

***Family background and context effects on
school dropout in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia,
Egypt and Syria.***

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Introduction

In many MENA countries, the level of schooling is still rather low. Especially in the countryside, a substantial number of children stops schooling at a too young age.

As the educational level of girls is often lower than of boys, there are also notable gender differences in education in the region.

The restricted possibilities for children to go to school are a great problem, both for themselves and for the countries in which they live.

A higher level of education of the population of a country leads to more economic growth, less poverty and inequality, and dynamic, competitive economies

A higher level of education of women has the additional advantage of reducing infant and child mortality and malnutrition, reduction of fertility and enhancement of family welfare

Introduction cont.

Raising the educational level of children and reducing the gender differences in education is therefore a major priority for the governments of the MENA countries.

However, policies directed at increasing the educational level of children can only be effective, if they are based on a thorough understanding of the factors by which their school attendance is furthered or hindered.

These factors are situated both at the family level, where parents take the decision to send their children to school, and at the level of the context in which the family lives, where characteristics of the available educational facilities and of the local labor market, together with cultural factors exert their influence.

For achieving progress in this field, it is necessary to study the relevant factors at the household and context level simultaneously, so that it becomes clear what the relative importance of the different factors is in shaping the educational decisions of parents and children.

In our research such an approach is applied

Research questions

1. To what extent is the school dropout of children in these countries influenced by socio-economic, demographic, geographic and cultural characteristics of their family background?
2. To what extent is the school dropout of children influenced by socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the larger context in which the family lives?
3. To what extent do effects of factors at the household level depend on characteristics of the context in which the family lives?

Why do children drop out of school?

- Human capital theory: Focus on returns to education
- Is it rational for parents to invest in the education of their children?
- This depends on the involved costs and the expected returns
- Decision needs not be rational, but are influenced by how the parents and children perceive the world around them -- which not necessarily is in line with reality -- and by cultural norms and values, that may legitimize existing inequalities
- In the age group on which we focus (12-15), children themselves may want to dropout, because they prefer to earn money at the labor market, help in the family business (which they may take over later), or prepare for marriage

Costs of Education

Direct costs

- Costs of school, transportation, books etc.

Opportunity costs

- Costs because children at school cannot help at home or contribute to family income
- Opportunity costs for girl's education are relatively high in societies with large families, because girls can help in the household
- Older children may carry the highest burden and younger children may profit from their work

Returns to Education

- Labor market returns
- Marriage market returns
- Old age security for parents

Gender differences may be caused by

- Low labor market returns for women because female labor force participation is very low in these countries (it varies between 8% in Algeria to 21% in Tunisia)
- Culture: Public domain is male dominated, women's domain inside home. For managing the household primary education is considered to be enough
- Girls marry often into the family of the husband, so the returns to the investment in their education may go to another family

Data

Large household datasets supplemented with context information

Sources:

- PAFAM: Pan Arab Project for Family Health (sponsored by the League of Arab States)

Morocco 2003, Algeria 2002, Tunisia 2001, Syria 2001

- DHS: Demographic and Health Surveys (sponsored by USAID)

Egypt 2003

N = 23,330 children aged 12-15 who ever went to school

Not in school at time of interview: 3,697 children (16%)

Household-level variables and hypotheses

Socio-economic factors

Education, occupation, wealth: More resources leads to higher participation

Employment mother: Economic hardship or emancipation?

Demographic factors

Family size: The more children, the less resources for each individual child

Sex of siblings: More brothers might mean less resources left for girl's education

Birth order: Later-born children might have more chance to be in school because earlier-born children help at home

Parent missing: Less resources available

Extended family: More kin present to help in household might mean less need for help of children

Biological child: Parents may invest more in their own children than in foster/adoption children

Geographic factors

Urbanization: Less schooling and transport facilities in countryside

Context variables and hypotheses

Modernization: More developed region -> more participation

(e.g. better infrastructure & educational facilities, more influence global culture, better enforcement of compulsory education laws)

- District Development Index (percentage of households with car, fridge, telephone, tv, electricity, running water etc in district)
- Living in urban or rural area

