Innocenti Research Brief

2015-06

Ghana LEAP programme increases schooling outcomes*

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The body of literature analysing the impacts of social cash transfer programmes (SCT) on schooling is growing. This Brief summarizes findings from the impact evaluation of the Ghana Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme on schooling outcomes overall and for various subgroups: by sex, age group and cognitive ability. The findings underscore the importance of going beyond average treatment effects to analyse impacts by subgroup in order to unpack the programme effect. In addition, some have argued that unconditional cash transfer programmes (UCTs) are not effective for schooling outcomes of children who are 'marginalized' in low-income settings, such as those with lower cognitive ability. With limited resources, it is assumed parents will invest more in the human capital of higher ability children because the return on their investment is greater. Therefore, the assumption is that SCTs with schooling conditions are necessary to affect lower ability, or more marginalized, children.

Ghana LEAP programme

The LEAP programme is Ghana's flagship social protection programme and is implemented by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP). It was initiated in 2008 and as of October 2015 was reaching more than 116,000 households in extreme poverty across the country. The programme aims to alleviate short-term poverty by delivering direct cash payments, and to push long-term human capital development by providing health insurance and encouraging school enrolment. LEAP targets extremely poor households which have a household member who is any of the following: an orphan or vulnerable child (OVC), an elderly person, or one with severe disability, unable to work (PWD). At the time of this study, LEAP households received a bimonthly transfer of GH¢ 16 - 30, based on the number of beneficiaries (approximately US$ 11 - 21). Although theoretically transfers to households with OVCs were conditional on school enrolment, in practice conditions were not enforced and the majority of beneficiaries believed there were no conditions.

Study design

The evaluation is a longitudinal propensity score matching design (PSM). This involved selecting a random sample of 699 LEAP households and then from a national survey selecting 914 comparison households that were not enrolled in LEAP, but had characteristics similar to the LEAP households. These households were followed over time with two rounds of data collection: baseline in 2010 and follow-up in 2012. At baseline and follow-up, the sample included 2,218 and 1,945 children aged 5 - 17 years respectively.

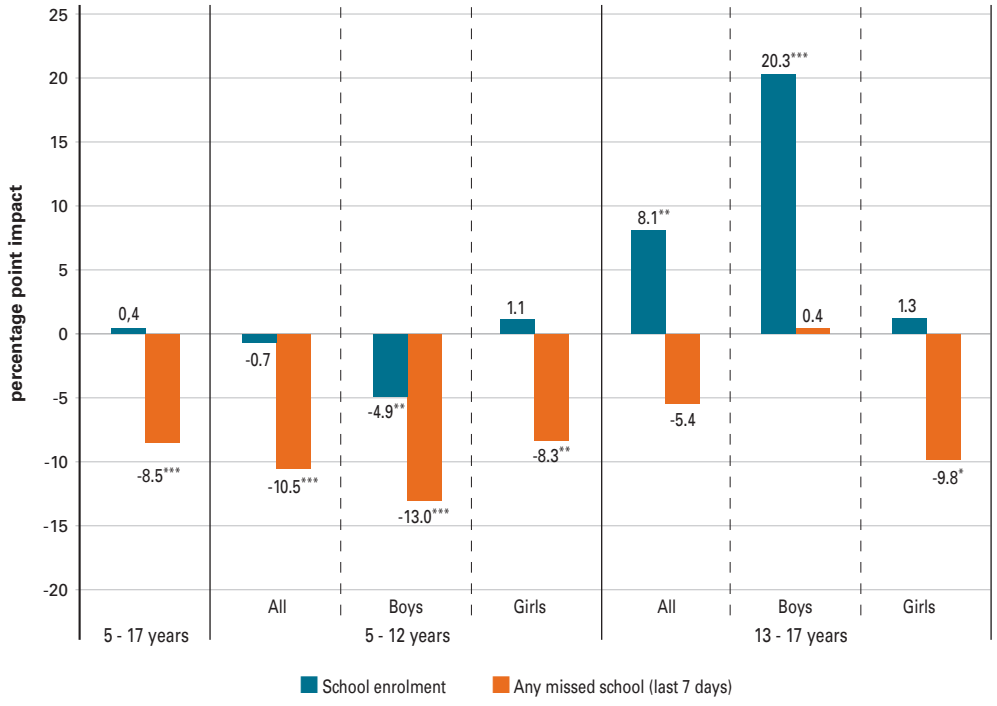
Results

This study tracks two schooling indicators: 1) whether the child is currently enrolled and 2) whether the child has missed any school in the seven days before the survey. Figure 1 (page 2) presents the impacts on these indicators by sex and age group. When looking at the total population of children 5 - 17 years, as well as the younger age group (5 - 12 years), there is no impact on school enrolment, but when disaggregated there is a negative impact on the younger boys of about 5 percentage points. This negative impact is due to an imbalance in this indicator at baseline and a so-called 'ceiling effect' in the treatment group. The enrolment rate for LEAP children in this age group is around 95 per cent at baseline, while for the comparison children it is 88 per cent. Due to this high enrolment rate for LEAP children at baseline, there is not much room for improvement and this is called a 'ceiling effect'. It is at the secondary school age that the impacts of LEAP appear. For the total group of children 13 - 17 years, LEAP increased school enrolment by 8 percentage points. However, disaggregating this effect by sex, the impact on school enrolment is concentrated among the boys, with an impact of more than 20 percentage points, but no significant effect on the girls.

