ABSTRACT

THREE ESSAYS ON THE SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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This three-paper dissertation examines the social determinants of early childhood and in-utero health. The first chapter examines the impact of early childhood stunting on educational outcome in Tanzania. Using the extent of third-trimester overlap with the Tanzania hunger season to create an exogenous variation in stunting, I find that a one standard deviation stunting decreases educational achievement by .88 school years compared to a child’s siblings. A placebo group not affected by the hunger season is used to confirm that in-utero nutrition deprivation is the cause of the education differences. The second paper utilizes the food price shocks and price increases to examine the impact of nutritional sufficiency on child development in four
sub-Saharan countries. I find adverse effects of third-trimester and early-childhood exposure to food price increases, but get inconsistent results on infancy that requires additional research. The final paper uses an instrumental variable method to determine the impact of public health spending on infant mortality in India. The results imply that a one percent of state-level GDP increase in public health prevents seven children deaths for every 1,000 live births. Together the three papers highlight the possible role investments in early childhood health could have in increasing human capabilities and well-being.