



Economic and Sector Work (ESW) Proposal

RG-E1978

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Subtitle of Proposal:

Misperceived Gender Norms and the Gender Gap in Labor Force Participation: Experimental Evidence fr

Proposed Amount in USD:

ESW Modality:

Research

Date of Proposal:

28 Aug 2023

Status:

Department Review

Team Leader:

Bustelo, Monserrat

Unit:

SCL/GDI

Joint Proposal:

No

Selected units:

N/A

Beneficiary Countries (even if it is Regional, please specify the countries in which the work will be carried out):

COLOMBIA

II. OBJECTIVES, EXPECTED RESULTS AND ACTIVITIES

1. State the objectives:

In line with the Gender and Diversity Sector Framework (2022), we recognize that gender norms significantly impact gender disparities in Latin America, especially regarding women's choices and development opportunities. However, there's a scarcity of robust evidence on how these norms can be transformed, leading to increased female labor participation and a more balanced distribution of household care responsibilities.

Our project aims to explore societal gender norms' role, particularly misperceptions surrounding them, in perpetuating the gender gap in labor force participation in Bogotá, Colombia. We plan to implement a randomized controlled trial (RCT) designed to challenge and reshape these norms. Our primary objectives are:

(i) Documenting gender norms and identifying instances of pluralistic ignorance among Bogotá couples regarding labor force participation. We aim to highlight the discrepancy between prevailing and perceived norms concerning women's labor force participation within couples. We will strive to

deepen the measurement of social norms and align our questions with other existing efforts or measurements such as Latinobarometro, World Values Survey and Gallup World Poll.

(ii) Evaluating an intervention involving informational text messages sent to couples, our study aims to modify gender norms perceptions and stimulate changes in women's labor market conditions. We will measure several intermediate outcomes, including changes in both wives' and spouses' beliefs about gender roles, as well as their participation in household chores and childcare. We'll also focus on changes in wives' labor market conditions, investigating shifts in their employment status and their willingness to participate in an employment intermediation program "La ruta de empleo" provided by el Servicio Publico de Empleo.

(iii) Investigating how our intervention's impact varies based on proximity to external childcare facilities. This will help us understand if access to childcare amplifies the intervention's effects.

This project pioneers a comprehensive research agenda on social norms' impact on labor market outcomes, aligning with corporate documents like the GDI SDF and DIA focusing on gender issues.

2. Describe the motivation and main question(s) this ESW intends to answer:

Deeply embedded cultural expectations in Latin America assign women primary responsibility for caregiving and household duties, leading to an unequal distribution of tasks. This disparity is evident even in homes without young children, with women devoting over twice as much time to unpaid domestic and care responsibilities compared to men (CEPAL 2022). These disparities, influenced by social norms—both descriptive and prescriptive—are reflected in the labor market. In Colombia, the labor force participation gap widens for families with young children, with nearly a 37-percentage point difference between men and women. This gap narrows to 19 percentage points for those without children or with children over 18 (SIMS BID 2023). Data from the World Values Survey reveals prevalent attitudes, with about half of the population believing that preschool-aged children suffer when their mothers work. Interestingly, more women (54%) than men (44%) agree with this statement in Colombia, reflecting societal expectations' persistent influence.

The research team who will support this proposal's implementation include academics from the Department of Economics at Universidad Javeriana and the University of Strasbourg, conducted a pilot representative survey in 2021 of cohabiting couples in Bogotá, which identified a phenomenon known as "pluralistic ignorance." This refers to individuals holding certain opinions but erroneously believing others hold the opposite opinion, leading them to adopt behaviors incongruent with their personal beliefs. For instance, a woman may desire to work outside the home but incorrectly believes that her partner or community disapproves, causing her to refrain from seeking employment or only considering work-from-home jobs. This phenomenon, in the context of gender norms and female labor force participation, has been identified in regions such as Saudi Arabia (Bursztyn et al., 2020), where an information intervention about actual societal beliefs significantly impacted labor force participation.

