



Intra-household allocation of educational expenses: Gender discrimination and investing in the future

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Accepted 12 December 2017

Keywords:
Education
Gender discrimination
India
Intra-household allocations

ABSTRACT

Gender discrimination within the household exists in many contexts. In societies where the norm is to not expect future support from daughters, parents may invest even less in the health and human capital of girls. In India, as in other patriarchal societies, the eldest son occupies a special position as the potential head of the extended family and is expected to assume responsibility for parents' welfare in their old age. In this paper, I explore intra-household differences in educational expenditure and enrollment for children by gender and birth order. Using child level data from the nationally representative India Human Development Survey-II (2011–12), I confirm the presence of a pro-male bias and an additional preference for the eldest son. In families with more children and greater competition for resources within the household, the pro-male bias falls and the bias in favor of the eldest son is greater. Parents in the higher income bracket, who are also less likely to be dependent on their children, discriminate less in favor of the eldest son. As expected, pro-male bias is highest in the north, central and eastern zones of the country. The north-eastern zone exhibits the lowest levels of intra household discrimination based on gender. Finally, I find evidence suggesting reverse discrimination, i.e. discrimination against sons, in the state of Meghalaya which follows a rare matrilineal system where the youngest daughter takes over as the head of the household.

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1. Introduction

Discrimination against women, and in particular daughters, exists in many parts of the developing world. This is especially true in India, where a strong preference for sons has resulted in a skewed sex ratio due to female infanticide, sex selective abortions (Arnold, Kishor, & Roy, 2002), and the lack of proper diet and medical care for girls (Das Gupta, 1987). Sen (1990) notes that North Africa, China and South Asia have such severely skewed sex ratios that over a 100 million women are 'missing' due to various forms of neglect.

Once born, girls face discrimination in the allocation of household resources. From the nutritional standpoint, Sen and Sengupta (1983) and a sharp bias against girls in terms of caloric intake in West Bengal and Behrman and Deolalikar (1990) report that the nutritional burden of a price rise falls disproportionately on women and girls. Jayachandran and Kuziemko (2011) and that mothers breastfeed daughters less than sons. A similar pattern has been noted in health expenditures, particularly when parents face a binding income constraint (Asfaw, Lamanna, & Klasen, 2010;

Rose, 1999). Finally, a number of studies have found evidence of gender discrimination in educational expenditures in India (Azam & Kingdon, 2013; Kingdon, 2005; Lancaster, Maitra, & Ray, 2008; Subramanian & Deaton, 1991).

There are multiple social and economic factors that contribute towards a pro-male bias, particularly in educational expenditure. Aside from cultural preferences and social norms in favor of sons, there are differences by gender in expectations of old age support, perceived returns to schooling, costs of education and availability of schools (see Alderman and King (1998) for a summary and review of evidence supporting different motives for gender discrimination.) One channel through which the male bias may intensify is parents choosing to invest disproportionately in the child who is designated to look after them in their old age. Ebenstein (2013) proposes patrilocality (i.e. co-residence with sons) as a key determinant of the sex ratio in developing countries. In Korea, where patrilocality is the norm, he finds evidence that the sex ratio improves following a pension expansion which makes parents less likely to be dependent on their children in the future. While parents have higher expectations from sons in general, in India it is the eldest son in particular who is the family heir and typically assumes responsibility for his parents and extended family (Das Gupta, 1987; Mullatti, 1995). In Hindu families, the eldest son is

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also important for religious reasons and is responsible for performing the last rites of his parents. Jayachandran and Pande (2013) find evidence of better anthropometric outcomes for the eldest son in Indian families and attribute this to the special position that an eldest son enjoys.

This paper contributes to the literature on discrimination in education by using child specific data on educational expenditures and enrollment from the nationally representative India Human Development Survey-II (2011–12). The model uses household fixed effects controlling for age and birth order of the child. This methodology allows for an examination of intra-household patterns of discrimination. While previous literature has examined male bias in education, this paper additionally looks at differences in the treatment of not just sons, but eldest sons in particular.

I confirm the presence of a male bias and an additional preference for the eldest son in educational expenditures and enrollment. I also find that first born children receive preferential treatment. Next, I examine the behavior of households as the number of children increases and find that an increase in family size and greater competition for resources within the household causes the pro-male bias to fall and the bias in favor of the eldest son to become greater. As income increases and parents are less likely to depend on their children for support, preferential treatment towards the eldest son declines, particularly in the enrollment decision. Pro-male bias is strongest in the north, central and eastern states of the country. Finally, I study households in the state of Meghalaya, which follow a matrilineal system. In Meghalaya, as opposed to the rest of India, husbands move into the family home of their wives and the youngest daughter is the family heir (Gneezy, Leonard, & List, 2009). In line with the motivation to invest in the likely care giver, I find evidence suggesting reverse discrimination, i.e. discrimination against sons in this state.

