Does Domestic Violence Law Shift Gender Attitudes and Female Labor Force Participation in Kyrgyzstan?*

Chisato Tachibana[†]

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This is a work-in-progress paper, please do not circulate.

Abstract

This paper examines whether legal reforms aimed at protecting women can translate into substantive economic empowerment in contexts characterized by strong patriarchal norms. Using the 2017 Domestic Violence Law in Kyrgyzstan as a quasi-natural experiment, I study its effects on gender attitudes, intra-household decision-making power, and female labor force participation (FLFP). Employing an intensity-based triple-differences design that exploits regional variation in pre-reform domestic violence prevalence, I find that the law led to significant improvements in attitudes toward women's work and increased women's bargaining power within households. These effects are particularly pronounced in initially conservative regions with higher exposure to domestic violence prior to the reform. However, despite these attitudinal and intra-household shifts, I find no increase in FLFP across regions. This divergence between changing norms and unchanged economic behavior highlights a key limitation of legal empowerment: while anti-violence legislation can reshape perceptions and private decision-making, structural and social constraints may continue to limit women's observable labor market participation. The findings contribute to broader debates on discrimination, gender norms, and the conditions under which legal reforms translate into meaningful substantive economic outcomes.

Keywords: Female Labor Force Participation; Domestic Violence; Perception

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