

Life and death under son preference. Effect of economic shocks on the fertility and mortality in rural Spain from a gender perspective, 1750-1950.

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Relying on longitudinal micro data from 17 Spanish rural villages between 1750 and 1950, this paper assesses whether discriminatory practices affected fertility and sex-specific mortality during infancy and childhood during economic crises. In particular, our aim is to explore the consequences of economic shocks on registered fertility and infant and child mortality by gender and socioeconomic level in the short-, and long-term, in a rural area with a strong preference for sons. Economic shocks are identified using information on yearly prices of basic foods and wages of day-labourers for a locality in the study area and for the very close town of Zaragoza.

Preliminary results suggest a connection between economic shocks, fertility and sex ratios at baptism (most of the baptisms were in the first 24 hours after the birth of the child). In this regard, during the years of high prices, the number of registered baptisms decreased and the sex ratios at baptism increased. Moreover, sex ratios seemed to have increased in the decades following an economic shock. Therefore, our paper could be evidencing that families mortally neglected a significant fraction of their female babies during economic crises period, both in the short- and long-term.

In relation to mortality, we analysed the excess mortality that girls experienced in the study area (especially visible in the 1-5 age group) to explore whether it was even more negative in the years of economic shocks and in the subsequent years. At the same time, we explore how these patterns may have varied by age, socioeconomic status and period, as well as the number and sex-composition of the living siblings.