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Grandparenting and mothers' labour force participation: A comparative analysis using the Generations and Gender Survey

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Abstract

Background: It is well known that the provision of public childcare plays an important role for women labour force participation and its availability varies tremendously across countries. In many countries, informal childcare is also important and typically provided by the grandparents, but its role on mothers' employment is not yet well understood. Understanding the relationship between labour supply decisions and grandparental childcare is complex. While the provision of grandparental childcare is clearly a function of the social and institutional context of a country, it also depends on family preferences, which are typically unobserved in surveys.

Objective: We analyze the role of informal childcare provided by grandparents on mothers' labour force participation keeping unobserved preferences into account.

Methods: Bivariate probit models with instrumental variables are estimated on data from seven countries (Bulgaria, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Russia and The Netherlands) drawn from the Generations and Gender Survey.

Results: We find that only in some countries mothers' employment is positively and significantly associated with grandparents providing childcare. In other countries, once we control for unobserved preferences, we do not find this effect.

Conclusions: The role of grandparents is an important element to reconcile work and family for women in some countries. Our results show the importance of considering family preferences and country differences when studying the relationship between grandparental childcare and mothers' labour supply.

Comments: Our results are consistent with previous research on this topic. However, differently from previous studies, we conduct separate analyses by country and show that the effect of

grandparental childcare varies considerably. The fact that we also include in the analyses Bulgaria, Hungary, Russia and Georgia is an important novelty as there are no studies on this issue for these countries.

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