

The Impact of Motherhood on Professional and Economic Prospects: A Review of the “Motherhood Penalty”

María Andrea Soto Jiménez

Tecnológico de Monterrey, Monterrey, Mexico

Abstract

Mothers face significant challenges in the labor market, especially in comparison to fathers and women without children. Motherhood requires a wide range of compromises and prioritization, often leading mothers to shift their focus from their careers to their families. As a result, women encounter difficulties keeping a continuous and consistent professional path, which has an important impact on their economic opportunities and long-term earnings. To explore this impact, studies focus on a diversity of factors contributing to the motherhood penalty, including parental wage gap, gender equality, “fatherhood premium,” attitudes and behaviors toward mothers, work conditions, and government and institutional support. This article seeks to gain understanding of the impacts of motherhood by using secondary data to examine five determinants of motherhood penalty and suggesting actionable policies: (1) stereotypes, (2) reduction of working hours, (3) risk of economic vulnerability, (4) long-term earnings, and (5) actionable policies. This review aims to offer an updated perspective on the labor challenges of mothers by examining the intersection of social class in determining the size of motherhood penalty, in addition to analyzing the long-term wage gaps and labor opportunity differences between mothers and both non-mothers and fathers. The article argues that motherhood penalty cannot be attributed to a single cause and not only has immediate post-birth impacts but arises from a combination of psychological, social, economic, cultural, and educational factors that cause long-term setbacks in earnings. Research on the topic is fundamental to understanding the hardships of the workforce for mothers and examining the various elements that need to be considered when developing support systems for mothers.

Keywords: motherhood penalty, gender wage gap, career progression, work-family balance, economic vulnerability, gender stereotypes



1. Introduction

Despite advances in gender equality, mothers continue to face major obstacles in the workforce. Generally, childless women earn significantly more than mothers with similar qualifications, who, due to motherhood, tend to take career breaks (Torres et al., 2024), choose part-time or low-salary jobs that are better aligned with caregiving roles (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2020), face employer discrimination in the workplace (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024), and overall experience disadvantages due to the societal expectations associated with motherhood (Okimoto & Heilman, 2012).

In the United States, approximately 29% of the total gender wage gap is attributed to being a parent (American Sociological Association, 2025). Family-related factors account for two-thirds of the overall gap, and after adjusting for worker demographics and human capital attributes, they contribute to 19% of the gender wage gap (American Sociological Association, 2025). These findings are referred to as the "motherhood penalty."

When women become mothers, their focus tends to shift from their professional careers to their families, limiting their economic opportunities and career development. Studies in the United States generally find average wage penalties ranging from 5% to 10% per child among women in their 20s and 30s (Kahn et al., 2014), and 24% of women exit the labor market in their first year of motherhood. Cross-country research demonstrates that five years after childbirth, the percentage of women in the workforce drops to 17%, and after a decade, 15% are still absent (Kleven et al., 2023).

In China, the employment rate of women between their mid-20s and 30s (the age at which women are most likely to become mothers) is exceptionally high, and the impact of the motherhood penalty on future labor opportunities is less pronounced (Lin, 2025). Meng et al. (2023) found, through an event study, that the share of mothers in the workforce drops by 40 percentage points in the year of childbirth. However, this number recovers quickly, with child penalty ultimately accounting for only 30% of the gender wage gap.

On the other hand, in Denmark, the transition to parenthood creates a gender wage gap of approximately 20%, attributed to a change in labor force participation, hours of work, and wage rates. The total gender earnings gap is 24%, meaning that the child penalties constitute roughly 80% of the overall gap (Perry, 2018).

Extensive research makes it clear that the transition into motherhood plays a crucial role in shaping women's career paths and economic opportunities. Torres et al. (2024) explain that mothers are less likely to adopt leadership positions. They provide evidence that the barriers faced by women in their career progression are often mistakenly seen as personal choices rather than systemic problems. However, societal expectations, attitudes toward the competency of mothers, time availability, access to childcare, and difficulties balancing work and personal life are actually systemic factors that contribute to the severity of the motherhood penalty (Torres et al., 2024).

Goldin et al. (2022) claim that mothers in the United States aged around 30 to 39 years old dedicate about 10 fewer hours to paid work than fathers do when their youngest child is still in preschool, and around eight fewer hours when the youngest is predominantly in middle and high school. The reduction of paid labor is mainly due to the increased time women must commit to their household chores, resulting in an average of 4.3 hours daily of unpaid labor (Goldin et al., 2022). Similarly, in Japan, working mothers reduce about seven hours of work per week in the year after their first birth. The year before the first pregnancy, women's earnings were already reduced by 16% and increased to 40% during the first year of parenthood



(Hsu, 2021).

Despite the continuous and substantial workload, the reduction of paid working hours and unconventional professional paths play a crucial role in the career development of mothers, not only in early motherhood but over the decades. For instance, in Belgium, female earnings reduce by 43% up to eight years after childbirth. In addition, mothers are about 40% more likely than fathers to experience work disability during the same period (Fontenay & Tojerow, 2020).

Besides, Halrynjo and Mangset (2024) examine the significance of stereotypes that lead to an implicit bias against mothers, highlighting that the societal context in different regions shapes the views of mothers in the workforce. Additionally, research indicates that motherhood impacts long-term earnings, retirement income, and economic vulnerability (Möhring, 2018). However, research in this field is limited in fully capturing the actual effects of motherhood.

This review seeks to go beyond traditional analyses of the labor barriers of mothers, which commonly focus on the immediate wage gaps, by exploring the intersection of social class and family structure in determining economic vulnerability. In addition to offering insights into the long-term wage gaps, working hour differentials, and reduced professional opportunities that extend into women's early 50s and result in a diminished retirement income, the central position of the article argues that the motherhood penalty cannot be attributed to a single cause and not only has immediate post-birth impacts but arises from a combination of psychological, social, economic, cultural, and educational factors that cause long-term setbacks in earnings.

This article primarily includes peer-reviewed research focusing on OECD countries, which employs quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods focusing on motherhood, career progression, wage gaps, economic vulnerability, workplace, and social factors that contribute to the motherhood penalty. Due to the prominence of U.S. data in existing literature, most of the studies and findings rely heavily on data from this geographical scope.

The rest of the paper is divided into five sections and is structured as follows: Section 1 examines the influence of stereotypes, attitudes, feelings, and behavior toward mothers. Section 2 examines the reduction of working hours and interruption of career paths. Section 3 reviews the risk of economic vulnerability due to inconsistent career trajectories. Section 4 presents long-term economic effects of the motherhood penalty. Section 5 presents actionable policies to address the significant consequences. The final section provides the conclusions, limitations, and future research recommendations.

