

NATASHA JHA

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EMPLOYMENT

Current

Postdoctoral Research Associate, Kellogg Institute for International Studies 2023-present

Previous

Research Associate, Indian School of Business 2016-2018

Research Analyst, Barclays Shared Services 2014-2016

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University 2023

M.S., Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University 2021

M.A., Economics, Delhi School of Economics 2014

B.A. (Honours), Economics, University of Delhi 2012

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Fields: Development, Labor, Environmental Economics

PUBLICATIONS

Alcohol Ban and Crime: The ABC's of the Bihar Prohibition (Kalyani Chaudhuri, Natasha Jha, Mrithyunjayan Nilayamgode and Revathy Suryanarayana), Forthcoming, *Economic Development and Cultural Change*

We studied the relationship between alcohol consumption and crime using the implementation of a statewide total prohibition of alcohol in the Indian state of Bihar in 2016. Testing the theoretical argument that alcohol has differential effects on different kinds of crime, we used a difference-in-differences approach and found that the prohibition led to a 0.22 standard deviation point reduction in the reported incidence of violent crimes but had no significant impact on nonviolent crimes. The effect is fairly persistent over time, with the initial impact being large enough that, on average, there is a reduction in violent crime over at least a three-year period following the ban. Heterogeneity tests revealed that the effect on crime was stronger in interior districts and districts with higher baseline alcohol consumption. We also observed stronger effects in districts where a smaller proportion of the population faced religious restrictions on alcohol consumption. Since all these subgroups indicate districts where the ban is likely to have had a larger effect on alcohol availability and consumption, we conclude that the ban affects crime through this channel rather than that of institutional changes.

RESEARCH PAPERS

Social Norms and Human Capital Investment: Examining the Educational Impacts of Dowry in Rural India (Job Market Paper).

I explore the potential of policies that challenge social norms to disrupt human capital formation. Specifically, using a difference-in-differences design I leverage a legal change in India, that increased the cost of dowry for certain religious groups to study effects educational attainment among rural households. I find that dowry payments reduce as a response to the law change but so do years of educational attainment, particularly for women. I employ heterogeneity analyses to show that declines in female educational attainment were strongest among groups with higher prevalence and greater importance attributed to dowry payments. I consider a range of explanations and suggest that the findings align with dowry payments as a signal to communicate adherence to traditional social norms. Switching to reduction in female education as an alternate signal of social norm adherence appears to be a plausible mechanism. Hence while the legal change is effective in combating an exploitative social norm, it unintentionally depletes human capital for women.

Previously circulated as “Dowry and Human Capital Formation: Evidence from India”

Agriculture and Arsenic: Can over extraction of groundwater make us sick?

This paper brings attention to an environmental externality that arises as a consequence of agricultural policies that supported the Green Revolution. While the expansion of irrigation was a significant factor in the success of the Green Revolution, there has been an overlooked impact of irrigation technology, which is the contamination of groundwater with Arsenic. Using historical geological variations in aquifer depth to instrument for groundwater irrigation, I discover a higher incidence of Arsenic exposure beyond safety levels in areas with more extensive uptake of the Green Revolution. Drawing from insights in hydrology, I identify groundwater extraction for irrigation as the primary catalyst for Arsenic release in water sources, as opposed to alternative pathways such as fertilizer or pesticide usage. I also explore the implications of Arsenic exposure on fertility and infant mortality rates.

Minimum Support Prices in Indian Agriculture: Supporting Whom and at What Price? (Shilpa Aggarwal, Natasha Jha & Ishani Chatterjee)

While the distortions from price controls are well-understood in theory, these may be underestimated if the controls are captured for uses beyond fixing market failures. We study this issue in the context of minimum support prices (MSP), the government of India's procurement price of food grains. We find that when a district with a historically larger area under cultivation for a crop is slated to go for elections, the central government announces a higher MSP for that crop. Since government procurement price is the same across the country, the center uses this blunt instrument only when other policy instruments are unavailable, i.e., when the incumbent state government is not aligned with the center. Even small increases in MSP can have large welfare effects as the central government spent nearly 1% of the GDP on procurement in 2020-21.

