

Agricultural Practices, Organized Workers and Female Empowerment: Evidence from Italian Mondine

Abstract:

We study whether work practices adopted in recent history in agriculture influence the empowerment of women in a European country. Focusing on Italy, we study the case of female rice weeders and their successful history of unionisation and mobilisation for better working conditions. Relying on an instrumental variable strategy to predict quasi-exogenous variation in rice production, we test whether the historical presence of female rice weeders predicts differences in measures of women's economic and political empowerment during the second half of the XX century. We find that towns where rice production was historically relevant have higher women labour force participation, stronger support for divorce in the 1974 referendum, more women in politics, and are more likely to have a nursery school. Our results suggest the importance of collective action of working women to achieve persistent female empowerment.

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