Title: Understanding the Response to and Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis among Informal Sector Workers in Urban India

Authors: Farzana Afridi (Indian Statistical Institute, Delhi) f.afridi@gmail.com
Amrita Dhillon (King’s College London) amrita.dhillon@kcl.ac.uk
Sanchari Roy (King’s College London) sanchari.roy@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract: In an ongoing randomized control trial, we study the impact of social networks on take-up of an aggregator service in Delhi, India that provides information on jobs, with subsequent implications on women and their spouses’ employment outcomes, income, autonomy, gender attitudes etc. The baseline survey of approx. 1500 participant households has already been completed, and also contains information (including phone numbers) on the friends of our female and male participants as well. Our ongoing midline survey has now been expanded to also study the response and recovery to the COVID-19 crisis and the current nationwide lockdown among our study sample. In particular, we are interested in two research questions. First, we intend to study the humanitarian response to the crisis by examining the extent to which the crisis has affected these families living in such densely populated areas, and typically employed in the informal sector. For example, what happened to their livelihoods, and sources of income, food etc during the nationwide lockdown? Did the Government of India’s announced relief measures of giving free food/cash transfers reach these families, and were they adequate? Second, we are interested in examining how their social networks might have helped our study participants to cope with the COVID-19 crisis and lockdown, both in economic/financial terms, as well as by influencing their behavioural response to the government’s health directives (e.g. social distancing, washing hands etc.) to contain the spread of the disease.

Data Description: Phone surveys will be conducted to collect individual-level data on 1500 couples and their friends, including socio-economic information, job histories, current employment status and other outcomes, food security, health status, receipt of welfare assistance, social networks, mental health, behavioural responses to COVID-19 (social distancing, washing hands etc.)

JEL codes: J16, J22, J23, O14, O17

Key words: employment, social networks, gender, informal sector, India, COVID-19