

## A modification regarding the Kuppuswamy socioeconomic scale

Sir,

Socio-economic status (SES) is an important variable that can have an effect on the health of a person and a role in causation or prevention of disease. Its assessment is required in research studies conducted in various specialties of medicine, bioallied and social sciences. The Kuppuswamy's SES scale is a widely used scale for the measurement of SES in the urban areas in India.<sup>[1]</sup> A revision for the scale to bring it up-to-date and an online tool for its real-time updating are available.<sup>[2,3]</sup>

The Kuppuswamy scale comprises of three variables — education of head of family, occupation of head and income per month. The three items are given scores as per the level achieved. The three scores are summed up to get a total score, which is then used to classify SES as upper, upper middle, lower middle, upper lower or lower category. There is some element of confusion regarding the income subscale, specifically whether the categories

are meant to represent the total family income or per capita income. The original Kuppuswamy's scale was meant for the assessment of an individual and not a family. The education, occupation and income of the head of the family was calculated and scored. This is made clear by the validation procedure mentioned in the original scale. For adults, income of the individual himself and for students studying in schools, the income of the father was asked for.<sup>[1]</sup>

The various revisions of the scale published over time have interpreted the income to be taken as the total family income per month.<sup>[2,4,5]</sup> A justification for this can be that the entire income of the family can be considered as a pooled resource vested in the hands of the head of the family. Let us consider the Prasad classification, which is another tool available for SES and in this the income variable is explicitly specified to be per capita income.<sup>[6]</sup> A revision and online tool for this scale too are available.<sup>[6,7]</sup> If we compare the

original classifications at a similar base year or the revised classifications using the real-time updates for the present, there is a significant difference in the income category values, which should not have been there if both the income scales were per capita income. Though, the income scales in the two classifications are not directly and exactly comparable because while Kuppuswamy income subscale has seven categories, the Prasad classification has five categories. However, a rough calculation shows that the Prasad scale categories multiplied by the average family size give broadly the income range where the Kuppuswamy scale income categories lie. This can be taken to deduce that for calculating the Kuppuswamy scale, the income limits should be considered as family income per month.

Hence, has there ever been a modified Kuppuswamy scale? Mahajan and Gupta mentioned that one of the major problems in the use of Kuppuswamy scale is that family size is not taken into account. A modification of the original Kuppuswamy scale was proposed by them in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of their textbook.<sup>[8]</sup> This scale considered the per capita income and was quoted by the authors to represent a more valid indicator of SES when compared with the original Kuppuswamy scale. However, the modified scale did not figure in the subsequent third and fourth editions of the textbook.<sup>[9,10]</sup> It may be difficult to use with justification a scale that is not retained in newer editions of its original source itself.

Does per capita income represent a better component indicator of the SES than the total family income? That is a different research question altogether from a clarification of the existing scale and needs to be answered by future research studies. However, in view of the discussion above it can be ascertained that the income subscale of the Kuppuswamy socio-economic scale as being currently used, should be regarded as total family income and not per capita income.

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