

ABSTRACT:

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Motherhood and the Cost of Job Search

Why do women experience a persistent drop in employment and wages upon becoming mothers? To highlight some of the mechanisms on the labor supply side, we study the changes in search behavior associated with motherhood. We combine two rich sources of information on the search behavior of 400,00 involuntarily unemployed workers in France. First, we use a mandatory survey to measure their selectivity in wage and non-wage amenities. Second, we track the job applications sent on a popular online platform, to measure their search intensity and analyze the precise timing of their search activities. We start by documenting that mothers are more selective than observationally similar women with no children for all non-wage amenities, but equally selective in terms of wages. We also document that mothers send 9% fewer job applications. We then analyze the timing of search activities at a high-frequency: we show that motherhood generates systematically larger drops in job applications in the hours of the day when children are not at school. In addition, we analyze a reform which introduced school time on Wednesday in France in 2013-14 (instead of having Wednesdays off): we show the reform increased the number of applications sent by mothers, especially on Wednesdays. We use a simple partial equilibrium search model to help rationalize our empirical findings. Consistent with prior literature, our evidence suggests that motherhood increases the opportunity cost of market work. But our high-frequency results allow us to highlight another channel: motherhood also increases the (opportunity) cost of job search. This second channel has important implications for the welfare cost of motherhood and the policies that can reduce gender inequality in earnings.