



WOMEN ATTEND INFORMATION SESSION IN INDONESIA. PHOTO: JURIST TAN | J-PAL

J-PAL AFFILIATE SPOTLIGHT

LISA CAMERON

Lisa Cameron is a professorial research fellow at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, University of Melbourne. Her research explores questions related to education, health, and labor markets, focusing on the effects of social programs on children, women, and the elderly. Often working alongside the World Bank and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Lisa is committed to investigating issues that disproportionately impact marginalized groups.



J-PAL affiliate Lisa Cameron is driven by an innate curiosity about how people experience everyday life. Lisa is drawn to economics research not only because it provides a window into understanding human behavior, but also because it has the potential to inform programs that can improve people's well-being.

Lisa has dedicated much of her career as an empirical and behavioral economist to researching how economic issues impact women. Recent projects include studying the barriers to female labor participation, interviewing sex workers to understand the unintended consequences of criminalization, and meeting with migrant women to learn about their experiences seeking work overseas.

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In her conversations with migrant women in Indonesia, it became apparent to Lisa and her research partners, including fellow J-PAL affiliate Simone Schaner, that most women do not carefully select their employment agency. This agency often plays a direct role in determining who migrants end up working for in the destination country. To better inform women to make this choice, Lisa, Simone, and their co-authors designed an intervention that provides women with information about employment agency rankings and why they matter.



With the help of a custom storybook that tells the story of a young woman thinking of going to work overseas, project partner Mitra Samya led sessions with migrant women to deliver this information. Supported by funding from the Australian government, Lisa and her co-authors are conducting a

randomized evaluation to study the impact of these information sessions on workers' welfare and the migration market. They are working closely with Indonesia's National Agency for Protection and Placement of International Migrant Workers to ensure that the evaluation is designed to produce results that will inform future labor policies and programs in Indonesia.

In working on sensitive topics with marginalized communities, Lisa adheres to a strict personal code of respect for the individual. "The interest and rights of the people you work with are more important than the research question itself, and it's important to know where to draw the line," Lisa says. "Being a researcher is a real privilege. As researchers, we need to have respect for the people who are giving up their time or who may be affected by the research that we're undertaking."

Lisa has worked closely with J-PAL Southeast Asia since becoming a J-PAL affiliate in 2015. Their collaboration includes joint work on research projects in the field and policy outreach to inform more effective programs.

"It's important to keep in touch with your own priorities as a researcher! RCTs can take years," she notes. "Choose a research question that really motivates you. Spend time speaking with people in the field to understand the situation on the ground. And be sure to work alongside people you work well with and enjoy."

RESEARCH TO POLICY: SCALING UP SANITATION IN INDONESIA



Challenge: In 2008, when this evaluation began, 21 percent of Indonesia's population practiced open defecation due to a lack of sanitation facilities. This can lead to preventable illnesses such as diarrhea and intestinal worms, which in turn lead to malnutrition and stunted growth. One potential solution is an approach known as Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), which aims to change community norms around sanitation.



Research: In partnership with the World Bank, Lisa and her co-authors, including J-PAL affiliate Manisha Shah, led a randomized evaluation of the CLTS approach in Indonesia, which aimed to improve health by creating demand for toilets in areas where open defecation is a problem. As part of the program, CLTS facilitators visited villages to lead community discussions and help each village make a plan to improve local sanitation.



Results: Lisa and her co-authors found that CLTS modestly increased the rate of toilet construction, reduced cases of intestinal worms, and reduced community tolerance of open defecation. However, the poorest households were mostly unable to participate due to financial constraints.



Scaling: Building on these findings, Lisa and the World Bank are partnering again to test a similar CLTS approach in Laos, incorporating additional treatment arms to understand if incentives might help the poorest households participate. CLTS is implemented in many countries around the world; Lisa's research is designed to inform and, ultimately, improve these efforts.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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