

Women at Work: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment in Urban Djibouti

Stefanie Brodmann, Emanuela Galasso and Florencia Devoto

Abstract: “What keeps women in some developing countries from participating in the labor market? Is it limited job opportunities or limiting social norms? We examined the effects of these two factors on the labor supply decisions of women in urban Djibouti. Women were randomly assigned offers to be employed in a workfare program. The offers were exclusively targeted at women; the work could be performed by any other household member; and the earnings were paid out into a bank account established for the person who performed the work. We find a net increase in labor supply of over 50 percentage points: 96 percent of the women accepted the offers and 73 percent of women performed the work themselves. We observed none of the longer-term effects on labor supply by women that we would have observed if the increases in women’s employment had changed prevailing social norms on women working. Indeed, the women who received the temporary employment offer reverted back to non-participation in the labor market when the program ended. This suggests that, in urban Djibouti, what keeps women from participating in the labor market is not so much deterrent social norms but limited employment opportunities.”