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## The Power of TV: Women's Status in India and the Role of Cable Television

Emily Oster  
*University of Chicago*

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Women's Status in India and  
the Role of Cable Television*

**Emily Oster**

**Assistant Professor of Economics  
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Emily Oster is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics at the University of Chicago. She received her B.A. in Economics, magna cum laude, from Harvard College in 2002 and her Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University in 2006. As a talented young economist, she is best known for her Ph.D. dissertation, “Hepatitis B and the Case of the Missing Women,” in which she suggests that biology can be used to reveal the truth about the “missing-women” puzzle. Her current work focuses primarily on HIV in Africa.

Professor Oster is a strong communicator and her lecture deals with a three-year study on how the introduction of cable television in India is associated with improvements in women’s status. “It may be that cable television with programming that features lifestyles both in urban areas and in other countries is an effective form of persuasion because people emulate what they perceive to be desirable behavior and attitudes.”

# The Power of TV: Women's Status in India and the Role of Cable Television

**Emily Oster**

Television is a medium beloved by many for purposes from entertainment to news, though it is simultaneously derided for lowering cultural standards. Thus, the prospect that it could be used to improve the status of women is exciting. In the discussion that follows, this possibility, and some other facets of women's place in society, will be explored. However, I want to provide some background on the status of women in Asia first. Then I will address the research that I have done on the possible role of television in helping ameliorate some of these gender inequality issues. In addition, I want to look at how economists and researchers think about finding answers to these questions.

The most salient example of the inequality in women's status in India is the fact that women die at higher rates than men, we call that excess female mortality. This is something that people have observed for a long time, but really has been brought vividly to people's attention by Amartya Sen, a Nobel prize winner in economics who wrote about this subject about twenty years ago, and illustrated his points with a graph that looked just like figure 1.

# Asia's "Missing" Women

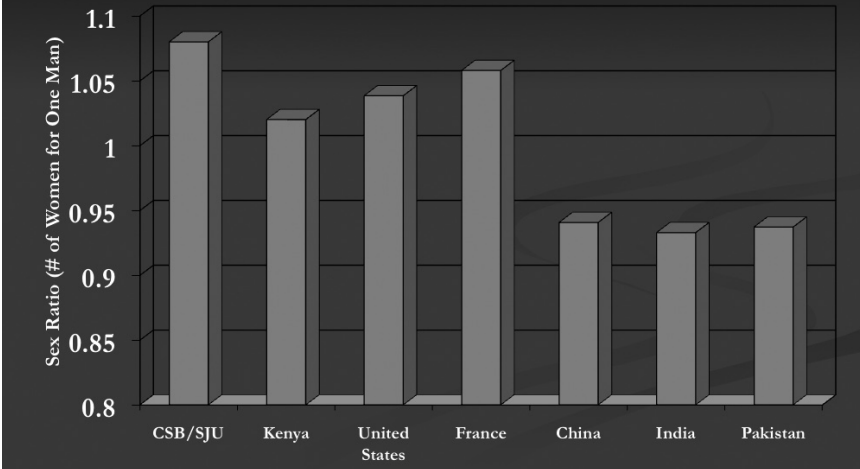


FIGURE 1

A common measure for an economist or sociologist is called the sex ratio, which is really just the number of women divided by the number of men in any population. To give you a sense of what that means, figure 1 shows you the sex ratio in some different populations. The first bar is St. John's and St. Ben's – in the student population here there are about 1.08 women for each man. And then the next three bars show Kenya, the US, and France; this really shows the same thing you would see throughout the developed world and to a large extent in Africa. You can see there are typically more than one woman for every man. In the case of the US, this is about 103 women for every 100 men. And that's mostly what we expect in a population with a regular mortality rate. In contrast, and this is what Sen and others have noted, some countries in Asia – China, India, Pakistan, and others – tend to have many more men relative to women. So instead of there being 103 women for every hundred men, there are only 95, as shown in figure 2. Sen has coined the phrase "missing women" to describe the women in the darkest bars – the women who would exist if the sex ratio were 103, but instead do not.

Sen has argued, and mostly people tend to agree with this, that these missing women are missing because of mistreatment and excess mortality. Girls are poorly treated by their parents and they die at higher rates, because of infanticide, poor care for women in childbirth, and so on. People have provided different estimates

## Asia's "Missing" Women

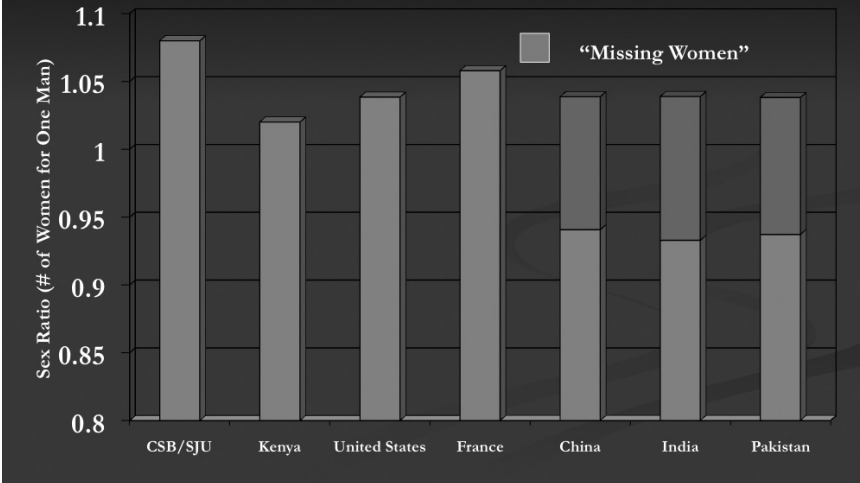


FIGURE 2

for the numbers of these missing women, and they run something on the order of 40-60 million. This is a subject people often discuss, and something that some of you may be familiar with, but actual issues of gender inequality in this region really go far beyond just purely excess mortality.

