

2011 Eastern Economic Association Meeting  
CSWEP session summary  
February 25-26, 2011  
Sheraton Hotel, New York City

**Session Title: The Economics of Gender**

**Chair:** Carlena Ficano (Hartwick College)

**Discussants:** Greg Colman (Pace University), Jennifer Kohn (Drew University), and Jill Janocha (American University)

John D. Leeth (Bentley University) presented “Do Workers Earn Less in Female Jobs? The Impact of New Measures of Comparable Worth.” Previous research showing a sizable drop in wages for both men and women as the proportion of women within an occupation rises either does not control for occupational characteristics or uses measures derived from the *Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)*. As part of the National Compensation Survey, the BLS evaluates jobs in terms of what it calls “generic leveling factors,” a set of standards that allow a comparison of overall duties, responsibilities, and work environments across jobs and occupations. These BLS leveling factors are more extensive and subject to less measurement error than are the occupational characteristics derived from the *DOT*. Leeth reports that, inconsistent with theories of occupational crowding or devaluation of women’s work, occupational gender composition has no impact on wages after controlling for skill requirements and job attributes using the BLS generic leveling factors.

Irena Dushi (Social Security Administration) presented her joint work with Marjorie Honig (Hunter College), “How Much Do Respondents in the Health and Retirement Study Know About Their Tax-Deferred Contributions: A Gender and Cohort Analysis.” They examined the extent to which wage earners in the Health and Retirement Study correctly report their inclusion in tax-deferred retirement accounts, and conditional on inclusion, their annual contributions. Findings indicate that while respondents in the more recent cohort are more likely than their counterparts in the earlier cohort to report whether they were included in a tax-deferred retirement plan, they are no more accurate in reporting whether they contributed to their plans. Respondents in both cohorts, moreover, significantly overestimated their annual contributions. No significant gender differences exist regarding reporting accuracy of contribution amounts.

Yang Wang (Lafayette College) presented "The Effect of EITC Payment Expansion on Maternal Smoking" (joint with Susan Averett of Lafayette College). Using data from the NLSY79, they demonstrate that the EITC expansion in 1993 which significantly increased EITC benefits for families with two children relative to families with one child decreased the probability of smoking for white mothers but not for black mothers.

Due to a torrential downpour, Eric Sarpong (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality) was unable to make it to the session in time to present his paper.

**Session Title: Health Economics****Chair:** Reagan Baughman (University of New Hampshire)**Discussants:** Resul Cesur (Georgia State University) and Muzhe Yang (Lehigh University)

Jamie Rubenstein Taber (Cornell University) presented “The Effect of Health Insurance Mandates in Child Support Agreements on Children’s Insurance Coverage.” The paper examines the effect of state child support laws requiring parents to provide private health insurance for child after a divorce on whether a parent is ordered to provide health insurance and on whether the child is actually covered. This paper is the first to collect data on these laws and examine the impact of these statutes on reducing the number of children who lose insurance due to parental divorce. Preliminary results show a positive and significant effect of having an order to provide health insurance in the child support agreement on the probability of coverage but no significant effect of a state mandate on the probability of having a mandate in the child support order to provide coverage or on the probability of coverage.

Dhaval Dave (Bentley University and NBER) presented joint work with Inas Rashad Kelly (Queens College) titled “How does the Business Cycle Affect Eating Habits?” As economic expansions raise employment and wages, associated shifts in income and time constraints would be expected to also impact individuals’ health behaviors. Based on fixed-effects methods applied to data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, this study finds that, among individuals predicted to be at highest risk of being unemployed, a one percentage point increase in the resident state’s unemployment rate is associated with a 2-8% reduction in the consumption of fruits and vegetables and an increase in the consumption of unhealthy foods, with a somewhat higher impact among married individuals and older adults. Supplementary analyses also explore specific mediating pathways, and point to reduced family income and adverse mental health as significant channels underlying the procyclical nature of healthy food consumption.

Nick Stacey (Lafayette College) presented his paper (joint with Susan Averett of Lafayette College) “The Depth of Obesity in South Africa: A Two Part Model,” in which he documented that women of color in South Africa not only are more likely to be obese but they are much heavier compared to white women or men.

