

ROSTOCK SOCIAL SCIENCE NEWS

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What's on Next Week?

28. Januar – 1. Februar 2019

Montag, 28.01.2019

Dienstag, 29.01.2019

Volkswirtschaftliches Forschungsseminar
17 Uhr, SR 021, Ulmenstr. 69

Thomas Siedler (Universität Hamburg), Vortrag: **"Sports Club Vouchers and Children's Health Behavior"**

Süßmilch Lecture Series
15 Uhr, MPI, Konrad-Zuse-Str. 1

Professor Dalton C. Conley (Princeton University, USA), Vortrag:
"Deploying Genetics to Inform Social Demography"

Mittwoch, 30.01.2019

Donnerstag, 31.01.2019

Freitag, 01.02.2019

Dienstag, 20.11., 15 Uhr, MPI, Konrad-Zuse-Str. 1: Dalton C. Conley (Princeton University, USA), Vortrag: "Deploying Genetics to Inform Social Demography"



The cost of genetic information has been dropping at a rate faster than of Moore's law in microcomputing. As a result, the science of genetic prediction has improved by leaps and bounds in recent years and with it has emerged a novel field: sociogenomics. Sociogenomics seeks to integrate genetic and environmental information to obtain a more robust, complete picture of the causes of human behavior and population dynamics. This talk will highlight some recent examples of sociogenomic research, touching upon issues such as adolescent peer effects, racial discrimination and health, assortative mating and fertility patterns. The talk will conclude by discussing the social and policy implications of genetic prediction.

Dienstag, 22.01., 17 Uhr, SR 021, Ulmenstr. 69: Volkswirtschaftliches Forschungsseminar: Thomas Siedler (Universität Hamburg), Vortrag: "Sports Club Vouchers and Children's Health Behavior"



Thomas Siedler ist Professor für Volkswirtschaftslehre mit dem Schwerpunkt Mikroökonomie an der Universität Hamburg. Er erhielt seinen PhD sowie einen MSc in Applied Economics and Data Analysis an der University of Essex in England, sowie seinen Diplom-Volkswirt an der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Thomas Siedler ist Kernmitglied des Hamburger Center for Health Economics (hche), Research Associate am Institute for Social & Economic Research (ISER) an der University of Essex, Research Fellow am Forschungsinstitut für Zukunft und Arbeit (IZA) in Bonn, Research Fellow am Deutschen Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung (DIW) in Berlin und Mitglied des Berliner Netzwerk für Arbeitsmarktforschung (BeNA).

A major issue in today's developed countries is childhood obesity (WHO 2016). While a rich strand of literature illustrates the general importance of early childhood interventions for future life outcomes (see Heckman, 2007), studies concerning health behavior and physical activity have focused on the short-term effectiveness of incentivizing adults to go to the gym. It thus remains unclear how to shape health habits in the long run. We investigate long-term effects of waiving sports club membership fees for children as an incentive for physical activity.

In 2009, a large-scale governmental program in Saxony distributed sports vouchers to an entire cohort of about 33,000 third graders in elementary school. These vouchers were distributed by head teachers in class and could be used to pay membership fees in extra-curricular sports clubs. We seek to answer the questions whether the voucher program increases (active) membership in sports clubs, whether it changes sporting activity and health behaviors, and whether we observe lasting long-term behavioral effects nine years later. The data we analyze stem from a unique survey that we conduct in Saxony and two similar federal states in Germany, namely Thuringia and Brandenburg. The respondents are chosen randomly from registry data and we obtained more than 16,000 completed surveys so far. To analyze the causal impact of the voucher program, we implement a regression discontinuity design that exploits an exogenous birthdate cutoff rule for school starting age in Saxony. Any child turning six before July is supposed to start school the same year, any child turning six after June is supposed to start school the year after. Thus, this birthdate cutoff rule generates plausibly exogenous variation regarding who received a voucher around the cutoff.

We find that the program increases the likelihood of sports club membership and active membership by about 14 percentage points. Moreover, the likelihood to do sports at all increases 9.7 percentage points, and the chance that an individual exercises more than 2 hours per week raises by 11 percentage points. These results are robust to a variety of specifications, including different functional specifications for the forcing variable, including additional control variables, and a wide range of bandwidths.

We conclude that the sports club voucher program for elementary school children has positive and long-lasting effects on membership and sports behavior. These results complement previous randomized control studies on gym membership and sports activities. Hence, it is possible to influence sporting habits in the long run with relatively cheap early-life interventions, which is a promising insight for governments in order to improve sports and health behaviors.