

Day 1: Monday, 17 August 2026

Session 1: *Shocks, Educational Opportunities and Development*

When Women Get a Chance: Direct and Spillover Effects of Women's Access to Higher Education in Pakistan

Noman Ahmad (University of Georgia, Athens)

Discussant: Dagmara Celik Katreniak

Female enrollment in higher education in developing countries remains low due to cultural norms restricting mobility and concerns about safety. This paper examines whether expanding local educational opportunities can help mitigate these barriers. I study a novel policy in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province that opened previously male-only public colleges to female students by introducing a four-year BS program. Combining administrative data on the rollout of the BS program with the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) survey, I use a difference-in-differences design to show that increased geographic access to higher education raises female schooling and the likelihood of completing a four-year degree. Consistent with dynamic complementarities in human capital investment, I also document positive spillover effects for younger girls at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. Finally, I find suggestive evidence of improvements in marriage-market outcomes for post-college-aged women.

The impact of a child marriage edutainment intervention on education outcomes in Pakistan

Albena Sotirova (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam)

Discussant: Noman Ahmad

Nearly four in ten adolescent girls worldwide fail to complete upper secondary school, and early marriage—affecting one in five girls—may contribute to this gap. We study the effects of an edutainment intervention designed to reduce child marriage on girls' education in rural Pakistan using a cluster-randomized controlled trial conducted in 177 villages with unmarried girls aged 14–17 at baseline and their caregivers. Villages were randomly assigned to receive the intervention targeted at fathers, mothers, or both. Eighteen months after the intervention, girls' school enrollment increased by 10.7 percentage points relative to a control mean of 27.2 percent. Enrollment effects do not differ across treatment arms. However, grade attainment increases only when fathers are targeted, with girls progressing 0.5 additional years on average. Mediation and mechanism analyses suggest that reductions in child marriage and shifts in gender norms contribute to enrollment gains, while increased educational aspirations among girls drive improved progression. The results highlight the importance of within-household targeting and the potential of scalable, low-intensity edutainment interventions to delay marriage and improve girls' education.

The long-term impact of natural disasters on human capital: Evidence from the 2010 Pakistan flood

Rida Ali Khan (Center for Studies and Research on International Development)

Discussant: Albena Sotirova

This paper uses the 2010 Pakistan flood, the largest natural disaster in the country's recorded history, to estimate the long-run effect of early-life exposure to an environmental shock on human capital. The flood began in late July 2010, affected more than 20 million people, killed between 1,800 and 2,000, and destroyed or damaged roughly 1.7 million homes. I combine satellite-based measures of district inundation with the 2019–20 round of the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement survey, the first round to include a disability module and one that records both month and year of birth. Comparing children who were in utero during the flood in affected districts with adjacent birth cohorts and with contemporaneous cohorts in unaffected districts, I find that ten years later in utero exposure raises an index of adverse health outcomes by 0.059 points, or 56 percent of the sample mean, and raises cognitive disability by 0.040 points, or 68 percent of its mean. The estimated effect on functional disability is positive but not statistically distinguishable from zero. The effect is concentrated among children exposed in the first trimester and rises with the share of the district population affected by the flood. Children who were of school age in 2010 complete 0.32 fewer years of schooling and are 1.9 percentage points less likely to complete secondary school. Losses are largest in rural areas, in low-income households, and in the most heavily inundated districts. Disability estimates are larger and more precisely estimated for boys; schooling losses are concentrated among girls. The results survive balance tests, three placebo exercises, alternative exposure and outcome definitions, and alternative estimation windows.

Session 2: Gender, Assets and Economic Outcomes

Intended and unintended consequences of a de facto inheritance reform

Kate Vyborny (World Bank)

Discussant: Bezawit Bahru

De jure reforms to improve women's legal rights are often not enforced in practice. In this study, we examine the effects of a land records reform in Punjab, Pakistan on de facto land rights of females, who are legally entitled to a share of parental land. This reform digitized and centralized land records and created a biometric verification requirement intended to limit females' exclusion from the inheritance process. Exploiting the staggered rollout of the reform across Punjab as well as the quasi-random timing of father/husband deaths, we find that it significantly increased the probability of female inheritance from 13% to 22%. Downstream, this increased access to land inheritance led to heterogeneous effects on marriage market outcomes.