In this project, we will deepen this analysis by assessing whether gender norms can be changed by providing information. We will use a representative sample of neighborhood-level couples in Bogotá, collecting baseline data on gender norms perceptions and measuring pluralistic ignorance. Then, couples will be randomly assigned to treatment or control groups. Treatment couples will be informed about their neighbors' actual gender norms perceptions, while control couples will receive general statistics about their responses to environmental policies.

By deepening our comprehension of social norms and scrutinizing the extent and impact of pluralistic ignorance in relation to gender norms, our study seeks to contribute valuable insights. We aim to explore how shifts in gender norm perceptions can stimulate changes in women's labor market conditions. These insights could prove invaluable for policymakers and organizations committed to advancing gender equality and enhancing work-life balance.

3. Describe how the question(s) asked complements existing literature on this subject (including any previous ESWs):

There is evidence that social norms, in general, influence labor force participation (LFP) and human capital accumulation (Fernández and Fogli, 2009; Ashraf et al., 2020; Bau and Fernández 2022). However, there is much less evidence of social norms' influence household production and the distribution of care responsibilities within couples.

Results from a previous ESW (RG-E1723) identifies that the main channel through which the pandemic has disproportionately impacted women's labor market outcomes is the increased burden of childcare work performed by women with school-age children living at home (Viollaz, et al. 2022). This finding highlights the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to address this structural challenge faced by women in the labor market.

Existing research has emphasized the significance of gendered preferences, societal norms, and gender-stereotyped beliefs in shaping gender roles and division of domestic labor. For instance, a study conducted with French couples by Couprie (2020) demonstrated that deeply ingrained gender stereotypes often lead to inefficient production decisions. Indeed, upon informing couples about their individual productivity, deviations from the efficiency outcome were reduced.

Moreover, other studies have highlighted the influence of cultural components and gender norms on women's labor market outcomes. Pluralistic ignorance, a concept frequently discussed in this context may lead to the enforcement of conforming behavior to avoid public criticism (Fernandez, 2004; Bertrand, 2019; Bursztyn, 2020; Aloud, 2020). The concept of group identification is central to pluralistic ignorance (Prentice, 1993), as individuals tend to conform to their group's expectations and interpret similar behavior in others as reflective of their personal beliefs. However, social norms are not fixed and can be influenced by economic policies that encourage socially beneficial norms (Smerdon, 2020; Bursztyn, 2020; Bartovs, 2018; Gauri, 2019). When a strong sense of group identity is paired with complete information about others' preferences, first and second-order beliefs align (Smerdon, 2020). In some contexts, men misperceive social norms on female labor force participation, expecting more disapproval among their peers than is the case. In such situations, a simple information intervention has been shown to reduce this misperception of social norms in Saudi Arabia and has the potential to increase women's labor supply (Bursztyn, 2020). Also, in the study performed by Cameron et. al (2022), 4000 Indonesian participants demonstrated that individuals underestimate support for working women and shared childcare. The provision of targeted information notably increased the likelihood of choosing career mentoring by 23-26%.

Building upon the existing literature, our study, set in Colombia, a Latin American country, aims to make significant contributions by documenting gender norms and identifying instances of pluralistic ignorance among Bogotá couples regarding labor force participation. Simultaneously, we will evaluate an intervention involving informational text messages sent to couples, designed to modify gender norms perceptions and stimulate changes in women's labor market conditions. By doing so, we aim to enrich the global body of research on gender norms and labor outcomes, specifically contributing to the understanding of these dynamics within the Latin American context.

References

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4. Provide a description of the main outputs (deliverables) and related activities expected to be carried out:

Key activities for 2024 encompass: conducting two surveys with Bogotá couples; designing and implementing a randomized control trial to test our intervention; analyzing data to assess social norms beliefs and the intervention's impact on gender norms and women's labor market conditions; and developing a working paper as per the Inter-American Development Bank's publication protocol.

