

Is Women's Work a Pathway to Their Agency in Rural Egypt?

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Whether work is performed for household members' consumption (subsistence work) or for sale to others (market work), it may be an enabling resource for women's agency, or their capacity to define and act upon their goals. The present paper asks: Do women who engage in market work have higher agency in the three domains of economic decision-making, freedom of movement, and equitable gender role attitudes, compared to those who engage in subsistence work and those who do not work? To address this question, we leverage data from a probability sample of ever-married women in rural Egypt. We use latent-variable structural equation models with propensity score matching to estimate the influence of women's work on three domains of their agency. We find no effect on gender attitudes or decision making. However, women's subsistence and market work are associated with increasingly higher factor means for freedom of movement, compared to not working.

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