

Health Care Reform and the Number of Doctor Visits - An Econometric Analysis

Summary

Our final project based on the paper which evaluates the German health care reform of 1997. The individual number of doctor visits is the outcome measure. The data set is from German Socio-Economic Panel for the years 1995-1999, 32837 observations are collected.

As the final project for econometrics, we decided to reproduce the work in table 1, 2, 3 and part of table 5 as the pedagogical exercises. Five different models including (1) Poisson regression model, (2) negative binomial regression model, (3) Zero-inflated negative binomial regression model, (4) Hurdle negative binomial model, and (5) Hurdle probit poisson log normal model are fitted to the data set and evaluated by log-likelihood, AIC and BIC. Among all the models, Hurdle negative binomial model demonstrates the best fitness to the data set. Based on the analysis, we found out that XXX. Our conclusions are consistent with the authors of the original paper.

Besides following the analysis in the original paper, we also generate some visualization to describe the data distributions and demonstrate the fitness of the models. The topics we learned in STAT 520 (Ordinary least square, Heteroscedasticity, Two-stage least squares) give us a solid foundation to understand the advanced topics and models such as Generalized linear models, Zero-inflated models, and Hurdle models in the paper.

Introduction

As one of the OECD (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, Germany has a large publicly funded health sector taking a substantial portion of total GDP. A possible explanation for the increase in healthcare spending includes (1) expanding technological and expenditure possibilities in the healthcare services, (2) the surge in demand from the aging population, and incentive structures in the public health sector not promoting the efficient use of resources. One of the significant reforms on the German healthcare system was the reform of 1997, in which the co-payments for prescription drugs were raised by 200%, and the reimbursements of physicians by state insurance were capped. To evaluate the effect of the healthcare reform of 1997, we want to know (1) whether the reform of 1997 is successful and effective and (2) how the effect of reform differs among different groups of the population.

Some background information needs to be elaborated on before we dig into the analysis. The general aim of this reform is to limit healthcare expenditure and its growth rate. The change in co-payments (for prescription) drugs is the most eminent element of the 1997 reform, with measures like an extended exclusion list of drugs not covered at all by social insurance, price ceilings related to the availability of generics, and a binding overall annual budget for drugs and doctor service.

An increased co-payment has a direct fiscal effect of reducing the proportion of cost covered by the insurer. The increased out-of-pocket expenses would disincentive customers from excessive use of prescription drugs and medical resources as a moral hazard.

The analysis of this paper focuses on the disincentivizing effect on prescription drug use by tracking the number of doctor visits by a person during a given time. The rationale for this approach, other than the unavailability of data on drug use, is the correlation between prescription drug use and doctor visit. The implemented policy will increase the expense of drugs, and the patient might try to persuade the doctor to prescribe in larger size or reduce their drug use while not seeing the doctor. Though some other effects might

affect the number of visits – one might still see a doctor for diagnosis or advice on non-prescription drugs, the number of such visits would not be affected by the increased co-payment. Thus, an analysis of patient visits could help us get some insights into the effectiveness and success of the 1997 Healthcare reform.

Data

The primary empirical strategy is to pool the data over the five years and estimate the effects of the reforms by comparing the expected number of visits in 1998 and 1996 *ceteris paribus*, i.e., for an individual with given characteristics.

The models that will be estimated in the following sections all include a systematic component (linear predictor) of the type

$$\begin{aligned} x'_{it}\beta = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{age}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{age}_{it}^2 + \beta_3 \text{years of education}_{it} + \beta_4 \text{married}_{it} + \beta_5 \text{household size}_{it} \\ & + \beta_6 \text{active sport}_{it} + \beta_7 \text{good health}_{it} + \beta_8 \text{bad health}_{it} + \beta_9 \text{self-employed}_{it} \\ & + \beta_{10} \text{full-time employed}_{it} + \beta_{11} \text{part-time employed}_{it} + \beta_{12} \text{unemployed}_{it} \\ & + \beta_{13} \text{equivalent income}_{it} + \beta_{96}(\text{year} = 1996)_{it} + \beta_{97}(\text{year} = 1997)_{it} \\ & + \beta_{98}(\text{year} = 1998)_{it} + \beta_{99}(\text{year} = 1999)_{it} \end{aligned}$$

The reference year is 1995. In addition, there are three dummies for the quarter in which the interview took place (winter, autumn, spring).

There are three general channels through which these variables can affect the demand for doctor visits. The first is the underlying health status, the second the budget constraint, and the third the preference formation.