Take for example data from a nationally representative survey of 90,000 women in India. The women were surveyed and asked a lot of questions about their health, their children, and their spouses; in addition they were asked a series of questions that helped people measure the decision making power and the way that women are treated. The results appear in figure 3. One question was asked about who decides about health care? Women were asked, "If you don't feel well, who decides whether you get to go to the infirmary?" About 27% of women in the sample said they make this decision on their own – if they don't feel well they go to the clinic, and that's the way it is. About 25% say that, while they participate in that decision, other people are also involved. So I go to my husband, and I say, "I'm not feeling well", and then we discuss together whether it's OK for me to go to the doctor. But more than half of the women in this sample say that somebody else makes that decision. When they don't feel well, they go and ask their husband or their parents-in-law, "I'm not feeling well, I'd like to go to the health center", and then somebody else decides whether that's OK.



# Beyond Excess Mortality

## ■ Who Decides about Woman Obtaining Health Care?

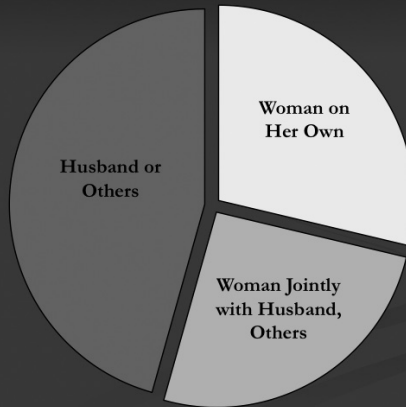


FIGURE 3

Figure 4 provides another example. Most of the women in this survey were married women, living with their husbands or their husband's parents. They were asked, "Do you need permission to visit your parents?" Again, about 25% of the women said that they don't need permission; they can visit their parents whenever they want. But a full 70% of women say that they have to get permission. They cannot just visit their parents, they have to ask their husband, or they have to ask their parents in law. And in fact, 1.3% said they are not ever allowed to visit their parents. It does not matter whether they ask permission; they are just not allowed to visit them at all.

The final question, and for me this is probably the most surprising result, is that women were asked about the acceptability of spousal abuse. The question was phrased, "Is it acceptable for a husband to beat his wife if \_\_\_\_\_". Note that this is not, "Do husbands do this?" This is, "Do you find this to be an acceptable practice?" And there are a set of circumstances for which they can say, "I think it's acceptable in that situation, but not that one." Shown in Figure 5 is the share of women who say that beating is acceptable in the set of hypothetical situations. To give you a sense, if the wife is disrespectful, about 32% of the women in the sample say that beating is acceptable in that situation, and about 22% say it is acceptable if she doesn't cook well. And we see numbers in the range of 25-30%

# Beyond Excess Mortality

- Do You Need Permission to Visit Your Family?



FIGURE 4

# Beyond Excess Mortality

- Husband may beat wife if...

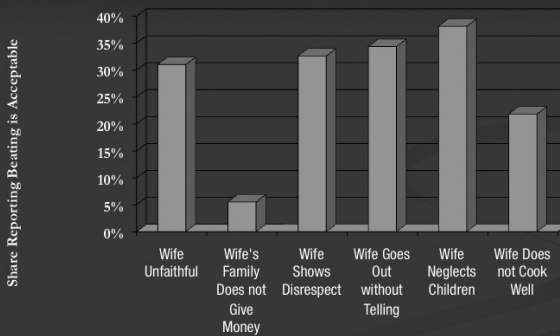


FIGURE 5

for a number of things: going out without telling him, neglecting the children, being unfaithful.

Much of this was surprising to me when I first saw the data, and it got me thinking that it was a problem we should try to address. But there are arguments for trying to affect the status of women, even if you didn't care at all about the actual women in the population. In particular, there is a lot of evidence from economics, sociology, and other disciplines, that women having power over things – being educated and having control over money – are much better than men having this control. When you see women with lots of education, their children tend to be healthier, and they tend to get more education themselves. When only men get more education, these positive results are much weaker. Likewise, when you put money in the hands of women they tend to spend it on food for their children, or school fees, or healthcare. Men are far more likely to drink and gamble it away. Even if you do not care about people's kids and you do not buy these other stories, there is this very basic fact: if women are not allowed to go out without their husbands, and are not allowed to make decisions on their own, it limits the degree to which they can be active participants in the economy. And one of the things we have seen a lot in the developing world is that there is a real role for women in pushing forward small businesses and entrepreneurial activities.

