Parental Involvement in Abortion Decisions and Teenager Responses: Evidence from Spain[*]

Xavier Moncasi[†]

Abstract

This paper analyzes the effects of abortion costs for minors on abortions, sexual behavior, and births. We exploit a 2015 change in parental involvement (PI) laws in Spain as a natural experiment in costs, together with rich population-level data on abortions and births. Using the exact date of teenager birth, we first document a decrease in abortions by 17-years-olds using a difference-in-difference comparison with 18-years-olds, consistent with the law that targeted Spanish minors. Using bunching methods from the Public Finance literature, we show evidence of temporal displacement. Some 17-years-old delayed their abortion and waited until they turned 18 and thereby avoided involving their parents. Second, we consider how the law change may have influenced health-related behaviors, finding implicitly that sexual behaviors changed so as to reduce the likelihood of becoming pregnant before turning 18 (and thereby internalized the cost of parental involvement). This is seen in the permanent shift in the number of abortions at age 18 that exists after removing the temporal displacement abortions around the age 18 threshold and an increase in the number of births to mothers who were pregnant at age 17. This paper finds that an important dimension of risky youth behavior responds to incentives contained in parental notification laws.

[†]Department of Economics, Columbia University, xavier.moncasi@columbia.edu