



The Motherhood Wage Penalty: Do Kentucky Women Face Such a Penalty?

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Abstract: The wage gap between men and women has been extensively researched. The gap between mothers and non-mothers at the regional level needs to be assessed further. This analysis examines the characteristics of a ‘mommy track’ wage penalty for Kentucky mothers. Using Public Use Microsample (PUMS) Data from the U.S. Census, this analysis focuses on the years 2007-2009. This analysis focuses on Kentucky women aged 21-60 who worked 50 to 52 weeks per annum and reported incomes over \$10,000. Data on marital status, single head of household, educational level and employment sector are examined. The results indicate no consistent or predictive trend in accounting for a motherhood penalty for all Kentucky working women who work year round; motherhood penalties are persistent for less educated Kentucky mothers. Human capital and work experience data mediate the effects of the motherhood penalty. Our findings indicate that marital support (spouse present) provides a significant wage benefit to Kentucky women with children. However, there remain trends in wage inequalities and earnings for less educated women with children. This analysis indicates that single women with children face substantial barriers in earnings as do less educated women with children. We recommend a policy change in Commonwealth of Kentucky child care supports for low wage-earning Kentucky mothers to close the wage gap.

Keywords: Wages, motherhood, PUMS

INTRODUCTION

The word motherhood is a cultural social construction as well as a biological one. Motherhood has been referred to as the

“most important job in the word” (Crittenden 2001). Although motherhood appears to be highly valued, that does not

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necessarily translate into dollar values and equality in wages in the job market and may be a significant contributor to the gender wage gap in U.S. society. This motherhood wage penalty or “mommy penalty” is that part of the gender wage gap that is attributable to mother vs. non-mother status. (Anderson, Binder and Krause 2002, Budig and England 2001, Glauber 2007).

Prior research on the wage gap between mothers and non-mothers draws on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women (NLSYW). Our research draws on U.S. Census data from the Public Use Microsample Data (PUMS), allowing for a state-specific analysis of the gender/motherhood wage gap for the state of Kentucky. This analysis focuses on Kentucky women between 21-60 years who worked 50 to 52 weeks during the 12 months for each calendar year 2007 to 2009. Control data on marital status, single head of household status, educational level and employment sector are included to determine their effect on the wage gap. Our focus on Kentucky women allows for an account of the effect of the motherhood wage penalty and regional differences in earnings between mothers and non-mothers.

Table 1.1 compares Kentucky and the United States. Table 1.1 indicates relative similarities between Kentucky and national characteristics. Kentucky women are married (65%) at similar rates to women nationally (61%). There are fewer female headed households among Kentucky working women (36%) in comparison with the entire United States (41%). Fewer women in Kentucky have received a Bachelor’s degree (19%) compared with national levels (24%); approximately 10% of women in Kentucky compared with the United States (10%) have graduate degrees (Masters’ Degree or higher). Data for

employment sectors indicates that Kentucky women are working in the manufacturing sector (12%) at roughly the same rate as women nationally (10%). Percentages for Kentucky women employed in the professions (10%) are similar to the national average (12%). There are substantive differences in wages between Kentucky women and women at the national level. Annual wages for women in Kentucky (Mean=\$39,435; Median=\$32,000) seems to be significantly less than for U.S. women (Mean=\$45,965; Median=\$36,000). The similarities and differences in the labor market experiences of Kentucky women in comparison to women in general may or may not reveal some regional differences in labor force dynamics regarding the motherhood penalty.

Literature

Comparisons of female and male wages indicate that women average between 60 to 70 cents on the dollar earned by males (Williams and Cooper 2004; Waldfogel, 1998). Additionally, prior research also indicates that mothers experience a 10-15 percent earnings penalty in comparison to non-mothers with the same educational and work experience (Williams and Cooper 2004, Waldfogel, 1998). Researchers focus on three explanations in defining the motherhood wage gap: 1) stereotypes, 2) labor market segregation, and 3) women’s choice in work/family decisions.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes underscore the polarity that defines definitions of women in general and women workers who are mothers in particular. Women are stereotyped as “warm, communal and nurturing” or as competent, yet cold and distant (Benard Paik, and Correll, 2008).

