

RESEARCH INSIGHTS



How Do Longer School Days Affect Students' Economic Well-Being in Adulthood?



Many Latin American countries and cities have substantially lengthened the school day over the past generation. Chile, for example, increased the school day by 30 percent between 1997 and 2010.



While evidence on lengthening these additional instructional resources points to positive effects in the short term, we know little about whether these reforms affect students' long-term economic outcomes once they enter the labor market.



This project finds longer elementary and secondary school days substantially improve economic well-being by increasing educational attainment, delaying childbearing, and increasing earnings in young adulthood.

CONTEXT

How school resources affect students' outcomes is a key question in education policy, and previous studies show that expanding school day or year improves academic performance in the short run.

In Latin America, most research on this topic has examined short-term effects by focusing on current students, finding either no significant effects or only modest test improvements.

Still unknown, though, is how school day reforms affect students' outcomes in adulthood. Examining the long-term economic consequences can provide important insights for policymakers and contributes to the growing literature that finds educational interventions with short-term gains followed by a medium-term fade-out can still improve long-term economic outcomes.

PROJECT

Studying a large-scale reform in Chile (Jornada Escolar Completa, JEC) that increased instructional time by 30 percent between 1997 and 2010, this project evaluates the effect of longer school days on a set of economic outcomes in adulthood.

JEC gradually changed school days from a two-shift system (half of the students attended school in the morning, and half in the same building during the afternoon) to a single full-day shift, with all students attending in the morning through mid-afternoon. As this program required a large investment in school buildings and personnel, students had different levels of exposure to JEC depending on where they lived and when they were born.

RESULTS

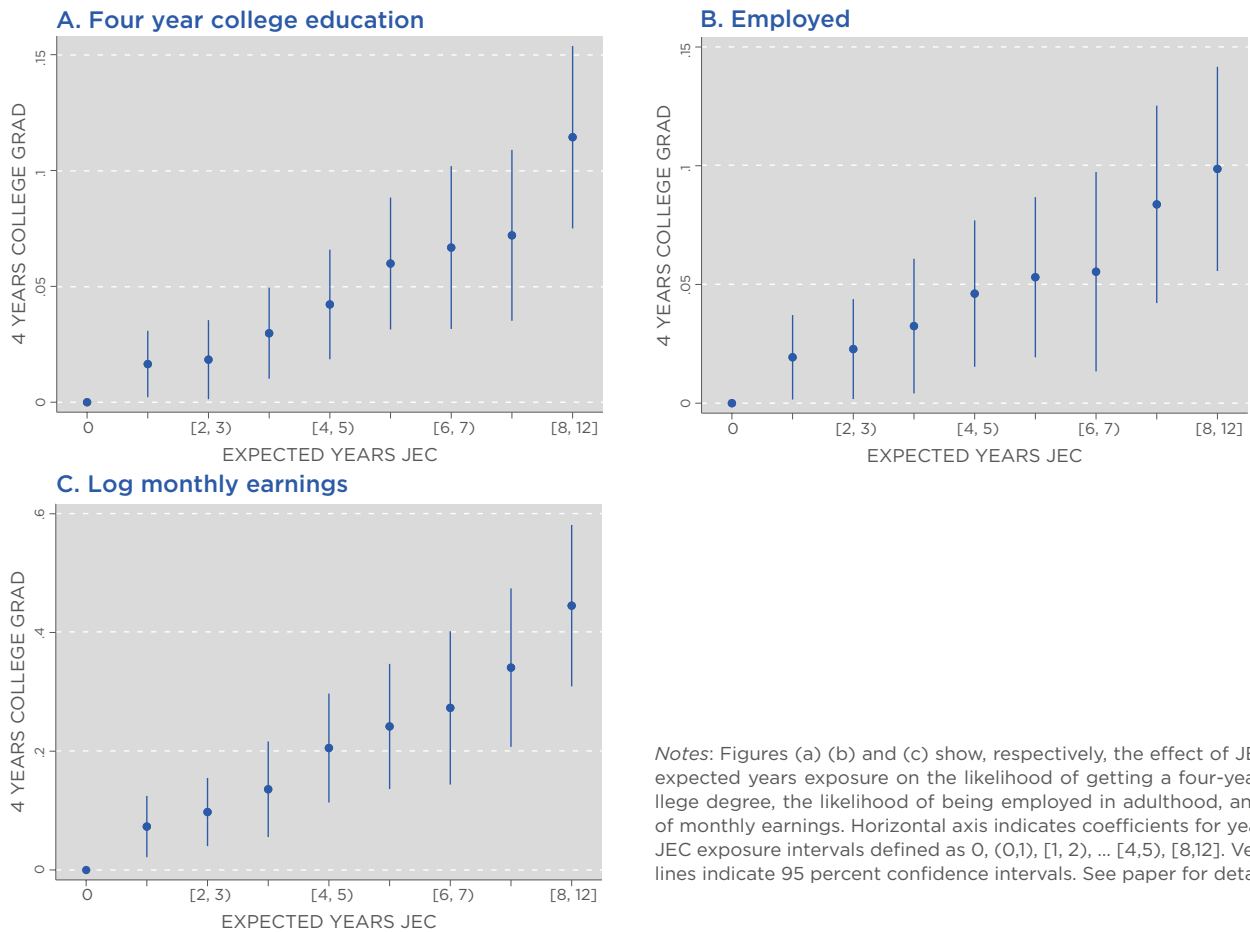
An analysis of the effect of JEC during adulthood found longer school days:

- 1.** Increase high school and college graduation for both women and men, and for students from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds as well as those from wealthier families.
- 2.** Increase earnings, and the likelihood of working in a highly-skilled occupation in adulthood. Each additional year of full-day schooling increased earnings 4-5 percent, implying a 16 percent rate of return to an additional year-equivalent of schooling.
- 3.** Consistent with previous studies that document a contemporaneous reduction in teenage pregnancy, we find a delay in childbearing.
- 4.** Labor market adaptations differ by student's family background. For example, as a result of JEC exposure students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to work in managerial, professional, and technical occupations, whereas students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to enter the workplace.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 1.** School resources and instructional time matter: additional time in school can improve students' well-being in multiple dimensions. In contexts where students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have access to less instructional time and lower school resources, increasing time in school can be an important avenue for reducing inequities in the school system.
- 2.** Long-run consequences should be incorporated into policy evaluation, as benefits to students extend beyond contemporaneous tests scores to include better labor market outcomes. Considering the full time horizon is especially important for large-scale investments in public education that have high up-front costs but generate meaningful benefits over a longer period. Incorporating potential gains that are realized in adulthood is a key consideration in assessing the effect of large educational reforms.

Figure 1. The Impact of JEC in Adulthood by Expected Years of Exposure



Notes: Figures (a) (b) and (c) show, respectively, the effect of JEC by expected years exposure on the likelihood of getting a four-year college degree, the likelihood of being employed in adulthood, and log of monthly earnings. Horizontal axis indicates coefficients for years of JEC exposure intervals defined as 0, (0,1), [1, 2), ... [4,5), [8,12]. Vertical lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. See paper for details.



FULL STUDY

[Dominguez, P., y K. Ruffini. 2020. "Long-Term Gains from Longer School Days."](#)

Also published in the [Journal of Human Resources](#).

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND CHIEF ECONOMIST

The Department of Research and Chief Economist generates new ideas to enrich the knowledge base that supports the policy agenda of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and its member countries for achieving sustainable and equitable development in the region. To maximize the impact of its research, the Research Department carries out activities that serve as inputs to other IDB departments, governments, the academic community and public opinion in the region.

