

# Targeted Regulations on Abortion Providers: Impact on Women's Occupational Mobility in the U.S. Labor Market

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## Abstract

Restrictive abortion policies impact women's labor force outcomes in the United States, increasing economic inequality between men and women and limiting women's ability to move into higher-paying employment. The existing economic literature studying the impact that abortion restrictions have on women's labor force outcomes shows that there is a negative correlation between access to reproductive healthcare and more employment and economic opportunities as well as higher rates of educational attainment. Significantly, a 2019 economic study analyzing the impacts of targeted regulations on abortion providers (TRAP laws) on occupational mobility finds that these laws do restrict women's ability to change occupations. Further, they limit women's abilities to move into higher-paying occupations and full-time employment. There is also economic literature that shows that TRAP laws have a negative impact on the gender wage gap. There is ample research on the impact of birth control on economic outcomes for women, which has been shown to increase labor force participation and educational attainment for women. This paper studies the impact that TRAP laws have on women's occupational mobility for the years 2021-2022 using data from the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC). I combine economic and demographic data with abortion policy data from the Guttmacher Institute to analyze the impact that TRAP laws have on changes to women's labor force outcomes. My sample size consists of 9,933 observations from the CPS. Using a linear

probability regression model, I hypothesize that women living in states with strict TRAP laws are less likely to change occupations.

## I. Introduction

Access to reproductive healthcare largely impacts women's decisions on if, when, and under what conditions to have children. Restricting access to abortion reduces women's freedom in family planning, which affects the choices women make regarding their careers and occupations. This study analyzes the impact that targeted regulations on abortion providers (TRAP laws) have on women's ability to change occupations between the years 2021 and 2022. Occupational mobility is important because having the ability to change occupations into different fields can impact an individual's earning potential and opportunities for more advanced employment. It also serves as an important indicator for the health and vitality of labor markets; individuals may have increased occupational mobility in robust labor markets. TRAP laws are medically unnecessary, politically motivated restrictions on abortion services that make it more difficult for healthcare providers to perform abortion services (Brown, 2007). Examples include policies like provider requirements, which require only licensed medical doctors to perform abortions, as well as location requirements, which require abortion facilities to be located within fifteen miles from a hospital.<sup>1</sup> This leads to the question of how TRAP laws impact occupational mobility for women and men in the United States.

Using data from the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC), I use a linear probability regression model, based on Bahn, et al (Bahn, et al., 2019). which gives a robust methodology for analyzing the impact that TRAP laws have on job lock for American women from 2015-2016. Job lock is the idea that workers do not have any choice but to continue working in their positions, despite wanting to leave in order to keep benefits like health insurance and retirement pensions (Fisher, et al., 2016). This study will look at these impacts using more recent data from the years 2021-2022 to understand how this information has changed given more restrictions on abortion access in recent years. This study will analyze economic and demographic data to understand how likely women are to change occupations within the given year, controlling for several factors, including race, ethnicity, and education, as well as how accessible abortion is across states.

I expect to find that there is a negative relationship between TRAP laws and women's occupational mobility. Based on previous literature, I also expect to find that men's occupational mobility will be unaffected by TRAP laws but may be impacted by other factors in the study, like age or education. TRAP laws by and large reduce choice in reproductive freedom, meaning that women who may not wish to become mothers when they become pregnant do not have any other choices. This limits options regarding what individuals have in their careers, as the risk of unplanned pregnancies

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<sup>1</sup> Abortion procedures have a 99% safety rate, TRAP laws are not based in any medical or scientific necessity.

may change career decisions and steer workers away from taking risks in their careers. Women who have children often take time away from the labor market, which impacts their earnings when they choose to reenter the workforce.

This research will be significant and interesting for an economic understanding of how abortion policies directly affect labor markets (Coast, et al., 2021). It will add to the activism for women's right to choose and for the basic right to bodily autonomy (Dixon & Nussbaum, 2011). Restrictive abortion policies need to be examined to understand the economic consequences they will have on women and their economic outcomes. There is not a significant amount of existing literature on the impact that abortion restrictions have on occupational outcomes for women and men, and even fewer studies look at the impact on occupational mobility specifically. More recent literature on the impacts that abortion restrictions have on economic outcomes, especially as we are entering a time when abortion services are no longer a protected right. This research paper will add to the literature by giving more breadth to the research done by Bahn, Kugler, Mahoney, and McGruber in 2019, by looking at more recent data to determine how TRAP laws continue to impact occupational mobility.

