

Child Disability and Parent's Workforce Participation: A Study Using Matched 1993 NHIS and 1995 NSFG Data

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Extended Abstract

This study explores the workforce participation among parents of children with disability. Prior research has found that these families face increased emotional, financial, and caregiving strains. Greater caregiving demands may make mothers of these children more likely to exit the labor market, or at least delay their return to it. In turn, fathers may need to work additional jobs in order to compensate for their partner's withdrawal from the workforce. Overall, we hypothesize that mothers of child with disability will spend a greater proportion of their child's life outside of the workforce, while their male partners will work more jobs than men without such children.

Background and Theory

Research on child disability often focuses on the well-being of the child, at times ignoring the impact of the disability on the family. Child disability can affect the family in a variety of ways, especially parents. This is particularly true for mothers of children with disability. In the contemporary United States, mothers tend to serve as the primary caregivers for children, both generally and children with disability (McCallion, Janicki, and Grant-Griffin, 1997; Heller et al. 1997). It is mothers who spend more time in caregiving roles and carry the bulk of caregiving relative to fathers of children with disability.

The term caregiving is used to describe the tasks engaged in by one individual to provide for the well-being of another. Among parents of children with disability, caregiving may entail constant monitoring of the health status of their child, the administration of medications and therapies, the coordination of medical and therapeutic services and providers, and the like. Caregiving research suggests that the provision of care for individuals with disability can be associated with increased stress and distress (Marks 1998). Providing such care may occupy so much of a caregiver's time that they are unable or limited in their ability to participate in the workforce. Porterfield (2002) found that the disability status of children influenced their mother's likelihood of participating in the paid labor force.

Further research has examined the economic factors that hinder the return to work for all mothers. These studies mainly focus on the difficulties associated with child care costs; however most of these studies ignore the important needs of children with disability. Special caregiving needs for these children are often more expensive and less available than traditional child care, both of which could hamper a woman's decision to return to work.

Labor force participation, then, may be problematic for many families with children with disability. Caregiving demands may require mothers to withdraw from the labor force. At the same time, parents of children with disability face increasing financial burdens. This demand may encourage labor force participation. The partners of these women may work additional jobs to compensate for the mother's withdrawal from the workforce. Offering support for this proposition, other study findings suggest that these families are more likely to be composed of breadwinning husbands and full-time wives

and mothers (Traustadottir 1991).

Present Study

In this study, we examine mother's work trajectories after the birth of a child with or without disability, as well as the labor force participation of their husbands. We explore the labor force participation of mothers of children with disability compared to their peers. Using event history analysis we examine the return to work after the birth of a child and whether the return to work is slower for mothers of children with disability. We also look at the proportion of the child's life that the mother has participated in the workforce. This measurement allows us to capture the fitful employment that seems to often be experienced by mothers of children with disability. Along with this, we examine the labor force participation of the mother's partner, or current husband. Information on the number and type of jobs worked by men allows us to assess the extent to which men are compensating for their partner's withdrawal from the labor force.

Data and Methods

We use matched records from the 1993 National Health Interview Survey and the 1995 National Survey of Family Growth. The 1993 NHIS provided the sampling frame for the 1995 NSFG. As a result, records from women interviewed in the 1993 NHIS can be linked to records of the same women interviewed in the 1995 NSFG. We merged these files so that the unit of analysis is a birth. The 1993 NHIS is a continuing, nationwide interview survey designed and administered by the National Center for Health Statistics

(NCHS). Information is obtained about the health, disability, and other characteristics of each member of the household.

The 1995 NSFG is a nationwide survey that examines marital, fertility, contraception and employment trajectories of women ages 15-44. Like the NHIS, the NSFG is designed and administered by NCHS. Detailed information regarding employment and marital history, as well as a variety of demographic and economic characteristics, were obtained through in-person surveys and short self-administered questionnaires for 10,847 civilian, non-institutionalized women. This includes information about the birth dates of all children regardless of residence, and the dates in and out of paid employment. This survey also includes demographic information on women's partners or husbands, particularly their employment status.

Results

Current results indicate that mothers of children with disability are slower to re-enter the workforce, if they ever enter at all. Along with this, we also find that mothers who were working at the time of their child's birth are more likely to exit the workforce, for three months or more, if they have a child with disability. We also find that these same mothers spend significantly less time in the workforce over the course of their child's life. We expect the results for men to reflect the given hypothesis: Men living in co-residence with children with disability will be more likely to work more than on job. Both sets of these results lend support to are overall hypothesis that parents of children with disability face greater caregiving and financial burdens that significantly affect their workforce participation.