

Essays in Empirical Economics of the Family  
Kristína Hrehová

Dissertation Thesis Review by Martin Kahanec

The thesis at hand empirically examines key family decisions, analyzing how firms, state agents, and NGOs influence family outcomes when facing challenges such as long commutes, insolvency, or unwanted pregnancies. It comprises three studies with quasi-experimental elements that explore the effects of firm relocations, aid center locations, and mailing campaigns on family stability, personal bankruptcy rates, and reproductive rates, respectively. The thesis explores various identification strategies and sources of variation to advance existing empirical research.

The thesis comprises three substantive analytical chapters. Chapter one analyzes the impact of commuting distance on the likelihood of separation for married and cohabiting couples with children. The author used Swedish register data from 2010-2016, focusing on employees of relocating firms with one workplace and over 10 employees. The author examined changes in commuting distance resulting from firm relocation, which can plausibly be considered as exogenous. The results show that a 10km increase in commuting distance leads to a 0.09% higher probability of separation if the employee remains with the firm for the next 5 years.

Chapter two investigates how access to public services affects their use. The author analyzes the impact of distance from Centers for Legal Aid (CLAs) on personal bankruptcy rates in Slovakia, using a large administrative dataset. By controlling for the expected distance from the nearest CLA, the author aims to mitigate the problem of endogeneity and isolate the effect of increased legal aid availability. Her findings indicate that the closer the nearest CLA, the higher the incidence of personal bankruptcy in a given municipality. Improved access to free legal aid thus appears to have a significant impact on the use of personal bankruptcy, with municipalities having good access to CLAs experiencing 3.3 more bankruptcies per 1,000 inhabitants than those with weak access (compared to the corresponding national average of 6.3 bankruptcies per 1,000 persons).

Chapter three examines the impact of pro-life mailing campaigns on families. There are few empirical studies validating the effectiveness of such campaigns. In this study, the author provides an empirical assessment of the impact of a pro-life leaflet mailing campaign on conception and abortion rates. The mailing campaign operated in Slovakia from 2016-2017 and utilized common pro-life messaging. The author identified its effects using a municipality-level

| Phone: +43.1.25230-3110 | Web: [www.dpp.ceu.edu](http://www.dpp.ceu.edu) | Email: [dppoffice@ceu.edu](mailto:dppoffice@ceu.edu) |

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

**CEU GmbH** | Quellenstraße 51 | A-1100 Wien | Austria  
Vienna Commercial Court | FN 502313 x

inverse probability weighting strategy. The findings indicate that the campaign did not have a statistically significant impact on conception rates or abortion rates after conception.

Overall, I evaluate this dissertation thesis as a solid piece of PhD research. It demonstrates an advanced understanding of the craft of doing economic research, analytical rigor, and interpretative cautiousness.

The thesis is effectively written and structured according to the standards of the economic profession. The author is, very rightly, transparent when it comes to some weaknesses of the analysis.

At times it is a bit difficult to follow some analytical steps, mainly due to slight imprecision or some missing detail (perhaps too obvious to the author), but not to the extent that the analysis would become incomprehensible.

I do have some questions and comments on the three studies, which will need attention before submitting them to good academic journals.

## Chapter 1

Overall, this chapter sheds light on a relevant economic and public policy issue. The author is aware of the key issues with identifying the effect of commuting on separation.

My main point of criticism of this paper is that relocation may reflect some economic issues/adjustment/technological change directly impacting separation, beyond the possible effects working through commuting time. E.g. if such technological shift results in financial or other distress for the household.

Another possible issue is that measurement error in measuring commuting time may introduce some bias into the results. 2SLS may in part mitigate this problem.

Relocation of firms may result in a shorter commuting distance. For the interpretation of the results it would be helpful to know what proportion of such cases might be in the sample.

## Chapter 2

This chapter studies an interesting and policy-relevant issue, even if perhaps less politicized in Slovakia than in Czechia. The study is well executed, but I am missing some details of motivation

| Phone: +43.1.25230-3110 | Web: [www.dpp.ceu.edu](http://www.dpp.ceu.edu) | Email: [dppoffice@ceu.edu](mailto:dppoffice@ceu.edu) |

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

**CEU GmbH** | Quellenstraße 51 | A-1100 Wien | Austria  
Vienna Commercial Court | FN 502313 x

of eq. 2.2 and 2.1. I appreciate that the author uses predicted distance to mitigate endogeneity, but the prediction seems to be based on variables that may affect the location of CLAs as well as the risk of personal bankruptcy. Details are also missing in relation to the changing network of CLAs and the factors deciding what CLAs were added, which in my view were included decisions endogenous with respect to the relationship studied.

### Chapter 3

The last study reports some findings on how NGO campaigns may affect abortions and conceptions. The study produces null results. This is not unexpected, as it is not easy to imagine that decisions of such weight (abortion, conception) would be affected (measurably) over a 12-week period by leaflet campaigns. It is however not impossible a priori, so the study is still meaningful and useful. I'd recommend to the author to consider some related decisions which may be more sensitive to informational campaigns, such as the use of various contraceptive methods. I find the identification strategy reasonable, but its exposition lacks clarity at times.

**Overall, the thesis satisfies formal and content requirements for a PhD thesis in Economics. I recommend the dissertation for a defense.**

With kind regards,



---

Martin Kahanec