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Nationality: Sri Lankan

Software Skills: Stata, Matlab, ODK/Survey CTO, L^AT_EX

Language Skills: English, Sinhala (highly proficient), Spanish (CEFR level B1)

Research Fields: Development Economics, Labour Economics, Education Economics

Education

PhD Economics, University of Cambridge 2015-present

Advisors: Kaivan Munshi and Hamish Low

MSc Economics for Development, University of Oxford 2011-2012

Result: Distinction. Awarded the George Webb Medley Prize for best overall performance in the MSc Economics for Development, 2012.

Thesis: *Brain Drain and Efficiency Gain: Modelling the Effects of Private Franchise Universities on the Sri Lankan Labour Market*, Grade Awarded — Distinction.

BA (Hons) Economics and English Literature, University of Melbourne 2007-2010

Result: First Class Honours.

Thesis: *The Legacy of War: a Model of Underdevelopment Traps and Human Capital Accumulation*, Grade Awarded — First Class Honours.

Awards, Scholarships and Prizes:

Keynes Fund Award (JHOW), “Herding in Organ Transplant Decisions”, University of Cambridge 2018
(with Kaivan Munshi, Soenje Reiche, Hamid Sabourian and Kouros Saeb-Parsy)

Smuts Cambridge International Scholarship, University of Cambridge 2015-2018

Robin D. Hocking Scholarship, University of Melbourne 2010

Joe Kirby Memorial Prize, Ormond College, University of Melbourne 2010

Alexander Sutherland Award, University of Melbourne 2009

McLennan Scholarship, Ormond College, University of Melbourne 2009

Teaching Experience

Teaching Fellow, University of Cambridge

The Economics of Developing Countries (Undergraduate Tripos Part IIB)	2016-2018
International Trade and Economic Development (Undergraduate Tripos Part IIA)	2016-2017
Awarded Faculty Teaching Fellow Prize 2016/2017 and 2017/2018	

Teaching Assistant, University of Melbourne

Introductory Macroeconomics (Undergraduate Year 1)	2010
Introductory Microeconomics (Undergraduate Year 1)	2009

Teaching Assistant, Ormond College, University of Melbourne

Microeconomics (Undergraduate Year 3)	2010
Quantitative Methods II (Undergraduate Year 2)	2009-2010
Quantitative Methods (Undergraduate Year 1)	2009
Introductory Macroeconomics (Undergraduate Year 1)	2009

Other Work Experience

Research Coordinator, Innovations for Poverty Action	2013-2015
Graduate Intern, Child Protection Section, UNICEF Liberia	Jan-Apr 2013
Research Assistant, University of Ottawa	Sep-Apr 2013
Research Assistant to the Executive Director, Institute for Policy Studies	Sep 2012-Jan 2013
Research Intern to the Executive Director, Institute for Policy Studies	Mar-Sep 2011

Working Papers

A Job Worth Waiting for: Parental Wealth and Youth Unemployment in Ghana
(Job Market Paper)

Youth unemployment in Ghana is increasing in parental wealth. This occurs because, in the absence of unemployment insurance, only workers with a sufficiently high stock of parental wealth can afford to remain unemployed, and do so in order to search for scarce, high-productivity jobs. I build and estimate a structural model of endogenous education, employment and occupational choice to quantify this effect, and to demonstrate that it leads to a number of undesirable labour market outcomes: namely, low educational attainment, high income inequality and low match efficiency among workers of heterogeneous ability. I use the estimation results to decompose the effect of wealth on average lifetime earnings into an education channel and an unemployment channel, and show that the latter accounts for 37% of the total effect. Further, I use the estimated model to compare the effectiveness of two alternative policy interventions: an education subsidy and unemployment insurance. I find that the education subsidy is most effective at increasing aggregate productivity, but comes with the cost of increasing income inequality, while unemployment insurance has a smaller effect on aggregate productivity but also decreases income inequality.

Private or Public? Efficiency and Equity Implications of Tertiary Education Choice

While the presence of private universities in developing countries has increased significantly in recent decades, their growth experience varies widely across individual countries. This paper seeks to explain such variation and, consequently, to consider the range of impact private universities may have on the efficiency of human capital allocation, aggregate output, and the dynamic evolution of income inequality. To that end, I build and estimate a structural model of tertiary education choice using data for a group of six developing countries: Armenia, Bolivia, Colombia, Georgia, Ghana and Kenya. I show that underlying parameter values position countries in one of three potential scenarios, each of which has different implications for the composition of the graduate workforce, the growth of private universities, output per worker and income inequality. I find that, over time, when private universities are more productive than public ones, economies tend to move away from the most socially efficient of these scenarios, while the least efficient scenario is highly persistent.

Work in Progress

Herding in Organ Transplant Decisions

(with Kaivan Munshi, Soenje Reiche and Hamid Sabourian)

This paper deals with the efficiency cost of herding behaviour among UK hospitals in organ transplant queues. An algorithm determines the order in which patients are offered a deceased donor's organs in the UK. Nevertheless, while demand significantly outstrips organ availability, 37% of livers and 24% of kidneys failed to be utilised over the last decade. We show that herding behaviour plays an important role in such wastage: once an organ is rejected by one or more centres, subsequent centres emulate their behaviour, ignoring their own assessment of the organ's quality. Although such behaviour may be rational from each centre's perspective, it generates an economic inefficiency as independent assessments by those who herd fail to be passed on to those that follow. We employ unique administrative data from the NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) that covers the universe of abdominal organs donated in the UK during 2006-2016 to provide reduced-form evidence of herding behaviour among transplant centres. Further, we develop a structural model of herding in transplant decisions, and estimate its parameters in order to show the ways in which herding behaviour causes organ wastage, and to consider the impact of counter-factual policy interventions.

Presentations

Oxford Development Economics Workshop, University of Oxford and CSAE	2016
Oxford Development Economics Workshop, University of Oxford and CSAE	2018

References

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Dr. Kai Liu
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