

For Better or Worse?: Education and the Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Turkey*

Bilge Erten
Northeastern University

Monday 19 October 2015, 15:00 (PLEASE NOTE THE IRREGULAR DAY)

Natuk Birkan Building Murat Sertel Lounge

Abstract

Domestic violence remains an important social, economic and public health problem, particularly within developing countries. We exploit a change in compulsory schooling law in Turkey to estimate the causal effects of education on prevalence of domestic violence. The change in the law implied that individuals born after January 1987 were obliged to complete eight years of schooling whereas those born earlier had the option of dropping out after five years. Using this discontinuity and the National Survey on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey (2008), we adopt a Regression Discontinuity (RD) design to estimate causal effects of the reform on domestic violence. We find that the reform resulted in an increase of one to one and half years of additional schooling of women on average. This higher educational attainment resulted in improved labor market outcomes for women, including being employed, particularly in the nonagricultural sector, and having a higher personal income. In contrast, we find no evidence of a significant effect on marriage market outcomes or domestic violence attitudes. Our findings show that the effects of the reform were particularly strong for the main compliers, women who have grown up in rural areas facing constraints in accessing education. There is no evidence of a corresponding effect on women grown up in urban areas. We find that the reform had a positive effect on psychological violence and financial control behavior experienced by these women from rural areas, without any evidence of a significant impact on physical or sexual violence. We interpret these findings as evidence for instrumental theories of violence. Higher personal income earned by these women in return for their additional years of schooling created incentives for male partners to use coercive instruments to extract rents from women and regain control over household decision-making.

*-joint with Pınar Keskin