

Gender Norms and the Cognitive Gender Gap: Evidence from SHARE

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Abstract:

Several studies showed that women outperform men in verbal and memory abilities, but this finding is not universal. In particular, this female cognitive advantage decreases when gender roles are more traditional (i.e. men expected as breadwinners). As literature shows that cognitive performance improves with human capital investment, gender gaps in education and labour market participation are expected to contribute to cognitive gender differences. We investigate the contribution of gender norms to the gender cognitive gap using second generation immigrants in the Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) and a proxy for gender norms at the parental home-country level in the World Value Survey (WVS). We find that female memory skills decrease relatively to men when both parents are born in a country associated to traditional gender roles. Women outperform men in verbal skills when only the mother comes from a country characterised by a traditional view of gender roles, questioning gender heterogeneity in gender norms transmission to the next generation.