

Timeline

May 2020-February 2021

Study Type

Randomized Evaluation

Research Implemented by IPA

No

The Health and Wellbeing Impacts of COVID-19 Among Rural Households in Bangladesh and India

Researchers

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Abstract

To curb the spread of COVID-19 Bangladesh started a countrywide lockdown from late March 2020, which resulted in business closure and disruption of economic activities bringing the livelihood of millions of people, particularly those in the low-income groups, to a virtual halt. Food insecurity and job loss seem to have traded places with illnesses and virus-related deaths due to isolation and the lockdown of markets amidst poor institutions and lack of social safety nets in developing countries such as Bangladesh and India. The adverse effects of a countrywide lockdown may extend beyond income shocks and food insecurity and may also affect people's mental health and overall wellbeing. Adherence to the guidelines prescribed by the government agencies may be lower among the poor and those in rural regions due to their lack of education and awareness, thereby making them particularly susceptible to the spread of COVID-19.

This project aims to examine the effect of information on COVID-19 protective measures given via text messages/phone call/both, the health and socio-economic effects of COVID-19, lockdown, and social distancing in the southwest part of Bangladesh.

Project Outcomes of Interest

The effects of lockdown and social distancing measures on 1) the physical and mental health of men and women within the family; 2) lives and livelihood with a particular focus on women and children; 3) compliance with social distancing and other recommended health practices

following telephone-based information campaigns over the phone, and 4) the long-term effects of completed randomized evaluations on interactions with COVID-19 responses

Partners

[BRAC, Global Development & Research Initiative Foundation \(GDRI\)](#)

Key Findings

This paper evaluates a randomized over-the-phone counseling intervention aimed at mitigating the mental health impact of COVID-19 on a sample of 2,402 women across 357 villages in Bangladesh. We find that the provision of mental support to participating women improves their mental health ten months post-intervention, leading to reductions of 20.4% in the prevalence of moderate and severe stress and 32.8% in depression, relative to women in the control group. We also find positive impacts on economic outcomes: household food security and time invested in homeschooling of children, suggesting that improvement in mental health is an important step toward better economic well-being for these women. Finally, we also observe impacts on various other outcomes, including preventive health behavior associated with COVID-19 and vaccination take-up. Our results suggest that this type of low-cost intervention can be effective in providing rapid psychological support to vulnerable groups in times of crises.

Link to Results

- [Improving Women's Mental Health during a Pandemic \(IZA Institute of Labor Economics Working Paper October 2021\)](#)
- [Raising Health Awareness in Rural Communities: A Randomized Experiment in Bangladesh and India \(Working Paper, October 2021\)](#)

Impact Goals

- Build resilience and protect the financial health of families and individuals
- Improve social-safety net responses
- Improve women's health, safety, and economic empowerment
- Reduce COVID-19 transmission rates

Project Data Collection Mode

- IVR (Interactive voice response)

Results Status

Results