2. Influence of Stereotypes and the Historical Views of Motherhood on Mothers' Professional Advancement

During the last decades, views and attitudes toward women in general have changed, bringing more opportunities in the labor world. Nevertheless, when it comes to parenthood, there are expectations that women should take care of the majority of household responsibilities and have to sacrifice their career opportunities for their family (Torres et al., 2024). This expectation comes from a historical background linking mothers to caregiving tasks and associating them with values such as warmth, which makes them considered incompetent for taking over leadership roles, commonly related to competitiveness, aggression, and selfishness (Torres et al., 2024). The decreased time availability and characteristics intertwined with motherhood build assumptions about mothers in the workforce that lead to biased hiring and limited

promotional opportunities.

2.1. Historical Context of the Division of Labor

"Stereotypes are overgeneralized and exaggerated pictures in our head associated with social groups' characteristics and behaviors" (Odenweller & Rittenour, 2017). Throughout history, there have been generalized views on the role of women and men in the workforce and in parenthood, typically referred to as the "sexual division of labor." This division arose from the historical distribution of responsibilities, associating men with hunting and women with gathering (Bird & Coddling, 2015). The partition of tasks was designed to fit the needs and abilities of both groups; for instance, the larger bodies of men and pronounced canine teeth were linked with the pattern of male fighting and intelligence. On the other hand, women generally nurtured their children because of their ability to breastfeed, avoiding dangerous duties to ensure the safety of their children (Hart, 2023).

The historical background of the division of parenting labor habitually obstructs the search for egalitarian economic opportunities for women in contemporary society, as concepts such as nature, family, and sexual division of work are used as misconceptions (Mies, 1981). When it comes to motherhood, women's childcare is often seen as an extension of their physiology because they give birth and breastfeed, classifying them as the primary caregivers. In contrast, fathers are not "naturally" seen as responsible for care but as providers. All the labor that mothers put into childcare is considered a natural human activity rather than real labor, whereas men's compensated jobs are actually regarded as real work under capitalist conditions (Mies, 1981).

Capitalist views shape the way paid and unpaid household labor is perceived by society, recognizing men as workers and women as housewives or non-workers despite the substantial workload of family responsibilities (Hart, 2023). Additionally, capitalism focuses on the significance of body parts associated with production, particularly hands and head, minimizing the importance of other fundamental necessities such as the breast for feeding children. The concept of sexual division of labor can also be taken as a misconception if seized as a simple division of chores among men and women, overlooking the fact that there are systemic barriers that hinder women's progression in the workforce (Mies, 1981).

2.2. The Impact of Stereotypes on the Motherhood Penalty

As a result of the historical categorization of parenting chores, the career development of women in modern society is largely impacted by the societal views that tend to see stay-at-home mothers as primary caregivers and men as financial providers. Because mothers often take the caregiving role, they are commonly seen as warm, caring, and loving but not qualified for high-ranking job positions (Nannette & Piton, 2021). On the other hand, businesswomen and non-mothers are seen as more competent for leadership roles but lacking motherly qualities.

In the United States, mothers have 10% lower competency ratings compared to non-mothers and are considered 12.1 percentage points less committed to their jobs than women without children (Correll et al., 2007). Besides, non-mothers are 8.2 times more likely to be recommended for promotion than mothers and more likely to receive 2.1 times as many callbacks (Correll et al., 2007).

Additionally, mothers who have better management of work-family responsibilities are perceived as overworked and stressed since they need to fulfill all their family and work duties without sacrificing quality in either area (Odenweller &

Rittenour, 2017). These attitudes demonstrate that stay-at-home parents, working mothers, and non-mothers face oppressive views and negative stereotypes that can limit their career prospects (Okimoto & Heilman, 2012).

Nevertheless, Ma et al. (2022) argue that motherhood can enhance women's knowledge, skills, capacity, and mental strength, which are transferable to the workplace and may help mothers prepare for future leadership roles. Similarly, in Spain, a study examining female executives in leadership positions found that motherhood can act as a driver of career growth by fostering empathy, resilience, multitasking, perspective, and balance—characteristics that translate into leadership strengths (Dominguez-Soto et al., 2024).

Regardless of whether motherhood skills are viewed as a strength or a weakness in the workforce, social expectations of motherhood often pressure mothers to choose between being an "ideal mother" or "ideal worker." An ideal mother is one who practices intensive mothering, dedicating all her time and effort to her family (Hays, 1996). An ideal worker is one who is fully committed to their occupation, available to work long hours, and prioritizes work above everything else (Cobb et al., 2024).

For mothers, achieving either of the standards is significantly challenging, as family obligations are related to reduced work commitment, and work devotion is linked with parents being less dedicated to their families. This places women in a situation where they feel expected to prove that they are committed to their jobs. However, when they manage to dedicate a greater amount of time to work, they are seen as ineffective parents (Okimoto & Heilman, 2012). In South Korea, for instance, feminist movements have arisen from women's perception of being "treated as cooks, cleaners and 'baby-making machines.'" They are expected to be both earners and dutiful mothers, and are subject to demeaning scrutiny if they fall short in either domain" (The Economist, 2023).

Nevertheless, assumptions about mothers that can limit their economic opportunities do not only come from the labor context but can also be internalized in their family's principles. The internalized gender stereotypes linking mothers to caregiving tasks and fathers to work are also shown to be associated, at least in part, with the guilt that parents feel when work interferes with family (Aarntzen, 2023).

Mothers with traditional gender prejudices are driven to feel more guilty than fathers when work and family responsibilities overlap (Borelli et al., 2016). This circumstance can drive women to take breaks from work or accept part-time jobs to have more time to take care of their families, while fathers can fully commit to their jobs and even extend their working hours since they are expected to provide financial support to their families. By contrast, when families have a more egalitarian view of parenthood, tasks are shared more equally, and their level of guilt is relatively similar (Aarntzen, 2023).

2.3. The Role of Media in Shaping Expectations of Motherhood

One of the primary contributors to the perpetuation of stereotypes about motherhood is the media. Films, magazines, books, and advertisements reinforce the social construction of parenthood, in which a mother is not merely a woman with children but someone who performs intensive motherhood (Mary et al., 2025). Through the media, society strengthens the traditional view of mothers as self-sacrificers and caregivers, highlighting the idea that women should set aside their professional goals to take full responsibility for the household. This concept also influences women to willingly shift their focus from stable professional prospects to a full-time role as a parent to avoid feeling or being perceived as ineffective



mothers (Mary et al., 2025).

Nonetheless, the media also allows for the expression of feminist views on parenthood, suggesting that mothers do not need to sacrifice themselves for parenting and that deciding to continue developing in various life dimensions, such as their professional career, will not lead to neglecting their parental responsibilities (Wu, 2021).

The media is a powerful way to express the idea of parenthood as a shared responsibility and the importance of the multiple roles of women in society. Through the shared experiences of women in motherhood, it is feasible to offer a more realistic view of the parenting journey, raising awareness of the challenges and commitment needed to become a mother. Consequently, it promotes the idea that raising a child is not solely the mother's role but a shared commitment, and with supportive social and labor policies, women can balance their work and parental duties to maintain a stable career (Wegener et al., 2022).

