

Title: Forced Displacement, Mental Health, and Child Development: Evidence from the Rohingya Refugees

Speaker: Asad Islam, Monash University

Area: Economics

Date: 14.11.2023, Venue: P11 @ 4PM

Abstract:

Forced displacement is a major driver of mental disorders among refugees worldwide. Poor mental health of adult refugees, particularly mothers, is also considered a risk factor for the psychological well-being and development of their children. In this study, we experimentally examine the extent to which a multifaceted psychosocial program improves the mental health of refugee mothers, and facilitates growth and development among children under the age of two. In partnership with BRAC, we ran a cluster randomized controlled trial on 3,500 Rohingya mother-child dyads in refugee camps in Bangladesh. Participants were given weekly psychosocial support for 44 weeks through peer volunteers, which includes psychoeducation and parenting support for mothers and play activities for both mothers and children. The intervention was largely successful and led to: (i) reductions in the psychological trauma and depression severity of mothers and children, (ii) improvements in communication, gross-motor, and problem-solving skills of children, and (iii) reductions in stunting and severe stunting. The intervention cost about \$1 per dyad per week and is currently being scaled up in refugee camps in Bangladesh, where about seventeen thousand mother-child pairs now benefit from it.

Speaker Profile:



I am the Director of the Centre for Development Economics and Sustainability ([CDES](#)) and a Professor at the Department of Economics at Monash University. I am one of the Chief Investigators for the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW). I am also an affiliated Professor at Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab ([J-PAL](#)), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), adjunct fellow at the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) in Bangladesh. Before joining Monash in 2009, I was a Research Fellow Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS)- the leading think-tanks in Bangladesh. I also taught Economics at the University of Dhaka.

I am a Development Economist. My recent research focuses on early childhood and primary education, health, Gender, social networks and technology adoption, energy, microfinance, SMEs, and risk-sharing mechanisms. I am particularly interested in issues that can generate public policy interest. I am passionate about making changes in the lives of the poor people in developing countries through my research, collaboration and external engagement with NGOs, governments, policymakers and development practitioners around the world.

My recent fieldwork includes working in countries such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, China, Indonesia, Fiji, Vietnam, Phillipines, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Tanzaniaia, and Cambodia. My research has been funded by the UK ESRC, Australian Research Council (ARC), International Growth Centre (IGC) and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)/AusAID Australia, UK foreign Aid (FCDO), World Bank, Asian Development Bank and European Union.

I have published in leading journals including *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, *Review of Economics and Statistics*, *Economic Journal*, *European Economic review*, *Journal of Development Economics*, *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty and Demography*.

Webpage: <https://research.monash.edu/en/persons/asadul-islam>