

The Women Empowering Effect of Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper estimates the causal effects of higher education on labor market and marriage outcomes, paying special attention to heterogeneity by gender in a setting with low female labor force participation and high levels of women's economic and social disempowerment. Exploiting a staggered rollout of constructing public universities across Egypt in 1960s-70s, the paper shows that the opening of a new university in an individual's province increases the likelihood of obtaining a university degree for the exposed cohorts by about 10 percent. The impact is driven mainly by women, as social norms limit their mobility to get higher education elsewhere. This is particularly the case for urban women. Men on average are not affected, however those who live in rural areas benefit more. The paper shows that exposure to higher education increased women's likelihood of joining the labor force by 3.7 percentage points (16 percent), and improved the type of jobs they take: e.g., formal and paid jobs. The paper also shows evidence of improved marriage outcomes, as well as higher levels of social empowerment for the exposed cohorts. The effects are robust to several robustness checks.

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