

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

Abstract

Mothers face significant challenges in the labor market, especially in comparison with 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 causes an important impact on their economic opportunities and long-term earnings. To analyze this impact, studies focused on a diversity of factors driving motherhood penalty, including parental wage gap, gender equality, “fatherhood premium”, attitudes and behaviors towards mothers, work conditions, government and institutional support. This article seeks to gain understanding of the impacts of motherhood by using secondary data to examine four determinants of motherhood penalty: 1) Stereotypes, 2) Reduction of working hours, 3) Risk of economic vulnerability, 4) Long-term earnings. This review aims to offer an updated perspective of the labor challenges of mothers while arguing 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 understand the hardships of the workforce for mothers and examine the various elements that need to be considered when developing support systems for mothers. (Peterson, 2024)

Key words: motherhood, career progression, wage gap, earnings, challenges.

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Despite advances in gender equality, mothers continue to face major challenges in the workforce. Generally, childless women earn significantly more than mothers with similar qualifications, who, due to motherhood, tend to take career breaks, choose part-time or low salary jobs, face discrimination in the workplace and overall experience disadvantages due to the societal expectations associated with motherhood. These findings are referred to as the “motherhood penalty”. (Peterson, 2024)

Motherhood requires a wide range of compromises, time, prioritization and unpaid work. Consequently, when women become mothers, their focus tends to shift from their professional careers to their families, limiting their economic opportunities and career development. Studies have generally found average wage penalties ranging from 5% to 10% per child among women in their 20s and 30s, (Kahn et al., 2014a) and 24% of women exit the labor market in their first year of motherhood. Five years later, the percentage drops to 17% and after a decade, still 15% are absent. (Kleven et al., n.d.)

Vast research makes it clear that the transition into motherhood plays a crucial role in shaping women’s career paths and economic opportunities. Calegari et al. (Torres et al., 2024) explain that mothers are less likely to adopt leadership positions. They evidence that the barriers faced by women in their career progression are often seen as personal choices rather than systemic problems. However, it is examined that societal expectations, attitudes toward the competency of mothers, time availability, access to childcare and challenges to balance work and personal life are fundamental elements for the severity of motherhood penalty.

Goldin claims that mothers of around 30 to 39 years old dedicate about ten fewer hours for paid work than do fathers when their youngest child is still in pre-school, and around eight fewer when the youngest is predominantly in middle and high school. The reduction of paid labor is driven by a greater need to extend unpaid working time to take care of household tasks, prompting women to spend on average 4.3 hours daily of unpaid labor. Despite the continuous and substantial workload, the reduction of paid working hours and unconventional professional paths is studied to have a crucial role in the career development of mothers, not only at early motherhood, but over the decades. Besides, Halrynjo et al. (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024) examine the significance of stereotypes that lead to an implicit bias against mothers, highlighting that the societal context in different regions shape the views of mothers in the workforce. Additionally, it has also been stated that motherhood impacts long-term earnings, retirement income and economic vulnerability.(Möhring, 2018) However, research on this field is limited in fully capturing the actual effects of motherhood.

This review aims to offer an updated perspective of the labor challenges of mothers emphasizing the significance of stereotypes and reduction of working hours on the

economic opportunities of mothers. Moreover, it focuses on analyzing the influence of the stereotypes and attitudes towards mothers as well as the long-term effects of motherhood penalty, a part of the literature which is not vastly studied but is equally important to understand the true impact of motherhood. 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.

The rest of the paper is divided into four sections and is structured as follows: Section 1 analyses the influence of stereotypes, attitudes, feelings and behavior towards 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 paths. Section 4 presents long-term economic effects of the motherhood penalty. The final section provides the conclusions and limitations of the review.

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

During the last decades, views and attitudes towards 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 built assumptions about mothers in the workforce that lead to biased hiring and limited promotional opportunities.

“Stereotypes are overgeneralized and exaggerated *pictures in our head* associated with social groups' characteristics and behaviors.” (*Stereotypes of Stay-at-Home and Working Mothers: Southern Communication Journal: Vol 82, No 2, n.d.*) 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 arises from the historical distribution of responsibilities, associating men with hunting and women with gathering.(Bird & Coddling, 2015) The partition of tasks was prompted 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 for 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 due to the fact that they give birth and breastfed, classifying them as the primary caregivers, while fathers are not "naturally" seen as responsible for care, but as providers. All the labor that mothers put into childcare is considered as 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.(Mies, 1981) 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 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)

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 which tend to see stay-at-home mothers as primary caregivers and men as financial providers. Based on the evidence that women often take this role, they are commonly seen as warm, caring and loving but not qualified for high rank job positions, while businesswomen and nonmothers are seen as more competent for leadership roles but lacking motherly qualities. Mothers have 10% lower competency ratings than non-mothers and are considered 12.1 percentage points less committed to their jobs than women without children. 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 a 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 of both areas.(*Stereotypes of Stay-at-Home and Working Mothers: Southern Communication Journal: Vol 82, No 2, n.d.*) 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.(*The "Bad Parent" Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers | Request PDF, n.d.*)

On account of the social expectations of motherhood, working mothers are often pressured to choose between being an "ideal mother" or "ideal worker". An ideal mother is the one who practices intensive mothering, dedicating all her time and effort to

family.(Hays, 1996) While an ideal worker is the one who is fully committed to their occupation, available to work long hours and prioritizing work above everything else.(Cobb et al., n.d.) For mothers, achieving either of the standards is significantly challenging as family obligations are related with 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.(The “Bad Parent” Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers | Request PDF, n.d.)

Nevertheless, assumptions of 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. Mothers with traditional gender prejudices are driven to feel more guilty than fathers when work and family responsibilities overlap.(When Work–Family Guilt Becomes a Women's Issue: Internalized Gender Stereotypes Predict High Guilt in Working Mothers but Low Guilt in Working Fathers - Aarntzen - 2023 - British Journal of Social Psychology - Wiley Online Library, n.d.) 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.(When Work–Family Guilt Becomes a Women's Issue: Internalized Gender Stereotypes Predict High Guilt in Working Mothers but Low Guilt in Working Fathers - Aarntzen - 2023 - British Journal of Social Psychology - Wiley Online Library, n.d.)

Misconceptions surrounding mothers in the workplace play a crucial role in women career progression and economic opportunities after they become mothers. The attitudes, beliefs and behaviors towards mothers lead to biased hiring practices, reduced promotion opportunities, career breaks, and exclusion from leadership roles.(Torres et al., 2024, p. 4) These assumptions come from the historical, social and internalized views of motherhood and can vary depending on the culture and the gender equality advances that have taken place.(Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024) However, in general, motherhood significantly changes the professional path of women and can lead to long-term economic consequences. Understanding the role of stereotypes is fundamental to address the systemic barriers that mothers face and rebuild the social perspectives of motherhood.

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. 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 at early parenthood but also to limited labor opportunities in the future.(Goldin et al., 2024) This indicates that reduction of working hours to take care of household responsibilities is a fundamental element that leads to gender parental wage gaps and 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.(*Telecommuting and Gender Inequalities in Parents' Paid and Unpaid Work before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, n.d.) 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 literature explain this phenomenon. First the *theory of compensating differentials* claims that mothers usually choose occupations that allow better balance between work and childcare with parent adjustable characteristics such as flexible hours, few demands for travel and family-oriented benefits. Secondly, the *effort theory* suggests that mothers invest less energy into work than women without children as they commit a greater effort into unpaid work such as family obligations.(Kalabikhina et al., 2024)

Although choosing flexible, low intensity jobs is useful to fulfill parental duties, it drastically changes the professional path of women, decreasing income, limiting promotional opportunities and expanding parental wage gap.(Peterson, 2024) Compared to fathers, women whose youngest child is between 0 and 2 years old work about 3.5 fewer weeks a year, when kids are still in pre-school mothers work about ten 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 a week.(Goldin et al., 2024) Consequently, mothers' starting salaries after returning to labor is 7.9% lower than non-mothers and 8.6% lower than fathers.(Correll et al., 2007)

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.(Collins et al., 2021) The increase of 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 the 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 facilitated parents to divide more equally the household demands, enabling more time

for mothers to commit to their jobs, significantly reducing the parental gender pay gap. Nevertheless, if fathers do not raise their contributions to household chores, the pandemic can expand 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 life.(Collins et al., 2021) Studies suggest that mothers of children aged 1-12 reduced their working time for nearly 2 hours weekly and the smallest reduction was for mothers with children over 17. By contrast fathers had very few changes in the work hours, not falling below 40 hours per week. 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.(Hipp & Bünning, 2021)

Although reducing office hours is one of the most common measures women take after becoming mothers to fulfill their family responsibilities, it is also evident that it is one of the key factors leading to the parental gender wage gap. This adjustment in working time brings immediate and long-term consequences as mothers' income decreases and career path changes, limiting future opportunities.(Goldin et al., 2024) Addressing this issue will require a vast set of policies that support family oriented benefits to permit mothers to have steady professional trajectories.(Torres et al., 2024)

Risk of Economic Vulnerability for Mothers

Evidence has shown that the motherhood penalty represents a meaningful obstacle for women's career progressions and economic opportunities. Wage differentials and low payment occupations reduce mothers' income 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 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 motherhood penalty do not only affect women's income, but represent a risk for their families. When women exit the workforce or reduce their working hours, the income of the family decreases, leaving fathers as the primary or only financial support. If the father's income is not enough to economically cover all the family 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 scenario poses considerable difficulties, prompting mothers to remain employed after giving birth. Nonetheless, the motherhood penalty is studied to represent a wage gap between 5-10% per child compared to non-mothers (Kahn et al., 2014a) meaning that even if women are willing to retain one's job 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)

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. Despite being the second most common family, economic disadvantages are significant and lead to an 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) 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) Motherhood penalty is a crucial contributor to this matter as women are required to continue in the workforce, facing systematic challenges such as discrimination, stereotypes or low paying jobs that in multiple cases are barely enough to fulfill the family necessities. Due to the economic downturn, mothers tend to reduce their out-of-pocket spending including maternal care services like emergency room care or office base care which in the future may result in greater financial insecurity and jeopardize care services.(Grafova et al., 2022)

While single mothers evidently face stronger economic barriers due to the motherhood penalty, adolescent mothers are another demographic group which is heavily affected by financial obstacles. The social and economic struggles of teen moms start since the impossibility of finishing high-school for half of them in the USA, compared to the 90% of non-mothers who manage to get a diploma.(*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*, n.d.) For adolescent mothers, building a solid professional path for the future presents diverse difficulties since, for most of them, economic struggles have been present even before becoming mothers. It has been studied that long-term family financial struggles shape girls' future perceptions, limiting their view of the opportunities available to them. 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 on reproductive decision-making.(*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*, n.d.) 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)

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 economic resources even before becoming parents.(Cano, 2022) Consequently, the economic support that a mother receives to raise her children is a fundamental element to

determine 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. When mothers are part of a higher social class, they are more likely to be in a position where it is possible to afford caregiving services, for instance, babysitters, chefs or drivers to offer assistance in taking care of their children. As a result, mothers can accomplish better time management to fulfill their family and household chores, meaning that they can thrive in both aspects and achieve a stable family economy.(Cano, 2022; Looze & Desai, 2020) On the other hand, low-income, single or adolescent mothers are not likely to be in a position to afford caregiving services, which means that all work-family tasks need to be taken care of by themselves, often causing a greater struggle to manage time, driving to a lack of dedication in both fields.