In the fields and at home: Housework and gender productivity gap in agriculture

Bezawit Bahru (University of Hohenheim)

Discussant Kate Vyborny

We study if hours spent on housework generate binding time and attention constraints to farm work and if such constraints explain the persistent gender productivity differences in agriculture. We develop a theoretical model linking housework time to farm manager's time and attention allocation, crop choice, and total factor productivity. We empirically test out model using a unique data that combines individual plot manager's time use and plot level agricultural variables. We find that housework demands do not only reduce the number of hours managers work on their plots but also divert managerial attention in those reduced hours with stronger effects for women. Being mindful of their time and attention constraints, women disproportionately choose crops that are less time sensitive which also happen to have lower monetary value. The combination of less time available to work the plot, reduced managerial attention, and induced choice of lower-value crops indeed help explain the otherwise-unexplained gender gap in agricultural productivity. These findings offer newer explanations for the segregation of women in low value crops and to the hitherto-unexplored set of factors that significantly contribute to gender productivity gaps in agriculture. It also highlights that inequality in time allocation at home carry negative productivity consequences to the field. Therefore, addressing housework burden through improved access to labor-saving mechanisms could potentially reduce gender gaps in agricultural productivity.

Day 2: Tuesday, 18 August 2026

Session 3: *Behavioural Responses to Conflict and Crime*

Fraternity or Fracture? National Identity and Violence amid the India-Pakistan Cricket Rivalry

Humoyun Abdumavlon (University of Chicago)

Discussant: Awais Ali

Nation states offer a cohesive identity to a diverse citizenry, at once minimizing their differences and elevating their commonality. While collective success can strengthen national identity, collective adversity can unravel it. We study the interplay between religious identity and national identity and how it is influenced by a sporting rivalry of unparalleled geopolitical consequence: inter-national cricket matches between India and Pakistan. When India loses to Pakistan, we find a seven-fold increase in religious violence in Indian districts with a significant Muslim minority; both when these matches are played in India and when they are played abroad. In contrast, Indian cricketing losses against other countries do not incite religious violence. Our results underscore the fragility of identity and its importance in influencing social cohesion

City of Shame: Crime Signaling and Inverse Deterrence in a Weak State

Sheheryar Banuri (University of East Anglia)

Discussant: Humoyun Abdumavlon

Do high-profile crimes deter future offending or signal weak enforcement? We study the effects of the highly publicized rape and murder of a seven-year-old girl in Kasur, Pakistan, in 2018 on child sexual abuse. Using district-month data from 2015–2024 and a synthetic difference-in-differences design, we compare Kasur to a constructed counterfactual from other districts. We find a large, persistent increase in reported child abuse, about ten additional cases per month, concentrated in opportunistic offenses and weakly supervised settings. The increase emerges gradually and becomes most pronounced following subsequent institutional responses, persisting for several years. The delayed and sustained nature of the effect is inconsistent with a short-lived salience shock and instead aligns with inverse deterrence in a setting of limited institutional capacity.

Terrorism and Consumer Sentiments in Pakistan

Awais Ali (Institute of Business Administration)

Discussant: Sheheryar Banuri

Consumer confidence plays a pivotal role in key economic decisions; however, research on what shapes or impedes this confidence in developing economies remains an open question. In this paper, we ask whether exposure to negative shocks impacts consumer sentiments. Exploiting rich consumer confidence data from Pakistan and combining it with terrorism data, we estimate TWFE regressions to answer this question. Our results suggest a strong negative association between short-run exposure to terrorism and four different proxies of consumer sentiments: the Consumer Confidence Index, the Macroeconomic Optimism Index, Household Expected Financial Conditions, and Inflation Expectations. These findings are robust to various alternative specifications and also withstand various tests. Moreover, the negative effect is most pronounced among older respondents, high-income households, and men, suggesting that a negative shock is not uniformly impacting the population

Session 4: Governance and Institutional Reforms

How Rules and Compliance Impact Organizational Outcomes: Evidence from Delegation in Environmental Regulation

Muhammad Haseeb (University of Bristol)

Discussant: Saqib Hussain

The divergence between regulations as written and regulations as enforced can affect regulated entities. Combining new data on firms' permit applications and internal regulatory communication with a natural experiment, we show that delegating regulatory authority increased approval rates for pollution-intensive firms, altering entry composition. However, one third of applications were not delegated, violating formal rules. Senior officers were less likely to delegate applications with greater pollution potential, and less likely to delegate if they had applied more scrutiny to applications before the reform. We highlight how and when divergences between policy design and actual implementation occur, and their consequences.

