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Peer effects and educational choices: a theoretical framework

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This work presents a systematic and in-depth review of the literature on peer effects, with the aim of providing a clear and up-to-date overview of the theoretical and methodological developments that characterize this field of research. Firstly, the analysis focuses on the main theoretical frameworks, with particular attention to reference theories and studies on social interactions in educational contexts. These perspectives allow us to understand how peer relationships influence the formation of aspirations, motivation, and, more generally, educational choices. Secondly, the review examines the different methodological approaches used to operationalize these concepts, highlighting the distinction between individual-level indicators—such as average peer performance—and measures based on the structure of social networks, derived from network analysis. This dual perspective has enabled the literature to develop increasingly advanced statistical methods for studying peer effects. Finally, the review identifies several significant gaps, particularly regarding peer effects on educational choices, a research area that remains underexplored.

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