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On the Distributional and Evolutionary Nature of the Obesity Wage Penalty¹

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Highlights:

- We examine the obesity wage penalty across the wage distribution and career.
- Quantile and fixed-effect quantile regression control for unobserved heterogeneity.
- We find an increasingly severe penalty across the wages distribution for women.
- The obesity wage penalty has grown over time and may slow wage growth.

Abstract

The economics literature supports a link between labor market measures, such as earnings, and health conditions, such as obesity. There is reason to believe the effects of obesity on wages may vary for high- and low-earning individuals and that obesity wage effects may evolve over a lifecycle or from generation to generation. Drawing on data from two longitudinal surveys, we estimate quantile and fixed effect quantile regressions, among others, to further examine the obesity wage effect. Results suggest an increasingly severe penalty across the wage distribution for females. Specifically, the highest-earning women may be penalized as much as five times that

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