Stereotypes surrounding motherhood can have both negative and positive impacts on women's career progression; however, stronger evidence indicates that the misconceptions of women in the workforce eventually lead to reduced economic opportunities. The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward mothers lead to biased hiring practices, reduced promotion opportunities, career breaks, and exclusion from leadership roles (Torres et al., 2024).

These assumptions come from the historical, social, and internalized views of motherhood, which can vary depending on the culture and advances in gender equality that have occurred (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024). However, in general, motherhood significantly changes the professional path of women and can lead to long-term economic consequences.

Addressing stereotypes of motherhood involves a holistic change in the social view of women and their role as parents and workers. To achieve this, it is fundamental to educate about the topic from the early years of childhood and present parenthood as a shared responsibility (De Sarlo et al., 2022). Additionally, in the workplace, establishing policies including paternity leave for fathers reinforces the idea that mothers are not solely responsible for their children (Dominguez-Folgueras et al., 2022).

Finally, since the media strongly influences people's perceptions, perspectives on mothers as self-sacrificing should be avoided in order to end the idealistic expectations of mothers (Schmidt et al., 2023). Understanding the role of stereotypes is fundamental to addressing the systemic barriers that mothers face and rebuilding the social perspectives of motherhood.

3. Reduction of Working Hours

One of the key aspects of the motherhood penalty is the significant wage difference between mothers and both non-mothers and fathers (Goldin et al., 2024). The wage gap is caused by a diversity of obstacles mothers face in the workforce, which lead to interrupted career paths and a reduction of working hours (Torres et al., 2024). Nurturing a family requires dedication and time, especially in the first years of motherhood. Consequently, mothers occasionally leave employment, reduce their work hours, or shift into less intensive work positions or firms. These changes in their career paths lead to lower wages in early parenthood but also to limited labor opportunities in the future (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2020; Goldin et al., 2024). This indicates that reducing working hours to take care of household responsibilities is a fundamental factor contributing to gender parental wage gaps and the motherhood penalty.

As stated previously in this paper, traditional views of motherhood place women as the primary caregivers, while fathers are associated with the financial support for the family (Lyttelton, 2022). Consequently, after becoming parents, fathers' working hours continue to be stable or even greater as they focus on economic support. On the other hand, mothers are left with the majority of household responsibilities, often reducing their labor hours (Gough & Noonan, 2013).

Two theories in the literature explain this phenomenon. First, the theory of compensating differentials claims that mothers usually choose occupations that allow a better balance between work and childcare, with parent-adjustable characteristics such as flexible hours, few demands for travel, and family-oriented benefits (Wuestenek & Begall, 2022). Secondly, the effort theory suggests that mothers invest less energy into work than women without children, as they commit greater effort to unpaid work, such as family obligations (Kalabikhina et al., 2024).

Although choosing flexible, low-intensity jobs is helpful to fulfill parental duties, it drastically changes the professional path of women, decreasing income, limiting promotional opportunities, and expanding the parental wage gap. Compared to fathers, women in the United States whose youngest child is between zero and two years old work about 3.5 fewer weeks a year (Goldin et al., 2024). When kids are still in preschool, mothers work about 10 fewer hours a week than fathers, and around eight fewer hours when children are in middle school. Compared to women without children, mothers reduce their work hours by about seven hours per week (Goldin et al., 2024). Consequently, mothers' starting salaries after returning to labor are 7.9% lower than those of non-mothers and 8.6% lower than those of fathers (Correll et al., 2007).

In the same manner, in Sweden, mothers reduce working hours by 14% during the 10 years following their first childbirth. Over the same period, the employment penalty is about 6%, which is relatively modest compared to other countries (Angelov & Lindahl, 2024). Even though Sweden provides substantial support for maternal employment and has moderately small child penalties, women continue to reduce their working hours to prioritize family responsibilities (Angelov & Lindahl, 2024).

3.1. Contemporary Evidence Demonstrating the Presence of Working Hour Differentials

The reduction of working time after becoming mothers has always been existent; however, in previous years, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered the way of balancing work and family responsibilities (Zamarro & Prados, 2021). The increase in remote jobs allowed parents to find a better balance between work and family responsibilities, opening the possibility for mothers to maintain stable work shifts. Nonetheless, the closure of schools and daycares also increased family obligations, since a greater amount of time was needed to take care of children at home (Collins et al., 2021).

Two possible scenarios may emerge from this situation. Firstly, working from home enabled parents to divide household demands more equally, enabling more time for mothers to commit to their jobs, significantly reducing the parental gender pay gap. Empirical studies using Estonian Labour Force Survey data found that the pandemic marginally reduced the gender wage gap in 2020. The raw hourly wage gap dropped from 19.9 percentage points to 18.4 in 2020, and the unexplained wage gap narrowed slightly (Tverdostup, 2022).

Nevertheless, another possible scenario is that fathers do not raise their contributions to household chores, expanding the pay gap, since mothers will be forced to exponentially reduce their working hours to fully take care of all family tasks, causing greater disruptions in their professional lives (Collins et al., 2021). Studies suggest that in the United States, mothers of children aged 1–12 reduced their working time by nearly two hours weekly, and the smallest reduction was for



mothers with children over 17. By contrast, fathers had very few changes in work hours, not falling below 40 hours per week (Hipp & Bünning, 2021). This little reduction is a result of the financial stress of the pandemic, placing fathers as primary earners but exacerbating the wage gap with their partners.

3.2. The Impact of Organizational Policies on the Reduction of Working Hours

In order to increase the percentage of mothers in the workforce, institutions and companies implement parental policies that allow mothers to dedicate more time to their household tasks without jeopardizing their employment and salary. Two of the most broadly applied policies include maternity leave and increased job flexibility.

Maternity leave refers to a paid period of time that women can take out of the workforce after becoming mothers, allowing them to take full-time care of their children during the first weeks of motherhood. However, this policy does not apply equally to all women, since the time off for childcare differs per country; for instance, in the U.S., it is 12 weeks, in the UK 39 weeks, in Canada 18 weeks, and in Mexico 12 weeks (World Population Review, 2025).

In Great Britain, maternity leave policies that provide birth wage replacement and job protection increase maternal employment by 5–7 percentage points (Stearns, 2018). Women with stronger job protection are 30% more likely to return to their employment after maternity leave. In addition, there was a 3–5 percentage point reduction in the probability of exiting the labor world (Stearns, 2018).

From another perspective, maternity leave can exacerbate the economic consequences of the motherhood penalty. When mothers extend their time out of the workforce or decide to return to part-time jobs, their working hours are exponentially reduced, along with their earnings. Consequently, over time, their commitment to their professional career and ability to perform demanding job requirements can be put in question, dismissing their future labor opportunities and hindering their prospects of having increased working time (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024).

Furthermore, multiple institutions opt to increase the flexibility of mothers' working time to enable them to manage work-life responsibilities and minimize conflicts arising from overlapping activity schedules. For instance, Fuller and Hirsh (2019) reveal that temporal flexibility in Canada helps reduce the wage disadvantage faced by mothers, especially those with university qualifications. Flexible jobs help mothers remain employed at higher-wage establishments from which they might otherwise be excluded because of rigid schedules (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019).

