

Papers presented at the Southern Economic Association Conference in Florida, November 2025

The Association for the Advancement of African Women Economists (AAAWE)

Session Organizers

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Session 1

Title: Issues in Health and Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Chair: Neepea Gaekwad, State University of New York at Fredonia

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Paper 1

Title: The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence Exposure on Children's Mental Health: Evidence from Ghana

Author and Presenter: Ami Adjoh-Baliki, American Institute for Research Fellow,
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Abstract

This study explores how maternal mental health mediates the relationship between exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV) and child mental health. Utilizing data from the Ghana Socioeconomic Panel Survey and employing Generalized Structural Equation Modeling (GSEM) with linear decomposition, the analysis assesses the direct, indirect, and total effects of IPV on child depression. The research includes a sample of 1,562 children from a nationally representative panel survey of Ghanaian households, with surveys conducted in three waves in 2010, 2014, and 2018. The findings reveal that maternal depression significantly influences how IPV exposure impacts child mental health. Mothers who experience IPV are considerably more likely to suffer from depression, which subsequently increases the risk of depression in their children. The mediation analysis indicates that approximately 48% of the total effect of IPV on child depression occurs through maternal depression. While the direct effect of IPV on child depression is relatively small and not statistically significant within the GSEM model, the indirect pathway via maternal mental health proves to be substantial. The study offers policy recommendations based on these findings and contributes to the growing body of literature on IPV and child mental health. As the first study of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa, it emphasizes the need for evidence-based policies to break the cycle of violence and promote the well-being of future generations.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence, Mental Health of Children, Ghana

JEL codes: J12, J19

Paper 2

Title: School Calendars and Academic Achievement: Evidence from a Year-Round Schooling Policy in Ghana

Author and Presenter: Deborah Aba Gaisie, Georgia State University, abagaisie09@gmail.com

Abstract:

Decision-makers are increasingly recognizing the importance of continued access to the school environment – often measured by instructional time – on academic achievement. However, because of budgetary pressures and space constraints, schools frequently face a trade-off in the quantity and quality of educational inputs provided. Traditionally, schools have dealt with this by increasing class sizes or restructuring instructional time through the use of modified academic calendars such as adjusting school start times, the four-day school week, and multi-track year-round calendars – where the same number of school days is spread throughout an academic year with students (and their teachers) placed into a specific track, where at least one track is on break at any point in time. Year-round schooling is particularly appealing because it allows schools to accommodate increased enrolment while maximising existing infrastructure. Yet this could come at the cost of losses in educational outcomes, particularly in low-income settings where existing structural deficiencies constrain educational systems.

In this paper, I investigate how student achievement responds to massive and abrupt changes in academic calendars. To identify these effects, I exploit a policy change in Ghana's education sector that eliminated user fees for secondary school students. This Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP) resulted in an enormous increase in the number of admitted secondary school students beyond the capacity of the existing infrastructure. A year-round schooling policy - Double Track System (DTS) - was subsequently introduced, which divided some secondary schools and, in effect, students, teachers, and staff into two tracks that rotate on and off break, with each track being in school for two semesters a year. Using a difference-in-difference framework, I exploit variation in the exposure to the double-track system across public senior high schools in the country. I use student-level administrative data on high school exit exam scores of students from 2013 to 2022 to investigate the impact of this policy on academic achievement.

While year-round schooling is practiced in some developed countries, evidence of its impact is both scarce and inconclusive. This study will provide insights into the effects of this policy, particularly in contexts where educational systems may not have the capacity to support large-scale policy changes.

Paper 3

Title: Impact Evaluation of the Free Primary Education Program in Nigeria and in Neighboring Beninese Communities

Author and Presenter: Maryam Salihu, American University Email: salihumaryam77@gmail.com

Author: Dozie Okoye, Dalhousie University

Author: Leonard Wantchekon, Princeton University

Abstract:

This paper examines the effects of a Free Primary Education (FPE) program implemented by Nigeria's Western Region in 1955. Specifically, we study the persistence of the program's effects six decades later. By analyzing cohorts born before, during, and after the program's implementation, we trace how this intervention affected not only those directly exposed to free primary education but also subsequent generations. Using DHS data and a novel dataset, we provide evidence on the mechanisms through which educational investments yield returns over time and geography.

