

Book reviews

Econometrics, Statistics and Computational Approaches in Food and Health Sciences. By Alok Bhargava. Pp. 381. (World Scientific Publishing Co., Singapore, 2006.) £41.00, ISBN: 981-256-841-7, hardback. doi: 10.1017/S0021932008002915.

This book is a compendium of Alok Bhargava's most important contributions in longitudinal econometric methods and their application to problems in food, nutrition and health-related research. It demonstrates the usefulness of rigorous econometric and statistical methods in addressing issues of under-nutrition and poor child health in developing countries, as well as obesity in developed countries.

This volume compiles 27 published papers dealing with health and nutrition issues in developed and developing countries. Some of these papers are co-authored with prominent researchers in the specific fields. These papers, unarguably, cross the disciplinary borders by being published in several disciplinary and multi-disciplinary journals. Most of the methodological issues arising in nutrition, econometrics, development economics and population sciences are discussed in detail in this volume. This book is organized into six sections, namely, methodological contribution, food intakes, health and productivity in developing countries, child health and cognitive development in developing countries, population health and economic growth, economic demography, and behaviour, diet and obesity in developed countries. The reader is informed using examples from important surveys like the Michigan Panel Survey of Income Dynamics, the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-arid Tropics Data, National Family Health Survey, the PERFORM data, Women's Health Trial and the National Food Stamp Program Survey about various methodological challenges.

The first section discusses in detail methodological issues and is a must read for quantitative researchers. All the four papers in this part focus on sophisticated econometric methods. In spite of its focus on important aspects of longitudinal methods with high relevance for research, it is surely not for undergraduates. The second section of this volume focuses on food intakes, health and productivity in developing countries. This section also highlights sophisticated methods to capture the relation between food intake and health. The third section (child health and cognitive development in developing countries) focuses on the very important yet neglected area of children-oriented research. The fourth section (population health and economic growth) consists of two articles using macroeconomic data; interestingly, the authors show a significant positive effect of higher ASR (Adult Survival Rate) on GDP growth in low-income countries.

The fifth section, like section four, is interesting for economists as well as demographers and utilizes data at country, regional and household level. One of the interesting arguments is that the elasticities of infant and child mortality rates with respect to female literacy are smaller for non-African countries compared with African countries. Moreover, the finding that presence of older sisters in the

household was beneficial for survival chances of the 'index' child compared with the presence of older brothers shows very clearly for the first time the role of the girl child as a caretaker and the 'value' of her contributions.

The final section is focused on individual behaviour, diet and obesity in developed countries. In the context where the US population is moving from 'the tallest to the fattest', it is increasingly important to observe individual factors. Alok Bhargava concludes that apart from economic factors, individual-level dietary knowledge, life style, and self control need to be emphasized to tackle the alarming obesity situation.

This book is a positive step in promoting interdisciplinary research. It is not very common to find a successful scholar that masters several disciplines. Alok Bhargava, using this volume, shows that it is possible to understand and relate various disciplines. However, some readers may find it difficult to relate various themes of this book. For instance, the first part of the volume is too complicated for social scientists like anthropologists, psychologists and nutritionists. Though sophisticated econometrics is used in some of the chapters, a non-econometrician can still benefit by addressing methodological issues to avoid spurious results, especially when it comes to policy.

The close connections between the issues and themes analysed in disciplines such as economics, nutrition, psychology, demography, anthropology, epidemiology and public health provide a sound basis for the formulation of public policies. This is what policy-oriented research should aim at, and this volume is highly recommended for researchers with policy focus.

The author himself stresses some of the potential problems of this volume such as terminological differences across disciplines. However, the author tries to please all the disciplines by including the synonyms. Most public health researchers, anthropologists, psychologists and demographers are unfamiliar with concepts like 'endogeneity' and 'heteroskedasticity'. These researchers might want to avoid this volume, especially after reading the first part. However, the preface and introduction of the book provide a summary in a systematic way to show that not all sections are full of sophisticated statistical terminology.

This volume will help health researchers – irrespective of their discipline – in understanding various methodological challenges that are taken for granted, and 'state of art' econometric solutions in dealing these issues. Personally, I found some of the examples, such as the ones using ICRISAT data, very useful. It is very difficult to sum up the book due to the magnificent amount of information. Even though methodological issues are at the heart of the chapters, one can appreciate the discussion and challenges addressed in each chapter.

ARAVINDA MEERA GUNTUPALLI
University of Southampton,
UK

Jesus in Our Wombs. Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent. By Rebecca J. Lester. Pp. 344. (University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005.) ISBN 0-520-24268-8, paperback. doi: 10.1017/S0021932008002976.

Jesus in Our Wombs describes the transformation that young women go through during the first year of religious training to become nuns in a Roman Catholic