

Accepted Manuscript

Title: Female Babies and Risk-aversion: Causal Evidence from Hospital Wards

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PII: S0167-6296(17)30453-8

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2017.12.006>

Reference: JHE 2087

To appear in: *Journal of Health Economics*

Received date: 15-5-2017

Revised date: 17-11-2017

Accepted date: 29-12-2017

Please cite this article as: Pogrebna, Ganna, Oswald, Andrew J., Haig, David, Female Babies and Risk-aversion: Causal Evidence from Hospital Wards. *Journal of Health Economics* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2017.12.006>

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FEMALE BABIES AND RISK-AVERSION: CAUSAL EVIDENCE
FROM HOSPITAL WARDS*

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17 November 2017

Abstract

Using ultrasound scan data from paediatric hospitals, and the exogenous ‘shock’ of learning the gender of an unborn baby, the paper documents the first causal evidence that offspring gender affects adult risk-aversion. On a standard Holt-Laury criterion, parents of daughters, whether unborn or recently born, become almost twice as risk-averse as parents of sons. The study demonstrates this in longitudinal and cross-sectional data, for fathers and mothers, for babies in the womb and new-born children, and in a West European nation and East European nation. These findings may eventually aid our understanding of risky health behaviors and gender inequalities.

JEL Classification: I10, J16, C93, C90, D81

Keywords: pregnancy, risk attitudes, daughters, child gender

* Acknowledgement: We thank the referees, the editor, and Dalton Conley, Clement Chaise-Martin, Amanda Goodall, Botond Koszegi, Ulrike Malmendier, and Carl Veller, for their helpful comments and suggestions. The research described in the paper was sponsored by the Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship “Pregnancy, Parenting and Risk Attitudes” awarded to Ganna Pogrebna. We are grateful to the maternity hospital in southern Ukraine for help in collecting the Ukrainian data. In the United Kingdom, we thank Professor Dilly Anumba and research midwives Alison Carey, Anne Chamberlain, Hillary Rosser, Sarah Senbeto, and Siobhan Gillespie for help in collecting the UK sample in the Jessop Wing Unit at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals (STH) NHS Trust. We thank the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) for financial support provided to the STH research team. We thank Daniele Swain for administrative assistance and the STH research coordinators Clare Pye, Lema Vernon and Angela Pinder. Andrew Oswald acknowledges funding through the CAGE centre from the UK Economic and Social Research Council. Ganna Pogrebna also acknowledges financial support from RCUK/EPSRC research grants EP/N028422/1 and EP/P011896/1. The authors declare no competing financial interests.

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