Financial well-being of lone, working-age mothers of children with developmental disabilities

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Background

- Most children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities live at home with family caregivers in the US
  - Regardless of age, the caregiving “system” rests on the backs of family caregivers, typically mothers
  - Ongoing deinstitutionalization, special education mandates since 1975
- In the US, family support and income transfers are exceptionally limited
  - $US 698 monthly max for Supplemental Security Income, income transfer program for people with disabilities in the US (75% of the federal poverty level in the US)
Background, continued

- Bidirectional relationship between poverty and developmental disabilities

- Lifelong care needs for people with developmental disabilities
  - Launching stage delayed (often for decades)
  - Reduced maternal employment -> increased poverty, reduced saving to buffer hardships and temporary setbacks
Research Question

- What is the financial well-being of lone mothers of children with developmental disabilities, in comparison to other lone mothers?

- Developmental disabilities are lifelong conditions, that emerge during childhood and are associated with cognitive impairments and other functional limitations
  - Down syndrome
  - Spina bifida
  - Cerebral palsy
  - Intellectual disabilities
  - Autism
Data & Analyses

- **Survey of Income and Program Participation**
  - Longitudinal survey conducted by US Census Bureau
  - Nationally representative
  - High quality information on income, assets, material hardship, program participation

- **Multivariate logistic & linear regression models**
  - Covariates: age, race, ethnicity, education, age of child, and income for the asset-based indicators

- **Cross-sectional analyses**
  - SIPP is longitudinal, but data on disability is only collected in 1-2 waves
# Description of Sample of Mothers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Without DD Children (n=6547)</th>
<th>With DD Children (n=242)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American*</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina or Hispanic (NS)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked most weeks of month***</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No job and not looking***</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean years) (NS)</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or better*</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\(p<.05\); **\(p<.01\); ***\(p<.01\)
Measures of Financial Wellbeing

- **Assets**
  - Net worth: assets from all sources excluding home equity
  - Liquid assets
  - Retirement accounts from all sources
  - Net worth < $0

- **Income**
  - Income from all sources (earned & unearned; including income transfers)

- **Poverty**
  - US income poverty: absolute measure of poverty equivalized for household size; in 2012, $US 11,170 was annual poverty level for individual
  - EU income poverty: households with income <60% of median
  - US & EU Asset poverty (net worth < 3 months of income at poverty level)
Findings
Unadjusted Indicators of Lone Mothers’ Well-being

- Annual income: **without DD** - $40,417, **with DD** - $32,450
- Net worth: **without DD** - $61,336, **with DD** - $54,467
- Liquid assets: **without DD** - $4,681, **with DD** - $28
- Retirement saving: **without DD** - $5,794, **with DD** - $935

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.01
Unadjusted Poverty of Lone Mothers

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.01
Limitations

- Reliance on self-reported information for disability status of children and dependent variables
  - No independent or clinical corroboration of child’s diagnosis
  - Longitudinal analyses of financial well-being not possible
  - Accuracy of financial well-being not verified
Implications

- Lone mothers of children with developmental disabilities are highly vulnerable
  - Low assets are particularly worrisome because children with developmental disabilities often have unexpected health care costs
- Policy interventions are warranted to improve the financial wellbeing of lone mothers of children with developmental disabilities
- Leave policies need to accommodate the dynamic needs of children with disabilities (FMLA is not adequate; no right to paid sick time)
- Existing income transfer programs (SSI, SSDI) are inadequate
  - Supplemental Security Income under fire
- Lone mothers need targeted support to enable them to work
  - Accessible child care, subsidies, training to child care providers in disability issues, accessible transportation, flexible leave
Acknowledgements

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