

Religion, Numeracy and Disease:

Lessons from Ugandan mission hospital patient registry, 1908-1970

Shane Doyle (University of Leeds)

Felix Meier zu Selhausen (University of Southern Denmark, University of Sussex , Mountains of the Moon University)

Jacob Weisdorf (University of Southern Denmark, CEPR)

Abstract

In recent years economists and economic historians have devoted increasing attention to the long-term effects of Christian missionary activities on African education, gender, social mobility and religion (Nunn 2010, Gallego & Woodberry 2010, Frankema 2012, Cogneau & Moradi 2014, Nunn 2014, Meier zu Selhausen 2014, Meier zu Selhausen and Weisdorf 2015). Despite the prevalence of mission hospitals throughout most of sub-Saharan Africa, so far little is known about the impact of missionary activities on African health and sexual behaviour. Using hitherto unexplored information contained in the registers of 10,000 African in-patients from one of the earliest mission hospitals in Uganda we investigate the role of religion and gender in the formation of African human capital development and health in colonial and early post-colonial western Uganda. In particular, we test whether Christian missionaries, Islam teachings, or African traditional religion differently promoted education using the age-heaping technique. Next, we investigate whether Protestant and Catholic missionaries differently promoted education of males and females relative to non-Christians. This puts historical ‘flesh’ to the long-run correlations found by Nunn (2014) between the locations of early missionary stations in Africa and current human capital formation. Finally, we investigate the role of missionary diffusion of knowledge of personal hygiene and the scientific underpinnings of diseases on African health by studying the prevalence, types, and outcomes of Christian and non-Christian patients’ diseases. In particular, we explore the influence of Christian missionary teachings of hygiene and faithfulness on the occurrence of sexual transmitted diseases and contagious contact diseases.