Information, Norms, and Female Employment: An Experiment in India

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Information, Norms, and Female Employment

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However, the fact that many women aren’t employed could mean families simply lack information.

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Addressing information constraints much easier than norms:
- This paper: low-cost video intervention that provided promotional information on new job for women
Experiment in Rural Uttar Pradesh, India

- Partner with one of India’s largest carpet producers
- Program to train and employ women as carpet weavers
  - Women paid salary during training
- Worked with firm as it introduced program in 6 villages
- Sample: 490 married women, aged 18-40, from the villages
Promotion Intervention

- Video with promotional information on program
  - Six minutes
  - Firsthand accounts interspersed with shots of workplace

- Randomize whether husbands and parents-in-law saw video
  - Have a lot of control, often oppose women’s employment
    (Lowe & McKelway 2022); men worldwide less supportive of
    women working than women (Bursztyn et al. 2023)
  - Control: basic details
  - Treatment: basic details and promotion

- All women given basic details and promotion
Treatment Increased Women’s Employment in the Short Run
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N = 490, 490, 416, and 391. Strata FE and PDS Lasso variables included. Standard errors clustered by HH. Bars denote 90% CIs.
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Why so effective?
- Firsthand accounts lent credibility
- Seeing workplace
- Two types of info spread well in video

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Did information on women’s employment change HH bargaining power?

Two measures of empowerment in the household at 4 months:

1. Index of women’s reports of who makes 7 different HH decisions
2. Incentivized choice

Women entered into lottery, the prize was their choice between:

1. Husband’s allocation of 500 rupees across women’s and men’s goods
2. Husband’s allocation of $500 - P$ after discussion with woman. $P$ = 0, 50, or 100 (randomized).

Greater bargaining power has ambiguous prediction for discussion choice

More control in discussion → choose discussion
More control outside discussion → discussion not worth time and effort

Price varies strength of two forces

Higher price → less money to be bargained over → first force weaker

More bargaining power could make discussion more likely at low prices, but less likely at high prices.
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Treatment Raised Women’s Empowerment in the Household

Involvement in HH Decisions Index

Chose Discussion at:
- No Price
- Mid Price
- High Price

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Hours Spent Yesterday on:
- Work
- Chores
- Leisure
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Why were chores not reallocated?
Strong norms that women internalize
Over 80% said woman’s main role should be housework
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- Why? Doing chores and work may have been unsustainable

- Treated women who left work between short- and long-run endlines were the ones who spent more time on chores in short run

- No evidence for other potential explanations for fading of employment effect
  - No evidence for: spillovers to control, women disliking work, select group surveyed at 1 year
Conclusion

- An information intervention increased women’s employment in the short run
  - Despite strong social norms that constrain it

- Policymakers or firms could implement such interventions at low cost
  - E.g. in brochures or advertisements

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Thank you!