

# Does Parenthood Damage Your CV?\*

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## Abstract

We contribute to the multidisciplinary literature on parenthood and labour market success. A field experiment is conducted to investigate hiring discrimination as an explanation for their association. We find that having one child affects women's hiring chances negatively while having two children results in more positive call-back from employers. We explain this pattern by the fact that employers may fear maternity leave in the near future to be the highest for women with one child (compared to no or two children). In addition, mentioning one or two children on their CV, decreases the job interview invitation probability for male candidates by about 18%. This overall fatherhood penalty is driven by unfavourable treatment of fathers in male-dominated occupations in the private sector.

**Keywords:** motherhood; fatherhood; hiring discrimination; children; field experiment.

**JEL:** J13; J71; J16; J20; C93.

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\* **Authorisation.** The present research was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of Ghent University.

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# 1. Data

## 1.1 An Extended Correspondence Experiment

We run a field experiment that extends the correspondence experimentation framework of Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004). In general, within this type of experiment, pairs of fictitious job applications are sent to real vacancies. The applications differ essentially only from their pair member in the characteristic that is to be tested. This characteristic is randomly assigned within the pair. By monitoring the subsequent call-back, unequal treatment in first hiring decisions by this characteristic can be measured and given a causal interpretation (Baert, 2017; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Neumark, in press).

In the beginning, correspondence experiments were exclusively applied to investigate hiring discrimination on grounds based on which unequal treatment is forbidden, such as ethnic and gender discrimination (Baert, 2017; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Neumark, in press; Oreopoulos, 2011). More recently, however, scholars have employed this kind of experiment to study the causal impact on employment opportunities of CV characteristics other than classic discrimination grounds. For instance, unemployment duration dependence (Baert & Verhaest, 2014; Eriksson and Rooth, 2014; Kroft et al., 2013) and Facebook picture appearance (Baert, 2018) were investigated as success factors in hiring by means of a correspondence experiment.

We conducted our experiment between November 2015 and April 2016 in the labour market of Flanders, i.e. the Northern part of Belgium. Two fictitious applications of job candidates were sent to randomly selected vacancies in six occupations from the database of the Public Employment Agency of Flanders (PEAF), i.e. Flanders major job search channel. For each vacancy, we randomly assigned the treatment of mentioning children to one of the applicants and the control situation of not having children to the other pair member. This within-pair randomisation of revealed parenthood was combined with a between-pair randomisation of three other factors: number of children (for the pair member mentioning children), gender and age (both equal between the pair members). In addition, we logged for each vacancy its contract type, the gender of the mentioned contact person and its sector. Thereafter, reactions from the employer side were analysed to investigate unequal

treatment in hiring based on revealed parenthood, in general and by relevant candidate and vacancy characteristics.

This research was reviewed and approved by the Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of Ghent University at its meeting of 9 July 2013, largely based on the arguments mentioned in Riach and Rich (2004).

## **1.2 Tested Occupations**

We sent pairs of fictitious job applications to real vacancies for six occupations: administrative clerk (ISCO-08 code 41), production operator (ISCO-08 code 93), waiter (ISCO-08 code 51), remedial educationalist (ISCO-08 code 26), sales representative (ISCO-08 code 33) and planner (ISCO-08 code 43)—ISCO-08 is the second-generation International Standard Classification of Occupations, based on a resolution of experts on labour statistics held in December 2007 and endorsed by the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in March 2008. These occupations were chosen to realise variation in the tested vacancies by two dimensions: skill-level and gender representation in the occupation.

With respect to skill-level, the three former occupations are (middle-)low-skilled, asking for a secondary education degree or lower, while the three latter occupations are (middle-)high-skilled, asking for a tertiary education degree (see Section 1.3 for the particular degrees held by our fictitious job candidates).