Table 1.1 Kentucky Women, 21-60 Years of Age in Comparison to Women Nationally (2007-2009), by Marital Status, Educational Level, Employment Sector, and Income (n=1,055,239)

Marital Status

Married, Spouse Present		Married, Spouse Absent		Widowed, Divorced, Separated		Never Married	
KY	US	KY	US	KY	US	KY	US
64%	59%	1%	2%	20%	19%	15%	20%
Female Sole Head of Household							
Kentucky				United States			
36%				41%			

Educational Levels*

Less Than High School		High School Graduate		Bachelor's Degree		Master's Degree	
KY	US	KY	US	KY	US	KY	US
4	5	27	23	19	24	10	10

Employment Sector**

Manufacturing		Retail		Service		Professional	
KY	US	KY	US	KY	US	KY	US
12	10	12	12	4	5	9	12

Average Salary Range over past 12 months***

Mean	\$39,435	\$45,965
Median	\$32,000	\$36,000

2007-2009 ACS PUMS DATA, Source US Census Bureau. All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole percentage point.

*Percentages do not yield 100%, not all categories represented in table. Missing categories include: Some College, Associates Degree, Professional Degree, and Doctorate Degree.

The ideology of women as a wife, mother, and caregiver was perpetuated in the 1950's both in popular culture and in social analysis of the day that held that men's and women's roles were complimentary (Parsons, 1954).

In these mid-Twentieth century sociological analyses, men were defined as income earners; women, as homemakers, with an emphasis on child rearing as exclusively the domain of women. The idea of gender

complementarity remains a controversial political issue; social conservatives hold it as the ideal and define any variant of the complimentary family as deviant. Complementarity is also the underlying assumption behind child care policy in the United States. The preponderance of research findings over the last sixty years indicates little evidence for breadwinner/caregiver household model as the optimal way to organize work/family dynamics. Nonetheless, this belief informs the prevailing ideology that defines women's "place" as less valued in the labor force and continues to inform child care policy and potential employer stereotypes. Crosby, Williams, and Biernat (2004) assert that, for employers, impressions, judgments, and behaviors are guided by "assumptions, preconceptions, prejudices, and stereotypes," which in turn translate into lower wages for women in the workforce.

These assumptions have been empirically demonstrated as a salient process in the mommy gap wage differential. Correll, Bernard and Paik, (2007) distributed 1,900 fictitious resumes to employers in a large national job market; employers were asked to make fictitious decisions based on resume and individual, including family, characteristics. In this study, hypothetical job applicants' educational status and prior job tenure were held constant; parental status varied. Mothers were statistically significantly less likely to be employed than were fathers or single women. If employed, mothers were paid less. Mothers were penalized on perception of future competence and suggested beginning salary, while men seemed to receive a parental bonus for parenthood.

Williams and Segal (2002) describe three stereotyping processes applied by employers towards mothers: prescriptive, descriptive, and competence-based.

Prescriptive stereotyping occurs when employers may hold a preconception that a mother's place is in the home and that the man should be the breadwinner for his family. Descriptive stereotyping occurs when an employer assumes a mother will not want to work overtime. Competence-based stereotyping is characterized by a cognitive bias on the part of employers whereby a woman's perceived competence on the job will diminish after having a child. Crosby et al (2004) document how preconceptions of the relationship between work, gender, and maternal status are part of a larger social construction that employers use to stereotype working mothers. Employer stereotypes, in turn, affect organizational processes. Hiring decisions and labor force attachment in specific types of jobs are predicated on employers' perceptions of future job performance; gender in general and maternal parenthood status in particular are stereotyped negatively in these organizational decisions. (Crosby, Williams and Biernat, 2009).

Segregation and Productivity

The pattern for employment for the past two decades has been for workers to be sorted by gender into masculine and feminine jobs. This process is termed sex segregation (Reskin and Bielby, 2005). Sex segregation can happen both consciously or unconsciously in that employers may actually have a built-in bias when hiring for a particular position based on the type of job available. Some firms practice intentional discrimination against one sex over the other for certain jobs, while other firms will use gender as a proxy for perceived future productivity (Reskin and Bielby, 2005); this latter process is termed statistical discrimination. If an employer implements subtle screening criteria that would eliminate more women than men, this is an indicator of statistical discrimination by

gender in that the employer is basing perceptions of future performance on worker characteristics not related to the job. Potential employers in Reskin and Bielby's study view this sorting and labor force attachment as having the potential to result in more productive workers or reduced transaction costs. Research findings, however, indicate little evidence for increased worker productivity (Budig and England, 2001).

