

Discussion of:

“Family Planning and Women’s Labor Supply: Experimental
Evidence from Urban Malawi”

by Mahesh Karra, Daniel Maggio, and David Canning

Discussant:

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Summary of the paper:

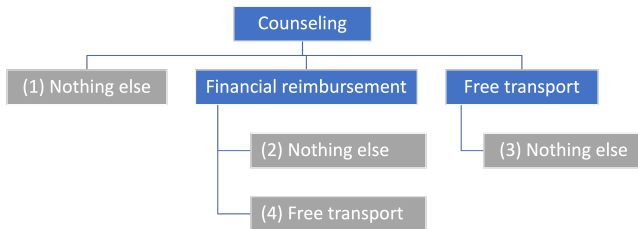
- ▶ Investigates the labor market effects of a family planning program in the capital city of Malawi, Lilongwe
 - (i) free counseling, (ii) free transportation to a clinic, and (iii) financial reimbursement
- ▶ Finds that providing the treatment package increases women's employment, particularly wage-earning employment, and labor income all on the extensive margin

Summary of my thoughts/comments:

- ▶ I enjoyed reading the paper
- ▶ Isolating the effects of each sub-treatment
- ▶ Understanding the underlying mechanisms and interpretation of results

Main thought: Isolating the effects of each sub-treatments

- ▶ There is no separate treatment arms for each component of the treatment package
- ▶ But learning which sub-treatment drives the effects of family planning intervention is important from the policy perspective
- ▶ 4 possible sub-groups that took different combinations of the treatments



- ▶ For example, pregnant vs. postpartum women

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Pregnant} - \text{Postpartum} &= (\text{transport} + \text{financial support}) - (\text{counseling} + \text{transport}) \\ &= \text{financial support} - \text{counseling} \\ &\approx \text{financial support}\end{aligned}$$

where counseling ≈ 0 from the heterogeneity results for postpartum women.

Smaller comments: Underlying mechanisms and interpretation of results

- ▶ Fertility and labor supply decisions by members of households with children are mutual decisions \Rightarrow Additional heterogeneity analysis
 - age difference, education difference, husband's age and education
- ▶ Why the baseline treatment effects are significant at 5% level, and the effects are concentrated among pregnant women? \Rightarrow Relate to behavioral literature
- ▶ Maggio et al. (2023) finds that the MFPS improved child's quality \Rightarrow A potential mechanism via quantity-quality trade-off (i.e., counseling + family planning services \Rightarrow quality is equally important as quantity \Rightarrow fertility \downarrow and employment \uparrow)
- ▶ Time use results are puzzling \Rightarrow Heterogeneity analysis for time-use regressions, particularly, employed vs. unemployed at baseline
- ▶ Men's results show that there is no deleterious effects. But why men's employment \uparrow is not explained. \Rightarrow A possible interpretation could be explained based on intra-household bargaining power literature.
- ▶ Robustness checks
 - Robustness of baseline results to logit/probit models
 - Robustness of heterogeneity results to using interaction method instead of sample splitting

Thank you!