Nevertheless, under certain circumstances, this policy may have adverse effects. Once flexibility combines with high expectations, it can result in work overload that is harder to manage for mothers, leading to criticism about their commitment to their jobs and their ability to continue in their position in the future (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024).

While organizational policies have been present for the last few decades, not all women have access to them. For mothers in vulnerable communities and lower socioeconomic status, job flexibility and a large maternity leave are often not an option for those working in hourly, low-wage, or manual jobs that have strict schedules and limited benefits. In addition, they may feel economic pressure to continue in their careers or take even longer shifts to earn enough to fulfill their family's needs (Arif, 2025).

Although organizational policies were designed to increase mothers' participation in the workforce and have been



expanding over the years, it is also observable that they are one of the key factors leading to the parental gender wage gap. Policies that aim to improve the presence of mothers in the workforce must be designed to avoid large backfiring effects that can increase the economic gap or perpetuate negative stereotypes about mothers. Besides, it is fundamental to recognize that women in different social classes or cultures do not have the same access to parental benefits. Consequently, institutions should give due consideration to the needs of mothers across various demographic groups to provide equitable support (Goldin et al., 2024). Addressing this issue will require a comprehensive set of policies that support family-oriented benefits to permit mothers to pursue steady professional trajectories (Torres et al., 2024).

4. Risk of Economic Vulnerability for Mothers

Evidence shows that the motherhood penalty represents a meaningful obstacle for women's career progressions and economic opportunities. Wage differentials and low-paying occupations reduce mothers' incomes and constitute an increased risk of economic vulnerability for the entire family (Strengmann-Kuhn, 2007).

Nevertheless, the economic stability after parenthood is not the same for every family, as it is influenced by a set of demographic variables related to family composition, including the number of children, marital status, and age of the parents (Harkness, 2022). While most mothers face economic penalties in the workforce, low-income, single mothers and teenage mothers are disproportionately affected as they confront larger hardships balancing their work-family responsibilities (Harkness, 2022).

The consequences of the motherhood penalty not only affect women's income but also represent a risk for their families (Torres et al., 2024). When women exit the workforce or reduce their working hours, the income of the family decreases, leaving fathers as the primary or sole financial support. If the father's income is insufficient to economically cover all the family's needs, there is a higher risk of experiencing material hardship, for instance, food insecurity and housing instability. Besides, these earnings losses accumulate over time, affecting long-term financial planning and asset building (Strengmann-Kuhn, 2007).

In low-income families, this situation creates significant challenges, often requiring mothers to continue working after childbirth. Nonetheless, cross-country research reveals that the motherhood penalty is studied to represent a wage gap between 5–10% per child compared to non-mothers (Kahn et al., 2014), meaning that even if women are willing to retain their jobs after having children, wages will potentially be lower and continue to decline as the number of children in the family increases (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2020).

4.1. Single Mothers

Parenthood for most families constitutes a threat to financial security; however, for single mothers, this risk is even higher. In 2019, single mothers represented 30% of families with children in the United States (Grafova et al., 2022). Despite being the second most common family type, economic disadvantages were significant and led to increased exposure to poverty. In 2018, 39% of single-mother families were in a poverty category, while only 8% of two-parent families were in this group (Grafova et al., 2022).

Similarly, through a cross-country examination, Moullin and Harkness (2021) suggest that the poverty risk of single mothers

in Canada, Germany, and Australia is over 20% higher than that of couples with children. In Latin America, the penalties range from 12% in Brazil to 21% in Chile, largely driven by market structures that concentrate mothers in informal and low-income employment sectors, thereby increasing poverty risk (Villanueva & Lin, 2020).

Additionally, following a first birth among single mothers, disposable income experiences a substantial reduction, and economic vulnerability risk increases by approximately 11 percentage points (Harkness, 2022). The motherhood penalty largely contributes to this matter, as women are required to continue in the workforce while facing systematic barriers such as discrimination, stereotypes, or low-paying jobs that in multiple cases are barely enough to fulfill the family necessities (Rubio-Codina & Vaillar, 2017). Due to the economic downturn, mothers tend to reduce their out-of-pocket spending, including maternal care services like emergency room care or office-based care, which in the future may result in greater financial insecurity and jeopardize care services (Harkness, 2022).

4.2. Adolescent Mothers

While single mothers undeniably face more substantial economic barriers due to the motherhood penalty, adolescent mothers are another demographic group that is heavily affected by financial obstacles. The social and economic struggles of teen mothers start with the impossibility of finishing high school for half of them in the U.S., compared to the 90% of non-mothers who manage to get a diploma (Reed, 2022). Comparably, in Chile, teen motherhood is associated with lower rates of completing high school, lower rates of enrolling in technical institutes or universities, and fewer years of education (Berthelon & Kruger, 2017).

For adolescent mothers, building a solid professional path for the future presents diverse difficulties since, for most of them, economic struggles are present even before becoming mothers (Agha & Rind, 2025). It has been studied that long-term family financial struggles shape girls' future perceptions, limiting their view of the opportunities available to them (Reed, 2022).

Additionally, under-resourced communities are also linked to gender stereotypes that lead to an increase in the reliance on male partners and may reduce girls' power in reproductive decision-making (Reed, 2022). After becoming mothers, teen girls face adversities entering the workforce, exiting low-income settings, and establishing stable career paths, compromising their future earnings (Cone et al., 2021).

4.3. Influence of Social Class

There is a clear pattern showing that the risk of economic vulnerability exacerbates in families with few sources of income, low profit, and a context of lack of monetary resources even before becoming parents (Cano, 2022). Consequently, the economic support that a mother receives to raise her children is a fundamental element in determining the financial stability of her family and her opportunities to continue in the workforce (Cano, 2022).

Women in a higher social class commonly get greater access to external support to raise their children, meaning that they can achieve a better balance between work and family responsibilities, leading to a more continuous career trajectory (Looze & Desai, 2020). External support refers to the help of family members, access to caregiving services, and educational opportunities that play a crucial role in raising and looking after children.

On the other hand, low-income, single, or adolescent mothers are not likely to be in a position to afford caregiving services. This means that all work-family tasks need to be taken care of by themselves, often causing a greater struggle to manage time, leading to a lack of dedication in both fields.

Furthermore, women in higher social classes are prone to having a larger professional network, which can include family members, friends, or close people in general who can offer them higher professional opportunities to expand their careers before and after becoming mothers (Yasmin, 2020). This can prevent them from experiencing biased hiring and limited promotional opportunities. However, low-income mothers do not usually have access to such resources. Consequently, they face firsthand the discrimination and stereotyping against mothers in the workforce.

