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Ziebarth receives Vernon Memorial Award

BY Olivia Hall | June 12, 2018

IN Policy Analysis and Management



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[Nicolas Ziebarth](#), associate professor of Policy Analysis and Management, and Lauren Jones Ph.D. '14, assistant professor of consumer sciences at Ohio State University, earned top honors in their field last year. The co-authors became recipients of the 2017 Raymond Vernon Memorial Award, given annually for the best paper in that year's volume of the "Journal of Policy Analysis and Management" (JPAM).

The prize committee selected their paper "U.S. Child Safety Seat Laws: Are They Effective and Who Complies?" from among 548 total submissions to JPAM in 2017, fewer than 10 percent of which were published in the journal.

For Ziebarth and Jones, the prize recognizes several years of work motivated by state laws that require children to ride in safety seats for longer periods – an average of 6 years, up from about 2 years in the early 1990s.

"It is an example of a largely overlooked government regulation that has become increasingly stringent," Ziebarth said. "Few people would question the rationale of such laws because we are talking about child

safety. Still, such public policies trigger my natural curiosity as an empirical researcher who wants to know: what do the data tell me?”

The researchers found that these regulations are indeed effective in raising the age of children riding in safety seats. But not all parents are influenced equally: Those already using regular seatbelts tend to switch to safety seats, while those not restraining their children rarely start to do so.

Because, as Ziebarth and Jones confirmed in a prior study, safety seats are not more effective at preventing fatalities than seatbelts for children aged two to six, the laws merely shift compliant parents between equally safe measures and overall do not significantly reduce the likelihood of children dying in a fatal accident.

“I believe this is a good example of relevant public policy research,” said Ziebarth. “It triggers people’s attention and desire to talk about it, as we all care about child safety and most of us have first-hand experience with child safety seats.”

Now he and Jones hope to spark more research and discussion by publishing their work outside of their own field in interdisciplinary journals. “I also hope that journals will publish zero effect findings more often, which is important for a balanced evaluation of public policy,” he added.

Receiving a best paper award is hardly a new experience for Ziebarth. Since 2010 he has racked up a total of ten awards for research he has co-authored, most recently the prize for the best health economics paper in 2017 by the German Health Economics Association.

“I am very excited and grateful for this wonderful award,” he said. “JPAM is our top field journal and the signature journal of the Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management. Being selected as the number one paper means a lot to us and is a big motivation to continue to work hard on policy-relevant, high-quality research.”

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