

Gender Peer Effects in High Schools: Evidence from India

Abstract:

This paper presents robust evidence about the existence of gender peer effects in high schools in India using a unique dataset. We use a new administrative dataset from the Central Board of Secondary Education which is the single largest board of education with an all-India presence. Identification of gender peer effects is achieved by exploiting variation induced by idiosyncratic changes in gender composition across cohorts within schools, in addition to controlling for ability and past inputs using a proxy variable. The proportion of female classmates in a student's cohort has a statistically significant and sizable positive effect on test scores of both male and female students. We find that gender peer effects are greater for students belonging to disadvantaged communities. Finally, we provide suggestive evidence on plausible mechanisms: some of the heterogeneous effects that we observe (across subject streams, ability distribution) suggests that gender peer effects do not operate primarily through ability or achievement spillovers rather improvement in classroom environment due to female students might play a key role.