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Evaluating the effects of a targeted home visiting program on maternal and child health outcomes

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Abstract

We evaluate the effects of home visiting targeted towards disadvantaged first-time mothers on maternal and child health outcomes. Our analysis exploits a randomized controlled trial and combines rich longitudinal survey data with unique administrative health data. In a context in which the target group has comprehensive health care access, we find no effects of home visiting on most types of health utilization, health behaviors, and physical health measures. However, the intervention has a positive effect on some maternal mental health outcomes, reducing depressions reported in the survey data by eleven percentage points and prescriptions of psycholeptics recorded in the administrative data by seven percentage points.

JEL-Classification: I14

Keywords: Child Health; Health Inequality; Mental Health; Early Childhood Intervention

1. Introduction

It is well established that children from disadvantaged families suffer more ill-health than children from advantaged backgrounds (e.g. Case et al. 2002; Currie and Stabile 2003; Currie and Lin 2007; Condliffe and Link 2008) and that there is a pronounced link between family income and child health (Currie and Lin 2007; Hoynes et al. 2015; Kuehnle 2014; Milligan and Stabile 2011). The child health gradient in socio-economic status (SES) persists into adulthood (Apouey and Geoffard 2013; Case et al. 2002) and contributes to well-documented income-related health

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