

Employment and Earnings across the Transition to Fatherhood: A Life Course Perspective

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Abstract: Existing studies support the hypotheses that married fathers are likely to work longer hours for pay than their childless counterparts, and to earn more money. In this study, I draw upon the life course perspective in asking whether married men respond to becoming fathers for the first time in the same way regardless of the age at which fertility takes place. Fitting fixed effects models to data from the NLSY79, I test several competing hypotheses which particularly focus upon delayed fathers, or those who become first-time parents in the thirties and after. Preliminary findings suggest that while delayed fathers' employment and earnings are not affected by parenthood, there is a significant (but small) disjunction among older men based on their attitudes towards gender egalitarianism. The results appear to have implications for the study of work-family linkages and for discussions of delayed fathers and the "new fatherhood".

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There is a large literature on the effect of parenthood on women's employment and earnings, but the impacts on married men are considerably less studied. However, there are several important reasons to study how married men's employment and earnings change when they become fathers. Although fathers' income is a positive asset for their co-resident children, long work hours may crowd out time available for children (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001), and may also make partners' work-family difficulties more acute (Deutsch 1999). In addition, the link between fatherhood and economic provision is an important one for understanding contemporary, culturally normative ideas about masculinity (Townsend 2002).

Existing studies generally support the hypotheses that married fathers are likely to work longer hours for pay than their childless counterparts, and to earn more money, even when age differences between fathers and others are taken into account (Eggebeen and Knoester 2001; Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000; Lundberg and Rose 2000; Nock 1998). In this study, I draw upon the life course perspective, whose emphasis upon the timing and ordering of transitions (Elder 1985; Neugarten, Moore, and Lowe 1965) leads me to ask whether married men respond to becoming first-time fathers in the same way regardless of the age at which fertility takes place. I test several competing hypotheses which particularly focus upon delayed fathers, or those who become first-time parents in the thirties and after. Not only is such delay becoming far more common than in the past, but delayed fathers have attracted considerable research attention (Coltrane 1996; Cooney, Pedersen, Indelicato, and Palkovitz 1993; Heath 1994; Parke and Neville 1995).

H1: Delayed fathers are more likely than their younger counterparts to be established in the workforce prior to parenthood (Daniels and Weingarten 1982). They may thus have less need and less opportunity to work harder and to earn more money.

H2: Conversely, delayed fathers tend to be highly educated (Parke and Neville 1995). Their human capital may afford them the opportunity to respond to parenthood by increasing their work involvement and their earnings.

H3: Marriage, as well as parenthood, increase men's employment and earnings (Nock 1998). Since delayed fathers are less likely than their younger counterparts to undergo marital and parental transitions simultaneously (Coltrane 1996; Daniels and Weingarten 1982), they may not work harder or earn more after the birth.

H4: One study has shown that men who believe in egalitarian gender roles actually work fewer hours if they are parents (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000). If delayed fathers are especially likely to hold such views (Coltrane 1996), then they may be less likely than younger men to work harder or earn more after the birth.

This study aims to contribute to our understanding of both the employment-fatherhood link (where past research has not taken a life course perspective) and the consequence of delaying fatherhood (where past research has not adequately considered the consequences for employment). In addition, while the most sophisticated past studies of the effect of fatherhood on employment have utilized data from a long span of men's lives, muddying the question of what happens during the *transition* to parenthood, I focus specifically on the medium term.

Data and Methods

In this study, I utilize all waves (1979 to 2002) of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1979 Cohort (NLSY79). (For a complete description of this dataset, see the User's Guide at <http://www.bls.gov/nls/79guide/nls79usg.htm>.) The NLSY79 is an excellent source for studying the timing of parenthood because it covers several decades of respondents' lives. The NLSY79 is also one of the best sources for male fertility timing in the United States. Researchers reviewed the NLSY79 male fertility information for the years from 1979 to 1998 and assigned confidence ratings regarding the paternity of each child who had ever been claimed as a respondent's biological offspring (Mott 2002). I count a biological birth only if the father's paternity has been rated as "virtually certain" or "reasonably certain".

As is well known, the NLSY79's sampling frame over-represented Black and Hispanic youths and White youths living in low income households. It seems likely that this is the major reason that the average age at which married respondents became fathers is 25.95, which is low compared to contemporaneous period estimates. I define delayed fatherhood as first birth in the upper 25% of the sample, which means age 30 or above. The small proportion of late fathers in the NLSY79 sample is more than counterbalanced by the quality of the fertility information and the breadth of the prospective longitudinal record.