Furthermore, women in higher social classes are prone to have a larger professional network, this can include family members, friends or close people in general that can offer them higher professional opportunities to expand their career before and after becoming mothers.(“Familial Support as a Determinant of Women Career Development,” 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.

Evidently, the social class of mothers is fundamental to understand 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.(“Familial Support as a Determinant of Women Career Development,” 2020) However, for low-income families, exiting the workforce or obtaining low-paying, part time jobs represent a significant threat to their financial stability, compromising their future financial security.

There is clear evidence that motherhood penalty does not only involve an economic risk for mothers but 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 moms, motherhood penalty represent even a greater threat to financial stability as they are in need to fulfill caregiving and monetary responsibilities.(Grafova et al., 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*, n.d.) Besides, the social class of mothers plays a crucial role in determining the career opportunities and

financial stability of the family, since higher class women are able to afford caregiving services that help them manage time between work-family tasks, while for low-income mothers, this may not usually be an opportunity. Recognition of the economic impacts of parenthood is fundamental to develop 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.

Long-term Economic Effects of 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 usually interfere with the process of returning to pre-motherhood earnings and work hours.(Goldin et al., n.d.) 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 fundamental to gain full insight of the real 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.(Goldin et al., n.d.) 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 childless women or fathers.(Goldin et al., n.d.) In Japan, “working mothers reduced 7 hours of work per week during the first years of motherhood, remaining for ten years at a level around 34 to 35 hours”(pag 24).(Hsu, 2021) When a second child was born, women reduced extra 3 hours more of work time, and after 10 years, work time was only 0.8 hours per week shorter than their pre-second birth level.(Hsu, 2021) In the USA mothers work about ten fewer hours than fathers do when the youngest children are still in pre-school, ten years later, they continue to work about eight fewer hours, and when mothers are in their early fifties, they still work six fewer hours than fathers. Of that difference around 4 hours are due to the fact that generally women work less than men.(Goldin et al., n.d.) Nevertheless, compared to childless women, mothers in their fifties usually manage to have equal job positions as childless women.(Kahn et al., 2014b) It is evident 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 USA, 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., n.d.) 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.(Möhring, 2018) Such 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 pensions 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. When comparing to fathers the gap is even larger, going from 40% to 50% of less pension incomes.(Möhring, 2018) It has been studied that the pensions system is a fundamental element to determine the size of the income gap. In countries such as Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, introducing strong welfare systems and universal pensions systems have 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.

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 extend until retirement.(Goldin et al., n.d.; Hsu, 2021) Additionally, it is also evident 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.(Goldin et al., n.d.) 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.

Conclusion

In this article, the key factors of motherhood penalty were identified. It was analyzed 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. Evidence has shown 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 cause long-term setbacks in earnings.

In general, most of the decisions taken by mothers to fulfill caregiving tasks, such as exiting the workforce, are taken as personal decisions, nevertheless, there are systemic barriers that constrain women from finding a balance between work and family duties.(Torres et al., 2024) Stereotypes are a fundamental contributor to this matter. Implicit bias against mothers in the labor world was observed, this results from a common association of mothers with values such as warmth, but thinking of them as incompetent for high ranking positions.(Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024) Besides, historically, mothers have been seen as the primary caregivers and their unpaid work is undervalued in capitalist societies, linking them with a lack of time availability and commitment to their jobs, motivating biased hiring and diminishing the likelihood of promotional opportunities.(Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024; Torres et al., 2024) At the same time, mothers who decide to continue in the work force are likely to be seen as ineffective parents as they do not dedicate their full time to household tasks.(*The “Bad Parent” Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers* | Request PDF, n.d.)

The need to take care of family responsibilities often results in dropping out of the workforce or significantly reducing the working hours during the first years of motherhood. Mothers in the USA work about 3.5 weeks less a year than fathers when kids are still in preschool.(Goldin et al., n.d.) Over time, working shifts experience an increase but do not equal fathers' work time. Fewer working hours, taking part-time or low paying jobs with more flexible schedules directly impact mothers' income and contribute to an unconventional professional path that results in future difficulties to stabilize their economy.(Hsu, 2021) During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clearly evidenced that when parents divide the caregiving responsibilities equally, mothers can continue a more consistent career path and narrow the income gap. However, when all tasks are left to women, continuing in the workforce is a formidable task.(Collins et al., 2021; Hipp & Bünning, 2021)

As a result of the reduction of income, mothers and their families suffer from a higher risk of economic vulnerability, as fathers are left as the primary economic support and their income must fulfill all family needs.(Strengmann-Kuhn, 2007) The risk of financial instability is even greater for single and adolescent mothers. First, single mothers are required to continue in the workforce to cover their children's economic necessities, however balancing work-family tasks is demanding since the necessity of flexible schedules and biased hiring can get them to accept low-wage occupations that barely pay enough for their needs.(Grafova et al., 2022) Furthermore, adolescent mothers are most generally associated with economically vulnerable contexts even prior to motherhood. Consequently, they face even greater hardships obtaining high paying jobs since half of them do not get a high school diploma or have valuable previous work experience. (*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*, n.d.)

Additionally, the social class of mothers plays a significant role in determining the risk of financial stability and career prospects. Women in a high social class are more likely to afford caregiving services as a support to raise their children while continuing to focus on their professional development. Besides, their large social network may facilitate their hiring and promotional opportunities before and after becoming mothers, preventing them from experiencing stereotyping.

Finally, the motherhood penalty has effects that can last for decades. The reduction of working hours, lower earnings and economic vulnerability is still present when mothers are reaching their fifties.(Goldin et al., n.d.; Hsu, 2021) Over time, mothers' economies tend to get similar to the ones of childless women, nonetheless, compared to fathers the gap continues to be significant.(Goldin et al., n.d.) This discrepancy is more noticeable in the retirement income since mothers generally have 40-50% less pension income than fathers and 25-40% less than childless women.(Dotti Sani & Luppi, 2021; Möhring, 2018) Although most of these long-term consequences are overlooked, they are still fundamental for understanding the complete effect of the motherhood penalty.

Motherhood is largely valued by society. Nevertheless, it causes harsh economic consequences for mothers and for the whole family. Acknowledging these consequences is crucial to build support systems for mothers that can allow them to continue stable career paths while taking care of their children and avoid putting them in a situation where they have to choose between committing their full time and energy to their families or to their professional development.

Limitations

This study focuses mainly on the motherhood penalty of middle and low class women. The educational level, age of the birth of their first children, number of children, marital status and family-provided financial assistance is not considered, unless it is clearly stated. Whereas this article tries to include different perspectives of 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 motherhood penalty for every nation.

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

Data September 14th

1. Originality & Significance

Strengths: The paper brings together several dimensions of the motherhood penalty (stereotypes, working hours, economic vulnerability, long-term effects) and highlights intersections with class, culture, and institutional support. This integrative approach is valuable.

Suggestions: To increase originality, consider explicitly identifying gaps in previous reviews—e.g., “While prior studies focus on wage gaps, few explore the intersection of class and institutional pension systems.” Explicitly framing how your review adds something *new* will strengthen significance.

2. Clarity & Structure

Strengths: The article provides a clear roadmap in the abstract and introduction, outlining the four determinants and section structure.

Suggestions: Some paragraphs are long and contain multiple points. Break them into smaller sections to enhance readability (e.g., the long historical stereotypes section). Consider adding subheadings within sections for complex topics (e.g., within “Risk of Economic Vulnerability,” create subheadings for “Single Mothers,” “Teen Mothers,” and “Social Class Differences”). In the conclusion, briefly restate policy implications or recommendations to tie findings back to real-world significance.

3. Use of Evidence & Research Methods

Strengths: The review cites a broad range of studies (e.g., Correll et al., Goldin et al., Möhring) and includes quantitative evidence such as percentage wage penalties and hours reduced.

Suggestions: Clarify criteria for selecting studies (e.g., “This review includes peer-reviewed research from 2010–2024 focusing on OECD countries...”). Stating selection criteria or limits strengthens methodological transparency. Double-check some in-text references with “n.d.” or incomplete details (e.g., “Goldin et al., n.d.”) and provide complete bibliographic information. Where percentages are used (e.g., “5–10% wage gap”), cite exact sources directly after the statistic to avoid ambiguity. Also, the geographical location of the studies could add on understanding which mothers are being spoken about.

4. Engagement with Literature

Strengths: The paper engages with foundational works (e.g., Hays' *intensive mothering* concept) and contemporary analyses (COVID-19 impacts, telecommuting studies). The historical framing (Bird & Coddling; Mies) adds depth.

Suggestions: Explicitly compare and contrast differing scholarly positions. For example, do some studies argue that flexible work options close gaps while others find they exacerbate them? Highlighting tensions strengthens critical engagement. Consider including recent global or non-Western perspectives to show awareness of diversity in cultural contexts beyond the U.S. and Europe.

5. Grammar & Language

Strengths: The writing is largely professional and academic in tone. Key terms are defined (e.g., "motherhood penalty").

Suggestions: Minor issues include occasional repetition ("It was analyzed that...", "It is evident that...") and slightly awkward phrasing ("prompting women to spend on average 4.3 hours daily of unpaid labor" could be "prompting women to devote an average of 4.3 unpaid hours daily"). Use consistent tense (past or present) when summarizing studies—mixing "has been studied" and "is studied" can disrupt flow. A light proofread for punctuation (e.g., commas after introductory clauses) will improve polish.

