

Maternal Employment Patterns from Birth to Age 9

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Extended Abstract

Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study, this paper examines the employment patterns of mothers over the first nine years of their child's life.

Background and Significance

Maternal employment has increased significantly over the last 40 years (BLS, 2013). The implications that maternal employment has for child wellbeing, for the material wellbeing of households, for gender equity, and for public policy, make it an important area of study. A large body of research has studied the effects of maternal employment on the wellbeing of children and women (Han, Waldfogel, & Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Ruhm, 2004; Waldfogel, Han, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002), as well as predictors of employment, but very few studies have investigated maternal employment patterns over time.

This study fills this gap in the literature by looking at maternal employment patterns over the first nine years post the birth of a child. Using longitudinal data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWB) we address the following questions: 1) What are labor force participation rates among an urban birth cohort sample of mothers and what are the patterns of employment over time? 2) Does the type of employment, measured using data on earnings, work schedules, and workplace flexibility change over time? And 3) do the patterns of employment vary by key demographic characteristics: race/ethnicity, mother's marital status, and mother's education?

Prior research has found that cross sectional estimates of employment obscure a significant amount of transition that occurs in maternal employment (Vandenhoevel, 1997; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005), but this research has only focused on dichotomous measures of employment (employed or not). We extend earlier research on employment patterns by looking at multiple aspects of employment: considering unemployment and out of the labor force, full/part time work, standard/nonstandard hours, wages and earnings, overall weeks and hours worked, and number of jobs worked at the same time. By using longitudinal data to study employment patterns we can study the stability and prevalence over time. We also investigate whether the maternal employment is wages and workplace flexibility improve, worsen or are stable over time. We then look at variation in these patterns by race/ethnicity, mother's relationship status, and education, as research has shown the importance of these characteristics in predicting maternal employment. Ultimately we seek to provide a more comprehensive picture of maternal employment over time.

Prior Literature

A large empirical body of research has studied the causes and consequences of women's employment. Cross-sectional estimates of women's employment find that 58% of the female population of working age was employed in 2011, but that among mothers with children under 18 this figure was as high as 71% (BLS 2013). The birth of a child may result in a change of

work status for mothers, but many mothers return to work after the birth of their first child. In 2008, 64% of women had returned to work one year post the birth of their first child, and among mothers who were working during pregnancy, nearly 80% had returned to work (Census, 2011). Studies have also found that there is considerable variation in the timing of the return to work (Han, Ruh, Waldfogel & Washbrook, 2008), and differences by demographic characteristics are large (e.g. 75% of unmarried mothers are employed versus 69% of married mothers; BLS, 2013).

Cross-sectional estimates of employment mask a lot of variation in the stability and complexity of maternal employment. Although little research looks at maternal employment over time, a few studies have used longitudinal data to study maternal employment patterns.

Vandenhoevel (1997) used data from the PSID to show that conceptualizing mothers (2 to 10 years after the birth of a child) as home-makers or in the labor force belies significant variation in transitions between the two states over time. Hynes and Clarkberg (2005) build on this earlier research by using group based trajectory analysis to categorize mothers into different employment pattern groups. They find that women's employment trajectories in early parenthood (from one year prior to the birth through 2 years post) fall into six broad categories: mothers who remain continuously out of the labor force (18%), those who have low levels of intermittent employment (14%), those who exit the labor force at the birth of their child (10%), those with declining employment over time (9%), those who have a hiatus at the birth but return to the labor force (12%) and those who remain employed continuously (37%).

These earlier studies document the importance of studying employment transitions and patterns over time; however, none of these studies go beyond conceptualizing employment as a simple dichotomous measure (employed/not employed). Employment status may hide other important differences in employment such as wages or earnings, the use of non-standard work (work outside of the 9-5, Monday-Friday work schedule), as well as levels of employment (hours & part-time/full-time status). Evidence suggests that mothers adjust work hours after the birth of a child (Moen 1985), and nonstandard work hours are relatively common among mothers (12% of mothers work more than half their time outside of day-shift hours but more than 57% work some non-standard hours; Connelly & Kimmel, 2007). Similarly, research shows that over time, wages generally increase, yet none of this research has looked at how patterns of hours, work schedules or other measures like workplace flexibility vary over time.

Research on the predictors of employment and of variation by demographic characteristics has found that mother's education, race/ethnicity and marital status heavily influence the likelihood of employment (BLS, 2013). As such, this study also investigates differences in employment patterns and quality by these key demographic characteristics. Specifically, this study adds to the descriptive literature on maternal employment by documenting patterns of employment over 9 years using multiple measures of maternal employment. Further, we expand the literature on maternal employment by considering how other characteristics of maternal employment change over time: earnings and wages, non-standard work schedules, number of jobs worked, and subjective data on the flexibility of mother's work in terms of ease of meeting family needs, childcare and whether work creates family stress.