Gender differences in Tertiary Health Care Utilization: Evidence from India (Tarun Jain, Natasha Jha and Revathy Suryanarayana)

We examine gender differences in access to and service within a publicly financed tertiary healthcare program in a developing country. Using claim-level administrative data from the program we estimate gender differences in access and services. We find that women on average experience shorter interactions with the healthcare system with fewer days between surgery and discharge, reduced hospital revisits, and are less likely to travel to seek healthcare. Further, we find women in childbearing years face the brunt of these differences and that public hospitals perpetuate these differences.

(Authors listed alphabetically with equal contributions for all papers)

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Like Mother, Like Daughter? The Impact of Mother's Work Experience on Daughter's Educational and Employment Aspirations: Evidence from WWII (Natasha Jha, Giulia Olivero, Revathy Suryanarayana and Meredith Welch)

We examine the influence of mothers as role models on the math and science ability self-beliefs, preferences for STEM based education and career paths of adolescent girls in the United States. We propose to leverage the increase in mothers' employment during World War II, particularly in unconventional manufacturing jobs, as a historical shift in societal attitudes towards women's work in the United States. To construct variables to instrument for mothers' employment, we use historical data (1940s) on manufacturing, war mobilization, and casualty rates. Our outcomes are derived from the Project Talent database, a unique cohort panel dataset that captures career choice and subject-based interest scores of the 1942-1946 cohorts of high-school students. The empirical methodology will use an Instrumental variable approach and instruments for mothers' employment using wartime production, mobilization, and casualty rates.

Sterilization and Structural Change: Evidence from India (Natasha Jha and Vrinda Kapoor)

We investigate the potential of a brutal and regime imposed mass sterilization program in India to bring about structural change. The 1975-76 sterilization program sterilized over 8 million men. According to news reports the sterilization camps were unsanitary and operations were rushed which resulted in casualties and lifelong disabilities that impacted labor market productivity. We posit that the reduction in agent productivity triggered a structural change on account of movement away from labor intensive occupations. We combine twenty years (1970-1990) of state level digitised records on sterilization targets and achievements from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare yearbooks with

census data on occupation categories to explore our hypothesis. Using a cohort by year analysis we explore if cohorts of men who were likely to be exposed to the sterilization programs are less likely to be in agricultural and labor heavy industries.

OTHER WRITING

Arsenic and Agriculture: Is Our Growing Dependence on Groundwater Irrigation Poisoning Our Water? Blog post for Tata-Cornell Institute, published June 2022

Thinking About Soil from the Farmers' Perspectives. Blog post for Tata-Cornell Institute, published April 2021

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2022: PacDev, *University of San Francisco*; MIEDC, *University of Minnesota*; 21st Summer School in International and Development Economics, *CEPR/LEAP*; NEUDC, *Yale University*

2019: APPAM, *Denver*

2018: NEUDC, *Cornell University*; SEA, *DC*; International Conference on South Asian Economic Development, *South Asian University*;

2017: Winter School, *Delhi School of Economics*; Human Capital Workshop, *Indian School of Business*

INVITED SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS

2023: University of Georgia;

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Referee: *The World Bank Economic Review*, *China Economic Review*, *Economics of Education Review*, *Economic Modelling*, *PLOS ONE*

Cornell University: Member Graduate Students for Gender Equity in Economics

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant, AEM 2000 - Contemporary Controversies in the Global Economy (January 2023 - May 2023)

Teaching Assistant, AEM 2020 - Better Decisions for Life, Love and Money (January 2022 - May 2022)

Teaching Assistant, AEM 6120 - Applied Econometrics (August 2019 - December 2019)

AWARDS

Tata-Cornell Scholar, Annual Assistantship Award (\$35,000) (2019 - 2023)

TECHNICAL SKILLS

STATA, SAS, Python, R, Microsoft Office, L^AT_EX, QGIS, VBA

REFERENCES

Christopher B. Barrett

Stephen B. and Janice G. Ashley Professor of Applied Economics and Management

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