5. Describe the methodological approach to be used and the type of data (when applicable) which will be used. Be as specific as possible:

Our plan involves conducting a telephone survey with 1500 cohabiting couples (3000 individuals) aged 20-45, who have children of childcare age. The study, while acknowledging the unique challenges single-headed households face, will primarily focus on cohabiting couples. Our aim is to explore the potential enhancement of women's employment prospects through the modification of social norms and redistribution of care responsibilities within households. The sample will be developed in partnership with IPSOS, ensuring neighborhood-level representativeness based on the 2018 national census data.

The survey will gather data on participants' demographic characteristics, labor market status, and roles in household chores and childcare. We will delve deeper into obstacles to women's labor force participation, such as childcare availability, discrimination, and self-perceived constraints through supplementary questions. Additionally, we'll measure pluralistic ignorance among participants using questions from previous studies and consider insights from regional social norm measurements.

Our data collection strategy will elicit first-order beliefs from each participant, then probe into second-order beliefs. For instance, a participant might share their personal beliefs about gender roles in childcare (first-order belief), followed by their perception of the community's dominant belief (second-order belief). We'll construct a pluralistic ignorance measure by quantifying the discrepancy between these second-order beliefs and the actual beliefs held by individuals in the same neighborhood. Please refer to the attached document for an example.

Two weeks post-initial survey, we'll implement a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) using a WhatsApp chatbot. This intervention involves sharing actual neighborhood gender norm perceptions with participant couples (please refer to the attached document for an example of messages that will be shared). The treatment group will receive this data via a brief survey, while the control group will receive general statistics about their environmental policy responses. We'll conduct data verification checks to confirm participants not only received but also read the provided information, using a series of confirmation questions.

Participants will be assigned to treatment and control groups through couple-level randomization, based on gender, presence of children under six, and proximity to the nearest childcare facility. This stratification ensures balanced representation of different household types in both groups.

Several weeks after the intervention, we'll conduct an endline telephone survey to evaluate the impact of the intervention on our defined outcome variables. Specifically, we'll examine changes in both wives' and spouses' beliefs about gender roles, as well as their participation in household chores and childcare. We'll also focus on changes in wives' labor market conditions, investigating shifts in their employment status and their willingness to participate in an employment intermediation

program "La ruta de empleo" provided by el Servicio Publico de Empleo. While our primary interest is in changes in wives' labor conditions, we will survey both partners to gain a comprehensive understanding of household labor market decisions. This approach will also allow us to explore any adjustments on the men's side in terms of work flexibility.

The analytic framework for estimating the effect of the intervention is based on an intention-to-treat (ITT) approach.

For the two primary outcome variables: changes in beliefs about gender roles, and changes in participation in household chores and childcare, we will capture these changes across our entire sample of couples.

The regression equation is as follows:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * T_i + \beta_2 \text{ Gender}_i + \beta_3 \text{ Child6}_i + \beta_4 \text{ DistCare}_i + X_i'\gamma + \varepsilon_i$$

Where Y_i refers to the outcome variables, including changes in beliefs about gender roles and changes in participation in household chores and care for the entire population. The binary variable T_i designates if participant 'i' was treated or not. We also control for the stratification variables, 'Gender' is a binary variable that takes the value 1 if the respondent identifies as a woman and 0 if not. 'Child6' is another binary variable, scoring 1 if the respondent has at least one child aged 6 or under. 'DistCare' signifies the distance in meters from the respondent's residence to the closest care institutions.

The coefficient β_1 in our regression model will indicate the average effect of the intervention on beliefs and participation in household chores and care across the whole population. We will introduce interaction terms between the treatment variable T_i and the stratification variables 'Gender', 'Child6', and 'DistCare' to explore potential heterogeneous effects. The interaction between the treatment and the 'Gender' variable will allow us to investigate whether the intervention effect differs between genders. Simultaneously, the interaction between the treatment and 'Child6' will highlight if having a young child in the household moderates the treatment effect. Lastly, the interaction between the treatment and 'DistCare' will reveal whether the proximity to a care institution influences the effect of the intervention.

