



Are all jobs created equal? A cross-national analysis of women's employment and child malnutrition in developing countries[☆]



Rebekah Burroway^{*}

Stony Brook University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 March 2017
 Received in revised form 29 June 2017
 Accepted 28 July 2017
 Available online 1 August 2017

Keywords:

Female labor force participation
 Women's employment
 Child malnutrition
 Developing countries
 Cross-national research
 Multi-level models

ABSTRACT

Using multi-level models, the analysis examines female employment and child stunting across 49 developing countries. At the country level, female labor force participation is not associated with malnutrition after controlling for economic development. At the individual level, a binary measure of employment is not significantly associated with malnutrition. However, a more nuanced measure of seven occupational categories shows that certain types of employment improve malnutrition. Professional, clerical, sales, and domestic jobs are associated with reduced stunting. These effects are only partially mediated by wealth, perhaps suggesting that some jobs may bring benefits to the household beyond the sheer acquisition of tangible resources. Agricultural jobs are associated with increased malnutrition. Manual labor and service work do not have an effect on malnutrition, compared to unemployment. Thus, women's employment is not necessarily a mechanism for empowerment and wellbeing. Not all jobs are created equal, and many of them do not confer the benefits that are typically associated with working outside the home.

© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Globally, gender gaps in employment trended toward convergence until 2007, followed by a period of reversal from 2008 to 2012 during the economic crisis (ILO, 2012). Gender gaps remain relatively unchanged since then in many parts of the world, while the gaps grow wider in others (ILO, 2016). Although approximately 370 million women joined the labor market in the last two decades, women still comprise less than 40 percent of the work force globally (Verick, 2014). And the chance for women to participate in the labor market remains about 27 percent lower than for men (ILO, 2016).

Nonetheless, many scholars, policy makers, and development practitioners alike posit that women's employment is a key mechanism for enhancing health and wellbeing (e.g., Sen, 1999; Diiro et al., 2016; IFC, 2013; World Bank, 2012). Improving women's employment prospects has long been a goal of development agencies worldwide (Lamontagne et al., 1998). World Bank President Jim Yong Kim underscores the broad-based benefits of promoting gender equality in the labor market: "We know that reducing gender gaps in the world of work can yield broad development dividends: improving child health and education, enhancing poverty reduction, and catalyzing productivity. Empowering women and girls is vital in order to achieve our twin goals: ending extreme poverty by 2030 and boosting shared prosperity" (World Bank, 2014: foreword).

[☆] This research was supported by a grant from the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Fund for Excellence at Stony Brook University. Previous versions of this paper were presented at the annual meeting of the Sociology of Development in Salt Lake City, Utah; the winter meeting of the Sociologists for Women in Society in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico; and the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, New York.

^{*} Department of Sociology, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, NY 11794, United States.

E-mail address: rebekah.burroway@stonybrook.edu.

Despite the persistent gender gaps in labor force participation, women's employment is heralded as a tool of both empowerment and development, particularly in poor countries. Given that women bear the primary responsibility for caregiving across many different cultural contexts (Duflo, 2012), their empowerment has particularly substantial consequences for children.

Yet, most recent research explores the impact that women's work has on children in the developed world (e.g., Morrill, 2011; Wills and Brauer, 2012; Bauer et al., 2012). While these studies generate important insights, the findings do not easily translate to developing country settings. For example, a large and growing body of research links maternal employment to child obesity in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands (Morrissey, 2013). Although the concern over child obesity is growing in developing countries, this is not the most pressing childhood problem for most. Almost one in four children are stunted worldwide (versus 6 percent who are overweight), and 90 percent of stunted children live in the developing world (UNICEF, 2015). Understanding the patterns of inequality in child malnutrition not only affects children in the present, but it also has long-term consequences for the future. Adults who have suffered from malnutrition in childhood are less physically and intellectually productive (Blackwell et al., 2001). This makes child malnutrition a fundamental underpinning of development in developing countries because it shapes how nations progress (UNICEF, 2007).

But empirical evidence for the link between women's work and child malnutrition in developing countries is both limited and mixed (Mugo, 2012). In country case studies, some find that maternal employment improves child malnutrition (Lamontagne et al., 1998 [Nicaragua]; Diiro et al., 2016 [India]). Others find that employment increases the risk of malnutrition and infant death (Abbi et al., 1991 [India]; Basu and Basu, 1991 [India]; Glick and Sahn, 1998 [Guinea]), or that it is not statistically significant (Berman et al., 1997 [India]; Mugo, 2012 [Kenya]). Still others report mixed results depending on the health outcome (Ukwuani and Suchindran, 2003 [Nigeria]) or the gender of the child (Bhattacharya, 2006 [India]). Cross-national studies are rare, but yield similarly contradictory results (e.g., Boehmer and Williamson, 1996; Frongillo et al., 1997). Because of such inconsistent findings and the relative lack of developing country or cross-national analyses, there is still much we do not know about the effect of women's work on child health.

Thus, this analysis contributes to previous literature by examining the country-level influences on child malnutrition, as well as the household and maternal characteristics that impact malnutrition at the individual level. The study utilizes multi-level models that estimate the effects of female employment on within- and between-country variation in stunting among children under the age of 5 in 49 developing countries. Comparing women's status across countries is essential for capturing the structural conditions that shape gender stratification (Ghuman et al., 2006). Furthermore, multi-level models of women's employment are important for understanding wellbeing because the country-level variables capture the norms of the broader society and processes of institutionalization, while the individual-level variables tap into household processes and child socialization (Treas and Tai, 2012). This technique suggests that child malnutrition is shaped by proximate variables, such as mother's employment or household wealth, but it is also shaped by the larger social context in which a child lives.

1. Women's employment, empowerment, and child health

Gender remains a salient source of social stratification worldwide, and inequalities between men and women are frequently linked to a wide range of demographic and health outcomes (Ghuman et al., 2006). Women's empowerment is touted as central to improving conditions for the next generation, since women's opportunities shape those of their children (World Bank, 2011). Despite its frequent use, *women's empowerment* is an elusively defined refrain that is associated with many concepts (i.e., agency, autonomy, status, control, equality, freedom). Among the various definitions, there is some overlapping consensus on the key aspects of empowerment that are most central to improving wellbeing: resource control and decision-making (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Desai and Johnson, 2005).

Women's education is one of the most well-studied correlates of development and child health in the developing world (Bollen et al., 2001) and is typically used as a proxy indicator for empowerment. This is, in part, because education fosters more opportunities for women to work outside the home (Nussbaum, 2003). Yet, the large and growing scholarship on the consequences of women's education for child health far outweighs the scholarship on women's work in developing countries (Basu and Basu, 1991). What has been missing from cross-national research is an investigation into whether women's work has the same positive benefits for children in developing countries that education does.

In theory, women's employment improves child health by giving them control over income, which subsequently enhances their status in society and increases their decision-making capacity in the household. Lisa C. Smith et al. (2003) stress that "employment is at the root of women's economic independence from men" (22). Indeed, economic power and control over resources may be the most important determinants of women's equality (McGuire and Popkin, 1990). Such control over income is imperative for improving child health because women are more likely than men to use economic resources on basic family needs (Blumberg, 1988; Hoddinott and Haddad, 1995). Putting income under women's control raises household allocations toward food, nutrition, health, and education (Quisumbing, 2003; Gummerson and Schneider, 2013). Consequently, child survival probabilities increase significantly when income is controlled by mothers (Thomas, 1990). Children's wellbeing

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5046960>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5046960>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)