

To Work or Not to Work: The Role of Local Childcare Costs and State Pre-K Policy in Shaping Maternal Employment Trajectories Post-Childbirth in the U.S.

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In this paper, I use a multi-level dataset, combining the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) with restricted geocode files, the National Database of Childcare Prices (NDCP, 2008-2018), and state-level childcare policy data, to examine how variations in childcare contexts influence maternal employment in the U.S. Unlike prior research, which has largely focused on state-level childcare prices, I consider local variations by linking individuals' locations with county-level childcare prices and state-level childcare policy in this paper. Using an event history approach with individual fixed effects, I aim to identify changes in individual women's employment status around the "event" of transitioning to motherhood influenced by various childcare contexts. Results suggest that local childcare prices and state-level pre-K policy have varying impacts on maternal employment, particularly across educational levels. This paper provides a nuanced, geographically informed analysis by examining county-level variations that contribute to inequalities in mothers' labor supply. The findings intend to inform childcare and family policies that encourage maternal employment, reduce gender disparities in the labor market, and enhance the well-being of women from various sociodemographic backgrounds.

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