Labor market structure: Good opportunities -> more participation

- Percentage of men employed in white collar jobs
- Percentage of women employed in with collar jobs

Cultural factors: More traditional -> less participation of girls

- Percentage of households with grandfathers from fathers side in district

Interactions with context (in paper)

Figure 1. Percentage women and men who never went to school by period they should have started primary education

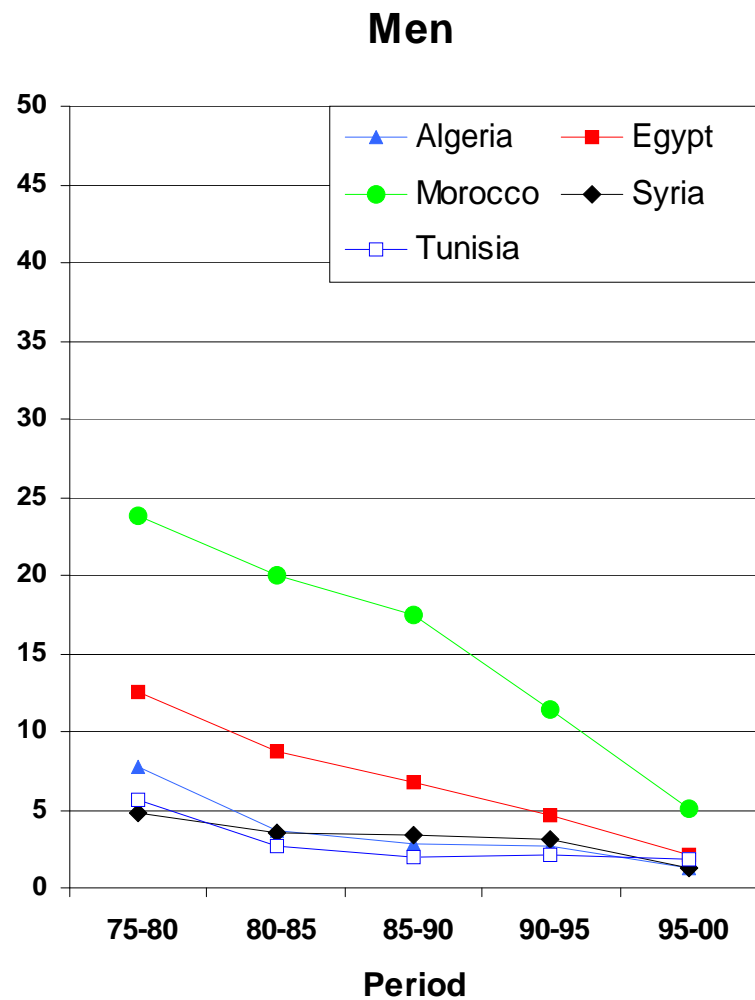
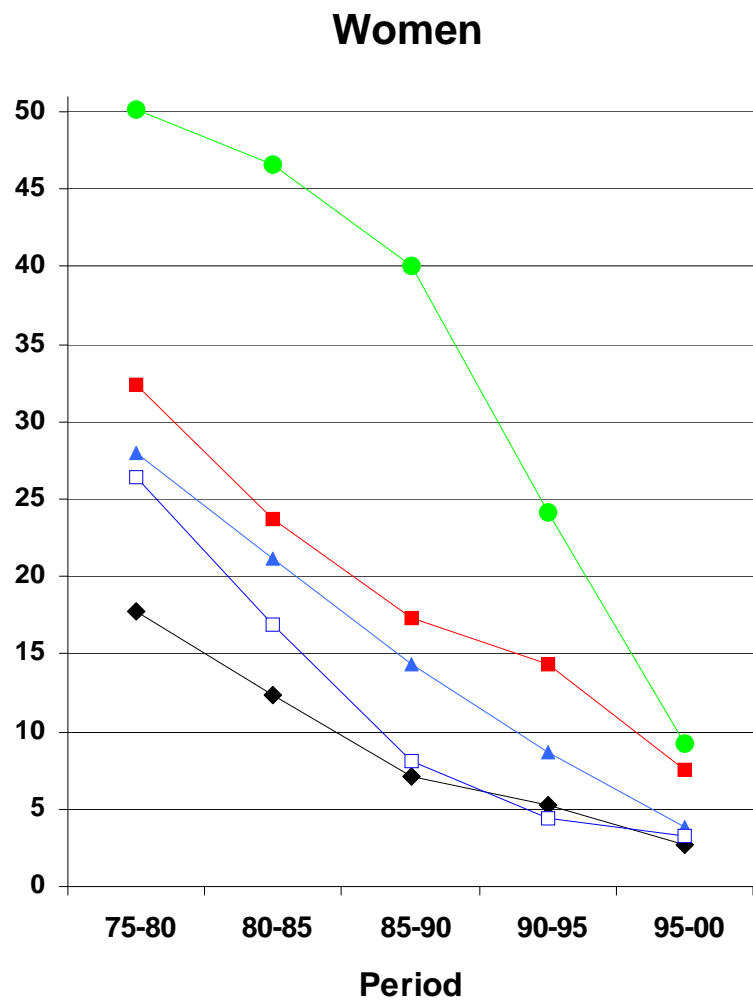


