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Job Market Paper: Residential segregation and female labor market participation: The case of Santiago de Chile

Abstract:

Chile’s female labor market participation ranks amongst the lowest in Latin America. In a country where over 90% of the population lives in cities, the urban landscape has surprisingly been neglected as an explanatory factor for women’s infrequent participation in paid work. This paper addresses this omission by theorizing and calculating the effects of residential segregation on labor market participation. This paper finds that the market-oriented reforms dating from the late 1970s that economically segregated Santiago entailed negative effects on labor market participation for less educated women in the form of spatial mismatch effects. These effects are particularly high among female caregivers, signaling that spatial constraints interact with gendered asymmetries in the distribution of unpaid care work to intensify mobility constraints in accessing employment. Hence, residential segregation contributes to the consolidation of gender inequalities within less educated households and economic inequalities between more and less educated households.