Alexa Prettyman

Children do not choose to be poor, maltreated, nor uneducated, and their success should not be predetermined by the zip code in which they are born or neighborhood in which they grow up. Children make up our future, so we must invest in effective policies that mitigate disparities in community and household resources and provide families and youth equitable opportunities to succeed. I use economic thinking and analysis to evaluate and influence education and child welfare policies.

My dissertation uses econometric models, quasi-experimental approaches, and national administrative data to identify and address issues related to child maltreatment and evaluate potential solutions, such as foster care. Chapter 1 estimates the effect of extending foster care support and services from 18 to 21 years old on the transition to adulthood for youth that have grown up in foster care. Chapter 2 evaluates how state legislation related to mandatory reporters impacts the demand for child maltreatment intervention. Finally, chapter 3 describes how economic hardships and mandatory reporters contribute to the number of children reported for maltreatment.

My dissertation provides a new perspective for thinking about child maltreatment by modeling the reporting of maltreatment and evaluating potential solutions through an economic framework. Much of the existing research stems from social work and public health, but child maltreatment is an interdisciplinary issue that can have lasting economic consequences for families and society, so it is important that economists also join the discussion.

I value interdisciplinary research and seek opportunities to work with colleagues to merge expertise and provide a more holistic approach and answer that enhances the final product. I have worked with colleagues to develop and implement a randomized control trial to test the effectiveness of an attendance nudge in reducing chronic absenteeism. Additionally, I have worked with colleagues to evaluate charter school performance in Georgia. Currently, I am working with a team to determine COVID-19 learning loss for students in the metro Atlanta area.

My existing research portfolio demonstrates my ability to apply economic thinking and techniques to social issues related to child welfare and education policy. I want to continue to understand how childhood experiences affect adult well-being and productivity. I hope to influence policy that aids in skill development for children, youth, and families and equalizes opportunities across marginalized and vulnerable groups. My research agenda relates to my broader life goal of reducing poverty and inequality.