

The Fast and the Studious? Ramadan Observance and Student Performance

Olivier Marie with Kyra Hanemaaijer (EUR) and Marco Musumeci (EUR)

8 March 2022

We investigate the impact on student performance of observing the Ramadan fast. We exploit the timing of the high stakes end of secondary school exam in the Netherlands – which fell during Ramadan in 2018 and 2019 – and compare outcomes for pupils depending on their likelihood to fast for the Muslim holy month. Results indicate that the exam grade of those most likely to comply drop significantly but that there is no detectable effect on the continuous school exam taken the same years. This negative final exams' impact is concentrated in students living closer to mosques and those going to schools with a high number of peers also fasting. Using a characteristics-based Ramadan compliance model, we show that, for groups with high variation in fasting likelihood, there is only an effect for those most likely to fast. Finally, a placebo test on the high probability faster non-compliers, detects no final grade effect of Ramadan on this group.