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Evidence from the German Socio-Economic Panel*

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Michael Kühhirt

Abstract Using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel on children born between 2002 and 2006, this study investigates the relationship between mothers' monthly employment sequences in the first five years after birth and their children's body weight around age six. Employment history is measured by different variables derived from sequence analysis that each capture specific aspects such as typical employment patterns (based on additional cluster analysis), complexity, and turbulence. The association between these measures and children's body weight is estimated by inverse probability of treatment weighting of marginal structural models, a method developed in epidemiology to deal with the challenges of estimating the effects of time-varying exposures such as maternal employment. The results indicate that children who experienced very different maternal employment sequences but are similar with regard to background characteristics such as maternal education, household income, and family structure show no substantively or statistically significant disparities on body weight around age six. The study goes beyond the literature by focusing on maternal employment history beyond simple duration measures and by explicitly accounting for time-varying confounders of the relationship between maternal employment and child development.

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