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Current Position

University of British Columbia
Assistant Professor 2016-present
Vancouver School of Economics

Education

London School of Economics
Ph.D., Economics, 2017.

McGill University
M.A., Economics, 2010.

Mount Allison University
B.A., International Relations, 2005.

Work in Progress

"Kinship Taxation as an Impediment to Growth: Experimental Evidence from Kenyan Microenterprises" (Link)
Many developing country entrepreneurs face family pressure to share income. This pressure, a kinship tax, can distort capital allocations. I combine evidence from a lab experiment—which allows me to estimate an individual-level sufficient statistic for the distortion—with data I collected on a sample of Kenyan entrepreneurs, to quantify the importance of the tax. My data reveal high kinship tax rates for a third of entrepreneurs in my sample. A simple structural model of input allocation fitted to my data implies that removing distortions from kinship taxation would increase total factor productivity by a quarter, and increase the share of inputs used in the largest firms.

"Kinship Taxation and Worker Effort: Experimental Evidence from the DRC"
Does pressure from relatives to redistribute income reduce labor incentives? I use data from a modern agricultural firm in Lubumbashi, DR Congo, to test this effect. By directly estimating the income-sharing pressure workers face using a lab experiment, I measure the size of this distortion and describe how it correlates with worker ability and position in the firm. Using data on worker productivity, combined with results from the lab experiment, I estimate the cost of kinship taxation in terms of lost output for the firm, and evaluate policies aimed at attenuating these costs. Varying the observability of output and earnings separately allows me to measure the effect of social sharing pressure on effort separately form other effects of social comparison.

“Paternalism or Commitment? Experimental evidence from a Conditional Cash Transfer”

Support for the poor is often tied to conditions, whether through the provision of in-kind transfers or explicitly with conditional cash transfers. There are many reasons for governments to impose these conditions, but do some of the poor themselves prefer conditionality? Before being randomized into conditional or unconditional cash transfer treatments, I ask participants in a cash transfer RCT which they prefer. I find that 81% of participants say they would prefer cash transfers which are conditional on their children attending school, rather than receiving equally large unconditional transfers. Widespread preference for conditionality undercuts one of the key arguments in favour of unconditional, rather than conditional, cash transfers: that by revealed preference, constraints can only leave households worse off. A simple model illustrates that preference for conditionality is consistent with time inconsistency, intra- or inter-household conflict, or demand for monitoring of children. Preliminary results suggest demand for conditionality is driven by intra-household conflict, where spouses disagree about the optimal schooling decision for their children.

“Kinship taxation, Property Rights and Repayment Incentives”

What explains high repayment rates for uncollateralized microcredit loans to the poor? This paper proposes a credit model with imperfect property rights. Specifically, liquid assets are subject to requests from one’s relatives, modelled as a tax. This kinship tax can motivate repayment even when no punishment on the part of the lender is possible other than refusing future credit. Here, loans are taken not as a means of intertemporal transfer of resources, but rather as a tool to limit tax payments. Loans are therefore repaid to ensure continued access to this tax evasion mechanism. This special feature of loans may also explain a series of other empirical puzzles: persistent cycles of borrowing at high interest rates, over-accumulation of durable goods, and simultaneous borrowing and saving.

“Conditional Cash Transfer for Primary Education in Kenya”

Cash transfers that are conditional on children attending school can improve educational outcomes through both substitution and income effects. This study disentangles the two by randomizing households into either conditional or unconditional cash transfers. Preliminary findings show that the conditionality is necessary in this context to increase enrolment and attendance, suggesting that substitutions effects dominate income effects. There is also strong evidence of substitution of schooling within households: parents whose cash transfers are conditional on a particular child attending school substitute schooling away from other children, potentially leading to a less efficient distribution of schooling across children. Cost-benefit analysis suggests that neither conditional nor unconditional cash transfers are effective in increasing primary school attendance in this setting.

Grants	Hampton Grant, 2016 PEDL Exploratory Research Grant, 2014 STICERD Research Grant, 2013
Teaching	**UBC, undergraduate** Seminar in Applied Economics—The Economics of World Poverty Advanced Empirical Methods for International Economics
Service	Referee: Journal of Development Economics, Journal of Labor Economics, Economic Development and Cultural Change, Economica, Bulletin of Economic Research