

Sabbatical Report - Fall 2019

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Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Collin College, the Board of Trustees, President Neil Matkin, Dean Brenda Carter, Associate Dean Brandy Fair, and the members of the Sabbatical Committee for the opportunity to take sabbatical leave and work on my dissertation during the Fall of 2019.

Sabbatical Purpose:

The purpose of my sabbatical leave was to allow me to work full-time on my dissertation research and writing in the hopes of completing my PhD in Public Policy and Political Economy at the University of Texas at Dallas. I began this program in the fall of 2014 thanks to the invaluable financial support of Collin's UTD Doctoral Scholarship. The four years I spent taking classes in my PhD program greatly improved the way I think about complex socio-economic phenomena, especially in the area of social and health policies aimed at the most economically vulnerable among us. Specifically, my studies at UTD have improved my proficiency performing quantitative analysis of issues in the social sciences. All of this contributed to my developing a more nuanced approach to teaching my courses, and a willingness to take on new risks by designing new student projects and learning communities.

In my dissertation, I study the effect that abortion policy has on abortion rates, especially for those groups of women with higher incidence of abortion and thus more vulnerable to changing policy conditions. I am passionate about this topic because it is clear that avoiding unintended pregnancies is an integral part of most women's lives, with the average

American woman spending approximately thirty years trying to avoid pregnancy. There is empirical evidence of a long list of negative consequences for unintended pregnancy, both for mothers and their children, with regards to physical and mental health, education, and employment throughout their lives. Consistently, almost half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended, and the incidence of unintended pregnancies is higher among vulnerable populations such as low-income (65% unintended pregnancy rate) and women of color (69% and 56% for Black and Hispanic women, respectively). As a consequence of this racial and socioeconomic disparity, the already modest odds of advancement for these women are further damaged by the negative consequences of unintended pregnancy mentioned earlier.

Corresponding to racial and socioeconomic disparities in unintended pregnancy, there are also significant disparities in abortion rates among racial and socio-economic groups within the United States. The latest research estimates that abortion rates in 2014 were highest for Black women, for those with only a high school degree, and those with incomes below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level. On the policy side meanwhile, as a direct result of the 2007 Supreme Court decision in *Gonzales v. Carhart*, a wave of state-level abortion restrictions have been passed by state legislatures.

Sabbatical Summary:

I began by seeking and obtaining the Guttmacher Institute's 2014 Abortion Patient Survey, a restricted-access dataset from Guttmacher Institute. I merged it with the 2008 dataset from the same survey and gathered basic summary statistics to help refine my research questions and hypothesis. Also, I gathered and cleaned demographic data from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, as well as data on state-level abortion policies, economic conditions,

and attitudes from a variety of sources. The following were my tentative questions and hypothesis, as presented in my sabbatical application:

1. How did changes in state abortion restrictions between 2008-2014 affect abortion rates?
2. Is the effect of state abortion restrictions on state-level abortion rates mediated by changes in the rates of unintended pregnancy?
3. What were the effects of changes in US economic conditions between 2008-2014 (i.e., the Great Recession) on state abortion rates?
4. Do economic conditions act as a moderating factor for the effect of abortion restrictions on abortion rates?
5. Does state-level socio-economic and racial/ethnic composition have a moderating effect on abortion restrictions?

These questions were to be addressed using different econometric approaches to multivariate regression analysis, depending on the nature of each research question, informed by economic models that consider fertility and abortion decisions to be a sequence of utility-maximizing decisions under uncertainty.

Upon learning more about the data available and not available, inspecting the results of my preliminary data analyses, and discussing theoretical frameworks with my advisor, I implemented the following changes to my plan:

- I changed the theoretical framework of my study, from utility-maximization to intersectional theory. I became convinced that the latter would be much more apt for studying the differential impacts of abortion policy on the most vulnerable populations.
- I revised my research questions, as follows:

1. How can disparities in abortion rates be understood using an intersectional framework?
 - a. What changes occurred in abortion rates and disparities between 2008 and 2014?
 - b. What role do state-level abortion policies play in understanding these changes?
2. How can measures of access to abortion be understood using an intersectional framework?
 - a. What changes occurred in abortion access between 2008 and 2014?
 - b. What role do state-level policies play in understanding these changes?
3. How can abortion timing and the probability of self-induction be understood using an intersectional framework?
 - a. What changes occurred in abortion timing and the probability of self-induction between 2008 and 2014?
 - b. What role do state-level policies play in understanding these changes?
- I changed my methodological approach, from standard multivariate regression analysis, to a series of quantitative approaches appropriate to intersectional study, as recommended in the latest literature.

After revising my questions and approach, I was able to write a draft of the following sections of my dissertation:

- Background
- Literature Review
 - Health Disparities

- The Social Determinants of Health
- Disparities in Unintended Pregnancy and Abortion Rates
- Abortion Policy in the United States
- Effects of Abortion Restrictions
- Intersectionality as a Theoretical Framework Apt for Health Disparity Research
- Quantitative Approaches to Intersectional Research
- Problem Statement and Research Questions
- Data and Methodology

By the end of my sabbatical leave, I was working on the analysis and results section, which I was hoping to complete this past spring or summer. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting difficulties prevented me from making as much progress as I would have wished. I am now aiming to complete my remaining work in the next few months.