

Together in Search: Impact of Coordinated Travel on Women’s Job Search in Urban India

How Coordinating Travel Can Increase Women’s Job Search Efforts and Interview Participation

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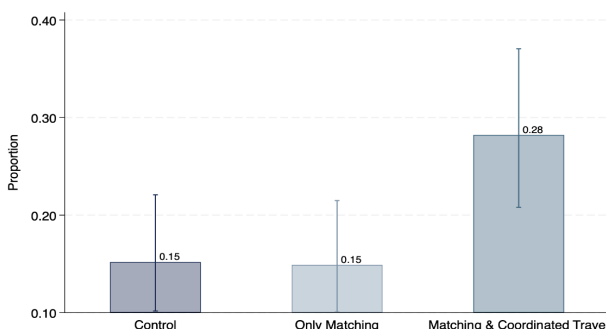


Coordinating travel for job-seeking women helps overcome mobility barriers and boosts job search.

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Topic at a Glance

Restrictive social norms and safety concerns limit women’s ability to move freely in many developing countries. One important yet unexplored consequence of these norms and concerns is that they compel women to travel only with companions. For many, traveling with family members or female friends is a way to navigate seclusion norms and feel safer - which could limit their job search if the companions are unavailable. A natural solution could be to coordinate travel with other job-seeking women, who, due to their shared purpose, are more likely to be reliable travel companions. But this, too, can be challenging. We address this constraint in a field experiment in urban India. We match job seeking women within neighborhoods and randomly vary whether they can coordinate their travel to factory interviews by scheduling interviews on the same date or on different dates. Our experimental design, supplemented by heterogeneity analysis allows us to show that the effects on interview attendance and job search are driven by women coordinating their travel with each other and that matching without coordination has no effects. These results highlight a low-cost novel intervention to address mobility constraints and improve women’s labor market participation.



Caption: Participation in factory interviews based on whether job-seeking women in a neighborhood- were not matched, were matched but couldn’t travel together, and were matched and could travel together.

New Insights

1. Coordinating travel significantly improves interview attendance at the factories. Women in the Matching & Coordinated Travel treatment – where job-seeking women were matched within neighborhoods and scheduled for interviews on the same date to facilitate travel coordination – were 85% more likely to attend interviews compared to the control group. The effect was even stronger for women who reported feeling unsafe while traveling and had fewer social ties, increasing their attendance by 155%-310%.

2. The effects are driven by facilitating travel coordination between job-seeking women and not just by simply knowing them. Women in the Matching & Coordinated Travel treatment were 100% more likely to travel with other women job seekers compared to the control group. However, in the Only Matching treatment—where women were matched through group meetings but assigned interviews on different dates, preventing travel coordination—there was no improvement in interview attendance, confirming that travel coordination was the key driver.

3. Notably, most women in the control group (83%) traveled to interviews with adult companions, and 63% of these women traveled with other control group participants from their neighborhoods. This suggests that the control group women actively sought out each other as travel companions to the interviews. However, their lower interview attendance rate relative to the Matching & Coordinated travel treatment indicates that many women were unable to make such connections on their own. The Matching & Coordinated Travel solves this coordination problem by connecting women who want to attend interviews but don’t know other job seekers in their neighborhood.

4. The treatment also improved women’s broader job search efforts six weeks later. Women in the Matching & Coordinated Travel treatment were 78% more likely to visit prospective employers and made twice as many job search trips beyond the study interviews, demonstrating lasting behavioral changes in job-seeking efforts. Most women in the treatment group continued to coordi-

nate their travel with other women when seeking jobs, reinforcing the role of travel companionship in sustaining job search intensity.

5. Women continued coordinating travel beyond job search. Women in the Matching & Coordinated Travel group were significantly more likely to travel together for non-job-related activities, suggesting that the intervention fostered ongoing social support networks, extending beyond job search efforts.

6. Six weeks after the interviews, 24% of women in the control group were employed. The Matching & Coordinated Travel treatment increased employment by 8.1 percentage points.

Policy Recommendations

1. Firms requiring in-person interviews could expand their pool of female applicants by inviting or mobilizing women in groups in targeting communities for interviews on the same days. This is particularly relevant for garment factories, where hiring for production roles primarily takes place through in-person visits, with many factories even requiring workers to visit job sites to inquire about openings. Our study shows that matching job-seeking women into groups and enabling coordinated travel can help them make more frequent visits to factories and employers.

2. Policymakers could also improve women's employment by expanding women's social networks to include other job-seeking women, enabling them to coordinate travel and search for jobs together.

3. When compared to a pilot intervention that fully covered travel costs to factories for interviews, the Matching & Coordinated Travel treatment had twice the impact on interview attendance. This suggests that combining travel coordination with public policies like free transport for women could be a more effective strategy for improving women's labor market access.

Limitations

First, the findings of our study are context-specific and may not be generalizable to all settings. In regions with better public transportation or weaker mobility restrictions, the impact of such an intervention may be smaller. Conversely, in areas with even stricter gender norms or safety concerns, the intervention could have a stronger effect by addressing more severe barriers to job-seeking. Second, our study is limited to a specific hiring process—that require in-person interviews and job inquiries. While these findings are highly relevant for sectors reliant on walk-in hiring, they may not directly apply to sectors where digital job applications or formal referral networks play a larg-

er role. Third, while our study demonstrates that coordinating travel increases interview attendance and job search intensity, we do not observe long-term employment outcomes beyond six weeks after the intervention. Further research is needed to assess whether the effects on job search persistence and employment retention holds over a longer period.

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