

You Want What You Get: The Effect of Realized Fertility on Fertility Preference

Prankur Gupta*

October 19, 2023

Full paper coming soon

Abstract

Fertility preferences are critical in understanding fertility trends and in making reproductive policies. However, if fertility itself influences preferences, this would complicate its usage. This paper investigates if there exists a causal effect of realized fertility on desired fertility. I exploit the quasi-random occurrence of twins or the birth of a female child at first birth as an instrument for exogenous variation in realized fertility. Using data from 230 rounds of demographic and health surveys from 74 developing countries, I find that having an additional birth causally increases desired fertility by 0.15-0.30. Further, I find the result is unlikely to be driven by experiential learning but can be explained through either a model of reference-dependent preferences or ex-post rationalization. The result has important policy and research implications specifically when using fertility preferences to estimate excess fertility, the need for family planning programs, son preference, or as proxies for intrahousehold bargaining.

*Department of Economics, University of Texas at Austin (Email: prankur@utexas.edu)