Introduction to the Thematic Issue on Health, Economics, and Family Role

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The growth of health care costs challenges the health of individuals, families, and nations. In the United States, health care expenditure has risen by more than eight folds relative to that of 1980. This rise in health care expenditure has been much higher than the growth in family income during the last three decades. Given the inherent market failure in delivering health care services, other countries are also facing similar challenges, albeit to a smaller extent at present. Rising health care costs indicates regulatory failures for which governments are responsible. Thus, it is of critical importance to devote a special issue of the *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* to the underlying major issues that span the broad spectrum of health, economics, and family role.

Since the inception of the health economics as a discipline, the underlying uncertainty, asymmetric information, and externalities in the demand and supply of health care have justified government's intervention to enhance people's welfare (Arrow 1963). While much of the policy debate on health care reform focuses on health care providers and the payers for health care, a large part of the health of individuals and the nation depends on the actions of individuals and families (Grossman 1972; Becker 1978). As the role of the public sector in regulating, financing and delivering healthcare grows, individual accountability may be seriously weakened—increasing health costs and failing to achieve intended health outcomes.

The state of flux in the health care poses ongoing challenges and opportunities to the families, providers, insurers, and regulators who have varied incentives and

aspirations. This provides a fertile ground for scholars to analyze underlying health issues, and to provide ideas that would influence the individual and families in playing a more effective role in improving the nation's health. The ideas of scholars and health policy makers are powerful, but not commonly understood—especially in view of the increasing size and complexity of the public and private roles in the health care of families. This special edition brings fresh perspectives that could possibly turn much of the policy debate on its head.

The thematic approach benefited substantially from the inputs by Elaine Anderson, Roger J. Vaughn, and Jing Jian Xiao. This issue includes 14 articles that address significant issues in health, economics, and family role. The call for papers for this issue was widely circulated and was well received. All submissions went through double-blind peer-review process, and every paper was reviewed by two or more reviewers.

This special issue brings together papers that investigate important topics in health, economics, and family role. Notwithstanding the research methodologies, several major interrelated topics frame the thematic approach in this special issue. The first two papers in this special issue show that lifestyle is an important determinant of health. The next four papers focus on the recent phenomenon of obesity. Two papers show that, among other things, knowledge influences nutrient consumption in the elderly and fertility in women. Four papers show how finances play an important role in child's health (and vice versa), drinking, and smoking. One paper investigates the impact of life circumstances on depression, and the impact of depression on employment and welfare use. Another paper provides evidence on the effect of health and health insurance coverage on the decision of farmers to stay in or to leave farming. The last paper captures the unintended

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consequence of government policy in providing insurance for children.

Gregory Ponthiere's theoretical piece complements the literature in the intergenerational transmission of health and survival in relation to lifestyles. In this paper, Ponthiere successfully develops an interesting overlapping generation model to investigate the long-run prevalence of unhealthy and healthy lifestyles induced by mortality patterns.

Mir M. Ali and Olugbenga Ajilore use National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health and propensity score matching methodology to investigate health improving effect of marriage. Their use of propensity score matching methodology allows for reducing the probability of selection bias. Their data and the propensity score matching methodology allows the authors to examine the role of marriage on risky behaviors, such as, smoking, drinking, and drug use.

Daniel P. Miller uses National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS)—Child Supplement and a fixed-effects model to challenge previous studies that positively associate the likelihood of child obesity to increased work by mother. He also extends his analysis to subgroups (e.g., low income families and single mothers), which sheds further insight on the impact of economic and marital status on the child obesity.

Wen You and Gregory C. Davis use data from Houston MSA on 311 families to investigate the impact of primary-time and secondary-time (measured by multi-tasking time) on the children's overweight probability. Moreover, You and Davis consider whether change in the parental behavior influences predicted overweight probability. They also examine the role that uninvolved parents play in the children's overweight probability.

Lisa Benson and Manouchehr Mokhtari use the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)-Child Supplement to investigate whether both parents employment are important determinants of children's percentile body mass index. They also consider the impact of shared parent-child activities on childhood obesity. Peer reviews of this paper are handled by Jing Jian Xiao.

Qi Zhang, Zhuo Chen, Norou Diawara, and Youfa Wang merge the panel data of the NLSY-79 cohort in 1985–2002 and the Cost of Living Index data to investigate the unhealthy food prices on the food-stamp recipients' bodyweight. Using their dataset, they consider whether the higher food prices for unhealthy food can influence the direct relationship between Food Stamp Program participation and bodyweight among low income women.

Kai-Wen Cheng uses Taiwan's family planning program data to investigate the effect of contraceptive knowledge on fertility. Among other things, Cheng also considers impact of the mass media and social networks on the women knowledge about contraceptive. This allows Cheng to

consider whether women effectively transform knowledge onto action, which would reduce fertility.

Hung-Hao Chang, Rodolfo M. Nayga, and Kung-Chi Chan investigate the factors that relate to the nutrient intake of the elderly. Using a nationwide survey from Taiwan, their analysis sheds lights on the impact of dietary knowledge, physical condition of men, and mental health of women on the nutrient deficiency of the elderly.

Sandra Hofferth and Angela Pinzon use the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey, Kindergarten cohort, examine the impact of nonresidential father's investment of time and money on children's behavior and achievement. They use a two-wave cross-lagged model to investigate children's health following parental separation. This is mainly gauged by analysis of the impact of financial support in kindergarten on children's health.

Vipul Bhatt uses seven waves of NLSY 1997–2003 and exploits cross state and time variation in the price of alcohol to investigate parental pecuniary incentives to influence child behavior. In particular, Bhatt focuses on the relationship between binge drinking by the youth and parental financial transfers, and tests for hypothesis that the greater binge drinking among the youth is associated with receiving significantly lower transfers from parents.

Whitney Witt, Kristin Litzelman, Carmen Mandic, Lauren Wisk, John Hampton, Paul Creswell, Carissa Gottlieb, and Ronald Gangnon use Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) for an empirical evaluation of the impact of childhood activity limitations on child and family level healthcare related financial burden.

Irina Grafova uses 1999–2005 waves of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) to examine the relationship between family financial strain and smoking. She approximates financial strain by financial solvency and the availability. Grafova's piece sheds light on the likelihood of smoking and the onset of financial strain among men.

Vanessa Hunn and Claudia Heath use data from Welfare and Self-Sufficiency Survey to investigate the role of barriers, including depression, in achieving the goal of the Personal Responsibility and Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which was to transition individuals from welfare to work.

Kuo-Liang Chang, George Langelett, and Andrew Waugh use MEPS for 2000–2007 to analyze the effect of health and health insurance coverage on the decision of farmers to stay in or to leave farming. This study is very important and timely, shedding light on the impact of health insurance for the farmers. Moreover, the authors show that health and health insurance may have more important roles on farmers' exit decision than the usual economic variables (say, income).

David Zimmer examines the impact of State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) on health insurance

coverage for children. Zimmer also further considers if the children covered by the SCHIP are from families that already have private insurance.

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