

Daniel J. Sonnenstuhl

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Education

University of Chicago , PhD. Public Policy	2020-2026 (expected)
University College London , MSc. Economics, <i>Distinction</i>	2017-2018
University College London , BA. Philosophy and Economics, <i>First Class Honors</i>	2014-2017

References

Professor James Robinson (Chair) University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy jamesrobinson@uchicago.edu	Professor Gregory Lane University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy laneg@uchicago.edu	Professor Eduardo Montero University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy emontero@uchicago.edu
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Research Fields

Primary: Development Economics
Secondary: Labor Economics, Experimental Economics, Political Economy

Research Experience

Pre-Doctoral Fellow, The University of Chicago, Booth School of Business	Feb 2020-Sept 2020
Pre-Doctoral Fellow, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver School of Economics	Oct 2018-Jan 2020

Job Market Paper

Working Without Wages: The Consequences of Widespread Pay Delays (with Dauda Musa)

We show that firms in low-income countries frequently withhold employee wages and study how workers respond to this widespread practice. Using original survey data from Lagos, Nigeria, we document that 30% of workers across firms of all sizes report delayed or unpaid salaries. To examine how workers respond to wage withholding, we implement a field experiment: we incorporate a firm, recruit more than 1,700 workers, and hire 600 of them perform image-labeling tasks. Unpaid wages increase employees' initial effort, without affecting absenteeism or total hours worked. Widespread wage withholding creates uncertainty that induces worker selection: credibly signaling salary reliability increases job take-up by 25%. Although this effect is driven by individuals who had initially expressed no interest in wage employment, it does not attract more productive workers. Combining intensive- and extensive margin estimates suggests that, in our setting, firms incur minimal productivity losses of about 0.2% from engaging in wage withholding. This gives firms little incentive to refrain from the practice, while workers valuing reliable pay highly at over 30% of the monthly minimum wage.

Publications

A Denial a Day Keeps the Doctor Away (with Abe Dunn, Joshua D. Gottlieb, Adam Shapiro and Pietro Tebaldi) *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 139(1): 187–233, February 2024.

Who bears the consequences of administrative problems in health care? We use data on repeated interactions between a large sample of U.S. physicians and many different insurers to document the complexity of health care billing, and estimate its economic costs for doctors and consequences for patients. Observing the back-and-forth sequences of claim denials and resubmissions for past visits, we can estimate physicians' costs of haggling with insurers to collect payments. Combining these costs with the revenue never collected, we estimate that physicians lose 18% of Medicaid revenue to billing problems, compared with 4.7% for Medicare and 2.4% for commercial insurers. Identifying off of physician movers and practices that span state boundaries, we find that physicians respond to billing problems by refusing to accept Medicaid patients in states with more severe billing hurdles. These hurdles are quantitatively just as important as payment rates for explaining variation in physicians' willingness to treat Medicaid patients. We conclude that administrative frictions have first-order costs for doctors, patients, and equality of access to health care. We quantify the potential economic gains — in terms of reduced public spending or increased access to physicians — if these frictions could be reduced and find them to be sizable.

Working Papers

The Causes and Implications of the Pentecostal Movement: Evidence from Nigeria

The global spread of Pentecostalism represents an unprecedented instance of religious dynamism. This paper estimates the causal effects of joining a modern Pentecostal church in Nigeria on individuals' behavior, perceptions, social identity, and well-being. I collect original data and leverage a partnership with one of Nigeria's largest Pentecostal denominations, Living Faith Church. This partnership allows me to exploit quasi-random variation in the denomination's proselytization activities. Constructing an appropriate control group, I instrument for church membership using exposure to the proselytization team. Joining the church increases religious participation but reduces individuals' perceived locus of control, with no detectable effects on income or mental health. Finally, combining survey data with administrative records on service attendance after proselytization, I exploit quasi-random variation in sermon topics to identify the messages that attract new members. Sermons emphasizing divine intervention and health are particularly effective in drawing individuals to the church.

Works in Progress

The Economics of Wage Withholding: Evidence from Nigerian Firms (with Dauda Musa)

Megachurches and Religious Messaging in Nigeria (with Olaitan Ogunnote)

Pentecostalism and Social Cooperation: The Big Gods Hypothesis in Action (with Olaitan Ogunnote)

Research Grants and Awards (Total funding received as PI or co-PI: ~\$240,000)

Becker Friedman Institute, Data Acquisition Grant (\$18,100)	2025
Development Economics Center at the University of Chicago, Research Grant (\$30,000)	2025
The Pearson Institute, Small Research Grant, with Dauda Musa (\$5,000)	2025
The Weiss Fund, Research Grant (\$50,000)	2024
Structural Transformation and Economic Growth (STEG), PhD Student Research Grant (£15,000)	2024
Development Economics Center at the University of Chicago, Research Grant (\$25,000)	2024
Development Economics Center at the University of Chicago, Pilot Grant (\$10,000)	2024
The Weiss Fund, Pilot Grant (\$11,500)	2024
The Weiss Fund, Pilot Grant, with Olaitan Ogunnote (\$15,000)	2024
The Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA), Seed Grant, with Olaitan Ogunnote (\$10,639)	2024
PEDL, Seed Grant, with Nofiu Adebisi and George Agyeah (£5,000)	2023
The Pearson Institute, Small Research Grant (\$10,000)	2023
Becker Friedman Institute Political Economics Initiative, Small Research Grant (\$5,000)	2023
Development Economics Center at the University of Chicago, Pilot Grant (\$10,000)	2023

Development Economics Center at the University of Chicago, Exploratory Grant (\$5,000)	2023
The Weiss Fund, Exploratory Grant (\$3,500)	2023
Development Economics Center at the University of Chicago, Exploratory Grant (\$5,000)	2022

Fellowships and Awards

Harris Graduate Student Fellowship	2020-2026
Erste Bank Group Scholarship	2015

Teaching Experience

Senior Thesis: Public Policy (undergraduate)	Preceptor	<i>Fall 2025- Winter 2026</i>
Senior Thesis: Public Policy (undergraduate)	Preceptor	<i>Fall 2024- Spring 2025</i>
Economics, Politics and African Societies (PhD)	TA for Prof. James Robinson	<i>Spring 2024</i>
Power and Development (master)	TA for Prof. Raúl Sánchez de la Sierra	<i>Spring 2024</i>
Senior Thesis: Public Policy (undergraduate)	Preceptor	<i>Fall 2023- Winter 2024</i>
Principles of Microeconomics II (master)	TA for Profs. Sonin & Kumar	<i>Winter 2023</i>
Statistics for Data Analysis I (master)	TA for Profs. Frank & Moskowitz	<i>Fall 2022</i>
Senior Thesis: Public Policy (undergraduate)	Preceptor	<i>Fall 2022- Spring 2023</i>
Principles of Microeconomics II (master)	TA for Profs. Kumar & Lo	<i>Winter 2022</i>
Statistics for Data Analysis I (master)	TA for Profs. Frank & Moskowitz	<i>Fall 2021</i>
Senior Thesis: Public Policy (undergraduate)	Preceptor	<i>Fall 2021- Spring 2022</i>

Seminars and Conferences

Seminars	2025	Leibniz Institute for Economic Research (Berlin), STEG Early Career Workshop
	2024	Covenant University
Conferences	2025	CSAE, DevPEC, EEA Meeting, Advances with Field Experiments Conference
	2024	ASREC, SIOE, RES PhD Conference

Other

Citizenship: German
Programming Skills: Stata, Julia, Python, R
Languages: German (native), English (full professional proficiency)