For most economists, once you establish that the status of women is lower in these areas than it is, say, in the US, the next question to ask is “why?” What is it about the environment, about the society, that drives the status to be low? For an economist, and for people who think about this generally, the first thing to ask is, “What are the costs and benefits of having children?” If we think that a lot of this difference in status of women, and this excess female mortality is caused by the way that parents view their kids, then we should try to understand the differences in the costs and benefits of kids by gender. We can start by outlining what people like about their kids, what's so expensive about kids, and so on. To start, what might be the benefits of children? One fact is that most people like their kids. I have some friends who have kids and some like them and some do not, but on the whole kids are a positive thing. Even if you do not like them, there are economic benefits to having kids. One of them is that if you are living in an agricultural area, your kids provide labor for the farm. But even beyond that, because on the whole these are areas without savings opportunities – pretty much no social security – your kids are a real way to save money, since they can send you money when you are too old to work. But of course, children are not free. There are some obvious costs: you have to feed them, buy them clothes, send them to school, and all those things cost money. And in the particular Indian context, weddings and dowries tend to

be a rather large expense, as a share of the total cost of a child.

So these are some overall benefits and costs of kids, and to understand why girls may not be valued by their parents, you have to think specifically about how these costs vary for boys and girls. As I said, one of the benefits is that you like kids. That is pretty gender neutral, but there are other issues, specifically earning power, which tend to not be gender neutral. In fact, boys are much better as sources of income, both as children and especially as they get older. The fact that girls do not ultimately earn and send more money back to the parents is one of the reasons people do not want a female child as much as they want a male child. This is not simply a theory, we can see a bit of evidence for that in Figure 6, which shows the relationship between the percent of women in the state (this is by state in India) on the x-axis, and the share of girls in the population of children ages 8-12 on the y-axis. As you move to the right you see a larger and larger percentage of women working, and you can see that the graph is pretty starkly upward sloping. This tells you that, in areas where there are more women working, you actually end up getting more girls. So, one way to think about this is to say that, in a place where it seems like girls are able to earn more money because you see more women working, perhaps girls are more valued there, treated better, and hence survive longer.

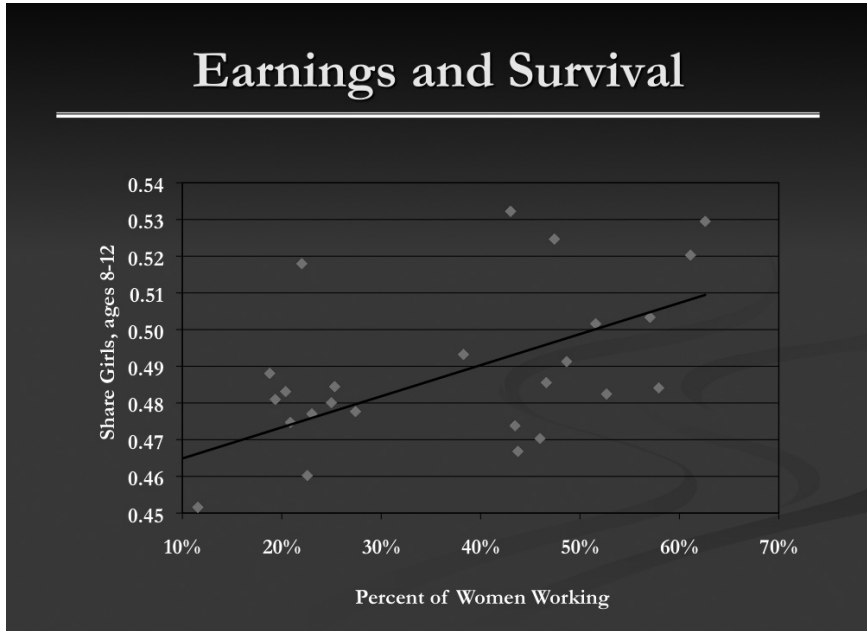


FIGURE 6

On the cost side, the biggest issue is weddings. In India, weddings are extremely expensive. It is very expensive to marry off your daughter because you have to pay a lot of dowry money. Thus, a major cost in raising girls gives us some sense of why the status of girls is low. We don't have a complete answer, but this gives us a clue.

Then the second question to address is, "How can women's status improve?" We know it's low, we have some sense of why, so how can we make improvements? Referring back to that picture of the upward sloping graph; maybe we can improve the labor markets for women. If we see states with good labor market opportunities have more girls, we can work to improve the labor market opportunities, and maybe that will make people value their daughters more. We can also try decreasing the costs, as India has tried getting rid of dowries. They have tried saying you cannot have dowries, and outlawing them completely. That was their big plan, but it turned out it is actually quite hard to outlaw things like that, because people just say, "Oh no, it is a gift to my child, it is not a dowry." It is very hard to prosecute things like a gift for your kids, so we can recognize this as something people have tried, but which is very difficult to put into practice.

