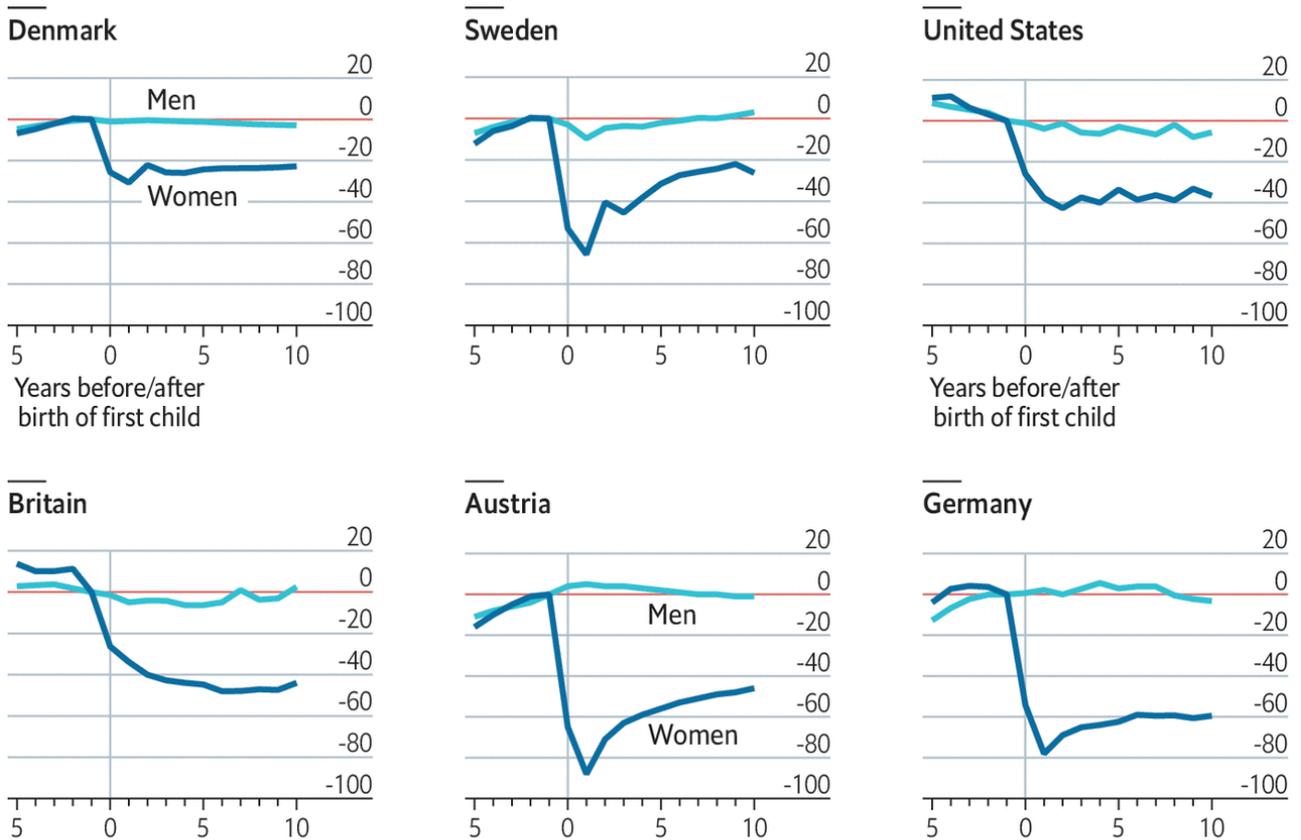


Daily chart - How big is the wage penalty for mothers? | Graphic detail

Jan 28th 2019, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2019/01/28/how-big-is-the-wage-penalty-for-mothers>

Labour costs

Earnings relative to pre-child earnings, 2015 or latest %



Source: "Child Penalties Across Countries: Evidence and Explanations", 2019, by H. Kleven, C. Landais, J. Posch, A. Steinhauer and J. Zweimüller
The Economist

Huge in Germany, not so big in Denmark

GERMANS CALL them Rabenmütter (“raven mothers”)—women who work so hard outside the home that they barely have time for their children. It is meant as an insult. The opposite is a Gluckenmutter (“hen mother”), who dotes on her children as a hen dotes on her eggs. This is hardly complimentary, either. Whatever mothers do, it seems, they are expected to feel guilty about it.

They also face a wage penalty as soon as they give birth. This is largely because mothers choose to work fewer hours, or in lower-paid but more child-friendly jobs, or not at all when their children are very young. A new academic working paper tries to measure this effect. It defines the motherhood penalty as the amount by which women’s earnings fall compared with

their earnings a year before giving birth. (It includes the non-existent earnings of women who give up work entirely.) It finds that the motherhood penalty exists in all six countries studied—but varies greatly in size.

It was largest in Germany: after ten years, a typical mother was earning 61% less than she was before she gave birth. In Austria the penalty was a hefty 51%. It was somewhat smaller, at about 40%, in America and Britain, and smallest in Sweden (27%) and Denmark (21%). Men's earnings in all countries were largely unaffected by parenthood.

The study found that the motherhood penalty was biggest for mothers whose own mother had stayed at home when they were children, as these were the most likely to follow their example and also stay at home.

Public policy also accounts for some of the difference. Sweden requires firms to offer 12 months of parental leave per child, split evenly between the two parents, with three months reserved for the father. If he does not take it, it is lost. This is perhaps why Swedish men see a small dip in their earnings after becoming fathers—they take more paternity leave than American or German men do. However, after three months they tend to go back to work, leaving their wives with the nappies and the carrot-flavoured mush.

The motherhood penalty was largest in countries where more people tell pollsters that women should stay at home with the kids—presumably because in such countries, they are more likely to do so. At the current rate of change, the World Economic Forum estimates that it will be 202 years before men and women achieve parity in the workforce.