

AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
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Employment

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TO: See Distribution  
FROM: Juan Buttari, PPC/PDPR/EPD *JJB*  
SUBJECT: Recent Research On Why LDC Employers Frequently Prefer  
To Hire Men.

The enclosed research report may be useful for the Agency's policies that seek to improve the labor market conditions of women workers in LDCs. Your comments are welcomed.

Attachment

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A NOTE ON RECENT RESEARCH ON WHY LDC EMPLOYERS FREQUENTLY PREFER TO HIRE MEN.

By providing insights on the factors that affect the supply and the demand for labor, economic analysis can help to understand how wage and employment conditions for specific population groups are determined.

As in much economic analysis, the study of the determinants of employment conditions for women requires that institutional variables which affect perceived costs and benefits be considered. In this respect, recent ILO research is enlightening. Such research has been summarized in an article by Anker and Hein on which most of this note is based. <sup>1/</sup> The importance of this line of research is that it highlights the perverse effects some regulations, and that it shows that many employers make hiring decisions on the basis of cost/benefit perceptions which may be influenced by stereotypes and biases. Moreover, in my view, such research is relevant for AID's efforts directed to improve the labor market conditions of women in LDC's.

In the sections below I first summarize the main conclusions of the ILO studies. To this end, a distinction is made between the factors that limit the overall demand for women workers, and the factors that affect such demand in specific occupations. I then comment on the implications that I see for Agency's policies.

I. On factors that limit the overall demand for women workers.

There has been relatively little research on the factors that influence employers' beliefs regarding the relative costs of hiring women as opposed to hiring men. Clearly, if profit-seeking employers feel that hiring women is more costly, they will prefer men. Unfortunately, there are several factors that can make the hiring of women more costly and, as one would expect, the negative impacts of these factors are felt more strongly in the for-profit private sector. The factors have to do with:

1. Pregnancy and maternity protection costs. These include such aspects as: (a) payment of maternity leave entirely borne by the employer (often cited as a reason by employers),

<sup>1/</sup> See Richard Anker and Catherine Hein, "Why Third World urban employers usually prefer men", International Labour Review, January-February 1985.

(b) need to replace the worker during maternity leave and possible work discontinuities, (c) legislation requiring the provision of nursing breaks, and (d) legislation requiring employers of more than a given amount of women to provide creche facilities. These factors are especially important in countries experiencing high fertility rates.

2. Absenteeism. Many employers ascribe to women a higher rate of absenteeism and the ILO studies tend to confirm the impression of higher female absenteeism. Such higher absenteeism seems to be linked to strong family-care (mainly children) responsibilities. The studies, however, also show that differences in absenteeism by sex are relatively small and that many women are absent less frequently than men.

3. Higher turnover. The possibility that women workers tend to experience higher turnover rates does not come up as an important explanatory variable in explaining employer preferences for men.

4. Cultural restrictions on women. Some cultural norms tend to reduce the demand for women workers either because they raise the cost of having a mixed male-female labor force or because they limit the jobs for which women are hired. Examples are the need to provide separate facilities such as dining areas for women and men, and the cultural imperative that women not be required to work early, late or outside of the office. The studies cite several instances where this type of factor is an important constraint on the hiring of women.

## II. Factors affecting the demand of women workers in specific occupations.

The factors mentioned in this section tend to create "male" and "female" occupations.

1. Protective legislation. An effect of this type of legislation is to exclude women from certain segments of the labor market. Such legislation is often based on ILO standards such as ILO Conventions that ban night work and underground work for women, and that limit the maximum weight carried by an adult woman to substantially less than that of an adult male. A number of countries have repealed such type of legislation precisely because of the negative impact on the labor market opportunities of women.

2. Sex-typing of jobs. More or less, this factor consists in reserving specific occupations for one of the sexes. In these instances the ascription of occupations to sexes is made on the basis of prevailing attitudes or preconceptions which are in turn influenced by impressions regarding:

Muscular strength required. In most cases the attitudes are inconsistent with facts that show that quite frequently women do engage in heavy work.

Ability to supervise. This relates to beliefs that women make poor supervisors. Naturally, such attitudes limit the career opportunities of women. The authors trace these beliefs to traditional lines of authority between men and women.

Potential conflicts in male-dominated jobs. Such conflicts might relate to attitudes of male employees and to employers' fears of being accused of sexual harassment if disciplinary actions are required (Nigeria is mentioned as an example of the last instance).

Willingness to work for low wages and greater docility. Because they attribute these qualities to women, in some countries employers have explained their willingness to hire especially females for certain unskilled jobs. For example, in Mauritius a substantial proportion of employers indicated that women work harder, make fewer complaints and do not join trade unions. As the authors point out, such notions about the docility of women are linked to perceptions about the traditional hierarchical relationship between men and women.

Household-type skills. This factor means that some employers tend to think that women are better suited to occupations requiring skills similar to those used at home.

Sex-appeal. In some cases workers of one sex are used to attract a clientele of the opposite sex.

### III. Implications for AID policies.

The studies show that employers' reluctance to hire women can be based on objective financial considerations, stereotypes or cultural imperatives. When legislation or regulations make the hiring of women more costly, or segment the labor market against them by impeding their access to desirable occupations, the Agency should give high priority to changing the institutional setting through the policy dialogue.

In evaluating the success potential of projects whose objective is to improve the labor market potential of women through training, for example, account should be taken of the wider institutional setting. It might be wise to concentrate our resources for this type of project in countries where the regulatory setting does offer minimal favorable conditions. In the other countries where such conditions are not met, the correct strategy would seem to be to concentrate, instead, on first producing changes in the regulatory setting.

When the reluctance of employers essentially reflects stereotyping and prejudices, an important element in AID strategy would be to support educational programs and similar means that clarify the factual record.

Juan J. Buttari, PPC/PDPR  
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