

Analysing gendered impacts of COVID-19 on Job Search Behaviour

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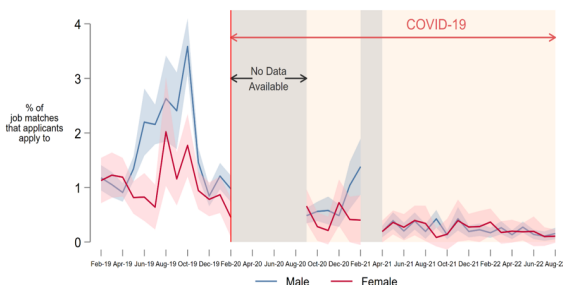
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Topic at a Glance

COVID-19 has triggered unemployment worldwide; evidence suggests that there will be significant divergence in the recovery between developing and developed countries (ILO 2021). In order to speed up recovery, better data is needed to understand the differential impact of COVID-19. This project builds on a job matching platform, Job Talash, created by researchers at Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan, which generates data on job postings and applications for over 10,000 jobseekers and 1,200 firms. Using the Job Talash platform, this brief discusses job search behaviour of job seekers and employers during COVID-19, allowing us to document the impact and recovery from COVID-19.

Applied to Job Matches | By Gender



Unit of observation: One observation per job ad sent to jobseeker i.
The red vertical line indicates the emergence of Covid-19 in the country.
Activity of Matching people to jobs was paused in the 2nd Quarter of 2020.
This brief has comparisons from two time periods:
1) Pre vs Post COVID-19 which compares data between December '19 - January '20 and September '20 onwards and
2) during COVID-19 which compares data between September '20 - January '21 and February '21 - August '22.
Note that we did not collect data for some time after COVID-19 (highlighted in grey in the graph) due to lockdowns and an operational ramp-up while adapting to COVID-19.
Job Seekers: 8,980 | Matches: 847,157

Caption: An overall reduced job application rate on-platform post COVID, with male and female plots converging from 2nd quarter 2021 onwards.

New Insights

Women are expected to be disproportionately affected by the economic crisis from COVID-19 (ILO 2020). This is because of strong gender occupational segregation in contact intensive sectors that are more likely to be affected by COVID-19 (Alon and others 2020), and because women are more likely to be employed in precarious jobs that are likely to experience lay-offs in times of crisis (Bari et al. 2020). Thus, gender disaggregated data can help inform recovery from COVID-19.

We document the gendered impact of COVID-19 on job search using data from our job search platform, Job Talash. In our baseline data, we found that most job seekers search through networks of friends and family or by visiting work sites. During COVID-19 with lockdowns and social distancing, these channels of communication are likely to be disrupted. The Job Talash platform provided them an opportunity to search by telephone and SMS, without in person interactions. In this brief, we explore how on and off platform search changed with the COVID-19 outbreak.

The sample for the service was drawn from a representative sample of both employers and job seekers in Lahore, Pakistan, a metropolis of over 10 million. Registered firms are given an opportunity to list vacancies on an ongoing basis and we match and send applications of relevant, interested candidates to firms. The service has been operating before COVID-19 and it continued to operate post COVID-19. We have used observations from December 2019 to August 2022 in this brief. During this period, 340 vacancies were listed and 491,696 matches were generated against 8,912 jobseekers for these vacancies.

We observe the following insights from our platform and the high frequency follow up surveys:

- Job ads on the platform significantly decrease after the COVID-19 outbreak. We observe a decrease in ads by 40% between December '19-February '20 and September '20- August '22. This could be a response of firms to frequent closures and lockdowns, declining revenues and overall slower economic activity.

- Out of the firms that listed vacancies on our platform after the COVID-19 outbreak, 84% of them had taken some measure to protect their employees. Around 65% of them reported providing masks to employees and 60% had provided sanitizers. However, only 4% of them had the flexibility of working from home.

- Job search by job seekers on the platform has also decreased significantly with COVID-19. For any given job ad, application rates dropped by 54% between December '19-February '20 and September '20-August '22. This pattern is similar for both genders: there is a decrease in applications by 53% and 54% for female and male jobseekers, respectively.

- Job search on the platform continued to decrease as COVID-19 progressed and it has been consistently low since then. Application rates fell by 55% between September '20-January '21 and February '21-August '22. As seen in the graph, application rates were higher for male job seekers compared to females in the pre-COVID 19 months, and this trend continued in the initial time frame after the COVID-19 outbreak between September 2020 and January 2021. However, post-January 2021, the rate at which both genders were applying for jobs through our platform converged, and the application rates have been consistently lower since then. This downward trend could be possibly explained by the time trend observed on our platform, whereby subscribers are most active right after they sign up, and their level of activity declines over time; however, our current sample has been enrolled on the platform since 2017 so it is likely to play a limited role.

- Application rates fell for both high and low exposure jobs after the COVID-19 outbreak. Application rates fell by 67% for low exposure jobs while high exposure jobs experienced a relatively smaller drop of 47% between December '19-February '20 and September '20-August '22. Consistent with the trend above, application rates for both high & low exposure jobs continued to fall as COVID-19 progressed.

- Male jobseekers are working more as COVID-19 progressed compared to female jobseekers. Overall, 10% more respondents reported working between September '20-January '21 and February '21-August '22. This is predominantly driven by male job seekers as their work has significantly increased by 12% between September '20-January '21 and February '21-August '22. Compared to male jobseekers, work for female jobseekers has significantly declined.

Overall, we find evidence from our platform that both demand and supply of labour has decreased with COVID-19. Despite declining job search throughout this period, we do find that more jobseekers, primarily male, reported working in the latter months of COVID-19 compared to the initial months of COVID-19.

Policy Recommendations

The evidence above suggests that job search has declined for both males and females. However, more men reported working in the latter months of COVID-19 compared to the initial months of COVID-19 while fewer women reported working as COVID-19 progressed. This suggests that COVID-19 recovery might be slower for women, and targeted policies that aim to relieve the constraints faced by female job seekers can help speed up the recovery from COVID-19.

Limitations

While our results about vacancy posting are statistically significant, it is difficult to further decompose these patterns by firm characteristics given the sample size of jobs. This limits the extent to which we are able to comment on the impact of COVID-19 on the employer's end.

The on-platform findings in this brief are based on descriptive analysis of the data on Job Talash. Thus, it mostly addresses job search on the Job Talash platform and does not capture jobseekers' search off-platform. To capture off-platform search in the future, we have developed and implemented a high frequency follow up survey with jobseekers enrolled on our platform.

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