Jing Shi Liu (Drew University) presented her joint work with Jennifer Kohn (Drew University), “Dynamics of Medical Care Use.” They find that both high and low medical care use is persistent both year-to-year and over a long 18 year panel. This persistence is conditional on covariates including age, health and socio-economic status. Such conditional persistence suggests that efforts to bring people into the health system to improve their health may not in turn reduce the demand for medical care.

**Session Title: Economics of Obesity****Chair:** Yang Wang, Lafayette College**Discussants:** Elizabeth Peters (Cornell University), Jamie Rubenstein Taber (Cornell University), and Swati Mukerjee (Bentley University)

Jennifer Tennant (Cornell University) presented “The causal effect of depression on obesity: an investigation using three national datasets,” coauthored with Dhaval Dave (Bentley University & NBER) and Gregory Colman (Pace University & NBER). The economic burden of depression, currently estimated at about \$100 billion annually, is under-estimated if depression has a positive causal impact on obesity. Based on evidence from three large-scale nationally-representative cross-sectional and longitudinal datasets, this study finds that, among females, past or lifetime diagnosis of major depression raises the probability of being overweight or obese by about 7 percentage points, with this effect plausibly shown to be driven by shifts in food consumption and physical activity. This higher risk of overweight and obesity among females adds about 4% (or \$4.2 billion) to the estimated economic burden of depression.

Gregory Colman (Pace University & NBER) and Dhaval Dave (Bentley University & NBER) presented “The Effects of Unemployment and the Recession on Physical Activity.” This study investigates the impact of area-specific unemployment rates on total physical activity as well as work-related and leisure-time physical activity, based on MET-measured energy expenditure from the American Time Use Surveys. The analyses find that the suggestive evidence from previous studies that unemployment increases the amount of exercise does not stand up when more accurate data on exercise is used. Instead, this study finds that total energy use declines during recessions, which may partly explain the positive association often found between unemployment and psychological depression and also suggests potentially adverse effects on individuals' BMI and long-term health.

Nicholas Stacey (Lafayette College) presented his paper “Obesity and Socioeconomic Status in South Africa: Decomposing Gender and Race Differentials,” in which he and coauthor Susan Averett (Lafayette College) used 2008 data from South Africa to document substantial gender and race differences in the probability of obesity and decomposed these differences using the Fairlie decomposition method. They report that about half of the obesity gap between men and women cannot be explained by differences in observable characteristics.

Inas Rashad Kelly (Queens College) presented “The Benefits of Breastfeeding across the Early Years of Childhood,” coauthored with Clive Belfield (Queens College). There has been much scrutiny recently of the choice to breastfeed rather than formula-feed an infant, yet key identification issues remain to be resolved. This study uses the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey–Birth Cohort to explore the causal effect of breastfeeding on child development. Using simultaneous equations models and propensity score measures and adjusting for confounding factors, we examine health, physical, and cognitive outcomes and relate these to a set of breastfeeding and formula-feeding intensities measures. The results indicate that breastfeeding is protective against obesity and improves cognitive outcomes at 24 months and 54 months. Furthermore, not being formula-fed at birth is associated with increased probabilities of being in excellent health at 9 months.

**Session Title: Human Capital**

**Chair:** Hope Corman (Rider University)

**Discussants:** Reagan Baughman (University of New Hampshire), Jennifer Tennant (Cornell University), John Leeth (Bentley University), and Cheryl Carleton (Villanova University)

Shin-Yi Chou (Lehigh University), “Using National Twin Data to Estimate the Peer Effects on Children's Educational Outcomes.”

Wehn-Jyuan Tsai (Shih Hsin University); Jin-Tan Liu (National Taiwan University and NBER); Michael Grossman (City University of New York and NBER); and Shin-Yi Chou (Lehigh University and NBER), “Intergeneration Transfer of Human Capital: Results from a Natural Experiment in Taiwan.”

Resul Cetur (Georgia State University), “Siblings and Obesity: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey.”

Hope Corman (Rider University); Dhaval Dave (Bentley University & NBER); and Nancy E. Reichman (Robert Wood Johnson Medical School & Princeton University), “The Effects of Welfare Reform on Vocational Education and Training.”

