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Empirical essays on education and health

van Ewijk, R.J.G.

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This thesis presents four essays describing empirical studies on education and health. The first study examines the long-term health effects of Ramadan fasting during pregnancy. Medical theory suggests that people who were prenatally exposed to fasting may have a worse health later in their life, and, in particular, that they may have higher chances of developing coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and kidney problems. These long-term effects of Ramadan fasting during pregnancy have hardly been studied until now and the study in this thesis provides several new insights into these effects. The second study investigates whether teachers grade ethnic minority students differently from ethnic majority students. The study is carried out as an experiment in which a number of teachers had to grade the same set of essays written by 11-year old students, on which the names of the writers had been manipulated, so that the same essay alternately appeared to be written by a Dutch, or by a Turkish/Moroccan student. The last two studies focus on peer effects: the effects of going to school with fellow students with certain characteristics. The first study looks at the effect of average socioeconomic status, the second at the effect of the share of ethnic minorities among fellow students on achievement. Both topics have been investigated before, but the findings from earlier studies varied considerably. In the essays in this thesis, these earlier studies are quantitatively compared (meta-analysis) to find out why their results differed and to reconcile their findings.

Reyn van Ewijk (1977) graduated in Psychology (Social Psychology and Research Methods) in 2001, and in Economics in 2002, both at the University of Groningen. After having worked in market research for two years, he started his PhD at the University of Amsterdam in 2005. Initially working at the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences with a focus on research on education, he later changed to the Economics department, where his research focuses on education and health.

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