Khashayar Pourtaheri

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Education

University of Washington — Expected 2027
Ph.D. in Economics | Advisor: Alan Griffith — Seattle, WA, USA

Smith School of Business, Queen's University — 2021
M.Sc. in Management, Business Economics — Kingston, ON, Canada

Sharif University of Technology — 2020
M.Sc. in Economics

Sharif University of Technology — 2017
B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering

Research

Fields: Applied Microeconomics, Health and Labor Economics, Causal Inference, Behavioral Economics and AI

Working Papers

The Social Cost of Drug Decriminalization: Overdoses, Crime, and Recriminalization in Oregon and Washington [link]
Job Market Paper | SSRN working paper — October 2026

What does society gain and lose when states reduce criminal penalties for drug possession? Using FBI arrest and crime records and CDC death records, I compare Oregon's and Washington's 2021 reforms with weighted comparison states that tracked them before 2021. Drug-user arrests fall 68 percent with no shift to other charges, while overdose deaths rise 34 percent and property crime 17 percent. Deaths rise in every comparison group, including groups matched on COVID, fentanyl's spread and state politics. Restoring penalties in Washington brings arrests back but not deaths down. Health and crime costs outweigh the gains from less enforcement: a net social cost of $26.6 billion by mid-2023, mostly from 1,971 excess deaths. The results show that reducing penalties for drug possession can cut arrests sharply and still leave society worse off.

Behavioral History Outperforms Descriptions of the Person for LLM Synthetic Personas [link]
with Ahmad Zareei | arXiv preprint — October 2026

- Builds 4,225 synthetic personas with Claude, one for each of 845 U.S. adults under five nested information conditions, to predict each person's choices on 14 behavioral biases.
- Finds that behavioral history beats every description of the person: demographics, personality, and cognitive scores, even combined, reach 7–12% of the human test–retest benchmark, while adding past answers raises this to 28%, the best in all 17 demographic groups.
- Shows that population averages look right but mask individual-level failure, and that personas overweight education and income (74% vs. 18% of explained variation).

The Price Effect of the Salon Mechanism in a Freight Transportation Market
Working paper

- Finds that a government-mandated queue mechanism matching freight companies with truck drivers raises prices by about 13% and cuts price dispersion by about 11%, using 40 million bills of lading, fixed effects, and propensity-score matching.

Work in Progress

- **The Effects of Common Ownership on Oligopoly**
  Contract-theoretic model of the conditions under which common-ownership links can sustain collusive product-market outcomes.

Work Experience

Research Economist Sep 2026 – Present

Comparative Health Outcomes, Policy, and Economics (CHOICE) Institute

Project: Adolescent Mental Health Study | Supervisor: Noémi Kreif

- Strengthened the causal framework of a large study of how adolescent depression affects adult employment and earnings, identifying problems in the final estimates and designing solutions to correct them.
- Designed the study's confounder strategy, combining a 46-study literature review and a causal diagram (DAG) with data-driven selection across more than 6,000 variables.
- Converted the study's estimates into labor-supply elasticities for economic and return-on-investment models, avoiding double counting across outcomes.
- Organized weekly team meetings and presented findings and recommendations to colleagues, including lawyers and health researchers.

Data Scientist Researcher — Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) Summer 2025

- Produced subnational estimates of HIV prevalence, antiretroviral-therapy coverage, and viral-load suppression for Malawi and Zimbabwe by integrating PHIA, DHS, and AIS survey data in reproducible pipelines.
- Ran statistical, machine-learning, and forecasting models, and documented legacy code so the team could maintain and extend it.

Research Assistant — Smith School of Business, Queen's University May 2021 – Aug 2021

- Integrated and cleaned data from multiple sources, validated data quality, and communicated statistical findings through reproducible analysis in R and Stata.

Teaching

Instructor — Intro to Microeconomics, University of Washington Winter 2024

- Designed and delivered lectures on supply and demand, market equilibrium, consumer theory, and firm behavior; created assessments and held office hours.

Teaching Assistant — University of Washington Sep 2022 – Present

- Courses: microeconomics, data science, and econometrics labs.
- Taught R and Python labs on data cleaning, visualization, reproducible workflows, supervised learning, cross-validation, regularization, tree-based models, and neural networks.

Teaching Assistant — Managerial Economics (MBA), Queen's University Jan 2021 – May 2021

- Led quiz and review sessions for MBA students, translating economic concepts for working professionals.

Skills

Econometrics: Event-study DiD, synthetic DiD and synthetic control, DML, CV-TMLE, AIPW, and Super Learner, IV, RDD, survey-weighted inference, mediation and sensitivity analysis (E-values, MNAR)

Programming: R (tmle, SuperLearner, survey), Stata, Python, SQL, Git, MATLAB, LaTeX/Beamer

Data: Add Health (restricted-use), NLSY97, FBI NIBRS, CDC WONDER, PHIA, DHS, AIS

Other: LLM experiment design (Claude), machine learning (scikit-learn, PyTorch), Tableau

References

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