Data and Research Methods

This study uses the first 5 waves of data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a study of approximately 5,000 births that were randomly sampled between 1998 and

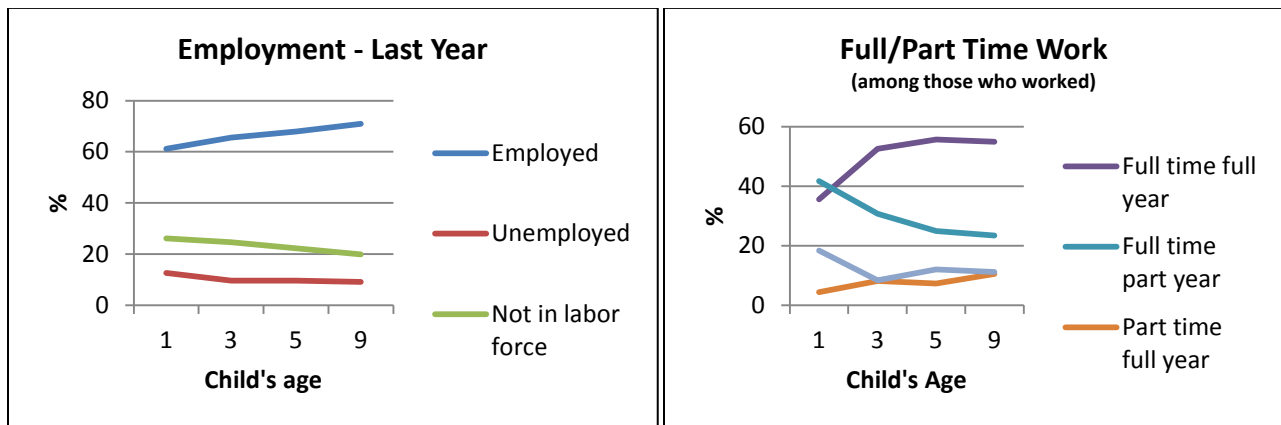
2000 with an oversample of non-marital births. The data are representative of births in large cities (populations over 200,000). Mothers and fathers were interviewed at the time of the birth of the focal child and follow-up interviews were conducted when the child was 1, 3, 5, and 9 years old. This study is descriptive in nature and will mostly utilize descriptive statistics (bivariate) to document trends in maternal employment. We study each outcome by year as well as patterns over time.

Because we are interested in understanding a broad range of characteristics of maternal employment, we use a number of different measures to capture employment information. We study employment status last week (employed, unemployed, not in the labor force) as well as last year. We also consider full versus part time employment and whether mothers were employed full or part year. We study patterns in mother’s work hours and the number of weeks she was employed over time.

To further describe employment patterns, we also study non-standard work schedules (following Dunifon, Kalil, Crosby, Houston Su, Deleire, 2013), as any evening, night, weekends or shifting schedules. In addition, we study whether mothers report holding more than one job at the same time, and her weekly wages/earnings trajectory. Lastly, we investigate three mother reported measures of workplace flexibility including whether her work schedule causes the mother or child stress, whether her work makes it difficult to deal with childcare problems, and whether her work schedule is flexible enough to regularly meet her family’s needs (reverse coded).

Initial Results

The figures below highlight a few of our initial findings. We find that 61% of mothers worked in the first year post the birth of the focal child and by age 9 this figure increases to 71%. Over time, fewer mothers remain out of the labor force. As children age full-time full-year employment increases dramatically. Although we find that the number of hours worked per week is remarkably stably among the employed, the number of weeks worked in the year increases from 34 weeks at age 1, to 43 weeks at age 9.



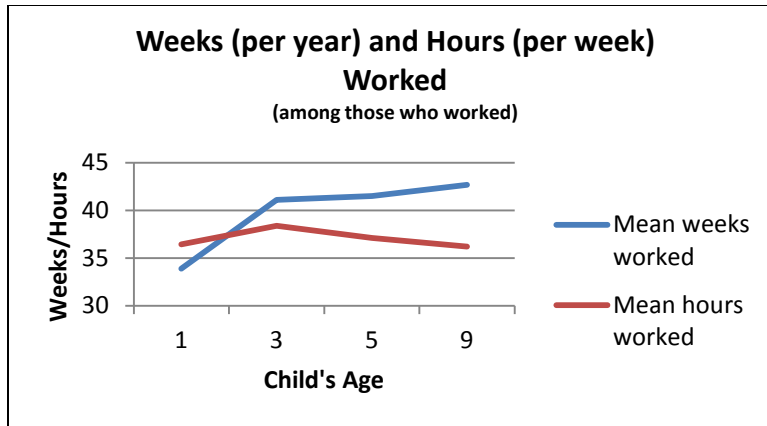


Table 1 shows some suggestive evidence that work schedules may also be improving over time, as fewer mothers report evening and night work over time, weekly and yearly earnings are increasing (not shown) and subjective measures about workplace flexibility suggest increased responsiveness to family needs over time. On the other hand, over time, working more than one job becomes more common, which may suggest poorer employment outcomes.

When we consider employment over all waves (not shown) we find that 89% of mothers have worked at some point during the first nine years of their child's life, another 34% report being unemployed at some point, and 42% report not being in the labor force at some time during the 9 years. In terms of employment consistency, about 43% of mothers are in the labor force in all waves but only 11% are never in the labor force over the 9 year period.

Table 1: Employment by Child's Age

<i>Child's Age</i>	1	3	5	9
Weekday (standard)	-	61.5	64.3	65.5
Evenings	21.3	17	14.5	13.9
Nights	8.4	9.3	6.6	6
Weekends	30.2	24.2	26.1	24.5
Work different schedules regularly	21.1	17.3	17.4	18.7
Work multiple jobs	8.7	9.2	11.8	12.5
Work schedule causes stress mom/kid	14.5	16.1	12	8.7
Work does not make it easy to deal with childcare problems	11	10.8	8.2	11.3
Work schedule not flexible for family needs	29.4	30.8	29.2	22.4

Note: Sample is restricted to just those mothers who report working. Data are weighted by city weights.