

Maternal Employment, Household Nutrition, and Obesity

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My job market paper explores the relationship between maternal employment, the combination of time and money used in household food production, and the consequences for the quality of food intake of both children and parents and for their risk of being obese. In the second paper I study the causal relationship between maternal employment and childhood obesity, using a large longitudinal survey of children followed from kindergarten through the 8th grade.

1 Maternal Employment and Household Food Production: Implications for Nutrition and Obesity (*Job Market Paper*)

This paper explores the mechanisms through which maternal employment affects the quality of household nutrition and the possible implications for adult and childhood obesity. In a simple theoretical model, I conceptualize the tradeoff between time and money in household food production and the implications for the nutrition of family members. Using the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), I find that time spent shopping for and preparing food in both married-couple and single-mother families falls with maternal employment. A parallel analysis of the Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals (CSFII) reveals that the share of food expenditure spent on food prepared away-from-home rises with maternal employment. This substitution of money for time in household food production can have detrimental effects on the nutrition of both adults and children in the family if the dietary quality of away-from-home food is inferior to that of food prepared at home. I use the Healthy Eating Index (HEI) and the densities (per 1,000 calories) of 12 important nutrients and food components to assess the quality of dietary intake for CSFII sample persons. Reported height and weight are used to calculate BMI and determine obesity status. In married-couple families, I find that the quality of food-intake falls with maternal employment in all subgroups studied, and that obesity sometimes, but not always, rises with maternal employment. In single-mother families my results suggest a weaker association between maternal employment, nutrition, and obesity. Overall, my findings suggest that maternal employment can explain very little of the time trend increase in obesity.

2 Transitions in Maternal Employment and the Onset of Childhood Obesity (in progress)

While recent studies have found a positive association between maternal employment and childhood obesity, the causal relationship between the two is still uncertain. Furthermore, all longitudinal studies of maternal employment and childhood obesity in the U.S. have used either the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) or the Panel Survey of Income Dynamics (PSID). The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K) follows a large nationally representative sample of children from kindergarten in 1998 through 8th grade in 2007. In this paper I exploit the panel data structure of the ECLS-K to further investigate the causal relationship between maternal employment and childhood obesity.