

Ronja Helénsdotter

Address: Department of Economics
University of Gothenburg
Vasagatan 1, Box 640
SE 405 30 Gothenburg

Telephone: +46 (762) 335-258

E-mail: ronja.helensdotter@economics.gu.se

Web page: www.ronjahelensdotter.com

Citizenship: Sweden

Fields of Concentration:

Primary: Labor Economics

Secondary: Health Economics, Law and Economics, Economics of Crime

Desired Teaching:

Labor Economics, Health Economics, Econometrics

Dissertation Title: *Court-Ordered Care*

Supervisors:

Professor Randi Hjalmarsson (main)

Professor Andreea Mitrut

Degrees:

Ph.D., Economics, University of Gothenburg, 2024 (expected)

MSc., Economics, University of Gothenburg, 2018

BSc., Economics, University of Gothenburg, 2016

Grants, Scholarships, and Awards:

ASHEcon Diversity Scholarship, Scholarship, 2023

Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, Research grant, 2023

Kungl. och Hvitfeldtska stiftelsen, Research grant, 2021 & 2023

Herbert & Karin Jacobssons Stiftelse, Research grant, 2020 & 2023

Stiftelsen Lars Hiertas Minne, Research grant, 2020 & 2023

Kungl. och Hvitfeldtska stiftelsen, Travel grant, 2020

Best Performance in Econometrics, University of Gothenburg, Award, 2016

Göteborgs Handelshögskolefonds Stipendiestiftelse, Scholarship, 2016-2017

Stiftelsen Kjellbergsska Flickskolans Donationer, Scholarship, 2014-2016

Teaching Experience:

Lecturer, Applied Economics (Undergraduate), University of Gothenburg, 2021-2022

Teaching Assistant, Statistics 1A (Undergraduate), University of Gothenburg, 2021-2022

Teaching Assistant, Basic Econometrics (Undergraduate), University of Gothenburg, 2021-2022

Teaching Assistant, Applied Economics (Undergraduate), University of Gothenburg, 2020

Tutoring, Econometrics (Undergraduate), University of Gothenburg, 2017

Tutoring, Microeconomics (Undergraduate), University of Gothenburg, 2017

Tutoring, Statistics (Undergraduate), University of Gothenburg, 2017

Research and Work Experience:

Research Assistant to Prof. Randi Hjalmarsson, University of Gothenburg, 2019

Research Assistant to Prof. Olof Johansson Stenman, University of Gothenburg, 2017-2018

Working Papers:

“Surviving Childhood: Health Effects of Removing a Child From Home” [Job Market Paper] (September 2023)

“Treated Together: Spillovers Among Youths Admitted to Residential Treatment” (August 2023)

Works in Progress:

“Decision-Making in Child Removal Cases,” with E. Jason Baron and Joseph J. Doyle, Jr.

“Forced to Get Better: The Effects of Involuntary Treatment for Mental Illness and Substance Abuse,” with E. Jason Baron

“Peer Effects in the Hospital,” with E. Jason Baron

“Spillovers in Substance Abuse and Self-Harm,” with Emily Cuddy and Elisa Jácome

“Left Behind: Effects of Having a Sibling or Cousin Placed in Out-of-Home Care”

Presentations and Summer Schools:

2023: MIT; Duke University; Texas Economics of Crime Workshop; Copenhagen Business School; Stockholm University; Labor Economics Seminar, University of Gothenburg; Ph.D. Conference, University of Gothenburg; NORDLOCH meeting; EALE Conference (planned); University of Copenhagen (planned)

2022: Ragnar Frisch Centre for Economic Research; The Stockholm Health Day, Stockholm University; Arne Ryde Workshop on Gender and Family Wellbeing, Lund University; Labor Economics Seminar, University of Gothenburg; Ph.D. Conference, University of Gothenburg

2021: Essen-Gothenburg Workshop in Health Economics; Summer School on Socioeconomic Inequality (HCEO); Methods in Econometrics Workshop, University of Gothenburg; Labor Economics Seminar, University of Gothenburg; Ph.D. Conference, University of Gothenburg