Another thing people have tried is a policy of reimbursement, actually paying people if they have a daughter. My co-author and I have examined a program that was run in Haryana, India called "Apni Beti, Apni Dahn" which means "Our Daughter, Our Wealth." Results from this are shown in Figure 7. This program simply gave money to parents who showed up with a baby that was a girl. You register a female birth and you get 500 rupees, which is not very much money, but since this was done with very low-caste people in Haryana, which is a very poor state, this was not a trivial amount to them. We tried to evaluate this program by looking at the share of girls aged 0-6 in Haryana and in another state, before and after this program. If this program has an effect on the share of girls in the population, we should expect to see that the sex ratio gets more biased towards girls after the program, relative to the changes in the other state. The bars on the right in Figure 7 are Haryana, and as you can see the program had virtually no effect. In fact, Haryana actually got a little worse over time, and this other state did not. As it turns out, this system where you give people money for their daughters, at least in this particular case, did not seem to have been very successful. You can say that maybe it was not enough money, but this is the type of thing the government is working to do on a larger scale, and initial results do not seem promising.

The third thing people have thought about, other than trying to affect these costs and benefits, is actually trying to advertise and really change people's minds about what is appropriate. So without doing anything to the real variables, gov-

# Payments for Daughters

- Apni Beti, Apni Dahn: Haryana, India

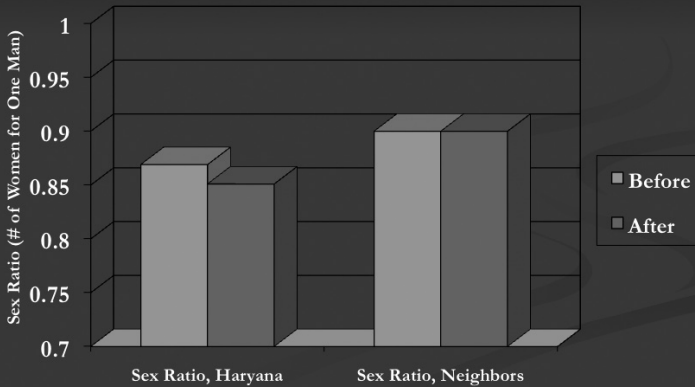


FIGURE 7

ernments can try to change what people think is OK, the attitudes that people have, particularly through television, billboards, and radio. A lot of this goes on in China, as well as in India. And that is really where our study kicks in.

We are going to discuss whether there is really a role for television in understanding this issue. So the first thing to know, and part of what makes this interesting, is that television is a really big deal, and has become a much bigger deal in India. Figure 8 gives you a sense of current and expected cable penetration in India over the period from 2000 to 2012, and you can see there is about a fourfold increase in the expected number of televisions in households. Big increases are evident in TV access in general, as well as satellite and cable access. So we are going to ask whether this expansion in television affects women's status. The first research question to ask people before you start thinking about anything is, "Is this even remotely plausible?" I think the answer is yes, and there are a couple of reasons. The first thing to note is that TV really changes people's information, so it can change their views. A lot of the places we will be talking about are very isolated, rural villages in India where many people spend their whole lives within a single social structure, knowing and being known by a single set of people, and those are the peers with whom they compare their behavior. And if, all of a sudden, you introduce cable

# The Expansion of Television

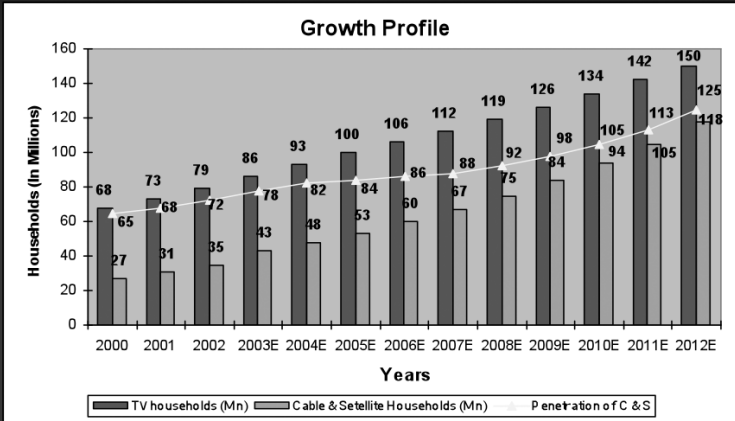


FIGURE 8

television, this introduces a whole new set of peers. All of a sudden there are lots of people on TV, doing all sorts of crazy things, and you think, “Maybe I could do that, that looks pretty good. Why do I have to behave like all of the people in my village? Why can’t I behave like Ross and Rachel on *Friends*?”

I think this is completely plausible. There is also an extensive literature in economics arguing that television *has* influenced people’s attitudes and behavior. The first of these papers is about television in the Muslim world, arguing that differences in the kinds of channels you are exposed to change your opinions about the 9/11 terror attacks and who perpetrated them. Likewise, the second paper is about the relationship between getting access to Fox news channel and voting patterns. The authors find that when people get access to Fox news channel, it switches them to voting more Republican. Of course they found this very surprising, because Fox is supposedly very fair and balanced, but apparently not so much. There is also a fair amount of evidence in the anthropology literature on the effects of television in the Amazon region. I think it is plausible to think TV could have effects on people’s attitudes.

The second thing that we want to think about is what kind of TV is it that we are really talking about? What is actually on TV? Take, for example, TV in India,

starting in 1959 and then going into the early 1990s: the only available option was broadcast TV, which was government sponsored. And for the most part it wasn't terribly entertaining. It was a lot of, "This is information about crop planting," and "This is information about culture," but there were few serials that people really liked.

