

WHO MISSED SCHOOL? CASTE IN RURAL PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This paper utilizes primary data on literacy and school participation from four villages in Pakistan in order to test some hypotheses concerning social segmentation and schooling. There is now a growing body of empirical literature on the determinants of schooling in Pakistan. The most common explanatory variables relate to the characteristics of individuals (such as gender and age) and of families (such as parental schooling, income and wealth). Some of the more sophisticated studies have also begun to focus on community characteristics (such as quality of schooling services supplied). The data generated by the study provide, in addition, a rare opportunity for examining the importance of "caste" in rural Pakistan.

The data used in this paper were collected as part of a survey of schools in communities in rural Pakistan in 1999. The main aim of that study was to investigate the conditions of government primary schools, and to develop a political economy of school performance. A total of over one hundred government schools were surveyed. In addition to the school survey, however, a population census was conducted in four of the seventy-plus survey villages - in the districts of Muzaffargarh, Toba Tek Singh, Chakwal, and Mardan, respectively. The population census included questions about education and school participation, as well as about household characteristics such as land ownership and caste. The dataset encompasses over four thousand individuals in over five hundred households.

Village census data presented here confirm the findings of other studies about the correlation between gender, age, household wealth, and the quality of schooling facilities, and educational indicators such as literacy and school participation rates. In addition, caste appears to be a close correlate of education. Multivariate tests indicate, in fact, that the caste effect tends to dominate wealth as a determinant of education. This finding is of some importance given the paucity of caste data in Pakistan. Moreover, the data show that the public schooling appears to mitigate the caste effect in some cases but not others. Prior conditions of social hierarchy are important sources of friction in this regard.