Gender-specific managerial training program and firm productivity in Colombia

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Sector(s): Firms, Gender, Labor Markets

Fieldwork: Good Business Lab

Sample: 500 shift and store managers across 76 restaurants

Target group: Firms Managers Workers

Outcome of interest: Employment Job mobility Productivity Profits/revenues

Intervention type: Apprenticeships and on-the-job training Training Employment

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0011019

Partner organization(s): Good Business Lab, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Arcos Dorados Holdings

In Colombia, women continue to experience significant gender gaps in the labor market and may face barriers to accessing managerial positions, which can affect their productivity and career aspirations. Researchers are evaluating the impact of providing a gender-specific managerial training program on career advancement prospects for women and workplace productivity.

Policy issue

Across many settings, women experience significant gender gaps in the labor market and may face barriers to accessing higher-paying managerial positions. Moreover, the lack of career advancement opportunities for women might negatively affect workplace productivity and women's career aspirations, and could contribute to a culture of discrimination in the workplace.

However, some evidence suggests that women's presence in managerial roles can motivate women in frontline positions, which include workers engaging directly with customers and service providers. Additional research indicates that managerial skills can help motivate worker productivity, and that different leadership styles can be differentially effective for male and female managers. Can a gender-specific managerial training program improve the career advancement prospects for women and contribute to workplace productivity?

Context of the evaluation

In Latin America, women continue to experience significant gender gaps in the labor market. In 2022, women's labor participation rate in the region, at 52 percent, was 23 percentage points lower than men's participation rate. In this setting, close to 50 percent of working women are employed in the service sector, making it one of the main employers for women. However, women often concentrate on low-wage, frontline roles instead of better-paid managerial positions.

In Colombia, women's labor force participation rate is 27 percentage points lower than men's, and over 30 percent of working women are concentrated in the commerce, restaurant, and hotel industry. In this context, previous research suggests that in the quick service restaurant (QSR) sector, relatively few women reach managerial roles. In a leading QSR company, while 62.5 percent of frontline workers are women, only 54 percent of the middle management positions are occupied by women, and the estimate further decreases for senior management.



A woman entrepreneur in Colombia.

Photo credit: Shutterstock; Alexandre Laprise

Details of the intervention

Researchers partnered with Arcos Dorados to evaluate the impact of providing a gender-specific managerial training program on career advancement prospects for women and workplace productivity. The study participants were 500 shift managers, both women and men, working across 76 fast-food restaurants across Colombia.

The study had two intervention arms, and each restaurant participating in the program was randomly assigned to one of three groups :

1. *Gender-matched curricula group (25 stores)*: Managers and promotion candidates received a four-month gender-specific training, in which women received a female-oriented training and men a male-oriented training.
2. *Gender-mismatched curricula group (25 stores)*: Managers and promotion candidates received a four-month training using the curriculum created for the opposite gender. The goal of this intervention arm was to assess potential complementarities between gender-specific management styles.

3. *Comparison group (25 stores)*: Managers and promotion candidates received no training intervention.

The main outcomes of interest in this intervention are sales, productivity, and employee retention, as measured at the store level through daily production data and survey data before and after the intervention. In addition, researchers surveyed managers prior to the intervention and six months after completing the training program. The manager survey included information on demographics, managerial traits, and tested knowledge of the content covered by the training program.

Results and policy lessons

Research ongoing; results forthcoming.