Abstract

We examine the relationship between early childhood circumstances, adverse events experienced by the household, and social protection schemes and time spent working at the age of fifteen in four low/middle income countries. We define work to include paid and unpaid work outside and inside the home, including caring for others. Our empirical model includes information on the earliest years of childhood, as well as working hours when the child was eight years old. We have detailed information on household and child characteristics in four rounds of panel data, including usually unobserved factors such as parental attitudes and aspirations, and child ability at the age of five. We find that structural factors such as ethnicity, location, and household poverty remain important even in a saturated model. We also find persistence in time spent working—work hours at age 8 are a good predictor of working hours at age 15. Social protection programs do not affect work time except in Peru, where those receiving a conditional cash transfer work fewer hours.

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