## II. Literature Review

Access to birth control and abortion has significant impacts on women's role in society and the economy. Legalization and diffusion of the oral birth control pill in the 1960s gave women the power to control their fertility, which meant that women entered the labor force at unprecedented rates; further, it gave women the opportunity to pursue higher education and advanced degree programs, like medical and law school because they now could put off having children until they decided if and when they were ready (Bailey, 2006). Women were also getting married later in life than ever before due to increased access to contraception, and they now had the opportunity to focus on advancing their education and career once the pill became more readily accessible to young, unmarried women (Goldin & Katz, 2002). Before the *Roe v. Wade* (1973) ruling, several states already had legalized abortion; in states where abortion was legal prior to the ruling, there were much higher rates of labor force participation among women than there were in states without abortion protections, showing that abortion access has had a historically large impact on women's labor and career choices as well as economic opportunities (Kalist, 2004).

TRAP laws are more expensive to individuals and healthcare facilities because these harsh restrictions make it more difficult for women to access abortions. Raising costs of services mean that women may seek unsafe abortions, which often result in needing emergency medical care, which is more expensive to hospitals and individuals (Latoff, et al., 2020). Further, banning certain techniques of abortion can also be more costly, as legislators may ban or restrict a cheaper, less invasive alternative, such as medication abortion, which forces women to have expensive, often surgical abortion procedures (Latoff, et al., 2020). One TRAP law that several states have enacted in recent years has been the abortion provider regulation, meaning that only practitioners with medical degrees can perform abortion services, which often causes a severe

shortage of doctors who are able to provide abortions, therefore waiting periods can be longer (Latoff, et al., 2020).

Public funding for abortion has also been shown to significantly improve economic outcomes for women. When public funding for necessary abortions was available, women's options expanded, giving women in poverty and women who already had children increased opportunity to decide if they wanted to end the pregnancy; further, when public funding was not available, many families who had to carry the pregnancy to term were more likely to require government assistance (Cook, et al., 1999). Public funding also expanded women's career decisions, so women who had access to funding and were able to end their pregnancies were more likely to change their careers, many being able to move into full-time employment from part-time employment, as well as becoming employed after being out of the workforce (Bahn, et al., 2019). Financial burden is often a reason women do not obtain an abortion within the gestational time period (Coast, et al., 2020). It also more directly impacts poor women and women of color as they face more economic barriers as they have to navigate through abortion expenses, as well as traveling expenses and potential loss of wages (Jones, et al., 2013).

There are also economic consequences of being denied abortion services. Women who were denied abortion services due to gestational age limits were found to have been economically worse off when compared to those who were able to receive an abortion, particularly those in poverty. The options and supportive services for these women were significantly reduced, and many women experienced higher levels of poverty (Uphadyay, et al., 2023). They had much higher debt levels and lower credit scores for up to four years after giving birth (Miller, et al., 2023). When women are not able to receive the reproductive healthcare services that they need or want, it negatively impacts their financial well-being.

This literature is relevant and significant to my hypothesis that abortion access and increased access to contraception are important to women's control over their own fertility and whether or not they choose to have children. It is positively impactful to women's economic advancements, labor force participation, and increased educational attainment. Increasing women's economic power also improves the overall economy.

### III. Economic Theory

Occupational mobility refers to the ability of a worker to move from one occupation to another. The inability to move into different occupations can result in job lock, which is the idea that being "locked" in one's job can lead to decreased productivity, job satisfaction, and poorer matches between employers and employees. Occupational mobility is important for labor markets because having the ability to move to a job that is a better fit or a job that is higher paying facilitates more suitable employer-employee relationships, creating more job satisfaction for workers.

The supply and demand model can provide interesting insights into the role of economic theory in legislators' decision-making on policy. TRAP laws, such as admitting privileges, waiting periods, and facility requirements like corridor width, all reflect

supply-side policies, which have been found to be more effective in actually reducing the number of abortions, instead of placing restrictions on pregnant women (Joyce, 2011). This reflects my hypothesis by showing that conservative abortion policies are designed to place scientifically unnecessary restrictions on abortion providers, making it more difficult for women to seek and obtain abortion services (Andaya & Mishtal, 2016). Using an economic reasoning process also shows the intention that right-leaning policymakers have to push an anti-abortion agenda.

