

Family structure, education and women's employment in rural India

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Abstract: This paper investigates if residing in a joint family affects non-farm employment for married women in rural India. Our estimates based on a longitudinal survey of over 27,000 women conducted in 2005 and 2012, and using the conditional logistic regression and instrumental variable approach suggest that living in a joint family lowers married women's participation non-farm work by around 12% points. The adverse impact is higher for younger women, for those from families with higher social status, and for those residing in Northern India. We present evidence to suggest that women with higher education are not constrained from cultural and traditional norms since education raises women's decision-making power in a joint family. An increased education level is likely to raise women's earning capacity as well as the quality of jobs which may help in lowering family pressure against work. Public policies that encourage higher education, improve job accessibility along with affordable childcare, will raise non-farm employment, which has increasingly been the main source of new jobs, for women living in a rural India.

Keywords: Non-farm employment, Family structure, Female autonomy, rural areas.

Highlights: The study examines the role of co-residing family members in married women's decision to take up non-farm work. Living in a joint family lowers women's non-farm employment in rural India by around 12% points. Less autonomy rather than higher family income or elderly care is the main obstacle to join non-farm work. Adverse impact is higher for women with less education, from higher social status and from Northern India. Accessibility to jobs and availability of childcare reduce the adverse impact of joint family on women's work.