

The effect of education on fertility: evidence from a policy experiment in Vietnam

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The inverse association between female education and fertility is well known. Empirical evidence of the causality of the association is, however, limited and particularly so in developing countries. We exploit a policy change in universal education which mandates an increase of lower secondary education by one additional grade in the Northern Vietnam in 1989 to study the causal effect of female educational attainment on fertility. Using household survey data, we first evaluate the effectiveness of this policy in terms of the change in age of leaving school. We then investigate the policy impact on fertility using the 2009 Census data and a reduced form approach. We find that the policy does result in higher age of leaving full time schooling, especially among women with high school education. We also find that the policy caused changes in key fertility outcomes. Women who were affected by the policy experienced higher age at first birth and lower cumulative fertility by age 30. This fertility impact of increasing education due to the policy however varies by the level of educational attainment.