

Abstract

The years of schooling in Malawi varies across birth months substantially and consistently at least over thirty years. Those who were born in the last half of each year have 1.5 years longer of schooling than those who were born in the first half of each year. The difference is substantial given that the average years of schooling in Malawi is about six years. The availability of food across months and birth weight do not match the variation of years of schooling across birth months. To explain these discrepancies, we propose a selection mechanism hypothesis that a person who was born alive in the last half of each year survived malnutrition in utero and, as a result, had higher innate ability. Because of higher innate ability, such individuals had longer years of schooling than other individuals. To prove the validity of our hypothesis, first we first show that the pattern of pregnancy termination rate is consistent with the variation of years of schooling across birth month. Second, using a novel approach used by Gørgens, Meng and Vaithianathan (2012), we regress each person's years of schooling on his or her parents' birth months controlling each person's birth month and parents' education. We show that the years of schooling of children whose parent were born in the last half of each year is longer than those of children whose parents were born in the first half of each year. This result shows that individuals who were born in the last half of each year survived sever malnutrition and have innate ability.