Keywords: Free education, impact evaluation, Historical microdata, Persistence and Spillover.

JEL Codes: I25, I28, J24, N37, D62, I21, O12.

Session 2

Issues in Health

Chair: Ami Adjoh-Baliki, American Institute for Research Fellow, amivad@gmail.com

Paper 1

Title: Weather Shock and Health: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

Author and Presenter: Jones Arkoh Paintsil, Howard University, jones.paintsil@bison.howard.edu

Abstract:

This paper examines weather shocks and health in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) using data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and DHS Geospatial covariate data. The dataset spans the years 2006–2023 and comprises 330,290 observations across 33 countries. This study examines the relationship between annual daylight land surface temperature (ADLST) and child anthropometric outcomes, specifically weight-for-height z-scores (WHZ), weight-for-age z-scores (WAZ), and their corresponding binary indicators of wasting and underweight. Employing both linear regression models and machine learning algorithms, the analysis begins with a broad sample of children aged 0 to 59 months. The study then narrows its focus to children under 36 months to assess age-specific effects. Finally, this study explores potential moderating factors influencing the temperature–nutrition relationship. The analysis reveals that higher daylight land surface temperatures are significantly associated with reductions in children's weight-for-height (WHZ) and weight-for-age (WAZ), corresponding to increased prevalence of wasting and underweight. The negative and significant quadratic term suggests a non-linear relationship, where moderate temperatures exert less detrimental

effects, while extreme heat intensifies the impact on child nutritional status. Based on these findings, the study recommends a commitment to climate finance in SSA to address climate-related child health issues. Recommended interventions include accelerating the transition to renewable energy, expanding electric and low-carbon urban transportation systems, and introducing climate levies in cities with high levels of industrial and greenhouse gas emissions.

JEL: O12, I15, Q54

Paper 2

Title: The effect of ending the pandemic-related mandate of continuous Medicaid coverage on health insurance coverage

Author and Presenter: Keisha Solomon, Howard University, keisha.solomon@howard.edu

Author: Kabir Dasgupta

Abstract:

The Medicaid continuous enrollment provision, which ensured uninterrupted coverage for beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic, ended in March 2023. This unwinding process has led to large-scale Medicaid disenrollments, as states resumed their standard renewal process to evaluate enrolled individuals' eligibility status. Our analysis investigates whether the resumption of states' renewal process has led to an increase in the risk of becoming uninsured for adults aged under 65. Using state-month variation in the timing of the first round of disenrollments, we first document a 6-12 percent decline in total Medicaid enrollments after states resumed their renewal process. Next, based on nationally representative samples of adults younger than 65, we do not find statistically relevant effects on the probability of being without any health coverage. However, looking at different demographic groups, we see a one percentage point increase in the likelihood of becoming uninsured for adults who have a college education but do not have a bachelor's or higher degree.

Keywords: Continuous enrollment provision; COVID-19 pandemic; Medicaid, health insurance, policy analysis

JEL Classification: I13; I18; I31

Paper 3

Title: Intimate Partner Violence and Child Health Outcomes: Evidence from SSA

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Abstract:

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is an issue that affects many women worldwide. It transcends age, race, and social class barriers. The World Health Organization estimate shows that about 27% of women worldwide have experienced sexual or physical violence by their intimate partners. This estimate is high in low and middle-income countries (LMICs), especially in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where about one-third of women have reported ever experiencing IPV. One issue that has been left out of the discussion is the impact of IPV on child health. This study examines the effect of IPV on children's health outcomes in SSA. The study utilizes data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). We combined the population module with the household, women, and children module to obtain a composite data set that identifies women in the household with their children. We used the Stunting measures as the primary outcome variables as indicator of the child health. By WHO's new standards, we measure stunting as a height-for-age Z-score (hav). Intimate partner violence (IPV) violence is measured as abuse by partners that occurred in the past 12 months. We employ Ordinary Least Squares, Lewbel (2012) 2SLS approach (which uses within-data heteroskedasticity to produce internal instruments to test for robustness of our standard 2SLS estimations) and Propensity Score Matching approach the study the relationship. We instrument IPV with the woman's history of violence. We find that IPV is associated with a 7.4 percentage point decrease in haz. However, after accounting for endogeneity, the IV estimate shows that IPV decreases haz, respectively, by 17.7 percentage points.