With respect to the division of occupations by gender representation, we relied on a measure of the PEAf. The PEAf measured in September 2012 the occupational aspirations of all the unemployed in their database at that moment. More concretely, each unemployed had to indicate up to eight occupations in which they were interested. By September 2012, 78.1% (75.0%) of the unemployed willing to work as administrative clerk (remedial educationalist) were female, while 75.2% (74.1%) of those being interested in a job as production operator (sales representative) were male. The occupations of waiter (49.0% females among the interested unemployed) and logistics planner (47.4% females among the interested unemployed) were characterised by a mixed gender representation.

### 1.3 Job Application Template Pairs

For each occupation, we constructed two types of templates ('type A' and 'type B'), comprising a CV and a motivation letter matching the general requirements of this kind of job. To ensure that our applications were realistic and representative, examples of the PEAFF were calibrated for our purposes.

All fictitious applicants were born and living in Antwerp, Ghent, Louvain, or Hasselt, i.e. four of the largest cities of Flanders. The city closest to the workplace mentioned in the vacancy was chosen. Type A and type B candidates had graduated from the same type of school, with a comparable reputation. The candidates applying for a job as administrative clerk, production operator, or waiter graduated from secondary education with a degree in commerce. Those applying for a job as a remedial educationalist, sales representative, and planner held a Bachelor's degree in socio-educational care work, marketing, and logistics management, respectively. The candidates with a secondary education degree had graduated at the age of 18, those with a Bachelor's degree at the age of 21. These are the common ages in the case of no grade retention in Belgium. After leaving school, all candidates had been working in a job similar to that for which they applied until November 2015, i.e. the start of our experiment, since when they had have been unemployed.

In addition, we added to all applications the following features: a typically Flemish-sounding first name and surname; a Belgian nationality; a random day and month of birth; an address with an existing street name but a non-existing house number in a middle-class neighbourhood; a telephone number and an email address from major providers; being married as marital status; adequate Dutch, English, and French language skills; comparable computer skills; and a driver's license.

All motivation letters mentioned that the job applicant: (i) found the vacancy in the database of the PEAFF, (ii) had graduated with the right qualifications, (iii) was motivated to start the job and (iv) was looking forward to a job interview. The CV and motivation letter templates are available upon request.

Type A and B templates differed concerning inessential peculiarities (e.g., a variety of common wordings was used for the educational degrees) and layout to avoid detection. It is important to note that these minimal differences between the type A and type B job

application templates could not bias the discrimination measures, because the parent and control identities were randomly assigned to these types, as will be elaborated on in the next subsection.

#### **1.4 Randomised Candidate Characteristics**

The parent and control identities were alternately assigned to the type A and type B applications. This was done by just mentioning their number of children in parentheses after their marital status. For the parent identity “married (one child)” or “married (two children)” was mentioned, for the control identity “married (no children)” was mentioned. In Belgium, a sample of ten human resource managers confirmed that CVs commonly comprise this kind of information.

Besides this within-pair randomisation, which is standard in correspondence experiments building on Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004), three candidate characteristics were randomly assigned between pairs. Firstly, we alternated between pairs in which the parent identity mentioned one child versus two children. So, exactly one fourth of our fictitious candidates were parents with one child and one fourth were parents with two children (while one half mentioned that they had no children). Secondly, we alternated between female and male pairs of fictitious candidates. Thus, the gender of the candidates was constant at the pair (and vacancy) level. Finally, we alternated between 28 years old and 38 years old candidate pairs. These ages were chosen for the following reasons. Twenty-eight years is the average age at which females get their first child in Belgium (Kind en Gezin, 2014). Given that they get, on average, about 1.7 children, the probability of getting (more) children at or after the age of 28 is high (Kind en Gezin, 2014; Van Bavel & Nomes, 2015). In contrast, only three births out of 100 are given by mothers of 38 years old or older. So, from this age on, the probability of getting more children is rather low (Kind en Gezin, 2014; Van Bavel & Nomes, 2015).

