The Impact of Phone-based Job Search Assistance on Women's Economic Recovery From the Covid-19 Pandemic in Pakistan

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Sector(s): Gender, Labor Markets

Fieldwork: Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan

Sample: Jobseekers

Target group: Job seekers Urban population Women and girls

Outcome of interest: Employment

Intervention type: Digital and mobile Information COVID-19 response

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The economic crisis resulting from COVID-19 is expected to affect women disproportionately. In Pakistan, researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to test the impact of a job search assistance platform on men's and women's return to searching for jobs and working during the COVID-19 economic recovery. Project ongoing; results forthcoming.

Policy issue

The Covid-19 crisis is likely to have disproportionate negative effects on women's employment. Women work in sectors that are more likely to face greater job losses (e.g., teaching, caregiving, etc.) relative to male-dominated sectors. Further, women may also face greater risk of contracting Covid-19 at work, as they are often employed in professions that require in-person interaction, such as teaching or caregiving. The COVID-19 crisis has also increased the burden of unpaid and domestic care work, which often falls on women due to cultural norms around gender roles, and limits employment opportunities.

Finally, when countries begin to recover from the crisis, women may face barriers to finding jobs due to mobility constraints, care responsibilities, and lack of information.

How does the Covid-19 crisis impact women's economic opportunities, relative to men's? Can a job search assistance program improve women's job search and employment outcomes during Covid-19 recovery?

Context of the evaluation

Women's labor force participation in Pakistan is low; only 22 percent of women over the age of 15 engaged in the labor force in 2020 [1], . To better understand women's job search and employment in Lahore, Pakistan, researchers are conducting randomized evaluations through a job search platform called Job Talash. Job Talash is a job search assistance platform that matches jobseekers to available jobs based on their qualifications and preferences. To date, the Job Talash platform has collected

administrative data from over 800,000 matches of ads with qualified jobseekers. Researchers are using the Job Talash platform to conduct other research on the effect of the pandemic on the Pakistani labor market.

Survey data from Lahore illustrates that, among participants in the study, women are more likely than men to work in occupations that involve greater health risks due to in-person interactions. For instance, 64 percent of women in the study started their careers as teachers, which was also the most common profession among women. Contrastingly, male jobseekers worked in far more varied occupations, with no single occupation making up more than 10 percent of men's first jobs.

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Details of the intervention

Researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to study the impact of phone-based job-search assistance, provided on a mobile platform, on women's job search and employment during the Covid-19 crisis.

Researchers randomly assigned individual job seekers on the Job Talash platform to either the treatment or comparison group. The platform regularly matched jobseekers in both groups to vacancies based on their qualifications and preferences. The comparison group received a text message with a short list of the matched vacancies and an invitation to call Job Talash to submit job applications. The treatment group received a phone call with a list of the vacancies and could submit applications during the call. To evaluate the impact of the program, researchers will compare the treatment group to the comparison group with access to Job Talash, as well as to a another group of households, identified by the researchers, which did not have access to the platform.

To understand the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on employment outcomes, researchers are conducting additional data analysis as part of this ongoing evaluation. The Job Talash platform collects a host of administrative data on jobseekers and firms. With data

on 10,000 jobseekers (7,000 male and 3,000 female), researchers will explore how occupational health risks, job loss, and job search differ by gender during and after the crisis. For example, do women apply to jobs with more flexible work hours to accommodate increased care responsibilities? Researchers will also conduct phone surveys with participating households to measure job loss, income, household responsibilities and dynamics, and Covid-19 symptoms at both the individual- and household-level.

Results and policy lessons

Research ongoing; results forthcoming.

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1.   World Bank. "Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)" The World Bank Group.