2020: Labor Economics Seminar, University of Gothenburg

2019: The Centre for Collective Action Research Annual Conference, University of Gothenburg; Behavioral Economics Seminar, University of Gothenburg

Languages:

Swedish (native), English (fluent), German (basic)

References:

Prof. Randi Hjalmarsson
University of Gothenburg
Department of Economics
Vasagatan 1, Box 640
SE-405 30 Gothenburg
randi.hjalmarsson@economics.gu.se

Prof. Andreea Mitrut
University of Gothenburg
Department of Economics
Vasagatan 1, Box 640
SE-405 30 Gothenburg
andreea.mitrut@economics.gu.se

Prof. Joseph J. Doyle, Jr.
MIT Sloan School of
Management
77 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139
jjdoyle@mit.edu

Dissertation Abstract

My current research focuses on health, risky behaviors, and judge decision-making. I am especially interested in court-ordered care. In my dissertation, I study one of the most vulnerable groups in society: children and youths who interact with the child protection system. This population is at a high risk of engaging in destructive behavior, such as self-harm, substance abuse, and crime, and fare disproportionately worse in adulthood. At the same time, it is a surprisingly large group: child protective services investigate more than 1 in 3 U.S. children for maltreatment at some point before their 18th birthday.

My dissertation consists of three chapters that use large, novel data sets and quasi-experimental methods to investigate decision-making in the child protection system and the effects of child protection interventions. The first chapter, my job market paper, estimates how removing children from their homes affects child and parent outcomes, including mortality, hospitalization, and crime. The second chapter studies peer effects in residential treatment homes for youths. The third chapter (joint with E. Jason Baron and Joseph J. Doyle, Jr.) studies the drivers of differential treatment by judges and child protection investigators in child protection cases.

Surviving Childhood: Health Effects of Removing a Child From Home (*Job Market Paper*)

Suicide and drug use disorder are among the top three causes of teenage death in many Western countries. A particularly vulnerable group is children placed in out-of-home care. Studies in for example Australia, Denmark, and Sweden document that 2-6% of children will be placed in out-of-home care by age 18. At the same time, children with experience of out-of-home care in these countries are 3-5 times as likely to die in adolescence and early adulthood as their peers. They are also more likely to use heavy drugs, attempt suicide, and be diagnosed with a range of physical and mental disorders. Nevertheless, there is little causal evidence on the effects of out-of-home placement on health outcomes.

In this paper, I study the effects of involuntary removal from home on all-cause mortality, suicide, and accidental overdose. I use a novel data set based on court documents spanning 2001-2019 that I transcribe and link with detailed register data. The final data set contains over 26,000 child-by-case observations and 800 judges. To achieve identification, I employ an instrumental variable (IV) design. Specifically, I exploit quasi-random variation in judge assignment together with across-judge variation in the tendency to favor removal. In my baseline specification, I define the instrument as the mean removal rate in all other cases handled by the same judge, leaving out the focal case.

I find that involuntary out-of-home placement has large adverse effects on the mortality of the marginal child. Removal increases the risk of death by the year the child turns 19 by 7 percentage points (relative to a control complier mean of 0.7%). This increase is primarily driven by suicides that occur while the removed children are still placed in out-of-home care. I also trace out the effects over the months following the court's judgment. For children who are

old enough to self-harm and use harmful substances, there is a significant increase in the risk of suicide (but not accidental overdose) already by month 9. In addition, removal causes large increases in the risk of being hospitalized for mental illness and the risk of committing a non-narcotic crime. An important driver of the latter is a rise in the risk of the marginal child committing a crime against persons (e.g., violent and sexual crimes). As for children, child removal increases the risk of any birth parent committing a non-narcotic crime. However, there is little evidence of adverse health effects for birth parents.