Keywords: Intimate partner violence, intergenerational transmission, Sub-Saharan Africa

JEL codes: J12, J19

Session 3

Financial Constraint and Financial Inclusion in Developing Countries

Chair: Keisha Solomon, Howard University, keisha.solomon@howard.edu

Paper 1:

Title: Digital wage payments and financial inclusion in Developing and Emerging Economies

Author and Presenter: Sandrine Kablan, Université de Paris Est Créteil, Email: sandrine.kablan@u-pec.fr

Author : Ismaila Bello, Federal University Gusau Nigeria, Petroleum Technology Development Fund Nigeria

Author : Sebastian Galanti, University of Orléans LEO

Abstract :

The study examines the impact of wage payment mode on financial inclusion in Developing and Emerging Economies. In such countries, non-bank financial institutions like mobile money agents have an important role as payment service providers. To account for this specificity, we build two indices: a traditional (banking) financial inclusion index, and a digital financial inclusion index. We test the hypothesis that distributing wages on financial accounts, through mobile phones or cards (which we label "digital wage payment"), does increase financial inclusion, whereas wages paid in cash do not. Countries wishing to improve their financial inclusion would therefore have a lever for action by regulating how salaries are paid.

Keywords: Digital Wage payments, financial inclusion, Principal Component Analysis, fractional logit regression, emerging and developing economies.

JEL Classification: J39, C14, C21, O39

Paper 2:

Title: Market-based Information to Predict Small Firms' Marginal Returns to Capital and Other Business Support Services

Author and Presenter: Amanda Awadey, Mount Holyoke College, Email: aawadey@mtholyoke.edu

Author: Laura Boudreau, Columbia University

Author: Elwyn Davies, World Bank

Abstract:

Entrepreneurs in developing countries typically have small and stagnant businesses despite the ubiquity of business support programs aimed at spurring growth. Their ability to use grant or loan financing to increase their businesses' growth varies widely and only a small group of business owners are successful at doing so. This suggests substantial scope to increase targeting precision of credit and loan programs for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Recent research points to a promising possibility of using information in the community to predict which entrepreneurs and firms have high returns to capital. In this study, we leverage a randomized control trial evaluating a large-scale business support program implemented in Ghana to explore entrepreneurs' business networks and examine the ability of peer entrepreneurs to predict marginal returns not only to capital but also managerial consulting and a larger business network. We also examine the potential for strategic misreporting when resource allocations are at stake and offer two simple tools from mechanism design to consider for improving prediction accuracy.

Keywords: small and medium-sized enterprises, firms, capital.

JEL Classification: L26

Paper 3 :

Title: Firms' Financial Constraint in Developing Countries: Is Africa Different?

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Abstract:

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the private sector's role as a driver of growth for developing countries has become increasingly important (Loayza, 2023). Additionally, most firms report that access to finance is the most critical constraint on their business. The study utilizes data from 133,525 firms in 113 developing countries from 2006 to 2023 to investigate whether, all else being equal, firms in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) are more likely to be financially constrained than firms outside SSA. We find a robust gender gap for businesses in SSA: all else equal, SSA firms are approximately 11.6 percentage points more likely to face a binding financial constraint. The access to finance gap is consistent across various types of firms, including sole proprietorships, small businesses, medium-sized companies, manufacturing firms, and service sector businesses. We identify policies that may help alleviate the financial access gap.

Keywords: Financial constraints, firms, Sub-Saharan Africa.

JEL Classification: L20, O55,