

Reducing gender inequalities within low-and-middle-income countries

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Gender inequalities within low-and-middle-income countries

- Persistent gender inequalities in human capital, decision-making power and welfare in many LMIC, but with lots of heterogeneity
- Cultural norms around gender
 - Where norms are leading to inefficiencies this begs a few questions:
 - Why do these norms exist?
 - Why (and under which conditions) do these norms persist?
 - Can study this when systems get “shocked”, e.g. through gender-targeted or policies changing constraints/conditions
 - Who benefits?
 - We should not expect norms to be uniform => importance to analyze gender disparities in specific contexts

Dupas and Jain (2023)

- Deep dive into one context and one (so far largely undocumented) disparity: hospital care in Rajasthan, India
- Simple conceptual model on household demand for female versus male hospital care to guide analysis
 - Differential economic returns
 - Biased preferences
 - Cost of seeking care
- What does paper do ?
 - Rich descriptive analysis of disparities
 - Followed by analysis of shifts in response to 2 shocks that shift factors affecting demand in conceptual model:
 - Increased insurance coverage
 - Political reservation
 - In context where both male and female care is constrained

Dupas and Jain (2023) – cont.

- Data:
 - Very rich administrative data
 - hospital visits for secondary and tertiary care (based on claims to the government health insurance scheme)
 - geocoded
 - Complemented with various targeted survey data
 - E.g. unauthorized out-of-pocket charges
 - And data from secondary sources to estimate sex-specific illness prevalence
- Understudied outcome
 - Most studies focused on access to health care services in LMIC focus on primary care
 - Studying hospital care is challenging because need for such care is conditional
 - Analysis by age group
 - Careful discussion and analysis of gender differences in medical conditions

Some broader reflections

- Non-gender specific policies can have gender-differentiated outcomes in either direction
 - Lifting constraints will not automatic lead to reduction of disparities, and may increase them
 - When (long-term) implications are multi-dimensional (e.g. human capital policies) even more complex
- We still don't know all that much about how and when gender-specific policies shift gender norms
 - Political reservation shown to affect large set of short- and long-term outcomes
 - More open questions on policies empowering female leaders through other means
 - What about gender-targeting (of information interventions, transfers, ...) more generally => is this an area with lots of "hidden" results?
 - How much depends on the reason for why the norms exist?
 - Possibly particularly relevant for harmful norms without clear "winners" (stigma around menstruation, FGC, foot binding, ...)