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Fields Research: Labor Economics, Public Economics, Applied Microeconomics
Teaching: Microeconomics, Labor Economics

Education Ph.D., Economics, Northwestern University, 2020 (Anticipated)
Dissertation: Essays in Labor and Applied Microeconomics
Committee: Matthew Notowidigdo (Chair), Seema Jayachandran, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach
B. Soc. Sci. (First Class Honors), Economics, National University of Singapore, 2012
B. Eng. (First Class Honors), Chemical Engineering, National University of Singapore, 2012

Fellowships Dissertation Year Fellowship, Northwestern University, 2019–2020

Teaching Experience Teaching Assistant, Northwestern University, 2015–2019
Labor Economics, Fall 2015
Introduction to Microeconomics, Winter 2018

Research Experience Research assistant, Matthew Notowidigdo, Northwestern University, 2016–2019
Research assistant, Lee Lockwood, University of Virginia, 2017

Other Experience Economist, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Government of Singapore, 2012–2014

Job Market Paper “*The effect of child support on labor supply: An estimate of the Frisch elasticity*”
In many countries, child support is set as a function of income and child support liabilities end when the children involved reach emancipation age. Exploiting these two features, this paper estimates the intertemporal elasticity of labor supply (Frisch elasticity) in an event study design using individual-level panel data from four countries. Empirically, I find that the observed child support rate that fathers face drops to nearly zero upon emancipation of the children; correspondingly, these fathers increase their work hours and earnings at this time. Based on these results, I estimate Frisch elasticities of 0.7–0.8 on the intensive margin and 0.1–0.2 on the extensive margin.

Working Papers

“Inexpensive heating reduces winter mortality”, with Janjala Chirakijja and Seema Jayachandran

This paper examines how the price of home heating affects mortality in the US. Exposure to cold is one reason that mortality peaks in winter, and a higher heating price increases exposure to cold by reducing heating use. In addition, a higher price raises energy bills, which could also affect health by decreasing other health-promoting spending. Our empirical approach combines spatial variation in the energy source used for home heating and temporal variation in the national prices of natural gas versus electricity. We find that a lower heating price reduces winter mortality, driven mostly by cardiovascular and respiratory causes.

“The riskiness of owning versus renting housing”, with Lee M. Lockwood, Scott R. Baker, and Lorenz Kueng

Homeowners and renters have mirror-image exposures to the substantial risks in housing prices. The costs of these exposures depend crucially on their correlations with other important exposures in household portfolios. Using over 70 years of data on local markets in the U.S., we find that rents and home prices are strongly positively correlated with wages at all horizons. As a result, renting insures earnings risk, and—contrary to widely-held views—for many households owning is much riskier than renting. Combined with evidence that many households view ownership of a home as a particularly safe asset, our findings suggest that the efficiency costs of the substantial tax preferences for owner-occupied housing are greater than previously thought.

“The effect of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program on local area economic outcomes: Evidence from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act”

While simulation estimates generally generate large fiscal effects for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), little work has been done verifying these estimates based on data. In this paper, I identify a source of geographic variation in SNAP transfers that can be exploited for a causal estimate of the effect of SNAP on the local economy. Specifically, I use the fact that the benefits received through the program differs by household size, and hence in a differenced regression, any confounder would have to mimic the by-household size increase in SNAP as well. I then use the large increase in SNAP during the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to recover an estimate of the effect of the SNAP on the local economy. In my preferred specification, I find that the average implied jobs fiscal multiplier is around 0.34 jobs per thousand dollars, which maps to a fiscal multiplier of 19. While I do not find a statistically significant effect on total payroll, the point estimate is large as well, with an average implied fiscal multiplier of 15. These estimates are much larger than those of other programs that have been found in the literature.

Other work in progress

“Seasonal unemployment and drug use”, with Jason Ward

This paper investigates the effect of unemployment on all major drug use categories in the US. For identification, we exploit an underappreciated fact of employment: it varies across months of the year, for reasons unrelated to the current macroeconomic conditions and outside the control of individuals. Furthermore, this seasonality varies across industries and occupations, motivating a difference-in-differences strategy. We find that seasonal unemployment leads to higher illicit drug use, mainly driven by use of opioids (heroin and painkillers) and depressants (tranquilizers and sedatives). Because seasonal unemployment is highly predictable and short-lived, the effect is unlikely to be due to changes in income or psychological factors, but due to increases in time availability in months of low employment demand.

Languages

English, Mandarin Chinese

Computing skills

Stata, Python, Matlab

References

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