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RECOVR Roundup Vol. 12: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

In this twelfth installment of our RECOVR Roundup series, we are sharing new findings and analysis from the [RECOVR Research Hub](#) and from our partner organizations, as well as links on what is happening in the Social Protection landscape in response to COVID-19. Read the [previous installment](#) if you missed it, and [sign up for our mailing list](#) if you'd like to receive this roundup series directly to your inbox.

As always, we encourage you to [write to our team](#) with ideas for features.

New Findings & Analysis

Bangladesh: How has the pandemic affected vulnerable households with children?

The economic impacts have lessened, but negative impacts on women's mental health persist

As COVID lockdowns started in 2020 and economic disruptions spread, IPA and researchers Emily Beam and Priya Mukherjee wanted to track how they were affecting parents of young children. In June and December of 2020, [they surveyed](#) mothers and fathers of 2,000 vulnerable families with young children at risk of not returning to school, to see how they were coping, economically and psychologically. They found **acute economic impacts, food insecurity, and mental health deterioration**. By December, economic hardship had slightly lessened, but food insecurity still remained high (if better than before): fewer households were relying on less preferred foods (from 92 to 87 percent) or reducing the size or frequency of meals (from 75 to 59 percent). **Mothers reported worsening mental health and reported feeling depressed at much higher rates than fathers** (this accords with [similar findings from studies in Latin America](#)). **Finally, most parents reported that their children would “definitely” return to school when they reopened, and these rates were higher for girls (82 percent) than for boys (75 percent)**. While parents had educational aspirations for their sons, boys were more likely to

have taken on extra work to support their families during this crisis.

Ghana and South Africa: How have low-resource urban neighborhoods coped during the pandemic?

Economic and mental health stressors were top of mind for respondents

Researchers Kathrin Durizzo, Edward Asiedu, Antoinette Van der Merwe, Attie Van Niekerk, and Isabel Günther sought to understand how poor households in Accra and Johannesburg have weathered the crisis. After surveying 1,400 households across both cities, they found that **67 percent of self-employed workers in South Africa and 86 percent in Ghana had to close their businesses during citywide lockdowns and did not have another source of income. Such economic anxiety was also reflected in mental health: in South Africa, 51 percent, and in Ghana, 37 percent of the urban poor surveyed reported feeling somewhat or strongly down and depressed.** The authors also highlight that stricter regulations do not always lead to higher compliance with social distancing: despite restrictions, 25 percent of respondents in South Africa, and 38 percent of respondents in Ghana reported that they did not avoid large gatherings during lockdowns.

What We're Reading & Watching

- If you ever wonder how to compare different countries' pandemic responses, doing that just got a little easier: the **Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker** catalogs government policies related to closure and containment, health and economic policy for more than 180 countries since January 2020 and is featured in *Nature Human Behavior*.
- For our readers focused on **humanitarian assistance**, the British Red Cross has developed a Cash in Emergencies Toolkit to help practitioners on the ground.
- How did Namibia manage to **send emergency cash transfers to over 30% of its citizens** in April - May 2020, with each application only taking 72 hours to process? It built on an integrated digital National Population Register, which was cross-referenced with other databases to rapidly determine eligibility.
- In South Africa, the Minister of Social Development has called for a **basic income grant** to be implemented after the emergency cash transfers put in place during the pandemic expire in April 2021.
- An interesting data set is available: Data from **Ghana's LEAP program, which provides cash and health insurance to poor households with infants in their first 1,000 days**, is now available online through the Transfer Project.
- Are people with disabilities benefiting from social protection programs in Indonesia? Recent research from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade finds that **97 percent of this population does not receive any benefits from the Indonesian government**, leaving them vulnerable to poverty. (You can also

read the report in [Bahasa Indonesia](#).)

- How do **cash transfers affect beneficiaries' working hours in Bolivia?** A new study in *Economic Development and Cultural Change* finds that women are more likely to work when they receive transfers, largely because they find it easier to start small businesses, but men who were overworked before receiving the transfers took more time off and had a better work-life balance.

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