

SOCIOLOGY AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES II

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ANALYZING SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND INEQUALITIES: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS (SES) AND OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE INDEXES

SERAN DEMİRAL, LÜTFİ SUNAR, YUNUS KAYA

Abstract

Today there are two main approaches to social inequality in contemporary sociology. One is the neo-Marxist class studies that focus on economic polarization. The other is the neo-Weberian status studies that focus on the concepts of social stratification and mobility. Some neo-Weberian theorists also claim that stratification is the inequality caused by socio-economic structures. Since Socio-Economic Status (SES) also plays a central role in social stratification and social mobility studies, using SES indexes has recently become common in the social sciences. In Turkey, the lack of such an index became an obstacle to studying Turkish socio-economic status; and that's why we decided to develop a SES index and conduct a survey with the support of The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK).

The concept of SES is closely related to income differences, educational levels and especially occupational position. A SES Index relies on income, education and occupation variables, yet occupation itself relies on income and education variables. In modern societies, people from any class, group or strata, define themselves in terms of their job. Work life has become more and more important part of actual life since the beginning of the industrialization process. Therefore, to analyze and interpret the post-industrial society, it is essential to take into consideration the occupational structure. Today, occupations have a central importance in contemporary sociology, especially in the studies on stratification and development status scales. Occupational Prestige Indexes represent another methodological approach to clarify occupational structures and work life.

In this paper, we aim to present the growing value of occupational life and how it relates to one's identity, social status and life-style. The concepts of SES and Occupational Prestige will be discussed by clarifying the relationship between occupational social status and occupational prestige scales. Towards the end, the study will reflect on why indexes such as these have been necessary for sociological surveys.

Key Words: occupations, social stratification, occupational prestige, SES.

Conceptual Overview of Social Class, Status and Stratification

Today there are two main approaches to social inequalities in contemporary sociology: One is the neo-Marxist class studies that focus economic polarization and the other is the neo-Weberian status studies that focus on the concepts of social stratification and mobility. In this paper, Marxist class definition and Weberian status term will be explained briefly, and then the studies in these fields that are related to stratification and socio-economic status will be discussed.

According to the Marxist class perspective, social class depends on the relations of production. The concept of class is directly related to class consciousness and

class struggle. In neo-Marxist literature, traditional Marxist class analysis was scrutinized during the 20th century and after the 1970s debates on class analyses increased. For example, Harry Braverman (1974) studied monopoly capital. There he mentioned the relation between different stages of capitalism and changes in class structure. Similarly, Nicos Poulantzas (1975) analyzed the influences of the capitalist state to class structure. Marxist approaches correlate the concept of “class” with major structures, such as the state or the economic system itself. As such Marxist theorists tend to articulate grand theories, but Erik Olin Wright, a neo-Marxist theorist, studied class analyses at a micro level converging into a neo-Weberian approach.

Wright used the concept “contradictory class locations” instead of “contradictory locations within the basic contradictory class relations” (1976, p.26). He used that distinction in order to explain the differences between middle classes. According to Marxism, middle classes are a dominant class and they struggle to preserve their privileged location from the lower classes. However, people from a “new middle class” embody contradictions between labor and capital and they have difficulty becoming part of the capitalist community. Wright (1996) used both Marxist macro level and Weberian micro level class analysis together in his studies. He tried to synthesize the micro with the macro level in class studies by exploring details of macro diversity (Wright, 1997). Wright (1998), claimed that class structure itself determines social changes and social structures. Giving point to social structures and individuals and trying to distinguish some occupational groups of new middle classes from each other made Wright get closer to neo-Weberian social status discussions.

Neo-Weberian stratification and status studies have also increased during the 1970s. The concept of “status” differs from class with giving importance to people’s consumption habits, choices and life styles. While Marxists have been focusing on economic polarization instead of analyzing the middle classes, Weberians have been trying to uncover middle classes’ differentiation. In order to examine this differentiation, stratification theories are more useful than traditional class approaches. The term of class traditionally refers to European class system, however American society was claimed to be classless by functionalist Weberian theorists. One of American sociologists, Lloyd Warner (1960), tried to explain inequalities of this so-called ‘classless’ society social status based on occupational differences. The second part of *Social Class in America* comprises of field-work that explains classes based on factors such as occupation, income, and education. In 1940s, Warner studied inequality and social mobility in small communities, *Yankee City* is one of his most important works which describes different class values and life styles.

