

Beliefs about Maternal Labor Supply

Abstract

This paper provides representative evidence on the perceived returns to maternal labor supply. We design a novel survey to elicit subjective expectations, and show that a mother's decision to work is perceived to have sizable impacts on child skills, family outcomes, and the future labor market outcomes of the mother. Examining the channels through which the impacts are perceived to operate, we document that beliefs about the impact of additional household income can account for some, but not all, of the perceived positive effects. Beliefs about returns substantially vary across the population and are predictive of labor supply intentions under different policy scenarios related to childcare availability and quality, two factors that are also perceived as important. Consistent with socialization playing a role in the formation of beliefs, we show that respondents whose own mother worked perceive the returns to maternal labor supply as higher.

This paper is joint work with Teodora Boneva (University of Bonn and IZA), Katja Kaufmann (Bayreuth University and IZA) and Christopher Rauh (University of Cambridge).

Marta Golin

**Postdoctoral Research Associate at the University of Zurich
and the Jacobs Center for Productive Youth Development**