

Mother's work can be beneficial to child body weight, study finds

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Up to a certain number of hours, maternal employment is beneficial for children's body weight. This is the key finding by Jianghong Li (WZB Berlin Social Science Center) and her international collaborators who analyzed longitudinal data from the Western Australia Pregnancy Cohort Study ("Raine Study"). The finding contradicts previous research that linked longer working hours to children's higher body mass index (BMI) suggesting that any maternal employment was a risk for child health.

The optimal number of hours in [maternal employment](#) depends on the developmental stage of the child: Among preschoolers, a risk of a child becoming overweight or obese is lower when a mother worked between 1 and 24 hours a week, compared to working 35 or more hours per week.

Amongst school aged children (8-14 years) the risk decreased when a mother worked between 35 and 40 hours per week, compared to working shorter (1-24) or longer hours (41 or more) a week.

This effect also differs by [family income](#): it is stronger in low to medium income families, compared with high income families.

Fathers' work hours also matter. When fathers worked less than 45 or more hours per week, the risk of child overweight or obesity associated with long maternal work hours (41 or more) or short hours (1-24) decreased, compared to when fathers worked 45 or more hours among school aged children from low to medium income families.

The researchers concluded that mothers' employment, up to a certain threshold, can bring to families positive gains.

"Employment supplies resources to a family such as income, but also psychological resources like social support, a valued identity, self-efficacy and optimism that we believe may make a difference,"
Jianghong Li and her co-authors report.

Provided by WZB Berlin Social Science Center

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