

Abstract

This dissertation investigates effective household coping strategies during profound economic shocks, as well as the impact of violent conflicts and natural disasters on parents' child gender preferences in developing countries.

In light of rising concerns about food insecurity caused by a variety of crises, the first chapter investigates effective coping strategies households can employ to mitigate the lasting impacts of income shocks and associated nutrition deficits. We uncover a previously unexplored coping mechanism - home production - and establish the extent of its effectiveness in mitigating the negative effects of crises on child health. To do so, we focus on the transition period after the collapse of the Soviet Union and investigate the role of household production of potatoes. Specifically, utilizing individual-level data from Russia, Kazakhstan, and other post-Soviet countries and exploiting the variation in the soil suitability index, we establish that households that grew potatoes on land more suitable for their cultivation were able to reduce the negative effects of transition shock on the health of their children as measured by adult height and height-for-age z-score. Our findings suggest that targeted nutritional interventions are needed to mitigate long-term adverse health impacts on children in times of catastrophic economic shocks, particularly in areas where households face limitations in home production.

The second chapter explores whether and how long-run exposure to violent conflicts contributes to and shapes the child gender preferences of parents. To conduct the analysis, I use temporal and spatial variations in conflicts in Nigeria and combine the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and the Demographic and Health Surveys Program. The results show that the effect of long-run exposure to violent conflicts on stated preferences (attitudes) for boys is not homogeneous. While conflict events with low or no civilian deaths increase preferences for sons, violence targeted at civilians works in the opposite direction and decreases preferences for boys. I find no evidence of translating these preferences into behaviour via sex-selective abortions. Instead, evidence shows that parents use the stopping rule to achieve the desired gender composition of children. Further, my analysis also indicates that, in the districts affected by conflict, parents have a positive bias towards boys in terms of their postnatal health investment.

The final chapter investigates the enduring effects of natural disasters on parental gender preferences, focusing on the activated memory of the 1988 Armenian Earthquake. This chapter proposes a novel explanation for skewed sex ratios, suggesting that natural disasters can exert enduring effects on women's child gender preferences. Leveraging data from four rounds of Demographic and Health Surveys in Armenia and exploiting the plausible exogeneity of interview timing, my research uncovers a significant impact of the reactivated memory of the 1988 Armenian Earthquake on women's stated preferences for male children. Specifically, women interviewed on or around December 7 – the day marking the earthquake victims' commemoration – express a 3-percentage-point higher preference for sons. Further analysis reveals that women from the most affected region, Shirak, exhibit an even stronger preference for boys, with a noteworthy 12-percentage-point increase. These effects are particularly pronounced among women who are already mothers, suggesting a lasting imprint of the earthquake's memory on child gender preferences.