The process of gender differentiation defines what constitutes a masculine or feminine job. For example, secretarial positions are defined as women's work, while managerial positions are considered male positions (Petersen and Togstad, 2004). Others argue that many workplace policies are gendered in that they are based on an idealized image of a male worker who has a wife at home and no family responsibilities other than to make money for the family (Budig and England, 2001).

Choice

A third persistent explanation of the maternal wage gap is rational choice (Becker, 1985). This argument asserts that women choose motherhood, with the concomitant childcare and household responsibilities, vs. wage work. The problem with rational choice explanations is that they fail to account for differentials in government support for child care, which in the United States must, paradoxically, be paid for in the market if a woman is faced with the 'choice' between work and child care. These choice explanations have come to dominate analyses of the female parental wage gap; these analyses, which support the prevailing ideology that parenthood is an economic choice for women but not for men (Webber and Williams, 2008). These explanations do not address the reality that men who are parents are not forced to make this choice (Correll, Bernard and Paik,

2007). The idea that work is a choice for mothers reinforces a "personal responsibility" ethic. Employers are not responsible for the constricted choices that labor market structure provides for women who are negotiating motherhood, vs. male parents, allowing for the further institutional exploitation and discrimination of women in the job market (Webber and Williams, 2008).

The personal responsibility ethic and the definition of work vs. motherhood as a choice are embedded in cultural norms that define the 'ideal worker' as 'always there,' 'committed,' and as a person who sacrifices all for the job (Correll, Benard, and Paik, 2007). Cultural tension is created between the concepts of the 'ideal worker' and the 'good mother' indicating that the mother must be a less committed worker in order to be the 'good mother' (Blades and Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2006). This tension may explain women's under representation in supervisory and management positions. In 2000, for example, women employed full time accounted for 42 percent of the labor force; however, women who were managers only comprised one-third of the managerial labor force (Reskin and Bielby, 2005). Women managers are found in greater number in female dominated industrial sectors in comparison to men than in male dominated industries. One possible rationale for why there are so few women in management may be due to mothers choosing to have children and accepting part time work, lower salaries, and future job penalties, given the lack of child care support in the United States (Webber and Williams, 2008).

Assessing Research Findings

We have reviewed literature on three processes that researchers assert affects the wage gap between mothers and non-mothers: stereotypes, labor market

segregation, and women's choice in work/family decisions. Empirical findings from these literatures indicate that stereotyping does play a factor in employer decisions (Correll, Bernard and Paik, 2007). Sex segregation and sorting of men and women into different job categories does effect wages differentially (Reskin and Bielby, 2005; Webber and Williams, 2008). There is considerably less evidence for the explanation that motherhood vs. work is a choice (Becker, 1985). Economic analyses of dual earner couples, both with children and without, suggests that women's wage is not optional, but essential, in dual-earner couples, regardless of presence or absence of children (Mischel, Bernstein, and Schmitt, 2001). The following analysis draws on empirical findings from this literature. While the limitations of our data do not allow for an assessment of the employer decision making process, we can determine the extent to which working mothers are sorted into lower paying labor market categories, particularly in relation to other women and male workers. We assess the degree to which marital status, presence and age of children, and industrial sector affect the wage gap between mothers and non-mothers. We also assess the degree to which human capital characteristics, specifically level of education, affect the wage gap.

METHODS

Data for this analysis is from the U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), from a subsample of American Community Survey (ACS) data. The analysis is based on employment and salary data for women of the Commonwealth of Kentucky aged 21-60 years. This research uses a 3-year data set for the years of 2007-2009.

We analyze the effects on wages, the dependent variable, over a twelve-month

period for each of the three years analyzed. Only respondents are included who have worked for 50 to 52 weeks of the year. This data is limited in that it does not allow for full time employment or part-time employment to be examined separately as weekly workforce hours are not recorded in PUMS data. We control for variability in annual wages and labor market experiences, by limiting analysis to respondents who reported incomes over \$10,000 per year over the 50-52 weeks that they were employed.

Independent Variables

We examine how presence and number of children, marital status, education, occupation, and income and industry sector affect variability in wages. Control variables for race and age of respondent are also included.

