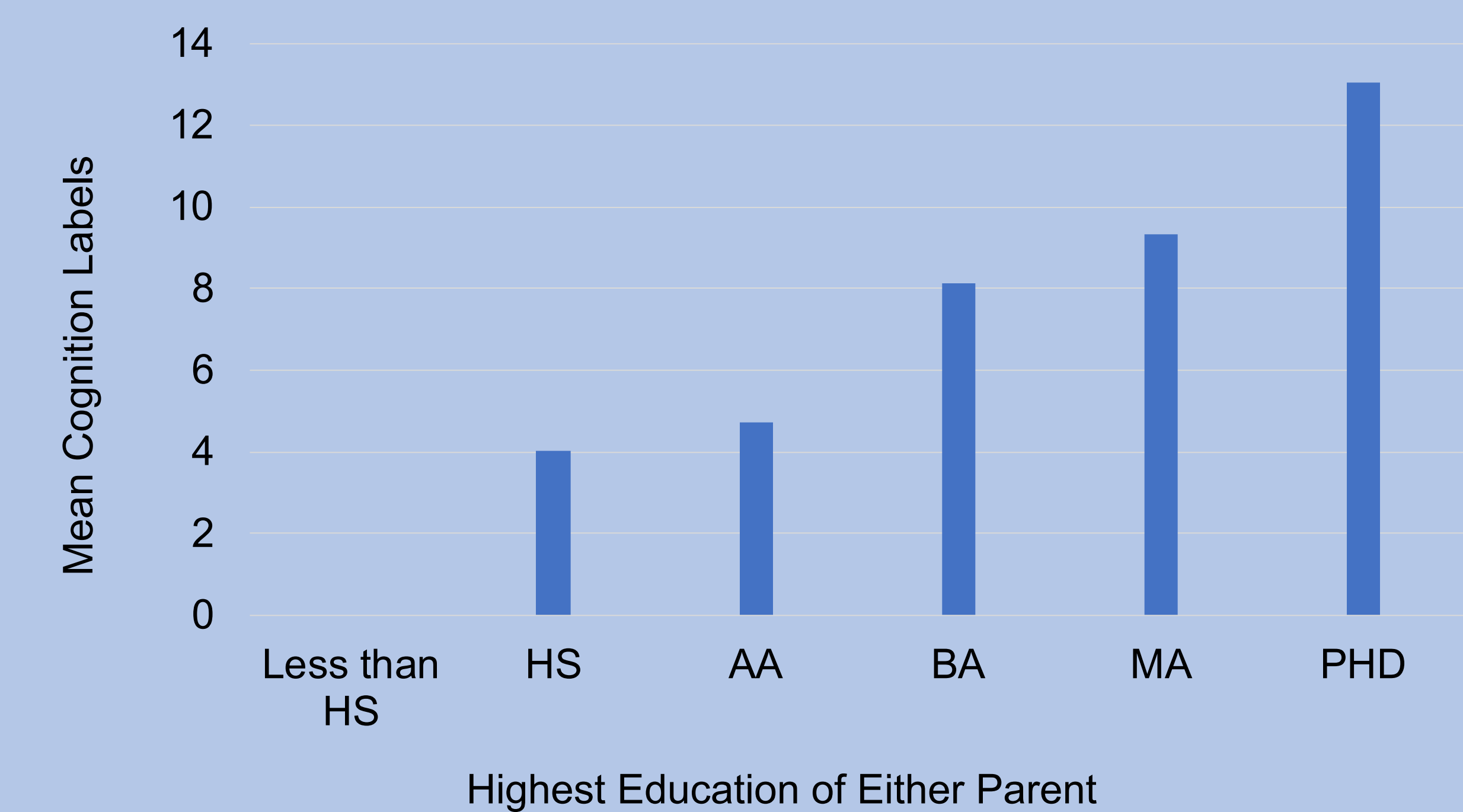


"Why do you **think** she looks **angry**?"

Coding

- Parent talk was transcribed and coded for three types of mental-state terms:
 - Emotion**: happy, sad, angry, scared, etc.
 - Cognition**: think, know, remember, wonder, etc.
 - Desire**: would like, would love, want, etc.
- Each mental-state utterance was also coded as either a **statement** or **question**.

Results



- Controlling for the total number of parental utterances and child age, parents with higher levels of education used more cognition terms, $F(1,40) = 3.36, p = 0.013$.
- No effects of education were found for usage of emotion or desire terms.

Conclusion

- These results suggest that parental mental-state talk does differ across SES.
- Mental-state language, especially usage of cognition terms, can be predictive of how children perform on various false-belief tasks (Roby & Scott, 2018).
- This can help explain why there are sociocognitive differences in false-belief understanding.

References

- Devine, R.T. & Hughes, C. (2018). Family correlates of false-belief understanding in early childhood: A meta-analysis. *Child Development, 89*, 971-987.
- Roby, E., & Scott, R. M. (2018). The relationship between parental mental-state language and 2.5-year-olds' performance on a nontraditional false-belief task. *Cognition, 180*, 10-23.
- Taumoepeau, M., & Ruffman, T. (2006). Mother and infant talk about mental states relates to desire language and emotion understanding. *Child Development, 77*, 465-481.

*Funding provided by the National Science Foundation