Treated Together: Spillovers Among Youths Admitted to Residential Treatment

Individuals struggling with substance abuse and self-harm are often treated in group-based programs. However, concerns have been raised about the risk of adverse outcomes through peer-to-peer spillovers. This paper analyses the effects of peers placed in residential treatment facilities on each other's outcomes using novel data on the universe of youths (over 16,000) admitted to state-owned treatment facilities in Sweden between 2000 and 2020. To overcome the issue of nonrandom assignment of youths to facilities, I use the natural flow of youths to and from facilities within a given year by including facility-by-year fixed effects. Through a series of tests, I show that the central assumption – that the variation in peer composition is as good as random after netting out facility-by-year fixed effects – is empirically valid.

I find strong evidence of reinforcing peer effects in substance abuse and self-harm. Exposing youths with a history of substance abuse (self-harm) to peers with a similar background increases the risk of experiencing adverse events related to substance abuse (self-harm) post-discharge. These effects are robust to the inclusion of controls for other peer characteristics (crime, mental disorders, gender, nationality, and age).

Decision-Making in Child Removal Cases, with E. Jason Baron and Joseph J. Doyle, Jr.

As seen in the other chapters of my dissertation, the decision to remove a child from home has potentially severe consequences. Given the high stakes, it is important that decisions are fair, consistent, and based on the case's merits. However, prior studies, including my job market paper, document substantial variation in decision-making for otherwise similar cases. In this paper, we use rich data on child protection investigators in Michigan and judges in Sweden to shed light on the drivers of variation in decision-making across decision-makers and over time. We consider several sources of influence. Beyond static decision-maker characteristics, we consider the effect of personal experiences such as the birth of their first child. In addition, we investigate the impact of news coverage of care home conditions and within-family maltreatment on decision-making. For judges, we also study how their removal tendencies are affected by an appellate court reversing or affirming their judgment.

Future Research Agenda

In the future, I will continue to address policy-relevant questions at the intersection of labor, health, and crime using quasi-experimental methods and high-quality data. I will focus on vulnerable sub-populations, such as the mentally ill, substance abusers, and children who interact with child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Joint with Dr. E. Jason Baron, I have obtained approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority to undertake a set of ambitious projects aimed at strengthening our knowledge about the impact of voluntary and involuntary treatment of mental illness and substance abuse on own and family outcomes. In the first project, *“Forced to Get Better: The Effects of Involuntary Treatment for Mental Illness and Substance Abuse”*, we construct a novel data set by transcribing Swedish court cases involving the involuntary provision of psychiatric, forensic psychiatric, and substance abuse treatment. We employ a judge IV design to isolate exogenous variation in treatment and estimate the causal effects of involuntary care provision on own and family

health, labor, and crime outcomes. In the second project, “*Peer Effects in the Hospital*”, we exploit detailed data on patients admitted to Swedish hospital wards to study patient-to-patient spillovers in self-harm, substance abuse, and other destructive behaviors. As in my second dissertation chapter, we include ward-by-year fixed effects to achieve identification. Thereby, we exploit the natural variation in peer composition within each ward and year stemming from the continuous flow of patients.

I am also working with Dr. Emily Cuddy and Dr. Elisa Jácome on a project, “*Spillovers in Substance Abuse and Self-Harm*,” that aims to strengthen our understanding of the spillover effects of hospitalizations and deaths related to substance abuse and self-harm on family members and peers. Peers are defined as persons in the same workplace or school. We use difference-in-difference designs and rich Swedish data spanning 1987-2022 to estimate short- and long-run effects on the health, economic, and social outcomes of the individuals, their families, and their peers. An application for approval has been submitted to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.

The adverse effects of involuntary out-of-home care on the removed child that I find in my job market paper might be partly explained by family separation. A natural follow-up question is whether adverse effects can be found for siblings who are left behind. Beyond siblings, cousins can also be affected if, for example, their parents change their behavior in response to the removal event. For the work in progress “*Left Behind: Effects of Having a Sibling or Cousin Placed in Out-of-Home Care*”, I add rich register data on siblings, cousins, grandparents, uncles, and aunts to the data set used in my job market paper. I employ the same judge IV design as in my job market paper to achieve identification. The project has been approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority.