

Short Commentary

Grandparental Childcare and Maternal Labor Supply: A Short Commentary

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China has experienced a widening of the gender gap in labor force participation, characterized by a decreasing percentage of female employees. This trend is potentially exacerbated by the relaxation of the one-child policy, as the primary responsibility for childcare falls on mothers, subsequently reducing women's labor supply. The situation is further intensified by the restricted availability of formal childcare services, as having access to daycare services increases labor force participation (MLFP) by 24–29% in urban China. For children under the age of three, the work-family conflicts become evident for working mothers. Thus, grandparental childcare emerges as a practical solution [1-3].

According to recent study published in *International Sociology* [4], which uses data from the 2018 China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), the impact of grandparental childcare on mothers' labor supply was analyzed. It was observed that grandparental childcare could significantly enhance mothers' labor force participation rate and extend their weekly working hours. Regression analysis indicated a significant positive association between grandparental childcare and mothers' labor force participation, notably amplifying labor participation and working hours for mothers with children aged 0 to 2 years. The study also confirmed that higher educational attainment and enrollment of children in formal childcare institutions significantly increased mothers' labor force participation and working hours. Comparison between one-child and multi-child families revealed that grandparental childcare significantly bolstered labor force participation, particularly in one-child families. However, the augmentation in weekly working hours was marginally superior in multi-child families.

The research affirms that grandparental childcare promotes mothers' labor force participation and working hours by lessening childcare obligations and facilitating a balance between work and family life. Moreover, the influence of grandparental childcare was more pronounced on the labor supply for mothers with children aged 0 to 2 years due to these children's ineligibility for preschool and requirement of intensive care. This highlights the effective role of grandparental childcare in compensating for the limited services, easing women's childcare responsibilities, and sustaining professional progression without significant interruptions.

The findings emphasize the necessity to establish a comprehensive childcare system that inclusively engages the government, family, and community to ease childcare burdens on women. Recommendations include the incorporation of flexible retirement plans and skill-enhancing training initiatives for grandparents in the childcare strategies. The findings also underscore the need to ensure women-friendly professional arrangements and extend accessible and affordable childcare resources, especially within the legal framework that permits up to three children in a home.

However, certain limitations exist in the study. One is the unavailability of women's pre-childbirth labor supply data in CFPS, which could potentially lead to an underestimation of the correlation between grandparental childcare and maternal labor supply. The study also focused exclusively on labor force participation and working hours without considering the effects on work types and job specificity. A relatively small sample size of maternal grandparents providing childcare suggests a need for further research to differentiate between paternal and maternal grandparental support influences. Lastly, the current study does not explore the underlying causes of grandparental childcare preferences, which could be an area of further investigation to broaden the understanding in this domain.

In conclusion, the study underscores the significant role of grandparental childcare in bolstering maternal labor force participation in China, especially for mothers with infants and toddlers. It highlights the need for a comprehensive childcare system and flexible policies to balance women's professional and familial roles. However, the study's limitations suggest the need for more extensive research. Future work could explore the root causes of grandparental childcare preferences and the differential impacts of maternal and paternal grandparental support.

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