Monster-in-law?
The Effect of Co-resident Mother-in-law on the Welfare of Bangladeshi Daughters-in-law

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Objective:

- Measure the causal impact of the presence of a mother-in-law in a patriarchal joint family on the well-being of a co-resident daughter-in-law.
What’s the big deal?

UN Millennium Development Goal No.3: “Promote gender equality and empower women”

Effort to shed light on the part played by women themselves in perpetuating their plight, and what they can do about it
What’s the big deal?

- Big deal in countries where the patriarchal joint family is still the norm
  - South Asia, home to quarter of the world’s population
  - East Asia, Arab World and many African countries
What’s the big deal?

Social norms

- Where Patriarchal joint family still the norm:
  - Around 80% of currently married women coresided with the in-laws in their first residence after marriage, half to one third currently live with the mother-in-law. (Jejeebhoy and Sathar 2001)
  - On average, a daughter-in-law lives in the father-in-law’s household for 4.2 years (Andrew Foster 1993)
  - Mother-in-law primary source of stress, physical and mental violence (Kerala Mental Health Survey 2004)
What’s the big deal?

“The fact that the in-coming female comes from another group means that in some ways she is viewed as a threat: her behavior must be closely watched; she must be re-socialized so that she comes to identify her own interests with those of her husband’s kin; senior family wives tend to dominate young in-marrying wives” (Dyson & Moore, 1983)

“The eldest woman in the household, if wise and strong-willed, often gained considerable authority (in household decision making) over time, and in any event she could control the women” (Goode, 1970)
What’s the big deal?

- When a young woman is required to make vital decisions pertaining to her own fertility and human capital investments in her children, she is under the control of the mother-in-law.
Literature Review:
Effect of Joint Residence (not mother-in-law effect, per se)

- Results are suggestive that investments in health is lower for Bangladeshi daughters-in-law compared to other women in the household. (Foster, 2004).
- Position in the household as a daughter-in-law or sister-in-law has significant adverse effects on the mobility and decision making authority of rural Bangladeshi women (Balk 1997).
Literature Review: Mother-in-law effect

- Coresidence with mother-in-law used as one of the proxies for women’s status in rural India. Finds significant negative association between coresidence with mother-in-law and economic decision making and access to economic resources. (Jejeebhoy 2000)

- Daughters-in-law are significantly more likely to use contraception in households where the mother-in-law reported that she discussed contraception with them. All the women in the sample lived with their mothers-in-law (Fikree et al. 2001)
Literature Review: Mother-in-law effect

- In estimating the effect of various dimensions of women’s autonomy on maternal health care utilization of 300 women in a North Indian city, finds association between living with the mother-in-law and the decision making capacity of women, but it has no effect on their freedom of movement, and only the latter significantly influences maternal health care utilization. (Bloom, Wypij and Das Gupta 2001)
Contribution

- Fill a gap in Gender and Development literature, a gap not unnoticed by researchers (Foster 2004; Balk 1997)
- To my knowledge, this is the first quantitative study that attempts to specifically estimate the causal effect of coresidence with mother-in-law on the well-being of daughters-in-law, correcting for possible bias resulting from selection on unobservables.
- Looks not only at the depth, but also the breadth of ‘mother-in-law effect’
Data

- Matlab Health and Socio-economic Survey 1996
- Currently married women living with their husbands: 4053
- Widows and wives of outmigrant men excluded
Data

- Total no. of currently married women: 4053
- No. of women who co-reside with mother-in-law: 889 (21.9%)
Data

Mother-in-law present in the first household where the daughter-in-law lived with her husband: 77.52%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>co-resid</th>
<th>not co-resid</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MIL present in first hh</td>
<td>93.7 %</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
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</table>
Selection Problem

- Co-residence of mother & daughter-in-law is not random, but a matter of choice

- Selection at two stages
  - At the time of marriage
  - At the time of household partition

- Selection on unobservables may not be a big deal
  - Arranged marriages, Custom
  - Picked outcomes affected only by current coresidence
  - Only one Inverse Mills Ratio is statistically significant
  - Height test
Other estimation issues

- Heterogeneity of effects
- The mother-in-law effect is different for different types of co-residence
  - Expect biggest effect in father-in-law headed households
  - Expect smallest effect in husband (mother-in-law’s son) headed households
    - Average effect (Main models)
    - Sensitivity analysis (Main sub-groups)
Estimation Strategy

- Heckman’s Treatment Effects Model with Exclusion Restrictions

- Instrumental Variables
  - (Average effect)
Estimation Strategy

Instruments for:

- Current co-residence with mother/father-in-law:
  - First hh mother-in-law present
  - First hh father-in-law present
  - Husband eldest son
  - Husband’s no. of brothers
Probability that a woman has a coresident mother-in-law

Effect of Instruments on Probability of Coresidence

- Mother-in-law present in the first household
- Husband eldest son
- Husband's number of brothers
## Comparison of Means
**(Main Outcome Variables)**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>co-resident</td>
<td>not co-resid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No role in buying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saree*</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevented from</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Working*</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member of Org.*</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever used contra.*</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI*</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
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‘Mother-in-law Effect’ on outcomes

- No say in purchase of own clothes: 7.9%**
- Prevented from going out to work: 5.2%
- Member of organizations: -7.0%**
- Ever used contraceptives: 0.0%
- BMI: -0.35*
- Height: -0.23
- Desire for more children: 6.8%
Policy Implications

- Behavior Change Communication

- Examples:
  - Bangladesh Integrated Nutritional Intervention Program
  - SUMATA, Nepal
  - Senegalese grandmother project
Future Research

- Effect on India
- Effect on the health seeking behavior of daughters-in-law
- Effect on children, particularly girls