

OFFICIAL ABSTRACT and CERTIFICATION

Parenthood: Penalty or Premium? The Effect of Parental Status and Gender on Perceptions of Doctors

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Two experiments were designed to test whether the motherhood penalty would be affected by age of children and physician specialty. In Experiment 1, 300 participants were randomly assigned to read one version of a Facebook-style recommendation for a pediatrician, a field dominated by women and in which experience with children would presumably be valued. After reading their assigned recommendation, which manipulated both the gender of the doctor as well as whether the doctor had children and the children's ages, participants rated the doctor in terms of warmth, competence, commitment, and their likelihood to visit him/her. While parental status did not affect perceived competence and commitment, pediatricians with children in elementary school were rated warmest and received the highest likelihood to visit ratings. The most likely explanation for the lack of a motherhood penalty lies in the nature of the field of pediatrics. A second experiment explored this idea by changing the type of doctor to an orthopedist, a male-dominated field which lacks an association with communal traits. The results of the second experiment were almost opposite those of the first; while warmth and likelihood to visit were not affected by parental status, orthopedists with either elementary or college-aged children suffered in terms of perceived competence and commitment. The results of these experiments suggest that in jobs linked with communal traits, there may be a parent premium rather than a motherhood penalty; however, having children may diminish perceptions of competence and commitment in male-dominated and/or agentic jobs.

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