Women empowerment and child labour consequences of family law reform in Ethiopia.

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Abstract: This study evaluates the causal impact of the family law policy reform on women empowerment and child labour in Ethiopia. The reform provides an improvement in economic rights of women and guarantees the equality of women in the family. Legal reforms are a means for women empowerment which is closely linked to positive outcomes for children. The reform initially rolled out in three regions and two autonomous cities until 2005 and fully implemented throughout the country in 2011. The study exploits this regional and timing difference in the implementation of the family law reform as an identification strategy and uses the unique household survey of the Ethiopian National Labor Force Survey before and after the policy change. Women empowerment is also estimated separately as an unobserved latent variable using structural equation modeling. The result from the difference in difference methodology reveals that the policy change has increased the bargaining power of women as measured by the composite index of empowerment. In addition, an increase in a mother's bargaining power is associated with fewer hours of work though the reform has no significant impact on child labor directly. This may suggest that the trickling down effect of the reform to children in the form of child labor reduction may take time to materialize.