#### **1.5 Monitored Invitation Outcomes and Vacancy Characteristics**

We sent the 16 resulting combinations of the two job application templates, two particular sets of parent and control identities (one child or two children in combination with no child),

two particular ages, and two genders in an alternating order to the selected job postings, with a one-day delay in between. To avoid detection and for ethical reasons, we only applied to the same employer with one pair of applications.

Based on the relative supply of vacancies within the occupations mentioned in Section 1.2, we decided to send out 96 pairs of applicants to each of the occupations of administrative clerk, production operator, and waiter, and 64 pairs to each of the occupations of remedial educationalist, sales representative, and planner, resulting in 960 job applications for 480 vacancies. As a consequence, our experiment is of the same order as that of Correll et al. (2007), testing 638 vacancies—but having substantially less variation in their measured call-backs than we have—and smaller than that of Bygren et al. (2017), testing 2,144 vacancies.

Reactions from the employers were received via telephone voicemail and email. To minimise inconvenience for the employers, we immediately terminated the recruitment procedure after getting a positive reaction. All call-backs received later than 30 days after the date of application submission were discarded. However, this turned out to be an unnecessary restriction, as we hardly received any (positive) responses after 30 days. In line with Correll et al. (2007), the outcome variable of our analysis is of binary nature: it is 1 in case a fictitious applicant gets (immediately) invited to a job interview and 0 otherwise.

Besides monitoring this outcome variable for all fictitious candidates we also registered three main characteristics that could be identified for (almost) all vacancies: (i) the full-time versus part-time nature of the posted job, (ii) the gender of the contact person—in five vacancies this name of the contact person was not observed so that we opted for a category “female or unknown” given that female contact persons were overrepresented—and (iii) the sector of the vacancy (for-profit or non-profit).

## **2. Results**

In this section, we present the empirical insights from a statistical examination of the experimentally gathered data. Firstly, we report interview rates for the fictitious candidates

with and without children, in general and classified by gender and further (randomised) vacancy and candidate characteristics. Secondly, we discuss a regression analysis that allows us to control for vacancy characteristics that may correlate with the experimentally controlled candidate characteristics and tested occupations.

## 2.1 Interview Ratios

Table 1 presents interview rates for the parent and control candidates within our experiment. Panel A does not distinguish between female and male candidate pairs while Panel B (Panel C) focusses on female (male) pairs only. Cluster of rows I provides the statistics at the level of all tested vacancies, while the following clusters of rows show the corresponding statistics by (II) number of children for the pair member who is a parent, (III) age of the pair of candidates, (IV) tested occupation, (V) contract type of the vacancy, (VI) gender of vacancy's contact person, and (VII) sector of the vacancy.

<Table 1 about here.>

Overall, the candidates mentioning one or two children in their CV got an invitation for a job interview in 16.7% of their applications, while their counterparts without children got an invitation in 18.5% of the cases. Column A.4 shows that the overall interview ratio is about 0.903, indicating that the parent identity had a 9.7% lower probability of getting invited for a job interview. However, this statistic is not statistically significantly different from 1. As a consequence, we cannot reject that, overall, parents and non-parents were treated equally, based on the experimentally gathered data.

However, this overall insignificant effect of mentioning a positive number of children conceals various interesting dimensions of heterogeneity. Firstly, this overall zero effect of parenthood is the resultant of a zero motherhood penalty and a substantial fatherhood penalty. Indeed, the invitation ratio among females is exactly 1.000, saying that females mentioning one or two children in their CV got, on average, as many job interview invitations as females mentioning not having children. In contrast, male candidates with children got 18.1% fewer job invitations than their counterparts without children. In terms of percentage points, the difference in invitation probability is 3.7 percentage points (i.e. 20.4% minus 16.7%). This pattern is the opposite of the substantial motherhood penalty and zero

fatherhood penalty found in the United States by Correll et al. (2007). It also contrasts with the homogeneous zero parent effects in Sweden by Bygren et al. (2017).

