

# Niharika Singh

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## ACADEMIC POSITIONS

Columbia University, New York, NY  
Postdoctoral Research Scholar

2020—

## EDUCATION

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA  
PhD., Public Policy  
Dissertation Title: Essays in Development Economics

2020

McGill University, Montreal, QC  
Bachelor of Arts  
First Class Honours in Economics, Minors in Mathematics and English

2010

## RESEARCH AND TEACHING FIELDS

Development Economics, Labor Economics, Applied Microeconomics

## PUBLICATIONS

“Upping the Ante: The Equilibrium Effects of Unconditional Grants” (with T. Andrabi, J. Das, A. I. Khwaja, and S. Ozyurt). *American Economic Review*, 110 (10): 3315-49.

## JOB MARKET PAPER

“Hiring Frictions in Urban Labor Markets: Experimental Evidence from India” (with A. N. Fernando and G. Tourek).

Firms accustomed to hiring through networks may face sparse applicant pools, limiting the quantity or quality of hires. Online job portals expand their pool of potential employees, but such firms may be reluctant to trust workers outside their networks. We sample over 1,500 firms posting vacancies on an online job portal in India and randomly: (i) increase the size of their applicant pool, doubling the number of applicants; (ii) provide background verification services for their applicants; or (iii) both. Firms assigned to the combined treatment increase hiring from the portal relative to control and the individual treatments, which contributes to greater hiring overall. The hires from the portal are good matches as measured by employee retention after six months. We show how combining the treatments can generate a complementarity when firms value both ability and trustworthiness, but place greater relative weight on the latter. Our results suggest the effectiveness of online job portals can be enhanced through the provision of screening tools that induce greater employer trust in job seekers.

## WORKING PAPERS

“Regulation by Reputation? Quality Revelation of Labor Market Intermediaries in International Migration” (with A. N. Fernando).

Migrant workers and prospective employers rely on intermediaries to facilitate complex, lucrative, and often risky labor market matches; yet, where frictions prevent market actors from observing the placement quality of intermediaries, they may have little reason to invest in it. We examine a Sri Lankan government program that provided reputational incentives to local migration intermediaries and then

publicly revealed a quality rating. We find that agencies eligible for the program—especially pre-program underperforming agencies—invest in the rating criteria announced by the government, experience large gains in revenue and are less likely to exit the market. Placement quality made by such agencies also improves: migrants receive higher salaries, their contracts include better amenities, and they are less likely to be placed with an abusive employer. Using discontinuities in the ratings formula, we find that a better rating results in substantially higher foreign demand. Our results suggest the program successfully improved placement quality through providing incentives to eligible agencies and facilitating screening by foreign employers.

## **WORKS IN PROGRESS**

“Gender Gaps in Competitive Careers: The Case of the Indian Civil Service” (with K. Mangal).

Status: Draft in preparation

Entry into prestigious, high-paying jobs often depends on succeeding in tournaments. These are often the same jobs in which women are often under-represented. In this paper, we explore the causes of under-representation of women in the Indian civil services, where placement depends on succeeding in a highly competitive examination process. Using a dataset from a large Indian state that covers the universe of applicants and their placement outcomes to state-level civil service jobs between 2012-2016, we first uncover where gaps arise in the recruitment process. We show that test re-taking is a key constraint for women: successful placement typically require multiple attempts, but women—particularly those that score well on initial attempts—are less likely to retake the exam than men. This dynamic selection of applicants across exam attempts contributes to a gender gap in placement outcomes. We provide suggestive evidence that the marriage pressure constrains high-ability women from making more attempts.

“Job Targeting and Beliefs: Evidence from an Online Job Platform.”

Status: Project funded, data collection in progress

Online job portals have dramatically changed job-seeking behavior around the world. In this experiment, I partner with an online job portal in India to provide local and customized information to jobseekers about prevailing market conditions on the portal in an effort to allow job seekers to better target search behavior. I randomize whether thousands of job seekers searching on the platform receive summary information about vacancies and/or jobseekers for their preferred city and occupation generated using data from the job portal. Job seekers receive this information for a period of three months allowing them to incorporate trends in labor market conditions. I then measure how search and employment outcomes change for job seekers in response to treatment through a combination of administrative and survey data. This project will shed light on how transparently sharing information about local market conditions on a job portal influences job seeker outcomes and whether incentives to share information are aligned between the job portal and users.

“What Can Online Vacancies Tell Us About Labor Market Conditions in Lower-Income Countries?