Nevertheless, Kim et al. (2022) reveal that among relatively privileged, urban, educated women in China, motherhood still imposes constraints on career trajectories. Mothers tend to prioritize stability and flexibility in order to accommodate early childcare demands, sacrificing their career satisfaction. Similarly, in countries with higher support for mothers' employment, an unexplained wage penalty of about 4% to 8% per child was present. Even when the candidates for a job position had similar qualifications and mothers were educated, their starting salaries were 2-3% lower than those of non-mothers (Cukrowska-Torzewska & Matysiak, 2020).

Overall, the social class of mothers is fundamental to understanding the risk of financial stability of their family, since higher social classes have access to a larger and stronger network of opportunities to maintain a stable career while their children continue receiving considerable attention (Yasmin, 2020). However, for low-income families, exiting the workforce or obtaining low-paying, part-time jobs represents a significant threat to their financial stability, compromising their future financial security.

Nonetheless, the truth is that the motherhood penalty impacts the professional and economic opportunities of all women regardless of their social status and involves an economic risk for the entire family. Income drops jeopardize the parents' ability to meet household needs and can increase the exposure of economic vulnerability (Strengmann-Kuhn, 2007). Nevertheless, for single and adolescent mothers, the motherhood penalty poses an even greater threat to financial stability to those balancing caregiving and monetary responsibilities (Grafova et al., 2022; Reed, 2022).

A fundamental way to reduce economic vulnerability is through the development of policies that enable mothers to maintain a continuous work trajectory in order to avoid significant income drops post-birth. For instance, affordable childcare services and flexible work arrangements may permit parents to achieve a better balance between work and family duties and prevent them from exiting the workforce (Garcia et al., 2022).

Additionally, policies must be inclusive, aiming to address the necessities of mothers from different social classes. A notable complication to the minimization of the motherhood penalty is that low-income parents face limitations in the amount of paternity benefits they receive. As a result, a crucial step toward wage penalty reduction is ensuring that mothers in low-income or strict-schedule jobs are also supported by paternity benefits, have job protection, and paid maternity leave (Arif, 2025). Recognition of the economic impacts of parenthood is fundamental to developing support systems for mothers that allow them to build a solid career trajectory and be able to look after their family without risking their future opportunities and stability.

5. Long-Term Economic Effects of the Motherhood Penalty

The motherhood penalty has severe immediate economic impacts on mothers. However, these changes in professional career paths do not only affect the first years of motherhood but can extend for decades. Interrupted or unconventional career trajectories often disrupt the process of returning to pre-motherhood earnings and work hours (Goldin et al., 2022). The pursuit of stable occupations is likely to extend for over a decade and can also influence retirement income and wealth accumulation gaps (Hsu, 2021; Möhring, 2018). Understanding the long-term economic effects of motherhood is essential to gain full insight into the effects of the motherhood penalty.

As discussed above in this article, the decrease of income and slower career progression of mothers is heavily influenced by the reduction of working hours women take to fulfill household responsibilities. As children grow up and are able to look after themselves, mothers seek to increase their working hours. Nonetheless, a decade after women become mothers for the first time, their work time is still lower than that of childless women or fathers (Goldin et al., 2022).

In Japan, "working mothers reduce seven hours of work per week during the first years of motherhood, remaining for 10 years at a level around 34 to 35 hours" (Hsu, 2021, p. 24). When a second child is born, women reduce an extra three hours more of work time, and after 10 years, work time is only 0.8 hours per week shorter than their pre-second birth level (Hsu, 2021).

In the U.S., mothers work about 10 fewer hours than fathers do when the youngest children are still in preschool (Goldin et al., 2022). Ten years later, they continue to work about eight fewer hours. When mothers are in their early 50s, they still work six fewer hours than fathers. Nevertheless, compared to childless women, mothers in their 50s usually manage to hold equal job positions (Kahn et al., 2014). It is indicated that as children grow up, mothers can pursue a more stable career trajectory. However, this progression is slow, and even decades later, there is still an existent wage gap with fathers.

As working hours continuously rise over time, mothers' earnings also experience an important increase. In the U.S., college-educated women earn about 12% less than childless women during the first year of motherhood, but as children grow up, the earning gap nearly disappears (Goldin et al., 2022). However, when comparing to fathers' earnings, income gaps are substantial and do not fully cease to exist over time. Mothers have about 43–54% lower earnings than fathers during early motherhood, and decades later, the income gap narrows but does not equal fathers' earnings (Hsu, 2021).

The slow recovery of working hours and earnings impacts the retirement income of women, generating a large gap between mothers and non-mothers, and even a bigger disparity compared to fathers (Madero-Cabib & Fasang, 2016). Such a discrepancy is generally associated with the unconventional professional paths of mothers, driving them to obtain lower earnings over their life course and resulting in lower retirement savings. The amount of retirement income women earn is significantly shaped by a combination of individual and institutional factors, including the number of years in employment, job type and earnings, work hours, career breaks, and pension systems (Möhring, 2018). Nonetheless, typically, the longer women stay out of the workforce, the lower the retirement income tends to be (Dotti Sani & Luppi, 2021).

In some European countries, such as Germany, mothers have 25–40% less pension than childless women (Möhring, 2018). When comparing to fathers, the gap is even larger, going from 40% to 50% less pension income (Möhring, 2018). It has been studied that the pension system is a fundamental element in determining the size of the income gap. In countries such as



Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, introducing strong welfare systems and universal pension systems has resulted in a significant reduction in the income gap (Dotti Sani & Luppi, 2021). This demonstrates that institutional and governmental initiatives are needed to address the unequal retirement income.

The motherhood penalty has clear immediate effects; however, long-term consequences are also present but generally overlooked or even completely ignored. The interrupted professional development shapes women's economic opportunities over the decades following their first birth and extends until retirement (Goldin et al., 2022; Hsu, 2021). Additionally, it is also shown that the economic gap is noticeably larger when compared to fathers than to childless women. Consequently, gender gaps are still present and are more clearly seen when it comes to the motherhood penalty (Amarante & Tenenbaum, 2018).

Aiming for the reduction of the retirement income gap due to inconsistent professional trajectories, retirement policies must acknowledge the valuable contributions of mothers who temporarily exited the workforce. Even when mothers were not formally involved in paid labor, they continued to provide unpaid services, like caregiving and household management, that contributed to the development of society (Amarante & Tenenbaum, 2018). As a result, it is essential that these years of unpaid labor are rewarded as contributory years for retirement purposes, ensuring that women are not economically penalized for nurturing, as it requires ongoing dedication and is equally important but unpaid (Möhring, 2018).

Acknowledging the long-term effects of motherhood is essential for developing support systems that foster a more secure, stable, and quicker career recovery for women, allowing them to maximize their professional skills and avoid being hindered by caregiving responsibilities.

6. Actionable Policies

6.1. Public Childcare

As observed, one of the main obstacles to mothers' professional development is the limited time they have to balance work and family responsibilities. In order to address the issue, a widely effective measure is the public investment in childcare services (World Economic Forum, 2022). Increasing the affordability and accessibility of childcare serves as an effective means to enable parents to dedicate more time to their jobs while ensuring that their children are receiving attentive care and an integral education (International Labour Organization, 2024).

