

Parental investments and son preference in a diverse high-inequality Gulf country.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines parenting norms and behaviors in the United Arab Emirates, a country that is notable for its diverse population and where its citizens constitute the large minority: roughly 90% of the residents and 50% of the children in the country are non-citizens, having migrated for work. The largest group of migrants from a single country comes from India and constitutes slightly over a third of the population. The context thus offers a unique opportunity to examine parenting behaviors in a diverse environment characterized by high levels of socioeconomic polarization in which there is not a clear dominant parenting norm. This paper examines parental investments in children and dynamics of son preference, both in terms of offspring composition and differential parental investments by sex. As one of the key inputs into child development and child well-being, parents' spending on children has received substantial attention in recent years. Research on parental expenditures has focused on understanding how and why parents spend on children's education, childcare, extracurricular activities, and other goods for their children. We find evidence of substantial son preference in sex ratios of children but less evidence when examining expenditures, although there is some heterogeneity by national origin.