The sample is restricted to civilian male respondents who were married and living with their first child after becoming fathers (although some were unmarried prior to the birth) and who provided complete data on the measures of interest (N=2136 respondents). Because data collection became biennial in 1994, and because the most complete data about employment and

earnings refer to the year prior to each interview, I study change in employment outcomes across two year periods between odd-numbered years (1979, 1981, and so on until 2001).

The two outcomes examined are annual hours worked at all jobs during a calendar year, and logged annual earnings from employment. I model within-individual change in hours and earnings over time using cross-sectional time series models with fixed effects. Although the NLSY79 covers a long span of respondents' lives, I focus on the medium-term effect of fatherhood by restricting the models to a maximum of three biennial observations before and after the first birth.

To assess the effect of parenthood on married men of varying ages, I fit models with the following form.

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Parent}_{it} + \beta_2 \text{Parent}_{it} * \text{Before22}_i + \beta_3 \text{Parent}_{it} * \text{22-25}_i + \beta_4 \text{Parent}_{it} * \text{30plus}_i + \beta X + \gamma W + U_i + Z_{ij}$$

where X is a vector of time-varying controls and W is a vector of indicators for the respondent's current age. Because age is non-parametrically controlled, the coefficient for parenthood is net of the tendency for hours and earnings to grow during the young adult years. The unusual aspect of this model is that it includes an interaction between parental status and three categories for the timing of the first birth (before age 22, 22 to 25, and 30 and above, with age 26 to 29 as the comparison group), even though it does not include the main effects for timing. Age at first birth, like all time-constant measures, cannot be a covariate in a fixed effects model, but interactions between time-constant and time-varying variables are permitted (Johnson 1995).

Preliminary Results and Implications

Preliminary findings provide some support for three of the hypotheses with regard to earnings. Men 25 and under earn more as a result of the transition to fatherhood ($p < .01$), while others do not. The age difference is accounted for by controls for labor force experience and for marital duration. (Labor force experience has more explanatory power.) Moreover, men 30 and over earn more after the birth if they hold traditional gender attitudes, and less if they hold egalitarian views (*difference significant at $p < .01$*). The same is not true for younger men.

In contrast, men who become fathers at 22 or earlier are predicted to work 91 fewer annual hours after the birth ($p < .10$), while those who become fathers between 22 and 25 are predicted to work 69 fewer hours ($p < .05$). Those who become fathers in the late twenties work

83 more hours ($p < .05$), but delayed fathers do not significantly change their behavior. The negative effect of fatherhood on young men is accounted for in a model controlling for educational attainment, which suggests that the original finding reflects the situation of young, married fathers with little education and correspondingly precarious labor market prospects. Similarly to the models for earnings, older men work 126 more hours after fatherhood if they are traditional, but 49 fewer hours if they are egalitarian (*difference significant at $p < .001$*). Gender role attitudes do not affect the hours of younger men.

For young men, there is a disjunction between what happens to their hours and their earnings. While others have observed a similar disjunction for new fathers as a whole (Lundberg and Rose 2000), this finding needs to be unpacked. Most likely, the main effects hide differences between groups of young men. I plan to explore what happens when the sample is broken down into categories defined the respondent's race, immigrant status, and other contextual variables.

In line with H1 and H3, older men do not change much on average when they become fathers. As H4 suggested, however, the overall lack of change hides a divide between those with egalitarian and traditional views. It is remarkable that only those who wait until thirty or after can increase or decrease their hours and earnings in line with their preferences. This suggests a modification of H2, namely that delayed fathers have the ability to realize their employment preferences because of their advantaged positions in the labor market. I plan to test this modified hypothesis, utilizing additional measures of labor market position besides education (such as occupational prestige).

If the findings hold true in the final models, they will suggest caution in discussions about delayed fathers and the "new fatherhood". Although older men with egalitarian beliefs work fewer hours after becoming fathers, the magnitude of the difference is small (about one hour per week). Moreover, such men were working longer hours than others *prior* to parenthood. While they do not appear to need to demonstrate their masculinity by increasing their involvement with employment upon making the transition to fatherhood, as many men do (Nock 1998), there is little evidence that these fathers, as a group, are relinquishing their breadwinning roles (Potuchek 1997).

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