

The feminisation of the labour force in South Africa: A supply-side phenomenon?

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The post-apartheid period 1995 to 1999 has witnessed a continued feminisation of the labour force. In 1995, just over 40 percent of all adults working or actively looking for work in South Africa were women; in 1999, this had grown to some 45 percent. Although total employment over the same period decreased, women's share of employment increased. In this paper, we explore these labour dynamics more closely. We investigate first why the supply of female labour has increased, exploring the relationship between, *inter alia*, changes in household structure, men's employment status and female labour supply. We then examine where and why the gender composition of employment has changed. Using data from the 1995 and 1999 October Household Surveys, we demonstrate that the feminisation of employment in South Africa is associated particularly with a feminisation of self-employment in the informal sector. Although there is some evidence of an increase in the demand for female labour, much of the increase in women's employment seems to derive from an increasing number of women "making work" in the informal economy. If this increase in informal sector employment reflects not simply an increase in work performed but also the better collection of data on informal sector work, then there is less evidence of a feminisation of employment, and the feminisation of the labour force would be more of a supply-side phenomenon.