In the early 1990s, cable and satellite television were introduced. People liked this much better, and the cable and satellite services were showing primarily Indian produced TV shows. I mentioned Ross and Rachel, but *Friends* is not actually something you can watch in India. However, there are some "Bold and the Beautiful" type shows, and mostly things like Bollywood movies, serials, game shows, and to some extent sports. To give you a very literal sense of what is on, the most popular show in India, and it's been the most popular show for almost a decade, is called "Because a Mother-In-Law Was Once a Daughter-In-Law Also." Meet Govardhan Virani, a powerful industrialist. Govardhan lives with his family: his wife, three kids, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. They all live in his family home, ironically named Shantiniketan, which means peacefulness. This is ironic because he has three daughters-in-law, Savita, Daksha, and Gayatri, who love nothing better than to put the rest of the family through trying times. Packed into this are four weddings, and unfortunately a funeral – or is it really? No, it ends up not being a funeral, because the deceased is not really dead! He has amnesia, and we are left wondering whether he will cure himself in time to keep his wife from marrying again. Will the doctor who nursed Mihir back to health ever realize and accept that he can never be hers?

You must be familiar with this plot line. It has all the familiar elements: amnesia, funerals, weddings, a lot of personal conflict, and, if you watch these shows like "The Bold and the Beautiful", it is pretty easy to follow. But if you watch these kinds of shows, it does not really seem like the show is about female empowerment. Many people in India claim that this show is very traditionally oriented, there is a good deal of staying home with the family and respect for your spouse. But even though gender equity and women's status are not really central, there are some things you can see in the description that would have been quite different from experiences that women would be having in rural areas, where we are thinking about these events. There are some points of interest with this program. For example, there was a female doctor nursing Mihir, and in general women tend to have jobs, high-powered jobs. In addition this show is set in an urban area, and empirically attitudes towards women in urban areas are more liberal than in rural areas in India.

It is not crazy to think that the general way in which people behave on such



shows would be more egalitarian than TV viewers see in their daily lives. In fact, there has been some work in anthropology where researchers interview people and ask things about what they thought the effects of TV would be. And people suggested that TV lets men and women “open up a lot more”. Some men in these areas actually complain that they have to do a lot more chores now. There is actually sizeable literature on this, pointing to the idea that TV brings on some of these effects. So having established that it is plausible that TV might have these effects, how can we identify them?

We can think about the problem like this: if I love TV, and I am interested in women’s studies, how might I figure out if cable TV is affecting women’s status? One thing we could do is take a basic ethnographic, anthropological approach. We could go to people and say, “I noticed you recently got cable TV, what effect has that had on your attitudes towards women?” That is actually a reasonable way to get some information, and we have learned a lot from this sort of literature. But I think there are a couple of drawbacks to this approach. Firstly, it is hard to get a very big sample if you are asking in depth questions. And it is difficult to quantify these results. If people say, “It has a big effect”, well what does that mean? Big relative to what you expect? Big relative to some actual measure of bigness? It is very hard to figure out what they mean. And even more, it is very difficult to ask people this question in a way that does not lead them to say one thing or another.

Another thing we could do would be to compare places that have cable TV to places that do not. We can get some data from two different places: we could go to Delhi which has TV, and to a rural village in Bihar which does not, and ask people what they think about the status of women. We could ask them some of these questions we showed you in the beginning: Who makes decisions about healthcare? Who makes the decisions about permission to visit the family? Is it acceptable for husbands to beat their wives? And then we could compare the areas that have cable to the areas that do not, Delhi to this tiny village in Bihar. But the problem with this is that it is very hard to find places that are otherwise identical, but where one has TV and the other does not. The comparison between Delhi and Bihar is not so good, since many things are different. For one thing, Delhi is an urban area, thus it has more contact with the West. It is very hard to think about this cross sectional exercise, because there are so many other variables, so many other features of the world, which are going to be different between any two places we might choose.

So, we chose to take a panel data approach. Figure 9 is a graphical illustration of what we did. For this study, we have 2500 women in 80 villages in India. We interviewed each of these women 3 years in a row: 2001, 2002, and 2003. When

## A Simple Methodology

- 2500 women, 180 villages (Bihar, Goa, Haryana, Delhi, Tamil Nadu)
  - Interviewed in: 2001, 2002, 2003

