

Tracking the Value of Time During the Post-Curfew in Nairobi, Kenya

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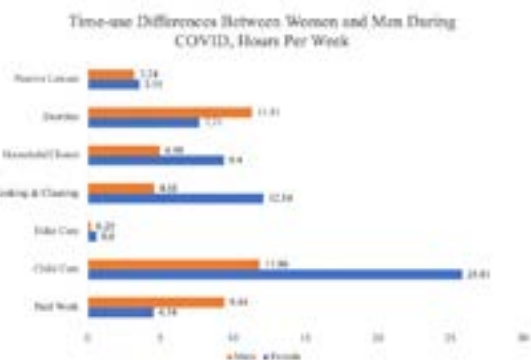


COVID-19 has shaped employment and the value of time for informal workers in Kenya

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Topic at a Glance

COVID-19 has had widespread consequences in Nairobi, Kenya, including the loss of earnings and starvation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women have fared disproportionately worse, with higher incidences of job loss, skipped meals, and increased household work. This project seeks to understand how COVID has shaped employment and well-being for a diverse group of respondents. Even without a global crisis, it is difficult to track earnings in settings where informal work prevails. To overcome this challenge, this project tracks earnings alongside a novel measure, the value of time. This measure captures changes in opportunity costs and in doing so, reveals respondents' economic situations and well-being. By developing and tracking this value of time measure, this project also seeks to provide information that can be used to target aid or employment support to those who are stuck in an unemployment or underemployment trap as a result of coronavirus disruptions.



New Insights

Our broad objective in this project was to provide information that could be used to target aid and welfare or employment support to those who are stuck in an unemployment or underemployment trap due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We also wanted to understand how COVID-19 shaped the time-use and well-being of informal sector workers living in Nairobi, Kenya. To meet these objectives, we targeted a large sample of respondents living in Kibera, Kenya. We successfully recruited $N = 597$ respondents. Our sample comprised mostly of women (67.7%), in a marriage or marriage-like relationship (51.4%), with three+ kids living at home ($M=2.67$, $SD=1.50$).

- Consistent with research conducted world-wide, the respondents that we surveyed reported significant disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, respondents reported working an average of 8.37 fewer hours per week, which resulted in a personal income loss of 6,700 KSH per month. Of the 31% who reported being laid off from one of their main jobs since March 2020, 98.5% of respondents reported that this layoff was a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast to anecdotal evidence suggesting that women might be disproportionately affected, in our sample, we did not observe any gender differences in income loss or job loss because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consistent with the idea that there was variability in employment outcomes, more highly educated respondents experienced significantly less income loss because of the pandemic.
- However, consistent with previous research conducted in the US, Europe, and South America, women reported spending considerably more time on chores and childcare during the COVID-19 pandemic as compared to men. Notably, the women in this sample reported spending nearly twice as much time engaged in childcare, cooking, cleaning, and chores as compared to men, and women reported that the time they spent engaging in these activities represented a significant increase that was driven by the COVID-19 pandemic. Because they spent more time on chores and childcare, they also reported spending less

time engaged in passive leisure activities like resting and relaxing. In turn, the fewer hours that women spent engaged in passive leisure activities compared to men significantly undermined their subjective well-being as compared to men.

- Consistent with the results of our previous pilot research, the value of time measure employed in this study tracked with the number of hours that respondents reported working. Respondents who worked more and had less slack time available also exhibited a higher value of time than respondents who worked less and had more slack time available. This measure also significantly correlated with respondents' self-reported financial health. People who had less slack time available and exhibited a higher value of time were also more likely to report that they were financially comfortable or were doing "OK" financially. This speaks to the usefulness of this measure as a way to proxy income among informal workers with variable income.

Policy Recommendations

- This project underscores the importance of understanding the long-term economic and household changes that have happened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents in our sample reported persistent and significant decreases in wages. These decreases were somewhat attenuated if respondents reported higher levels of education but were—perhaps unsurprisingly—widespread and pervasive among respondents.
- This project speaks to the importance of measuring well-being and of targeting interventions toward the reduction of unpaid labor that women disproportionately face and are increasingly burdened with because of the additional caregiving demands placed during COVID-19. Women spent significantly more time engaged in chores and childcare. While this did not appear to impact employment outcomes in terms of the amount of money earned between women and men, these childcare and chore demands did shape well-being. To the extent that women were unable to engage in passive leisure activities like resting and relaxing at the same rates as men, they also experienced significantly lower levels of subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction and positive mood). Although we did not observe impacts of passive leisure time on women's physical health in our current research, over time, the ability to rest could significantly undermine women's health.
- Finally, this project speaks to the benefits of using value of time measures to track underemployment and unemployment. Our value of time measures tracked with respondents' self-reported employment outcomes, speaking to the potential value of tracking the value of time to better understand the time availability and employment outcomes of respondents living in low-income communities where frequent surveying is

logistically difficult and expensive.

- Overall, this project speaks to the importance of 1) measuring the value of time 2) understanding the burden of unpaid labor not only for employment outcomes but for wellbeing and 3) designing interventions to reduce the burden of unpaid labor for women.

Limitations

A limitation of this research is that we used convenience sampling—we recruited people who were interested and willing to complete our surveys and who were willing to respond to the measure of the value of time. This could limit the generalizability of our findings. We might be oversampling individuals who have enough time to complete our surveys and wealthier individuals who have the time and social network necessary to complete these surveys and learn about the possibility of completing these surveys through pay through their social networks. Given the sample characteristics, our results likely underestimate the impact of the burden of chores and childcare on women's well-being (if the busiest women are not represented in our data set). Our results also likely underestimate the impact of COVID-19 on the employment status of working adults living in Nairobi Kenya, given that we are most likely sampling wealthier and more educated participants. Future research should seek to replicate these efforts with a nationally representative sample.

Read more → g2lm-lic.iza.org/projects/covid-19/tracking-the-value-of-time-of-informal-sector-workers/

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