Over the last decade, a large body of papers that study the roll out of the safety net, with a focus in particular on programs which were created or greatly expanded during the War on Poverty has given us evidence about short- and particularly long-run effects positive effects of these programs. During the mid or late 1960s, the Food Stamp Program, Medicaid, Medicare, the School Breakfast Program, job training programs, and Title 1 were all created or made permanent. Other programs such as the National School Lunch program and AFDC were expanded or altered. The Office of Economic Opportunity made grants to family planning clinics, Head Start programs, and community health centers. And this interacted with civil rights legislation requiring recipients of federal funds not to discriminate. Finally, several programs followed in the early 1970s—Supplemental Security Income, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and WIC.

This emerging literature focuses on the roll out of many of these programs, comparing places where the programs were implemented early to those where they were implemented later, controlling for national shocks and time-invariant differences across locations. We take advantage of variation from this existing literature and combine it with rich administrative data on earnings and use of SSI and SSDI benefits—the Continuing Work History Sample. Thus, our key independent variables are the share of time an adult was exposed to the food stamp program from birth through age 5, whether the Head Start program had made grants in the adult’s county by age 3, and their interactions and our key dependent variables are measures of earnings and quarters worked from the administrative records. We also introduce new policy variation based on whether the FSP replaced the Commodity Distribution Program or came into effect with no other large food assistance program. We will expand the analysis to look at other programs and grants such as WIC, the Summer Food Service Program, and their interactions across children’s life cycles.

These data are taken from earnings histories of a one percent sample of Social Security Numbers ever issued. Restricting ourselves to the native-born individuals, born between 1955 and 1980, where we can link their place of birth to the data on the rollout of SNAP, we have a sample of 875,000 individuals. We model annual earnings as a function of dummy variables for year of birth, county of birth, for being white, and for being male, as well as other controls. For women, living in a county where Food Stamps were available for the entire time from conception to age 5 leads to an increase in earnings of at age 32 of between $587 and $654 (about a 3 percent increase at the mean), significant at the 5% and/or 10% level. While the point estimate for earnings for men and women are similar, the effects are only significant for women. Women are also less likely to ever be on the SSI program (full exposure translates into about a 6% reduction). These suggest important positive long run effects of the Food Stamp program.
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