

# The Power of the Dutch Pill: Access to Birth Control, Religious Beliefs, and Women's Outcomes” with Esmée Zwiets (Princeton University)

Olivier Marie (Erasmus University / Maastricht University)

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We study how access to birth control affects short- and long- term outcomes of women in a new context: the 1970 liberalization of the contraceptive pill in the Netherlands. We first document a massive immediate drop in the birth rate post-liberalization which was particularly strong for young women, the group for which access restrictions were most drastically lifted. We then exploit area level social norms – proxied by votes for religious parties which were against relaxing access rules – to obtain causal estimates of the impact of the availability of the pill on female fertility control and especially changes in the prevalence of ill-timed births. We find that women who lived in areas that were less religiously resistant to the introduction of the pill were much less likely to experience an underaged birth or to end up in a ‘shotgun’ wedding (i.e. married seven months or less before a birth). We then show that women who were less likely to experience ill-timed births went on to invest more in their education and, conditional on working, earned higher wages. Finally, we measure the importance of birth control technology providers’ beliefs by estimating the additional effect of the religiosity of local health professionals on women’s outcomes. We find that, given an area’s level of social norms, the probability of ill-timed births was only reduced for women exposed to a less than median proportion of religious ‘technology gatekeepers’ at the time of the pill liberalization.