

Menstrual Health, Worker Productivity and Well-being among Female Bangladeshi Garment Workers

Kristina Czura
(LMU Munich)

Andreas Menzel
(CERGE-EI, Prague)[†]

Martina Miotto*
(CERGE-EI, Prague)

November 2019

Abstract

We conducted a randomised controlled trial (RCT) on a sample of 1,000 female garment workers in three factories in Bangladesh, offering access to free sanitary pads at work to 500 of the workers. We cross-randomised participation in information sessions for hygienic menstrual health care implemented by an experienced local NGO, and we vary the salience of commonly perceived taboos in the pad collection process. We find effects of the free pads and information sessions on self-reported pad use, but not of the taboo variations. We find effects on absenteeism and adherence to traditional restrictive and health-adverse taboos surrounding menstruation, but not on worker turnover or self-reported well-being at work.

PRELIMINARY VERSION: The trial is currently being repeated between September 2019 and April 2020, with an additional 1,000 workers to reach the final targeted sample size.

Keywords: Menstrual Health, Taboos, Productivity, Export Manufacturing
JEL Code: O14, O15, O35, M54, J32, J81

*We are grateful to Selim Gulesci, Jonas Hjort, Seema Jayachandran, Rachel Thornton, Christopher Woodruff, and seminar participants at LMU, CERGE-EI, PEDL PhD Workshop, Firms and Markets in Development Workshop 2019 in (Syracuse, IT), and the EPED Workshop 2019 (Boston) for many valuable comments. We also thank Rana Farhad, Kamrul Hasan and Romana Hasan for their great support, and Silvia Fernandez Castro for providing excellent research assistance. Financial support by PEDL, LMU, and from GA CR Standard Grant 17-26395S is acknowledged. The trial was registered at the AEA RCT registry under RCT ID AEARCTR-0003298.

[†]Corresponding Author. Address: R.330 - CERGE-EI, a joint workplace of Charles University and the Economics Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Politických veznu 7, P.O. Box 882, 111 21 Prague 1, Czech Republic. Email: Andreas.Menzel@cerge-ei.cz