These concepts are related to social belongings as much as economical positions. That’s why the term of status may also be defined as socio-economic status (SES). SES is specified by economical, educational and cultural factors such as, income, property, graduation and occupation. In all these factors, occupation is the most determinative one. Warren and Hauser (1996, p.1), claim that occupational-standing measures social, cultural and political existence of people in a complex society. The occupation of someone determines his/her social identity, people begin to know each other through their jobs. A typical conversation between strangers begins with the question: “What is your job?”

Blau and Duncan (1967), who studied SES in American society during the 1960s, also thought that occupation is the main factor determining social status/class. Duncan created the term “occupational class” by assuming occupations as a kind of class structure. Duncan claimed that social differences caused by occupational difference create social distance between classes (1979, p.794). Earlier Duncan (1955, p.502) also claimed that occupational groups signify SES. In Blau and Duncan’s (1967) pathbreaking work *American Occupational Structure*, they mentioned about major occupational groups that have been used since 1940s. As it will be explained in subsequent chapters, occupational status, prestige-scales or SES indexes are created by using these major groupings.

John H. Goldthorpe, who is another important theoretician about socio-economic status, uses “social prestige” in order to denote the the Weberian term “status”. According to him and his colleague Keith Hope, the term “social status” contains the meaning of any strata or groups’ belonging within a stratification system (Goldthorpe & Hope, 1972). They also defined stratification as “inequalities in life-chances” (Goldthorpe & Hope, 1972, p.22) providing from socio-economic structure. Moreover, while explaining stratification and mobility in Britain, Goldthorpe created schemas from occupational groups. These schemas show that occupational hierarchy determines SES, and social mobility is also determined by occupational structure through socio-economic status (Goldthorpe, 1987).

As well as social and economic belongings of classes –or stratas; political background or motivations are influential on social stratification and mobility. C. Wright Mills concludes that vertical mobility of “power elite” may be an example for the hierarchy among political groups. Mills (1951, p.71), also emphasized the direct relation between occupations as income sources and class positions. As it is seen, with Marxist or Weberian perspective, many different theoreticians agree that class or stratification could hardly be thought without occupational structure and the hierarchy of occupational status. That’s why we now turn to the relation between socio-economic status and occupations.

The Relation between SES and Occupations

In advanced industrial societies, occupational choices determine a person’s identity. The factors of SES are generally income, property and occupation, in addition to that, income, property, prestige and life style are assigned by occupations (Pavalko, 1988). There are three different attitudes for one’s occupational choice. The first attitude is rational corresponding to the economic position of occupations and people’s expectations about their careers. When a person makes a decision about his/her occupation, he/she equilibrates individual desires and possible social advantages. The second attitude is based on chance. Decisions are often fortuitous. The last is the effects of socio-economic status. Occupational choices are thought to be related to socio-economic factors more than chances or rational manner. As occupational structure affects socio-economic status, occupations are under the influence of SES.

Occupation and SES influence each other. Income and occupation are thus, also closely related. Ganzeboom and colleagues have emphasized this relation. According to them, the source of income is occupation; but there is another variable of SES that might be more determinative because of being the source of occupation:

education (1992). In complex societies, education is almost the main vehicle for social mobility since professionalization endures the course of one's life. Income, occupation, education and working conditions are included in the concept of social status, but "occupational status" is more usual. Another concept that should be mentioned is "occupational prestige", differing from status. Goldthorpe and Hope (1972) used these two concepts interchangeably despite their differences.

According to Goldthorpe and Hope, occupational prestige provides social advantages and power (1972). They especially explain the concept of prestige and how an occupation acquires more prestige. According to them, prestige is "the general desirability of occupations" (1972, p.54). The more an occupation is desired by people, the more its prestige increases. Ganzeboom and colleagues (1992, p.7) have also agreed on the definition of "desirability". Prestige itself is important to shape social status. There are four criteria that determine socio-economic status: "Standard of living", "prestige in the community", "power and influence over other people" and "value to society" (Goldthorpe & Hope, 1972, p.35). The fourth criteria is the result of others and also it is determined by prestige of occupations that people evaluate. In addition to the relation between "value to society" and occupational prestige, standard of living is also closely related to occupational structure because income and consumption habits are determined by occupations. In occupational prestige scales, these criteria are considered, furthermore the criteria "power and influence over other people" is tried to analyze with the variable of "authority."