Figure 2. Percentage *not* in school of girls and boys by age

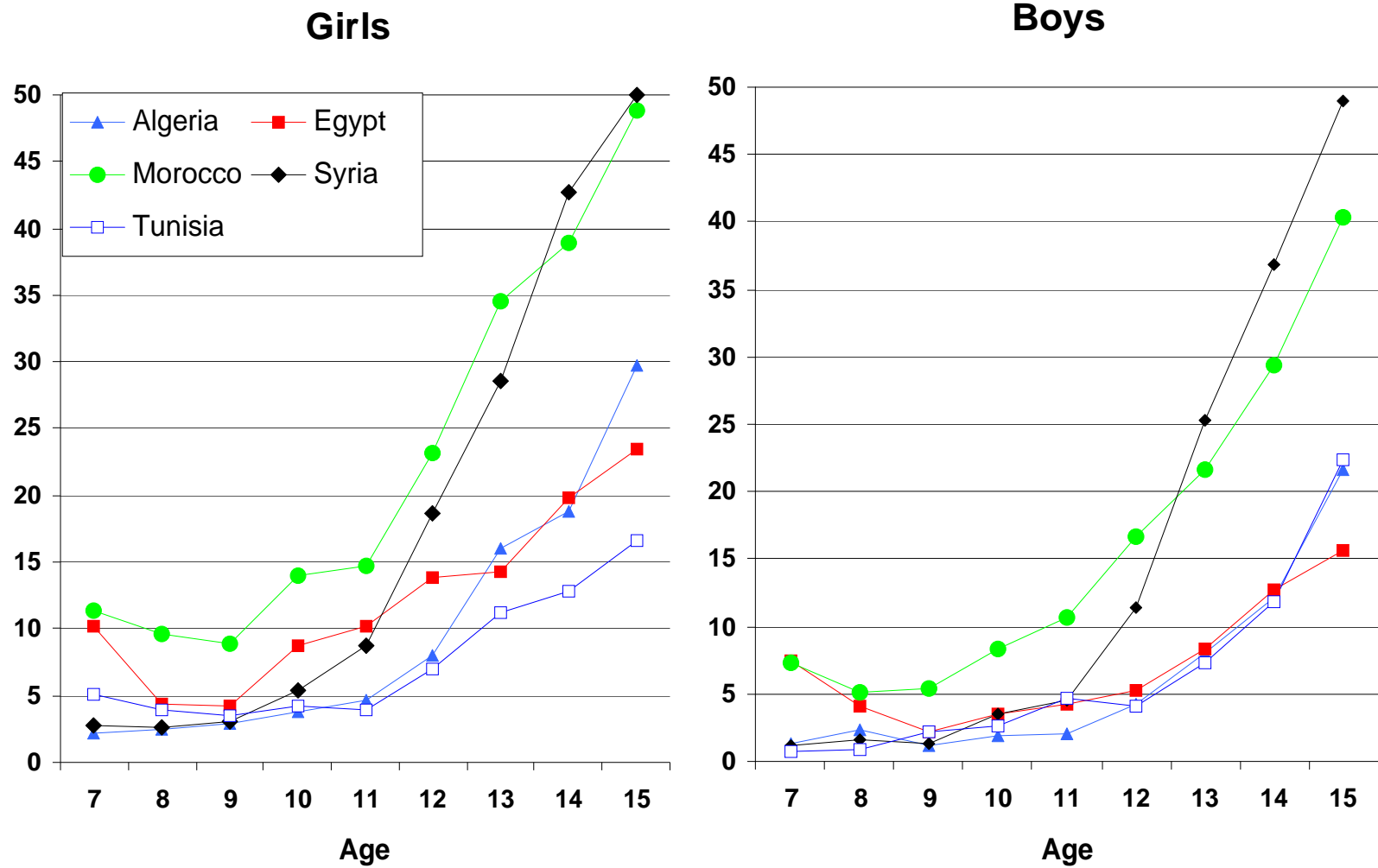


Figure 3. Percentage *not* in school of girls and boys aged 12-15 in urban and rural areas