Final. Overall Feedback & Encouragement

Recommended for publication while addressing some of the suggestions here

- Make explicit what is *new* about your review compared to prior work
- Improve readability by breaking up long paragraphs and adding subheadings
- Strengthen methodological transparency and citation completeness
- Deepen engagement with contrasting views and broaden cultural scope.
- Perform a careful language and style check for consistency and flow.

With these revisions, the paper will be more impactful and clearer for readers, while maintaining a professional academic tone.

Dr Monica Mastrantonio Martins

Feedback on the Research Article: The Motherhood Penalty

- Revise and resubmit (major revisions needed, acceptance not guaranteed)

I want to start by commending you as an evolving scholar for taking on such an important topic. The motherhood penalty is not only a pressing issue in the labor market but also a matter that affects the broader structure of families, communities, and opportunities for gender equity. Your effort to highlight the challenges working mothers face shows both thoughtfulness and commitment to advancing conversations that matter.

That said, there are ways to strengthen your paper further. The literature review you've assembled does a good job of presenting existing studies, but you could make clearer what your paper specifically offers in terms of research gaps. Framing your review around the unique angle or insights will help readers understand the contribution of your work. I have also given in text comments within your paper

Addressing few areas or your established categories around policy measure would add depth and demonstrate how policies must be tailored rather than one-size-fits-all. Similarly, more could be said about how workplace culture and organizational policies (like parental leave and flexible scheduling) interact with larger systemic inequalities.

You mention few limitations, which are valuable for transparency, but it may help to suggest how future researchers can expand on it.

Your conclusion feels a bit repetitive. Instead of restating earlier arguments, I suggest condensing it and using the space to emphasize actionable policy measures. These could include expanding affordable childcare, enforcing pay transparency, incentivizing paternity leave, and normalizing flexible work arrangements. Framing these measures as part of a broader social agenda for gender equity will give your conclusion more power. I have also added current resource links.

Lastly, I encourage you to consider the role of media briefly in setting cultural and corporate expectations. Media representation can either reinforce traditional gender norms or dismantle them by showing diverse models of parenthood and success. Highlighting this could add a cultural dimension to your policy recommendations.

Overall, this is a strong effort on a critical topic. With sharper focus, clearer policy recommendations, it will contribute greater depth.

Here are few latest resources and data from International Labor and World Economic Forum

<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/unpaid-care-work-prevents-708-million-women-participating-labour-market>

<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/05/reduce-motherhood-penalty-gender-pay-gap/>

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

Abstract

Mothers face significant challenges in the labor market, especially in comparison with 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 causes an important impact on their economic opportunities and long-term earnings. To analyze this impact, studies focused on a diversity of factors driving motherhood penalty, including parental wage gap, gender equality, “fatherhood premium”, attitudes and behaviors towards mothers, work conditions, government and institutional support. This article seeks to gain understanding of the impacts of motherhood by using secondary data to examine four determinants of motherhood penalty: 1) Stereotypes, 2) Reduction of working hours, 3) Risk of economic vulnerability, 4) Long-term earnings. This review aims to offer an updated perspective of the labor challenges of mothers while arguing 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 understand the hardships of the workforce for mothers and examine the various elements that need to be considered when developing support systems for mothers. (Peterson, 2024)

Key words: motherhood, career progression, wage gap, earnings, challenges.

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

Despite advances in gender equality, mothers continue to face major challenges in the workforce. Generally, childless women earn significantly more than mothers with similar qualifications, who, due to motherhood, tend to take career breaks, choose part-time or low salary jobs, face discrimination in the workplace and overall experience disadvantages due to the societal expectations associated with motherhood. These findings are referred to as the “motherhood penalty”. (Peterson, 2024)

Motherhood requires a wide range of compromises, time, prioritization and unpaid work. Consequently, when women become mothers, their focus tends to shift from their professional careers to their families, limiting their economic opportunities and career development. Studies have generally found average wage penalties ranging from 5% to 10% per child among women in their 20s and 30s, (Kahn et al., 2014a) and 24% of women exit the labor market in their first year of motherhood. Five years later, the percentage drops to 17% and after a decade, still 15% are absent. (Kleven et al., n.d.)

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<https://www.asanet.org/gender-wage-gap-vs-family-wage-gap-its-complicated-new-study-show/>

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

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Goldin claims that mothers of around 30 to 39 years old dedicate about ten fewer hours for paid work than do fathers when their youngest child is still in pre-school, and around eight fewer when the youngest is predominantly in middle and high school. The reduction of paid labor is driven by a greater need to extend unpaid working time to take care of household tasks, prompting women to spend on average 4.3 hours daily of unpaid labor. Despite the continuous and substantial workload, the reduction of paid working hours and unconventional professional paths is studied to have a crucial role in the career development of mothers, not only at early motherhood, but over the decades. Besides, Halrynjo et al. (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024) examine the significance of stereotypes that lead to an implicit bias against mothers, highlighting that the societal context in different regions shape the views of mothers in the workforce. Additionally, it has also been stated that motherhood impacts long-term earnings, retirement income and economic vulnerability. (Möhring, 2018) However, research on this field is limited in fully capturing the actual effects of motherhood.

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This review aims to offer an updated perspective of the labor challenges of mothers emphasizing the significance of stereotypes and reduction of working hours on the economic opportunities of mothers. Moreover, it focuses on analyzing the influence of the stereotypes and attitudes towards mothers as well as the long-term effects of motherhood penalty, a part of the literature which is not vastly studied but is equally important to understand the true impact of motherhood. 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.

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The rest of the paper is divided into four sections and is structured as follows: Section 1 analyses the influence of stereotypes, attitudes, feelings and behavior towards 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 paths. Section 4 presents long-term economic effects of the motherhood penalty. The final section provides the conclusions and limitations of the review.

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

During the last decades, views and attitudes towards 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 built assumptions about mothers in the workforce that lead to biased hiring and limited promotional opportunities.

“Stereotypes are overgeneralized and exaggerated *pictures in our head* associated with social groups' characteristics and behaviors.” (*Stereotypes of Stay-at-Home and Working Mothers: Southern Communication Journal: Vol 82, No 2, n.d.*) 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 arises from the historical distribution of responsibilities, associating men with hunting and women with gathering.(Bird & Coddling, 2015) The partition of tasks was prompted 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 for 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 due to the fact that they give birth and breastfed, classifying them as the primary caregivers, while fathers are not “naturally” seen as responsible for care, but as providers. All the labor that mothers put into childcare is considered as 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.(Mies, 1981) 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 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)

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 which tend to see stay-at-home mothers as primary caregivers and men as financial providers. Based on the evidence that women often take this role, they are commonly seen as warm, caring and loving but not qualified for high rank job positions, while businesswomen and nonmothers are seen as more competent for leadership roles but lacking motherly qualities. Mothers have 10% lower competency ratings than non-mothers and are considered 12.1 percentage points less committed to their jobs than women without children. 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 a 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 of both areas.(*Stereotypes of Stay-at-Home and Working Mothers: Southern Communication Journal: Vol 82, No 2*, n.d.) 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.(*The “Bad Parent” Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers* | Request PDF, n.d.)

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On account of the social expectations of motherhood, working mothers are often pressured to choose between being an “ideal mother” or “ideal worker”. An ideal mother is the one who practices intensive mothering, dedicating all her time and effort to family.(Hays, 1996) While an ideal worker is the one who is fully committed to their occupation, available to work long hours and prioritizing work above everything else.(Cobb et al., n.d.) For mothers, achieving either of the standards is significantly challenging as family obligations are related with 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.(*The “Bad Parent” Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers* | Request PDF, n.d.)

Nevertheless, assumptions of 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. Mothers with traditional gender prejudices are driven to feel more guilty than fathers when work and family responsibilities overlap.(*When Work–Family Guilt Becomes a Women’s Issue: Internalized Gender Stereotypes Predict High Guilt in Working Mothers but Low Guilt in Working Fathers* - Aarntzen - 2023 - *British Journal of Social Psychology* - Wiley Online Library, n.d.) 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. (*When Work–Family Guilt Becomes a Women’s Issue: Internalized Gender Stereotypes Predict High Guilt in Working Mothers but Low Guilt in Working Fathers* - Aarntzen - 2023 - *British Journal of Social Psychology* - Wiley Online Library, n.d.)

Misconceptions surrounding mothers in the workplace play a crucial role in women career progression and economic opportunities after they become mothers. The attitudes, beliefs and behaviors towards mothers lead to biased hiring practices, reduced promotion opportunities, career breaks, and exclusion from leadership roles. (Torres et al., 2024, p. 4) These assumptions come from the historical, social and internalized views of motherhood and can vary depending on the culture and the gender equality advances that have taken place. (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024) However, in general, motherhood significantly changes the professional path of women and can lead to long-term economic consequences. Understanding the role of stereotypes is fundamental to address the systemic barriers that mothers face and rebuild the social perspectives of motherhood.

