

# The Causal Effect of Maternal Education on Child Mortality: Evidence from the Education Reform in Vietnam

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## Abstract

In 1991, Vietnam introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) mandating that all children aged six years old must enroll in primary school and imposing five compulsory years of schooling. The UPE provides a natural experiment to estimate the impact of increased maternal schooling on child mortality. Exploiting birth-month specific exposure to the 1991 UPE, we found that the 1991 UPE increased the average of female schooling by about 0.7 years. We found strong and robust evidence that maternal education induced by the 1991 UPE had positive and significant effects on child mortality reduction: an additional year of maternal schooling causally reduced the probability of child mortality by 4.5 percentage points and on average, increasing the number of maternal schooling by one year decreased the expected rate of the number of child mortality by 0.072. As for potential mechanisms through which increased maternal education might affect child mortality, we found that increased maternal schooling led to increase the likelihood of their high school completion, to better prenatal care and health-seeking behaviors during and after pregnancy. We also found that increased maternal education decreased the probability of having unwanted births. Findings of this paper highlight the important of education investment on girls to reduce child mortality in developing countries.

**Keywords:** child mortality, education reform, maternal education, Vietnam, regression discontinuity design.

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