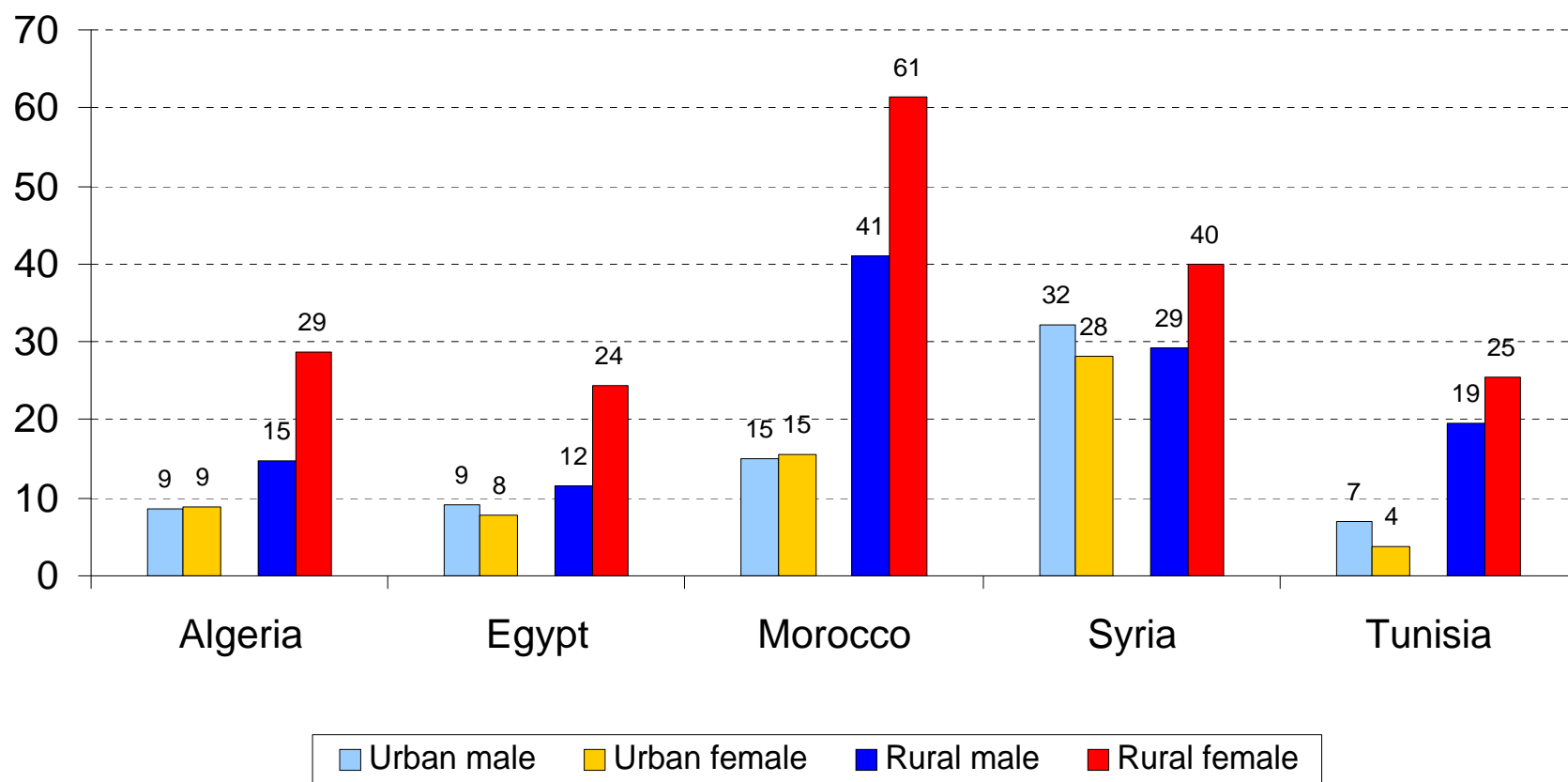


Figure 4. Percentage *not* in school of girls and boys aged 12-15 according to education of father and mother

