Abolishing User Fees, Fertility Choice, and Educational Attainment*

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September 2017

Abstract

This study examines the effect of abolishing user fees from the maternal and child health (MCH) services on child quantity and quality in South Africa in the post-apartheid era. Exploiting exogenous variation in exposure to the policy effect, we find that the policy resulted in lower fertility in households and greater educational attainment of children a decade later. The absence of the effects among children not subject to the policy eliminates channels through heterogeneous preexisting trends or unobserved concurrent changes. The important policy implications are (i) the theoretical predictions of the child quantity-quality tradeoff model characterize reproductive behavior among parents in developing countries; and (ii) MCH policy serves as a motivating force underlying the demographic transition and human capital development.

Keywords: user fees, fertility, education, South Africa

JEL codes: J13, I15, O15, I18

* We appreciate Jenny Aker, Laurie DeRose, Andrew Foster, Paola Giuliano, Nancy Hite, Seema Jayachandran, Ryo Kambayashi, Daichi Kawaguchi, Takashi Kurokawa, Ilyana Kuziemko, Dilip Mookherjee, Daniele Paserman, Adam Storeygard, Rodrigo Wagner, Hiroki Yamada, Wesley Yin, the two anonymous referees, and numerous participants at Society of Labor Economists, North American Winter Meeting of the Econometric Society, Population Association of America, 2015 Japanese Economic Association Spring Meeting, Kansai Research Group on Development Microeconomics (KDME) Workshop, and Economic Development Workshop at Hitotsubashi University for helpful comments. Financial support from the Grant-in-Aid for Young Scientists (Start-up) (Grant No. 21830058) from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science is gratefully acknowledged. The views expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the funding agency. All remaining errors are our own.

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