Secondly, the fatherhood penalty identified in Flanders is driven by the outcomes for particular (groups of) vacancies. Most importantly, this penalty is driven by the male-dominated occupations. Indeed, in the low-skilled male-dominated of production worker, fathers get 55.9% fewer invitations than non-fathers. This is the only subsample at the occupation level for which equal treatment can be rejected at the 5% significance level. However, the second-highest t-value is found for the high-skilled male-dominated occupation of representative. This finding supports an explanation for our overall fatherhood penalty: male candidates who opt to mention a positive number of children in their CV may be perceived as less assertive, competitive, independent, and dominant, i.e. typically male characteristics, which might be more important in male-dominated occupations (Fuegen et al., 2004). In addition, the fatherhood penalty is driven by the measured outcomes for full-time vacancies and vacancies in the for-profit sector.

Thirdly, the overall zero motherhood penalty is the resultant of a penalty for mothers with one child and a premium for mothers with two children. While mothers with one child have a 22.2% lower probability to be invited to a job interview, mothers with two children have a 46.3% higher probability. This U-shaped pattern in female invitation rates by number of children is what is expected in case employers rather punish females for their expected future maternity leave than for their general childcare. Indeed, while having one child may signal a future second birth and, therefore, future maternity leave. For mothers who have already two children, this risk is smaller as only a few (native) women get three children or more in Belgium (Kind en Gezin, 2014; Van Bavel & Nomes, 2015). This penalty for future maternity leave is also supported by the fact that we find higher invitation rates for 38 years old (and, therefore, less fertile) versus 28 years old women, while the opposite is true with respect to male candidates. Moreover, this penalty is consistent with (i) the U-shaped pattern in employment rates of 24- to 49-years old women in Belgium by number of children (Statistics Belgium, 2018) and (ii) the moderate discrimination against 25 years old heterosexual (versus lesbian) women found in Belgium by Baert (2014).



## 2.2 Controlling for Vacancy Characteristics

As the parent and control identity are assigned randomly within our pairs of applications, regressing the indicator of getting invited on an indicator of mentioned children leads to exactly the same empirical conclusion as the one based on the invitation ratio in Column A.4 of cluster of rows I of Table 1. In addition, as we randomly assigned these variables between pairs, regressions including interactions between parenthood and (i) the gender of the pair, (ii) the exact number of children mentioned by the parent applicant, and (iii) the age of the pair, should lead to the same empirical pattern as the one in clusters I, II, and III of Panels B and C of Table 1, at least for a sample size approaching infinity. However, our sample size is finite. Thus, some of these variables randomly assigned between pairs may happen to correlate with observable and unobservable vacancy characteristics. As these characteristics may affect the hiring chances of our fictitious candidates, not controlling for them might yield biased measures of the heterogeneity of the parenthood penalty by gender, exact number of children, and age. Therefore, we further explore the experimentally gathered data by means of a regression analysis controlling for the observed vacancy characteristics and (unobserved) vacancy fixed effects.

Table 2 presents our regression results. We regress the invitation indicator on parenthood (or, more exactly, whether or not children are mentioned in the CV) and various sets of interactions with this parenthood dummy. This is done by means of linear probability model regressions with White-corrected standard errors. These models have the advantage to be easy to interpret while Angrist and Pischke (2008) proved their adequate performance with binary dependent variables. Nevertheless, we also estimated logit and probit models, with and without vacancy fixed effects, to check the robustness of our results.

<Table 2 about here.>

More concretely, in regression model (1), we only include an indicator of parenthood as an explanatory variable. Next, from model (2) on, we breakdown this parenthood indicator into a motherhood and a fatherhood indicator. In regression model (3), interactions with the candidate characteristics that are experimentally controlled and with two occupation characteristics (skill-level and male or female dominance in the occupation, with mixed occupations as a reference) are added. Then, in regression model (4), also interactions with the aforementioned vacancy characteristics that are not randomly assigned are added. In

model (5), the interactions with parenthood in model (5) are deduplicated in motherhood and fatherhood interactions. Finally, in model (6) only the deduplicated interactions that are significantly different for mothers and fathers are retained.

