

# **The Parenthood Penalty in Mental Health: Evidence from Austria and Denmark**

## **Abstract**

Using Austrian and Danish administrative data, we examine the impacts of parenthood on mental health equality. Parenthood imposes a greater mental health burden on mothers than on fathers, leading to a long-run gender gap in antidepressant prescriptions of 93.2% (Austria) and 64.8% (Denmark). These parenthood penalties in mental health are likely to reflect the psychological effects of having, raising, and investing in children rather than biology. Supporting this interpretation, adoptive mothers (without biological ties) also encounter substantial penalties. Moreover, mothers who invest more in childcare (by taking extended maternity leave in quasi-experimental settings) are more prone to mental health problems.

This paper is joint work with Alexander Ahammer, Martin Halla, and Timo Hener.

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