

Nishtha Sharma

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Education

Ph.D. in Economics, University of California, Irvine	2022
Master of Economics, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi	2014
Bachelor of Economics (Honors), University of Delhi	2011

Research Fields

Behavioral and Experimental Economics, Labor Economics, Applied Microeconomic theory, Political Economy

Work Experience

Postdoctoral Research Associate, Social Science Division, New York University, Abu Dhabi	2022- Present
Ph.D. Intern, Fund Internship Program (FIP), Strategy, Policy and Review Department, International Monetary Fund	2021

Working Papers

“The Persistence of Disadvantages: Theory and Experiment”

Many economic situations involve contests for resources, such as winning prizes and earning bonuses. The likelihood of success in such contests is often skewed, favoring some competitors while putting others at a disadvantage. I study the strategic interaction between an advantaged and a disadvantaged competitor in a repeated contest where winning can help overcome the initial disadvantage. Theoretically, the competition for advantage increases effort by both competitors, but that the advantaged competitor increases effort more than the disadvantaged competitor. As a result, the disadvantaged competitor is even less likely to win when they have the potential to overcome their disadvantage, and the initial disadvantage is persistent. Evidence from a laboratory experiment supports these theoretical predictions.

“The Economics of Street Charity: Theory and Field Evidence” (Joint with Samreen Malik)

Won the Econometric Society's Best Paper Award in Applied Economics 2022

This paper examines the effect of offering a product on charitable behavior toward beggars on urban streets using a combination of theory and survey evidence. We propose a signaling model, which suggests that givers form beliefs about the intrinsic cost of working and willingness to earn based on the choice of begging with or without a product. In a separating equilibrium, the act of begging with a product separates the deserving from the undeserving and predicts higher charitable transfers to beggars with products. We use survey data collected in Delhi to find that the charitable transfers towards beggars with products are higher than towards beggars without products, even when givers did not take the product, indicating that the presence of a product does increase donations.

“Lawful Progress: Unveiling the Laws That Reshape Women’s Work Decisions” (Joint with Anna Fruttero, Diego Gomes)

This paper examines the impact of women’s legal rights on labor force participation decisions made by women and men through a granular analysis of 35 gendered laws. Building on previous literature, it departs from the analysis using aggregate indices due to concerns about (i) the usability of an index for policymaking purposes, (ii) the economic interpretation of an index’s average marginal effects, (iii) and the implicit assumption of homogeneous effects underlying regressions with an index. The findings identify nine key laws that can foster female labor force participation. Notably, laws related to household dynamics and women’s agency within the family are especially important in influencing their decision to work. This paper shows that improving women’s legal rights has no systematic negative effect on men’s labor force participation, reducing the gender gap.

Conference and Workshop Presentations

Association for Study of Religion Economics and Culture Graduate Student Conference	2021
Ahmedabad University's 2nd Annual Economics Conference	2021
Winter School, Delhi School of Economics & The Econometric Society	2020
Behavioral Research in Economics Workshop, IIM-A & IIM-B	2020
Southern Economic Association Conference	2020
Economic Science Association Global Virtual Conference	2020
Contests: Theory and Evidence Conference	2019, 2020
Workshop on India's Women, Work, and Development, Evidence for Policy and Design, Indian Statistical Institute	2019
Institute for Mathematics and Behavioral Science Graduate Student Workshop	2019
Women in Economics Spring Workshop, UC Irvine	2019
Graduate Student Workshop by the Association for the Study of Religion, Economics and Culture	2019

Research Grants & Fellowships

Experimental Social Science Laboratory Research Grant, UC Irvine (\$2400)	2021
Social Sciences Graduate Students Fellowship, UC Irvine (\$12500)	2021-2022
Graduate Division Completion Fellowship, UC Irvine (\$7500)	2021-2022
Non-Resident Supplemental Tuition Grant, UC Irvine (\$5000)	2022
Associate Dean's Dissertation Fellowship, UC Irvine (\$7500)	2020
Kugelman Citizen Peace-building Fellowship, UC Irvine (\$3000)	2020 - 2021
Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies Research Grant, UC Irvine (\$2800)	2020
Initiatives to End Family Violence Research Grant, UC Irvine (\$1000)	2019
Department of Economics Summer Research Fellowship, UC Irvine (\$8600)	2018-2021
Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies Travel Grant, UC Irvine (\$2000)	2019
Department of Economics Travel Grant, UC Irvine (\$500)	2019

Service and Leadership

Referee for Experimental Economics, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, Journal of Economic Dynamics and Control	
Organizer of the Theory, History, and Political Economy Workshop at UC Irvine	2020
Graduate student mentor, UC Irvine	2019

Teaching Experience

Teaching Assistant, Department of Economics, UC Irvine	
Graduate level: Microeconomic Theory 1	Fall 2018, 2019
Microeconomic Theory 2 (Game theory)	Winter 2019, 2020
Undergraduate level: Intermediate Microeconomics (Virtual)	Spring, 2020
Probability Theory	Fall 2016, Spring 2018, Spring 2019
Managerial Economics	
	Winter 2018
Economics of Strategy	Fall 2017
Basic Macroeconomics	Spring 2017
Basic Microeconomics	Winter 2017
Assistant Professor, Indian School of Business and Finance, London School of Economics and Political Science - International Center, New Delhi, India	
Introduction to Economics (Undergraduate Microeconomics and Macroeconomics)	2015-16

Software Skills

Proficient in Python, STATA, oTree, LaTeX and MS Office