Health behaviours and motivations to study in a gender perspective

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Abstract

The link between health and education is largely documented, particularly in the United States; more lately, several contributions have also focused on the link between unhealthy behaviors and educational outcomes. This paper contributes to this debate in many aspects. Firstly, it focuses on scholastic effort and on the desire to attend college (rather than on educational outcomes) among adolescents. Secondly, it analyzes the causal link between motivations to study, obesity and different lifestyles (namely, smoking, physical exercise and eating) in a gender perspective: for example, obesity might lead to low self-esteem only among females with an adverse impact on the educational outcomes (Sabia and Rees, 2015).

The empirical analysis focuses on adolescents aged 14 years and living in the UK; the microdata are drawn from the 2015 fifth survey of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS). The MCS is a longitudinal birth cohort study conducted in the UK, providing useful information on school choice, child behaviour and cognitive development, child and parental health and, overall, on the diversity of backgrounds into which children are born in the beginning of the 21st century.

Overall, the results confirm that education and family play a reinforcing role in improving human capital and productivity: school and family are still the main institutions through which young adults can learn to lower their discount rates on future utility and behave by investing both in education and health. Moreover, during adolescence, physicality might play different roles in the motivations to study according to gender (thus rising the gender gap in the labour market).

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