An important economic concept to this research is the gender wage gap in the United States, which provides evidence that women tend to make less than their male counterparts (Blau & Khan, 1994). This wage gap extends beyond discrimination based on gender, there is also a plethora of sociological and economic evidence of the motherhood penalty and fatherhood premium which shows that women with children experience even greater disparities in pay, particularly for mothers of children under the age of six (Budig & England, 2009). There is also evidence showing that men with children, specifically white, heterosexual, married men actually experience a fatherhood premium, meaning that having children often leads to an increase in earnings for working fathers (Glauber, 2008). This theory and evidence directly support my hypothesis that anti-abortion policy, which takes away women's right to choose to terminate pregnancy, effectively forcing pregnancy and motherhood onto some women, will hurt their potential earnings over their career and lifetime, reducing their economic freedom, especially compared to men (Ravid & Zandberg, 2023).

The human-capital theory is also an important economic theory to explain an individual's attributes towards their productivity and value to a particular occupation, greatly related to the returns of education and training (Fleischhauer, 2007). There has been a huge transition over the last fifty years of women gaining higher education, increasing their human capital, and supposedly closing the gender wage gap (though other factors still perpetuate it) (Becker, 1992). Women entered the workforce and higher education programs in droves because the diffusion of birth control pills and the right to an abortion greatly expanded their career and educational options (Goldin & Katz, 2002). Women's human capital substantially increased, especially as more women were entering medical and law programs, showing highly increasing returns to schooling (Bailey, 2006). The overturn of *Roe v. Wade* may limit women from building their human capital, women may not be able to go to school for advanced programs like law and medicine, and their college attainment rates may dwindle as well as they are not given the fundamental choice to control the timing of their fertility (Angrist & Evans, 1996). The inability of women to control the timing of when or if they have children may also exacerbate the gender wage gap among the college-educated.

Bahn, et al. (2019) found that TRAP abortion restrictions decreased women's ability to change occupations; it also restricted women's ability to move into higher-paying positions. This has a slightly greater impact on Hispanic women and women of color. This supports my hypothesis that restrictions on abortion access decrease women's economic outcomes and labor force participation. I would also want to add more on the impact this has on women of color's labor force participation and occupational mobility. Occupational mobility is the ability to change occupations should the individual choose to do so; abortion restrictions and TRAP laws have a negative effect on women, causing higher levels of job lock for women than men, overall. It also

finds that public funding for abortion and increased access to contraceptives under the ACA will positively impact women's and men's job opportunities and occupational mobility. This also supports my hypothesis that increased access to abortion and contraceptives is vital to women's economic freedom and job opportunities.

## IV. Method and Data Description

I estimate the following linear probability regression model to analyze the impact of abortion access on occupational mobility, following the model:

$$(1) Y_{isr} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TRAP\ laws_s + \beta_2 age_i + \beta_3 married_i + \beta_4 college\ graduate_i + \beta_5 urban_i + \beta_6 region_i + \beta_7 race + \beta_8 \times ethnicity_i + \beta_9 \times GSP\ per\ capita_s + \varepsilon_{isr}.$$

where  $Y_{isr}$  is an indicator showing whether individual  $i$  in state  $s$  in region  $r$  changed occupations between 2021 and 2022. The *TRAP laws* variable shows if the state introduced legislation restricting abortion access prior to 2022, showing how the variable impacts women's autonomy in reproductive healthcare decisions, which would affect their choices in family planning, causing them to possibly make different choices within the labor market. States that introduced TRAP laws before 2022 receive a value of 1, and a 0 if otherwise. I expect to find that TRAP laws will be negatively related to women's occupational mobility. I expect this relationship to be stronger for women than men, but not necessarily insignificant for men.

For robustness, I include several explanatory variables that are likely to impact occupational mobility. Age serves as a proxy for experience in the workforce and older individuals are less likely to change occupations, so I expect this number will be negative. I estimate models for women of reproductive and employment age between 18 and 50 years old, as well as for men of the same age group. I include marital status, as this is likely to impact employment decisions, and married individuals are less likely to change occupations, based on Bahn, et al., so I expect this number will be negative as well. I include a variable for whether or not the individual graduated college, as educated individuals are also less likely to change occupations. I also include an indicator for whether the individual lives in an urban area and regional controls defined by the United States Census Bureau to control for the ease of abortion access individuals living in urban areas are more likely to have than those in rural regions of the country. Controlling for regional effects is necessary because states with restrictive reproductive rights may also be without strong social safety nets and economic regulations may not be as strict. I include race and ethnicity variables as well, as institutional discrimination may make it more difficult for people of color and Hispanic individuals to change occupations.

