

Date
May 25, 2017

IPA and J-PAL Host Measuring Women's Empowerment Researcher Gathering

This one-day gathering brought together a small group of researchers and donors to discuss several current debates and challenges in measuring women's empowerment and to generate a practical set of recommendations on how researchers, practitioners, and donors can improve the ways we measure empowerment using surveys and non-survey instruments. IPA and J-PAL will summarize these recommendations in a series of blog posts, research resources, and apply best practices to their own work.

Sessions

Frameworks for Defining and Measuring Women's Empowerment

This session examined definitions and conceptual frameworks of empowerment across subfields and disciplines, such as development and feminist economics and anthropology. Other disciplines have specific definitions of empowerment, and economists do not always use the same terms. The participants drew lessons across frameworks to strengthen the definitions and measurement of empowerment.

Presenter: Jennifer McCleary-Sills of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation ([slides](#))

Discussant: Rachel Glennerster of J-PAL ([slides](#))

Improving How We Measure Decision-Making Power

Some of the most commonly used survey questions for measuring women's agency and decision-making power focus on participation and influence in household decisions, particularly spending decisions. But some researchers have recently reported that wording these questions even slightly differently has led to different answers. The participants discussed whether standard survey questions capture what we hope to understand about decision-making processes and proposed ways to improve or supplement them with other questions, different questions, or non-survey instruments to generate a fuller picture of household decision-making.

Presenters: Markus Goldstein of the World Bank ([slides](#)), Alessandra Voena of the University of Chicago ([slides](#))

Discussant: Anja Sautmann of Brown University ([slides](#))

Moving Beyond Access and Participation in Financial Inclusion and Labor Markets

Many policymakers, donors, practitioners, and researchers classify access to resources, such as affordable financial services, and participation in the labor market as indicators of women's economic empowerment or factors that encourage empowerment. In reality, a job or access to financial services may not be a sign of empowerment; women may be stuck in low-quality jobs or forced to work. The participants discussed how research can distinguish access or resources that could empower women or indicate empowerment and ways to measure how access or participation is contributing to empowerment.

Presenters: Jenny Aker of the Fletcher School at Tufts University ([slides](#)), Leora Klapper of the World Bank ([slides](#))

Measuring Violence Against Women

Violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence, is one of the most egregious violations of women's human rights. Capturing the prevalence of violence against women, and whether interventions reduce violence, is crucial to understanding empowerment. Yet, this kind of sensitive information can be extremely difficult to measure ethically and accurately. Sharing experiences across developing and developed country contexts, participants discussed ethical guidelines for surveys about violence, innovations in survey technology that allow people to take surveys privately, how to appropriately structure surveys about violence, and how to use non-survey instruments or administrative data to measure violence instead of surveys.

Presenter: Anna Aizer of Brown University, Jeannie Annan of the International Rescue Committee

Innovations in Non-Survey Instruments

There has been a recent explosion in the use of non-survey instruments, such as games, vignettes, structured community activities, and purchase decisions to measure indicators related to agency, decision-making, prejudice, and attitudes towards women. However, some researchers have raised concerns about what these instruments actually measure. The participants discussed the validity of these criticisms, promising new non-survey instruments to test, and how to use these tools to complement surveys.

Presenter: Simone Schaner of Dartmouth College ([slides](#))

Special thanks to our speakers:

Anna Aizer and Jennifer McCleary-Sills

In collaboration with



J-PAL

ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB

Address

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

City

Cambridge

Administrative Area

Massachusetts

Country

United States