The paper is organized as follows: Section two discusses motives for gender discrimination and makes the case for the importance of kinship norms. The data and sample are described in section three and section four discusses methodology. Results are presented in section five. The final section concludes and describes avenue for future work.

2. Gender discrimination and kinship norms

Kinship norms and social expectations play an important role in gender discrimination. In India, parents depend almost solely on their sons (and in particular the eldest son) for old age support and daughters are not expected to contribute to the material well-being of their natal families. Thus the perceived returns to educating a daughter are much lower than those for a son (Das Gupta, 1987; Foster & Rosenzweig, 1999). The prevalence of dowry in India makes daughters an additional liability and sons, an additional asset (Das Gupta et al., 2003). This gives parents an added incentive to invest in their son and make him as desirable as possible in the marriage market.

While sons in general are expected to provide for their parents, it is common practice in India for the eldest son of the household to inherit the bulk of the family estate and continue to live with his parents in what is known as a joint family. The joint family often includes younger brothers and their families, along with any unmarried siblings. In Hindu tradition, the eldest son is also responsible for carrying out the last rites of his parents, paying obeisance to family gods and performing rituals in the memory of common ancestors (Arnold, Choe, & Roy, 1998; Mullatti, 1995). It is considered the religious duty of the eldest son to look after the remaining members of the family in the absence of his parents. Thus, families have a strong motive to invest in the eldest son. In the joint family set up, the eldest son of the eldest son will enjoy

privileges over his cousins and siblings and inheritance passes to the son of the eldest son of the household (Seymour, 1993, chap. 3). Gupta (1994) describes the Indian joint family set up and argues that the forces of modernity in fact strengthen this system. Studies on health outcomes of children find evidence in support of an eldest son preference and in joint families, a preference for children of the elder son of the head of the household. Coffey, Khera, and Spears (2013) exploit intra-household differences in the autonomy enjoyed by the wives of the sons of the household to find evidence of preferential treatment to children of the eldest son (daughter in law). Jayachandran and Pande (2013) find that the eldest son in Indian families has significantly better anthropometric outcomes compared to other children.

The literature on parental motivation suggests that when one or more of the factors affecting gender discrimination are altered, parents may change patterns of allocation. Jensen (2012) finds that providing recruiting services to young women in villages in North India improves girls' educational and health outcomes. The experimental results suggest that an increase in the perceived returns to education makes parents more likely to invest in their daughters. The importance of access to school (through distance to school) has been studied in many developing countries including Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Peru and Philippines (Alderman & King, 1998; Dulfo 2003). Alderman, Orazem, and Paterno (1996) find that distance to school has a negative impact only on the enrollment of girls in Pakistan. Muralidharan and Prakash (2013) report that a policy of providing cycles to girls in Bihar, in India, makes them stay in school longer. The effect is the strongest for girls

Table 1
Household descriptive statistics.

	Mean	Std. Deviation
<i>Demographics</i>		
Size of the household	6.63862	2.698575
Monthly consumption per capita (Rs)	1618.857	1302.857
Urban	0.3114927	0.4631106
Educ. expense/hhd. expense	0.0769225	0.1001371
<i>Gender relations</i>		
Expect to live with son	0.8809089	0.323901
Expect to live with daughter	0.045248	0.207851
Expect financial support from son	0.8257025	0.3793713
Expect financial support from daughter	0.0494858	0.2168836
Observations	33,195	

Notes: 1. The sample comprises households with two or more children. 2. Households from Meghalaya are dropped.

Table 2
Individual (child) descriptive statistics.

	All	Boys	Girls
Eldest son of hhd. head	0.218 (0.413)	0.422 (0.494)	0 (0)
No. of siblings	2.500 (1.573)	2.362 (1.558)	2.647 (1.575)
Age	11.53 (3.242)	11.44 (3.230)	11.62 (3.252)
Currently enrolled	0.925 (0.264)	0.934 (0.248)	0.915 (0.279)
Annual educ. expense (Rs)	3431.9 (6807.7)	3808.6 (7260.9)	3030.5 (6264.2)
Time spent studying (hours)	39.70 (17.22)	40.21 (16.91)	39.15 (17.53)
Any govt. assistance	0.622 (0.485)	0.588 (0.492)	0.659 (0.474)
Attends govt. school	0.669 (0.471)	0.633 (0.482)	0.707 (0.455)
Observations	33,195	17,125	16,070

Note: 1. Mean of each variable with standard deviation in parentheses.

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