*GSP per capita* indicates the state of the local economy in 2021. States with lower GSPs are expected to have lower rates of occupational mobility than states with higher GSPs because their economies are more robust. Workers tend to be more willing to take risks in their career decisions in states with higher-performing economies where

the demand for jobs is higher than they are in states with lower-performing economies, where labor demand is likely to be lower.

The methodology I use is a linear probability regression model, based on that of Bahn, Kugler, Mahoney, and McGruber (2019) to estimate the likelihood of an individual changing occupations between 2021 and 2022. It also uses several explanatory variables to predict the outcome variable of occupational change, as these are key inputs that could impact an individual's career decisions and willingness to take risks. This uses a very similar method as an ordinary least squares regression (OLS), but instead of having a continuous outcome, the outcome is binary, so it has a value of 1 if the individual changed occupations, and a value of 0 if the individual did not change occupations.

I use data from the Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) from the Current Population Survey (CPS), accessed through the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) for demographic and economic information on individuals across the country. The CPS ASEC is an individual survey that provides information on employment, wages, work experience, occupation, industry, weeks worked, hours worked per week, reasons for not working full-time, and supplemental income components. Households in the CPS database are interviewed every month for four months, then after eight months, are interviewed again every month for four months. ASEC uses the March interviews for its database. IPUMS allows me to use harmonized data that can be matched across two years, which makes this the ideal database to use for this type of analysis. This dataset is ideal for my research because it is longitudinal and allows me to connect information from two years so I can calculate occupational mobility using the two years. This source differs from that used in Bahn, et al., where they use CPS Merged Outgoing Rotation Group (MORG) data harmonized by the Center for Economic Policy Research (CEPR). I did not use this source because it has not been updated since 2019 and it requires researchers to create the longitudinal sample themselves, unlike IPUMS, which creates it for you.

I used the Guttmacher Institute to collect data on abortion policies across states prior to 2021. I included TRAP laws, which impact the ability of healthcare providers to provide abortion services to women in need. The Guttmacher Institute provides detailed data on reproductive and sexual health policies in the United States and abroad. I estimate models for women of reproductive and employment age between 18 and 50 years old, as well as for men of the same age group.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

	full sample		female		male		states w/ TRAP laws		states w/o TRAP laws	
	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.	Mean	Std. dev.
Occupational mobility	53.6%	0.499	53.2%	0.499	53.9%	0.499	53.3%	0.499	53.9%	0.498
TRAP	39.8%	0.490	38.9%	0.488	0.406	0.491				
Age	35.890	8.816	35.970	8.870	35.820	8.767	35.806	8.926	35.783	8.802
Less than high school diploma	6.9%	0.253	4.2%	0.200	9.6%	0.294	7.5%	0.264	6.8%	0.251
High school diploma	28.2%	0.450	22%	0.415	33.5%	0.472	31.1%	0.463	27%	0.444
Some college	25.2%	0.434	25.8%	0.437	24.8%	0.432	27%	0.444	24.2%	0.429
Four-year degree	29.3%	0.455	31.6%	0.465	27.4%	0.446	27.6%	0.447	30%	0.458
Advance degree	16.3%	0.369	20.5%	0.404	12.6%	0.332	13.6%	0.343	17.6%	0.381
Female	46.8%	0.499					45.7%	0.498	46.4%	0.499
Married	51.6%	0.500	52.6%	0.499	50.8%	0.500	52.7%	0.499	48.9%	0.500
Urban	88.6%	0.318	88.6%	0.318	88.6%	0.318	84%	0.367	91.8%	0.274



