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Measuring Women’s Employment in 28 Muslim Countries

5.1 Introduction

This study primarily makes use of large data sets and regression-based techniques (multilevel models) that on the one hand enable the identification of general relationships and on the other hand allow me to test the complex dynamics and differences. This chapter provides information about the general data and methods used and insight into the choices made, the empirical novelties of this book, as well as some of the data limitations. First, I discuss which women were included in this study, and why for instance women who were still in school were excluded (Section 5.2), followed by the chosen logistic multilevel modelling (Section 5.3), and the data sets that underlie all empirical analyses (Section 5.4). In Section 5.5, I engage the debate on measuring employment and argue that women’s gainful non-agricultural employment can be measured quite well with the used surveys, and Section 5.6 discusses the operationalization of the explanatory factors. Section 5.7 closes this chapter with a short summary.

5.2 Population and cases

Table 5.1 gives an overview of the countries studied, the number of included districts and women, as well as more information of the surveys, which are discussed in Section 5.4.

5.2.1 Working-age women in Muslim countries who are neither disabled nor in school

In Chapter 2, I elaborately discussed the choice for focussing on Muslim countries and how I operationalized ‘Muslim country’ as ‘independent
state with a Muslim plurality population’. Contrary to what that discussion might suggest, the primary units of analysis here are women, not countries. For theoretical reasons three groups of women were deselected from the scope of this study. First, I will apply what Goertz calls the ‘Possibility Principle’ (Goertz & Hewitt, 2006; Goertz & Mahoney, 2006). This assumes that there are some fundamental variables that make it almost impossible for women to work, regardless of their characteristics in terms of the independent variables. These cases were negative and ‘irrelevant’ and should be excluded. For this study disabled women fall in this category, because if women have a severe disability, they are unable to work. Any other influencing factor becomes irrelevant, as they will nearly always score a zero on the dependent variable. Second, the specific hypotheses formulated in Chapter 4 are in the first instance applicable to women of working age (15–64) only. I expect that needs, opportunities, and values are translated differently to specific factors for non-working-age women. Third, women who were still in school were also excluded from the population. Schooling and labour participation are partly interchangeable, and it is therefore impossible to determine whether the position of not working but being in school is more similar to the status of being employed or not (e.g. if one sees school as a first step on the labour market). In sum, the population of relevant cases for the analyses in this book includes women of working age, living in Muslim countries, who are neither disabled nor in school.

5.2.2 From population to cases

So the theoretical focus is clear now, but that does not mean that all existing cases can be studied empirically. There are no comparable data sets for all Muslim countries available. Nonetheless, this book makes major steps forward by making use of a unique data infrastructure enabling the inclusion of 28 countries.

The selection strategy within these countries is that of random, multistage cluster sampling. In each country, small geographical areas (clusters) were randomly sampled from a list of all the country’s clusters. Within each of these clusters, households were randomly sampled and all the women of these households between the ages of 15 and 49 were included in the sample. Women aged 50 through 64 were not included in the survey process, despite their being part of the theoretical population. For each country at least several thousands of women were included in the sample. Women from all parts of the countries were included and the data sets list in which district the women live – throughout this study, I use the term ‘district’ to designate the provinces,