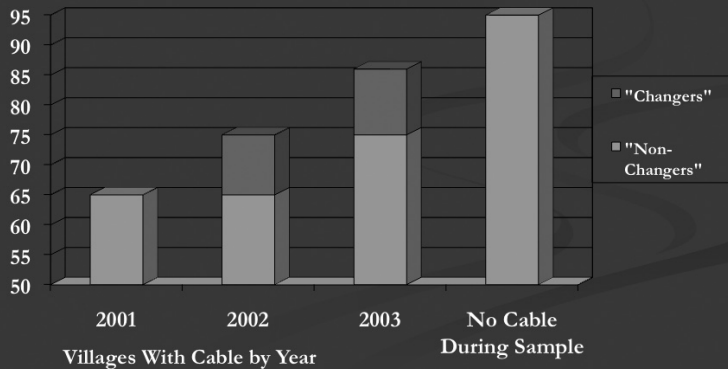


FIGURE 9

we arrived in India in 2001, 65 of these villages had cable access, but when we came back a year later, 75 of them had access. Ten of the villages got access to cable television between 2001 and 2002. And when we came back a third year, 11 more got cable between. So we have 10 villages that got cable between the first two rounds of the survey, and 11 more who got it between the second two rounds of the survey. And we have some villages that always had it, and some villages who never have it. So our identification, the way we are going to think about the effect of cable, to report changes in the attitudes towards women over time, is villages that changed their cable status versus villages that did not change their cable status. We are going to say that other than this change in cable status, there is not much change in these villages, and in fact, by comparing the changes over time, we were able to identify these effects, and which we will get to shortly.

The first issue to think about is whether changes in cable status correlate with changes in TV watching. There was broadcast TV in place in all of these villages before the introduction of cable. And it could turn out that, as happened in the US, people watched exactly the same amount of TV, but maybe they watched something a little different with the introduction of cable. This would make it very hard for us to pick up any effects in our study. But assuming this change in

patterns of TV watching exists, we are then going to ask whether adding cable correlates with changes in women's status.

What is really nice about this picture is that all of the results can be seen without numbers. Figure 10 is asking the question, "Does cable promote TV watching?" We have four categories of villages: we have villages that always had cable, we have villages that get cable between 2001 and 2002, we have villages that get cable between 2002 and 2003, and then we have villages that never have cable. And what is shown by the white bars is the share of people reporting that they watched TV in 2001, the light grey bar shows how many watched TV in 2002, and the dark grey bar is for 2003. You can see that, for the villages that always have cable and never have cable, the groups on the ends, TV watching is actually pretty flat over time; in fact, it does not really seem like there are a lot of changes in TV watching in these areas. In contrast, for the villages who got cable between '01 and '02, there is a really big difference, nearly a 40 percentage point increase in the share of people who say they watched TV in the last week, and this specifically happens between 2001 and 2002. When you move over to the one to the right, where we see villages that got cable before 2003, we see another big increase, but it does not happen until 2003. This is the kind of graph we would expect to see if cable

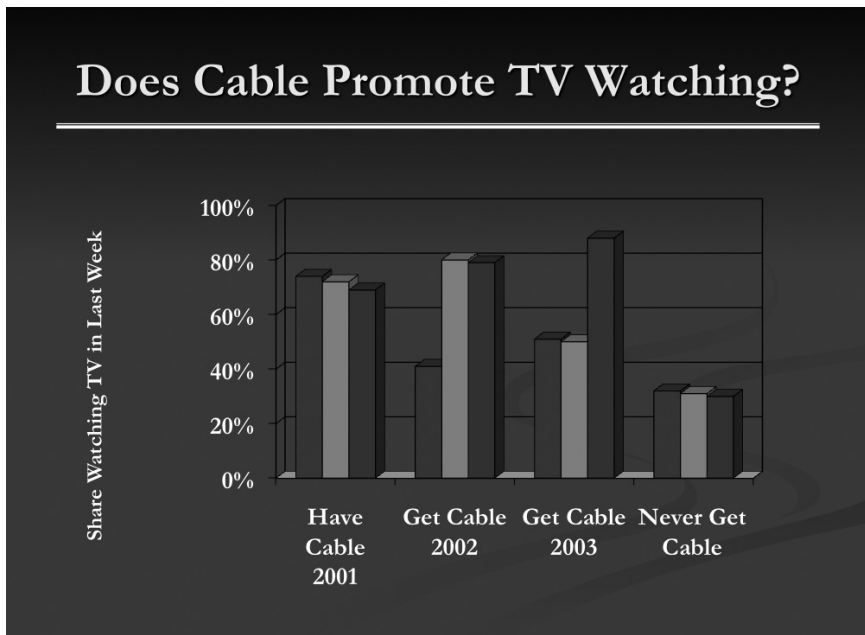


FIGURE 10

had an effect on TV watching. We would see no changes in the places that do not have a change in cable status, and changes in the places that do have changes in their cable status, and those changes would be correlated in terms of timing with the changes in cable access. The changes to look at would be changes between '01 and '02 for the first group, and changes between '02 and '03 for the second group. The first result is that, in fact, getting cable really does increase TV watching, and it's about a 40% increase.

Now let's look at some of our results. The first thing we want to look at is son preference, which is shown in Figure 11. I said in the beginning that a big issue that people think about is excess female mortality, the fact that there are not as many women in the population as we would expect. A lot of that seems to be about sex selective abortion anomalies, and some of that seems to be driven by people saying, "I really, really want boys." What we're looking at in Figure 11 is the share of women who say they want more children, and responded yes when they were asked, "do you want your next kid to be a boy?" The other choices are, "I want my kid to be a girl," or "I don't care." Almost no-one says they want a girl, but a lot people say they do not care. You can see for the villages that always have cable or never have cable, these proportions are quite flat. There is really no change in son

