Research Statement

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My research interests lie at the intersection of development economics, labor markets, health, and household decision-making. I use data from developing contexts to study topics in applied microeconomics that are of particular interest to economic development. My job market paper uses data on a number of sub-Saharan African countries to demonstrate how access to information and communication technology, particularly fast Internet access, affects employment status differentially for men and women, changes household decision-making patterns, and affects acceptability of domestic violence. This advances the literature on the interaction of information communication technology with labor markets and household decision-making, and it also demonstrates policy-relevant differences in the impact of fast Internet on employment by gender.

While my research is primarily empirical, my research questions are guided by economic theory from development, labor and health economics. In my empirical work, I use a variety of econometric tools and identification techniques to answer research questions that are not only relevant to economic literature, but are also informative to policy decisions. In particular, I pay close attention to minority groups, particularly women, in my own research, as these groups often warrant additional attention when directing policy.

My dissertation research is based in a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, I am interested in a wide-range of other developing contexts and hope to conduct research in other developing regions in the future.

Labor Markets and Economic Development

In my job market paper, entitled Internet Access, Employment, and Household Bargaining, I study how fast Internet access affects employment outcomes, allowing for heterogeneous treatment effects by gender. I identify the impact of fast Internet using the introduction of submarine cables to the African continent in the late 2000s and early 2010s. I interact the timing differences in these cables’ arrival with geospatial differences in access to terrestrial cable networks in a difference-in-difference framework to identify a treatment effect of fast Internet access.

I find that fast Internet access increases male employment rates, measured as having worked in the past 7 days, by 4.9 percentage points off a 73.5% mean male employment rate, while no statistically significant treatment effect is found for women. When measured as having worked in the past 12 months, I find that fast Internet access increases male employment by 4.8 percentage points on a 76.2% mean male employment rate, but only increases female employment by 2.8
percentage points on a 65.3% mean female employment rate. The gains in employment are primarily in the agricultural sector, although women experience some shift into skilled manual labor. Fast Internet access shifts men into self-employment and employment for family and out of employment for someone else, while it shifts women into year-round employment.

I then explore whether the differential employment effects by gender can be explained by interaction effects of fast Internet access with education level and household composition. Women who have some primary education or have completed primary see an increase in employment attributable to fast Internet access. In addition, unmarried women, women in small households, and women residing in households with no young children experience positive gains to employment from fast Internet access. This suggests that the differential impact of fast Internet access on employment by gender is partially explained by differences in education and household composition between men and women.

This research advances the literature on the impact of information technology innovations on employment effects and underlines the importance of allowing for heterogeneous labor market effects by gender. I emphasize the need to check for differential employment effects by gender, as grouping men and women together in a setting where such differential effects exist would overestimate treatment effects for one gender, while underestimating it for the other. I also argue that doing so is essential for informing policy decisions, where an emphasis on female employment and general welfare in developing contexts exists.

**Household Decision-Making and Resource Allocation**

In addition to the employment effects explored in my job market paper, *Internet Access, Employment, and Household Bargaining*, I also consider the impact of fast Internet access on household decision-making. This analysis is informed by the understanding that changes in employment outcomes which differ by gender may cause a significant shift in intra-household bargaining. Although measurement of decision-making is complex, I am able to use survey responses from men and women on whom usually makes various household decisions to address this question.

Fast Internet access increases the number of women who say they usually have some say in planning visits to family and relatives by 6.9 percentage points on a mean level of 67.9% and the number who say they have sole say in visits to family by 4.7 percentage points on a 19.2% mean level. Women are also more likely to say they usually are the sole decision-maker in large household purchases by a 3.5 percentage point increase on a mean level of 15.2%. Internet access decreases the number of men who say their wife should have sole say in spending his earnings and in his health care, by 3.9 percentage points on a mean level of 5.1% and 3.4 percentage points on a mean level of 6.8%, respectively. However, there is no statistically significant impact on the number of men who believe women should have some say in household decisions.

In a second paper, *Household Decision-Making and Female Genital Cutting: Evidence from Mali*, I consider the various motivations behind female genital cutting (FGC) in Mali and explore the household decision-making processes that lead to cutting a daughter. I use new data on FGC
outcomes by child to inform a literature that had previously conducted empirical analysis using only FGC outcomes by the mother. This data allows me to see variations in FGC status among daughters of the same parents, as well as observe stated opinions of FGC of each parent.

