School Meals and Student Participation in Urban India

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September 16, 2011

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Outline

- The Question
- The Answer
- Main Comments
- Minor Comments
TO WHAT EXTENT THE AVAILABILITY OF COOKED MEALS DETERMINES STUDENTS’ DAILY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE?
The authors study

1. Whether primary school participation rates are affected by transfers (to poor households) in the form of school meals.

2. How changes in program characteristics can impact schooling outcomes.
Balanced panel is 1,240 students, grade 1 to 5, covering the academic years 2002-03 and 2003-04.

Personal characteristics 2001-2007: age, gender, religion and caste, father’s occupation, monthly attendance rates (by grade and section), enrollment date (grade);

School characteristics: infrastructure, number of teachers/rate pupils-teacher, attendance rates by grade, date of MDM scheme;

Diff-in-diff: attendance differences between 09/2002 and 09/2003 (before - 'treat', after - 'control').

(2008 Survey of 26 random primary schools from the MCD Central zone)
They find that:

- Overall, the cooked meal program resulted in a **5 percentage point increase in attendance**.
  - The **disadvantaged students may have benefitted less** from it: significant improvements in daily school participation was observed only for non-muslims and upper castes.

- The program effects were **most systematic for boys (\(>7\%\))** and **largest for younger children (\(\sim 12\%)\)** in lower grades.

- No effect of program transition on school drop-out levels.
Good nutrition $\Rightarrow$ Good school performance?

- Is there an actual cognitive effect also (do the actual scores improve)?
  - Literacy rate?

- If there is also a cognition effect - disentangle whether this is because participation or if it’s via health improvements.
The program beneficiaries

- How come the disadvantaged benefitted less from the program?
  - Do they benefit of other social programs? To what extent these programs affect school participation?

- Is this program also increasing enrollments? The poorest-poor may not be in school at all, i.e., not have access to the program (at least 10% of all SES - is this enough? Are the poorest-poor under-represented in primary schools?).
  - Is there any cross-sectional data on program beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries households?
Main Comments (contd.)

Underestimating the effects

- Any spillover effects on the family diet?
  - Are they eating healthier?

- Is there a persistent positive effect on drop-out rates?
  - Did program beneficiaries stay in school after the 5th grade?
What are the broader implications of the transfer programs impact on school outcomes?

- Welfare arguments for policy interventions on *poverty perpetuation*.

Is there any effect on *fertility*?

- With these programs in place, parents can ensure a better education/health to their children.
- Have enrollment rates increased over time? i.e., do we see a jump in enrollments in 2010, say, when the 2003-2004 cohort enters school?

*Model* on income and inequality of transfer programs effects on household education and fertility decisions.