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. 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 at early parenthood but also to limited labor opportunities in the future. (Goldin et al., 2024) This indicates that reduction of working hours to take care of household responsibilities is a fundamental element that leads to gender parental wage gaps and 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. (*Telecommuting and Gender Inequalities in Parents’ Paid and Unpaid Work before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, n.d.) 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 literature explain this phenomenon. First the *theory of compensating differentials* claims that mothers usually choose occupations that allow better balance between work and childcare with parent adjustable characteristics such as flexible hours, few demands for travel and family-oriented benefits. Secondly, the *effort theory* suggests that mothers invest less energy into work than women without children as they commit a greater effort into unpaid work such as family obligations. (Kalabikhina et al., 2024)

Although choosing flexible, low intensity jobs is useful to fulfill parental duties, it drastically changes the professional path of women, decreasing income, limiting promotional opportunities and expanding parental wage gap.(Peterson, 2024) Compared to fathers, women whose youngest child is between 0 and 2 years old work about 3.5 fewer weeks a year, when kids are still in pre-school mothers work about ten 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 a week.(Goldin et al., 2024) Consequently, mothers' starting salaries after returning to labor is 7.9% lower than non-mothers and 8.6% lower than fathers.(Correll et al., 2007)

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.(Collins et al., 2021) The increase of 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 the 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 facilitated parents to divide more equally the household demands, enabling more time for mothers to commit to their jobs, significantly reducing the parental gender pay gap. Nevertheless, if fathers do not raise their contributions to household chores, the pandemic can expand 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 life.(Collins et al., 2021) Studies suggest that mothers of children aged 1-12 reduced their working time for nearly 2 hours weekly and the smallest reduction was for mothers with children over 17. By contrast fathers had very few changes in the work hours, not falling below 40 hours per week. 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.(Hipp & Bünning, 2021)

Although reducing office hours is one of the most common measures women take after becoming mothers to fulfill their family responsibilities, it is also evident that it is one of the key factors leading to the parental gender wage gap. This adjustment in working time brings immediate and long-term consequences as mothers' income decreases and career path changes, limiting future opportunities.(Goldin et al., 2024) Addressing this issue will require a vast set of policies that support family oriented benefits to permit mothers to have steady professional trajectories.(Torres et al., 2024)

Risk of Economic Vulnerability for Mothers

Evidence has shown that the motherhood penalty represents a meaningful obstacle for women's career progressions and economic opportunities. Wage differentials and low payment occupations reduce mothers' income 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

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composition, including 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 motherhood penalty do not only affect women's income, but represent a risk for their families. When women exit the workforce or reduce their working hours, the income of the family decreases, leaving fathers as the primary or only financial support. If the father's income is not enough to economically cover all the family 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 scenario poses considerable difficulties, prompting mothers to remain employed after giving birth. Nonetheless, the motherhood penalty is studied to represent a wage gap between 5-10% per child compared to non-mothers (Kahn et al., 2014a) meaning that even if women are willing to retain one's job 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)

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. Despite being the second most common family, economic disadvantages are significant and lead to an 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) 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) Motherhood penalty is a crucial contributor to this matter as women are required to continue in the workforce, facing systematic challenges such as discrimination, stereotypes or low paying jobs that in multiple cases are barely enough to fulfill the family necessities. Due to the economic downturn, mothers tend to reduce their out-of-pocket spending including maternal care services like emergency room care or office base care which in the future may result in greater financial insecurity and jeopardize care services.(Grafova et al., 2022)

While single mothers evidently face stronger economic barriers due to the motherhood penalty, adolescent mothers are another demographic group which is heavily affected by financial obstacles. The social and economic struggles of teen moms start since the impossibility of finishing high-school for half of them in the USA, compared to the 90% of non-mothers who manage to get a diploma.(*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*, n.d.) For adolescent mothers, building a solid professional path for the future presents diverse difficulties since, for most of them, economic struggles have been present even before becoming mothers. It has been studied

that long-term family financial struggles shape girls' future perceptions, limiting their view of the opportunities available to them. 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 on reproductive decision-making. (*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*, n.d.) 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)

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 economic resources even before becoming parents. (Cano, 2022) Consequently, the economic support that a mother receives to raise her children is a fundamental element to determine 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. When mothers are part of a higher social class, they are more likely to be in a position where it is possible to afford caregiving services, for instance, babysitters, chefs or drivers to offer assistance in taking care of their children. As a result, mothers can accomplish better time management to fulfill their family and household chores, meaning that they can thrive in both aspects and achieve a stable family economy. (Cano, 2022; Looze & Desai, 2020) On the other hand, low-income, single or adolescent mothers are not likely to be in a position to afford caregiving services, which means that all work-family tasks need to be taken care of by themselves, often causing a greater struggle to manage time, driving to a lack of dedication in both fields.

Furthermore, women in higher social classes are prone to have a larger professional network, this can include family members, friends or close people in general that can offer them higher professional opportunities to expand their career before and after becoming mothers. ("Familial Support as a Determinant of Women Career Development," 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.

Evidently, the social class of mothers is fundamental to understand 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. ("Familial Support as a Determinant of Women Career Development," 2020) However, for low-income families,

exiting the workforce or obtaining low-paying, part time jobs represent a significant threat to their financial stability, compromising their future financial security.

There is clear evidence that motherhood penalty does not only involve an economic risk for mothers but 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 moms, motherhood penalty represent even a greater threat to financial stability as they are in need to fulfill caregiving and monetary responsibilities.(Grafova et al., 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*, n.d.) Besides, the social class of mothers plays a crucial role in determining the career opportunities and financial stability of the family, since higher class women are able to afford caregiving services that help them manage time between work-family tasks, while for low-income mothers, this may not usually be an opportunity. Recognition of the economic impacts of parenthood is fundamental to develop 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.

Long-term Economic Effects of 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 usually interfere with the process of returning to pre-motherhood earnings and work hours.(Goldin et al., n.d.) 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 fundamental to gain full insight of the real 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.(Goldin et al., n.d.) 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 childless women or fathers.(Goldin et al., n.d.) In Japan, "working mothers reduced 7 hours of work per week during the first years of motherhood, remaining for ten years at a level around 34 to 35 hours"(pag 24).(Hsu, 2021) When a second child was born, women reduced extra 3 hours more of work time, and after 10 years, work time was only 0.8 hours per week shorter than their pre-second birth level.(Hsu, 2021) In the USA mothers work about ten fewer hours than fathers do when the youngest children are still in pre-school, ten years later, they continue to work about eight fewer hours, and when mothers are in their early fifties, they still work six fewer hours than fathers. Of that difference around 4 hours are due to the fact that generally women work less than men.(Goldin et al., n.d.) Nevertheless, compared to childless women, mothers

in their fifties usually manage to have equal job positions as childless women.(Kahn et al., 2014b) It is evident 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 USA, 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., n.d.) 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.(Möhring, 2018) Such 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 pensions 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. When comparing to fathers the gap is even larger, going from 40% to 50% of less pension incomes.(Möhring, 2018) It has been studied that the pensions system is a fundamental element to determine the size of the income gap. In countries such as Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, introducing strong welfare systems and universal pensions systems have 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.

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 extend until retirement.(Goldin et al., n.d.; Hsu, 2021) Additionally, it is also evident 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.(Goldin et al., n.d.) 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.

Conclusion

In this article, the key factors of motherhood penalty were identified. It was analyzed 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. Evidence has shown 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 cause long-term setbacks in earnings.

In general, most of the decisions taken by mothers to fulfill caregiving tasks, such as exiting the workforce, are taken as personal decisions, nevertheless, there are systemic barriers that constrain women from finding a balance between work and family duties.(Torres et al., 2024) Stereotypes are a fundamental contributor to this matter. Implicit bias against mothers in the labor world was observed, this results from a common association of mothers with values such as warmth, but thinking of them as incompetent for high ranking positions.(Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024) Besides, historically, mothers have been seen as the primary caregivers and their unpaid work is undervalued in capitalist societies, linking them with a lack of time availability and commitment to their jobs, motivating biased hiring and diminishing the likelihood of promotional opportunities.(Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024; Torres et al., 2024) At the same time, mothers who decide to continue in the work force are likely to be seen as ineffective parents as they do not dedicate their full time to household tasks.(*The "Bad Parent" Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers* | Request PDF, n.d.)

The need to take care of family responsibilities often results in dropping out of the workforce or significantly reducing the working hours during the first years of motherhood. Mothers in the USA work about 3.5 weeks less a year than fathers when kids are still in preschool.(Goldin et al., n.d.) Over time, working shifts experience an increase but do not equal fathers' work time. Fewer working hours, taking part-time or low paying jobs with more flexible schedules directly impact mothers' income and contribute to an unconventional professional path that results in future difficulties to stabilize their economy.(Hsu, 2021) During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clearly evidenced that when parents divide the caregiving responsibilities equally, mothers can continue a more consistent career path and narrow the income gap. However, when all tasks are left to women, continuing in the workforce is a formidable task.(Collins et al., 2021; Hipp & Bünning, 2021)

As a result of the reduction of income, mothers and their families suffer from a higher risk of economic vulnerability, as fathers are left as the primary economic support and their income must fulfill all family needs.(Strengmann-Kuhn, 2007) The risk of financial instability is even greater for single and adolescent mothers. First, single mothers are required to continue in the workforce to cover their children's economic necessities, however balancing work-family tasks is demanding since the necessity of flexible schedules and biased hiring can get them to accept low-wage occupations that barely pay enough for their needs.(Grafova et al., 2022) Furthermore, adolescent mothers are most generally associated with economically vulnerable contexts even prior to motherhood. Consequently, they face

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even greater hardships obtaining high paying jobs since half of them do not get a high school diploma or have valuable previous work experience. (*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*, n.d.)

Additionally, the social class of mothers plays a significant role in determining the risk of financial stability and career prospects. Women in a high social class are more likely to afford caregiving services as a support to raise their children while continuing to focus on their professional development. Besides, their large social network may facilitate their hiring and promotional opportunities before and after becoming mothers, preventing them from experiencing stereotyping.

Finally, the motherhood penalty has effects that can last for decades. The reduction of working hours, lower earnings and economic vulnerability is still present when mothers are reaching their fifties.(Goldin et al., n.d.; Hsu, 2021) Over time, mothers' economies tend to get similar to the ones of childless women, nonetheless, compared to fathers the gap continues to be significant.(Goldin et al., n.d.) This discrepancy is more noticeable in the retirement income since mothers generally have 40-50% less pension income than fathers and 25-40% less than childless women.(Dotti Sani & Luppi, 2021; Möhring, 2018) Although most of these long-term consequences are overlooked, they are still fundamental for understanding the complete effect of the motherhood penalty.

Motherhood is largely valued by society. Nevertheless, it causes harsh economic consequences for mothers and for the whole family. Acknowledging these consequences is crucial to build support systems for mothers that can allow them to continue stable career paths while taking care of their children and avoid putting them in a situation where they have to choose between committing their full time and energy to their families or to their professional development.

Limitations

This study focuses mainly on the motherhood penalty of middle and low class women. The educational level, age of the birth of their first children, number of children, marital status and family-provided financial assistance is not considered, unless it is clearly stated. Whereas this article tries to include different perspectives of 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 motherhood penalty for every nation.

Acknowledgements

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

Abstract

Mothers face significant challenges in the labor market, especially in comparison with 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 towards mothers, work conditions, government and institutional support. This article seeks to gain understanding of the impacts of motherhood by using secondary data to examine four determinants of motherhood penalty and suggesting actionable policies: 1) Stereotypes, 2) Reduction of working hours, 3) Risk of economic vulnerability, 4) Long-term earnings 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 opportunities 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 understand the hardships of the workforce for mothers and examine the various elements that need to be considered when developing support systems for mothers. (Peterson, 2024)

Key words: motherhood, career progression, wage gap, earnings, challenges.

