



Maternal Employment Dynamics and Children's Social and Emotional Well- Being

A Comparative Analysis of Ireland, the UK
and Denmark

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Motivation

- **Policy Perspective**

- Income from maternal employment more effective at reducing the 'income effect' on children's outcomes than cash payments (Esping-Andersen, 2009).
- 'Activation' debate: does maternal employment reduce child poverty and increase well-being?

- **Child Development Perspective**

- Income gains offset by time losses: negative impact?
- Work-life stress: negative impact?
- Job quality important (Kaili et. al. 2008).



Maternal Employment and Child Well-Being: Existing Evidence

- **Focus on maternal employment during infancy**
 - Evidence mixed but usually a small negative impact of maternal employment during year one on cognitive outcomes
 - Childcare type and quality important
- **Less is known about the effects of maternal employment during middle childhood (Ruhm, 2008).**
- **In particular, how do *changes* in mother's employment status affect child and adolescent well-being?**
 - Impact of taking up employment or job loss on child well-being?
 - Evidence limited
 - Primarily based on data from the United States (Chase-Landsdale et. al. 2003 & 2011)



Theoretical Models

‘Investment’ Models

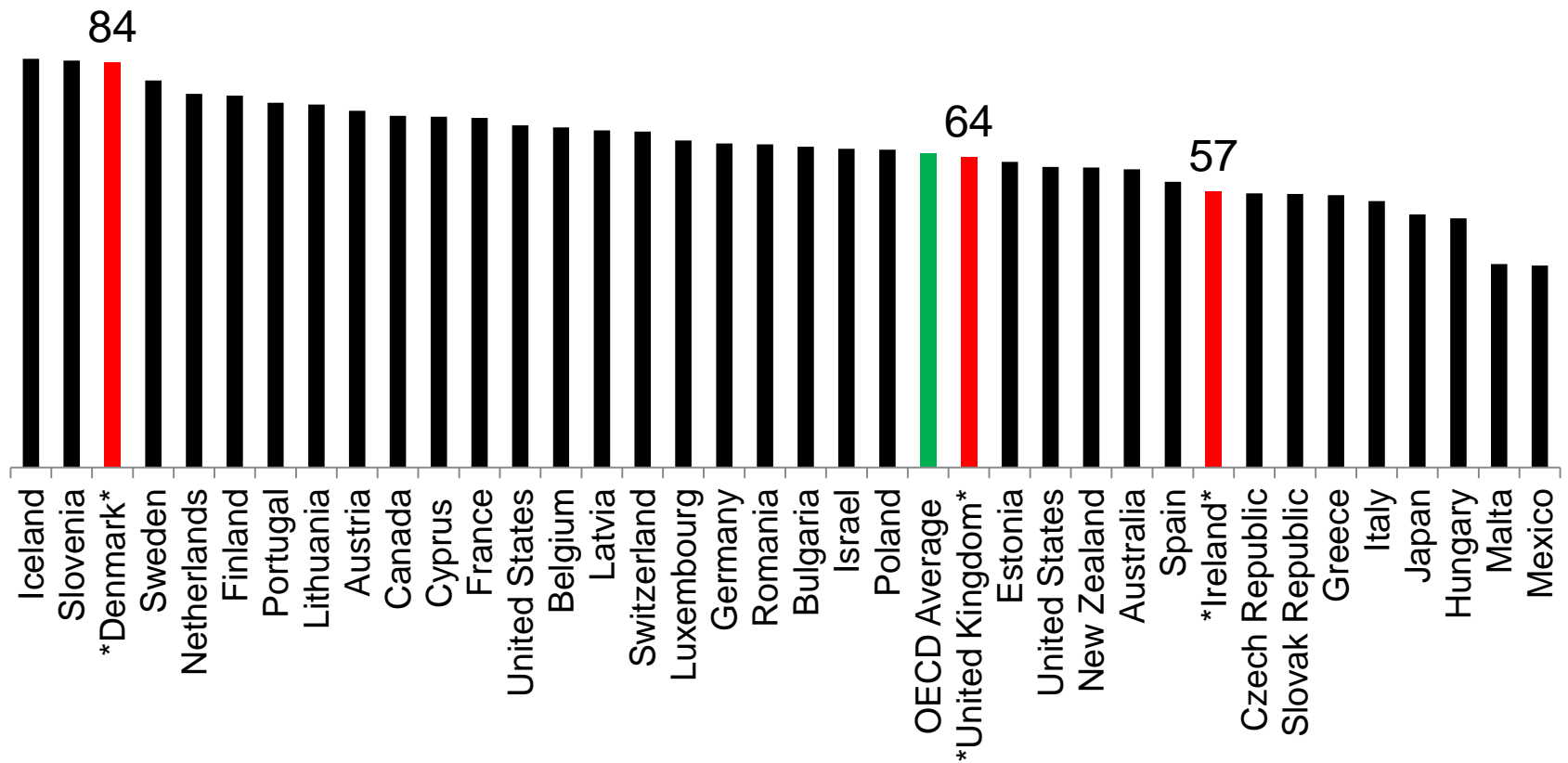
- Maternal employment → parental investments (time/money) → child well-being
- Increases household income → positive impact?
- But decreases ‘time investments’ → negative impact?

Psycho-Social Models

- Maternal employment → maternal well-being → child well-being
- Benefits of cognitively demanding work → positive impact?
- Increases work and family life stress → negative impact?

Maternal Employment Rates

Maternal Employment Rates 2011 (Source : OECD Family Database)





Does the policy context matter?

