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Spillover effects of family planning: Impact of contraceptive use on child malnutrition

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ABSTRACT

We use nationally representative data from India on women and her children aged below 5 years to evaluate the impact of contraceptive use on child health outcomes. Using exogenous variation in a woman's knowledge of her fertile period as an instrument, we estimate that the use of contraception leads to 1.01 SD (0.54 SD) increase in a child's height-for-age (weight-for-age) z-scores respectively. Additionally, we find that contraceptive use can reduce the likelihood of a child being moderately (acutely) stunted by 8.4 pp (19 pp) and moderately (acutely) underweight by 6.9 pp (7.7 pp) respectively. Moreover, contraception use increases the probability of a child being fed a more diverse diet which points to a potential mechanism through which our findings perpetrate. Our results indicate that a greater focus on the access to (and use of) contraceptive measures can lead to sizeable benefits in terms of child health apart from population stabilization.

KEYWORDS Child health; malnutrition; contraception; instrumental variables; India

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