I find that maternal opinions on FGC are more predictive of whether a daughter gets cut than are paternal opinions on FGC, allowing me to cast doubt on a commonly believed theory that FGC is driven by male control of household decision-making. I also find that there is variation in FGC status among daughters of the same father but of different wives in polygamous households, and that much of this variation is driven by maternal opinions on FGC, again suggesting that mothers play a crucial role in the decision-making process behind FGC.

In addition to these findings, I find that FGC status is not uniform across daughters of the same mother and same father. In fact, second and third daughters are more likely to be cut than first daughters. This casts doubt on the theory that FGC is simply a matter of convention or social norm. In addition, I find that, in my sample, parental religion and ethnicity are not predictive of FGC status, again suggesting that parents are not simply engaging in cultural norms without considering other factors. These findings suggest that deciding whether a daughter will be cut is, at least somewhat, a strategic decision that is made within the household.

This paper not only contributes to the literature on FGC, but also demonstrates the importance of analyzing household decision-making for practices that are widely considered a social norm.

**Health and Economic Development**

In addition to studying labor market and household decision-making effects, my job market paper, *Internet Access, Employment, and Household Bargaining*, also considers the health impacts of fast Internet access on women, especially their opinions of domestic violence against women. My research on this topic is driven both by the knowledge that changes in intra-household bargaining affect domestic violence rates and by prior literature on the impact of new technologies, such as cable television, in decreasing acceptability of domestic violence through introduction of new ideas and attitudes.

To determine opinions on domestic violence, I use data asking individuals if a man is justified in beating his wife in any of the following 5 scenarios: the wife goes out without telling her husband, the wife neglects her children, the wife argues with her husband, the wife refuses sex with her husband, and the wife burns food. I find that Internet access increases tolerance of domestic violence among both men and women.

I find that access to fast Internet increases the number of men who believe a beating is justified if a wife refuses sex or neglects her children, by 2 percentage points on a mean of 7.5% and 4.6 percentage points on a mean of 18.6%, respectively. In addition, fast Internet access increases the number of women who believe beatings are justified if a wife argues with her husband or goes out without telling her husband, by 5.1 percentage points on a 19.3% mean and 3.8 percentage points on a 20.3% mean, respectively. Although I find no impact of fast Internet access on reported
experiences of domestic violence, I still argue that these results are important for women’s health, both because changes in opinions on domestic violence may reflect broader social changes in terms of domestic violence incidence and because reported opinions may be a useful measures of actual experiences in self-reported surveys where women face actual or perceived negative repercussions for reporting domestic violence experiences.

In my second paper, *Household Decision-Making and Female Genital Cutting: Evidence from Mali*, I also explore the health impacts of FGC and how this impacts mothers’ decisions on whether to cut their daughters. Although I find no direct negative physical health impacts from FGC, I cannot rule out broader psychological impacts or negative physiological effects for which I have no good measure in the data. Despite the limitations my data presents when speaking to the health impacts of FGC for affected women, addressing the issue in this paper demonstrates my interest in health economics, particularly as health outcomes may interact with minority status.

**Additional Areas of Interest**

In addition to labor markets, health, and household decision-making, I have several other research interests that I hope to pursue in the future. Chief among them is the importance of minority status in impacting various labor and health outcomes. I have pursued this in developing countries primarily by considering the role of gender in shaping economic outcomes. In addition to this, I am also incredibly interested in the role race and ethnicity play, both in traditional developing contexts and in more developed countries. In my research entitled *Racial Income Inequality and Hate Crime Incidence*, I consider the racial income gap in the United States and how it impacts the rate of white-on-black hate crimes.

This paper explores another major interest of mine: inter-group conflict. Traditional psychological hate group literature suggests that inter-group hate emerges as the result of one of two phenomena. The first is a process of “othering”, whereby one social group sees another as fundamentally different from themselves, allowing for dehumanization of and hatred for the out-group to arise. The second arises from competition for social and economic niches, in which hatred occurs when one group feels threatened by the other group encroaching on a niche traditionally occupied only by the in-group.

My paper seeks to determine how changes in racial income inequality (a divergence in income which might increase “othering” or a convergence which might increase competition), identified by race-specific Bartik instruments, affect hate crime incidence. In addition to identifying the existence and direction of an effect, this research also hopes to discuss whether the observed effect can help inform how inter-group hatred and conflict arise, and whether the theories of “othering” and competition can help explain the effect. This work is in progress.