The Impact of Transportation and Information Access on Women's Job Search and Employment in Pakistan

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Sector(s): Firms, Gender, Labor Markets

Fieldwork: Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan

Sample: Jobseekers

Target group: Job seekers Urban population Women and girls

Intervention type: Digital and mobile Information Transportation

Partner organization(s): Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan

Women in South Asian cities are less likely than men to participate in the labor market, and are particularly likely to be “latent workers,” who are open to work but are neither actively working nor seeking employment. Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to test the impact of increased access to transportation and assistance with interview scheduling on women’s employment.

Policy issue

In low- and middle-income countries, urban labor markets contain a growing number of unemployed or economically inactive people, particularly among women. Women in these countries face a variety of gendered constraints that could inhibit their participation in the labor market, including transportation barriers and lack of phone access. Can interventions that make it easier to attend job interviews, like guaranteed transportation and interview coordination, improve women’s employment outcomes?

Context of the evaluation

In Pakistan, only 25 percent of women are active in the labor force, but another 25 percent express interest in employment. To better understand the reasons for women’s relatively low workforce participation, researchers collaborated with the Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan through their job search program Job Talash, which provides a job-matching service for both jobseekers and firms in Lahore, Pakistan. Researchers’ previous work with Job Talash has studied the impact of phone-based job-search assistance on women’s job search and employment during the Covid-19 crisis.

Female latent workers are common in this setting: 44% of women and 10% of men were neither working not searching for work when they registered for Job Talash. For women in particular, there are a number of reasons why individuals who are interested in work might not actively seek employment. Women might have significant physical mobility constraints, including both lack of access to transportation and concerns over safety or social acceptability of travel. Indeed, researchers’ previous work with Job

Talash has found to date that an offer of safe transportation can increase women's job search.

Furthermore, women may face barriers to information about jobs due to limited access to mobile phones (only approximately 50 percent of women in researchers' sample own mobile phones). Others may share a phone with another household member, who is often male.

Details of the intervention

Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to test the impact of increased access to transportation and job interview coordination on women's employment. They conducted two complementary interventions, the first testing the combined impact of transportation assistance and third-party interview scheduling assistance on interview attendance and job offer rate, and the second testing the impact of applicants' physical distance on firms' interest in that applicant.

Interview assistance and transport: Women with low access to transportation may not only struggle to commute to work, but also to successfully search and interview for a job. Furthermore, women without easy access to phones may struggle to communicate and coordinate with firms even once receiving an interview. Therefore, researchers separated applicants who received interview offers with firms into three groups:

1. *Transport and coordination group*: Applicants both received transportation to an interview and received assistance from Job Talash coordinating their interview schedule with firms.
2. *Coordination group*: Applicants only received assistance coordinating their interview schedule with firms.
3. *Comparison group*: Applicants received neither transportation nor coordination support.

Distance and firm interest: It is plausible that firms are less interested in an applicant who lives far away, even if they have access to transportation. Among applicants who were provided a guarantee of transportation to work in the intervention described above, researchers randomly assigned them into three groups:

1. *CV location removal group*: Applicants' location of residence was removed from their CV.
2. *Transportation offer information group*: Firms were informed of applicants' transportation offer.
3. *Dual intervention group*: Both interventions were applied.

Through these interventions, researchers hope to learn how firm preference on employee location, as well as transportation and communication limitations, can affect likelihood of employment, in addition to how these barriers may differently impact female and male job applicants. Researchers will also analyze the cost-effectiveness of the job search interventions to shed light on potential for scaling.

Results and policy lessons

Research ongoing; results forthcoming.