

YUJUAN GAO

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EDUCATION

University of Florida *August 2021 - Current*
Ph.D., Applied Economics
Graduate School Fellowship (Merit-based, 2021 – 2025)

Stanford Center on China's Economy and Institutions *August 2018 - August 2019*
Visiting Graduate Research Fellow

Shaanxi Normal University *August 2016 - December 2019*
M.A., Economics

Shanxi University of Finance and Economics *September 2012 - July 2016*
B.S., Statistics

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Institute for Development Impact, Washington, D.C. *December 2025 - Current*
Impact Measurement & Evaluation Specialist (Independent Contractor)

Stanford Center on China's Economy and Institutions *July 2025 - Current*
Research Assistant

Food and Resource Economics Department, University of Florida *August 2021 - July 2025*
Teaching and Research Assistant

Save the Children, China *July 2020 - January 2021*
Consultant for Yunnan Ludian 0-3 Years Early Childhood Development Project

RESEARCH FIELDS

Primary: Development Economics, Health Economics, Economics of Education
Secondary: Spatial Economics, Causal Inference, Food Nutrition

JOB MARKET PAPER

Bridging the Digital Divide: How 3G Internet Coverage Transforms Fertility Decisions in Nigeria, Accepted for presentation (Poster), ASSA 2026 [click here]

*This paper examines whether mobile internet access influences fertility behavior and women's autonomy in high-fertility settings. I link georeferenced 3G coverage data with 80,247 women from the 2013 and 2018 **Nigerian Demographic and Health Surveys** and exploit staggered network rollout using **heterogeneity-robust difference-in-differences** designs. To address high-dimensional and nonlinear confounding and the continuous nature of treatment intensity, I additionally apply **double machine learning (DML)**. A one-standard deviation increase in 3G coverage reduces the annual birth probability of adolescent women (ages 12–20) by 1.3–1.8 percentage points, an 11–16 percent decline relative to baseline. Event-study estimates confirm parallel pre-trends and show that impacts strengthen with exposure duration. Mechanism analysis indicates that fertility reductions operate through delayed cohabitation and postponed first births rather than increased contraceptive adoption. Mobile internet exposure also improves educational attainment and shifts young women from unpaid or family labor into moderate-skill wage employment, consistent with rising opportunity costs of early childbearing.*

SKILLS

Programming: R, Stata, Python, SQL, ArcGIS, L^AT_EX, GitHub, scikit-learn, EconML
Software: Survey Solutions, Qualtrics, ArcGIS

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

“Do Color-Coded Nutrition Facts Panels Nudge the Use of Nutrition Information on Food Packaging?” (with Xuqi Chen, Lisa House, and Zhifeng Gao) *Food Policy*, 2024. [\[click here\]](#)

“Associations between Urbanization and the Home Language Environment: Evidence from a LENA Study in Rural and Peri-urban China” (with Yue Ma, Scott Rozelle, *et al.*) *Child Development*, 2023. [\[click here\]](#)

“Maternal Health Behaviors during Pregnancy in Rural Northwestern China” (with Yue Ma, Sarah-Eve Dill, *et al.*) *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 2020. [\[click here\]](#)

“Arrival Order for Positive and Negative Effects of Parental Migration on the Academic Performance of Left-behind Children in Rural China” (with Yu Bai) *Studies in Labor Economics* (in Chinese), 2018.

WORKING PAPERS

Unintended Consequences of Best Intentions: Examining Spillover Effects in Targeted Supplementary Education Interventions (with Conner Mullally and Yue Ma), Under Review at *Economics of Education Review* [\[click here\]](#)

*This study investigates **spillover effects** from targeted **educational interventions** in resource constrained settings. Through a **cluster-randomized controlled trial** across 130 rural Chinese primary schools, I assigned boarding students to computer-assisted learning (CAL), traditional workbook exercises, or control conditions, then measured effects on over 6,400 untreated non-boarding classmates. Workbook interventions generated significant negative spillovers, reducing non-boarding students' math performance by 0.087 standard deviations, with effects intensifying among students who frequently interacted with treated peers and in classrooms with higher treatment density. In contrast, CAL programs implemented outside regular classrooms produced no spillover effects. Mechanism analysis reveals that workbook exposure undermines untreated students' instrumental motivation—their belief that mathematical effort will improve future opportunities—while leaving classroom competition and teacher attention patterns unchanged.*

