

## **How to Explain the Rise of the Female Activity in France in the Seventies? Schooling in Nursery School and the Labour Supply of Mothers With Young Children**

Yves de Curraize

[yves.de-curraize@ofce.sciences-po.fr](mailto:yves.de-curraize@ofce.sciences-po.fr)

In this study, we want to identify and measure the effect of schooling in nursery school on the female labour supply. To this end we focus on the behaviour of mothers with young children all through the seventies, as early childhood education at the nursery school level increases. Illustrating this trend, in 1981 a third of two-year olds, 90 per cent of the three-year olds, and every four-year olds children go to school. In 1969 these rates are respectively 15 per cent, 57 per cent and 84 per cent. The increase time that young children spend outside of the family home might help to explain the increase in activity among women since they leave the labour market less often and for shorter period of time after their children are born.

The evolution of the distribution of the activity rates of women according to the age of their first child is a way to test our assumption. The rise of the rate of schooling is supposed to be exogenous, which is probable in a situation of rationing where the rate of schooling is primarily determined by the supply of places. An increase in the activity rate of mothers having a child from two and four years old – compared to other mothers, could reflect the positive effect of the rise in the precocity and the amount of children schooling in nursery school. However our assumption will be confirmed only if the change observed cannot be explained by another reason. This is why it is necessary to take into account all institutional changes which modified, all through the seventies, the distribution of activity rates. In the same way, we must control the effect of changes in the variables usually affecting the female labour supply. For example, the increased age of women at the birth of their first child, observed since 1975, has probably affected the distribution of women's activity rates according to the age of their first child.

On the econometric level, we estimate a model of labour supply explaining the probability of being active by the following variables: the age, the number of children, the age of end of study, size of the city and of course the age of the youngest child. The model is estimated year per year from 1969 to 1981 starting from the data of the *enquête Emploi*. We finish this study by distinguishing the departments where schooling increases the most from those where it increases less. We expect that the distribution of the activity ratios changes more in the departments where schooling strongly increases between 1969 and 1981.