

Timeline

March-October 2021

Study Type

Randomized Evaluation

Research Implemented by IPA

No

Balancing Work and Childcare: Evidence from COVID-19 Related School Closures in Kenya

Researchers

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Abstract

This project explores changes in childcare responsibilities as a possible channel through which the COVID-19 crisis has affected women's labor. We use COVID-19 school closure policies in Kenya as an exogenous shock to estimate the impact of changes in household childcare needs on adults' labor, leveraging the partial school reopening of schools for students sitting national exams only for identification.

Having a child eligible to return increases adults' labor supply, with gains concentrated in household agriculture hours. Impacts are not significantly different by sex of the adult: though women have greater responsibility for childcare in Kenya, men also contribute and both increased childcare hours during school closures. The impact of partial reopening on work hours corresponds to over 30% of the fall in average hours in the first few months of the pandemic. Large labor effects of a potentially expensive childcare availability shock suggest that policies making childcare more available and affordable could have positive impacts on adult labor supply in Kenya.

This project is a part of the Women's Work, Entrepreneurship, and Skilling (WWES) Initiative.

Project Outcomes of Interest

Labor outcomes of interest include any labor force participation and participation in household agriculture, household enterprise, and wage employment, as well as participation in particular industries. In addition to the extensive margin of labor participation, researchers

will also consider the intensive margin and consider hours worked in total and in particular types of work, as well as income earned.

Partners

[The World Bank, Kenya Ministry of Education](#)

Key Findings

This paper uses COVID-19 school closure policies in Kenya as an exogenous shock to estimate the impact of changes in household childcare needs on adult labor supply. We use nationally-representative bi-monthly panel data in a difference-in-differences design to compare changes after schools partly reopened in Kenya in October 2020 for households with a child in grade 4 or 8—the grades eligible to return to school after the partial reopening—against households with a child in adjacent grades. Having a child eligible to return increases adults' labor supply in the weeks after reopening. Increases are concentrated on the intensive margin of hours and particularly in household agriculture hours, consistent with labor in this activity being more flexible. We find no effects on the extensive margin of labor participation or on wage employment, which may take longer to adjust to a childcare shock. Impacts are not significantly different by sex of the adult: though women have greater responsibility for childcare in Kenya, men also contribute and both increased childcare hours during school closures. Effects are driven by changes in household childcare burdens and in child agricultural labor when a child returns to school, and are larger in less wealthy households. The impact of partial reopening on work hours corresponds to over 30% of the fall in average hours in the first few months after COVID-19 cases were detected, indicating that school closures are responsible for a significant share of the reduction in labor supply during the pandemic. Large labor effects of a potentially expensive childcare availability shock suggest that policies making childcare more available and affordable could have positive impacts on adult labor supply in Kenya.

Link to Results

[Working Paper \(November 3, 2021\)](#)

Impact Goals

- Improve women's health, safety, and economic empowerment

Project Data Collection Mode

- CATI (Computer-assisted telephone interviewing)

Link to Data Collection Instruments

<https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/3774>

Link to Public Data

<https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/3774>

Implementing Organization

University of California, Berkeley

Results Status

Results

Link to Questionnaire

[Balancing Work and Childcare: Evidence from COVID-19 Related School Closures in Kenya \(Questionnaire\)](#)