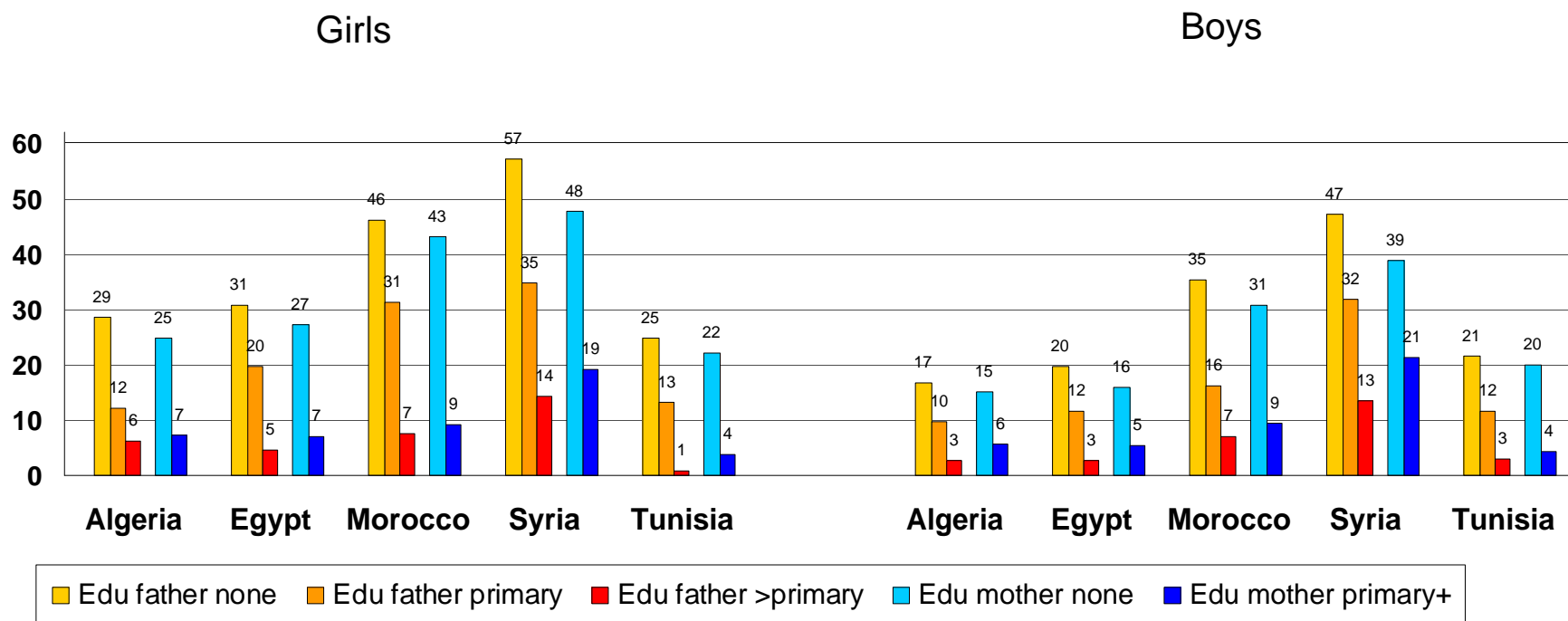


Table 1. Coefficients of multilevel logistic regression models predicting the odds of being still in school of girls and boys aged 12-15 who ever went to school in five Arab countries (N=23,330; N-not in school=3,697)

Socio-economic characteristics	Girls	Boys
Education father		
<i>None</i>	Ref.	Ref.
<i>At least some primary</i>	0.233**	0.419**
<i>At least some secondary</i>	0.884**	1.221**
Education mother at least some	0.449**	0.398**
Occupation father		
<i>Farm</i>	Ref.	Ref.
<i>Lower nonfarm</i>	0.086	0.069
<i>Upper nonfarm</i>	0.379*	0.374**
Mother employed	0.079	0.144
Household wealth		
<i>Lowest quintile</i>	Ref.	Ref.
<i>Middle quintiles</i>	0.345**	0.401**
<i>Upper quintile</i>	0.957**	0.678**

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Family structure	Girls	Boys
Mother missing	-0.653**	-0.094
Father missing	0.194*	-0.272**
Number of sisters		
<i>None</i>	Ref.	Ref.
<i>One or two</i>	0.034	-0.125
<i>Three or more</i>	0.013	-0.193
Number of brothers		
<i>None</i>	Ref.	Ref.
<i>One or two</i>	-0.087	-0.071
<i>Three or more</i>	-0.452**	-0.299**
Extended family	0.032	0.009
Mother got 1th child under age 18	-0.147	-0.204*
Individual characteristics		
Age	-0.602**	-0.685**
Biological child	-0.120	0.305
Birth order child		
<i>First born child</i>	Ref.	Ref.
<i>2th to 4th child</i>	0.018	-0.066
<i>5th or later child</i>	0.451**	0.300*

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Context factors	Girls	Boys
Living in rural area	-0.640**	0.129
District level of development	0.147	0.401**
% males in white-collar jobs in district	-0.027	0.049
% females in white-collar jobs in district	0.333**	-
% families with grandparents of fathers side in district	0.239**	0.222**

Conclusions

Over the last decades in all five countries much progress has been made in getting young children into school.

