

PAA Abstract Submission
Session 703: Educational Enrollment and Attainment
23 September 2004

1 Long abstract, 2-4 pages
1 Short abstract, 150 words

Gender Turmoil in Educational Attainment: Exploring and Reconciling Conflicting Evidence

Sara R. Curran¹, Sarah Martin², Sureeporn Punpuing³, Amara Soonthorndhada⁴

Abstract

Debates about the gender gap in education in many developing countries have lead to redoubled efforts to understand education patterns. In this study we examine longitudinal survey data from two different parts of Thailand and show shifting patterns of secondary and tertiary school attainment across cohorts of young men and women in a context of rapid social change. Interestingly, attainment rates vary in unexpected ways across social contexts whether comparing villages or rural-urban differences. We explore whether the novelty of schools and resources for schooling beyond the primary level may provide one explanation. We also examine qualitative evidence collected from youth, parents and community leaders in Kanchanaburi Province. We find discursive inertia among youth and parents concerning the importance and feasibility of schooling for all youth, but especially for girls. We propose that “cultural” inertia provides one explanation for the variability in outcomes and must be overcome to quickly realize equitable education opportunities for all youth in Thailand.

¹ Department of Sociology, Princeton University

² Office of Population Research, Princeton University

³ Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University

⁴ Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University

PAA Abstract Submission
Session 703: Educational Enrollment and Attainment
23 September 2004

1 Long abstract, 2-4 pages
1 Short abstract, 150 words

Gender Turmoil in Educational Attainment: Exploring and Reconciling Conflicting Evidence

Sara R. Curran⁵, Sarah Martin⁶, Sureeporn Punpuing⁷, Amara Soonthorndhada⁸

Detailed Abstract

Research Question and Motivation

Debates about the gender gap in education in many developing countries (King 1991; Knodel 1997; Knodel and Jones 1996) have led to redoubled efforts to understand patterns of educational attainment and enrollments. In this study we examine longitudinal survey data from two different parts of Thailand to show the shifting patterns of secondary and tertiary school attainment across cohorts of young men and women in a context of rapid social change. We find that attainment rates vary dramatically across social contexts whether comparing villages or rural-urban differences. These rates also vary in unexpected and puzzling ways. The relatively recent increase in schools and resources for schooling beyond the primary level may provide one explanation – we examine this possibility with information about scholarships and the timing of school establishment. We also turn to qualitative evidence collected recently from youth, parents and community leaders in Kanchanaburi Province. We find considerable inertia among youth and parents concerning the importance and feasibility of schooling for all youth, but especially for girls. The inertia appears rooted in conceptions of the risks posed to daughters and families when girls go to secondary school, the lack of financial resources to mitigate these risks, and limited social networks to provide a safety net to ensure healthy and upwardly mobile transitions to adulthood. We propose that this “cultural” inertia may provide one explanation for the considerable variability in outcomes (Buchmann 2000). Hence, it will take an additional and considerable national effort to overcome this inertia through both scholarship resources and social support networks to improve and equalize educational attainment among youth in Thailand.

Data and Analytic Approach

Our data come from the Kanchanaburi Demographic Surveillance Survey (K’buri DSS). The K’buri DSS is currently in the midst of its fourth wave of data collection (2000-2004) and includes demographic and health information from residents in 100 rural and urban communities. In addition, the data include household and community

⁵ Department of Sociology, Princeton University

⁶ Office of Population Research, Princeton University

⁷ Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University

⁸ Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University

level variables and spatially referenced information about community location, public facilities and institutions, as well physical infrastructure and environment characteristics. We complement our analyses of the K'buri DSS with analysis of data from the 1984, 1994 and 2000 Nang Rong Surveys. The Nang Rong Surveys were conducted in a different region of Thailand, but collect similar information from residents in 50 villages. From these data we can piece together a detailed picture of recent and historic patterns of educational attainment across male and female youth in Thailand. In addition, we can explore a variety of covariates that might explain gender differentials across communities and contexts.