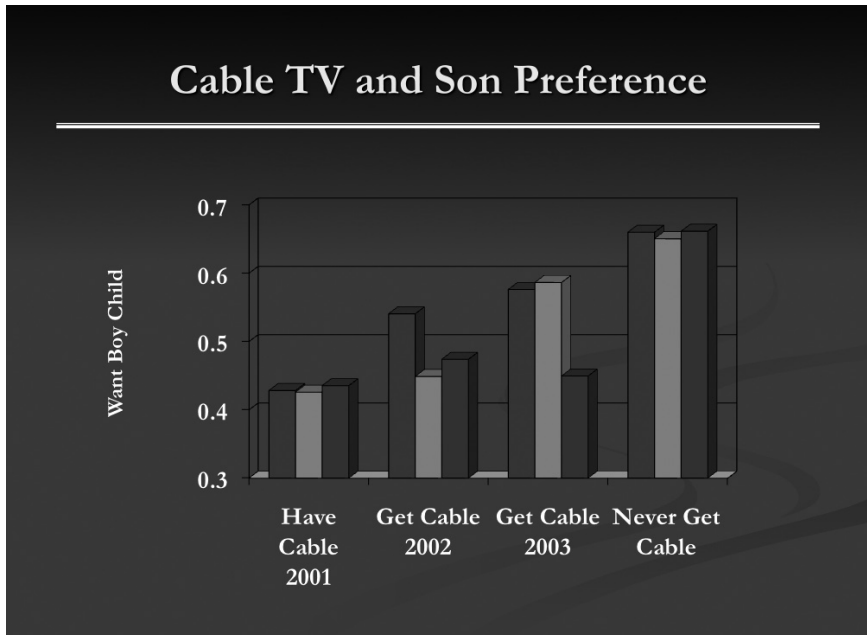


FIGURE 11

preference over this time period. However, we see decreases in the son preference for both the groups who changed cable status in '02 and the ones who changed it in '03. And those changes, just as in the graph about TV watching, are correlated with the timing of their cable access.

Figure 12 provides a second set of data oriented toward autonomy. This is a compilation of many questions asked of women about their ability to make decisions on their own. It includes, do you make decisions about your healthcare? Do you make decisions about purchases? Can you keep your own money? And so on. Here again we see the same pattern: this is flat for ones who do not change their status, and there are increases in this variable, improvements in autonomy, for both sets of villages that changed their status, and those changes are correlated with the timing of the changes in cable status.

Finally, in addition to these attitudes, we actually tried to look a little bit at some behaviors, and in particular at pregnancy. This is perhaps a little bit less obviously connected to the status of women, but one of the things you see in the literature is that when women have more bargaining power in the household, they tend to have fewer children. We looked, in Figure 13, to see whether a change in women's status is actually related to a change in pregnancy. The sample group

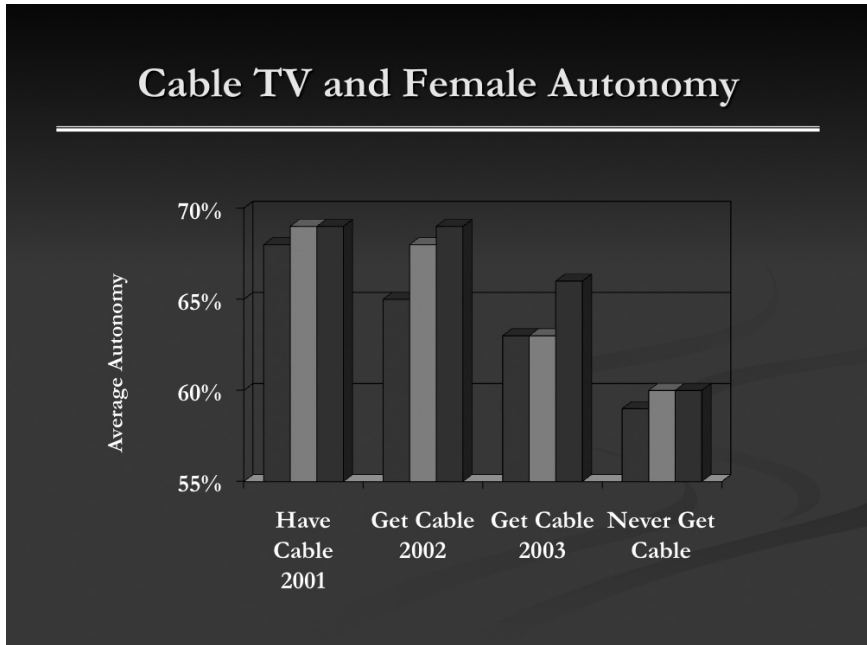


FIGURE 12

## Cable TV and Pregnancy

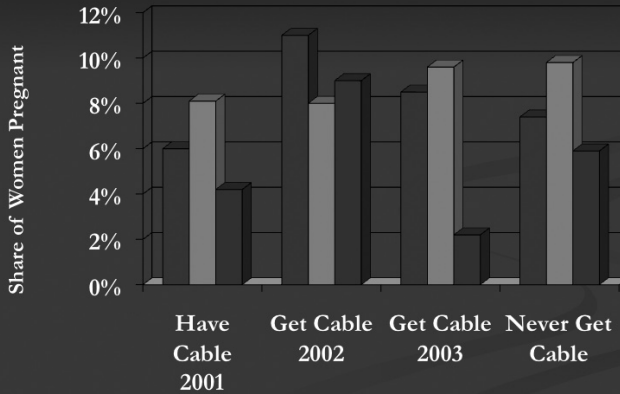


FIGURE 13

for women who are at risk for pregnancy is quite a bit smaller, but again we see no strong trend for the groups that do not change, and we see a big change for the ones who got cable in 2002 and 2003, likewise correlated in terms of timing, with their change in status.