White	81.2%	0.391	79.2%	0.406	83%	0.375	84.6%	0.361	78.5%	0.411
Black	9.4%	0.292	11%	0.313	8%	0.271	9.1%	0.287	10.2%	0.302
Asian-American	6.1%	0.240	6.1%	0.239	6.1%	0.240	3.7%	0.189	7.5%	0.263
Hispanic	15%	0.357	13.6%	0.343	16.2%	0.368	10.9%	0.312	18%	0.384
Employed	94.4%	0.230	94.9%	0.219	93.9%	0.240	95.6%	0.205	93.3%	0.251
Unemployed	4.9%	0.215	4.3%	0.203	5.4%	0.226	3.6%	0.186	6%	0.238
Not in labor force	0.7%	0.086	0.8%	0.088	0.7%	0.085	0.8%	0.090	0.7%	0.085
Northeast	18.8%	0.391	19.5%	0.396	18.3%	0.386	12.7%	0.333	23.1%	0.422
Midwest	21.7%	0.412	21.6%	0.411	21.8%	0.413	32.6%	0.469	14.5%	0.352
South	36.3%	0.481	36.3%	0.481	36.2%	0.481	47.7%	0.500	28.7%	0.453
West	23.2%	0.422	22.7%	0.419	23.7%	0.425	7.1%	0.256	33.7%	0.473
GSP per capita	58790	12926.4	58910.5	13092.9	58684.3	12778.8	52874.4	6783.05	62712.2	14409
Number of observations	9,933		4,673		5,260		3,911		6,022	

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study, broken into categories of male and female, and states with and without TRAP laws. About 47% of the observations are female. Roughly 84% of those in the full sample are white, while almost 9% are Black, about 13% are Hispanic, and 5% are Asian-American. In the educational category, about 6% of individuals in the full sample have less than a high school diploma, roughly 25% have a high school diploma, as well as 25% have some level of college education. Approximately 42% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Of the full sample, 35% of individuals live in the South, 27% live in the West, 21% live in the Midwest, and about 17% live in the North. About 60% of the full sample are married, and about 2% are members of unions. About 50% of the full sample lives in states where there are TRAP laws; about 58% live in states where insurance covers the cost of contraceptives, and about 62% live in states where public funding for medically necessary abortion procedures is available. Around 95% of the full sample is employed, while roughly 4% is unemployed, and less than 1% is not in the labor force.

About 50% of the full sample changed occupations between 2021 and 2022, with roughly 50% of women in the sample, and 51% of men. States without TRAP laws saw slightly higher levels of occupational mobility, with about 51% of those in states without TRAP laws changing occupations, and about 50% of those in states with TRAP laws changing occupations. Looking at transitions from part-time to full-time employment, about 49% of the full sample changed occupations from part-time to full-time; about 48% of women, and 50% of men. There was about a 0.4% difference between states with TRAP laws and states without TRAP laws in occupational mobility from part-time to full-time occupations. Interestingly, among the full sample, about 28% of individuals moved into higher-paying occupations, with about 29% being women and 27% being men. States with TRAP laws saw less movement into higher-paying occupations than states without TRAP laws by about 1%.

State economies also show to perform better where there are no TRAP laws, where the average gross state product per capita in states with TRAP laws is \$52,271.76; the GSP per capita in states without TRAP laws is about \$63,037.48, which is about an \$11,000 difference. This does not mean that TRAP laws are the cause of lower GSP, but that it seems to have a negative effect on state economies. Further, states where economies perform better often have more job opportunities, meaning people may be more willing and likely to change occupations.

## V. Results

**Table 2: Occupational Mobility**

VARIABLES	<b>Women</b> <i>without region</i>	<b>Men</b> <i>without region</i>	<b>Women</b> <i>with region</i>	<b>Men</b> <i>with region</i>	<b>Women</b> <i>with region &amp; GSP per capita</i>	<b>Men</b> <i>with region &amp; GSP per capita</i>
TRAP	0.00827 (0.0153)	-0.0178 (0.0144)	-0.00248 (0.0166)	-0.0273* (0.0156)	-0.00226 (0.0171)	-0.0303* (0.0161)
Age	-0.00438*** (0.000895)	-0.00391*** (0.000866)	-0.00435*** (0.000900)	-0.00397*** (0.000870)	-0.00435*** (0.000901)	-0.00397*** (0.000871)
Married	-0.0387** (0.0163)	-0.0239 (0.0154)	-0.0401** (0.0164)	-0.0238 (0.0154)	-0.0401** (0.0164)	-0.0239 (0.0155)
College graduate or higher	-0.0726*** (0.0154)	-0.0273* (0.0150)	-0.0718*** (0.0155)	-0.0289* (0.0151)	-0.0716*** (0.0156)	-0.0282* (0.0151)
Urban	0.00252 (0.0237)	0.00178 (0.0227)	0.00551 (0.0241)	-0.000306 (0.0230)	0.00597 (0.0242)	0.00107 (0.0231)
Midwest			0.0186 (0.0238)	-0.0563** (0.0227)	0.0197 (0.0249)	-0.0611** (0.0238)
South			0.0355* (0.0213)	-0.0194 (0.0204)	0.0416 (0.0277)	-0.0268 (0.0266)
West			-0.00621	-0.0851***	-0.00592	-0.0861***