Two-sided Technology Adoption: Evidence from a Field Experiment on QR Code Payments

Farah Said (Lahore University of Management Sciences)

Discussant: Muhammad Haseeb

Some technologies require coordinated adoption: one side's incentive to use the technology depends on whether others use it as well. Although digital financial access has expanded rapidly in many emerging markets, active use of digital merchant payments, which requires two-sided adoption by merchants and consumers, remains limited. We study whether temporary, policy-relevant interventions can increase QR code merchant payment use in a cluster randomized experiment. We work with 816 micro-merchants who had adopted the QR payment technology but display low digital payment usage, in northeast Pakistan. Merchant clusters were assigned to one of four arms for three months: information only, merchant financial incentives, joint merchant incentives with customer lottery incentives, or control. Financial incentives increase QR payment take-up during the campaign, with the strongest effects in the merchant-only incentive group. However, these gains are not sustained after incentives are withdrawn, suggesting that temporary subsidies induce experimentation but are insufficient to shift merchants and customers into a higher-digital-payment equilibrium. Information alone has no meaningful effect on adoption, and two-sided incentives do not outperform merchant-only incentives. Survey evidence suggests that incentives improve some merchant beliefs about QR payments, but this learning does not generate persistent use. The results highlight the limits of short-run marketing and subsidy campaigns when the underlying adoption constraint is coordination rather than access alone.

Spillovers of Digitization

Saqib Hussain (KDI School of Public Policy and Management)

Discussant: Farah Said

Property-rights reforms can reshape institutions far beyond their administrative mandate. I exploit the staggered introduction of land-record digitization to trace its spillovers across rural institutions in Punjab, Pakistan. Drawing on 45,347 confidential anti-corruption incidents, administrative records on agricultural credit, court cases, and taxation, I show that digitization expands agricultural credit, raises corruption detection, improves land-case resolution, and activates rental markets. These gains do not stem from shifts in the landownership patterns. Rather, digitization renders land records public and transparent, breaking local officials' exclusive control over them and reshaping how rural institutions function.

Day 3: Wednesday, 19 August 2026

Session 5: Gender and Labor Markets

Occupational segregation and job search: Evidence from a nudging experiment in Pakistan

Zunia Saif (Lahore School of Economics)

Discussant: Zahra Siddique

We conduct an experiment with men and women graduating from tertiary education in urban Pakistan to study occupational segregation and job search behavior. We document substantial gender gaps in setting parameters of occupations for search, with women less likely to select occupations that are in high demand. A simple information treatment indicating which occupations are in higher demand narrows the gender gap across occupations in setting initial search parameters. For men, this effect carries through to a higher rate of job applications; for women, the treatment ultimately fails to translate into higher rates of application to jobs in these occupations. Information is thus necessary but insufficient to close gender gaps in job search.

Nudging Firms to Consider Female Applicants

Harmalah Khan (CERP)

Discussant: Waqar Wadho

Women's labor force participation remains low across South Asia, and evidence from Pakistan's job-matching sector suggests employer-side hiring restrictions are a more binding constraint than jobseeker supply: roughly 45% of vacancies on Job Talash, a low tech job-matching platform in Lahore, explicitly restrict applicants to men. This raises the question of whether policymakers should ban firms from posting gender requirements in job ads, or whether it would be better to discourage rather than ban these requirements. We run a two-sided randomized control trial on this platform in Lahore, Pakistan to investigate how women's job search changes when gender-based vacancy restrictions are removed, and whether, as an alternative to a blanket policy, a simple nudge can encourage firms to open jobs to women. When gender-based vacancy restrictions are removed, female jobseekers apply to the newly opened vacancies, but they reduce applications to vacancies that were originally open to women, and these induced applications do not translate into interview invitations — unlike applications to jobs that were originally open to women. Thus the intervention has the unintended consequence of redirecting women towards unproductive search; adding information about which firms are interested in female applicants does not mitigate these effects. Instead, nudging firms to willingly open their vacancies to female applicants results in a modest response — 14% of treated firms open their vacancies — with responses stronger for firms that already have some female employees at baseline and firms that faced more limited applicant supply in past vacancies. Together, the results suggest that informational nudges are a low-cost but selective tool, while blanket policies removing gender restrictions risk unintended consequences for women's job search efficiency.

