Girls Versus Boys: Parents' Attitudes Toward Children's Educational Attainment in South Asia

Sabrina Fernandes
California Center for Population Research
University of California, Los Angeles

Educational attainment is a key component of children's success as adults in multiple spheres – including the labor market and later childrearing. A child's educational attainment is strongly influenced by characteristics of his/her parents, such as their own educational attainments, economic resources, and expectations. Attitudes and preferences regarding children's educational attainment are important determinants of parents' childrearing behavior. While much demographic research has focused on fertility preferences such as desired number of sons and daughters, less work has addressed "quality" preferences for boys and girls once they are born. In this paper I use data from the Survey of the Status of Women and Fertility (SWAF) and multinomial logistic regression methods to examine wives' and husbands' personal attitudes toward boys' and girls' educational attainment and the joint distribution of these attitudes in three distinct settings of South Asia: Uttar Pradesh in north India, Tamil Nadu in south India, and Punjab, Pakistan. This study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) Which characteristics of wives and husbands significantly influence their personal attitudes toward boys' versus girls' education in South Asia and how?; and 2) What are the processes and factors – including power dynamics and women's autonomy-- affecting concordance or discordance in attitudes between spouses regarding boys' and girls' education?

A range of basic socio-demographic factors shape parents' attitudes toward the education of boys and girls in developing settings, including parents' education, wealth, age, urban experience, and their own parents' education. School attendance is likely to decrease children's availability to contribute to family enterprises, potentially creating a serious tension, especially for families that could benefit from the short-run income provided by working children or that could suffer from the direct costs of educating children (Tan 1983; Chekki 1974). In environments where males have more job opportunities and higher wages, an attitude favoring higher levels of education for boys than to girls could reflect parental strategies regarding investments in the future. If so, parents with lower levels of economic security may express attitudes favoring more education for boys than girls, or less certainty regarding these attitudes. Increasingly, however, expansions of the industrial and service sectors replace household and farm labor with paid wage labor for women and men. Accompanying these changes are increased access to educational opportunity, decreases in desired family sizes, and the promotion of more egalitarian views toward raising boys and girls. Ideas of investing in the "ideal" child spread, and childrearing is viewed as a rewarding and fulfilling undertaking in and of itself rather than as an economic investment or an inevitability. Together, these changes might influence parents' attitudes toward the educational worth of boys and girls.

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA

In South Asia, however, economics and modernization alone do not capture the full dynamic of parents' attitudes toward children's education. With South Asia's primarily agrarian and patriarchal systems, these attitudes also reflect gender roles created by family structure, including the different nature of sons' and daughters' ties to natal family. The region's patrilineal and patrilocal kinship systems generate differential standards and expectations for girls and boys. Traditionally, a girl leaves her family upon marriage to join her husband's family, and so her worth as a child is primarily in her labor contribution to the household (Das Gupta, Zhenghua, Bohua, Zhenming, Chung, and Hwa-Ok 2003). As an adult, her worth is as a source of children and labor for her husband and his family. In India, this trend is particularly true in the North, where women's autonomy is more constrained, than in the South, where women have more freedom to maintain ties to their birth families (Das Gupta et al 2003). In Punjab, Pakistan, the most populous province of Pakistan, the situation mirrors aspects of both north and south India. As in north India, women in Punjab have limited inheritance rights, little access to economic resources, and few opportunities to work (Sathar and Kazi 2000). But as in south India, kin marriage and close natal family ties ensure that women are not cut off from their birth families to the same extent as in north India (Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001). Along with region, religion further influences gender roles as Muslim marriage patterns in north India and Pakistan are less alienating from natal kin than Hindu marriages (Mandelbaum 1986). In relation to women, men in South Asia are relatively freer to pursue employment and benefit their families as adults. In this analysis of parents' attitudes toward boys' and girls' educational attainment, autonomy, natal family ties, and religion are all considered.

EXAMINING COUPLES' DESIRES

In addition to furthering knowledge of which parental characteristics and experiences shape their attitudes toward boys' and girls' educational attainment – including economics, education, age, region, religion, and ties to natal family -- this paper seeks to understand dynamics between husbands and wives since eventual decisions are likely to be influenced by both parents. How do we think about dynamics between husbands and wives? Increasingly, socio-demographic data are available from both members of a couple, yet treatment of such data at the level of the couple rather than the individual is relatively rare, for outcomes other than fertility and use of contraception. Miller, Severy, and Pasta (2004) present a theoretical framework for couple-level treatment that pays special attention to concordance and discordance between spouses. Understanding these dynamics as well as their direction –each spouse's attitude and how these attitudes come together to form a joint attitude -- are important areas for empirical inquiry.

