

SUANNA OH

November 2019

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. Candidate in Economics, Columbia University	Expected 2020
Exchange Scholar Program, UC Berkeley	Spring 2018
M.A. in Economics, Doctoral Stream, University of Toronto	May 2012
B.S. in Economics and B.A. in Mathematics, Duke University	Dec 2010
<i>Magna cum laude</i> , Distinction in Research, Distinction in Economics	

FIELDS OF SPECIALIZATION

Primary field: Development

Secondary fields: Behavioral, Labor

JOB MARKET PAPER

“Does Identity Affect Labor Supply?”

Does identity—one’s concept of self—influence economic behaviors in the labor market? I investigate this question in rural India, focusing on the effect of caste identity on labor supply. In a field experiment, casual laborers belonging to different caste groups choose whether or not to take up various real job offers. All offers involve working on a default manufacturing task and an additional task. The additional task changes across the offers, is performed in private, and differs in its association with specific castes. Relative to the take-up rate of offers associated with an individual’s own caste, the average take-up rate of offers associated with other castes is 23 percentage points lower. This gap increases by an additional 24 pp if the groups associated with the relevant offers rank lower than the individual’s own in the caste hierarchy. Responses to job offers are invariant to whether or not the worker’s choices are publicized, suggesting that the role of identity itself—rather than social image—is paramount. Using a supplementary experiment, I show that 43% of workers refuse to work on tasks associated with other castes even when offered ten times their daily wage to do so for ten minutes. This paper’s findings suggest that people may completely avoid certain jobs due to a conflict of identity, contributing to the misallocation of talent in the economy.

WORKING PAPERS

“Does Financial Strain Lower Productivity?” with Supreet Kaur, Sendhil Mullainathan, and Frank Schilbach

This paper empirically tests for a direct causal impact of financial strain on worker productivity. We randomize the timing of income receipt among Indian workers who earn piece rates for manufacturing

tasks: some workers receive their wages on earlier dates, altering when cash constraints are eased while holding overall wealth constant. Workers increase productivity by 5.3% on average in the days after cash receipt. The impacts are concentrated among poorer workers in the sample, who increase output by over 10%. This effect of cash on hand on productivity is not explained by mechanisms such as gift exchange, trust in the employer, or nutrition. We present positive evidence that productivity increases are mediated through lower attentional errors in production, indicating a role for improved cognition after cash receipt. Finally, directing workers' attention to their finances via a salience intervention produced mixed results—consistent with concerns about priming highlighted in the literature. Taken together, our results indicate a direct relationship between financial constraints and worker productivity and suggest that psychological channels mediated through attention play a role in this relationship.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

“Gender Norms in Marriage and Female Labor Productivity” [Pilot in progress]

This project investigates whether gender norms lead women to hold back their potential in the labor market. The experiment engages married couples working as casual laborers in a short-term manufacturing job that pays piece-rate on output. Men work in the morning and engage in other activities in the afternoon, and women get a reversed schedule that includes one additional hour of piece-rate production. Women are randomized into one of three conditions in which: 1) wife is informed of her husband's productivity and expects both spouses to learn the couple's individual productivity at the end of the day; 2) wife is informed of her husband's productivity and expects that only she will learn the couple's individual productivity; or 3) wife is unaware of her husband's productivity and the couple is informed only of their joint productivity. Pilot results show that women in the last two conditions achieve on average one hour's worth of production more than that of their husbands. However, this productivity gap disappears when women expect their husbands to also find out about the couple's individual productivity, indicating that women reduce their own productivity. The full experiment will use different wage schemes and production tasks, randomize which spouse gets the additional hour of production, and randomize which spouse works in the afternoon to isolate the cause of this behavior.

“Demand for Flexible Work and Contract Choice” with Nandita Krishnaswamy and Yogita Shamdasani [Pilot in progress]

The unskilled labor market in rural India is characterized by both high levels of unemployment and high rates of worker absenteeism. To explain the coexistence of these two features, we propose that workers have substantial demand for flexibility in work arrangements. We first build a model of a segmented labor market with two main sources of employment—regular employment with structured schedules and casual daily-wage employment with flexible schedules—to illustrate that worker demand for flexibility can drive both high absenteeism in the former and high unemployment in the latter. Next, we use an incentive-compatible choice experiment with unskilled workers to elicit preferences over pairs of contracts that offer varying levels of flexibility for a month-long employment opportunity. Using these elicitations and survey data, we aim to measure the following: 1) the share of workers who have demand for flexibility that exceeds what is permitted by structured schedules offered in the market; 2) the correlates of worker demand for flexibility including measures of poverty; and 3) worker valuation of flexibility in terms of foregone potential earnings. These measures would indicate how worker demand for flexibility affects labor supply decisions, both in terms of absence and selection into particular work arrangements. We discuss the potential implications of our findings for income inequality in an economy that is transitioning into more structured modes of production.

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant, SES-1919139	2019
Research Fellow Grant, Program for Economic Research (PER)	2019
Student Research Grant, Center for Development Economics and Policy (CDEP)	2019
Eric M. Mindich Research Fund for the Foundations of Human Behavior with Supreet Kaur, Sendhil Mullainathan, Frank Schilbach	2017
Weiss Family Program for Research in Development Economics Grant with Supreet Kaur, Sendhil Mullainathan, Frank Schilbach	2017
Dean's Fellowship, Columbia University	2014 – 2019
University of Toronto Fellowship	2011 – 2012
Davies Fellowship, Department of Economics, Duke University	2010

WORK EXPERIENCES

Research Analyst, Northwestern University	2012 – 2014
Provided full-time research assistance to Seema Jayachandran	
Summer Intern, Innovations for Poverty Action Uganda	2013

RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP

Supreet Kaur, UC Berkeley and NBER	2018
Eric Verhoogen, Columbia University	2017
Emi Nakamura and Jon Steinsson, Columbia University	2015
Loren Brandt, University of Toronto	2012

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP

Columbia University	2015 – 2019
Programming and Data (Bernard Salanie and Michael Best), Economics of NYC (Donald Davis), Money and Banking (Perry Mehrling), Intermediate Microeconomics (Robert Barron)	
University of Toronto	2011 – 2012
Microeconomic Theory (Ajaz Hussain), Macroeconomic Theory (Gustavo Indart)	
Duke University	2010
Intermediate Microeconomics I (Thomas Nechyba)	

INVITED PRESENTATIONS

SEEDec (UC Berkley), AFE (U Chicago), NEUDC (Northwestern), Summer School in International and Development Economics (U Milan)	2019
Financial Consumer Agency of Canada National Research Symposium (Rotman)	2018

REFeree SERVICE

The World Bank Economic Review

PERSONAL

Citizenship: Canada
Languages: English (fluent), Korean (native)

REFERENCES

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