THE EFFECT OF JOINT CUSTODY ON FAMILY OUTCOMES

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Abstract
Since the 1970s almost all US states have introduced a form of joint custody after divorce. I analyze the causal effect of these custody law reforms on different family outcomes. My identification strategy exploits the different timing of reforms across the US states. Estimations based on state panel data suggest that the introduction of joint custody led to an increase in marriage rates, an increase in overall fertility (including a shift from non-marital to marital fertility), and an increase in divorce rates for older couples. Accordingly, female labor market participation decreased. Further, male suicide rates and domestic violence fell in treated states. The empirical evidence is consistent with the hypothesis that joint custody increased the relative bargaining power of men within marriage. (JEL: J12, J13, J18, K36, D13)

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