Who you gonna call?: Gender inequality in demand for parental involvement

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Motivation

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  - Partly driven by women doing disproportionate share of child-related tasks (BLS ATUS)

- 35% of moms experience a HH interruption during workday vs. 20% of dads
  - Associated with 9% decline in wages (Cubas et. al. 2021)

- Women earn less than men on similar online tasks, 50% of gap explained by interruptions for women with children (Adams-Prassl forthcoming)

- Substantial implications for labor market, human-capital, and health outcomes

- 58% moms vs. 31% dads Strongly/Somewhat consider child interruptions when choosing job (own survey)
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K-12 Schools: One source of external demands

School is one of many places women experience more demands than men

- School is widespread
- 40% US households (∼50 million) have school-aged children (NCES, 2021)

Survey data:
- Own survey
- N = 300
- "What proportion of the time do you contact the father/mother first if only contacting one parent first?"
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Results

Do principals respond to this request? ▶ One-fifth of principals called at least 1 parent. Are mothers more likely to be contacted? ▶ With no signal of responsiveness, 12% of principals call mother versus 8% call father ⇒ Moms called 1.4 time more than dads. ▶ Proportions almost identical in variations that control for parents' full-time status and desire to be involved.

What are the sources of this inequality? ▶ Decision-makers believe female parents are more responsive/available. ▶ But about half of inequality comes from "other deterrents."

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Gender norms play a role

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  - On right: Proxies for more traditional norms
Signals and who sends the email matter

Our messages change who gets called!

- Female still called 26% when male "very available" (39% if mom sends email)
- Male called only 10% when female "very available" (17% if dad sends email)
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Policy implications

No evidence of gender inequality: mothers face more child-related external demands

▶ Likely a lower bound on total external demand gap

▶ Elder care, mental load & compounding effects

Systems/norms need to change to alleviate this inequality

▶ What can parents do? Choose who makes contact, send signals about availability, share one phone number for child-related calls

▶ What can institutions making demands do? Make contact systems more flexible, move away from "primary contact"

▶ What can workplaces and government policy do? Make workplace and workplace policies more flexible for all

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