There is no direct health status in the GSOEP. We have the following three sets of proxies instead. Clearly, these are only crude measures of health, and one may want to account for the possibility of additional unobserved heterogeneity to capture any remaining health aspects, as well as other unobserved influences.

- A time-consistent measure of health over 1995–1999 is provided by a subjective self-assessment in response to the question: “How good do you perceive your own health at current?”, with responses “very good”, “good”, “fair”, “poor” and “very poor”. The two best responses are classified as ‘good health’, the two worst responses as ‘bad health’, with fair health being the reference group.
- Another proxy for health is the age polynomial.
- Finally, engaging in ‘active sports’ (defined as a weekly or higher frequency) acts as a further proxy for good health, although it might have an additional direct effect on the demand for health services as well.

The budget constraint is determined by income and prices. The main price variables are the opportunity costs of a visit to a doctor which, in turn, depend on education level and employment status.

Several of the variables affect more than one aspect at a time. Age, for instance, matters for health, opportunity cost (through the effect of experience on earnings) as well as potentially preferences. Similarly, education is an important factor in determining the optimal investment in health capital (Grossman, 1972). It is not the goal of this paper to disentangle these various transmission channels. Rather, the focus lies on the year dummies, whereas the other right-hand-side variables serve as controls for any effects these variables might have on the changes in visits over time.

Econometric Models for consideration

We consider the following few models

Poisson Regression Model

We take the Poisson distribution as the standard probability distribution for count data $P(y_i | \lambda_i) = \frac{\exp(-\lambda_i) \cdot \lambda_i^{y_i}}{y_i!}$ s.t $E(y_i | \lambda_i) = \text{Var}(y_i | \lambda_i) = \lambda_i$ We assume heterogeneous population with covariance x_i in regression, $\lambda_i = \exp(x_i^T \beta)$, $y = (y_1, \dots, y_N)^T$, $x = (x_1, \dots, x_N)^T$. The data was randomly sampled $P(y | x) = \exp \left[- \sum_{i=1}^N \exp(x_i^T \beta) \right] \prod_{i=1}^N \frac{[\exp(x_i^T \beta)]^{y_i}}{y_i!}$, and we look for MLE. The relative change in expected doctor visits as reform effects can be calculated with $\Delta\%_{(98,96)} = 100 \left[\frac{E(y_{i,98}|x)}{E(y_{i,96}|x)} - 1 \right] = 100[\exp(\beta_{98} - \beta_{96}) - 1]$ It should be noted that the Poisson Model has a few shortcomings:

1. The assumption exclude the case of unobserved heterogeneity
2. It ignore the Panel Structure of the data and the Standard Errors need to incorporate possible serial correlation (unless we can assume constant individual effect over time)
3. The single index structure of the Poisson Regression model implies that the distribution is determined w.r.t the given mean, and we cannot evaluate the effect of the reform over the distribution (i.e cannot how it affect different sections of the population)

Hurdle Models

Define $d_i = 1$ if a person does not see a doctor in the period and $d_i = 0$ if he/she sees a doctor, s.t. $d_i = 1 - \min(1, y)$, the probability function of the hurdle model is $f(y_i) = f_{1i}^{d_i} [(1 - f_{1i}) f_T(y_i | y_i > 0)]^{1-d_i}$, with $f_{1i} = P(d_i = 1)$, $f_T(y_i | y_i > 0) = \frac{f_2(y_i)}{1 - f_{2i}(0)}$.

For f_1 , we have the following hurdle functions as candidates

1. Poisson: $\exp(-\exp(x_i^T \gamma))$
2. Negative Binomial, Type 1: $(1 + \theta)^{-\exp(x_i^T \theta)/\theta}$
3. Negative Binomial, Type 2: $[\alpha / (\exp(x_i^T \alpha) + \alpha)^\alpha]$
4. Logit: $\frac{\exp(x_i^T \gamma)}{1 + \exp(x_i^T \gamma)}$
5. Probit: $\Theta(x_i^T \gamma)$

For f_2 , we have

1. Poisson
2. Negative Binomial
3. Poisson-log-normal $p(x) = (\exp(x\mu + x^2\sigma/2) \cdot (2\pi\sigma)^{-1/2})/x! \cdot g(y)$

