

Is There a Boy Bias in Household Education Expenditure?

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Research on education expenditure in developing countries suggests that parents may favour girls less than boys, or even discriminate against them, in terms of spending on schooling. Data appear to support this claim by showing that female enrolment rates are significantly lower than male rates. In India, previous work indicates a bias in favour of boys for children aged 10 years and over in rural areas. It has recently been argued, however, that such a bias results from the households' decision to enrol more boys in school than girls, rather than the amount of spending once the decision about enrolment has been made. When considering household data, it is thus important to separate the decision to enrol a child from the decision on how much to spend on schooling, in order to have an accurate understanding of bias.

Methodology

This paper examines whether gender bias in education expenditure – if it exists – is seen more in particular age groups, and why that may be so. The paper also asks which component of education spending actually drives the bias. The author analyses data from Young Lives research in Andhra Pradesh, looking at a sample of 982 households comprising 2578 children aged 11.5 to 12.5 years when surveyed in 2006. Because individual-level data is not available, the author seeks to estimate bias indirectly through an analysis of two methods: the Working-Lesser Engel form, and a hurdle model. Using household data, the author investigates gender biases by considering how the presence of children of similar ages but opposite sexes affects household spending on education.

Findings

The findings reveal that there are indeed differences in spending towards education among the Young Lives sample in Andhra Pradesh favouring boys at age 10 to 14 and 15 to 19. This difference in spending for 10 to 14 year olds results from both the decision to enrol a child in school and the decision on how much to spend after enrolment. School enrolment is significantly different for children in age groups from 5 to 9 years, and from 10 to 14 years. For the younger group, difference actually favours girls, but this difference is reversed as children become older. For the older group, the enrolment rates are not significantly different for boys and girls. The findings also show that more boys than girls are attending private rather than government schools, but this gender difference is not apparent as children get older and reach higher grades.

The author investigates the key driving force for the bias in spending on middle-school age children. The analysis here reveals that there is only a bias for expenditure on extra tuition fees, and not for other categories of spending, such as school fees, uniforms, books or transport. These findings suggest that parents place more importance on ensuring that boys have better quality education than girls. They are also more likely to provide extra coaching for boys than girls, especially at ages 10 to 14 years.

The empirical evidence presented here shows that decisions about household spending on education and investment in children's futures at least partly reflect social norms and differences in expectations between boys and girls.

