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Son Preference and Children's Housework: The Case of India

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(October 2012)

Abstract:

Son preference in countries like India results in higher female infant mortality rates and differentially lower access to health care and education for girls than for boys. We use a nationally representative survey of Indian households (NFHS-3) to conduct the first study that analyzes whether son preference is associated with girls bearing a larger burden of housework than boys. Housework is a non-negligible part of child labor in which around 60% of children in our sample are engaged. The preference for male offspring is measured by a mother's ideal proportion of sons among her offspring. We show that when the ideal proportion increases from 0 to 1, the gap in the time spent on weekly housework for an average girl compared to that of boy increases by 2.5 hours. We conduct several robustness analyses. First, we estimate the main model separately by caste, religion and family size. Second, we use a two-stage model to look at participation into housework (as well as other types of work) in addition to hours. Third, we use mother's fertility intentions as an alternative measure of son preference. The analysis confirms that stated differences in male-preference translate in de facto differences in girl's treatment.

Text: See [Discussion Paper No. 6929](#)



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