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

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, choose part-time or low-salary jobs, face discrimination in the workplace, and overall experience disadvantages due to the societal expectations associated with motherhood. 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”. (Peterson, 2024)

When women become mothers, their focus tends to shift from their professional careers to their families, limiting their economic opportunities and career development. Studies 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. Five years later, the percentage drops to 17% and after a decade, still 15% are absent. (Kleven et al., 2023)

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 to balance 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 aged around 30 to 39 years old dedicate about ten fewer hours to paid work than do fathers when their youngest child is still in pre-school, and around eight fewer when the youngest is predominantly in middle and high school (Goldin et al., 2022). 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) 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. Besides, Halrynjo et al. (Halrynjo & 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 analysis of the labor barriers of mothers, which commonly focuses 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 fifties, 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 from 2010 to 2025 focusing on OECD countries (most data is from the United States and Europe), which employ quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods focusing on motherhood, career progression, wage gaps, economic vulnerability, workplace, and social factors that contribute to motherhood penalty.

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 towards 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.

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

During the last decades, views and attitudes towards 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.

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).

The Impact of Stereotypes on 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. On the other hand, businesswomen and non-mothers are seen as more competent for leadership roles but lacking motherly qualities. 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, 2012).

On account of the social expectations of motherhood, working mothers are often pressured to choose between being an “ideal mother” or “ideal worker”. An ideal mother is the one who practices intensive mothering, dedicating all her time and effort to her family (Hays, 1996). While an ideal worker is the one who is fully committed to their occupation, available to work long hours and prioritizing 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, 2012).

Nevertheless, assumptions of 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. 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).

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).

Misconceptions surrounding mothers in the workplace play a crucial role in women's career progression and economic opportunities after they become mothers. The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards mothers lead to biased hiring practices, reduced promotion opportunities, career breaks, and exclusion from leadership roles (Torres et al., 2024, p. 4).

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 since 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).

And 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 address the systemic barriers that mothers face and rebuild the social perspectives of motherhood.

2. 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. 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 at early parenthood but also to limited labor opportunities in the future (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 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. Secondly, the *effort theory* suggests that mothers invest less energy into work than women without children, as they commit a greater effort into 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 parental wage gap (Peterson, 2024). Compared to fathers, women whose youngest child is between 0 and 2 years old work about 3.5 fewer weeks a year (Goldin et al., 2024). When kids are still in pre-school, mothers work about ten fewer hours a week than fathers, and around eight fewer hours when children are in middle school (Goldin et al., 2024). Compared to women without children, mothers reduce their work hours by about seven a 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 fathers (Correll et al., 2007).

Contemporary Evidence Demonstrating the Presence of Working Hours 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 (Collins et al., 2021). The increase of 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 the 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 facilitated parents to divide more equally the household demands, enabling more time for mothers to commit to their jobs, significantly reducing the parental gender pay gap. Nevertheless, if fathers do not raise their contributions to household chores, the pandemic can expand 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 mothers of children aged 1-12 reduced their working time for nearly 2 hours weekly and the smallest reduction was for mothers with children over 17. By contrast, fathers had very few changes in the 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.

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 USA is 12 weeks, in the UK 39 weeks, in Canada 18 weeks, and in Mexico 12 weeks (World Population Review, 2025).

Additionally, maternity leave can exacerbate the economic consequences of 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. Nevertheless, under certain circumstances, this policy may have adverse effects (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024). 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.

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 reducing office hours is one of the most common measures women take after becoming mothers to fulfill their family responsibilities, it is also observable that it is 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).

3. 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 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 motherhood penalty not only affect women's income but also represent a risk for their families. 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, 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).

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, economic disadvantages were significant and led to an 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).

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). 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. 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 (Grafova et al., 2022).

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 moms start with the impossibility of finishing high school for half of them in the USA, compared to the 90% of non-mothers who manage to get a diploma (Reed, 2022). 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. 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).

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 to determine 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 have 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.

Clearly, the social class of mothers is fundamental to understand 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 represent a significant threat to their financial stability, compromising their future financial security.

There is precise data that motherhood penalty not only involves an economic risk for mothers but 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 moms, 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 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 the paternity benefits, have job protection, and paid maternity leave (Arif, 2025). Recognition of the economic impacts of parenthood is fundamental to develop 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.

4. Long-term Economic Effects of 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 (Goldin et al., 2022). 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 childless women or fathers (Goldin et al., 2022).

In Japan, “working mothers reduce 7 hours of work per week during the first years of motherhood, remaining for ten years at a level around 34 to 35 hours”(pag 24)(Hsu, 2021). When a second child is born, women reduce an extra 3 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 USA, mothers work about ten 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. And when mothers are in their early fifties, they still work six fewer hours than fathers. Of that difference, around 4 hours are due to the fact that generally women work less than men (Goldin et al., 2022). Nevertheless, compared to childless women, mothers in their fifties usually manage to hold equal job positions as childless women (Kahn et al., 2014b). 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 USA, 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 (Möhring, 2018). Such 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% of less pension incomes (Möhring, 2018). It has been studied that the pensions system is a fundamental element to determine the size of the income gap. In countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, introducing strong welfare systems and universal pension systems have 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.

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 extend 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 (Goldin et al., 2022).

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 the society (Möhring, 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.

5. Actionable policies

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 for 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.

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 for stereotypes about mothers' work commitment.

(Torres et al., 2024).

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 amount 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.

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, rate, 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. 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.

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 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 motherhood penalty for each nation.

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 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.

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

Abstract

Mothers face significant challenges in the labor market, especially in comparison with 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 towards mothers, work conditions, government and institutional support. This article seeks to gain understanding of the impacts of motherhood by using secondary data to examine four determinants of motherhood penalty and suggesting actionable policies: 1) Stereotypes, 2) Reduction of working hours, 3) Risk of economic vulnerability, 4) Long-term earnings 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 opportunities 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 understand the hardships of the workforce for mothers and examine the various elements that need to be considered when developing support systems for mothers. (Peterson, 2024)

Key words: motherhood, career progression, wage gap, earnings, challenges.

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

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, choose part-time or low-salary jobs, face discrimination in the workplace, and overall experience disadvantages due to the societal expectations associated with motherhood.

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”. (Peterson, 2024)

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When women become mothers, their focus tends to shift from their professional careers to their families, limiting their economic opportunities and career development. Studies 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. Five years later, the percentage drops to 17% and after a decade, still 15% are absent (Kleven et al., 2023).

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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 to balance work and personal life are actually systemic factors that contribute to the severity of the motherhood penalty (Torres et al., 2024).

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Goldin et al. (2022) claim that mothers aged around 30 to 39 years old dedicate about ten fewer hours to paid work than do fathers when their youngest child is still in pre-school, and around eight fewer when the youngest is predominantly in middle and high school (Goldin et al., 2022). 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) 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. Besides, Halrynjo et al. (Halrynjo & 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 analysis of the labor barriers of mothers, which commonly focuses 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 fifties, 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.

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This article primarily includes peer-reviewed research from 2010 to 2025 focusing on OECD countries (most data is from the United States and Europe), which employ quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods focusing on motherhood, career progression, wage gaps, economic vulnerability, workplace, and social factors that contribute to motherhood penalty.

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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 towards 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.

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

During the last decades, views and attitudes towards 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.

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

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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).

The Impact of Stereotypes on 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. On the other hand, businesswomen and non-mothers are seen as more competent for leadership roles but lacking motherly qualities. 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).

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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, 2012).

On account of the social expectations of motherhood, working mothers are often pressured to choose between being an “ideal mother” or “ideal worker”. An ideal mother is the one who practices intensive mothering, dedicating all her time and effort to her family (Hays, 1996). While an ideal worker is the one who is fully committed to their occupation, available to work long hours and prioritizing 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, 2012).

Nevertheless, assumptions of 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. 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).

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).

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Misconceptions surrounding mothers in the workplace play a crucial role in women's career progression and economic opportunities after they become mothers. The attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors towards mothers lead to biased hiring practices, reduced promotion opportunities, career breaks, and exclusion from leadership roles (Torres et al., 2024, p. 4).

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 since 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).

And 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 address the systemic barriers that mothers face and rebuild the social perspectives of motherhood.

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2. 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. 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 at early parenthood but also to limited labor opportunities in the future (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 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. Secondly, the *effort theory* suggests that mothers invest less energy into work than women without children, as they commit a greater effort into 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 parental wage gap (Peterson, 2024). Compared to fathers, women whose youngest child is between 0 and 2 years old work about 3.5 fewer weeks a year (Goldin et al., 2024). When kids are still in pre-school, mothers work about ten fewer hours a week than fathers, and around eight fewer hours when children are in middle school (Goldin et al., 2024). Compared to women without children, mothers reduce their work hours by about seven a 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 fathers (Correll et al., 2007).

Contemporary Evidence Demonstrating the Presence of Working Hours 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 (Collins et al., 2021). The increase of 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 the family obligations, since a greater amount of time was needed to take care of children at home (Collins et al., 2021).

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Two possible scenarios may emerge from this situation. Firstly, working from home facilitated parents to divide more equally the household demands, enabling more time for mothers to commit to their jobs, significantly reducing the parental gender pay gap. Nevertheless, if fathers do not raise their contributions to household chores, the pandemic can expand 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 mothers of children aged 1-12 reduced their working time for nearly 2 hours weekly and the smallest reduction was for mothers with children over 17. By contrast, fathers had very few changes in the 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.

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 USA is 12 weeks, in the UK 39 weeks, in Canada 18 weeks, and in Mexico 12 weeks (World Population Review, 2025).

Additionally, maternity leave can exacerbate the economic consequences of 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. Nevertheless, under certain circumstances, this policy may have adverse effects (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024). 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.

Commented [MS13]: Section about the impact of organizational policies on mother's career continuity.

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 reducing office hours is one of the most common measures women take after becoming mothers to fulfill their family responsibilities, it is also observable that it is 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).

Commented [MS14]: Policy implications

3. 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).

Commented [MS15]: This section is was also divided into single mothers, adolescent mothers and influence of social class.

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 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 motherhood penalty not only affect women's income but also represent a risk for their families. 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, 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).

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, economic disadvantages were significant and led to an 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).

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). 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. 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 (Grafova et al., 2022).

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 moms start with the impossibility of finishing high school for half of them in the USA, compared to the 90% of non-mothers who manage to get a diploma (Reed, 2022). 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. 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).

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 to

determine 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, which 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 have 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.

Clearly, the social class of mothers is fundamental to understand 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 represent a significant threat to their financial stability, compromising their future financial security.