The regression results in Table 2 are in line with the discrimination ratios in Table 1. Firstly, model (2) shows that male job candidates revealing their fatherhood in their CV, have a 3.8 percentage points lower probability of getting invited to a job interview. This equals almost exactly the 3.7 percentage points fatherhood penalty mentioned in Section 2.1. From model (3) on, this coefficient becomes insignificant as it captures the fatherhood penalty in a particular reference category (e.g., fathers of 28 years old, having one child, in a low-skilled occupation that is neutral with respect to gender dominance). Secondly, the parenthood penalty is lower in case parents have two children (versus one child). As can be seen from model (5), and in line with what was discussed in Section 2.1, this finding is driven by the outcomes for female candidates. Thirdly, the parenthood penalty is higher in male-dominated occupations. Fourthly, the only triple interactions in model (5) that are different between mothers and fathers are the ones related to part-time contracts ( $p = 0.007$ ). While mothers are relatively better off in vacancies for full-time positions, fathers are better off in vacancies for part-time positions.

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TEXT IN PROGRESS

**Table 1.** Descriptive analysis

	A. All pairs				B. Pairs of female candidates				C. Pairs of male candidates			
	# pairs	Invitation rate		Invitation ratio: (A.2)/(A.3)	# pairs	Invitation rate		Invitation ratio: (B.2)/(B.3)	# pairs	Invitation rate		Invitation ratio: (C.2)/(C.3)
		Parent	Control			Parent	Control			Parent	Control	
(A.1)	(A.2)	(A.3)	(A.4)	(B.1)	(B.2)	(B.3)	(B.4)	(C.1)	(C.2)	(C.3)	(C.4)	
<b><i>I. Full dataset</i></b>												
All vacancies	480	0.167	0.185	0.903 [1.407]	240	0.167	0.167	1.000 [0.000]	240	0.167	0.204	0.819** [2.079]
<b><i>II. Division by number of children (for the pair member who is a parent)</i></b>												
One child	240	0.167	0.217	0.769*** [2.719]	120	0.175	0.225	0.778* [1.747]	120	0.158	0.208	0.760** [2.153]
Two children	240	0.167	0.154	1.084 [0.654]	120	0.158	0.108	1.463* [1.918]	120	0.175	0.200	0.875 [0.904]
<b><i>III. Division by age</i></b>												
28 years	240	0.179	0.192	0.932 [0.654]	120	0.167	0.158	1.057 [0.300]	120	0.192	0.225	0.853 [1.268]
38 years	240	0.154	0.179	0.860 [1.344]	120	0.167	0.175	0.954 [0.300]	120	0.142	0.183	0.776* [1.679]
<b><i>IV. Division by occupation</i></b>												
Administrative clerk	96	0.063	0.083	0.759 [0.815]	48	0.083	0.083	1.000 [0.000]	48	0.042	0.083	0.506 [1.430]
Production operator	96	0.083	0.146	0.568** [2.517]	48	0.083	0.104	0.798 [1.000]	48	0.083	0.188	0.441** [2.338]
Waiter	96	0.302	0.260	1.162 [1.157]	48	0.333	0.292	1.140 [0.703]	48	0.271	0.229	1.183 [1.000]
Remedial educationalist	64	0.109	0.125	0.872 [0.574]	32	0.000	0.063	0.000 [1.438]	32	0.219	0.188	1.165 [1.000]
Sales representative	64	0.234	0.281	0.833 [1.350]	32	0.219	0.250	0.876 [0.571]	32	0.250	0.313	0.799 [1.438]
Logistics planner	64	0.234	0.250	0.936 [0.331]	32	0.281	0.219	1.283 [1.000]	32	0.188	0.281	0.669 [1.359]
<b><i>V. Division by contract type of vacancy</i></b>												
Full-time	389	0.177	0.195	0.908 [1.184]	191	0.188	0.168	1.119 [0.943]	198	0.167	0.222	0.752*** [2.710]
Part-time	91	0.121	0.143	0.846 [0.815]	49	0.082	0.163	0.503** [2.066]	42	0.167	0.119	1.403 [1.432]
<b><i>VI. Division by gender of vacancy's contact person</i></b>												
Female (or unknown)	270	0.133	0.156	0.857 [1.281]	145	0.138	0.152	0.909 [0.533]	125	0.128	0.160	0.800 [1.420]
Male	210	0.210	0.224	0.936 [0.687]	95	0.210	0.189	1.111 [0.705]	115	0.209	0.252	0.828 [1.516]
<b><i>VII. Division by sector of vacancy</i></b>												
For-profit	403	0.179	0.199	0.899 [0.129]	199	0.196	0.186	1.054 [0.446]	204	0.162	0.211	0.768** [2.384]
Non-profit	77	0.104	0.117	0.889 [0.575]	41	0.024	0.073	0.329 [1.432]	36	0.194	0.167	1.167 [1.000]