- **Employment in Denmark**
 - More flexible work environment
 - Lower wage differentials
 - Availability of good quality childcare (less relevant in middle childhood) and after school services
 - Less work-life stress?
- **Unemployment and Job loss in Denmark**
 - Benefit replacement rate for a low income two parent family with two children
 - 92% in Denmark
 - 82% in Ireland and
 - 66% in the UK (Source: OECD Tax-Benefits models, 2014).
 - Negative impact of job loss/unemployment cushioned by generous social assistance?



Research Questions

- **How are changes in mother's employment status associated with children's social and emotional well-being?**
- **Do changes in income and time investments mediate this association?**
- **Does this association differ by family structure, maternal education and poverty status?**
- **Do these patterns differ across the three countries?**



Data



Growing up in Ireland

9 Years (2007)

13 Years (2011)



Danish Longitudinal Survey of Children

6 months (1996)

3 Years (1999)

7.5 Years (2003)

11.5 Years (2007)



Millennium Cohort Study

9 months (2000)

3 Years (2003)

5 Years (2005)

7 Years (2007)

11 Years (2011)



Measures

- **Outcome:** The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
- **Mothers' Employment Transitions**
 - Working at both time points
 - Not working at both time points
 - Not working at time 1 and working at time 2 (started working)
 - Working at time 1 and not working at time 2 (stopped working)
- **Occupation:** unskilled vs skilled/professional
- **Mediators :** Income changes and time changes
- **Moderators:** Family structure, maternal education, household poverty status



Controls

- Child's age and gender,
- Whether the child suffers from a chronic illness,
- Mothers' age at first birth,
- Number of siblings in the household,
- Maternal depression,
- Mothers' prior employment status (before birth),
- Parenting discipline style,
- Non-parental care prior to starting school,
- Hours in non-parental care at time 1,
- Family structure change between time 1 and time 2.



Method

- **Lagged Dependent Variable approach**
 - Multivariate regression predicting children's SDQ scores at time 2, while controlling for their baseline SDQ score at time 1
- **Mediation analysis:**
 - Step one: income and time changes as outcomes variable
 - Step two: add these indicators to the model predicting SDQ scores
- **Moderation analysis:**
 - Interaction term for employment dynamics and
 - family structure (two vs one parent families)
 - maternal education (high vs low education)
 - poverty status (living below 60% poverty line vs living above 60% poverty line)



Maternal Employment Transitions

	Ireland % (n)	Denmark % (n)	The UK % (n)
Working at both time points	53 (3060)	77 (2621)	60 (5464)
Not working at both time points	27 (1541)	6 (194)	22 (2017)
Started working	12 (715)	10 (344)	11 (1079)
Stopped working	8 (461)	7 (254)	6 (575)
Total	5777	3409	9135



Characteristics of Working Mothers

Mothers who were working at *both time points* were more likely to have:

- A degree or higher
- A smaller family (except in Denmark)
- Better mental health
- A child who is in good health (no chronic illnesses) (Ireland only)
- Have a partner (except in Ireland)



Maternal employment dynamics and children's SDQ scores

No support found for a mediating role of income or time changes over the same time period.

	Ireland	Denmark	The UK
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Working at both time points	Ref	Ref	Ref
Not working at both time points	.03 (.03)	.02 (.07)	.07 (.02) ***
Started working	.03 (.04)	.05 (.05)	.02 (.03)
Stopped working	.13 (.05) **	-.01 (.09)	.02 (.03)

Model includes all control variables ***p≤.001, **p≤.01 *p≤.05 +p≤.10



Sub groups

- **Does this association differ by SES and Family Structure?**
 - No evidence of a differential association for lone parents or lower SES families (poverty or low education).
- **What about fathers' employment?**
 - Sub group analysis of two parent families
 - Negative association between father unemployment (UK) and employment loss (Ireland) and SDQ scores
 - Not enough cases to conduct analysis of dual employment loss or unemployment



Does Job Type Matter?

	Ireland	Denmark	The UK
	B (se)	B (se)	B (se)
Working-High Occupation	Ref	Ref	Ref
Working-Low Occupation	.05 (.03)	.05 (.04)	.06 (.02)**
Not working at both time points	.05 (.03)	.05 (.07)	.11(.03)***
Started working	.05 (.03)	.05 (.05)	-.02 (.03)
Stopped working	.16(.04)***	.01 (.09)	.00 (.04)

Model includes all control variables

*** $p \leq .001$, ** $p \leq .01$ * $p \leq .05$ + $p \leq .10$



Conclusions (1)

1) **Small negative impact of employment loss on children's social emotional well-being in Ireland**

- Employment loss in Ireland more stressful? Context: economic recession.
- NB: differences in the age of the study child.

2) **Small negative impact of continuous non-employment and continual employment in unskilled jobs in the UK sample**

- Indicates that employment is an important axis of inequality in the UK.
- NB: employment more selective in the UK than in Ireland and Denmark.



Conclusions (2)

3) Employment dynamics have no association with children's social and emotional well-being in Denmark

- Danish welfare state better buffer against non-employment and employment loss?
- NB: unable to make causal conclusions about the influence on macro level factors on micro level outcomes.
- **Across all countries:**
 - No evidence that these associations differ by family structure or SES.
 - No support for income/time trade offs as a possible explanatory mechanism.



Avenues for Future Research

- **Test the association between employment dynamics and cognitive domains of children's outcomes.**
- **More rigorous methods for dealing with selective nature of employment : propensity score matching.**
- **Examining the validity of psycho-social processes in explaining the links between maternal (non)employment and children's well-being.**



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Questions?