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# Maternal Working Hours and the Well-Being of Adolescent Children: Evidence from British Data

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**Abstract** This study investigates how maternal working hours are related to various outcomes in children aged 11–15 using a sample of mothers and adolescents in the British Household Panel Survey. Research that examines the effects of maternal employment on children has been motivated by the rapid increase of female participation rates in the labour market and increased shares of children living in female-headed or single-mother households. The existing literature on this issue is very limited, mostly based on American data, and provides conflicting results. Fixed effects have been used in the present analysis to control for characteristics of children and mothers that do not vary over time. The results suggest that full-time maternal employment (as opposed to part-time) has little or no effect on the propensity of adolescents to smoke, their life satisfaction, self-esteem, or intention to leave school at 16. These results are stable and consistent across various specifications of the model and different socio-economic status.

**Keywords** Maternal working hours · Adolescent well-being · Children smoking

**JEL Classification** I10 · J13 · J22

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## Introduction and Motivation of the Study

Adolescence is a phase in which very important changes occur in many different areas—physical, psychological and emotional. Teenagers often experiment with risky behaviours, such as smoking tobacco and marijuana and drinking alcohol, and their emotional and psychological well-being is easily affected by their life circumstances (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention 2013; Gruber 2001).

The objective of this study is to understand whether maternal working hours have an effect on the risk of adolescent children smoking, having low levels of psychological well-being, or leaving education at 16, using data from the British Youth Panel. The existing literature on the effects of maternal employment mostly focused on early childhood, and only a very limited number of studies analysed effects on older children. These studies were mostly based on American data and provide conflicting results, with some showing negative effects of maternal hours of work, while others showing no significant difference in children's outcomes (Aughinbaugh and Gittleman 2004).

Research that examined the effects of maternal employment on children was largely motivated by the rapid increase of female participation rates in the labour market. In the UK, women labour market participation rate increased from less than 40 % in the early Sixties, to 50 % in the Nineties and more than 56 % after 2000 (Sorrentino 1983; World Bank 2013) and increased shares of children lived in female-headed or single-mother households. There were nearly 1.9 million lone parents with dependent children in the UK in 2013, a figure which grew steadily from 1.5 million in 1996. (Office of National Statistics 2013).

A great deal of literature in various disciplines has examined the consequences of this phenomenon on changes in child-care arrangements and, more generally, in the