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Perception of HIV risk and the quantity and quality of children: The case of rural Malawi

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Abstract

The empirical literature on HIV and the quality (Q) and quantity (N) of children generally reports negative associations for Q and unclear associations for N. We focus our analysis on the effects of HIV, as a predictor of mother and child mortality, on investments in child Q and N. We develop a Q-N model within which higher mothers' mortality predicts lower N while higher child mortality predicts lower Q. Those effects together make reasonable the expectation of negative influences of higher HIV likelihood on child Q and N. Based on longitudinal micro data on mothers and their children in rural Malawi we find that variation in mothers' reported HIV risk reduces both child quality, as reflected in children's schooling and health, and child quantity, when the perceived risk is already moderate or high. The effects are sizable, and, in the case of Q (schooling and health) are found in children and teenagers, as well as boys and girls, while in the case of N are found for young and mature women.

Keywords

Africa, AIDS, Child health, Child quality, Child quantity, Children, Fertility, HIV, Malawi, Malawi Longitudinal Study of Families and Health, Maternal morbidity, Mortality, Mothers, Schooling