Bringing the Breadwinner Back In: Relative Wages and Diseases of Despair

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Motivation

Motivation

- Gender identity norms
  - Male breadwinner role
- Couples in which women outearn husbands...
  - Less happy
  - More likely to have marital problems
  - More likely to divorce

Research Question and Approach
Research Question

- **Does violating gender identity norms lead to health problems?**
  1. Does lacking breadwinner status increase the likelihood that men have health problems?
  2. Does *losing* breadwinner status increase the likelihood that men have health problems?
- **Diseases of despair**
Data

- 15,463 married, heterosexual couples
  - Average of 4.36 years of data per couple
- Examine their health between 2003 and 2017
  - Serious mental illness
  - “Good” subjective well-being
  - Health better or worse than two years ago?
  - Obesity
  - Hypertension
  - Binge drinking
Empirical Approach
1: Fixed-Effects Analysis

- Are people healthier when they’re the breadwinner than when they’re not?
- Controls for all of the unique, time-constant traits of individuals

\[ Health_{it} = \beta_1 \ln FamIncome_{it-1} + \beta_2 Unemployed_{it-1} + \beta_3 Breadwinner_{it-1} + \beta_4 Breadwinner_{it-1} \times Unemployed_{it-1} + \beta_5 \bar{X}'_{it} + \beta_6 \bar{Y}'_{it-2} + \bar{u}_{it}, \]

where variables have been time-demeaned such that \( Health_{it} = Health_{it} - \overline{Health_{it}} \), etc.
2: First Differences Analysis

- Do immediate changes in breadwinner status lead to changes in health?
- Looks at changes in breadwinner status over two consecutive years

\[
\Delta Health_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \Delta \ln Fam Income_{it-1} + \beta_2 \Delta Unemployed_{it-1} + \\
\beta_3 \Delta Breadwinner_{it-1} + \\
\beta_4 \Delta Breadwinner_{it-1} \times \Delta Unemployed_{it-1} + \\
\beta_5 X'_{it} + \beta_6 Y'_{it-2} + \epsilon_{it}
\]
Findings
1: Among employed men, how does **lacking** breadwinner status affect health?

2: Among employed men, how does **losing** breadwinner status affect health?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2: First Differences</th>
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<td>+*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Good” Subjective Well-Being</td>
<td>-***</td>
<td>Stayed Poor: + Improved: + Declined: +</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Better or Worse?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Better: - Worse: +***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypertension</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binge Drinking</td>
<td>+***</td>
<td>Continued: +** Started: + Stopped: +*</td>
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*** p<0.01, ** p <0.05, * p<0.1. Odds ratios > 1 are represented as “+”; <1, “−”.
1: Among employed women, how does **lacking** breadwinner status affect health?

2: Among employed women, how does **losing** breadwinner status affect health?

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Conclusion

- Breadwinner status *does* affect health
- Effects vary between men and women

**Future research**

- When and why does breadwinner status affect health?
- How might other variation in intrahousehold income distributions affect health?