

# Insuring Girls' Lives Against Drought\*

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## Abstract

This paper revisits the relationship between agricultural productivity shocks and excess female infant mortality in India and investigates how this relationship changes when households have access to employment opportunities outside of agriculture. When a household's preference for sons coincides with adverse agricultural productivity shocks, households tend to disproportionately reduce care (prenatal or post-natal) for their female children. This leads to a relatively more balanced sex-ratio in good rainfall years and a more skewed sex-ratio (in favor of boys) in bad rainfall years. We show that a rural workfare program in India, which decouples both wages and consumption from rainfall, attenuates the relationship between rain and the sex-ratio of infants. Using a back-of-the-envelope calculation, we find that the program could have saved around 550 girls per district per year if the government had implemented it in the years 2001 to 2005. Lastly, we show that the program also attenuates (a) the effect of birth-year rainfall on long-run health outcomes of the surviving girls; and (b) the effect of rainfall on older women's mortality outcomes such as dowry death.

*Keywords:* sex ratio, health investments, gender, dowry deaths, rain, consumption smoothing, workfare program, National Rural Employment Guarantee, India

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