Note. To test whether the interview ratios are significantly different from 1, a paired t-test is conducted. T-values are in brackets. \*\*\* (\*\*)(\*) indicates significance at the 1%- (5%-) ((10%-)) level.

**Table 2.** Regression analysis

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Parent	-0.019 (0.013)					
Parent: mother		0.000 (0.020)	0.017 (0.041)	0.022 (0.041)	0.009 (0.061)	0.038 (0.041)
Parent: father		-0.038** (0.018)	-0.020 (0.038)	-0.015 (0.038)	-0.010 (0.045)	-0.037 (0.040)
Parent × Two children			0.063** (0.026)	0.063** (0.026)		0.062** (0.026)
Mother × Two children					0.098*** (0.037)	
Father × Two children					0.029 (0.036)	
Parent × 38 years			-0.013 (0.026)	-0.013 (0.027)		-0.015 (0.027)
Mother × 38 years					-0.026 (0.039)	
Father × 38 years					-0.006 (0.036)	
Parent × Occupation is high-skilled			-0.012 (0.027)	-0.023 (0.032)		-0.018 (0.032)
Mother × Occupation is high-skilled					-0.026 (0.068)	
Father × Occupation is high-skilled					-0.053 (0.050)	
Parent × Occupation is female-dominated			-0.038 (0.034)	-0.049 (0.035)		-0.037 (0.042)
Mother × Occupation is female-dominated					-0.075 (0.051)	
Father × Occupation is female-dominated					-0.069 (0.048)	
Parent × Occupation is male-dominated			-0.075** (0.035)	-0.077** (0.035)		-0.074** (0.035)
Mother × Occupation is male-dominated					-0.003 (0.043)	
Father × Occupation is male-dominated					-0.032 (0.047)	
Parent × Vacancy for part-time contract				-0.020 (0.034)		
Mother × Vacancy for part-time contract					-0.106* (0.056)	-0.116** (0.050)
Father × Vacancy for part-time contract					0.077** (0.037)	0.083** (0.039)
Parent × Vacancy with male contact person				0.004 (0.027)		0.003 (0.027)
Mother × Vacancy with male contact person					0.038 (0.039)	
Father × Vacancy with male contact person					-0.025 (0.037)	
Parent × Vacancy in non-profit sector				0.037 (0.041)		0.031 (0.041)
Mother × Vacancy in non-profit sector					-0.017 (0.058)	
Father × Vacancy in non-profit sector					0.086 (0.055)	
Constant	0.185*** (0.007)	0.185*** (0.007)	0.185*** (0.007)	0.185*** (0.007)	0.185*** (0.007)	0.185*** (0.007)
Vacancy fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Note. The presented statistics are linear probability model estimates and standard errors, clustered at the vacancy level, in parentheses. The dependent variable is getting invited. The corresponding variables without an interaction with 'parent', 'mother' or 'father' are saturated (as they are constant at the vacancy level). \*\*\* (\*\*) (\*) indicates significance at the 1%- (5%-) (10%-) level.