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Elley W B & Irving J C. A socio-economic index for New Zealand based on levels of education and income from the 1966 census.

NZ J. Educ. Stud. 7:153-67, 1972.

[New Zealand Council for Educational Research, New Zealand]

This paper presents a socioeconomic index for researchers to use when checking the representativeness of samples in large-scale surveys. A list of 315 occupations in the male labour force is classified into six levels according to equal weightings of income and educational criteria, along with the percentage of workers in each level. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 55 publications, making it the most-cited paper published in this journal.]

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As an educational researcher, I [WBE] had often felt the need for a handy tool for checking the representativeness of samples in large-scale surveys undertaken by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, where I worked. This article represents our first attempts to meet this need, and being the first objective index of its kind in New Zealand, it attracted much attention.

For my doctoral research at the University of Alberta in 1960-1961, I had occasion to study a variety of socioeconomic scale (SES) measures, and made considerable use of an objective Canadian scale developed by Blishen on the basis of national census data.¹ On returning to New Zealand, I felt sure that a similar development was possible in this country. I talked it over with Jim Irving, a colleague at the council who had

an extensive knowledge of our occupational structure, following his experience in vocational guidance.

Together we spent long hours analysing the voluminous tomes of the 1966 census, which were only available in printed form in a distant Census Office in Lower Hutt. After a series of false starts, we produced a scale of 315 occupations, which we classified into six levels on the basis of two factors shown elsewhere to be basic to SES—the average income and educational levels of workers in those occupations. The value of the scale was probably attributable to the fact that we combined the numbers of workers in each occupation within each of the six levels, so that we were able to produce a percentage of workers for each level to check representativeness of both urban and national samples. There had been attempts to produce SES indices before, but they tended to be arbitrary and subjective, with no attempt at producing such percentages.

This seemingly pedestrian statistical exercise required that we separate out heterogeneous occupational groups and combine others with common features in ways not previously envisioned. Census categories do not always coincide with the categories used by respondents who participate in social surveys!

The publication of the scale was welcomed by many researchers but regarded with suspicion by a number of lay critics who presumably clung to the belief that New Zealand was still a classless society. One newspaper headlined the production of a "snobbery scale." Such characterizations, and the numerous critics who misinterpreted its intentions, no doubt added to the frequency of its citing, but it is true that many researchers have made appropriate use of it for its original purpose. It is cited often because it is a useful tool. As a result, we were encouraged to revise the scale when new census data became available² and to publish a female scale as well.³

1. Blishen B R. The construction and use of an occupational class scale. *Can. J. Econ. Polit. Sci.* 24:519-31, 1958.

2. Elley W B & Irving J C. The Elley-*Irving* socio-economic index: 1981 census revision. *NZ J. Educ. Stud.* 20:115-28, 1985.

3. Irving J C & Elley W B. A socio-economic index for the female labour force in New Zealand. *NZ J. Educ. Stud.* 12:154-60, 1977.