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Children, Spouses, and Attitudes: Impact on Women's Work Status

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Abstract

Women face unique challenges in their balancing of career and family. Some questions women consider include children and childcare, spouses' earning potential, job stability, and their own attitudes on family relationships and gender roles. This study uses probit and probit with instrumental variables to examine the effects of these considerations on women's full-time work status, the dependent variable. Under the assumption of traditional social views regarding men as breadwinners and women as nurturers, increased childcare pressures and spousal potential to provide are expected to decrease the incentive for women to work full-time. The results of this study are mostly consistent with this theory. One especially interesting finding was that the most influential factor consistently statistically significant in both models used was women's attitudes regarding mother-child relationships.

Literature Review

Many studies have been conducted on women's role in the work force and the special challenges they face. As Lo notes in her study of female professionals in Hong Kong (2003), traditional social roles place much pressure on women who simultaneously pursue both employment and motherhood. Because women are traditionally expected to play a larger role in the home, families often assign greater income-earning responsibility to men (Gorman 1999).

Unlike previous research on women's work decisions which has focused primarily on perceived societal pressures, low-income mothers, or new mothers; this study broadens the scope to married U.S. women with or without children. In doing so, it will consider many of the same explanatory variables examined in the existing literature. As Dex and Joshi (1999) suggest, this study takes into account children and the availability of childcare, income-earning potential of husbands and the stability of the relationship, as well as attitudes toward traditional family roles. Because childcare costs inhibit ability to work for many mothers (particularly low-income mothers), according to Meyers, Heintze, and Wolf (2002), this study also considers the factors of government welfare and childcare subsidies. Like Even (1987) this study also controls for women's education, age, and number of children.

Data

The data for this study came from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) conducted in 2002 by the National Center for Health Statistics. Below is a table of the independent variables considered, the expected signs of their marginal effects, and the actual signs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Expected Sign</th>
<th>Actual Sign</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Expected Sign</th>
<th>Actual Sign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>EDUCAT</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMKDH</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>WARM</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHCARANY</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>ACHIEVE</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLPLHCLDC</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>MOWORKD</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUSAST</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>EDUCMOM</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPWOKST</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>** +0.01**</td>
<td>** -0.05**, *p&lt;0.1 in basic probit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Models

The basic probit model is as follows:

\[
\text{Prob}
\text{work} = \text{prob}(\text{A working mother can establish just as warm a relationship with her children as a non-working mother has the greatest potential to influence whether she works full-time or not).}
\]

Analysis

Each model had its strengths and weaknesses. The Hausman test showed that the basic probit model suffered from endogeneity issues, but the probit regression with instrumental variables (the model with stronger theoretical foundations) yielded less accurate forecasts than the probit. Below is a table showing the percent of correctly classified observations for each model:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Probit</th>
<th>IV probit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correctly classified</td>
<td>69.53%</td>
<td>53.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

Overall, the findings in this study were consistent with the theory that children, spouses, and attitudes are important influences in whether or not a woman works full-time. Perhaps the most interesting result was that, of all 11 independent variables considered, a woman's view on whether or not a working mother could establish just as warm a relationship with her children as a non-working mother had the greatest marginal effect and was statistically significant in both models. It can be understood, then, that a warm and secure relationship with her children is one of the most influential factors in determining whether a woman works full-time or not.

Women comprise half of America's working age population. In order to better understand the challenges this significant portion of the potential work force faces when making work decisions, more research needs to be done on the effect of full-time work on mother-child relationships.

References