

Constrained Geographical Mobility And Gendered Labor Market Outcomes Under Structural Adjustment: Evidence from Egypt

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Summary. — We examine in this paper the evolution of gender gaps in labor market outcomes during structural adjustment and explore the extent to which widening gaps can be attributed to women's more limited geographical mobility. Using comparable household surveys carried out in 1988 and 1998, we show that gender gaps in access to wage and salary employment and in earnings have widened during this period, especially in the nongovernmental sector. We attribute these changes, at least in part, to women's more limited geographical mobility. We show that women's commuting rates are not only much lower than those of men, but also have remained stagnant in a period where males were having to travel significantly more to obtain jobs outside the government.

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Key words — gender, wage differentials, labor market, structural adjustment, geographic mobility, commuting, Egypt, Middle East

1. INTRODUCTION

There are persistent and repeated claims in the international literature that structural adjustment measures and market-oriented reforms are strongly associated with a deterioration of women's relative position in the labor market (Beneria, 2003; Beneria & Roldan, 1987; Cornia, Jolly, & Stewart, 1987; Elson, 1992b; Haddad, Brown, Richter, & Smith, 1995; Palmer, 1992; Sparr, 1994). Measures such as cuts in government expenditures and payroll, privatization of state-owned enterprises, trade reforms, and exchange rate reforms are said to disproportionately affect women because of three major factors: the concentration of women in a few sectors of economic activity, their limited intersectoral and geographical mobility, and their position at the intersection of the household and market economies.

The existing literature on gender and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) has dealt extensively with the implications of occupational segregation by gender (Anker, 1998) and of women's unremunerated domestic labor for the asymmetric impact of SAPs by gender. Some authors have also addressed the disproportionate impact of public sector downsizing on women (Moghadam, 1998). There has been

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much less discussion in this literature, however, of the implications of women's more limited mobility, both geographically and across occupations and sectors. We have therefore chosen to focus in this paper on this aspect, recognizing the importance of the other factors mentioned above on the asymmetric impact of SAPs by gender.

Drawing primarily on examples from Latin America and Southeast Asia, the literature has also emphasized the feminization of the labor market under structural adjustment and economic liberalization (Beneria, 2003; Cagatay, Elson, & Grown, 1995; Cagatay & Ozler, 1995; Cerruti, 2000; Mehra & Gammage, 1999; Standing, 1989, 1999). The increased female participation in periods of crisis and structural adjustment is either attributed to the added worker effect, where women are pushed into paid employment to compensate for falling male incomes, or to the emergence of more casualized and deregulated labor markets where women are favored as low-cost workers. Scholars writing in the context of the Middle East and North Africa have cautioned that such a trend is not universal and that structural adjustment could instead be accompanied by defeminization as the more egalitarian public sectors contract (Moghadam, 1998).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relevance of these propositions in the Egyptian context. Our primary concerns are how females are faring relative to males in wage and salary employment and to explore whether their deteriorating positions can, at least in part, be attributed to their more limited geographical mobility. Although the focus of our analysis is wage and salary employment, we are keenly aware that the effects of structural adjustment are not limited to such employment, but extend to women's involvement in self-employment, family labor, and unpaid domestic work.

Using data from comparable household surveys carried out in 1988 and 1998, we present evidence that confirms that in the 1990s—a decade characterized by the implementation of a major economic reform and structural adjustment program in Egypt—gender gaps in the labor market have grown in terms of access to paid employment as well as rewards from such employment. We show that contrary to predictions of increased female participation in paid work during structural adjustment, there was a defeminization of the paid labor force, outside of government. Structural adjustment has resulted in a reduction of employment opportuni-

ties for young female new entrants in the civil service, without concurrently increasing their opportunities in nongovernmental sectors. We also show that the gender gap in earnings, corrected for observable human capital characteristics, has widened, with the effect being limited to the nongovernmental portion of the workforce.

As discussed earlier, these growing gender gaps can clearly be attributed to a variety of factors, including women's occupational segregation, the intensification of their domestic burdens, the contraction of opportunities in the public sector leading to overcrowding in the limited segments of the private-sector that are accessible to women. In this paper, we opt to focus in on one of the causal mechanisms, namely women's limited geographical mobility. Although, we do not formally test for a causal relationship between widening gaps in the labor market and limited geographical mobility in the context of structural adjustment, we do show that, during the decade under study, working women's commuting rates were not only significantly lower than those of men, but that they remained constant over time, in a context where access to nongovernmental sector employment required men to commute significantly more.

The remainder of the paper is organized into eight additional sections. Section 2 reviews the relevant international literature on structural adjustment and gender. Section 3 presents a brief overview of the Egyptian economic reform and structural adjustment program implemented in 1991. Section 4 describes our data sources. The empirical results are presented in the next four sections. Section 5 examines gender differences in access to wage and salary employment by age and educational attainment. Section 6 delves further into the apparent defeminization of employment by analyzing the gender composition and growth of job types outside government, where women are disproportionately represented. Section 7 presents the evidence on a growing gender wage gap, section 8 examines gender differentials in commuting across the 1990s, and section 9 concludes the paper.

2. GENDER AND STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT—A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Egypt’s labor market is highly segmented, with differentiation along a number of axes... It is my contention that gender is a central source of differen-

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