

Reading Summary - 'Safer Sex? The effect of AIDS risk on Birth Rates'

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Broad Question Being Asked

Spencer seeks to understand the effect of the prevalence of AIDS on local birth rates and abortion rates.

Precise Question

This paper specifically seeks to ascertain the link between the AIDS/HIV epidemics of the 80's and 90's and birth rates at the same time. Particularly, gaining insight into use of pregnancy as a mitigation strategy by way of entrance into monogamous unions or otherwise limiting exposure by likewise limiting sexual partners. This paper, therefore, seeks to model risk tolerance and choice in the marketplace of sexual and romantic partners for women using avoidance of life altering STI's as a lens.

Why Should a Policy Maker Care

A policy maker should have an obvious interest in this topic due to ongoing concerns with public health. While these topics are not as taboo as they were in the late 20th century, mitigation of the spread of STI's and understanding how birth rates are impacted by these decisions can sway policy to be better accommodating of the choice sets of women

Why Should an Economist Care

An economist should care since this is an interesting application of public health to model women's choice sets, and utilizes an interesting proxy variable for risk in AIDS incidence. Further, gaining insight into what was a major health event of last century is useful, and provides a framework for further extensions of this model and data.

What Economics are Learned

We learn two motivations that could account for the causal link between birth rate increases and AIDS risk. Firstly, Spencer proposes opting into monogamous relationships as one rationale, with women cutting risk by minimizing partners down to one. Next, there is the idea of switching from other contraceptive methods to condoms, which may have a higher failure rate. Either of these are interesting explanations for behavior shifts and may explain some of the data facts we see. Further, the paper discusses topics such as increases in abortion rates, marriage outcomes, and race based differences. Abortion rates increase. White and non-white + non-black women see increased birth rates while black women see negative, though statistically insignificant, effects on birth rates. White women seem to have therefore entered into monogamy while black women were less able, and saw higher rates of AIDS incidence.

A key takeaway is the importance of this research on women's health. Sexual health on its own is under discussed, but more notably women's sexual health is a massively important and under studied field. This paper provided massive insight into the topic.