To explore whether the intervention induced changes in labor status conditions for wives, controlling by the husband employment status at baseline. We aim to explore this using the following equation only for the wife's sample:

$$Y_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 T_i + \alpha_2 \text{ Child6}_i + \alpha_3 \text{ DistCare}_i + \alpha_4 \text{ HusbEmpStatus}_i + \mu_i$$

Where Y_i refers to the labor market outcome variables such as the willingness to participate in an employment intermediation program and employment status. The binary variable T_i designates if participant 'i' was treated or not. We also control for the stratification variables Child6 and DistCare, and control for the husband employment status at baseline. We will introduce interaction terms between the treatment variable T_i and the stratification variables 'Gender', 'Child6', and 'DistCare' to explore potential heterogeneous effects.

Please refer to the attached document for power calculations.

6. Specify the strategy and activities you will follow to disseminate the knowledge generated within this ESW. For that purpose, take into consideration: i) target audience of the knowledge generated; ii) goals of the dissemination strategy to each target population; iii) key dissemination activities for that target population:

Our study targets academics specializing in gender issues and policymakers. We've devised a concise dissemination strategy to reach this audience. We'll publish a working paper on the IDB publication repository and GDLab's website and present our findings at specialized seminars and conferences like LACEA. To engage policymakers and the public, we'll create accessible content, including blogs summarizing key findings and policy briefs with recommendations. These dissemination activities are scheduled for 2025 and 2026, post-study completion.

III. DELIVERABLES

Deliverable	Deliverable Name	Planned Date
DPR-Peer review report	Peer review report	30 Apr 2025
DUR-Unreviewed/unpublished reports	Unreviewed Working paper	31 Dec 2024
DWP-Working papers	Reviewed working paper	31 Dec 2025

IV. BUDGET (*):

V. BANK STAFF PARTICIPATION IN ESW:

Staff Name	Role	Unit
BUSTELO, MONSERRAT	Team Leader	SCL/GDI
DELVASTO OTALORA, NICOLAS	Project Assistant	SCL/MIG
ZAPATA PENALOZA MARIA PIA	Project Assistant	SCL/GDI

VI. RISKS:

6.1 Implementation Risks:

Our study prioritizes participant welfare and adheres to ethical guidelines, anticipating an Institutional Review Board (IRB) review at Javeriana University. Informed consent will be sought, detailing the research's aims, methods, benefits, and risks, and affirming participants' right to decline at any stage without repercussions. We will safeguard privacy and confidentiality through stringent data management protocols, storing data securely for study purposes only, and anonymizing personal identifiers. These privacy measures will be clearly communicated during the consent process, reinforcing our research's trustworthiness.

Informed Consent: provide a clear and detailed consent document that explains the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, benefits, risks, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Privacy and Confidentiality: participants' personal information will be collected to allow re-contacting for information provision in the second stage and for follow-up phone contact. This information will be collected by IPSOS, which will implement robust data security measures to protect it. IPSOS will anonymize the collected data so that it cannot be traced back to individuals without authorization and will restrict access to the data to only those individuals who are directly involved in the research.

Equity and Justice: we will use transparent and fair inclusion criteria to select participants and ensure that the sample of participants reflects the diversity of the target population.

Consent for the data use: we include in the consent document information on how data will be use in the future, including the follow up and publication. We ensure that participants have the option to withdraw their consent for future use of their data.

VII. COORDINATION WITH OTHER MDBs

7.1 Summarize collaboration or coordination with other MDBs, donors and other strategic partners (if any):

Our study involves a close collaboration with Bogota's "Dirección de Primera Infancia" to map child-care supply, aiding our analysis of heterogeneous effects. We're in ongoing discussions with this institution. The research will also be conducted jointly with academics from Universidad Javeriana, Colombia, and the University of Strasbourg, France.