

The motherhood wage penalty: A meta-analysis

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Abstract:

Mothers typically earn less money than women without children. Numerous studies have documented the so-called "motherhood wage gap." We use meta-analysis to review the existing empirical evidence on this topic and test for potential processes that could explain the pay gap's persistence. We discover an average mommy wage gap of roughly 3.6–3.8 percent based on 208 wage effects of having exactly one child and 245 wage effects of the total number of children. While the gaps connected with the total number of children are primarily explained by the loss of mothers' human capital during child-related career pauses, the gaps associated with a single child are primarily explained by mothers' preference for lower-paying jobs and occupations. The residual gap is smallest in Nordic countries, where public policies actively support gender equality and reconciliation of work and family, as well as Belgium and France, and largest in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries.

Keywords: social science, motherhood penalty .

INTRODUCTION

The fact that moms make less money than childless women with similar features is a well-known phenomenon known as the "motherhood wage gap," "motherhood wage penalty," or "family wage gap." To explain it, several mechanisms have been proposed. It has been suggested that mothers lose skills during care-related career gaps (e.g., Gangl and Ziefle, 2009; Napari, 2010), choose lower-paying positions that are more compatible with care (Felfe, 2012), or put in less effort at work (Anderson et al., 2003). It has also been suggested that women who want to have more children or have them earlier in life are less motivated on occupational jobs (Korenman and Neumark, 1992) or that companies discriminate against mothers (Budig and England, 2001; Correll et al., 2007). Finally, it was claimed that the extent of the motherhood wage difference is influenced by the social context, namely country-specific legislation and social conventions that influence how mothers balance paid work and childcare (Misra et al., 2011; Budig et al., 2012, 2016).

In this study, we estimate the gap in a variety of social circumstances and examine the validity of mechanisms described in the literature to explain the gap. We leverage current empirical research on the maternity wage penalty and conduct a meta-analysis, often known as a quantitative literature review, instead of conducting a new study on the subject. The purpose of the meta-analysis is to produce an estimate that best reflects the true unknown parameter based on the empirical data available (Borenstein et al., 2009). It also enables for the identification of reasons for discrepancies in interest estimates among research.

Theoretical framework

The The motherhood penalty's theories and notions:

Several explanations have been proposed to explain why moms are likely to earn less than childless women. The motherhood wage gap is believed to be caused by differences in standard human capital characteristics of mothers and non-mothers (such as differences in age and education) as well as the loss and non-accumulation of human capital during child-related employment breaks or reduced working hours, according to Becker's (1985) theory of human capital. Mothers are more likely than fathers to work fewer hours and have less work experience, as well as to pick different types of occupations. According to the compensating wage differentials theory, women obtain lower income because they choose employment that pay less on average but are more child-friendly. Part-time jobs, jobs with a high percentage of women, public sector positions, and jobs that offer flexible hours, don't demand a lot of travel, don't require weekend or evening work, or aren't overly stressful are all seen as mother-friendly. The empirical evidence on the importance of these factors is mixed once again.

Future research

In addition to individuals' interactions with technology, Strkersen and other writers in this special issue urge that social dynamics, which may give rise to unforeseen, emergent aspects of the human-technology system, should be considered. This could include how individuals utilise technology, how they adapt their behaviour to technology or (vice versa) how they adapt technology to meet their goals, and how they deal with circumstances where technology does not work as intended (cf. Jensen or an example in relation to digital connectivity, and Baumler et al. for an example regarding record keeping systems). Although these issues were beyond the focus of the Symposium and this special issue, they will have repercussions for education, training, and careers.

Another important topic for future research will be the influence of technological improvements on the health and welfare of those working in the maritime industry at sea and on land, as well as their families and communities. Previous study on wellbeing has mapped the occurrence of various illnesses, accidents, and deaths among sailors in relation to the overall population. However, as the current pandemic has demonstrated, seafarers are not only vital to international trade, but they are also reliant on national and international transportation and laws, such as for crew changes and access to shore-based services and supplies. As a result, the interplay of many actors and institutions in improving seafarers' health and well-being must be considered and improved.

Previous research

There is a lot of research on the reasons behind the maternal wage penalty. Nonetheless, the study's findings are contradictory, and it's unclear which mechanism – lost human capital, sorting to mother-friendly occupations, poorer work-effort, or selection to motherhood – is the most relevant explanation for the income disparity. Furthermore, based on past study, it is still unclear what impact the country's institutional and cultural framework has in producing income disparities between mothers and non-mothers. This is primarily due to data limitations. Small samples of nations and limited time periods are frequently used in cross-country comparative studies, which cover only a few social situations. As a result, drawing broad and conclusive conclusions about the role of the social setting in shaping the mothers wage penalty is challenging (e.g. Waldfogel, 1998; Gangl and Ziefle, 2009; Gash, 2009). What's more, studies describe the gaps in a variety of ways, implying that they look into distinct methods by which the social context influences the gaps.

Conclusion

This report does a meta-analysis of estimates of income differences between mothers and non-mothers to summarise available empirical data on the maternity wage penalty. Previous studies identified a number of mechanisms that explain why the pay disparity between moms and childless women persists. These mechanisms include:

1. Human capital degradation and reduced accumulation during professional pauses after childbirth
2. Moms' proclivity for choosing flexible employment that allow them to mix childcare and paid work
3. Differences in productivity between moms and childless women
4. Selection of women for paid work and parenting

Employers' discrimination against mothers. Based on the previous empirical work it is, however, difficult to conclude how large the gap is and which factors drive it, because the studies differ in terms of the data sources, time coverage, and estimation methods used.

For the same reasons, determining how country environment, such as culture and family policies, influences the size of the motherhood penalty is difficult.

