

Family Health and Social Capital

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to estimate the effects of poor infant health on parental social interactions. Having a child with a serious health problem imposes significant time and monetary costs on the child's parents. One aspect of these costs is the potential reduction of social interactions. This is a loss since social interactions directly provide utility and have been shown to increase mental and physical health. Social interaction can also produce alternatives to market-purchased child care services and other forms of instrumental support that can be especially important for low-income families.

The data that will be used come from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study (FFCWB). The FFCWB is a longitudinal survey of about 5,000 new births to mostly unmarried parents in 20 U.S. cities during the years 1998-2000. Both the mothers and fathers were interviewed at the time of the birth and followed up 1, 3, and 5 years later. Poor infant health is measured in alternative ways to reflect both serious and random health problems. Social interactions include participation in church groups, service clubs, political organizations, union or other work-related groups, community groups, and organizations working with children. Data on income, education and other demographics are included in the analyses.