Friendship Formation and Peer Effect: Using Seat Distribution as an Instrument (with Yu Bai and Scott Rozelle), R&R at *China Agriculture Economic Review* [\[click here\]](#)

*This paper studies how physical distance shapes peer networks and academic achievement in rural Chinese primary schools. Using data from 2,956 students and exploiting **exogenous seating assignments** as an **instrument** for study-partner formation, we find that belonging to a higher-performing study group increases individual math achievement by about 0.11 standard deviations. Effects are strongest for lower- and middle-performing students and in more cohesive groups. Mediation analysis shows that gains operate primarily through improved intrinsic motivation and academic self-concept, highlighting spatial proximity as a low-cost lever for enhancing learning.*

Using Text Messages to Improve Parenting Knowledge and Early Childhood Development in Rural China (with Yue Ma and Susanna Loeb), Under Review at *Education Finance and Policy* [\[click here\]](#)

*This study evaluates whether low-cost “**Tips-by-Text**” **interventions** can improve **early childhood outcomes** in under-resourced rural Chinese communities. Drawing on a **randomized controlled trial** with caregivers of children ages 0–3, the program delivered weekly text messages offering actionable guidance on play, language stimulation, and nutrition. The intervention significantly increased caregiver engagement, strengthened home learning environments, and improved children's language and cognitive development. Impacts were largest among caregivers facing higher parenting barriers. The results demonstrate that simple, scalable mobile messaging can effectively support early childhood development where access to formal services is limited.*

WORK IN PROGRESS

Maternal Migration and Early Child Development in Rural China
Determination of Labor Demand and Wage, Evidence from 500 million Job Post in China

POLICY AND OUTREACH WRITINGS

Bai, Yu and **Yujuan Gao** (2021). “Save the Children Yunnan Ludian 0-3 Years Early Childhood Development Project (2019-2020) Evaluation Report.”

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

AEB 3103 - Principles of Food & Resource Economics	TA for 49 students	2025
AEB3341 - Selling Strategically	TA for 65 students	2024
AEB3133 - Principles of Agribusiness Management	TA for 89 students	2023
IDS 2935-22961 - How Do We End Poverty?	Guest Lecture	2023
AEB3671 - Comparative World Agriculture	TA for 69 students	2023
AEB4283 - International Development Policy	TA for 77 students	2022
AEB4673 - International Agricultural Trade	TA for 9 students	2022

AWARDS, SCHOLARSHIPS, AND GRANTS

J. R. Greenman Memorial Scholarship from CALS, University of Florida	2022, 2024
Young Scholar Excellent Paper Award, China Education Finance Research Association	2023
Best Paper Awards, Agricultural & Applied Economics Association Annual Conference	2020

CONFERENCES AND SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS

2026: ASSA (Scheduled)
2025: ASSA; AAEA; Advances with Field Experiments (AFE); NABE Tech Economics Conference
2024: Global GLO-JOPE Conference (Job Market Session); APPAM Fall Conference; CES North America Annual Conference; PacDev at Stanford; SSC Young Researcher Workshop at Stanford; AAEA
2023: NEUDC at Harvard; AAEA Annual Conference
2022: WEAI 97th Annual Meeting
2020: AAEA Annual Conference

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Referee: BMC Public Health; PLOS One
Certification: Preparing Future Faculty Program, Center for Teaching Excellence, University of Florida (Fall 2024)
Service: Mentor, 2025 Summer AEA Mentoring Program

REFERENCES

Professor Conner Mullally (Chair) University of Florida Food and Resource Economics Department connerm@ufl.edu (352)294-7680	Professor Scott Rozelle (Committee) Stanford University Stanford Center on China's Economy and Institutions rozelle@stanford.edu (650) 862-0466
Professor Jared E. Gars (Committee) University of Florida Food and Resource Economics Department jgars87@ufl.edu (352)294-7692	Professor Xinde “James” Ji (Committee) University of Florida Food and Resource Economics Department xji1@ufl.edu (315)600-6676