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RECOVR Roundup Vol. 10: Social Protection in the Time of COVID-19

In this tenth 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

Bolivia: Can youth empowerment programs reduce violence against girls during the COVID-19 pandemic?

A youth empowerment program increased earnings and decreased violence against girls seven months after it ended

A new study finds that a youth empowerment program implemented by Save the Children in Bolivia reduced the prevalence of violence against vulnerable girls ages 15-18 during the COVID-19 lockdown. The program offered training in soft skills and technical skills, sex education, mentoring, and job-finding assistance. A randomized evaluation of the program, led by Selim Gulesci, Manuela Puente Beccar, and Diego Ubfal found that, **seven months after its completion, the program reduced the prevalence of violence against girls by 10 percentage points and also increased girls' earnings.** The authors note that these two findings could be related: the impacts on violence could be driven by girls having more bargaining power at home, or because the higher earnings reduced the prevalence of stress-related domestic disputes. Given research suggesting the pandemic brought on [increased levels of domestic violence](#), it's promising that this program—which was largely implemented before the pandemic began and wasn't designed with these circumstances in mind—helped protect vulnerable girls.

Ghana, Malawi, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania: Does knowledge about COVID-19 affect behaviors?

Knowledge about the safety measures was associated with practicing certain protective behaviors, with one (big) exception—social distancing

Information about COVID-19 self-protection measures abounds, but does enhanced knowledge ultimately change behavior? Early in the pandemic, researchers Anne Fitzpatrick, Sabrin Beg, Laura Derksen, Anne Karing, Jason Kerwin, Adrienne Lucas, Natalia Ordaz Reynoso, and Munir Squires [set out to test](#) whether coronavirus health knowledge leads to protective risk-mitigation behaviors. **While high levels of knowledge were associated with many increased protective measures, there was one exception: knowledge was inversely correlated with social distancing.** Respondents reported largely adhering to mask mandates and lockdowns, but continued coming into contact with others at small, informal gatherings not affected by mandates. The study suggests that early and consistent government provision of health information likely reduced the severity of the pandemic in Africa, but was not a panacea.

What We're Reading & Watching

- [A new survey finds](#) that **the Philippines' Social Amelioration Program**, which provides emergency COVID-19 subsidies to up to 18 million households, **helped existing recipients of the longstanding Pantawid social protection program better cope with food insecurity** in the first months of the crisis.
- The Center for Global Development [recaps](#) its recent webinar **"Creating Effective Research-Policy Partnerships for COVID Response and Beyond,"** in a blog post. Among the key takeaways:
 - **Co-creation with local policymakers is critical** to get results used, but it's hard to start building new relationships in a crisis, so established working relationships are important.
 - There should also be a **plan at the outset for communicating and using the findings** when they're ready.
 - **Building up administrative data capacity in normal times** (such as interoperability of databases across government departments), and **flexible funding** are also key to being able to respond in a crisis.
- Many governments expanded or launched new cash transfer programs at the beginning of the pandemic, but how many of them are still providing these benefits today? [A recent Oxfam study](#) shows that **41 percent of programs in low- and middle-income countries only provided one-off payments**, leaving many vulnerable individuals without support as the economic crisis continues.
- Can the impact of cash transfers be amplified when they're bundled with other

interventions? New research in Nigeria finds that a program which combines cash transfers with an information campaign on best practices in childhood feeding **helps to reduce stunting rates among children**—and that the benefits persist even after the transfers stop.

- With support from UNICEF and the E.U., the government of Turkey has expanded a conditional cash transfer program aimed at **helping young Syrian refugees to continue their education**.
- In the U.S., 13 percent of adult immigrants reported that **they did not take advantage of social protection programs for which they were eligible in 2020**. They were reacting to concerns that applying for these programs could complicate future green card applications, or lead to sensitive immigration status data being shared with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, according to a recent report from the Urban Institute.

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