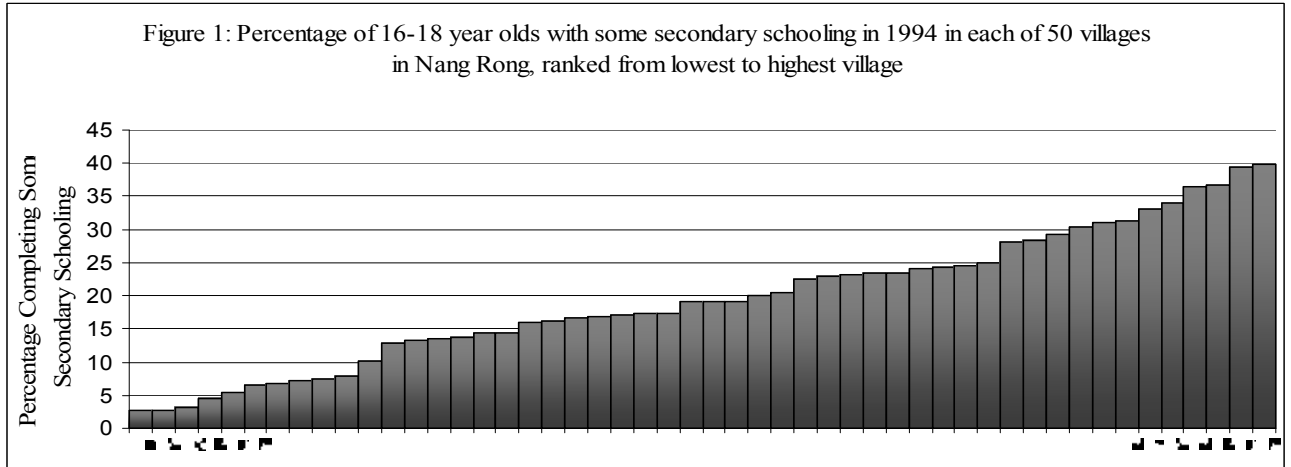
In a first, and very simple, cut of the K'buri DSS data from a limited set of communities for one year we find some interesting and unexpected findings (Table 1).

Location Ages	Rural				Urban			
	15-19		20-24		15-19		20-24	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	female	Male	Female
no education	6.3(3)	7.5(4)	8.1(3)	8.9(4)	-	1.1(1)	1.4(1)	3.1(3)
primary	18.8(9)	9.4(5)	40.5(15)	57.8(26)	14.3(12)	17.6(16)	21.9(16)	25.8(25)
lower secondary	41.7(20)	52.8(28)	18.9(7)	13.3(6)	44.0(37)	29.7(27)	24.7(18)	15.5(15)
higher secondary	33.3(16)	30.2(16)	16.2(6)	13.3(6)	32.1(27)	47.3(43)	31.5(23)	27.8(27)
tertiary	-	-	13.5(5)	6.7(3)	7.1(6)	4.4(4)	19.2(14)	27.8(27)
non-formal	-	-	2.7(1)	-	2.4(2)	-	1.4(1)	-
Total								
	100.0	100	100.0	100	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

We find that in rural areas a higher proportion of females than males have some secondary schooling among younger cohorts. On the other hand, and unexpectedly, these patterns are not matched in urban areas for the same age group.

We will extend our analyses of the data to the full 100 communities and to all four waves of data. Doing so will allow us to explore a variety of individual, household and village level covariates that might explain patterns of educational attainment as they differ across young men and women. In addition, we will explore spatial variability and proximity to public and market resources.

Similarly, in Nang Rong we find considerable variability in secondary school completion in 1994 (Figure 1). Figure 1 shows the distribution across villages from lowest to highest rank of secondary schooling among 16-18 year olds.



Our analyses of the Nang Rong data will be extended to include the 2000 wave of the survey. Recently revised school establishment data which is georeferenced will be incorporated into our analyses of educational attainment among different youth cohorts. This analysis will be an extension of work previously published (Curran, Chung, Cadge, and Varangrat 2004). Our extension of this analysis will also analyze the role of social networks (as defined by household ties to village labor networks and siblings within villages and outside the village) for influencing educational attainment.

To complement our quantitative data analysis we draw upon 72 focus group interviews conducted during 2002 and 2003 in Kanchanaburi province. In these interviews we explored adolescent transitions to adulthood in five realms of life, home, school, work, leisure, and health. Significant discussions in all of the interviews explored the role of schooling, the decision-making frames for investing in education, the perceptions of the value of school, and the tradeoffs both experienced and expected between schooling and other life realms (particularly work, but also health). We use the findings from these interviews to reflect upon the explained and unexplained education differentials in our quantitative data analysis.

Reference List

1. Buchmann, Claudia. 2000. "Family Structure, Parental Perceptions, and Child Labor in Kenya: What Factors Determine Who Is Enrolled in School?" *Social Forces* 78(4):1349-79.
2. Curran, Sara R., Chang Y. Chung, Wendy Cadge, and Anchalee Varangrat. 2004. "Boys and Girls' Changing Educational Opportunities in Thailand: The Effects of Siblings, Migration, and Village Remoteness ." *Review of Sociology of Education* 14:59-102.
3. King, E. 1991. *Educating Girls and Women: Investing in Development*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
4. Knodel, John. 1997. "The Closing of the Gender Gap in Schooling: The Case of Thailand." *Comparative Education Review* 33(1):61-86.
5. Knodel, John and Gavin Jones. 1996. "Post-Cairo Population Policy: Does Promoting Girls' Schooling Miss the Mark?" *Population and Development Review* 22(4):683-702.