			(0.0234)	(0.0221)	(0.0235)	(0.0222)
Black	0.0360	0.0348	0.0272	0.0243	0.0269	0.0246
	(0.0239)	(0.0248)	(0.0244)	(0.0252)	(0.0244)	(0.0252)
Asian	-0.0295	0.0408	-0.0251	0.0475	-0.0250	0.0487
	(0.0314)	(0.0299)	(0.0317)	(0.0302)	(0.0317)	(0.0302)
Hispanic	-0.00289	0.0175	5.79e-05	0.0250	0.000860	0.0262
	(0.0225)	(0.0192)	(0.0230)	(0.0196)	(0.0231)	(0.0197)
GSP per capita					-1.25e-07	-4.63e-07
					(0.0222)	(0.0209)
Constant	0.741***	0.698***	0.726***	0.745***	0.724***	0.777***
	(0.0382)	(0.0359)	(0.0418)	(0.0393)	(0.0618)	(0.0594)
Observations	4,525	5,138	4,471	5,071	4,471	5,071
R-squared	0.019	0.009	0.020	0.013	0.020	0.013

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Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 2 provides the regression results on the impacts that TRAP laws have on occupational mobility – or if the individual is likely to change occupations – between 2021 and 2022. When looking at the impact of TRAP laws on occupational change, the results were not statistically significant for women, which is interesting because it does not corroborate my expectations or the previous literature. Interestingly, I also find that TRAP laws are negatively impactful on men’s occupational mobility when controlling for region and GSP per capita, which is surprising as Bahn, et al. did not find these results for men. Taken together, this means that TRAP laws harmed men’s occupational mobility and did not impact women’s occupational mobility from 2021 to 2022.

Age was statistically significant and negative for both men and women; married women were about 0.3% less likely to change occupations, while married men were about 0.2% less likely to change occupations. This is consistent with previous literature, as individuals get older, they are more likely to remain at the same job. Marital status was important when looking at women, unlike men, which was interesting. Married women were less likely to change occupations by about 3%, whereas men were unaffected by marital status; this is slightly different from previous literature, where married men were also less likely to change occupations. This has significant implications for various labor market outcomes. Wages could be impacted by this statistic, implying that married women are less likely to earn as much as their husbands. It also implies that married women may stay in jobs that are poor fits for other reasons, such as healthcare tied to employment, which may cause women to more heavily rely on employer-provided healthcare coverage, causing them to stay in their job, even if they may want to leave. Female college graduates were also less likely to change occupations by about 6%, while male college graduates were not affected.

The regional impact was important for men. Men in the Midwest were about 3.4% to 4% less likely to change occupations. Men in the West were about 5% less likely to change occupations. Regional differences had no significant impact on women’s occupational mobility. Further, no race or ethnicity variables were found to have a statistically significant impact on occupational mobility. This finding is surprising because it differed from previous research and countered my expectations that race and ethnicity would be impacted by TRAP laws more severely as these groups are more heavily harmed by reproductive restrictions.

## VI. Discussion and Conclusion

I find that TRAP laws did not significantly impact women’s occupational mobility, but did impact men’s occupational mobility when including controls for region and GSP per capita. These results did not match my initial expectation, which was that TRAP laws were going to have a significantly negative impact on women’s occupational mobility. I did not expect to find stronger results on the impacts of TRAP laws on men’s occupational mobility. This could have several economic and social explanations.

One explanation is the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic recession caused by the coronavirus pandemic had effects on the labor market that were different from

previous recessions. Women's labor force participation in January 2020 was 57.8% and declined to 54.6% by April 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).<sup>2</sup> Men's labor force participation was 69.2% in January 2020 and fell to 66.1% by April of the same year (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). In comparison to the 2008 financial crash, women's labor force participation was 59.5% in January 2008 and stayed consistent throughout the recession (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). On the other hand, men's labor force participation was 73.4% in January 2008 and declined to 71.2% at the end of the recession (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). This comparison highlights the unique impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on labor market outcomes for men and women compared to previous recessions, which showed a more substantial impact on men than women.

