



NEWSLETTER

May 2020

We hope that you are all keeping well and safe at home. Below is some COVID-19 related research connected to the SIEF portfolio, as well as an Evidence to Policy note on preschool-age children, who are likely going to need much more research attention following the crisis.

A quick check on children during quarantine

SIEF supported researchers Igor Asanov, Francisco Flores, David McKenzie, Mona Mensmann, Mathis Schulte recently implemented phone surveys among a sample of high school students in Ecuador who are part of a [nimble evaluation](#) in the SIEF portfolio. Ecuador has suffered one of the worst outbreaks of Coronavirus in the world. The [researchers' recent working paper](#) reports on students' engagement with learning activities and their mental health. They find 74 percent are engaging in some online or telelearning, and 86 percent have done some schoolwork on the last weekday. Unfortunately, 16 percent of these students also have mental health scores that indicate depression.

What can we learn from past crises?

SIEF-supported researcher Jishnu Das also recently posted a [paper](#) and [brief note](#) that he wrote with colleagues on the impacts of the Pakistan earthquake of 2005 on children. Their findings suggest large losses in human capital for the current crisis. On average, children affected by the earthquake had test scores that put them behind an equivalent of 1.5 to 2 years of learning, compared to peers in unaffected regions, even though the two groups were equally likely to be enrolled in school. The authors estimate that school closures accounted for only 10 percent of the loss in test scores; much of the loss likely happened after children returned to school, possibly because they had fallen behind the curriculum and could not catch up. You can read about Jishnu's other research on education in Pakistan in the SIEF portfolio [here](#).



Our latest Evidence to Policy note

Even before the crisis, improving child development was a challenge. This month, SIEF released an [Evidence to Policy note](#) on an effort to increase the coverage of preschool and improve its quality. Researchers conducted [an impact evaluation in Cambodia](#) that tested how the construction of new and improved preschools affected school participation and child development. Since providing infrastructure alone may not be enough to get families to send their children to preschool, the research team also looked at whether providing parents information about preschool services led to higher participation rates and larger developmental impacts. Overall, the evaluation found that the upgrades were successful in increasing enrollment rates, and many families moved their children from pre-existing schools to the improved ones. The impacts on cognitive development, however, were uneven: children from wealthier families benefitted, while children from poorer families experienced little improvement. Contrary to expectations, the awareness campaigns didn't augment the impacts of school construction.



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