Alongside these elements, affordability is essential for the effectiveness of the policy. Institutions should invest significant resources in building an effective childcare system to lower the costs for families and ensure all children have access without causing financial strain (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Another possible financial approach includes income-based costs, which means that the cost of childcare will be relative to the income of every family (Zoch, 2024). Nevertheless, this alternative must also ensure that the expenses of childcare do not constitute a significant threat to the family's economy.

Beyond these aspects, an essential element of public childcare is making it reachable for mothers in rural or underprivileged areas. Women in vulnerable contexts not only face issues accessing childcare because of the costs, but also due to their living location (Romas, 2025). Consequently, it is crucial to increase the engagement of people in these areas in



the childcare industry by providing employment and economic benefits to make the services available for the majority of women.

6.2. Job Retention Policies

An additional significant threat to mothers' economic opportunities post-birth is the risk of losing their employment and returning to the paid workforce with low-paying, part-time occupations that do not cover the financial necessities of the family.

Aiming to address the problem, job retention policies and anti-discrimination laws are essential to guarantee that mothers can return to their pre-birth job position after maternity leave (Baker & Milligan, 2008). By ensuring this benefit, women are less likely to leave the labor force permanently, they improve their future economic and professional opportunities, and are encouraged to spend the needed time with their families after birth without fear of unemployment (World Economic Forum, 2022).

Anti-discrimination policies play a crucial role in preventing institutions from firing women for their personal decision of becoming mothers and help deal with the risk of job loss due to stereotypes about mothers' work commitment (Torres et al., 2024).

6.3. Pension Care Entitlements and Redistributive Pension Systems

As stated previously in this article, the motherhood penalty has consequences that extend to mothers' retirement income. Accordingly, implementing pension care entitlements and redistributive pension systems is an indispensable step to reduce the income inequality between mothers and other social groups (Möhring, 2018).

To begin with, pension care entitlements treat a certain number of unpaid labor years as contributory years, thereby increasing the retirement income. Consequently, such entitlements would credit mothers for the time they spent out of the workforce providing unpaid caregiving services, which would potentially decrease the impact of interrupted career trajectories throughout their lives and reduce wage differences (Dotti Sani & Luppi, 2021).

Nevertheless, entitlements must be complemented with a redistributive pension system to achieve a more effective balance in the differences in retirement income. This system aims to achieve social fairness by acknowledging that mothers' unpaid labor is equally essential to the development of society as paid labor (Cordova et al., 2022). Additionally, redistributive pensions and entitlements reduce the social class gap, since mothers who worked mainly in low-paying or part-time jobs obtain a greater retirement income that recognizes their work contributions (Möhring, 2018). This support acknowledges the systemic barriers mothers faced in the labor world, which limited their professional development while still valuing their paid and unpaid work.

7. Conclusion

In this article, the key factors contributing to the motherhood penalty were identified. It was assessed that, despite the social validation of becoming a mother, the motherhood penalty is still present in women's lives and has adverse economic and professional effects. Research indicates that the motherhood penalty cannot be attributed to a single cause but arises

from a combination of psychological, social, economic, cultural, and educational factors that lead to long-term setbacks in earnings.

Mothers' caregiving responsibilities, combined with systemic barriers and social stereotypes, limit their career progression and income. A significant reduction in working hours post-birth and biased hiring cause a diminished income that leads to economic vulnerability, which extends through the decades up to retirement income. Additionally, the social class of mothers plays a crucial role in determining the magnitude of the maternity penalty and the labor opportunities of women. As a result, policies to address the issue should be inclusive, attending to the needs of mothers in different social contexts.

The implementation of policies to reduce the motherhood penalty requires an extensive analysis of the contributing factors, for instance, cultural norms, individual behaviors, and economic conditions that lead to the wage gaps. Additionally, the population groups, race, ethnicity, and different types of employment play a crucial role in determining the size of the penalty. Consequently, policies should aim to obtain a holistic understanding of the necessities and complications faced by mothers across diverse demographic groups to provide them with essential support to balance their work-life responsibilities and be able to continue with their professional advancement.

Motherhood is broadly valued by society. Nevertheless, it causes harsh economic consequences for mothers and for the entire family. Reducing the motherhood penalty is essential for achieving true gender equality and unleashing the potential of women in the economy. Closing the parental gender wage gap will promote balance at work, productivity, economic growth, and stronger social cohesion. The motherhood penalty is not only a matter of fairness but a way to increase innovation and resilience in the workforce, creating a more solid and inclusive economy.

7.1. Limitations

This study focuses mainly on the motherhood penalty of middle- and low-class women. The educational level, age at birth of their first child, number of children, marital status, and family-provided financial assistance are not considered, unless it is clearly stated. Whereas this article tries to include different perspectives of the motherhood penalty from multiple countries, the cultural differences, governmental and institutional support, and social views of motherhood play a key role in determining the size of the motherhood penalty for each nation.

7.2. Future Research

Future developments of this line of research could evaluate more inclusive demographics, including educational levels, social status, and number of children, in order to understand in a more straightforward way the factors that contribute to the motherhood penalty. Additionally, it is worth investigating how specific policies have reduced or enlarged the motherhood penalty and the implications of applying them in other nations. Given the prevalence of U.S. data in existing literature, the findings of this article may be broadly generalized to other economies. Future research might opt to incorporate more diverse international data to strengthen the cross-country applicability of the suggested policies.

8. References

Aarntzen, L., Derks, B., van Steenbergen, E., & van der Lippe, T. (2023). When work-family guilt becomes a women's issue: Internalized gender stereotypes predict high guilt in working mothers but low guilt in working fathers. *British Journal of*



Social Psychology, 62(1), 12–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12575>

Agha, N., & Rind, R. D. (2025). How adolescent motherhood is perceived and influenced by sociocultural factors: A sociological qualitative study of Sindh province, Pakistan. *PLOS ONE*, 20(3), Article e0319064. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0319064>

Amarante, V., & Tenenbaum, V. (2018). Caregiver pension credits for women: Recent experience in Uruguay. *Social Policy & Administration*, 52(6), 1252–1274. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12438>

Arif, Y. (2025, January 6). Removing career barriers for working-class women: News. *Warwick Business School*. <https://www.wbs.ac.uk/news/career-barriers-working-class-women/>

Baker, M., & Milligan, K. (2008). How does job-protected maternity leave affect mothers' employment? *Journal of Labor Economics*, 26(4), 655–691. <https://doi.org/10.1086/591955>

Bird, R. B., & Coddling, B. F. (2015). The sexual division of labor. In R. Scott & S. Kosslyn (Eds.), *Emerging trends in the social and behavioral sciences* (pp. 1–16). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0300>

Borelli, J. L., Nelson, S. K., River, L. M., Birken, S. A., & Moss-Racusin, C. (2017). Gender differences in work-family guilt in parents of young children. *Sex Roles*, 76(5–6), 356–368. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0579-0>

