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Research policy options

An assessment of the Ba-Himmat Buzurg Programme (BHBP)

Research institution

Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC)

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Timeframe

August 2023 – February 2024

Objectives

To assist the PSPA in assessing the BHBP's impact on enhancing the socio economic well being of economically disadvantaged elderly women in Punjab

Main research questions

- In what manner has the overall socioeconomic status of the beneficiaries and their households improved?
- To what extent has the social inclusion of the beneficiaries been enhanced, considering shifts in their participation, representation, and integration within their communities?
- Is there a need for improvement in the design of the support programme? If yes, what specific measures are to be put in place, and what are their implications?
- What are the key implementation issues, and how could they be addressed?

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE BA-HIMMAT BUZURG PROGRAMME (BHBP)

BHBP provides monthly assistance of RS. 2000 to poor elderly women aged 65 and above. Despite modest transfer amounts, recipients are able to afford better-quality diets and cover health expenses, contributing to their overall well-being and dignity.

Background

In the realm of social welfare, non-contributory social pension schemes play a crucial role in mitigating economic vulnerabilities among specific demographics. The Punjab Social Protection Authority (PSPA), through its Ba-Himmat Buzurg Programme (BHBP), aims to provide a non-contributory social pension to the elderly in Punjab through regular unconditional cash transfers of PKR 6000 per quarter. Launched in November 2020, BHBP targets elderly women living in poverty, aiming to improve their socioeconomic wellbeing through enhanced consumption, reduced vulnerability, and improved health and nutrition. BHBP is currently subject to a programme freeze to re-enrol the beneficiaries according to the new data of the National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER) 2021.

This assessment aims to gauge the impact of BHBP on its beneficiaries' lives during the period they received financial assistance and to identify areas for improvement in design and implementation of the programme.

Study approach

The assessment exercise has adopted a mixed-methods approach employing both quantitative and qualitative analyses for a comprehensive understanding of the issues. Two

districts, Muzaffargarh and Okara, were selected, based on highest density of BHBP beneficiaries. For quantitative data, a survey of 713 households was conducted. One questionnaire per household was administered, each containing two major components: household profile and beneficiary's assessment of BHBP. The qualitative data collection included 64 in-depth interviews of beneficiaries in both districts and interviews of various stakeholders, including officials of PSPA, Social Welfare Department, District Government, and the Bank of Punjab.

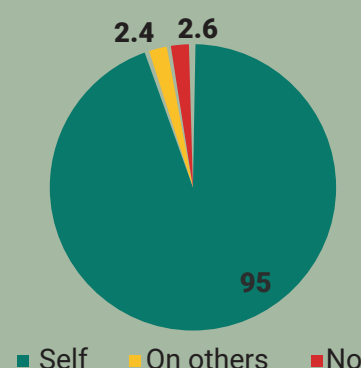
Main findings

- ⊖ Recipients of BHBP assistance consistently exhibit higher per capita monthly food expenditures compared to non-recipients.
- ⊖ At least 90 percent of the elderly beneficiaries utilised BHBP transfers to fully or partially finance health expenditures for themselves.
- ⊖ 72 percent of the beneficiaries acknowledged a positive impact of BHBP transfers on the improvement of their general health status.
- ⊖ 84 percent of beneficiaries perceived a positive impact of BHBP transfers on their overall life satisfaction.
- ⊖ In the qualitative survey, beneficiaries reported improved self-esteem as a result of increased agency to act and be considered as an active member of their household, rather than as a burden.
- ⊖ In several cases, beneficiaries reported being able to engage in social events that they had been unable to participate in without BHBP assistance.

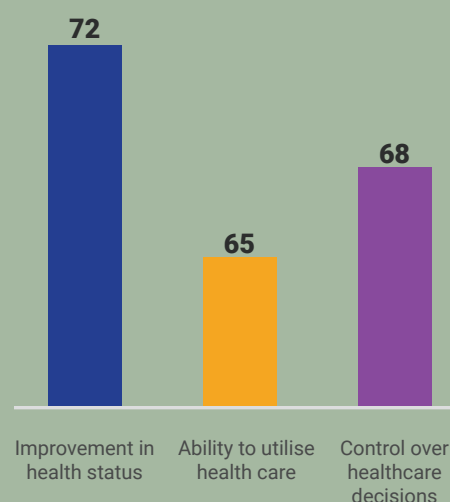
Conclusion

BHBP programme demonstrates commendable success in addressing certain aspects of wellbeing among the elderly, particularly in personal expenditure support and health financing. However, persisting high levels of food and nutrition insecurity call for continuous refinement of the programme, in particular with regards to transfer size, as well as complementary targeted interventions to enhance the overall impact of the BHBP transfers.

BHBP transfers use to finance health expenditure (%)



Positive Impact of BHBP Transfers (%)



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Policy options

- ⊖ Explore inflation indexing for the transfer amount to safeguard against rising costs of living.
- ⊖ Address concerns surrounding the vendor network, ensuring increased administrative control and transparency in service delivery.
- ⊖ Address PSPA's financial and human resource constraints, e.g. through fine-tuned coordination with implementing partners and training and monitoring of focal persons so that BHBP design and implementation can be made more efficient and effective overall.
- ⊖ Include disability as a preference indicator for registering the potential beneficiaries and explore the possibility of increasing the amount of assistance for them. Ensure regular, and timely delivery of transfers to beneficiaries.
- ⊖ Devise and implement an effective communication campaign that outlines BHBP eligibility, processes, rights, and responsibilities.

The Research Hub for Pakistan

The Research Hub project aims to bring policymakers and researchers together to ensure that social protection and social health protection initiatives in Pakistan are based on robust evidence. The project is coordinated by the German GFA Consulting Group and Pakistan's Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS) and funded by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through the Support to Social Protection-Social Health Protection (SP-SHP) project of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The Research Hub project works with the provincial governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, the federal government, civil society organisations and the private sector.