

Has the Opioid Crisis Affected Family Formation? Evaluating Local Nonmarital Childbearing, 2000-2016

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Abstract

The U.S. has experienced a dramatic rise in opioid addiction and opioid-related deaths in recent years. We investigate the effect of the opioid epidemic at the local level on nonmarital birth rates for the years 2000-2016. Local opioid-related death rates are estimated using restricted Vital Statistics records, and matched with birth data at the PUMA level. Models include year and area fixed effects. We also test endogenous models using the length of exposure to state medical marijuana laws as an instrumental variable. We find a significant increase in nonmarital birth rates in communities that experienced a rise in opioid-related death rates. Individual-level data from the ACS 2008-2016 are then used to further assess the potential causal mechanisms and to test differences by race and ethnicity. We find that the positive effect of the opioid epidemic on nonmarital childbearing is driven almost exclusively by white mothers.

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