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COVID-19 RESPONSE | POLICY BRIEF

FEBRUARY 2021

Impacts of the Pandemic on Vulnerable Households with Children in Bangladesh



The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global challenge that has affected the health and livelihood of billions worldwide. Citizens of low-income countries have been affected by the pandemic in nearly all areas of life, and the impacts have been particularly challenging for those with limited access to social safety nets. Bangladesh is especially susceptible to the negative economic impacts of the pandemic due to its strong ties to the global economy, and these negative demand shocks are likely to persist throughout and after the pandemic.

Researchers conducted two rounds of phone surveys in July 2020 and December 2020 with 3,125 vulnerable households with children across seven regions of Bangladesh. Across the two rounds of surveys, we find that the negative economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have persisted at least six months after the lifting of the general economic lockdown at the end of May 2020. Collectively, these findings point to several areas of need for vulnerable households, particularly in the area of education, mental health, and gender-based violence.

Key Findings

- Already vulnerable households have faced significant economic hardships due to the pandemic, which has also jeopardized food security.
- These changes have been accompanied by changes in women's decision-making power and increased their reported incidence of intimate partner violence.
- By December 2020, economic insecurity has lessened but negative mental health impacts on mothers persist.
- Most children (71 percent) are continuing educational activities in some way. Few watch government-provided lessons, and fewer use online resources. Instead, those that can, rely on the help of family members, neighbors, and paid tutors.
- This persistent negative economic impact highlights the need for continued assistance for vulnerable households, which may also have cross-cutting benefits on other dimensions of household wellbeing.
- Continued economic hardships may also pose a challenge for the return to in-person schooling. Additionally, the wide variation in educational supports available to students suggests that policymakers should anticipate substantial variation in the distribution of learning losses, when developing outreach efforts or remedial programs.
- The pandemic appears to have harmed women's mental health and increased intimate partner violence, which makes the need for strengthening systems to support women's mental health and reduce intimate partner violence even more pressing.

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COUNTRY

Bangladesh

SPONSOR

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
International Growth Centre

TIMELINE

July 2020, December 2020

STUDY SAMPLE

3,125 households

Policy Brief: Impacts of the Pandemic on Vulnerable Households with Children in Bangladesh

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