Evidence from India” (with J. Bloesch and K. Mangal)

Status: Project funded, data collection in progress

In lower-income countries, where labor market data is often scarce and infrequently collected, online job vacancy data may provide valuable insights. However, structural features of the economy, such as a large informal sector where recruitment of workers is less likely to occur online, may limit the usefulness of such internet-generated data. In this project, we collect historical and contemporaneous data from a wide range of online job portals in India to shed light on the usefulness of these data in lower-income countries in learning about broader trends in the labor market. The main strategy we adopt is to compare trends in these data to those in secondary data sources such as household and labor force surveys to see for which sectors and subgroups these data can be most informative.

“The Effects of Labor Organizing on Worker Welfare and Service Quality” (with S. Naidu, A. Reich, A. Sojourner, and P. Youngblood)

Status: Project funded, data collection in progress

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the high costs associated with low-wage, essential healthcare work for both workers and consumers. In such settings, improving the quality of jobs is likely to benefit both workers and patients. Leveraging a partnership with a healthcare union, we randomize ongoing ‘labor organizing’ efforts at healthcare facilities. Using administrative and survey data, we will measure the facility and worker-level impacts of labor organizing on earnings, employment, turnover, changes in worker composition, workplace culture and cohesion, and care quality and delivery. This project will provide experimental evidence on the effects of labor organizing and the degree to which these outcomes are mediated by successful unionization.

“The Impacts of Digital Community Support on the Well-being of Low-wage Workers” (with A. Reich and H. Shepherd)

Status: Pilot completed. Launch in Spring 2022.

With the decline of traditional labor market institutions in the United States, new models of workplace organization have arose to provide support to workers, particularly in the low-wage sectors of the economy. In this project, we work with a labor organization, United for Respect, to study how access to community support services delivered via digital technologies to low-wage workers in the retail sector affect their emotional wellbeing and proclivity for workplace collective action.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Spring 2020	Economic Development, Prof. Asim I. Khwaja
Spring 2019	Using Big Data to Solve Economic and Social Problems, Prof. Raj Chetty
Spring 2018	Introduction to Econometrics, Prof. Gregory Bruich
Fall 2017	Smart Policy Design, Executive Education, Prof. Rema Hanna
Fall 2017	Rethinking Financial Inclusion, Executive Education, Prof. Asim I. Khwaja

## RESEARCH-RELATED EMPLOYMENT

2015-17	Harvard Kennedy School, Part-time Research Assistant to Prof. Asim I. Khwaja
2012-14	Harvard Kennedy School, Full-time Research Fellow to Prof. Asim I. Khwaja
2010-12	JPAL South Asia, Full-time Research Associate to Prof. Shawn Cole

## AFFILIATIONS, FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

2021	JPAL North America Health Care Delivery Initiative, with S. Naidu, A. Reich, A. Sojourner and P. Youngblood. (\$134,440)
2021	Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, with S. Naidu, A. Reich, A. Sojourner and P. Youngblood. (\$412,830)
2020	JPAL North America Work of the Future Initiative, with S. Naidu, A. Reich, A. Sojourner and P. Youngblood. (\$75,448)
2020	G2LM   LIC Special Call on COVID-19, with J. Bloesch and K. Mangal. (\$19,360)
2020	G2LM   LIC Phase V (\$31,250)
2020	IGC SGB Evidence Fund, with A. N. Fernando and G. Tourek. (\$97,276)
2019	Foundations of Human Behavior Grant (\$5,000)
2019	Harvard South Asia Institute Winter Research Grant (\$1,500)
2019	Harvard Dissertation Completion Fellowship
2019	Weiss Family Program Fund (\$14,401)
2018	Kellogg Institute Research Grant, with A. N. Fernando and G. Tourek. (\$19,987)
2016	JPAL Urban Services Initiative Pilot Grant, with A. N. Fernando and G. Tourek. (\$48,174)

2015 Weiss Family Program Fund, with A. N. Fernando. (\$33,022)  
2015 Harvard South Asia Institute Graduate Student Research Grant (\$2,500)  
2015-20 Evidence for Policy Design, PhD Student Affiliate  
2014-17 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship

## **PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Referee Service: AER: Insights; Journal of Development Economics; Review of Economics and Statistics

### Conferences and Presentations

2021 PACDEV; University of Notre Dame Development; Jobs and Development Conference;  
Columbia Development Colloquium  
2020 NEUDC

## **PERSONAL**

Citizenship: Canadian, Indian Overseas Citizen

## **REFERENCES**

Prof. Asim I. Khwaja  
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