Treiman (1976), has developed a socio-economic status index (SEI) by utilizing occupations and authority in work. The interaction between the variables of education and occupation, or income and occupation is extremely important for any study about SES. According to Ganzeboom (1992, p.9), occupational prestige is derived from SES. Occupational status is also caused by socio-economical conditions. Due to the causation between SES and prestige, the scales about them are related. In order to develop a SEI, occupational prestige ranks can be used. While informing about developing indexes, Pavalko also explained the differences between status and prestige: Occupational status is based on some variables like education or income, occupational prestige is valument of people (1988, p.128). Using occupational prestige or status scales with data of demographic factors benefit to develop SEI.

To summarize, it is clear that socio-economic status is effected by different items; for instance, some demographic factors such as social origin of family, age, sexuality, and residential factors, especially coming from urban or rural origin, and also education level, occupation and income. In contemporary societies, being educated or having more desirable occupations are more effective than the other factors on SES. The other factors, such as social origin or the other demographic ones also determine educational, cultural or economic levels. Cultural factors are mostly derived from education and economic condition, income and property also result from one's occupational situation. That's why occupation and education as related to occupational structure, are most noticeable in class or stratification studies. The relation between SES and occupational status should be underlined in order to analyze social conditions. Finally, indexes or prestige scales make easier analysis. Before explaining our attempt for developing an index for Turkey, it will be mentioned the general features of these indexes in the next section.

SES and Occupational Prestige Scales

William C. Hunt was the first to utilize occupational data for SES in 1897 (Nam & Boyd, 2004, p.328). He created four occupational groups, A, B, C and D for analyzing social stratification system. Hunt pioneered studies that brought occupations and socio-economic status together. However, SES scores based on occupational data from Census Bureau's alphabetic indexes emerged after the 1950s (Nam & Boyd, 2004, p.330). According to SES scores, every occupation has an average education and income level. Scales may have distinctive features such as Siegel's scale which is only based on prestige. As another example, Duncan developed a prestige scale that could be estimated by SES (Nam & Boyd, 2004, p.333). Researchers have chance to choose different scale for their study's feature.

In Duncan's 1961 SES scale, there was a parallel connection between education and income. Stevens and Featherman (1981, p.365) who revised 1950 socio-economic status index (SEI) with the census of 1970 utilized education and income as predictor variables and occupational prestige as dependent variable. Upon that, education and income are alike to assign occupational prestige. And occupational prestige became useful for developing SEI in the studies of Nakao and Treas (1992, p.3). When they used 1989 prestige scores, they were aware of the accordance between SEI and occupational scores. To Nakao and Treas (1992), only SES scales can be response to socio-economical hierarchy through inter generational mobility.

Transition from industrial society to post-industrial society, occupational structures undergo extreme change around the world. But especially developing countries, like Turkey, the process is more remarkable. Due to rapid advancing of service sector, social mobility has increased in Turkey. Financial services have begun to gain more importance than industrial works. The hierarchy between manual and non-manual occupations has also become obvious. As a result, in the field of social class studies occupational mobility and stratification are becoming more and more important. Theories about middle classes and especially fluxional middle classes are attractive to focus on. However, it is not possible to analyze the occupational structure of a country or to compare the different social stratas with each other without indexes. Until now, there is only one academic study for developing a SEI in Turkey and that belongs to Sibel Kalaycıoğlu and her colleagues. They developed a survey based index for Ankara city in 2008. In their survey, A, B, C1, C2 and D groups were generated by the variables of education, income, property and occupation. The results proved that higher occupational status belongs to the groups that have higher SES. In addition to this, Kalaycıoğlu and her colleagues emphasized that the lack of occupational prestige index has been an obstacle to develop a SEI (2010, p.210). Their study is a huge step for stratification studies but its focuses on just the city of Ankara and is not based on occupational prestige. A general SEI for Turkey is needed for academic studies, educational planning, non-governmental organizations and also political and juristic surveys. That's why we have conducted a survey to develop a SES index.

Developing a SEI for Turkey has four stages. First of all, we have prepared a questionnaire and interviewed with 2500 people from 32 different areas of Turkey basing on the urban-rural sample of Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) in the level NUTS2. Since we gained data of household, interviewing with 2500 people has provided us to get data of more than 7000 people. In addition to demographic data,

we also get people's attitude about occupations and working life. In order to create an occupational prestige scale we asked people to rate 126 occupations that had been chosen from the third level groups of International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) 2008 till 1 to 100 scores. Second step of the study is developing the prestige scale. The regression analysis will be done between pure prestige scores and average levels of education and income, than it will be possible to calculate the prestige scores of all occupations for Turkish society. Third step is the main stage for connecting the developed occupational prestige scale to socio-economic status scale. Occupational status, education, income and property data of the whole people from interviewed households will be used to create SES scores. Lastly, developed SES scale will be used to analyze social classes of Turkey and stratification of Turkish society will be determined by the cluster analyzing method.