Children

Data for children presence and number of respondent's children, the primary independent variable in this analysis is described in Table 1.2. This variable allows for assessment of a motherhood wage penalty. For the purposes of this analysis, this variable is broken down by age range, between no children, preschool age children, children between 6 and 17 years old and where both age groups are present in the household. Most (61%) Kentucky working women, working year round, report having no children at home, followed by working mothers with children between the ages of 6 to 17 years (25%) of age at home, fewer working moms working year round report children under the age of six (8%) or both age groups present (6%) at home.

Other independent variables, marital status, education, and industrial sector job participation, are described in Table 1.2; we also include control variables for race and age.

Table 1.2 Kentucky Women, 21-60 Years of Age, Working Full-Time (2007-2009) by Children, Spousal Presence, Education, Employment Sector, and Income Levels (n=15,105)

Presence of Own Children					
No Children	Less Than 6 Years Old		6 to 17 Years Old	Both Age Groups Present	
61(%)	8(%)		25(%)	6(%)	
Marital Status					
Married, Spouse Present	Married, Spouse Absent	Widowed, Divorced, Separated		Never Married	
64	1	20		15	
Female Sole Head of Household					
36					
Educational Levels					
Less Than High School	High School Graduate		Some College	Associates Degree	
4	27		23	13	
Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Professional Degree		Doctorate Degree	
19	10	3		< 1	
Employment Sector					
Wholesale	Manufacturing		Retail	Service	
2	12		12	4	
Education	Social Care		Medical	Administrative	
14	3		26	7	
Financial	Professional		Military		
10	9		< 1		
Income Ranges and Percentages					
\$10,000 - \$30,000	\$30,001 - \$40,000	\$40,001 - \$55,000	\$55,001 - \$70,000	\$70,001 - \$95,000	Greater than \$95,001
47%	20%	17%	8%	4%	4%

2007-2009 ACS PUMS DATA, Source US Census Bureau. All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole percentage point. *Age range of women analyzed in this study between the ages of 21-60 years.

Marital status includes categories for married, divorced, and never married, as well as a category for “married, spouse absent” in order to capture respondents who are female sole provider head of households. (Anderson, Binder, and Krause, 2003)

Table 1.2 indicates that most Kentucky women (64%) live with a spouse; 36 percent of respondents are single heads of households.

Race

We include a control variable for race. Prior research indicates that the interaction of race and gender may impact the motherhood wage penalty (Budig and Hodges 2010; Glauber 2007).

Descriptive statistics for race indicate little racial variability in Kentucky in comparison to the United States. Within the PUMS data for women of Kentucky the largest portion of respondents are White women (92%) compared to African American women (6%), and all other ethnicities/races (2%). Due to lack of variability, we collapse all racial categories in the following wage comparison.

Age

The distribution of age for Kentucky women between 21-60 years, the cohort years that are the focus of this analysis, is described in Table 1.2,

Education

We use educational level as a measure of human capital (Benard et al., 2008; Benard and Correll 2010; Budig and England 2001; Budig and Hodges 2010; Crosby et al., 2004; Reskin and Bielby 2005; Williams and Segal 2002). Table 1.2 describes educational levels from less than high school (4%) to women with a Doctoral degree (<1%) in Kentucky.

Industry Sectors

Given that women vs. men in general are sorted and queued into different labor structures (so-called “pink collar” work) with different wage trajectories, we include distribution of workers by industry sectors. We assess employment and wages for eleven different industry sectors including

manufacturing (12%), retail (12%), service (4%), and education sector (14%) on wages.

HYPOTHESIS

Hypothesis 1: Mothers will earn less than non-mothers.

Hypothesis 2: Mothers with preschool-aged children will earn less than other comparison groups.

Hypothesis 3: Working mothers with spouse present will earn more than sole heads of households.

Hypothesis 4: Working mothers will earn less than non-mothers across all educational levels.

Hypothesis 5: Mothers with children will earn less than non-mothers across all industry sectors

Analysis

Standard Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests are used to compare average salaries of working women with and without children present. The first set of analyses (Table 1.3) examines marital status and sole head of household. We expect that women who are single heads of household with children will incur the largest wage penalty. Scheffe’s Tests are used to determine which categories are statistically significant in terms of salary differences.

