

Maternity Leave Extensions and Gender Gaps

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Summary

- **Question:** Do maternity leave extensions unintentionally widen gender gaps in hiring and job search?
- **Setting:** China's staggered maternity leave extensions in 2021–2022; ten provinces added 10–50 days
- **Data:** Applications, job/applicant characteristics, and early-stage employer callbacks from a large online job platform
- **Design:** DDD/event-study framework comparing female–male changes across policy change timing
- **Main findings:** Female applicants receive fewer callbacks, apply to lower-wage jobs, submit more applications, and search longer relative to male applicants

A lot to like about this paper

- **Relevant question:**
 - The maternity leave extension and other packages are introduced to support childrearing and increase fertility
 - These policies may backfire if employers respond by reducing demand for women or limiting women's career advancement – which can lower women's fertility intention
- **Clear contribution:** This paper uncovers policy impact on hiring discrimination and application behavior, rather than equilibrium labor-market outcomes
- **Excellent data:** The platform records both applicant behavior and early-stage hiring outcomes, which is rarely observed in standard administrative or survey data
- **Useful heterogeneity on mechanism:** Effects are smaller where governments cover additional wage costs and larger where firm costs/frictions are plausibly higher
- **Important implications:** Policymakers should consider the interests and responses of individuals, families, and firms when designing policies

Questions & Comments

- Empirically challenging to **separate employer-side & applicant-side effects**
 - Candidates may anticipate employer responses and adjust application behavior
 - Employer callbacks may also reflect changes in application volume and composition
- Time window of analysis
 - Employer-side: monthly variation (-/+ 7 months)
 - Applicant-side: weekly variation (-/+ 5 weeks)
- Suggestion:
 - Estimate both effects over common week-level and month-level windows
 - Compare the immediate vs. longer-run effects from both sides

Questions & Comments

- **Callback outcome**
 - Combining interview invitations, phone calls, contact exchange, and follow-up conversations within 24 hours
 - What's the usual order of actions? Possible to separate these different margins?
- **Location-based treatment**
 - For candidate-side analysis, is treatment status defined based on the account's registered location or IP address?
 - Do people normally apply for jobs within their own province or also apply across provinces? I guess mobility is more common among younger applicants or fresh graduates

Questions & Comments

- **Specification**

- Include job fixed effects in applicant-side analysis?

$$Y_{ijct} = \alpha + \kappa D_{ct} \times \Delta \% ML_c \times Female_i + \delta_{c*t} + \delta_{female*t} + \delta_i + \varepsilon_{ijct}, \quad (5)$$

- Perhaps there are not multiple applications per job because a random sample of applicants is drawn
- Is it possible to get the full dataset around the policy change cutoff, including all positions, applicants & applications?

- **Standard errors**

- S.E. are clustered at the city level for employer- & candidate-side analyses
- How many cities are there in total?
- Consider using job-level / applicant-level clustering for robustness

Questions & Comments

- **Nuance in policy change**
 - A wave of change in September 2021, following the national Population and Family Planning Law revision (“three-child policy”)
 - Although the leave duration was not extended in many provinces, the leave was also granted to the third child
 - In Jiangsu and Jilin, the extension was announced in September 2021 but implemented later in December/February
 - Is the Baidu search index based on national average or collapsing across different provincial trends around different policy change dates?

Thank you! Good luck with the paper 😊