

Summary

ESSAYS ON IMPACT EVALUATIONS OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH POLICIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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This dissertation investigates the extent to which schooling changes attitudes of HIV stigma and how much abortion legalization policy improved educational and labor market outcomes, as well as the sexual and reproductive health behaviors of people in Southern Africa. Stigmatizing attitudes toward people living with HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) is prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, which discourages people from getting tested and disclosing their HIV status. However, estimating the causal effect of schooling on HIV stigma is challenging due to unobserved factors. Therefore, I used the 1980 education reform in Zimbabwe, which increased access to education as a source of exogenous variation in education across birth cohorts in a regression discontinuity (RD) technique. I find that schooling has a significant negative effect on the propensity to stigmatize PLWHA and a positive effect on knowledge of HIV but has a zero impact on HIV serostatus and testing. These findings suggest that general schooling alone does not necessarily reduce HIV stigma (and, thus, prevalence) but changes peoples' (knowledge and, thus) willingness to express discriminatory

attitudes toward PLWHA. Moreover, education changes knowledge and stigma, but it alone may not necessarily change sexual behavior (and, thus, prevalence).

Furthermore, many African countries only allow abortion in situations where the pregnancy causes risks to the mother. These restrictive laws have resulted in high cases of unsafe abortions, maternal mortality, teen mothers, and very short birth intervals in Africa. However, over the past two decades, few African countries have legalized abortion. As a result, in the second part of this dissertation, I estimate the impact of abortion legalization on sexual and reproductive health behaviors and women empowerment in South Africa. I adopt a difference-in-differences (DID) design that leverages variation across birth cohorts induced by the timing of the law and variation in access to abortion facilities across provinces. The findings show that exposure to the abortion law reduced early motherhood. The result also suggests that abortion legalization effectively boosted educational attainment and labor market opportunities, but there is no evidence that the policy impacted teen fertility, marriage, and early sexual debut.