Many countries have their own SEI and prestige scales. As Treiman mentioned "in the three decades since World War II there have been some eighty-five studies of occupational prestige conducted in more than sixty countries throughout the world" (1976, p.285). Except for highly industrialized countries like U.S, in some traditional societies such as Thailand, Nigeria, New Guinea, India, all those studies had same shared methodology. The respect garnered by people as a result of their occupations was analyzed by interviewing a sample to represent the whole population. Through the studies Treiman mentioned, it is remarkable that "educated and uneducated, the rich and poor, the urban and rural, the old and young, all on the average have the same perceptions of the prestige hierarchy" (1976, p.285). In our Occupational Prestige Scale, there is a similar situation. It is as if the whole society argued and decided which occupation has more prestigious than others. People are seen having great interest in working life and occupational structure. Also in Turkish society, working concept has always been valuable, a person can only become a part of community by working and a person's job makes him/her be himself/herself exactly. As a result, in our questionnaire, we aimed to learn the perceptions of people about working concept, working life. There are likert scales for calculating attitude; for example "It is usual to get money without doing anything", "working is a mission to the society" and "I prefer to have a job that I don't like rather than to be unemployed" etc. To the results, it can be claimed that people value working so much and working means to them earning money first of all. Unemployment is great fear for them. In this matter, socio-economic status based on countries keeps its importance; international comparisons seem to be necessary.

Treiman is also a pioneer in implementing some cross-national surveys. International Socio-Economic Status Index (ISEI) and Standard International Occupation Prestige Scale (SIOPS) are two main international indexes. ISEI is an index to analyze the occupational status. SIOPS directly aims to create an international standard for occupational prestige scales, as it is understood by its definition. While Treiman's scale is combined with ISCO data in SIOPS-08, ISEC-08 uses EGP class schema (Ganzeboom & Treiman, 2010, p.5-6) that has been developed by Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero. In 1992, Goldthorpe updated EGP schema and created 13 different socio-economic class categories that ISEC-08 contains.

However SIOPS and ISEI have been criticized because of ignoring socio-cultural differences between nations, it is still important to compare nations to each other through SES studies. Especially comparing occupational status or prestige

scales is possible by using the general classification, ISCO. There were ISCO 1968 classification in Treiman's survey of 1970s. There were "nine major groups, eighty-three minor groups, 284 unit groups, and 1,506 specific occupations" (Treiman, 1976, p.286-287). This classification of ISCO is updated per 20 years, ISCO-08 (2008) is up-to-date now. Ganzeboom and Treiman (2010) compared ISCO-88 and ISCO-08 in 2010. ISCO-88 includes nine major groups, thirty-eight sub-major group (there was no sub-major definition in 1968 classification, it was developed for 1988), 115 minor groups and 363 unit groups. As it is seen, given numbers are much more than 1968 classification. And there are ten major groups, forty-four sub-major groups, 120 minor groups and 403 unit groups.

The surveys that are actualized within Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK) also use ISCO-08 classification. Whereby, data received from TÜİK can be compared with the other countries' panel surveys and it will be possible to study cross-nationally. There are some expectations that the levels of graduation and employment will increase in Turkish society. As a developing country, Turkey is remarkable for stratification and occupation studies. We aim that our Occupational Prestige Scale and Socio-Economic Status Index may be a stage about these issues. Understanding the facts of the society and analyzing the differences of social classes may be possible by using the indexes that will be developed. Not only in stratification studies, but also in the field of industrial sociology, social mobility studies or about economic development issue, SEI will be useful to estimate probable social change of the society. Actual matters about industrial sociology, such as women employment, flexible working conditions, and the new forms of capitalism, Turkey also represents a variable field to research. The velocity of social change and occupational mobility of Turkish society are meant to be at higher levels. To achieve true results about social mobility or changing social relations between classes –or stratas, it is necessary to study with indexes.

Social research needs analytical data and statistics to avoid from unproven speculation. Such studies bring balance to our sociological imagination as the facts of existing society come forward. Our attempt aims to strengthen this balance. Eventually, after having a national index, it will be easier to realize interdisciplinary studies by comparing Turkish social classes with the class structures of other countries and also to assign the social dynamics of Turkish society.

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