

The Effect of Changes to the Statutory Minimum Working Age on Educational, Labor and Health Outcomes

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Abstract: We explore the effects of a labor market reform that changed the statutory minimum working age in Spain in 1980. In particular, the reform raised the statutory minimum working age from 14 to 16, while the minimum age for attaining compulsory education remained at 14 until 1990. To study the effects of this change on the incentives to work or study, we consider the different alternatives available at age 14 to individuals born at various times of the year before and after the reform. Individuals born at the beginning of the year were legally able to work before finishing compulsory education preceding the reform. We show that individuals born at the beginning of the year were more likely to finish *both compulsory and post-compulsory* education if they turned 14 after the reform. In addition, we find that the reform decreased mortality at young ages (16-25) for both genders, and increased it for prime-age women (26-40). We provide evidence to prove that the latter increase is partly explained by the deterioration of the health habits of the affected women. This helps explain the narrowing age gap in life expectancy between women and men in Spain.