Abstract

1. We analyze the rural household and village questionnaires from the China Household Ethic Survey (CHES 2011), which covers households and villages from 728 villages in 81 counties of 7 provinces with substantial minority populations in China.

2. We analyze heterogeneous effects of consolidation on educational outcomes (attainment, reported national language ability) across groups defined at the intersections of minority status, gender, and community characteristics (poverty status, ethnic composition). We apply a difference-in-difference approach:

\[ E_{\text{Privit}} = \alpha + \beta_l + \gamma_p + \delta_u + \eta_i \]

- Without school closure, educational attainment \( E_0(\text{child } i \text{ from village } v \text{ in province } p; \text{at age } a \text{ in 2011}) \) could be decomposed into: a constant \( \alpha \), a village fixed effect \( \beta_v \), a province-specific age fixed effect \( \gamma_p \), a minority status-specific age fixed effect \( \delta_u \), and idiosyncratic terms (observed characteristics \( \theta_i \) and unobserved error term \( \epsilon_i \)).

- With school closure, the policy effect is assumed to be additive and captured by \( \beta^{\text{Cold}} \) for Han individuals and \( \beta^{\text{Cold}} \) for minority individuals; the effect is constant within age group \( z \) defined by age-at-closure \( t \) (with lower and upper bounds for each group \( i \) and \( s_i \)). Here, \( C_i \) is a binary variable indicating if individual \( i \) is from a village \( s \) with school consolidation (i.e., a treatment village).

Data and method

Descriptive findings

Sample analysis and full results summary

Background

Sparse school-age populations are an emerging challenge in rural, as well as urban, settings in many countries, and consolidation is a common policy response. Marginalized populations might be particularly vulnerable to institutional loss.

China experienced a school-aged population drop and consolidated rural schools on a massive scale in the early 21st Century.

Table interpretation:

- By 2011, minority youth ages 10 to 13 at time of closure in a closure village experienced about a 0.6-year decrement in years of schooling. For those 6 to 9 years old at closure, the decrement is around a half-year. Results are similar by community ethnic composition.

- Full results summary (details available via link to the full paper):
  - There is clear evidence of an average negative effect of closure on two of the three outcomes studied, educational attainment and reported written Mandarin ability, for minority youth, compared to Han youth.
  - Additional analyses indicated that average decrements experienced by minority youth masked significant heterogeneities at the intersections of youth statuses.
  - For example, for both educational attainment and written language facility, penalties accruing to minority youth occurred only in poorer villages and not to minority youth in wealthier villages.
  - Penalties were generally heavier for minority girls. However, in the most ethnically segregated minority villages, boys from minority families were highly vulnerable to closure effects on educational attainment and written Mandarin facility.

Implications

- While the nature and specific impacts of school consolidation policies likely vary across countries, rationales across the world are strikingly similar, as are the concerns about potential implications for children in socially and economically marginalized communities.
- Findings illustrate the importance of considering heterogeneous policy impacts along intersecting dimensions of stratification.