Currently the major challenge is to keep them in school. After age 11, participation rates of both boys and girls decrease rapidly. This decrease is strongest in Morocco and Syria, but it is also present in the other countries.

There are also huge differences between cities and countryside

In the rural areas school dropout is much higher than in the cities and there are also still major gender differences.

In the cities the gender differences have disappeared.

Conclusions cont.

Our multivariate analysis shows that socio-economic factors are still a major determinant of school dropout in these countries

When the parents have little or no education, or the father is employed in farming, the chances that their children go to school are strongly reduced

Wealth is an important factor too, so financial restrictions still play a major role

There is competition among children within families over restricted resources. Having several brothers decreases the chances for both girls and boys to stay in school.

Birth order counts, especially for girls. Older daughters may create the possibility for younger daughters and sons to stay in school

Conclusions cont.

If the mother is missing, school dropout of girls increases considerably. A missing father reduces the chances of staying in school of both boys and girls, but this effects is smaller than that of a missing mother.

School dropout of girls is much higher in the rural areas.

This effect is not caused by differences in parental education, wealth or family structure between urban and rural areas. Hence it is probably due to the influence of cultural factors in rural areas. The fact that boys are more in school in rural areas also indicates that parents in these areas prefer to educate their sons over their daughters

On the other hand we see that girls tend to drop out less in areas where there are more women employed in a white collar job. Hence good labor market prospects, or good examples, may help keeping girls in school.

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