

# Comments on “Preschool Availability and Female Labour Force Participation, Halim et al (2019)

Ashwini Deshpande

UNU-WIDER Conference on “Transforming Jobs”, Bangkok, September  
2019.

# Early Childhood Education Services

- Provision of preschools: massive benefits for children, but also the potential to increase maternal employment.
- Test this in the context of Indonesia.
- FLFP: 50.9% in 2016.
- Authors view this as low; is lower than East Asian average, but higher than South Asia.
- Pre-primary education: 25% (world avg: 32.1; regional avg: 43.3 and OECD avg: 73.3)

# Policy Change in 2003

- National Education System Act (NSEA) in 2003.
- Private and public provision increased
- 2004:  $<1/4^{\text{th}}$  of children (3 to 6) attended preschool.
- 2016: 60.3%
- Authors exploit the spatial and temporal variations in preschool access to gauge the causal effects of preschool access on maternal employment.

# Results

- Mothers of preschool-aged children increase their work participation by 7.4 pp, or 13.8% from the mean, if they are exposed to an additional public preschool per 1000 children.
- Private preschools do not have a statistically significant effect on work participation, but eligible mothers are more likely to hold a second job.
- No effect on earnings or hours worked.

# Paper: questions

- Carefully done.
- Figure 3: the trend in the growth in the density of public preschools doesn't show a break in 2003; but that of private schools does. Yet the effect of public preschools is significant.
- Public: WPR of mothers in high growth areas significantly higher than that in low growth areas in all years.
- 2014 onwards: convergence? Effect tapering off?
- Figure 5: WPR for high growth+ eligible > low+elig.
- But WPR for high (low)+not eligible same and higher than both above.

# Penalty of motherhood/childcare

- Figure 6: mothers whose first child is preschool aged (3-6) have higher WPR compared to mothers whose first child is 0-2.
- Preschool doesn't fully take care of childcare constraints.
- i.e. as a policy to push mothers back into the LF, or into the LF, we need childcare provisions earlier in the children's life.
- Figure 6: again, around 2013-14: convergence in WPR rates across different categories.
- Why should provision of preschools affect mothers' choice of industry? (Figure 8) (not formal/informal)

# Larger questions

- Paper finds that given preschools' hours of operation, mothers take up unpaid family work and jobs as agricultural workers.
- Preschools operate for less than half the day => tendency for women to take up informal work.
- What is the ultimate goal? To record an increase in WPR or to create conditions for women to participate in substantive work?
- Increase in FLFP, but in ways that increases their earning power and leads to economic empowerment → gender equality.

# Evidence from other studies

- Countries with higher affordable childcare have higher maternal employment rates.
- Provision of childcare, esp preschools, helps mothers achieve a better work-life balance.
- Caveats: scope of the policy limited in contexts where FLFP or affordable childcare is already high.
- Or where affordable childcare services crowd out other forms of non-parental care. Quality of caregivers?
- Norms about sharing domestic chores, childcare imp.