DATA AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The SWAF data were collected in 1993-94 through interviews with married women ages 15-39 and their husbands in a total of 26 community strata in India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand with the goal of enabling comparative research among countries. In India and Pakistan, data come from three culturally distinct sites: 1) a rural and semi-urban setting in the patriarchal Punjab province of Pakistan, 2) an equally patriarchal setting of Uttar Pradesh in north India, and 3) the more egalitarian setting of Tamil Nadu in south India (Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001). Fifty-two per cent of Pakistan's population lives in Punjab. The state, consisting of a few cities, is primarily agricultural with more advanced social conditions compared to others in Pakistan and India (Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001). Migration has also made Punjab more open to outside influences than other areas of Pakistan. The Indian sample used in this study represents a range of gender-related and socio-cultural conditions and is stratified between North and South India, with communities chosen from the less gender restrictive southern state of Tamil Nadu and the more conservative Uttar Pradesh state in the North, both poor states with roughly 40% living below the poverty line (Dyson and Moore 1983; Ghuman, Lee, and Smith 2004; Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001). The India sample contains data from 1,842 female respondents and, due to refusal or absence, 1,660 of their husbands, while the Pakistan sample contains data from 1,036 female respondents and 520 of their husbands.

This study consists of three sets of multinomial logistic models, one for wives, one for husbands, and one for couples. The strategy here is to begin by treating wives and husbands separately to understand which factors significantly shape their personal attitudes. To more fully understand the shape of these attitudes within couples, I then link wives and husbands (both of whom were interviewed) to analyze their accordance or discordance and which factors significantly affect their joint attitudes, including age and educational difference between spouses. The dependent variable for the wives' and husbands' models is the four category answer to, "Who should receive more education?" with potential answers: 1) Boys, 2) Girls, 3) Both should receive the same education, and 4) It depends. This last response is treated here as an admission of greater uncertainty about one's attitudes. After merging the wives' and husbands' samples, a dependent variable will be created that captures the joint distribution of spouses' individual answers to the same question, resulting in categories such as: Both favor more education for sons, Both favor more education for daughters, Both favor equal amounts, and categories reflecting degrees of uncertainty and/or discordance (i.e. Husband favors more education for boys; wife favors more education for girls, etc). Independent variables in the models include socio-demographic and cultural characteristics such as age, education, religion, and region, along with spouses' characteristics, and power and autonomy dynamics in marriage. Spouses' characteristics include his/her age, education, religion, and scheduled caste status. Power and autonomy in marriage include indicators such as whether a woman has access to resources, economic decision-making power in the household, freedom of movement, and whether she is physically abused (Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001).

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

The preliminary results I present in Table 1 are from initial models of wives' and husbands' answers to the question of whether girls or boys should get more education, estimated for the India sample only. The variables included are only of respondents' background and current characteristics and reflect a series of Wald and likelihood-ratio tests for best fit. Because favoring greater education for boys is the reference category, with 54% of wives and 41% of husbands giving this response, all results presented are odds of one attitude rather than this reference attitude. Among wives, living in the North rather than the South increases the odds of favoring an equal education for boys and girls rather than more education for boys by 71% controlling for education, age, and all other variables in the model and decreases the odds of favoring more education for girls by 81%. These regional dynamics are similar among husbands. While the increased odds of favoring equal education in the North rather than more education for boys run counter to what previous research suggests, the relationships between region and favoring more education for girls are

reflective of known regional differences. Estimating models that control for women's autonomy and spouses' characteristics will add further insight into interpretations of regional influence.

Having lived in an urban area increases wives' odds of favoring equal education by 80% while each additional year of schooling increases these odds by 12%. A similar significant education effect occurs for husbands. These results are as expected given the modernizing influences indicated by greater education. Among wives and husbands, being Hindu or Christian rather than Muslim increases the odds of favoring equal education rather than more education for boys by 50% and 65%, respectively, controlling for all other variables. Interestingly, having migrated from one's place of birth doubles the odds of favoring more education for girls rather than more education for boys among wives and nearly triples these odds for husbands. Again, controlling for women's autonomy and husbands' characteristics will add further insight into this result. Finally, as expected, each additional point on the asset index scale significantly affects these attitudes, increasing the odds of favoring equal of more education for girls by 4% and 14%, respectively, and decreasing the odds of being uncertain by 13%.

