

Leonel Borja Plaza

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Citizenship: Ecuadorian

Research interests

Development, Labor Economics, Applied Econometrics

Education

Cornell University

PhD Applied Economics and Management

Committee: John Hoddinott (Chair).

Christopher B. Barrett, Brian Dillon.

Ithaca, NY

May 2024 (Expected)

Northeastern University

MA in Economics

Boston, MA

August 2016 – December 2017

Universidad San Francisco de Quito

Economista

Magna Cum Laude

Quito, Ecuador

September 2009 – June 2014

Maastricht University

Semester Abroad

Maastricht, the Netherlands

September 2012- December 2012

Honors and scholarships

Dean's Scholarship (Northeastern University)

2016-2017

Fulbright Scholarship (for Master Studies in the US)

2019

Adam Smith Scholarship (Universidad San Francisco de Quito)

2009 - 2014

2nd Place *Colegio de Administracion para el Desarrollo Honors Award*

(Universidad San Francisco de Quito)

2014

Working papers

Are Teen Childbearing Effects Heterogeneous? Evidence from Ecuador

Abstract: Is teen childbearing a cause of economic disadvantage that is transmitted from one generation to the next? Extensive research has produced mixed evidence, making it difficult to draw policy recommendations. An explanation for the seemingly conflicting evidence is that teen childbearing affects each woman differently, given characteristics that are unobservable to researchers. To test for this unobserved heterogeneity, I estimate marginal treatment effects on schooling and labor outcomes for mothers; and mortality, schooling, and nutritional outcomes for firstborn children. I use deviations from a prediction of the age at menarche as a source of plausible exogenous variation in a large Ecuadorian sample to find that maternal treatment effects vary across unobservables that make women more or less likely to become teen mothers. These unobservables are characterized as an unobserved opportunity cost parameter. Women with lower unobserved opportunity costs do not have their schooling attainment negatively impacted if they become teen mothers. Women who face higher opportunity costs of teen childbearing can be severely affected, losing as much as two years of attained schooling and being 30% less likely to finish high school. Similar patterns emerge when analyzing women's labor force participation. I do not find evidence that teen mothers' firstborn children have higher mortality rates, less schooling relative to their age, or lower height-for-age Z scores, nor do I find evidence to suggest that treatment effect heterogeneity is a concern for children's outcomes. These findings imply that there is potential to improve women's economic outcomes by reducing teen childbearing rates when the individual cost of opportunity is sufficiently high. However, they do not support the belief that teen childbearing is a source of intergenerational transmission of low socioeconomic status.

Early Life Nutritional Improvements and Intergenerational Impacts on Education: Evidence from the INCAP longitudinal Study

with Jere Behrman, John Maluccio, Reynaldo Martorell, Manuel Ramírez-Zea, Aryeh Stein and John Hoddinott

Abstract: Whether any policy-induced benefits on human capital endure over the long term in resource-constrained environments is a concern because human capital may require sustained investment not to fade away. However, there is evidence that improvements in early-life nutrition increase schooling attainment and income in adulthood. Can these impacts also benefit the next generation? In this paper, we study the intergenerational effects on children's education of having a parent receive protein supplementation in early childhood in a low-income, rural setting. Using unique data that links two generations in a difference-in-difference framework, we show that children of early-treated male but not female participants of the INCAP longitudinal study—a nutritional intervention that occurred in Eastern Guatemala in the 1970s—have higher enrollment rates and schooling attainment than children of late- or non-treated fathers. We also find positive effects on boys' non-verbal cognitive ability, but these estimates are imprecise. We find no impact on vocabulary tests.

Work in Progress

Talent (Miss)Allocation and the Cost of Inequality of Opportunity

Abstract: Malnutrition and access to pre-primary education rates worldwide, especially in LMIC, suggest that the extent of unequal opportunity is worrisome. Many people do not have optimal investments at critical periods in their early life, irreversibly limiting their ability to realize their full human capital potential by no fault of their own. As long as the occupation type and human capital are complements, the optimal allocation of talent occurs when the individuals with the highest human capital match with the most productive jobs. Thus, barriers to early-life human capital formation represent a source of inequality of opportunity that produces an inefficient allocation of talent across occupations. Through counterfactual analysis, this paper quantifies the aggregate implications that stem from talent reallocation across occupations when barriers to human capital formation in early life are reduced.

The Effects of Compulsory Schooling on the Marriage Market: Evidence from Ecuador

Abstract: In 1977, Ecuador extended compulsory schooling from 6 to 9 years. Using a regression discontinuity design on recent household survey data, I find that the reform did not affect women's educational attainment, while it led to an average increase of 0.8 years of schooling for men. These heterogeneous effects had implications in the marriage market. Men married younger, more educated, and taller women. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to remain single, while those who got married did so to older, less educated, but also taller men. For couples that had children, where women should have benefited from the reform, the educational attainment gap between husbands and wives was significantly reduced.

Presentations

PacDev 2023: Early Life Nutritional Improvements and Intergenerational Impacts on Education: Evidence from the INCAP longitudinal Study

Research experience

Graduate Assistant for the America Economic Association (AEA) Data Editor

Summer 2021– Summer

2022

Supported the AEA Data Editor in the review of replication packages (code, data and output) of articles to be published in AEA affiliated journals. Tasks involved running code on different software including Python, Stata, R, Fortran, Matlab, and Julia, helping undergraduate students run code and produce review reports, as well as checking those reports as they are sent to authors to improve their replication packages.

Research assistant, "Reducing the Cost of Remoteness: Community-Based Health Interventions and Fertility Choices"

PIs: Catalina Herrera Almanza

October 2016 – December 2017

Maria Rosales Rueda

Link to published article [here](#).

Teaching experience	Teaching assistant, Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management	
	<i>Corporate Finance</i>	
	Prof. Johnny Tang	Fall 2023
	<i>Intro to Development Economics</i>	
	Prof. Steven Kyle Prof. Joanna Upton	Fall 2020 Summer 2023
Professional experience	<i>International Trade and Finance</i>	
	Prof. David R. Lee	Spring 2021
	Prof. David R. Lee	Spring 2020
	<i>Managerial Economics</i>	
	Prof. Terence Alexander	Fall 2020
Skills	Ministerio de Inclusion Economica y Social , Investigacion y Analisis Quito, Ecuador	
	Research Analyst	February 2018 - July 2018
	Fundacion Crisfe , Gestion del Conocimiento	Quito, Ecuador
	Specialist	August 2014 - August 2016
	Instituto Nacional de Estadisticas y Censos Estandares y Metodologias Quito, Ecuador	
Service to profession	Assistant 1	Feb 2014 - August 2014
	Programming	
	Proficient in: R, STATA, LATEX.	
	Familiar with: Python, MATLAB, Docker, Spss, GIS, QGIS, JULIA.	
	Languages	
Other interests	Spanish (Native), English (fluent), Italian (Basic), French (Basic)	
	Referee for Economics and Human Biology	
Other interests	Acoustic guitar, Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu	