

Legal Aid in Child Welfare: Evidence from an Experimental Design of Mi Abogado

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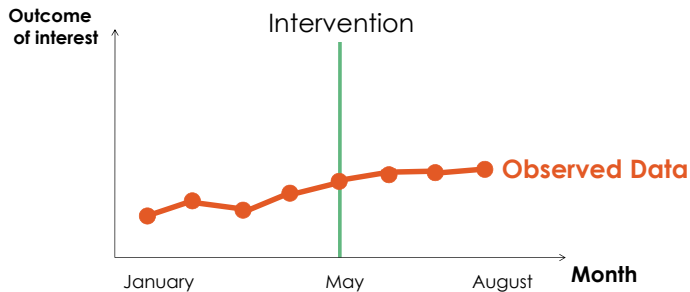
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Introduction

- ▶ Question: What works and what doesn't in child welfare?
- ▶ Idea: Smart roll-outs of new programs
 - ▶ Experimental Policy Initiative & Randomization
 - ▶ Administrative Data
- ▶ Application: Mi Abogado
- ▶ Findings
 - ▶ Substantial reduction in length of stay
 - ▶ Substantial reduction in criminal justice involvement
 - ▶ Suggestive evidence of improvements in educational outcomes

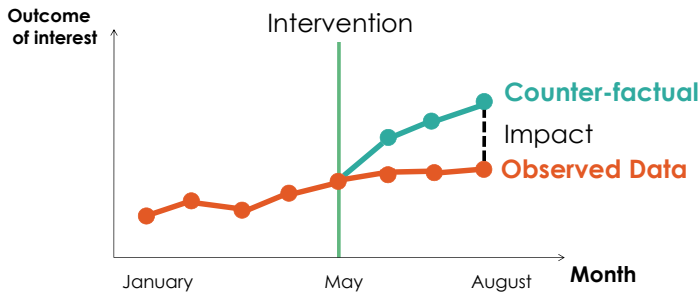
Rigorous Evaluation

Why have a control group?



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Child Welfare Background

- ▶ Child protective services are surprisingly common
 - ▶ Childhood incidence in US and Denmark both approximately 5%
 - ▶ Current levels: 6 per 1000 in US; 3 per 1000 in Chile (11,000 children)
- ▶ Common reasons for children to enter the protection system: serious neglect (49%), Physical violence (5%), Abandonment (3%)
- ▶ 39% in institutional homes (with concerns)
- ▶ Foster children are at high risk of poor life outcomes (e.g. homelessness, imprisonment)

(Lack of) Previous Literature

- ▶ Some evidence on causal effects of foster care placement (Doyle, 2007; Bald et al., 2021; Gross and Baron, 2022)
- ▶ Little evidence on interventions aimed at speeding the time to permanency or legal aid
- ▶ Rashid and Waddell (2019) find that increasing legal aid in the US increases the likelihood of adoption by 14% within one year of foster care entry.

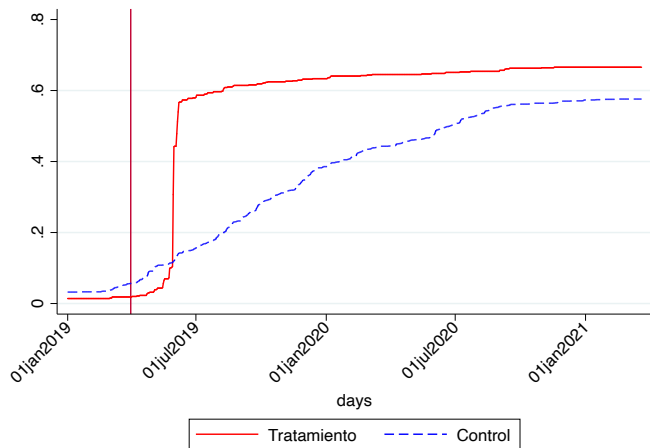
Mi Abogado Program

- ▶ Team of a lawyer, a psychologist and a social worker
- ▶ Program promotes return home when possible
- ▶ Facilitates access to services for children
- ▶ Lawyer represents the child in court and aims to promote best possible outcome
- ▶ Much smaller caseloads per lawyer

Experimental Design

- ▶ Children ages 6-18 in institutions in January/February 2019
- ▶ Strata: age groups and 4 regions
- ▶ (Main) Randomization on March 30 2019
- ▶ Out of 1871 eligible children, 581 were assigned to treatment
- ▶ Administrative data to track outcomes
 - ▶ Less costly
 - ▶ Updated daily
 - ▶ De-identified
- ▶ Results: Andrés Hojman

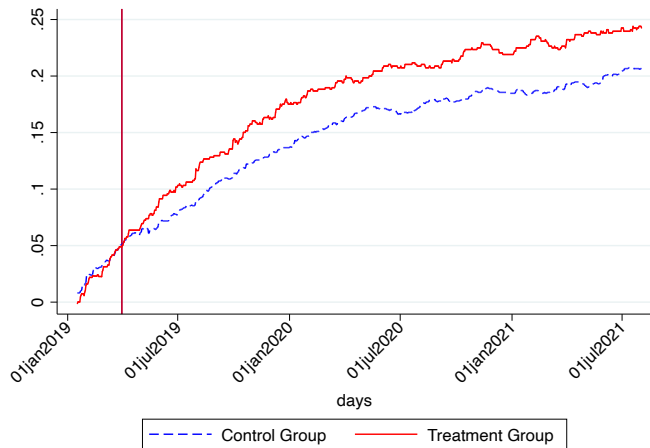
Participation in the Program by Experimental Group



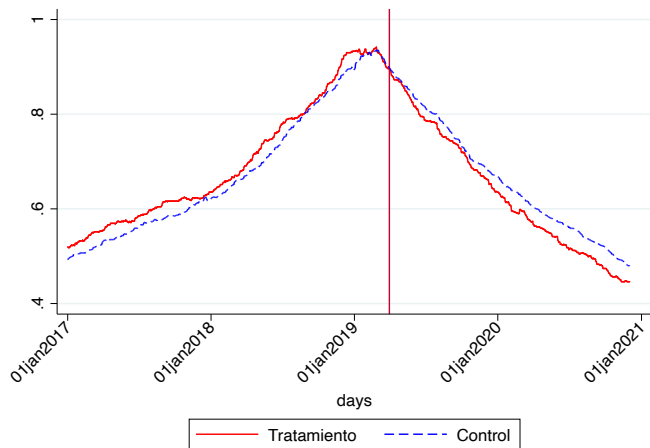
Trends

- ▶ The next diagrams show how our result variables change with time
- ▶ The figures have been residualized by strata

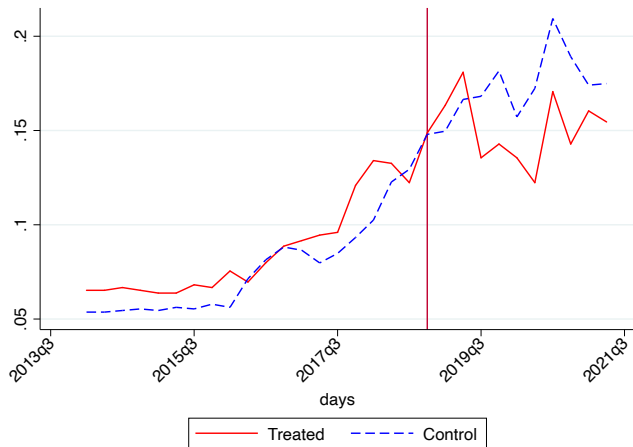
Living with a Family status by experimental group



Residence status by experimental group



Quarterly crime reports by experimental group



Results

- ▶ No significant impacts in grades, attendance or victimization
- ▶ Significant impacts in living with a family, living in residences, and crimes when using all the data
- ▶ Living with a family: control group 16%, treatment 21%
- ▶ Living in residences: control group 59%, treatment 53%
- ▶ Crime: control group is accused of .86 crimes during a period of around two years, treatment group .63 crimes

Interpretation

- ▶ Participation in June 2019 is around 40% higher for the treatment group
- ▶ After that, the gap shrinks
- ▶ Program effects on outcomes are explained by this gap
- ▶ Using this month as a reference gives us conservative estimates of the effect of the program
- ▶ All the previous impacts need to be inflated by a factor of around 2.5 to find the effect of participating on the program (as opposed to the effect of being assigned to it) because of imperfect compliance

Contribution

- ▶ Our study shows a mechanism to accelerate the exit from institutionalization of children
- ▶ It also shows how this population has significant barriers to use the judicial system even in a context where lawyers are formally assigned to cases
- ▶ Investing in legal and social protection can increase well-being of children in vulnerability

Thanks!