

Chapter 28

Patterns and determinants of gender bias in child health in India

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Abstract

The study will make an attempt to identify patterns of gender gap in child health in India and their determinants, and examine the possible role of female education and women's agency in reducing the gap. With the help of 21 selected indicators of health-seeking behaviour and health outcome, it is shown that there is ample evidence of varying level of gender gap. It is found that the gender gap in various health outcomes are not much related to the gender gap in various indicators of health-seeking behaviour. However, for the girl children's health achievement, the indicators of health-seeking behaviour are significantly related to the indicators of health outcome. It is also shown that any consistently robust pattern of gender bias against girl children in child health is *not* present in India. But there is a consistent pattern of girl children's absolute health achievement. Hence we focus on the girl children exclusively and tried to identify the determinants of health achievements for girl children. Given the Rawlsian theory of justice, the same determinants will, in turn, be able to reduce gender bias. We analyse the effects of some selected demographic and socioeconomic variables on the chance of full immunisation, chance of medical treatment in diarrhoea and medical treatment in fever/cough, chance of breastfeeding, chance of malnutrition and chance of mortality for girl children. Except for a few cases, the results are consistently robust.

Keywords: Gender bias, child health, NFHS, female literacy, women's empowerment, India

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