

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Social Science Research

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ssresearch

Pushed or pulled? Girls and boys facing early school leaving risk in Italy

Camilla Borgna^{*},¹, Emanuela Struffolino¹

WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Reichpietschufer 50, 10785 Berlin, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 October 2015

Received in revised form 13 May 2016

Accepted 29 June 2016

Available online xxx

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of dropout or early school leaving is worrisome, not only for its high economic costs in terms of wasted skills but also because it can exacerbate social inequalities. Students from low social strata run a greater risk of dropping out of school because their families are less equipped with economic, social, and cultural resources that can counteract school disengagement processes (Alexander et al., 1997; Chen and Gregory, 2009; Weihua Fan, 2012). Students who drop out of school and therefore enter the labor market without an upper-secondary qualification tend to experience difficulties in transitioning to their first job (Rumberger and Lamb, 2003; Solga, 2002), in later labor market integration (Gesthuizen, 2004; Gesthuizen and Scheepers, 2010; Vries and Wolbers, 2005), and in other life-course domains, such as health (Oreopoulos, 2007). Hence, early school leaving constitutes an additional penalty for students who are already disadvantaged by their socio-economic background.

Looking at gender differences in early school leaving, we encounter a more complex picture because neither boys nor girls can unequivocally be seen as the weaker group: while women still face labor market disadvantages in most industrialized societies, they have caught up to men in terms of educational attainment and, in many countries, even overtaken them (Buchmann et al., 2008). Moreover, female students have long obtained higher grades than their male peers (Mickelson, 1989); they also display more positive attitudes towards school, and have higher educational aspirations (Schoon and Eccles, 2014).

Scholars who investigate the determinants of early school leaving distinguish between “push factors,” which alienate students from the school system (Fine, 1986; Jordan et al., 1996), and “pull factors,” such as the availability of work, which provide incentives for them to leave it (McNeal, 1997). Previous studies have shown that generally boys tend to drop out more frequently than girls do (Bradley and Renzulli, 2011; McNeal, 2011), but it is unclear whether these gender differences are

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: camilla.borgna@wzb.eu (C. Borgna).

¹ The authors are listed in alphabetical order and contributed equally to the article.

driven by pull or push factors. On the one hand, the labor market might represent a more profitable alternative to school for boys than it does for girls. On the other hand, boys may be more vulnerable to push factors connected with academic failure.

In this article, we study gender differences in early school leaving by integrating insights from the gender inequality literature into the theoretical framework of push and pull factors. While much of our knowledge on the early school leaving dynamics comes from the American context, our contribution focuses on Italy, a typical Southern-European country characterized by problematic school-to-work transitions and by pronounced gender inequalities in the labor market. Early school leaving is a sizeable phenomenon in Italy: even in the youngest cohorts, almost 20% of students did not complete upper-secondary education (Eurostat, 2014). Among early school leavers, men outnumber women by three to two (OECD, 2015b). This is not surprising, given, on the one hand, the disproportionate concentration of boys among low-achieving students (OECD, 2015b, 2016) and, on the other hand, the aforementioned difficulties women face when competing with men in the labor market, especially in the access to low-skilled occupations (ISTAT, 2013). Yet, to our knowledge, gender differences in early school leaving in Italy have not been systematically investigated by any study.

Our analyses are based on two sources of nationally representative data: the *Participation, Labor, Unemployment Survey* (PLUS), which contains information on young cohorts as a whole, and the *Early School Leaving Dynamics Survey* (ESLD), a unique dataset on the educational trajectories of students with a poor scholastic performance. We empirically assess whether boys are more likely to drop out, i.e., to leave the educational system without an upper-secondary degree, and whether their weaker scholastic performance can explain these gender differences. Additionally, we investigate whether gender effects are homogenous or vary across different levels of school performance and parental education. Finally, we combine the individual-level information with data on the 20 Italian regions: by exploiting the territorial fragmentation of the Italian labor market, we assess whether males' greater propensity to drop out can be explained by better relative opportunities in the local labor markets.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1. Gender, school performance, and dropout

During the last century, gender differences in educational attainment have changed fundamentally: for a long time, the educational careers of women were shorter than those of men, but starting with the cohorts born in the 1960s this pattern progressively disappeared and was even reversed in most industrialized countries (Barro and Lee, 2013; OECD, 2015b). In contrast, the female advantage in educational achievement has a longer history: girls tend to have higher grades than boys (Buchmann et al., 2008), and they did so even at times when men reached higher educational levels than women (Alexander and Eckland, 1974; Mickelson, 1989).

It is unlikely that the better scholastic performance of girls reflects superior cognitive endowments, since, while girls generally do better than boys in reading, they often do worse when it comes to mathematics and scientific skills (Marks, 2008; OECD, 2015b; Stoet and Geary, 2013). Instead, girls seem to be better equipped with a number of social and behavioral skills that have a positive impact on school performance (DiPrete and Jennings, 2012; Duckworth and Seligman, 2006; Fortin et al., 2013). They tend to be more self-disciplined and learning-oriented, while boys are more likely to display attention disorders and externalizing behaviors, resulting in a disruptive attitude in the classroom (Buchmann et al., 2008; Matthews et al., 2009). In addition, compared to boys, girls generally have more positive attitudes towards school and place more importance on academic success (Schoon and Eccles, 2014). Since grades reward not only achievement, but also effort and classroom participation, such social and behavioral skills might benefit girls in two ways: first by facilitating their learning processes and second by raising teachers' assessments.

Grades play an important role in guiding students' transitions (Jackson, 2013; Stocké, 2007). In the early school leaving literature, low grades are considered a push factor contributing to students' estrangement from school (Bradley and Renzulli, 2011; Fine, 1986, 1991; Jordan et al., 1996; Stearns and Glennie, 2006; Stearns et al., 2007). Grades are better predictors of dropout than standardized test scores, possibly because they are more visible signals for the students (Ensminger and Slusarcick, 1992; Stearns et al., 2007). Besides poor scholastic performance, other push factors include disciplinary issues, relational problems with teachers or peers, late coming, and feelings of being out of place in the school environment (Fine, 1986; Jordan et al., 1996). While these factors are clearly interrelated with achievement, they are independently associated to dropout (Bradley and Renzulli, 2011).

Our basic hypothesis is that *boys generally drop out of school more than girls do (H1)*. Building on the above-mentioned literature on gender educational inequalities and on push factors of dropout, we develop the following hypotheses concerning prior scholastic performance. First of all, we expect *the higher propensity of boys to drop out to be partially explained by their lower grades (H2a)*. Moreover, since girls tend to be more persistent and to have higher educational aspirations than their male peers, we expect them to be more resilient to academic failure as opposed to boys, whose more casual attitude towards school makes them "give up" more easily when faced with low grades. Therefore, our additional hypothesis concerning prior scholastic performance is that *among low-achieving students, the higher propensity to drop out displayed by boys compared to girls is even stronger (H2b)*.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات