

Effect of health on changing labor outcomes in transition China

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Abstract: This dissertation investigates the effect of health on changing labor outcomes during the economic development and transition in China in the late 20th century. The returns to health were explored by testing the hypothesis that labor market gains during China's economic transition were significantly smaller for people who were in worse health.

Data were drawn from the 1989-1997 waves of the China Health and Nutrition Survey (CHNS). The longitudinal survey enabled estimation of individual-level panel data models of changing labor force participation as a function of a rich set of baseline health indicators, thus ameliorating the central problems of health measurement and endogeneity. Health measured in various ways---self-rated general health status (GHS), body mass index (BMI), height, mobility, and hypertension---had complex effects on the labor force participation among Chinese adults even after adjustment for per capita assets, education, marital status, and region. Results showed that people with better health were more likely to be in the labor force, and that the effects of health on labor force participation differed by factors such as age, marital status, education, and living in rural farming households. One of the notable findings was that people with low body mass index were more likely to work than people with higher BMI, contrary to the literature.

Evidence of returns from health can provide the justification for social and health policies to invest in human capital. This dissertation contributes to the existing evidence by assessing the causality of health effects on labor force participation and measuring the magnitude of the health effects.

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Subject: Public health; Labor economics; Cellular biology; Labor market; Polls & surveys; Studies; Economic conditions;

Classification: 0573: Public health; 0510: Labor economics; 0758: Cellular biology

Identifier / keyword: Health and environmental sciences, Social sciences, Health, Labor, China, Hypertension

Pages: 112 p.

Number of pages: 112

Publication year: 2005

Degree date: 2005

School code: 0153

Source: DAI-B 66/09, p. 4768, Mar 2006

Place of publication: Ann Arbor

Country of publication: United States

ISBN: 9780542341175, 0542341174

Advisor: Stearns, Sally C

University/institution: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

University location: United States -- North Carolina

Degree: Ph.D.

Source type: Dissertations & Theses

Language: English

Document type: Dissertation/Thesis

Dissertation/thesis number: 3190337

ProQuest document ID: 305392875

Document URL:

<http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/305392875?accountid=14244>

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Database: ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text

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