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6.D. Social security systems and health

The Obamacare impact: States that provide for accessible health insurance have lower suicide rates

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Background

Over the years, economic inequality and austerity have increased and the costs of primary utilities such as housing have boomed. This has threatened people's access to primary utilities. Access to such facilities contributes to individual

autonomy and a sense of agency over one's future, freeing people from suicidogenic feelings of self-alienation and powerlessness. Hypothesizing from this Empowerment theory, changes in facilities over time (and not between-state differences) would influence the suicide rate. A Durkhemian viewpoint rather argues that weak welfare facilities indicate a high degree of anomie in a community; the community that fails to establish common goods. Because of the large emphasis on the anomic culture of states reflected in the public goods that are offered, the observable implication is the following: between-state differences in

facilities are more important than modest short-term changes that take place within states

Methods

Data on the prevalence of uninsured people are available over all 50 states between 2013 and 2015. Cross sectional time series linear regression models were ran with control variables for macro-economic, social and political characteristics of states. Separate analyses were conducted for male and female age-standardized suicide rates.

Preliminary Results

States with a higher percentage of uninsured people tend to have higher suicide rates than states with a smaller share of the population insured. Still, suicide rates rose when the percentage of people left uninsured decreased within states. This latter effect was likely due to unobserved time trends as this effect disappeared when including time fixed effects.

Conclusions

Overall the results are more in support for the Durkhemian thesis that a high percentage of people left uninsured reflects a stronger culture of anomie in states. Future research should focus on the effect of changes on the long-term as more data will be available.

Key messages:

- Suicide rates are higher in American states with more people without health insurance, reflecting anomie.
- Higher health insurance coverage rates save lives in that they may prevent suicide.