

Final Progress Report
Sustainability Science Program, Harvard University
Term: September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012
Submitted: July 2012

Name: Alessandra Voena

Your field(s): Economics

Your degree program, institution and (expected) graduation date:
PhD, Stanford University, 2011

Faculty host(s) at Harvard name and department:
Nava Ashraf, Harvard Business School
Erica Field, now at Dept. of Economics at Duke University
Michael Kremer, Dept. of Economics

Description of SSP-related research activity:

Title: Maternal Health Risk and the Gender Gap in the Demand for Children in Zambia (with N. Ashraf and E. Field)

Abstract: Zambian men, as men from other Sub-Saharan African countries, are likely to report higher desired total fertility and lower acceptance of family planning compared to their wife. This study explores the hypothesis that this gender gap can be partly explained by the lower salience of the health costs of childbearing among men. We test whether providing information on the risk of maternal mortality may increase male acceptance of family planning and we compare the impact of delivering such information to men and to women on household take-up of contraceptives.

Identification of the problem you address:

Over one half of pregnancies worldwide are unplanned (UNFPA, 2010). In Sub-Saharan Africa, greater availability of contraceptives may not always increase their usage, as men often report wanting more children compared to their wives and exhibit a lower acceptance of family planning.

Key question asked about the problem:

This study examines one potential driver of the gender gap in the demand for children and for family planning: the lack of information on the maternal health risk among men. Bearing children imposes a large health cost on women, especially in countries like Zambia, which currently holds one of the world's highest maternal mortality ratios. Men may fail to internalize such cost in their fertility decisions, partly because it does not impact them directly, partly because it is less salient to them: preliminary survey data indicates that men are less likely to have known women who died at childbirth and have a more limited understanding of the risk factors compared to their wives.

The methods by which you answered that question:

The study uses quantitative data from a household survey, combined with a randomized controlled trial involving 2,000 couples in Lusaka.

Principle literature upon which the research drew:

Development economics, Economics of the family

Empirical data acquisition description:

Survey to 2,000 couples in Lusaka (Zambia).

Geographical region studied:

Zambia

Recommendations that might be relevant for your problem:

A description of the final product(s) you have/are aiming to produce:

Working paper that will be submitted to a peer-reviewed economics journal upon completion of the study.

Description of major other intellectual or professional advancement activity(ies) over the past academic year:

Research project “German-Jewish Émigrés and U.S. Invention” (with Petra Moser and Fabian Waldinger) is under revision upon request of the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*

Citations for reports, papers, publications and presentations that built on your fellowship research:

Principal collaborators outside Harvard:

Petra Moser, Luigi Pistaferri – Stanford University

Fabian Waldinger – University of Warwick

Costas Meghir – Yale University

Hamish Low – University of Cambridge

Denrick Bayot – University of Chicago

Awards or grants that you have received this year for the current or coming year:

NBER Household Finance research, \$12,900 in research funds, Dec 2011-Dec 2012

The project “Maternal Health Risk and the Gender Gap in the Demand for Children in Zambia” was selected to participate in the July 2012 DevelopmentXChange at the Gates Foundation, with other 64 innovations to “Save lives at birth”. On July 12th-14th 2012, I travelled to Seattle to present the project to a team of global health experts.

If you are moving to a new position, please list your contact information there:

The University of Chicago

Department of Economics

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