

FATHER ABSENCE, SOCIAL WELFARE, AND CHILD ILLNESS IN RURAL MEXICO

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Abstract

This paper assesses how father absence due to migration affects child illness in rural Mexico; and whether inclusion in an important social welfare program—PROGRESA—alters this effect. Using prospective data and longitudinal regression models, I find that father absence due to migration increases the probability of illness among children under age six by 7 percentage points. This effect doubles to 14 percentage points when households are not receiving PROGRESA. When households are enrolled in PROGRESA, the effect of father absence due to migration is small and statistically insignificant. These results suggest that in poor, rural Mexican households paternal migration may have negative consequences for child well-being, especially in the short term. Further, social welfare programs may provide important resources that can protect child health when these households experience the temporary loss of a key family member.