The second set of analysis (Table 1.4) examines the effect of education level on the motherhood penalty for Kentucky women. The third set of analyses assesses the effects of the differences in industry sector labor market participation on the motherhood wage gap (Table 1.5).

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Table 1.3. The Effects (Non-Effects) of the "Mommy Penalty" on Wages, for Kentucky Women (n=15,105) Between the Ages of 21-60 Years. Controlling for Income Greater Than \$10,000. Controlling for Marital Status and Head of Household

	No Children	Less Than 6 Years of Age	6 to 17 Years of Age	Both Age Groups Present	F-Test	Significance
Marital Status						
Married, Spouse Present (n=9699)	\$39,508	\$43,742	\$42,044	\$42,346	6.362	.000
Married, Spouse Absent (n=172)	\$34,007	\$27,943	\$33,485	\$23,700	0.643	0.588
Widowed, Divorced, and Separated (n=2998)	\$39,925	\$32,850	\$38,634	\$35,613	2.454	.061
Never Married (n=2236)	\$34,979	\$26,166	\$31,267	\$24,422	9.315	.000
Head of Household						
Spouse Present (n=9699)	\$39,508	\$43,742	\$42,043	\$42,346	6.362	.000
No Spouse Present (n=5406)	\$37,501	\$28,758	\$36,954	\$31,251	10.214	.000

Grey Scale Boxes represent statistically significant differences within groups and categories according to Scheff Test, $\leq .05$. All figures rounded to the nearest whole dollar amount.

FINDINGS

Table 1.3 compares married women with no children to those with children. While differences are significant between wage categories there does not appear to be a penalty for married women with no children vs. with children. Married working Kentucky mothers report significantly higher salaries than married women with no children in the home. Scheffe's Tests show statistically significant higher salaries for married women with children less than 6 years old (\$43,742), women with children 6 to 17 years old (\$42,044), women with both age groups present (\$42,346) than with married women with no children present (\$39,508).

The findings indicate a motherhood penalty for single, never married mothers. Significant differences exist in salaries with single mothers with children under age six making significantly less (\$26,166) than unmarried women with no children (\$34,979). There is a wage penalty for single mothers with both child age groups present in the household (<6 years and 6-17 years) with a mean income of \$24,422. There is partial support for Hypothesis 1: mothers in general will earn less than non-mothers. Table 1.3 compares groups of married and unmarried women with and without children. These data indicate a possible "bonus" for married women wage earners with children. Women with no children but a spouse present (divorced, single and separated) (\$39, 508) fare less well in wages and salary than women with young children (\$42,043), children between 6 and 17 years (\$42,043) and with both age groups present (\$42,346) and whose spouse is present in the household. There are statistically significant differences in salaries for women who are sole heads of households with no children (\$37, 501) in comparison to women who are sole head of households with children under 6 year

(\$26,758) and with both preschoolers and older children present in the household (\$31,251). The motherhood penalty reappears for those women who lack the resources and support of a partner in the home. These findings partially support Hypothesis 2. For mothers with spousal support, there is no evidence for an early childhood motherhood penalty; when there is no spousal support, however, the evidence for hypothesis 2 is strong. There is also strong support for Hypothesis 3. Working mothers with spouse present earn more than sole heads of households.

Table 1.4 outlines human capital effects on the wage penalty for working mothers. Anderson, Binder and Krause (2002) found that working mothers with high school and college degrees tend to make less than non-mothers with similar education levels. Our research extends this analysis to all educational levels. Our findings indicate that working mothers with less than a high school diploma or GED, high school graduates, Associates Degree and some college earn less in comparison to women who do not have children. These differences are significant (sig =.000) for 3 of the 4 educational categories. They are not significant for women with less than a high school education; these categories are all uniformly low in terms of yearly income across categories. The effect is particularly strong for high school graduates with young children, who make significantly less (\$24,444) than high school graduates without children (\$29,226). Women with some college and young children make significantly less (\$28,785) than women with some college without children (\$34,454) and working women with young, preschool age children who have an Associate's Degree make significantly less (\$33,185) than women with no children (\$39,950).

