The Impact of Entrepreneurship Training Using Imagery Techniques in Colombia

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Sector(s): Crime, Violence, and Conflict, Education, Gender

Fieldwork: Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)

Location: Colombia and Ethiopia

Sample: Approximately 2,000 entrepreneurs from vulnerable populations in Bogotá

Initiative(s): Jobs and Opportunity Initiative (JOI), Post-Primary Education Initiative (PPE)

Target group: Entrepreneurs Job seekers Refugees Adults Families and households Internally displaced persons Migrants Self-employed and microentrepreneurs

Outcome of interest: Earnings and income Employment Empowerment Self-employment Self-esteem/self-efficacy Aspirations Cognitive development Socio-emotional development Soft skills

Intervention type: Business skills training Coaching and mentoring Training Soft skills Empowerment training COVID-19 response Employment Psychosocial support

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0004695

Partner organization(s): World Bank, The City of Bogotá

Exposure to violence, conflict, and other traumatic life events can have harmful effects on the economic, human, and social capital of individuals and their communities. Entrepreneurship and business skills training curricula have been commonly adopted as an approach for promoting socio-economic inclusion in fragile settings. However, most of these programs pay little attention to motivation and internal barriers to learning and decision-making, which may be particularly relevant for victims of conflict. For such populations, imagery techniques—which encourage participants to envision future scenarios or adopt the perspectives of others—could be an effective pedagogical tool for boosting motivation. To evaluate the effectiveness of these techniques, researchers are designing and evaluating a soft skills training program that incorporates imagery for entrepreneurs who have experienced violence or other traumatic or challenging life circumstances in Bogotá, Colombia.

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Conflict and violence present critical development challenges that undermine economic growth and have disproportionate effects on vulnerable groups. Business and entrepreneurship training programs are a common approach for promoting socio-economic inclusion and improve well-being for conflict-affected populations. Yet, many of these programs fail to address internal barriers to learning and decision-making. Recent evidence, suggests that soft skills training—which emphasizes personal initiative and

future-oriented thinking—may be more effective than traditional business training in improving profits and growth in fragile or resource-constrained settings. However, individuals who have experienced conflict and other traumatic experiences often face internal barriers that may make it difficult to imagine and predict future events and opportunities.[1] For such populations, imagery techniques—which encourage individuals to visualize future scenarios or adopt the perspectives of others—may be effective in boosting motivation and improving individuals' abilities to conceptualize the future. However, the impact of imagery techniques on business decisions and economic outcomes have not yet been studied.

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Following decades of civil conflict, Colombia is now home to more than eight million registered victims of conflict: almost six million internally displaced persons,[2], and approximately 1.3 million Venezuelan refugees.[3], A large majority of forcibly displaced people in Colombia live in major urban areas, including the capital city of Bogotá. Recent research in Colombia has shown that more severe episodes of violence not only result in higher levels of psychological trauma and anxiety, but also greater risk aversion, and pessimistic perceptions of social mobility.[4], Higher trauma symptoms are also associated with poorer performance in non-cognitive skills and job training in local programs.[5] Against this backdrop, there is strong interest from local policymakers to invest in entrepreneurship programs that both stimulate economic growth and promote the full economic participation of historically underserved and vulnerable populations.



People standing in front of a mural smile at the camera.

Photo: Secretaría Distrital de Integración Social, 2019

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To study whether visualization can be used to access information more efficiently and improve decision making, researchers are collaborating with IPA, the Bogotá Mayor's Secretary of Social Integration, the Government of Colombia's Victims Unit, the Alta Consejería for Victims' Rights, and the World Bank to implement a randomized control trial to pilot imagery as a pedagogical tool for entrepreneurs. In particular, the team seeks to evaluate the impact of an entrepreneurship training program that incorporates imagery techniques on decision-making and welfare for vulnerable populations in Bogotá. The curriculum consists of ten three-

hour sessions, which incorporate case studies, hands-on exercises, group discussions, and practical tasks. Participants include Colombian victims of conflict and Venezuelan refugees, as well as people with disabilities, LGBTQ and low-income youth.

To evaluate the curriculum, approximately 2,000 entrepreneurs with existing businesses or concrete business ideas will be randomly assigned to one of three groups:

- **Soft skills entrepreneurship curriculum with imagery (1,000 participants):**This group will receive the curriculum that combines components of soft skills entrepreneurship with imagery-based activities. In particular, this will include three key applications of imagery: (1) imagery to increase forward-looking behaviour and boost motivation by invoking emotion, such as imagining pathways to goal achievement; (2) imagery to visualize alternative perspectives, such as the perspective of a customer or competitors; and (3) imagery to mentally rehearse actions prior to doing them. This curriculum will be delivered by two trainers, one specialized in entrepreneurship or and the other in psychology.
- **Soft skills entrepreneurship curriculum only (500 participants):**This group will receive the soft skills curriculum but not the imagery-based activities. This curriculum will be delivered by two trainers, one specialized in entrepreneurship and the other in psychology.
- **Comparison group (500 participants):**This group will not receive any training.

Researchers will assess whether imagery can improve performance in economic choices and whether this capacity to access information more efficiently can betaught. In the short term, outcomes of interest include the usage and quality of imagery, improvements indecision-making and business behaviors. In the longer term,researchers seek to measure the impact on business outcomes, personal livelihoods, and well-being.

An initial baseline survey is being conducted with participants immediately before the training. Two follow-up surveys will be conducted four and twelve months after the end of the intervention in 2020. Researchers are also conducting a phone survey about six months after the end of the intervention to understand how participants are responding to the Covid-19 pandemic at a household and business level.

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Project ongoing; results forthcoming.

Ashraf, Nava, Gharad Bryan, Alexia Delfino, Emily A. Holmes, Leonardo Iacovone, Christian Johannes Meyer, and Ashley Pople. “Learning to See the World’s Opportunities: Memory, Mental Experiencing, and the Economic Lives of the Vulnerable,” Working Paper, September 2024.

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