

Cain G G. *Married women in the labor force: an economic analysis.*

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966. 159 p.

[Economics Research Center, University of Chicago, IL]

Employment of women has increased enormously since the turn of the century in the US and in every industrialized country. This book attempts to explain the increase in work by married women in the US with an economic theory that postulates that a person chooses how much time to spend in market work in response to factors that influence the wage she can obtain, her household (or family) wealth, and other factors. The theory is tested with a variety of data sources, and quantitative estimates of how work by wives responds to wages, wealth, and other variables are provided. [The *SSCI*® indicates that this book has been cited in over 275 publications.]

Glen Cain
Department of Economics
University of Wisconsin
Madison, WI 53706

November 20, 1987

The book was written as a doctoral dissertation in economics at the University of Chicago in 1962-1963. It was inspired by a research article by Jacob Mincer that has since been recognized as a classic.¹ The book, which went out of print soon after it was published in 1966, has been widely cited because it was the first book to use modern economic research techniques to analyze the increase in the number of women in the labor force. The topic has since become as important as any in labor economics, not only because of its economic implications but also because of its demographic, social, and political consequences.

My motivation for the topic had several sources. The increase in market work by

married women is one of the two most important changes in the labor force in this century. The other great change is the decline in the amount of market work by men, defining the amount as the fraction of men's lifetimes that is spent in market work. The important economic explanation for the decline in work by men is simply that the rise in wealth leads to a growth in leisure (defined as time not spent in market work or in the subsistence activities of living, such as sleeping). Leisure increased among men despite the fact that the secular increase in wages—the principal source of the long-run increase in wealth—made work time more rewardable and leisure time more expensive. Using just the economic model, the increase by women implied that the long-run increase in wages must have a positive effect on their work choices that overpowered the negative effect from the rise in wealth. An abundance of data and the available econometric techniques allowed the ideas to be tested quantitatively.

The motivation of explaining (if only partially) the important historical event of the growth in women's employment, particularly an event that was ongoing, was and is challenging. In addition, there are practical uses of the quantitative estimates in such econometric research. For example, if taxes on women's wages are increased by 10 percent, how much less will wives work in response to this change? If taxes on the wages of husbands are increased by 10 percent, how much more will wives work in response to this change? Clearly, the ordinary workings of the economy do not provide us with controlled experiments to answer these questions. Observational studies provide uncertain answers, and the desire to do further and better research is ever present. For recent surveys and analyses of these types of topics by economists see references 2 and 3.

1. Mincer J. Labor force participation of married women: a study of labor supply. *Aspects of labor economics. A conference of the Universities-National Bureau Committee for Economic Research.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962. p. 63-105. (Cited 265 times since 1966.)
2. Killingsworth M R & Heckman J J. Female labor supply: a survey. (Ashenfelter O & Layard R, eds.) *Handbook of labor economics, volume 1.* Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1986. 1,273 p.
3. Nakamura A & Nakamura M. *The second paycheck: a socioeconomic analysis of earnings.* New York: Academic Press, 1985. 509 p.