There is precise data that motherhood penalty not only involves an economic risk for mothers but 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 moms, 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 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 the paternity benefits, have job protection, and paid maternity leave (Arif, 2025). Recognition of the economic impacts of parenthood is fundamental to develop 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.

Commented [MS16]: Policy implications

4. Long-term Economic Effects of 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 (Goldin et al., 2022). 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 childless women or fathers (Goldin et al., 2022).

In Japan, “working mothers reduce 7 hours of work per week during the first years of motherhood, remaining for ten years at a level around 34 to 35 hours”(pag 24)(Hsu, 2021). When a second child is born, women reduce an extra 3 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 USA, mothers work about ten 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. And when mothers are in their early fifties, they still work six fewer hours than fathers. Of that difference, around 4 hours are due to the fact that generally women work less than men (Goldin et al., 2022). Nevertheless, compared to childless women, mothers in their fifties usually manage to hold equal job positions as childless women (Kahn et al., 2014b). 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 USA, 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 (Möhring, 2018). Such 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% of less pension incomes (Möhring, 2018). It has been studied that the pensions system is a fundamental element to determine the size of the income gap. In countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, introducing strong welfare systems and universal pension systems have 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.

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 extend 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 (Goldin et al., 2022).

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 the society (Möhring, 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)

Commented [MS17]: Implication of policies to reduce long-term consequences

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.

5. Actionable policies

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)

Commented [MS18]: Additional section of Actionable policies including public childcare, job retention policies, pension care entitlements and redistributive pension systems.

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 for 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.

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 for stereotypes about mothers' work commitment. (Torres et al., 2024).

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 amount 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.

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

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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, rate, 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. 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.

Commented [MS20]: Importance of inclusive policies.

Commented [MS21]: Importance of reducing motherhood penalty to achieve gender equality and a stronger economy.

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 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 motherhood penalty for each nation.

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 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.

Commented [MS22]: Future research recommendations.

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Commented [MS23]: Double-checked the references.

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

Data September 14th

1. Originality & Significance

Strengths: The paper brings together several dimensions of the motherhood penalty (stereotypes, working hours, economic vulnerability, long-term effects) and highlights intersections with class, culture, and institutional support. This integrative approach is valuable.

Suggestions: To increase originality, consider explicitly identifying gaps in previous reviews—e.g., “While prior studies focus on wage gaps, few explore the intersection of class and institutional pension systems.” Explicitly framing how your review adds something *new* will strengthen significance.

To clearly identify the gap in the literature that the paper is trying to fill, I explicitly added in the introduction that the paper examines the intersection of social class, long-term wage gaps and labor opportunities differences in motherhood penalty

“This review seeks to go beyond traditional analysis of the labor barriers of mothers, which commonly focuses 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 fifties, and result in a diminished retirement income.

2. Clarity & Structure

Strengths: The article provides a clear roadmap in the abstract and introduction, outlining the four determinants and section structure.

Suggestions: Some paragraphs are long and contain multiple points. Break them into smaller sections to enhance readability (e.g., the long historical stereotypes section). Consider adding subheadings within sections for complex topics (e.g., within “Risk of

Economic Vulnerability,” create subheadings for “Single Mothers,” “Teen Mothers,” and “Social Class Differences”). In the conclusion, briefly restate policy implications or recommendations to tie findings back to real-world significance.

I separated long paragraphs and divided the sections 1,2 and 3 by adding subheadings. I summarized the conclusion to avoid repetition and instead added a section of actionable policies.

3. Use of Evidence & Research Methods

Strengths: The review cites a broad range of studies (e.g., Correll et al., Goldin et al., Möhring) and includes quantitative evidence such as percentage wage penalties and hours reduced.

Suggestions: Clarify criteria for selecting studies (e.g., “This review includes peer-reviewed research from 2010–2024 focusing on OECD countries...”). Stating selection criteria or limits strengthens methodological transparency. Double-check some in-text references with “n.d.” or incomplete details (e.g., “Goldin et al., n.d.”) and provide complete bibliographic information. Where percentages are used (e.g., “5–10% wage gap”), cite exact sources directly after the statistic to avoid ambiguity. Also, the geographical location of the studies could add on understanding which mothers are being spoken about.

1. In the introduction, I added the selection criteria for the sources used.

“This article primarily includes peer-reviewed research from 2010 to 2025 focusing on OECD countries (most data is from the United States and Europe), which employ quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods focusing on motherhood, career progression, wage gaps, economic vulnerability, workplace, and social factors that contribute to motherhood penalty.”

2. I placed references at the end of sentences containing statistics to avoid ambiguity, while also preventing disruption of the text’s flow and excessive repetition of sources.

E.g. Studies generally find average wage penalties ranging from 5% to 10% per child among women in their 20s and 30s (Kahn et al., 2014).

3. I double-checked the references and in-text citations and added all the years and authors that were missing.
4. In the selection criteria I included the regions from which the data is taken, stating it is mainly from the USA. And in the text when I used statistics from other countries, I explicitly stated it.

E.g. In 2019, single mothers represented 30% of families with children in the United States (Grafova et al., 2022).

4. Engagement with Literature

Strengths: The paper engages with foundational works (e.g., Hays’ *intensive mothering* concept) and contemporary analyses (COVID-19 impacts, telecommuting studies). The historical framing (Bird & Coddling; Mies) adds depth.

Suggestions: Explicitly compare and contrast differing scholarly positions. For example, do some studies argue that flexible work options close gaps while others find they exacerbate them? Highlighting tensions strengthens critical engagement. Consider including recent global or non-Western perspectives to show awareness of diversity in cultural contexts beyond the U.S. and Europe.

I aimed to include different perspectives on the effectiveness of policies. To deepen the analysis, I highlighted that policies should be inclusive, considering the varying needs of mothers across different social groups. I emphasized the experiences of developed countries, particularly regarding long-term economic effects, to show how retirement policies impact differences in retirement income.

5. Grammar & Language

Strengths: The writing is largely professional and academic in tone. Key terms are defined (e.g., “motherhood penalty”).

Suggestions: Minor issues include occasional repetition (“It was analyzed that...”, “It is evident that...”) and slightly awkward phrasing (“prompting women to spend on average 4.3 hours daily of unpaid labor” could be “prompting women to devote an average of 4.3 unpaid hours daily”). Use consistent tense (past or present) when summarizing studies—mixing “has been studied” and “is studied” can disrupt flow. A light proofread for punctuation (e.g., commas after introductory clauses) will improve polish.

I corrected spelling mistakes, separated paragraphs, long sentences and tried to clarify awkward phrasing. I also included synonyms for words like analysis, challenges, and evidence. Besides, I also analyzed studies either in past or present, avoiding mixing tenses.

Final. Overall Feedback & Encouragement

Recommended for publication while addressing some of the suggestions here

- Make explicit what is *new* about your review compared to prior work
- Improve readability by breaking up long paragraphs and adding subheadings
- Strengthen methodological transparency and citation completeness
- Deepen engagement with contrasting views and broaden cultural scope.
- Perform a careful language and style check for consistency and flow.

With these revisions, the paper will be more impactful and clearer for readers, while maintaining a professional academic tone.

Dr Monica Mastrantonio Martins

Thank you for your comments. I worked hard to improve the clarity and focus of the paper.

Feedback on the Research Article: The Motherhood Penalty

- Revise and resubmit (major revisions needed, acceptance not guaranteed)

I want to start by commending you as an evolving scholar for taking on such an important topic. The motherhood penalty is not only a pressing issue in the labor market but also a matter that affects the broader structure of families, communities, and opportunities for gender equity. Your effort to highlight the challenges working mothers face shows both thoughtfulness and commitment to advancing conversations that matter.

That said, there are ways to strengthen your paper further. The literature review you've assembled does a good job of presenting existing studies, but you could make clearer what your paper specifically offers in terms of research gaps. Framing your review around the unique angle or insights will help readers understand the contribution of your work. I have also given in text comments within your paper.

To highlight the gap in the literature addressed by this paper, I explicitly included in the introduction the intersection of social class, long-term wage disparities, and differences in labor opportunities.

"This review seeks to go beyond traditional analysis of the labor barriers of mothers, which commonly focuses 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 fifties, and result in a diminished retirement income."

Addressing few areas or your established categories around policy measure would add depth and demonstrate how policies must be tailored rather than one-size-fits-all. Similarly, more could be said about how workplace culture and organizational policies (like parental leave and flexible scheduling) interact with larger systemic inequalities.

At the end of every section of the paper I emphasized the idea that policies need to be inclusive taking into consideration the needs of mothers in different social groups. I Outlined the implications that policymakers should take into account when designing programs to reduce the motherhood penalty.

The part of workplace culture and organizational policies was included in section 2 "reduction of working hours" to highlight how most policies try to increase the continuity and work time to reduce motherhood penalty, and how effective it can be.

You mention few limitations, which are valuable for transparency, but it may help to suggest how future researchers can expand on it.

I added a section of future research after the limitations to emphasize the importance of studying specific demographic groups in order to understand better the factors contributing to the motherhood penalty.

Your conclusion feels a bit repetitive. Instead of restating earlier arguments, I suggest condensing it and using the space to emphasize actionable policy measures. These could include expanding affordable childcare, enforcing pay transparency, incentivizing paternity leave, and normalizing flexible work arrangements. Framing these measures as part of a broader social agenda for gender equity will give your conclusion more power. I have also added [current resource links](#).

I condensed the conclusion and added a section addressing actionable policies and its implications. In the conclusion I summarized the main findings and emphasized the need for inclusive policies and the importance of reducing the motherhood penalty to achieve gender equality.

Lastly, I encourage you to consider the role of media briefly in setting cultural and corporate expectations. Media representation can either reinforce traditional gender norms or dismantle them by showing diverse models of parenthood and success. Highlighting this could add a cultural dimension to your policy recommendations.

In section 1 I added a subsection about the role of media in creating cultural perceptions and expectations of mothers. I included different perspectives about the topic and concluded by adding the implications of policies to change the social views of mothers.

Overall, this is a strong effort on a critical topic. With sharper focus, clearer policy recommendations, it will contribute greater depth.

Thank you for your comments. I worked hard to improve the depth and focus of the paper.

