

The impact of access to health facilities on maternal care use and health status:  
Evidence from rural Uganda

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Abstract

Maternal and infant mortality remains high in developing countries. While timely and adequate antenatal care and delivery at formal health facility are considered to be some of the most important means to improve maternal and child health, many mothers do not follow these desirable health practices. This paper investigates whether and how newly established health facility can increase maternal health care utilization, and in turn improves the health of mothers and children. Using a decade-long panel data from Uganda on the availability of health facility, we show that public health facility, of both the basic and higher-level, increases the probability of delivering at formal facility, attended by trained personnel. Openings of basic public facility also increase regular antenatal care usage and decrease complications during delivery, suggesting early diagnosis of risky cases. Furthermore, new higher-level facility increases the probability of babies being weighted, though there is weak evidence of negative selection of babies to being weighted in terms of birth weight. These results suggest that better access to health facility promotes maternal health care usage, thereby saving mothers and children from negative health risks.