

Using Border Counties to Understand How Economic Policies Impact Public Health

Idea for Future Research

By James Sly

In 2015, Princeton economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton described how “deaths of despair” like suicide, drug overdoses, and alcoholism were causing mortality to increase to unprecedented levels among white men and women who did not have a college degree (Case and Deaton 2015), which in turn was contributing to an overall decline in life expectancy that has occurred in recent years. It is also useful to point out that lower income families are heavily impacted by the public health effects of smoking and obesity. I would like to do a research paper studying how economic policies decided at the state level impact deaths from suicide, lung cancer, and diabetes by looking at border counties in states that tried various economic policies that could impact public health, and compare them to counties on the other side of the border that did not. In particular, I would like to see how state policies on the minimum wage and state EITCs have an impact on suicide rates, while also examining how state excise and sales taxes on tobacco and soda effect deaths due to lung cancer and diabetes. This way we could learn whether mortality rates among the poor can be significantly reduced by economic strategies at the state level whether by raising wages and incomes or imposing higher sin taxes.

Reference

Case, Anne and Angus Deaton. 2015. “Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century.” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America. December 8th.