Childcare policy, maternal employment, and the UK policy debate: examining the evidence

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“Working Mothers” Have Evolved

1950s

1980s

now
Figure 2. U.S. Women’s Labor-Force Participation, 1910–2010

From Bailey and DiPrete (2016)
Fig. 1. Ratio of female to male LFP for 25–54-year-olds for select OECD countries, 2000–2014.

From Cascio, Haider, and Neilsen (2015)
The Big Picture

• Is the cost of childcare – and a lack of policy to alleviate it – holding back U.S. mothers LFP?
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  – Heavy reliance on public early education

• Trends in early public school attendance & maternal employment not strongly correlated
Trends in Maternal Employment and Public School Enrollment: 3 to 5 Year Olds in the U.S.

Note: Author’s calculations from the October CPS. Figures are 3-year moving averages.
Trends in Public School Enrollment by Age: 3, 4, and 5 Year Olds in the U.S.

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Trends in Maternal Labor Supply by Age: 3, 4, and 5 Year Olds in the U.S.

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Trends in Full-Day Public School Enrollment by Age: 3, 4, and 5 Year Olds in the U.S.

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Other Driving Forces?

1. Changes in “preferences” for work
2. Changes in non-labor income
3. Rising women’s wages
Figure 1. Adjusted Male-Female*, College-HS** Wage Gaps, 1979–2011

From Beaudry and Lewis (2014)
Or “Identification” Problem?

• Trends in public early education & maternal employment not strongly correlated

• But are trends masking a causal relationship?

• Not holding constant preferences, non-labor income, wages
Empirical Approach

• The correlation

1980s

now
Empirical Approach

• The correlation

1980s

now
Empirical Approach

• The causal estimate
Empirical Approach

• The causal estimate
“Quasi” Experiments

1. Take advantage of the establishment of public early education across cohorts
   - GA universal pre-K starts in 1995 → kids aged 4 in ‘95 are eligible, kids aged 4 in ‘94 are not

2. Take advantage of the age eligibility requirements for established programs
   - Aug. 31 cutoff for pre-K → kids aged 4 in Aug. eligible, kids aged 4 in Sept. are not
Timing of U.S. Studies on the 5-Year-Old Population

Cascio (2009) [1]

Note: Author's calculations from the October CPS. Figures are 3-year moving averages.
Timing of U.S. Studies on the 5-Year-Old Population

Note: Author's calculations from the October CPS. Figures are 3-year moving averages.
Timing of U.S. Studies on the 4-Year-Old Population

Cascio and Schanzenbach (2013) [1]

Fitzpatrick (2010) [2]

Note: Author's calculations from the October CPS. Figures are 3-year moving averages.
Lessons

• Methods matter: obtaining causal estimates must be a priority
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• Labor supply theory is useful:
  – Guides identification of high-impact groups
  – Aids identification of mediating contextual factors
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• The UK paper exemplifies lessons learned
Not a Full Policy Evaluation

• Impacts on “infra-marginal” mothers
  – Some receive an implicit income subsidy
    • Is this money spent in a way that benefits kids?
    • Might the financial relief improve mental health, and the quality of parenting?
  – Others can upgrade the childcare quality

• (Net) impacts on child well-being
Thank you!
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