Table 1.4 The Effects (or No-Effects) of the "Mommy Penalty" on Wages, for Kentucky Women (n=15,105) Between the Ages of 21-60 years. Controlling for Income Greater Than \$10,000. Controlling for Educational Level

Educational Level	No Children	Less Than 6 Years of Age	6 to 17 Years of Age	Both Age Groups Present	F-Test	Significance
Less Than High School (n=574)	\$25,917	\$21,513	\$23,247	\$22,303	.604	.613
High School Graduate (n=4131)	\$29,228	\$24,444	\$28,201	\$26,378	5.399	.001
Some College (n=3511)	\$34,454	\$28,785	\$32,572	\$28,941	6.765	.000
Associates Degree (n=1910)	\$39,950	\$33,185	\$39,075	\$35,574	6.238	.000
Bachelor's Degree (n=2919)	\$45,857	\$45,402	\$53,473	\$51,344	8.614	.000
Master's Degree (n=1523)	\$54,582	\$53,030	\$57,098	\$56,637	.737	.530
Professional Degree (n=398)	\$89,364	\$91,704	\$100,397	\$89,956	.481	.696
Doctoral Degree (n=139)	\$76,411	\$73,120	\$105,758	\$76,000	1.823	.146

Grey Scale Boxes represent statistically significant differences within groups and categories according to Scheffe Test, $\leq .05$. All figures rounded to the nearest whole dollar amount.

Higher levels of education appear to offset the motherhood penalty. Women with children between 6 to 17 years (\$53,473) or both age groups (under 6 and between 6 and 17 years) present earn more (\$51,344) than college educated women with no children or no children at home (\$45,857). There are also no significant differences highest levels of education. Among women with a Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree or Professional Degree, presence of children

does not seem to significantly affect wages one way or the other. There is little significant (>.05) difference in wages between working mothers and those working women without children at the highest levels of education. There is no significant difference between wage categories for women with advanced degrees for women without and with children.

Table 1.5 The Effects (No-Effects) of the "Mommy Penalty" on Wages, for Kentucky Women (n=15,105) Between the Ages of 21-60 Years. Controlling for Income Greater Than \$10,000. Controlling for Employment Sector

	No Children	Less Than 6 Years of Age	6 to 17 Years of Age	Both Age Groups Present	F-Test	Significance
Employment Sectors						
Wholesale (n=347)	\$41,504	\$58,366	\$40,286	\$46,468	1.822	.143
Manufacturing (n=1776)	\$38,225	\$44,267	\$40,090	\$37,608	1.585	.191
Retail (n=1790)	\$29,558	\$35,253	\$33,060	\$32,152	2.537	.055
Service (n=668)	\$29,364	\$26,929	\$28,553	\$31,635	.263	.852
Education (n=2171)	\$39,756	\$38,799	\$41,877	\$42,636	1.370	.250
Social Care (n=494)	\$29,690	\$24,057	\$30,370	\$23,989	1.573	.195
Medical (n=3949)	\$40,947	\$42,566	\$43,017	\$41,194	.945	.418
Administrative (n=989)	\$43,001	\$39,994	\$43,157	\$47,974	1.317	.267
Financial (n=1563)	\$45,758	\$46,970	\$49,788	\$57,694	.568	.636
Professional (n=1336)	\$46,810	\$54,535	\$52,252	\$49,473	.554	.646

The data indicate partial support for hypothesis 4, that human capital effects wages differentially between categories of women wage earners without and with children.

Table 1.5 summarizes the effects of employment sector on the motherhood wage gap. For all sectors (wholesale, manufacturing, retail, service, education, social care, medical, administrative, financial, professional), there was no significant difference ($\text{sig} > .05$) in average salaries for women with no children, women with children less than 6 years old, between the ages of 6 and 17 years and/or with both age groups present in the household. One industry sector, retail approaches statistical significance with a Scheffe's test value of .055.

DISCUSSION

The initial analysis indicates a motherhood penalty for Kentucky working women employed 50-52 weeks per year. However, findings indicate that this penalty is not consistent across labor market experiences for all Kentucky women. A motherhood penalty exists for working mothers who are single parents or sole heads of households (single, divorced, separated or widowed). Reported annual wages are consistently and significantly lower for these women with children in comparison to single women who are sole heads of households without children. For other Kentucky women, those with partners or spouses present, the presence of children does not seem to affect wages negatively. Our findings suggest a possible benefit for married women with children who have significantly higher wages than married women without children.