Women left the labor force in much higher numbers than men and were unable to find new jobs because of the economic shutdown. Primarily, the shutdown caused contact-heavy industries, such as service and healthcare, to close, which were jobs that were predominantly held by women, meaning more women lost their jobs early on in the pandemic (Bluedorn, et al., 2023). Women are also more likely than men to be employed in part-time and seasonal jobs, which tend to be cut first in times of economic downturn. Usually, male-dominated industries, namely manufacturing, are most likely to become unemployed as a result of economic recessions. Industries where women are more heavily concentrated than men were also not hiring during this time, meaning that even if women did want to change occupations, the options were constricted. Then childcare services closed down and schools moved to a remote platform, which also very heavily impacted working mothers, leading to huge inequalities in the division of labor between mothers and fathers in the home (Cohen, 2020).

COVID-19 also led to fears of people in the workplace getting sick and bringing the illness to their families, which could have also influenced their career decisions. If someone was worried about bringing COVID to their homes, they may have chosen to leave the workforce or not pursue a new career. Especially for workers in high-contact industries, where the risk of getting sick was even higher, which was predominantly women, they may have felt safer leaving their jobs due to the higher risk of exposure. There were a lot of uncertainties during this time, both on small scales within families and households, and on larger, macroeconomic scales, there were worries about the economic and financial implications of a massive shutdown, which could have made it even riskier to leave a stable job.

Another explanation for this is the fact that the Supreme Court case of *Dobbs v. Jackson* was leaked during this time. *Dobbs v. Jackson's Women's Health Center* (2022) was the case that determined abortion should not be constitutionally protected and led to the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, leaving the decision of abortion legality up to individual states. The decision was written by conservative Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito and was leaked anonymously to the public in early 2022. Many people speculated that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned, and access to abortion services was not guaranteed to women in many states, particularly throughout the South and Midwest. People may have remained at their jobs instead of choosing to take career risks during this period of uncertainty and fear when abortion access remained unsure. Many states also had trigger bans in place, meaning that if *Roe* was overturned,

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<sup>2</sup>Accessed through St. Louis Federal Reserve Economic Data

abortion bans were automatically made into law, which meant that when the *Dobbs* decision was released, states automatically banned abortion services, giving those in need very little time to prepare.

TRAP laws may have negatively impacted men's occupational mobility because they may have increased concerns about having to take on more responsibility if an unplanned pregnancy were to occur. Previously, when abortion access was not being threatened at this level, there was more room to take career risks, because if there was an unplanned pregnancy, abortion would have been an option for those who did not want to have a child or were unable to have children.

Connecting this with the pandemic, where many women were taking on more responsibilities in the home, threatening access to abortion during this time was a huge blow to women's right to choose. 59% of women who obtain abortion services already have children (Guttmacher Institute), meaning that if someone were to become pregnant during a time when there was economic uncertainty, fewer jobs were available, and women were facing much larger expectations in the home, they could not terminate their pregnancies. Coupling these issues made it tremendously difficult for women to seek out new job opportunities, or even stay in the workforce at all.

In conclusion, this paper studied the impact that TRAP laws had on occupational mobility between 2021 and 2022. I hypothesized that TRAP laws would negatively and significantly impact women's occupational mobility while having no significant impact on that of men. While I did not prove that this was the case, it still adds an interesting perspective on the impacts on the intersections between COVID-19, labor markets, and gender. I also include the impact that the *Dobbs* decision may have had on labor market decisions, limiting both men's and women's desire to take career risks, during a time when reproductive freedom was uncertain. There are some limitations that this study poses, including a relatively small sample size, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic possibly skewing the results. It will be interesting to revisit this study in the future, once we are better able to measure the impacts of the *Dobbs* case to give a greater understanding of how abortion restrictions play out in the labor market, in a post-*Roe*, post-pandemic America.

These results show significant policy implications. TRAP laws make it more difficult for men to change occupations, which is unexpected, but it is still important to address how policy-makers can correct this. For one, TRAP laws are inherently discriminatory as they limit access to necessary reproductive healthcare services. Secondly, they impact women and families' financial circumstances, as they are shown to make it more difficult to escape poverty and debt, so if families have to care for a child that they cannot afford, it places burden on parents, not just mothers, and can lock them into low-paying and unsatisfying jobs. There is a need for increased reproductive healthcare access, not just abortion, but also for birth control and family planning services to give families as much control over their fertility as possible.

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