

## **Research Summary**

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**June 2010**

I am an applied micro-economist with a focus on disadvantaged populations in the United States. My research lies at the intersection of three sub-fields of economics: health economics, urban economics, and economic demography. The nexus of these three areas is of particular interest to me because the interactions between health, geography, and demography are critical but under-studied determinants of economic disadvantage in the United States.

### ***Health of Disadvantaged Populations***

Researchers use infant health as a well-measured marker of population health and well-being, and my two infant health papers approach the topic in that spirit. The first analysis examines the role of public investment in sanitation on U.S. Indian reservations starting in 1960. I document that these investments had striking effects on infant mortality, that the interventions were cost-effective, and that the health impacts spilled over to neighboring non-Indian populations. This paper contributes to the debate over the degree to which public health investment ameliorates health disparities.

A second article shows that a lower minimum drinking age is linked to lower birth weight and higher rates of prematurity for babies born to mothers under 21, especially for black mothers. These births are also less likely to have a father reported on the birth certificate, and the adverse consequences of liberalized alcohol laws only occur in areas where it is difficult for young women to obtain an abortion. The evidence therefore suggests that a low drinking age increases the rate unintended pregnancy and adversely affects infant health. This paper highlights the role of beneficial unintended consequences and points to the importance of policy interactions.

My recent health work focuses on take-up of the Medicaid program (public health insurance for the poor) among immigrants. Up to half of eligible individuals fail to enroll in the Medicaid program and take-up rates are particularly low for immigrants. My first project in this area examines the link between enforcement of immigration law and participation in the Medicaid program for children of non-citizens. "Chilling effects" arising from an icy policy climate are a popular explanation for low take-up, but such effects are inherently hard to measure. I find robust evidence that heightened enforcement reduces Medicaid participation among children of non-citizens. The results imply that safety net participation is influenced not only by program design, but also by a broader set of seemingly unrelated policy choices.

A second project experimentally investigates barriers to Medicaid participation among legal permanent residents in the Dearborn, Michigan area. My co-author and I recently conducted a pilot study in which a random subset of nearly 300 surveyed immigrants were given a flyer containing information about how to get help from a local community group applying for public health insurance. Most participants knew about the Medicaid program before receiving the flyer, but recipients of the flyer were statistically more likely to visit the community organization, presumably for help with the application process. The results suggest that even when individuals are aware of a program, lack of information about how to apply may be an important barrier to participation.

### ***Urban Inequality and Segregation***

My work in urban economics is focused on the determinants and consequences of urban inequality and segregation. In one project, I develop a new measure of income sorting that is not mechanically related to the income distribution. The paper documents that growth in residential sorting by income is closely tied to the growth of income inequality in an area. I then use the new measure in a related piece to investigate how segregation relates to the growth of a metropolitan area. The fixed nature of the housing stock makes it unlikely that metropolitan residents re-sort immediately when there is a change in the income distribution. However, in rapidly growing areas, the configuration of the housing stock is more fluid and responds quickly to consumer demand. I show that rapidly growing areas are moving more quickly to a new equilibrium - one in which residential sorting by race is being replaced by residential sorting by income in the urban landscape. My new project in the area explores the relationship between school choice policies, residential segregation, and school segregation.

In other work, I examine the link between urban inequality and marriage rates. In cities where there is high urban inequality, low-income men may be less likely to marry because the norms established by families at the median may be less attainable. My co-author and I propose an economic identity model and posit that men prefer not to marry unless they can achieve a level of income consistent with an idealized norm of marriage. Empirically we find that men are less likely to marry if their income falls below the median of others in a local reference group, controlling for their absolute income.

Finally, in another article, co-authors and I develop a Roback-style model to better understand the determinants of urban wage inequality. After accounting for individual characteristics, wage dispersion across income groups should reflect differences in the relative valuation of local amenities and fiscal policies. We find evidence of a link between local taxes and expenditures of various types and the degree of dispersion in the wage structure.