**Session Title: Issues in Health Economics**

**Chair:** Inas Rashad Kelly (Queens College)

**Discussants:** Hope Corman (Rider University), Inas Rashad Kelly (Queens College), Jennifer Kohn (Drew University)

Swati Mukerjee (Bentley University) presented “Social Interactions and Health: An Empirical Investigation.” This paper empirically investigates the impact of social interactions on the self-rated health status of individuals in the United States using a national data set from 1972-2008. It finds that social interaction is significantly and positively associated with health and that the kind of interaction is important for different demographic groups. These results may help craft policies to target specific demographic groups in case of market failure.

Thomas J. Christian (Brown University) presented “Spatial Analysis in Nursing Home Markets.” This research tests for behavioral changes amongst elderly Americans during periods of macroeconomic and household level unemployment using data from the American Time Use Survey (2003-2009). The study finds that in the presence of unemployment, seniors spend more time sleeping and engaged in health-related self-care and less time doing chores. This research is notable for extending the time inputs to health literature to focus on seniors.

James Marton (Georgia State University) presented “Citizenship Verification in Medicaid.” This paper examines the impact of Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 mandated citizenship verification requirements on the Medicaid coverage of children using state administrative data from Georgia. The analysis suggests that children enrolled via the “Low Income Medicaid” eligibility category of Georgia Medicaid that were enrolled prior to the reform were slightly more likely to exit during the first “high impact” recertification in which the enhanced citizenship verification was binding than children whose first recertification occurred just prior to the reform. In addition, the author observes a slightly lower re-entry probability among children exiting during a “high impact” first recertification.”

**Session Title: Health****Chair:** Shin Yi Chou (Lehigh University)**Discussants:** Dhaval Dave (Bentley University), James Marton (Georgia State University), Shin Yi Chou (Lehigh University), and Carlena Ficano (Hartwick College)

Susan Averett (Lafayette College) and Yang Wang (Lafayette College) presented “Does Depression Cause Risky Behavior?” They note that depression has been recognized as one of the 10 leading diseases worldwide with substantial economic and medical costs. However, despite the pervasiveness of depression and the well-recognized association between depression and risky sexual behaviors and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among youth and young adults in the U.S., the economics literature has paid little attention to the causal effect of depression on risky sexual behavior among women, mainly due to the lack of a convincing identification strategy. In this paper, we exploit a unique opportunity in our empirical setting to identify the causal effect of depression, measured by the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CESD), on female young adults’ risky sexual behaviors. Specifically, we explored an unexpected event, the September 11 attacks (9/11), which occurred during the Wave III data collection of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth). Because of its unexpected nature and minimal impact on the continuation of AddHealth interviews, 9/11 is used as an IV in our 2SLS estimation. We find that those interviewed after 9/11 experienced a significant increase in the CESD, and that depression does lead to more engagement in overall sexual activity, oral sex, and sex without a condom, but not anal sex, in our full specification.

Muzhe Yang (Lehigh University) presented “Impacts of Paid Maternity Leave on Infant Feeding Practices: Evidence from California,” coauthored with Rui Huang (University of Connecticut). Breastfeeding is beneficial to both infants and mothers. Using data from the Infant Feeding Practices Study, we exploit an exogenous variation in the length of paid maternity leave induced by California’s (paid family leave) PFL program. We find that one more week of partially paid leave could raise the probabilities of exclusive breastfeeding through the first three and six months by approximately 8 and 7 percentage points, respectively. The additional week of partially paid leave could increase the probabilities of breastfeeding through the first three, six, and nine months by approximately 24 to 27 percentage points.

Anca M. Cotet (Ball State University) presented “Technological Improvement and Climate Change Mitigation: Evidence from the Diffusion of Air Conditioning and Seasonal Mortality in the US,” coauthored with Kevin K. Tsui (Clemson University).

Jennifer Kohn (Drew University) presented “The Marriage Myth.” The paper demonstrated a new econometric methodology to control for the endogeneity of marital status in a dynamic model of health status. She reports that married women are no healthier than are women who cohabit.