Results

Table 1

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Total Observation	6790.000	6555.000	6480.000	6781.000	6231.000
No. doctor visits	2.687	2.657	2.553	2.353	2.391
relative change in %	NA	-0.011	-0.039	-0.078	0.016
No. doctor visits (0/1)	0.348	0.328	0.352	0.372	0.346
Age	38.081	38.203	38.471	38.731	38.919
Unemployed (0/1)	0.085	0.084	0.092	0.085	0.075
Active sport (0/1)	0.295	0.247	0.262	0.307	0.266
Good health (0/1)	0.568	0.562	0.581	0.595	0.580
Bad health (0/1)	0.145	0.138	0.134	0.127	0.129

Table 2

The estimates for the basic Poisson model, with and without individual specific effects, are displayed in Table II. The log-likelihood of the models are as follows.

- The pooled model: -86566.18.
- The random effect model: -70176.72.
- The fixed effect model: -42738.86.

The estimations of coefficients and stander errors of the models are as follows.

	Pooled Estimate	Pooled Robust SE	Random effects Estimate	Random effects Robust SE	Fixed effects Estimate	Fixed effects Robust SE
Age	-0.011	0.007	-0.009	0.006	-0.009	0.006
Age ²	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Male	-0.209	0.021	-0.295	0.020	-0.295	0.020
Education	-0.006	0.004	-0.004	0.004	-0.004	0.004
Married	0.081	0.022	0.077	0.018	0.077	0.018
Household size	-0.052	0.008	-0.055	0.006	-0.055	0.006
Active Sport	0.047	0.019	0.006	0.013	0.006	0.013
Good health	-0.611	0.019	-0.501	0.012	-0.501	0.012
Bad health	0.813	0.022	0.623	0.012	0.623	0.012
Social assistance	0.086	0.044	0.041	0.026	0.041	0.026
Log(income)	0.093	0.023	0.017	0.016	0.017	0.016
Year=1996	0.001	0.027	-0.014	0.011	-0.014	0.011
Year=1997	-0.030	0.027	-0.050	0.011	-0.050	0.011
Year=1998	-0.105	0.027	-0.106	0.012	-0.106	0.012
Year=1999	-0.099	0.027	-0.107	0.012	-0.107	0.012

Table 3

Five different models are explored.

Models	Log.likelihood	AIC	BIC
Poisson	-86566.18	173176.4	173361.1
Negative Binomial	-64611.55	129269.1	129462.3
Zero-inflated Negative Binomial	-64369.56	128829.1	129207.1
Hurdle Negative Binomial Model	-64254.90	128599.8	128977.8
Hurdle Probit Poisson Log Normal Model	-77976.35	156040.7	156410.3

By dividing the visitors two groups at mean visit times, we can see that the previously less frequent visit groups are more affected by the reform. Assuming that there were no significant changes in other variables like business cycles, major socio-political events, or pandemic-related behavior changes over the short two year frame of 1996 - 1998 in Germany.

Table 5

- From the Poisson Model, the relative change in expected doctor visits from 1996 to 1998 is -10.060%
- From the Negative Binomial Model, the relative change in expected doctor visits from 1996 to 1998 is -8.890%
- From the Zero Inflation Model, the relative change in expected doctor visits from 1996 to 1998 is -6.321%

- From the Hurdle Binomial Model, the relative change in expected doctor visits from 1996 to 1998 is -3.482%

For future Research

The index models used in this research can be applied to study the effect of other medical healthcare events. From 1990 - 2015, multiple attempts were made to improve the solidarity-based system through competition to further improve economic efficiency of the healthcare system and promote technological advancement. ([https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(17\)31280-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(17)31280-1)) If policy objective is on the effect of promoting efficient and responsible use of healthcare services, we might apply the same analysis to the Act to Strengthen Competition in Statutory Health Insurance in 2007 and the Statutory Health Insurance Care Structures Act, given that the primary policies of 2007 reform are 1) mandatory universal coverage, 2) introduction of a uniform contribution rate, a central reallocation pool and resource allocation to sickness funds according to a morbidity-based risk structure compensation scheme, 3) choice of tariffs in statutory health insurance, while the 2011 Acts are more focused on supplementary premiums and reimbursement for new pharmaceutical products. It should be noted that to evaluate the effect of both reforms, in addition to variables we used in previous analysis, we might want to incorporate more economic variables related to economic growth, business cycles, considering the 2008 recession and 2010s European Sovereign Debt Crisis.

Appendix

The calculation of table 1

The calculation of table 2

The calculation of table 3

The calculation of table 5