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Daily labor mobility and the timing of entry into motherhood

The influence of female employment on fertility has been widely studied. However, there is a gap in the knowledge of the effect of daily labor mobility on fertility. The paper presents the study of the direct and indirect effects of commuting on the timing of entry into motherhood by comparison the age-specific first-birth rates of female commuters and non-commuters. The effects appear in simultaneous decision making on childbearing and commuting, and effects of cross-municipal flows of population and earnings, and fertility norms diffusion on childbearing. Estimation strategy addresses the problem of potential endogeneity of commuting decision. The study uses individual register data from Sweden for women born in 1974 and residing in the Stockholm area following them from 19 to 32 years old. Results demonstrate that commuting women postpone their first birth. Commuters' first-birth rates are more sensitive to the changes in relative earnings, fertility norms, and the proportion of commuters in the residing population. Swedish family and labor policies significantly improve reconciliation of family and working life in comparison with many European countries. However, the study demonstrates that the policies do not address commuting costs (in a general meaning) in childbearing decision. The results can be used to explain the link between fertility and daily labor mobility in high-income countries with a high proportion of women involved in daily labor mobility.

Keywords: daily labor mobility; the demand for children; the timing of first birth; first-birth rate; relative earnings; Sweden.

JEL classification: J11; J13; J61.

1. Introduction

Daily labor mobility², is a part of working life for 8% of workers in Europe (Eurostat, 2016). Over the past few decades, there has been an increase in the proportion of commuters³ in the labor force in Sweden (Eliasson et al., 2007; Mattisson, 2016). One in four workers were commuters in 2017⁴. Female daily labor mobility has been increasing more rapidly than male (Frändberg Vilhelmson, 2011)⁵.

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² In the paper commuting and daily labor mobility are used as synonyms.

³ A commuter is defined by Statistics Sweden as a person over 15 years of age, working in one municipality while residing in another.

⁴ Author's calculations are based on SCB (2019).

⁵ The studied period covers 1978–2006.