PLANS FOR ADDITIONAL WORK

Along with treating the various methodological issues discussed below, I will combine the Pakistan and India samples and estimate models containing respondents' background, current, and spouses' characteristics along with indicators of women's autonomy and test for the significance of these factors. I will also link wives and husbands and create a new dependent variable of the direction of discordance or concordance in couples' joint attitudes toward boys' and girls' education. To interpret this study's results as causal, a number of issues must be addressed. First, reverse causality is a concern. For example, a woman who favors more education for girls than for boys may also actively foster closer ties and remain close to her family. A similarly important issue for the couples' models is that women may seek out husbands who shares similar attitudes concerning children's education. Additionally, number of sons and daughters may affect and be affected by parents' attitudes toward boys' and girls' education. To address these issues, I will estimate a sequence of models that begins with background features determined before a marriage, then add in more contemporaneous measures, and possibly explore models for the subset of women who are early in their marriage and have no or only a small number of children. I will exercise caution in interpreting results because unobserved features of respondents may influence both their decisions about where to live and who to marry and their attitudes toward boys' and girls' education. To avoid attributing cultural influences to region when they are in fact more variable at lower levels of aggregation, I will control for the specific communities of respondents and test for their significance. Finally, to address the missing husbands in the data, I will examine if wives of certain characteristics are more likely to have husbands with missing data and account for these missing cases in the wives' and couples' models.

REFERENCES

Chekki D.A. 1974. Modernization and Kin Network. Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill.

Das Gupta M., J. Zhenghua, L. Bohua, X. Zhenming, W. Chung, and B. Hwa-Ok. 2003. "Why is Son Preference so Persistent in East and South Asia? A Cross-Country Study of China, India and the Republic of Korea." *The Journal of Development Studies* 40:153-187.

Dyson T. and M. Moore. 1983. "On Kinship Structure, Female Autonomy, and Demographic Behaviour in India." *Population and Development Review* 9:35-60.

Ghuman S., H. Lee, and H.L. Smith. 2004. "Measurement of Women's Autonomy According to Women and Their Husbands: Results from Five Asian Countries." *Social Science Research*. Forthcoming.

Jejeebhoy S.J. and Z. Sathar. 2001. "Women's Autonomy in India and Pakistan: The Influence of Religion and Region." *Population and Development Review* 27:687-712.

Mandelbaum D.G. 1986. "Sex Roles and Gender Relations in North India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 21:1999-2004.

Miller W.B., L.J. Severy and D.J. Pasta. 2004. "A framework for modeling fertility motivation in couples." *Population Studies* 58: p. 193-205.

Sathar Z. and S. Kazi. 2000. "Pakistani couples: Different productive and reproductive realities." Pakistan Development Review 39:891-912.

Tan J.P. 1983. "Schooling and demand for children: Historical Perspectives." Washington D.C.: The World Bank.

TABLE 1. Correlates of Wives' and Husbands' Attitudes Toward Boys' and Girls' Education, India, 1994.

	Wives (N=1842)			Husbands (N=1660)		
	Equal	**Girls More**	**Uncertain**	**Equal**	**Girls More**	**Uncertain**
North	1.72**	0.19**	14.8**	1.89**	0.18**	14.2**
	(0.27)	(0.06)	(4.11)	(0.27)	(0.08)	(5.32)
Urban	1.80**	1.15	1.23	1.13	0.94	0.39*
	(0.20)	(0.36)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.34)	(0.18)
Years School	1.12**	1.02	1.11**	1.08**	1.09*	1.02
	(0.02)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Age	0.97**	1.00	0.95**	0.99	0.98	0.92**
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Caste	0.65*	1.46	0.94		0.53^	0.73
	(0.13)	(0.77)	(0.24)		(0.20)	(0.18)
Religion (ref.=Muslim)	1.50**	1.35	0.67**	1.65**	2.13*	1.20
	(0.23)	(0.43)	(0.10)	(0.27)	(0.70)	(0.28)
Migration from Birthplace	1.06	2.05**	1.41	0.81	2.96**	0.70
	(.183)	(0.45)	(0.32)	(0.14)	(1.09)	(0.38)
Mom primary	0.81	.38†	0.51*	1.51†	1.20	1.99
	(0.14)	(0.20)	(0.16)	(0.32)	(0.47)	(1.03)
Mom secondary	1.12	.32	0.33	4.31	0.00	4.40
	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.35)	(4.02)	(0.00)	(5.90)
Index	1.04*	1.14*	0.87**	NA	NA	NA
	(0.02)	(0.08)	(0.04)			
Labor force Participation	0.74*	1.42	1.02	NA	NA	NA
	(.10)	(0.48)	(0.17)			
Owns house	NA	NA	NA	0.79†	0.96	1.61
				(0.10)	(0.27)	(0.51)

Ref.= reference category. **p<=.01 *p<.=.05 †<=.10

Source: Survey on the Status of Women and Fertility