In contrast to the effects on school enrolment, the impact of LEAP on any missed school can be seen among children 5 - 12 years old. LEAP reduces any missed school by more than 10 percentage points for this age group,

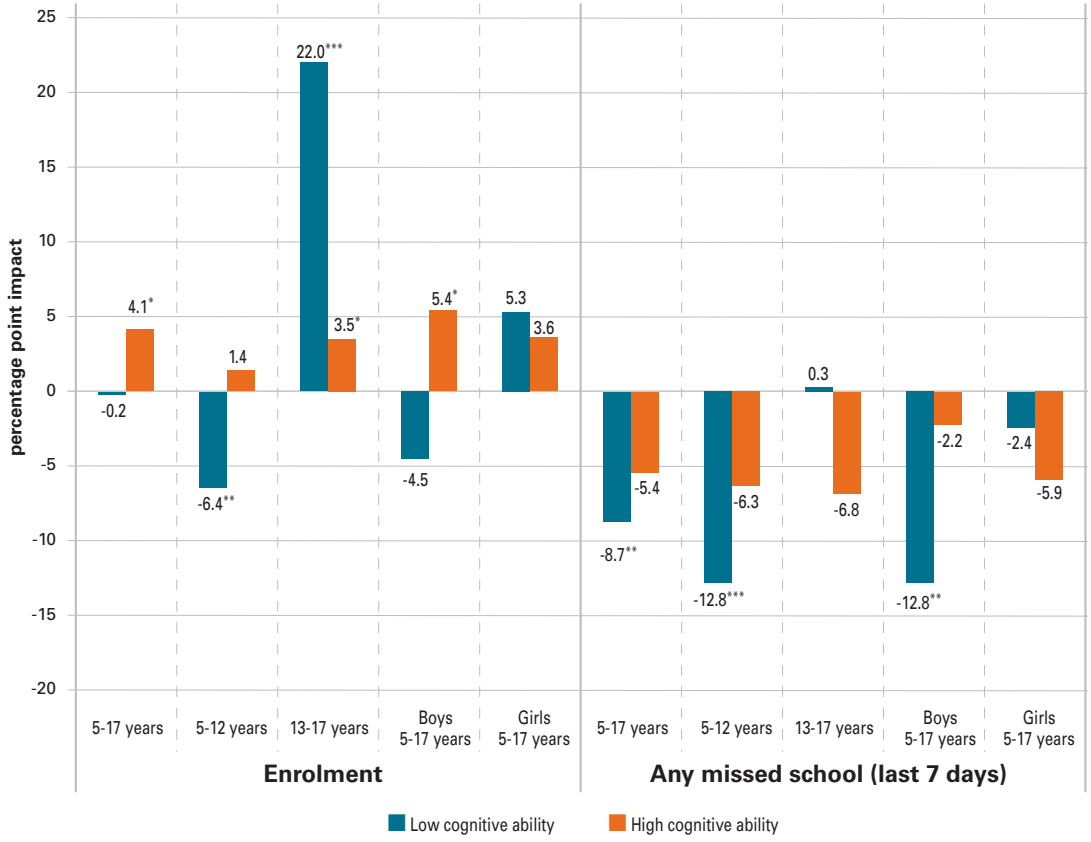
* For further details see Innocenti Working Paper 'Heterogeneous Impacts of an Unconditional Cash Transfer Programme on Schooling: Evidence from the Ghana LEAP Programme. www.unicef-irc.org/publications/series/15/

Figure 1 - *The impact of LEAP on school enrolment and any missed school, by sex and age group*



*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 2 - *The impact of LEAP on school enrolment and any missed school, by cognitive ability*



with a slightly higher impact on boys (13 percentage points) than girls (8 percentage points). In the older age group, there is an effect for girls of 10 percentage points, but this effect is only weakly significant.

• *Results by cognitive ability of the child*

It is important to understand if LEAP can push children to school who may be 'marginalized' with respect to their education. The study included an instrument called the Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices test to measure a child's cognitive ability. This test is a measure of a child's problem solving, and it does not require formal schooling for high scoring. Based on their baseline score on this test, children were classified in low or high ability using the mean of the baseline scores as a cut-off point.

Figure 2 presents the impact results by cognitive ability. In terms of school enrolment, there is a strong programme impact of 22 percentage points for children 13 - 17 years-old with lower cognitive ability. The negative impact for younger children is again explained by the ceiling effect. There are weakly significant results for higher ability children, especially for boys, and older children, but the size of the impacts is much smaller than for the lower ability children. As regards missed school, LEAP had no impact on higher ability children, but there are significant impacts for lower ability children, particularly children aged 5 - 12 years, and boys 5 - 17 years with a decrease in any missed school of 13 percentage points.

• *Pathways of impacts*

The LEAP study also considers potential pathways through which the programme has changed schooling outcomes. The study finds a significant increase in schooling inputs, such as school supplies and uniforms, as well as overall schooling expenditures for those subgroups that were impacted by the programme. These results provide important corroborating evidence that the results on schooling outcomes reported above are not spurious, and that LEAP appears to loosen the constraint on out-of-pocket costs to enable children in beneficiary households to enrol in school and attend more regularly.

Conclusion

The results of this study show that Ghana's LEAP programme had strong impacts on children's schooling, in particular on certain subgroups. By moving beyond average treatment effects, the study provides important insights on the nuances around the programme impacts. The strong results among older children with low cognitive ability supports theories of compensating behaviour by parents, and suggests that programme conditionality is not necessary to induce parents to send more vulnerable children to school.

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