Given these effects, one question to ask is how big the changes are. There are a couple ways to think about this. One is to say that, depending on which measure you are thinking about, these changes are equivalent to something between two and ten years of education for women. To explain, there is a lot of evidence that education for women is correlated with better status for women, and the effect of TV is very large relative to the effect of education. Another way to put it, more informatively, is that this change is large enough to “move” these rural areas between 45% and 70% of the way towards urban centers. There are some big differences between rural and urban areas to begin with, but this closes those differences by about half, or even a bit more, just from having cable for one year. So these changes happen very quickly, and they are actually quite significant.

A lot of the things I showed you pertained to these reported habits and these behaviors, and while I think it is good for women if they have more ability to make decisions for themselves, there is a sense in which it is not a real outcome.

The other thing we looked at is schooling for children. As I said in the beginning, a big argument in favor of improving the status of women is that it is good for their kids, so in the research we also look at patterns of schooling for children. And we find that even in administrative data, which are totally separate data sets from ours on the status of women, we actually see improvements in school enrollment after the introduction of cable. There is about a 2-5% increase in school enrollment in the year after cable introduction.

Before I conclude, I want to note that from a research standpoint there are really two central issues in addition to the results I've shown so far. The number one issue in all empirical economics research today is: are these effects plausible? Does the evidence that I show you mean that if I gave people access to cable TV, that it would cause them to change women's status? This is an important issue, and there are not a lot of ways for us to get at an answer. I think the big thing that people are concerned about is that something else is changing; modernity and technology are changing all the time; some villages are getting more modern, other ones are not getting more modern, but the faster you are getting modern, the more likely you are to adopt cable, and that also affects the status of women. This is a big problem, that there might be some kind of background trend or cause behind these variables that we cannot pick up. It is a little difficult to try to test this, but the one thing we can do, if you refer back to those figures, is to actually look at the groups who changed their cable status in 2003. These are observations for which we have 2001-2002, a period for which we do not think there should be any changes in status, and then we have 2002-2003. If there were a background cause that was somehow predictive of getting cable, we would expect to see some anticipation of that change in the outcomes for those who changed their cable status in 2003. And, in fact, we see no evidence of that: in all of these outcomes that we are looking at, we look at the changes between '01 and '02 for the group who will get cable in the following year, and we do not see any evidence that those people are changing any faster than some comparable set of villages that do not get cable. We can also look to a few villages who change cable status in the year after the '03 survey, and those groups also see no effect.

An additional issue is that even if you believe that cable TV would change the status of women, we still have to ask what is driving these events. To take in much of what I have showed you, it seems like I think these effects are caused by people wanting to copy people on television; that I change my attitudes because that is what I see on TV. And I think that is certainly a plausible story; I have a feeling it is true. But, of course, the evidence in this study does not rule out a variety of other explanations. For example, changes in time use or opportunity cost: now I

want to spend a lot of time watching TV, and maybe the thing that I substitute for is this time I was previously spending asking for permission to do things. Now, I just use all of that for TV time. It could also be I see all sorts of stuff on TV that I want, and that makes me want to spend more money, and so I do not have as many kids because I really need a Wii Fit. In exchange for my Wii Fit, I'll have no kids. That is another thing that it is hard for us to rule out.

Of course, even if we answered this question, I think there are still other unanswered questions here, and that is what is so fascinating about economic research; there is always something new to do. Some of the unanswered questions include: Why is TV good? We talked a little about that, and we could talk about what content is especially good. I made the case that entertainment is good because it gets people to watch the TV, but is there some specific kind of entertainment? Are informational programs terrible? Can we make them more entertaining? What if we had reality TV? These are all the kinds of questions we can think about answering. Another question I do not really understand the answer to is, whether there is likely to be a backlash here? Many people in the US grumble if you watch too much TV, saying it is rotting your brain. In India, we do not see a lot of that, but is that eventually going to happen? It is hard to say.

From a policy perspective, if we buy that this was a good idea, then we have to ask the question, is there a way to increase the spread of cable TV? Maybe the government agencies should be all about buying people TVs, and putting them in their houses. What is good, from a policy perspective, is that most people are going to get TV for sure. People love TV, and they are constantly trying to get it. So the government probably does not have to do too much here, and in fact, there are some very isolated areas, where people wondered about how they were going to get TV, and now it turns out that Direct TV, or some kind of satellite option, is becoming increasingly available. So from a policy standpoint, the government staying out of the way is the best way to get everyone to have a TV.

In conclusion, I hope you have learned something tonight about the effect of TV on the status of women in rural India. Beyond that, I hope you've also learned something about how economic research is done – how common sense, careful thinking, and some basic empirical study can help answer questions we have about life and culture. As such, economics has much to offer in better understanding our world and as a result much to offer in helping us to make our world a better place to live.









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