Cano, T. (2022). Social class, parenting, and child development: A multidimensional approach. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 77, Article 100648. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2021.100648>

Cobb, H. R., Thomas, C. L., Billeaud, M. L., & Rauvola, R. S. (2024). Confronting the ideal worker myth to better support efforts towards gender equity: Recommendations for a post-pandemic workforce. *Community, Work & Family*, 1–15. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2024.2354832>

Collins, C., Landivar, L. C., Ruppner, L., & Scarborough, W. J. (2021). COVID-19 and the gender gap in work hours. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(S1), 101–112. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12506>

Cone, J. N., Hendrick, C. E., Owotomo, O., Al-Hamoodah, L., & Maslowsky, J. (2021). Socioeconomic well-being in early adulthood among repeat versus one-time teenage mothers. *Youth & Society*, 53(7), 1090–1110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118x19892455>

Cordova, K., Grabka, M. M., & Sierminska, E. (2022). Pension wealth and the gender wealth gap. *European Journal of Population*, 38(4), 755–810. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-022-09631-6>

Correll, S. J., Benard, S., & Paik, I. (2007). Getting a job: Is there a motherhood penalty? *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(5), 1297–1339. <https://doi.org/10.1086/511799>

Cukrowska-Torzewska, E., & Matysiak, A. (2020). The motherhood wage penalty: A meta-analysis. *Social Science Research*, 88–89, Article 102416. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2020.102416>

- De Sarlo, G., Guichot-Muñoz, E., & Hunt-Gómez, C. I. (2023). Sketching motherhood: Maternal representation in contemporary picturebooks: The case of Spain. *Children's Literature in Education*, 54(2), 199–222. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-021-09474-5>
- Dominguez-Folgueras, M., González, M. J., & Lapuerta, I. (2022). The motherhood penalty in Spain: The effect of full- and part-time parental leave on women's earnings. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 29(1), 164–189. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxab046>
- Domínguez-Soto, C., Labajo, V., & Labrador-Fernández, J. (2025). Motherhood enrichment in leadership: Exploring top female executives in Spain. *Career Development International*, 30(2), 160–177. <https://doi.org/10.1108/cdi-10-2023-0383>
- Dotti Sani, G. M., & Luppi, M. (2021). Absence from work after the birth of the first child and mothers' retirement incomes: A comparative analysis of 10 European countries. *Work, Employment and Society*, 35(3), 470–489. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017020937935>
- Fontenay, S., & Tojerow, I. (2020). *Work disability after motherhood and how paternity leave can help* (SSRN Working Paper No. 3704139). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3704139>
- Fuller, S., & Hirsh, C. E. (2019). "Family-friendly" jobs and motherhood pay penalties: The impact of flexible work arrangements across the educational spectrum. *Work and Occupations*, 46(1), 3–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888418771116>
- Garcia, J., Latham-Proenca, R., & Mello, M. (n.d.). *Free childcare and the motherhood penalty: Evidence from São Paulo* [Unpublished manuscript]. University de Santiago de Chile. https://jmbvgarcia.github.io/assets/pdf/Childcare_SP.pdf
- Gender wage gap vs. family wage gap: It's complicated, new study shows. (2025, April 22). American Sociological Association. <https://www.asanet.org/gender-wage-gap-vs-family-wage-gap-its-complicated-new-study-show/>
- Goldin, C., Kerr, S. P., & Olivetti, C. (2022). When the kids grow up: Women's employment and earnings across the family cycle (NBER Working Paper No. 30323). National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w30323>
- Goldin, C., Kerr, S. P., & Olivetti, C. (2024). The other side of the mountain: Women's employment and earnings over the family cycle. *Oxford Open Economics*, 3(Supplement_1), i323–i334. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ooec/odad012>
- Gough, M., & Noonan, M. (2013). A review of the motherhood wage penalty in the United States. *Sociology Compass*, 7(4), 328–342. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12031>
- Grafova, I. B., Monheit, A. C., & Kumar, R. (2022). Income shocks and out-of-pocket health care spending: Implications for single-mother families. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, 43(3), 489–500. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-021-09780-6>
- Halrynjo, S., & Mangset, M. (2024). Motherhood penalty—Beyond bias? From stereotypes to substitutability structures. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxae027>
- Harkness, S. (2022). The accumulation of economic disadvantage: The influence of childbirth and divorce on the income and poverty risk of single mothers. *Demography*, 59(4), 1377–1402. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00703370-10065784>



- Hart, J. K. (2023, January 1). The sexual division of labor. *A Better World Somewhere on Substack*. https://www.academia.edu/112666629/The_Sexual_Division_of_Labor
- Hays, P. A. (1996). Addressing the complexities of culture and gender in counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 74(4), 332–338. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1996.tb01876.x>
- Hipp, L., & Bünning, M. (2021). Parenthood as a driver of increased gender inequality during COVID-19? Exploratory evidence from Germany. *European Societies*, 23(Supplement 1), S658–S673. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1833229>
- Hsu, C.-H. (2021). Parity-specific motherhood penalties: Long-term impacts of childbirth on women's earnings in Japan. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 50, Article 100435. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2021.100435>
- Inside the fight against misogyny and patriarchy in South Korea. (2023, April 5). *The Economist*. <https://www.economist.com/culture/2023/04/05/inside-the-fight-against-misogyny-and-patriarchy-in-south-korea>
- Kahn, J. R., García-Manglano, J., & Bianchi, S. M. (2014). The motherhood penalty at midlife: Long-term effects of children on women's careers. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(1), 56–72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12086>
- Kalabikhina, I. E., Kuznetsova, P. O., & Zhuravleva, S. A. (2024). Size and factors of the motherhood penalty in the labour market: A meta-analysis. *Population and Economics*, 8(2), 178–205. <https://doi.org/10.3897/popecon.8.e121438>
- Kim, S., Zhang, C., Yoshikawa, H., Fong, V. L., Way, N., Chen, X., & Ke, X. (2022). Family duties and job flexibility: Tradeoffs for Chinese urban, educated mothers with toddlers. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 53(1), 25–47. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs-2021-0045>
- Kleven, H., Landais, C., & Leite-Mariante, G. (2025). The child penalty atlas. *Review of Economic Studies*, 92(5), 3174–3207. <https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rdae104>
- Lin, J. (2025). Exploring the motherhood penalty in China: A scoping review of key manifestations and influencing factors. *Communications in Humanities Research*, 60(1), 36–44. <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7064/2025.22408>
- Looze, J., & Desai, S. (2020). *Economic engagement of mothers: Entrepreneurship, employment, and the motherhood wage penalty* (SSRN Working Paper No. 3778859). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3778859>
- Lyttelton, T., Zang, E., & Musick, K. (2022). Telecommuting and gender inequalities in parents' paid and unpaid work before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 84(1), 230–249. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12810>
- Ma, E., Kim, M. (Sunny), Yang, W., Wu, L., & Xu, S. (Tracy). (2022). On the bright side of motherhood—A mixed method enquiry. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 92, Article 103350. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2022.103350>
- Madero-Cabib, I., & Fasang, A. E. (2016). Gendered work–family life courses and financial well-being in retirement. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 27, 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2015.11.003>
- Mary, S. M., Duschinsky, R., Davis, L., Dunnett, S., & Coughlan, B. (2025). Representations of motherhood in the media: A



systematic literature review. *Information, Communication & Society*, 28(1), 169–186.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2024.2348020>

