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Johannes Norling

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Measuring Heterogeneity in Preferences over the Sex of Children

Johannes Norling*

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Abstract

This paper introduces a model-based approach for measuring heterogeneity in sex preferences using birth history records. The approach identifies the combinations of preferences over the sex and number of children that best explain observed childbearing. Empirical estimates indicate that a majority of parents in Africa, Asia, and the Americas consider the sex of children when making childbearing decisions. Many parents prefer sons and many prefer daughters. Comparisons with reported preferences suggest that survey respondents tend to underreport the degree to which they prefer sons or daughters. Estimates indicate that, although sex preferences are widespread, they have little effect on aggregate fertility levels.

JEL codes: J13; J16

Keywords: Sex Preferences; Fertility; Gender; Partial Identification

* Contact information: Department of Economics, Mount Holyoke College, 50 College Street, South Hadley, Massachusetts 01075, United States of America; jnorling@mtholyoke.edu.

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