Here are few latest resources and data from International Labor and World Economic Forum

<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/unpaid-care-work-prevents-708-million-women-participating-labour-market>

<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/05/reduce-motherhood-penalty-gender-pay-gap/>

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

Abstract

Mothers face significant challenges in the labor market, especially in comparison with 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 causes an important impact on their economic opportunities and long-term earnings. To analyze this impact, studies focused on a diversity of factors driving motherhood penalty, including parental wage gap, gender equality, “fatherhood premium”, attitudes and behaviors towards mothers, work conditions, government and institutional support. This article seeks to gain understanding of the impacts of motherhood by using secondary data to examine four determinants of motherhood penalty: 1) Stereotypes, 2) Reduction of working hours, 3) Risk of economic vulnerability, 4) Long-term earnings. This review aims to offer an updated perspective of the labor challenges of mothers while arguing 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 understand the hardships of the workforce for mothers and examine the various elements that need to be considered when developing support systems for mothers. (Peterson, 2024)

Key words: motherhood, career progression, wage gap, earnings, challenges.

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

Despite advances in gender equality, mothers continue to face major challenges in the workforce. Generally, childless women earn significantly more than mothers with similar qualifications, who, due to motherhood, tend to take career breaks, choose part-time or low salary jobs, face discrimination in the workplace and overall experience disadvantages due to the societal expectations associated with motherhood. These findings are referred to as the “motherhood penalty”. (Peterson, 2024)

Motherhood requires a wide range of compromises, time, prioritization and unpaid work. Consequently, when women become mothers, their focus tends to shift from their professional careers to their families, limiting their economic opportunities and career development. Studies have generally found average wage penalties ranging from 5% to 10% per child among women in their 20s and 30s, (Kahn et al., 2014a) and 24% of women exit the labor market in their first year of motherhood. Five years later, the percentage drops to 17% and after a decade, still 15% are absent. (Kleven et al., n.d.)

Commented [DD1]: Great Topic

Commented [DD2]: Good start! Are you going to mention any research gaps when you say updated.

To clarify the research gap, the sentence was rewritten as: 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 opportunities differences between mothers and both non-mothers and fathers.

Commented [DD3]: This section can accommodate strong data. Please navigate to the latest resource link and incorporate the relevant data. 33 to 29% <https://www.asanet.org/gender-wage-gap-vs-family-wage-gap-its-complicated-new-study-show/>

Commented [DD4]: You can let go of this sentence to avoid repetition

1. I included data about the significance of motherhood penalty in the total gender wage gap.

2. The sentence was deleted.

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

Goldin claims that mothers of around 30 to 39 years old dedicate about ten fewer hours for paid work than do fathers when their youngest child is still in pre-school, and around eight fewer when the youngest is predominantly in middle and high school. The reduction of paid labor is driven by a greater need to extend unpaid working time to take care of household tasks, prompting women to spend on average 4.3 hours daily of unpaid labor. Despite the continuous and substantial workload, the reduction of paid working hours and unconventional professional paths is studied to have a crucial role in the career development of mothers, not only at early motherhood, but over the decades. Besides, Halrynjo et al. (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024) examine the significance of stereotypes that lead to an implicit bias against mothers, highlighting that the societal context in different regions shape the views of mothers in the workforce. Additionally, it has also been stated that motherhood impacts long-term earnings, retirement income and economic vulnerability. (Möhring, 2018) However, research on this field is limited in fully capturing the actual effects of motherhood.

This review aims to offer an updated perspective of the labor challenges of mothers emphasizing the significance of stereotypes and reduction of working hours on the economic opportunities of mothers. Moreover, it focuses on analyzing the influence of the stereotypes and attitudes towards mothers as well as the long-term effects of motherhood penalty, a part of the literature which is not vastly studied but is equally important to understand the true impact of motherhood. 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.

The rest of the paper is divided into four sections and is structured as follows: Section 1 analyses the influence of stereotypes, attitudes, feelings and behavior towards 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 paths. Section 4 presents long-term economic effects of the motherhood penalty. The final section provides the conclusions and limitations of the review.

Commented [DD5]: These are two separate themes but from what I believe your focus is on systemic issues. Please cite secondary source where you say examined.

Commented [DD6]: you must provide an in-text citation that points to a specific source in your bibliography or reference list.

I rewrite the sentence clarify the idea that the paper examines systemic barriers of mothers and not personal choices, and added a citation.

Commented [DD7]: Any research gaps with updated. Sounds very general.

Commented [DD8]: Research gap? See if you can write three points of impact with a, b, & c

The paragraph was rephrased as: This review seeks to go beyond traditional analysis of the labor barriers of mothers, which commonly focuses 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 fifties, and result in a diminished retirement income.

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

During the last decades, views and attitudes towards 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 built assumptions about mothers in the workforce that lead to biased hiring and limited promotional opportunities.

“Stereotypes are overgeneralized and exaggerated *pictures in our head* associated with social groups' characteristics and behaviors.” (*Stereotypes of Stay-at-Home and Working Mothers: Southern Communication Journal: Vol 82, No 2, n.d.*) 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 arises from the historical distribution of responsibilities, associating men with hunting and women with gathering.(Bird & Coddington, 2015) The partition of tasks was prompted 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 for 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 due to the fact that they give birth and breastfed, classifying them as the primary caregivers, while fathers are not “naturally” seen as responsible for care, but as providers. All the labor that mothers put into childcare is considered as 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.(Mies, 1981) 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 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)

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 which tend to see stay-at-home mothers as primary caregivers and men as financial providers. Based on the evidence that women often take this role, they are commonly seen as warm, caring and loving but not qualified for high rank job positions, while businesswomen and nonmothers are seen as more competent for leadership roles but lacking motherly qualities. Mothers have 10% lower competency ratings than non-mothers and are considered 12.1 percentage points less committed to their jobs than women without children. 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 a 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 of both areas.(*Stereotypes of Stay-at-Home and Working Mothers: Southern Communication Journal: Vol 82, No 2*, n.d.) 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.(*The “Bad Parent” Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers* | Request PDF, n.d.)

Commented [DD9]: It would be good to mention here what evidence and research you are referring to

The phrase was changed to: Because mothers often take the caregiving role...

On account of the social expectations of motherhood, working mothers are often pressured to choose between being an “ideal mother” or “ideal worker”. An ideal mother is the one who practices intensive mothering, dedicating all her time and effort to family.(Hays, 1996) While an ideal worker is the one who is fully committed to their occupation, available to work long hours and prioritizing work above everything else.(Cobb et al., n.d.) For mothers, achieving either of the standards is significantly challenging as family obligations are related with 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.(*The “Bad Parent” Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers* | Request PDF, n.d.)

Nevertheless, assumptions of 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. Mothers with traditional gender prejudices are driven to feel more guilty than fathers when work and family responsibilities overlap.(*When Work–Family Guilt Becomes a Women’s Issue: Internalized Gender Stereotypes Predict High Guilt in Working Mothers but Low Guilt in Working Fathers* - Aarntzen - 2023 - *British Journal of Social Psychology* - Wiley Online Library, n.d.) 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. (*When Work–Family Guilt Becomes a Women’s Issue: Internalized Gender Stereotypes Predict High Guilt in Working Mothers but Low Guilt in Working Fathers* - Aarntzen - 2023 - *British Journal of Social Psychology* - Wiley Online Library, n.d.)

Misconceptions surrounding mothers in the workplace play a crucial role in women career progression and economic opportunities after they become mothers. The attitudes, beliefs and behaviors towards mothers lead to biased hiring practices, reduced promotion opportunities, career breaks, and exclusion from leadership roles. (Torres et al., 2024, p. 4) These assumptions come from the historical, social and internalized views of motherhood and can vary depending on the culture and the gender equality advances that have taken place. (Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024) However, in general, motherhood significantly changes the professional path of women and can lead to long-term economic consequences. Understanding the role of stereotypes is fundamental to address the systemic barriers that mothers face and rebuild the social perspectives of motherhood.

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. 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 at early parenthood but also to limited labor opportunities in the future. (Goldin et al., 2024) This indicates that reduction of working hours to take care of household responsibilities is a fundamental element that leads to gender parental wage gaps and 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. (*Telecommuting and Gender Inequalities in Parents’ Paid and Unpaid Work before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, n.d.) 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 literature explain this phenomenon. First the *theory of compensating differentials* claims that mothers usually choose occupations that allow better balance between work and childcare with parent adjustable characteristics such as flexible hours, few demands for travel and family-oriented benefits. Secondly, the *effort theory* suggests that mothers invest less energy into work than women without children as they commit a greater effort into unpaid work such as family obligations. (Kalabikhina et al., 2024)

Although choosing flexible, low intensity jobs is useful to fulfill parental duties, it drastically changes the professional path of women, decreasing income, limiting promotional opportunities and expanding parental wage gap.(Peterson, 2024) Compared to fathers, women whose youngest child is between 0 and 2 years old work about 3.5 fewer weeks a year, when kids are still in pre-school mothers work about ten 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 a week.(Goldin et al., 2024) Consequently, mothers' starting salaries after returning to labor is 7.9% lower than non-mothers and 8.6% lower than fathers.(Correll et al., 2007)

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.(Collins et al., 2021) The increase of 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 the 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 facilitated parents to divide more equally the household demands, enabling more time for mothers to commit to their jobs, significantly reducing the parental gender pay gap. Nevertheless, if fathers do not raise their contributions to household chores, the pandemic can expand 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 life.(Collins et al., 2021) Studies suggest that mothers of children aged 1-12 reduced their working time for nearly 2 hours weekly and the smallest reduction was for mothers with children over 17. By contrast fathers had very few changes in the work hours, not falling below 40 hours per week. 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.(Hipp & Bünning, 2021)

Although reducing office hours is one of the most common measures women take after becoming mothers to fulfill their family responsibilities, it is also evident that it is one of the key factors leading to the parental gender wage gap. This adjustment in working time brings immediate and long-term consequences as mothers' income decreases and career path changes, limiting future opportunities.(Goldin et al., 2024) Addressing this issue will require a vast set of policies that support family oriented benefits to permit mothers to have steady professional trajectories.(Torres et al., 2024)

Risk of Economic Vulnerability for Mothers

Evidence has shown that the motherhood penalty represents a meaningful obstacle for women's career progressions and economic opportunities. Wage differentials and low payment occupations reduce mothers' income 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

Commented [DD10]: Expand strongly on this policy domain in your response to limitations of the literature review and what could be done.