Meng, L., Zhang, Y., & Zou, B. (2023). The motherhood penalty in China: Magnitudes, trends, and the role of grandparenting. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 51(1), 105–132. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jce.2022.10.005>

Mies, M. (1981). *The social origins of the sexual division of labour* [Working paper]. Erasmus University. <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/38083/>

Möhring, K. (2018). Is there a motherhood penalty in retirement income in Europe? The role of lifecourse and institutional characteristics. *Ageing and Society*, 38(12), 2560–2589. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0144686x17000812>

The motherhood penalty: How childcare and paternity leave can reduce the gender pay gap. (2022, May 23). World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/05/reduce-motherhood-penalty-gender-pay-gap/>

Moullin, S., & Harkness, S. (2021). The single motherhood penalty as a gender penalty: Comment on Brady, Finnigan, and Hübgen. *American Journal of Sociology*, 127(2), 621–636. <https://doi.org/10.1086/717886>

Nautet, M., & Piton, C. (2021, February 25). How does parenthood affect the careers of women and men? National Bank of Belgium. <https://www.nbb.be/en/articles/how-does-parenthood-affect-careers-women-and-men-0>

Odenweller, K. G., & Rittenour, C. E. (2017). Stereotypes of stay-at-home and working mothers. *Southern Communication Journal*, 82(2), 57–72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794x.2017.1287214>

Okimoto, T. G., & Heilman, M. E. (2012). The "bad parent" assumption: How gender stereotypes affect reactions to working mothers. *Journal of Social Issues*, 68(4), 704–724. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.2012.01772.x>

Peterson, M. (2024, August 7). Motherhood is hard—Pay penalties make it harder. Institute for Women's Policy Research. <https://iwpr.org/motherhood-is-hard-pay-penalties-make-it-harder/>

Reed, E., Salazar, M., Behar, A. I., Servin, A. E., Ayala, G. X., Silverman, J. G., Rusch, M. L., Zuniga, M. L., & Raj, A. (2022). Economic vulnerability among girls at risk for adolescent pregnancy: Qualitative findings among a clinic sample of girls residing in the U.S.–Mexico border region. *Adolescents*, 2(1), 101–112. <https://doi.org/10.3390/adolescents2010010>

Romas, K. (2025, January 15). How inaccessible childcare affects families and early childhood educators. University of Michigan School of Public Health. <https://sph.umich.edu/pursuit/2025posts/how-inaccessible-childcare-affects-families-and-early-childhood-educators.html>

Schmidt, E., Décieux, F., Zartler, U., & Schnor, C. (2023). What makes a good mother? Two decades of research reflecting social norms of motherhood. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 15(1), 57–77. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12488>

Stearns, J. (2018). *The long-run effects of wage replacement and job protection: Evidence from two maternity leave reforms in Great Britain* (SSRN Working Paper No. 3030808). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3030808>

- Strengmann-Kuhn, W. (2007). Inequalities in earnings and child rearing: What is the gender aspect of poverty? *European Journal of Economics and Economic Policies: Intervention*, 4(1), 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.4337/ejeep.2007.01.12>
- Torres, A. J., Barbosa-Silva, L., Oliveira-Silva, L. C., Miziara, O. P., Guahy, U. C., Fisher, A. N., & Ryan, M. K. (2024). The impact of motherhood on women's career progression: A scoping review of evidence-based interventions. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(4), Article 275. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>
- Tverdstup, M. (2023). COVID-19 and gender gaps in employment, wages, and work hours: Lower inequalities and higher motherhood penalty. *Comparative Economic Studies*, 65(4), 713–735. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41294-022-00198-z>
- Unpaid care work prevents 708 million women from participating in the labour market. (2024, November 4). International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/unpaid-care-work-prevents-708-million-women-participating-labour-market>
- Wegener, C., Jage-D'Aprile, F., & Plumeier, L. (2023). Motherhood in social media: Phenomena and consequences of the professionalization of mothers and their media (self-)representation. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(7), 3222–3238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2022.2108479>
- World Population Review. (2025). Maternity leave by country 2025. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/maternity-leave-by-country>
- Wuestenenk, N., & Begall, K. (2022). The motherhood wage gap and trade-offs between family and work: A test of compensating wage differentials. *Social Science Research*, 106, Article 102726. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2022.102726>
- Yasmin, T., & Asmaul, C. (2022). Familial support as a determinant of women career development: A qualitative study. *Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Legal Studies*, 4, 76–81. <https://doi.org/10.34104/ajssls.020.076087>
- Zamarro, G., & Prados, M. J. (2021). Gender differences in couples' division of childcare, work and mental health during COVID-19. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 19(1), 11–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11150-020-09534-7>
- Zoch, G. (2024). Does the provision of childcare reduce motherhood penalties in job-related training participation? Longitudinal evidence from Germany. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 34(1), 69–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287231217199>

Acknowledgements

The author greatly thanks Dr. Iva Bimpli and Dr. Daryn Howland for their insightful comments and guidance throughout the creation of this paper.

Author Biography

María Andrea Soto Jiménez is a junior year high school student at Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico. She is passionate



about economics and its role in addressing real-world challenges, particularly how economic analysis can be used to improve living standards and strengthen societies.

This interest is reflected in her most recent research paper, which explores the relationship between motherhood and its impact on women's economic opportunities. Beyond research, María Andrea is actively involved in social initiatives and is interested in international debate, including participating in Model UN and OAS (Organization of American States).

She plans to pursue economics at the university level and is committed to promoting the importance of economics as a tool for improving people's lives using the resources available to society.

Mentor Contribution Statement

Dr. Iva Bimpli provided online classes twice a week for a period of six weeks, emphasizing the aspects of effectively carrying out academic research. These lessons were designed to help students understand the essential stages of the research process and to provide clear, structured guidance throughout the project. In addition, Dr. Bimpli reviewed weekly research progress and offered detailed feedback. During a one-on-one session, she discussed the progress in depth and pointed out modifications and suggestions for improving research quality and direction. Finally, she reviewed a final draft of the paper and provided feedback to ensure academic rigor.

Dr. Daryn Howland was present in all online classes advising on best practices for conducting research, explaining the fundamental elements involved in conducting academic research, ensuring that the methodology and structure were clearly understood. She reviewed students' weekly progress and consistently proposed constructive changes and improvements. Additionally, she reviewed a final draft during a one-on-one session and provided recommendations for additional sources to expand and strengthen specific aspects of the research.

