Preventing Child Maltreatment: Beneficial Side Effects of Public Childcare Provision

Malte Sandner¹, Stephan L. Thomsen², Libertad González²

¹ Institute for Employment Research (IAB), ‡ Leibniz University Hannover, § Universitat Pompeu Fabra
email: malte.sandner@iab.de

Motivation

• This paper investigates the impact of public childcare provision on the incidence of child maltreatment using large temporal and spatial variation in childcare coverage at the county level in Germany.
• Child maltreatment is highly prevalent (e.g. 683,000 cases in the U.S. in 2015) causing high short- and long-term costs (Conti et al. 2017; Wang and Holton, 2007; Fang et al., 2012).
• However, no research whether universal interventions, such as provision of public childcare, affect child maltreatment.
• This is the case although childcare influences several aspects in family lives and although many countries expand provision.

Administrative Child Maltreatment Data

• We use child protection cases as proxy for child maltreatment.
• Child protection case is initiated if well being of the child is in danger.
• Administrative data include all individual cases per county from 2002-2015.
• Data include certain case characteristics, e.g. age group, gender, reason for the case, household composition, which suggested the case.
• Overall, we can use information on 48,757 child protection cases for children below 6 years of age (over 300,000 for all age groups).

Empirical Strategy

\[ y_{ct} = \theta \text{treat}_{ct} + X'_{ct}\beta + \alpha_t + \delta_c + \epsilon_{ct}, \]

\( y_{ct} \) are the natural logarithm of child protection cases per 1,000 children (or cases for certain group) in county \( c \) at year \( t \).
\( \text{treat}_{ct} \) childcare coverage rate in county \( c \) at year \( t \).
\( \alpha_t \) year-fixed effects.
\( \delta_c \) county-fixed effects.
\( X'_{ct} \) time-variant characteristics of the counties.

We do the estimation separately for younger (treated) and older (less treated) children.

Main Results (dependent variable: log maltreatment cases per 1,000 children)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Age 0 to &lt;6 years</th>
<th>Age 12 to &lt;18 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Log cases per 1,000 children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of one pp. childcare expansion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0.018** (0.008)</td>
<td>-0.017** (0.008)</td>
<td>-0.017** (0.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year fixed effects</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County fixed effects</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional economic factors</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional educational factors</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County year observations</td>
<td>3,496</td>
<td>3,469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of counties</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Data provided by the Statistical Offices of the German Länder on public child care coverage for children under the age of three. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors clustered on the county level and are robust. Statistical significance indicated by stars (* p<0.1, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01).

Conclusion

• A county expanding childcare by one percentage point reduces protection cases by 1.8 percent.
• Results are robust to several robustness checks.
• Results give evidence that universal interventions can reduce child maltreatment.
• Main channel: Childcare may substitute inadequate informal childcare by males in families at risk.
• High fiscal relevance due to enormous costs for the society by child maltreatment.
• Results give further legitimation for expansion of public universal childcare.