At the end of every section, I included policy implications and emphasized the idea that policies should be inclusive, addressing the needs of mothers in different social groups. This idea was also restated in the conclusion.

composition, including 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 motherhood penalty do not only affect women's income, but represent a risk for their families. When women exit the workforce or reduce their working hours, the income of the family decreases, leaving fathers as the primary or only financial support. If the father's income is not enough to economically cover all the family 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 scenario poses considerable difficulties, prompting mothers to remain employed after giving birth. Nonetheless, the motherhood penalty is studied to represent a wage gap between 5-10% per child compared to non-mothers (Kahn et al., 2014a) meaning that even if women are willing to retain one's job 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)

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. Despite being the second most common family, economic disadvantages are significant and lead to an 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) 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) Motherhood penalty is a crucial contributor to this matter as women are required to continue in the workforce, facing systematic challenges such as discrimination, stereotypes or low paying jobs that in multiple cases are barely enough to fulfill the family necessities. Due to the economic downturn, mothers tend to reduce their out-of-pocket spending including maternal care services like emergency room care or office base care which in the future may result in greater financial insecurity and jeopardize care services.(Grafova et al., 2022)

While single mothers evidently face stronger economic barriers due to the motherhood penalty, adolescent mothers are another demographic group which is heavily affected by financial obstacles. The social and economic struggles of teen moms start since the impossibility of finishing high-school for half of them in the USA, compared to the 90% of non-mothers who manage to get a diploma.(*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*, n.d.) For adolescent mothers, building a solid professional path for the future presents diverse difficulties since, for most of them, economic struggles have been present even before becoming mothers. It has been studied

that long-term family financial struggles shape girls' future perceptions, limiting their view of the opportunities available to them. 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 on reproductive decision-making. (*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*, n.d.) 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)

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 economic resources even before becoming parents. (Cano, 2022) Consequently, the economic support that a mother receives to raise her children is a fundamental element to determine 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. When mothers are part of a higher social class, they are more likely to be in a position where it is possible to afford caregiving services, for instance, babysitters, chefs or drivers to offer assistance in taking care of their children. As a result, mothers can accomplish better time management to fulfill their family and household chores, meaning that they can thrive in both aspects and achieve a stable family economy. (Cano, 2022; Looze & Desai, 2020) On the other hand, low-income, single or adolescent mothers are not likely to be in a position to afford caregiving services, which means that all work-family tasks need to be taken care of by themselves, often causing a greater struggle to manage time, driving to a lack of dedication in both fields.

Furthermore, women in higher social classes are prone to have a larger professional network, this can include family members, friends or close people in general that can offer them higher professional opportunities to expand their career before and after becoming mothers. ("Familial Support as a Determinant of Women Career Development," 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.

Evidently, the social class of mothers is fundamental to understand 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. ("Familial Support as a Determinant of Women Career Development," 2020) However, for low-income families,

exiting the workforce or obtaining low-paying, part time jobs represent a significant threat to their financial stability, compromising their future financial security.

There is clear evidence that motherhood penalty does not only involve an economic risk for mothers but 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 moms, motherhood penalty represent even a greater threat to financial stability as they are in need to fulfill caregiving and monetary responsibilities.(Grafova et al., 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*, n.d.) Besides, the social class of mothers plays a crucial role in determining the career opportunities and financial stability of the family, since higher class women are able to afford caregiving services that help them manage time between work-family tasks, while for low-income mothers, this may not usually be an opportunity. Recognition of the economic impacts of parenthood is fundamental to develop 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.

Long-term Economic Effects of 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 usually interfere with the process of returning to pre-motherhood earnings and work hours.(Goldin et al., n.d.) 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 fundamental to gain full insight of the real 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.(Goldin et al., n.d.) 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 childless women or fathers.(Goldin et al., n.d.) In Japan, "working mothers reduced 7 hours of work per week during the first years of motherhood, remaining for ten years at a level around 34 to 35 hours"(pag 24).(Hsu, 2021) When a second child was born, women reduced extra 3 hours more of work time, and after 10 years, work time was only 0.8 hours per week shorter than their pre-second birth level.(Hsu, 2021) In the USA mothers work about ten fewer hours than fathers do when the youngest children are still in pre-school, ten years later, they continue to work about eight fewer hours, and when mothers are in their early fifties, they still work six fewer hours than fathers. Of that difference around 4 hours are due to the fact that generally women work less than men.(Goldin et al., n.d.) Nevertheless, compared to childless women, mothers

in their fifties usually manage to have equal job positions as childless women.(Kahn et al., 2014b) It is evident 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 USA, 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., n.d.) 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.(Möhring, 2018) Such 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 pensions 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. When comparing to fathers the gap is even larger, going from 40% to 50% of less pension incomes.(Möhring, 2018) It has been studied that the pensions system is a fundamental element to determine the size of the income gap. In countries such as Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, introducing strong welfare systems and universal pensions systems have 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.

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 extend until retirement.(Goldin et al., n.d.; Hsu, 2021) Additionally, it is also evident 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.(Goldin et al., n.d.) 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.

Conclusion

In this article, the key factors of motherhood penalty were identified. It was analyzed 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. Evidence has shown 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 cause long-term setbacks in earnings.

In general, most of the decisions taken by mothers to fulfill caregiving tasks, such as exiting the workforce, are taken as personal decisions, nevertheless, there are systemic barriers that constrain women from finding a balance between work and family duties.(Torres et al., 2024) Stereotypes are a fundamental contributor to this matter. Implicit bias against mothers in the labor world was observed, this results from a common association of mothers with values such as warmth, but thinking of them as incompetent for high ranking positions.(Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024) Besides, historically, mothers have been seen as the primary caregivers and their unpaid work is undervalued in capitalist societies, linking them with a lack of time availability and commitment to their jobs, motivating biased hiring and diminishing the likelihood of promotional opportunities.(Halrynjo & Mangset, 2024; Torres et al., 2024) At the same time, mothers who decide to continue in the work force are likely to be seen as ineffective parents as they do not dedicate their full time to household tasks.(*The "Bad Parent" Assumption: How Gender Stereotypes Affect Reactions to Working Mothers* | Request PDF, n.d.)

The need to take care of family responsibilities often results in dropping out of the workforce or significantly reducing the working hours during the first years of motherhood. Mothers in the USA work about 3.5 weeks less a year than fathers when kids are still in preschool.(Goldin et al., n.d.) Over time, working shifts experience an increase but do not equal fathers' work time. Fewer working hours, taking part-time or low paying jobs with more flexible schedules directly impact mothers' income and contribute to an unconventional professional path that results in future difficulties to stabilize their economy.(Hsu, 2021) During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clearly evidenced that when parents divide the caregiving responsibilities equally, mothers can continue a more consistent career path and narrow the income gap. However, when all tasks are left to women, continuing in the workforce is a formidable task.(Collins et al., 2021; Hipp & Bünning, 2021)

As a result of the reduction of income, mothers and their families suffer from a higher risk of economic vulnerability, as fathers are left as the primary economic support and their income must fulfill all family needs.(Strengmann-Kuhn, 2007) The risk of financial instability is even greater for single and adolescent mothers. First, single mothers are required to continue in the workforce to cover their children's economic necessities, however balancing work-family tasks is demanding since the necessity of flexible schedules and biased hiring can get them to accept low-wage occupations that barely pay enough for their needs.(Grafova et al., 2022) Furthermore, adolescent mothers are most generally associated with economically vulnerable contexts even prior to motherhood. Consequently, they face

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even greater hardships obtaining high paying jobs since half of them do not get a high school diploma or have valuable previous work experience. (*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*, n.d.)

Additionally, the social class of mothers plays a significant role in determining the risk of financial stability and career prospects. Women in a high social class are more likely to afford caregiving services as a support to raise their children while continuing to focus on their professional development. Besides, their large social network may facilitate their hiring and promotional opportunities before and after becoming mothers, preventing them from experiencing stereotyping.

Finally, the motherhood penalty has effects that can last for decades. The reduction of working hours, lower earnings and economic vulnerability is still present when mothers are reaching their fifties.(Goldin et al., n.d.; Hsu, 2021) Over time, mothers' economies tend to get similar to the ones of childless women, nonetheless, compared to fathers the gap continues to be significant.(Goldin et al., n.d.) This discrepancy is more noticeable in the retirement income since mothers generally have 40-50% less pension income than fathers and 25-40% less than childless women.(Dotti Sani & Luppi, 2021; Möhring, 2018) Although most of these long-term consequences are overlooked, they are still fundamental for understanding the complete effect of the motherhood penalty.

Motherhood is largely valued by society. Nevertheless, it causes harsh economic consequences for mothers and for the whole family. Acknowledging these consequences is crucial to build support systems for mothers that can allow them to continue stable career paths while taking care of their children and avoid putting them in a situation where they have to choose between committing their full time and energy to their families or to their professional development.

Limitations

This study focuses mainly on the motherhood penalty of middle and low class women. The educational level, age of the birth of their first children, number of children, marital status and family-provided financial assistance is not considered, unless it is clearly stated. Whereas this article tries to include different perspectives of 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 motherhood penalty for every nation.

Acknowledgements

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The Impact of Motherhood on Professional and Economic Prospects: a Review on 'Motherhood Penalty'

Review #2

Authors have addressed reviewers' comments quite thoroughly and considerably to improve their paper. Further minor suggestions for improvement include:

1. "This article seeks to gain understanding of the impacts of motherhood by using secondary data to examine four determinants of motherhood penalty and suggesting actionable policies: 1) Stereotypes, 2) Reduction of working hours, 3) Risk of economic vulnerability, 4) Long-term earnings 5) Actionable policies". There seems to be 5 determinants listed here, please clarify if this is what is meant by authors.
2. Data used in the Introduction is quite US-centric. It should be stated which data comes from which country to show what population is being represented. Broader international literature should also be included if possible.
3. It is stated that "This article primarily includes peer-reviewed research from 2010 to 2025" however, much of the literature included throughout the paper is from before this period. Related to this, it is unclear where the review using this timeframe actually starts in the manuscript ie where exactly are the Results? Authors may wish to consider not having a defined literature recall period if it is not applicable. It is also noted that presently there is no rationale for the time period of 2010-2025 to be chosen for this study ie were laws changed around this time? A large shift in social expectations?
4. There are concerns around the authors merely summarising the studies found without critical appraisal or interpretation, as there are no instances where two publications have stated similar or same sentiments. There are also very minimal, if any, examples of articles having opposing views regarding a topic.
5. Another limitation of the study would be that the data gathered primarily comes from the US and Europe. Would the findings be generalisable to other settings?