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The Evolution of China's One-Child Policy and Its Effects on Family Outcomes

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Abstract

In 1979, China introduced its unprecedented one-child policy, under which households exceeding the birth quota were penalized. However, estimating the effect of this policy on family outcomes turns out to be complicated. China had already enacted an aggressive family planning policy in the early 1970s, and its fertility rates had already dropped sharply before the enactment of the one-child policy. The one-child policy was also enacted at almost the same time as China's market-oriented economic reforms,

which triggered several decades of rapid growth, which would also tend to reduce fertility rates. During the same period, a number of other developing countries in East Asia and around the world have also experienced sharp declines in fertility. Overall, understanding the effects of China's one-child policy on family outcomes is a tremendous challenge. I expound the main empirical approaches to the identification of the effects of the one-child policy, with an emphasis on their underlying assumptions and limitations. I then turn to empirical results in the

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literature. I discuss the evidence concerning the effects of the one-child policy on fertility and how it might affect human capital investment in children. Finally I offer some new exploratory and preliminary estimates of the effects of the one-child policy on divorce, labor supply, and rural-to-urban migration.

Citation

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[Replication Package \(296.77 MB\)](#)

[Online Appendix \(2.86 MB\)](#)

[Author Disclosure Statement\(s\) \(43.13 KB\)](#)

JEL Classification

J11 Demographic Trends, Macroeconomic Effects, and Forecasts

J12 Marriage; Marital Dissolution; Family Structure; Domestic Abuse

J13 Fertility; Family Planning; Child Care; Children; Youth

J18 Demographic Economics: Public Policy

O15 Economic Development: Human Resources; Human Development; Income Distribution; Migration

P36 Socialist Institutions and Their Transitions: Consumer Economics; Health; Education and Training; Welfare, Income, Wealth, and Poverty

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