If the presence of male co-wage earners is taken into consideration, this motherhood "bonus" is not initially what it seems. Childless married women could be in earlier

stages of both family and career. The motherhood bonus for married women in Kentucky could be a *marriage* bonus. The presence of combined incomes for mothers and fathers together translates into the financial resources necessary for paid child care. Spousal support may provide the resources necessary to find paid work at higher wages and with greater prospects for continued labor force attachment.

Given that extensive child care arrangements for working parents, both mothers and fathers, are met via market mechanisms such as paid daycare, an economy of scale may be at work whereby the combined economic resources of two parents enable the mother to pursue better paying work.

The difference between married wage earning mothers with spouse present and head-of-household wage earners may also be explained by the lack of support for single mothers vs. married mothers with father present. The Commonwealth of Kentucky provides a child care subsidy for low-wage single mothers; however, the co-pay, that part of the unmet payment that a mother must pay for child care, is high. Kentucky ranks among the bottom quarter of states on income eligibility to qualify for child care assistance; low reimbursement rates negatively affect providers' ability to pay for trained child care providers and for child care seekers to find quality child care (Spears, 2008). The difference between married mothers in higher wage categories vs. low wage working mothers may be exacerbated by these factors.

Our three variable analyses (wages, marital status and children) account for the effects of age and job market experience. Married women with children may tend to be older and have more job experience than married women without children. But this lack of control for these other factors, potentially confirms that human capital (in

this case, job experience) is more important in explaining wage differences among women than motherhood alone.

Human capital characteristics account for differences in wages between women. Education seems to explain more than does work experience. In this case, these other set of findings tend to demonstrate a possible path and (curvilinear) direction for understanding educational influences on wages for Kentucky working women for both mothers and non-mothers. Less educated women experience a mommy penalty. Working mothers with lower educational levels earn less than women without children. College educated women with a four-year degree appear to experience a motherhood benefit with working mothers making more than their non-mother counterparts. Our study is limited in that we do not test for interaction effects between education and marital status; but given the correlations in similarities and differences between groups, this relationship seems likely. This potential marriage benefit dissipates at higher education levels insofar as there appears to be no significant difference in earnings between women with or without children among those women who hold a Masters, Doctoral or Professional degree, due to generally high wages across categories. Human capital seems to mediate the negative costs associated with motherhood at higher levels of education.

Industry sector employment does not account for significant differences between mothers and non-mothers in Kentucky. Educational level and workforce experience as well as marital support are important labor market characteristics to control for in future analyses.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis of PUMS data underscores causal patterns at work in the

distribution of labor market characteristics for Kentucky mothers vs. non-mothers. While we find that there is no motherhood penalty for all Kentucky working women who work year round, human capital (educational level) work experience are the best predictors of women's wages.

Our findings indicate both a shift in ideological constructs that define motherhood as counterproductive to work *and* persistent inequality for one labor market segment of Kentucky's working mothers. As education increases, the "mommy penalty" dissipates. This may suggest that long-held stereotypes about women's ability to contribute to the workforce as mothers may be subsiding for those working women with higher levels of education and workforce experience.

Persistent trends in wage inequalities and earnings for Kentucky women with children still, nevertheless, remain. Some reduction in the mommy penalty may be attributable to spousal support; that married couples are more economically stable than single mothers in particular does not signal a change in gender ideology inasmuch as it does the reduction of earning power for both men and women, necessitating two incomes for comprehensive child care resources. Less educated Kentucky single mothers face persistent substantial barriers and subsequent penalties in earnings. These working mothers still confront serious inequities insofar as their wages remain significantly lower than those of other single women or for women who are less educated who do not have children. Our findings indicate that, for less educated Kentucky mothers, there still exists a persistent mommy penalty.

What is the solution to a reduction and eventual elimination of the mommy penalty for the poorest of Kentucky's single mothers? As Kentucky faces ongoing restructuring of budget priorities, any cuts to

child care subsidies, or any increase in co-pays for child care, will only exacerbate the mommy penalty for this particularly vulnerable group. Supports for child care need not only to be maintained, but returned to 2005 levels in Kentucky (Spears, 2008). Additional child care and educational subsidies need to address gaps in human capital so that Kentucky's mothers can work without being penalized.

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