What do others think? Norm beliefs and women's work in Pakistan

Waqar Wadho (Lahore School of Economics)

Discussant: Kate Vyborny

Female labor force participation in LMICs remains persistently low, despite improvements in women's education, fertility, and income that would normally predict higher participation. We argue that this pattern can reflect a coordination failure sustained by miscalibrated second-order beliefs about community approval of women working outside the home. In many households, a woman's employment is determined by more than one decision-maker, and each may care about the perceived approval of both men and women in the community. Therefore, the binding misperception can lie in any of four belief cells: men's beliefs about men, men's beliefs about women, women's beliefs about men, or women's beliefs about women. We study these possibilities using novel primary survey data from more than 4,000 low-income Pakistani households. Within households, we elicit each respondent's own support for women's work, second-order beliefs about community support, and the target woman's labor-market behavior, comparing households within the same census block. We find that support for women's work is widely underestimated, especially support among women, so communities are substantially more accepting than their members believe. The belief most strongly associated with a woman's search and work history is her own perception of other women's approval. Male household members' beliefs matter mainly for women's current employment status, consistent with their role in granting permission. The belief that appears most important is also correlated across generations along gender lines: mothers' beliefs about women predict daughters' beliefs about women. Evidence on mechanisms points most strongly to social learning about respectability rather than the anticipation of social sanctions from other women.

Breaking Barriers? Female Doctors in Male Fields

Hadia Majid (LUMS)

Discussant: Zunia Saif

We examine the long-term impact of a 1992 reform in Pakistan that removed gender quotas in medical school admissions, increasing the number of female doctors. Using original data on over 650 doctors and a difference-in-differences design, we find that while women entered new specialties, labor market segregation worsened. Female doctors in male-dominated fields charge lower fees and are less likely to hold academic or senior roles. They also prefer different consultation hours. Our findings suggest that gender-based reforms can produce lasting changes in occupational structures, pricing, and hierarchies—even decades after the initial policy shift.

Session 6: Behavioral Responses to Information and Climate

The Power of Feedback

Dagmara Celik Katreniak (City St George's, University of London)

Discussant: Sonia Alam

In this paper, I bring evidence from a larger scale field experiment on the impact of two types of team competitions that are relatively cheap and can be easily adopted in school or village settings. The teams received feedback and (fraction of them) competed for rewards which allows me to study the complementarity effects of feedback and incentives on students' performance and their well-being. The results show that incentives can improve performance up to 0.28 standard deviations for informed students, but there is large heterogeneity in how they affect students' stress and happiness. The results emphasize the importance of feedback

Breaking the Scroll (BTS): A Randomized Controlled Trial Assessing Social Media Use and Youth Mental Health in the Context of a Developing Economy

Zubaria Andlib (FUUAST)

Discussant: Dagmara Celik Katreniak

This study examines the causal impact of addictive patterns of social media use on mental health outcomes through a randomized controlled trial conducted among young individuals (18 to 24 years) in Pakistan. Participants in the treatment group received an intervention designed to limit their social media use, while the control group maintained their usual usage patterns. The findings indicate that limiting social media use leads to significant improvements in mental health, including reductions in depression and anxiety, alongside notable increases in self-esteem and overall well-being among young adults. The intervention improves sleep quality and reduces perceived stress, demonstrating that excessive use of social media apps significantly affects psychological and behavioural health. The findings highlight the potential for policy interventions, including behavioural nudges, youth-targeted awareness campaigns, and regulatory actions, to decrease the negative externalities associated with unregulated social media use. Future research should evaluate the long-term effects of addictive patterns of social media use and the differential impacts across diverse socio-demographic groups, considering the increasing integration of digital platforms into everyday life.

Extreme Temperature, Labour Supply, and Subsistence Farming: Evidence from Pakistan

Sonia Alam (University of Reading)

Discussant: Zubaria Andlib

This paper examines how off-farm labour responses among agricultural households have evolved over the past two decades (2001–2018) in response to temperature shocks. Using repeated cross-sectional survey data from approximately 21,200 agricultural households across 107 districts, combined with high-resolution gridded temperature and rainfall data, the analysis documents a visible change in households' labour supply responses over time. We find no significant effect of one-year lagged temperature shocks on off-farm labour participation during the first decade (2001–2011). In contrast, during the later period (2015 and 2018) lagged temperature shocks are positively associated with off-farm labour supply. The paper empirically investigates three potential mechanisms underlying this shift. The results show that the increased reliance on off-farm labour is not driven by (i) a worsening of temperature shocks over time, nor by (ii) learning from repeated exposure to such shocks. Instead, the findings suggest that (iii) improvements in local development conditions partly facilitate off-farm labour

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Notes