Risky Health Behaviors: Evidence for an Emerging Economy

Working Paper No. 891 Keep in mind
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This paper uses the Colombian National Health Survey to analyze the relationship between education and risky health behaviors, namely smoking, heavy drinking, being obese, and unsafe sexual behavior, by estimating the education gradient using Logit models. We also provide evidence on the effect of education, socio-economic and knowledge variables on these health behaviors by gender and area of residence. Results indicate that there is a negative and significant effect of years of schooling on the probability of smoking, whereas the probability of heavy drinking and unsafe sexual behaviors increases with education, highlighting the importance of social and cultural factors. Knowledge variables not only reduce the probability of smoking, but also the probability of heavy drinking and being obese, indicating that campaigns and research on the negative effects of these behaviors have raised awareness about how harmful they are.

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