



Research Working Papers

Does Access to Free Pre-Kindergarten Increase Maternal Labor Supply?

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Access to free pre-kindergarten programs increases the labor force participation of prime-working-age mothers by 2.3 percentage points.

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We evaluate the effects of free pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) programs on the labor force participation of mothers. We use variation in Pre-K rules across all U.S. states, including income eligibility requirements in some states. To estimate the causal effects of access to Pre-K on labor supply, we exploit the panel aspect of the monthly Current Population Survey between 2002 and 2019. Specifically, we look at the change in labor market behavior of women when their child becomes age-eligible for Pre-K, controlling for individual factors. We find that access to free Pre-K programs increases overall maternal labor force participation by 2.3 percentage points. In particular, we find that mothers with the following demographic characteristics significantly increase their labor force participation with access to free Pre-K: married, college educated, white non-Hispanic, residents of metropolitan areas, and those with income either below 200 percent or above 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Our results are robust across a series of placebo tests, alternative specifications, and sample restrictions.

JEL Classifications: G50, H21, H23, I31, J01, J08, J15, J16, J18, J21, J22

Article Citations

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Related Research

- Daruich, Diego. 2018. "The Macroeconomic Consequences of Early Childhood Development Policies." Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, working paper 2018-29B. Available at <https://doi.org/10.20955/wp.2018.029>

- Ilin, Elias, and Ellyn Terry. 2021. “Policy Rules Database: Visualizing the U.S. Social Safety Net.” Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, August.
 - Terry, Ellyn. 2021. “Methodology behind the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta’s Labor Force Participation Dynamics.” Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Center for Human Capital Studies, Labor Force Participation Dynamics, July 27.
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