Is it All About the Work?

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March 10, 2026

Abstract

Can the physical act of engaging in productive activities—absent pay—replicate the benefits of paid employment? We address this question using a randomized experiment involving 2,520 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, who are assigned to one of three groups: an offer of paid work, an equivalent cash transfer, or an unpaid work opportunity. We find that paid work leads to a significantly larger improvement in psychosocial wellbeing than unpaid work or the cash transfer, neither of which produces any detectable effects. These results suggest that productive activity in isolation cannot account for the wellbeing gains associated with paid employment.

Keywords: Employment, Psychosocial, Refugees
JEL Classification: D91, I31, J22

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1 Introduction

The idea that work provides value beyond the income it generates has long been emphasized in the sociological literature (Jahoda, 1982), and recent experimental evidence confirms that work improves psychosocial wellbeing significantly more than an equivalent unconditional cash transfer (Hussam et al., 2022). These findings raise an important question: are these benefits of work driven by the routines and actions involved in productive activity itself, or does productive activity need to be tied to earned income to enhance a worker's sense of wellbeing? Answering this question has two important implications. First, it advances our understanding of the underlying sources of the value of work. Second, it informs policies aimed at supporting households during periods of unemployment. In many low- and middle-income countries, spells of unemployment are common, while organizations seeking to assist affected households face tight budget constraints. Unpaid work opportunities represent a potential policy response, but their value for worker wellbeing remains unknown.

To answer this question, we study households in the world's largest refugee camp in Cox's Bazar. Individuals are randomly assigned to one of four groups: (i) a control group, in which participants receive a nominal payment for weekly survey participation; (ii) a volunteer group, which offers an unpaid work opportunity alongside the same nominal survey payment; (iii) a cash group, which offers weekly cash transfers; and (iv) an employment group, which offers paid employment for the same amount of cash. Comparing the employment and volunteer groups allows us to distinguish the psychosocial value of being paid for one's work from the experience of engaging in productive activity without pay. Comparing the employment and cash groups identifies the non-pecuniary value of employment, as in (Hussam et al., 2022). Finally, comparing the employment and control groups captures the total value of employment, combining both pecuniary and non-pecuniary components.

We confirm that the treatments operate as intended. Both the paid employment and cash transfer arms significantly increase savings and reduce debt, with no change in the unpaid work arm. Likewise, both the paid employment and unpaid work arms significantly reduce leisure and idle time and increase time spent in productive activities, with no change in the cash arm. Taken together, these results indicate that the cash arm effectively relaxes financial constraints, the unpaid work arm reduces idle time, and the employment arm achieves both.

Our main result is that engaging in unpaid work does not generate psychosocial benefits, as measured by an inverse covariance–weighted index of depression severity, stress, life satisfaction, sociability, purposefulness, self-worth, locus of control, and perceived stability. Receiving cash likewise has no detectable effect on this index. In contrast, participants experience significant improvements in psychosocial wellbeing only when they are employed.

That the effects of paid work are approximately four times larger than those observed in either the cash or unpaid work arms, suggests that neither income nor productive activity alone drives the benefits of work; rather, these components operate jointly.

This study makes two contributions. First, we causally identify the impact of engaging in unpaid work on psychosocial wellbeing in a context of widespread unemployment. This complements a small literature on the effects of volunteering in high-income settings. For example, (Krekel et al., 2024) estimate the impact of volunteering for the NHS during COVID-19 and find that volunteers experience higher wellbeing and a stronger sense of community belonging. That setting differs fundamentally from ours: participants were generally employed in other lines of work, and were explicitly seeking ways to contribute to their community. In contrast, our study takes place among unemployed individuals with limited employment opportunities, which more closely mirrors the conditions faced by many households in low- and middle-income countries, where jobs can be scarce and institutions or governments have limited capacity to provide work opportunities. In this context, we find that engaging in productive, unpaid work does not replicate the psychosocial benefits of paid employment, suggesting that the value of unpaid work depends critically on the circumstances in which individuals find themselves in.

Second, we distinguish between the pecuniary and non-pecuniary channels through which employment may improve psychosocial wellbeing. This builds on (Hussam et al., 2022), which shows that the psychosocial benefits of paid work are, on average, four times greater than those from receiving an equivalent cash transfer. We replicate this finding, finding a strikingly similar difference: that the psychosocial benefits of paid work are approximately four times greater than those of an equivalent cash transfer. We then extend this analysis by showing that the benefits of work cannot be replicated by engaging in unpaid productive activity. This result deepens our understanding of the value of work, suggesting that there is something unique about the experience of gainful employment that neither cash alone nor the mere act of engaging in productive activities can provide. This finding also has important policy implications. If the value of employment derived entirely from the act of work, low-cost volunteering programs could be a highly cost-effective way to improve wellbeing among low-income households facing periods of unemployment. Instead, we find that the psychosocial benefits of employment arise only when individuals both work and are compensated for their efforts.

2 Research Context

The experiment takes place in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, which is home to one of the world's largest refugee camps (Habib et al., 2018). Following violent "clearance operations" in Myanmar, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya crossed into Bangladesh and settled in densely populated refugee camps. They joined individuals from a previous wave of Rohingya refugees, bringing the population across all camps to approximately 900,000 individuals. There are 34 camp sites, each divided into four to seven blocks. Each block is further subdivided into 14 to 42 sub-blocks, with 60 to 130 households per sub-block.

Refugees living in the camp face severely restricted movement and few employment opportunities. There are formal legal restrictions on refugees' right to work (Bhatia et al., 2018). While informal work outside the camp is available, movement in and out of the camps is risky due to police checkpoints. Some limited opportunities are available for refugees to work as agriculture or construction day laborers. NGOs serve as the primary source of employment for refugees (Mree, 2019), who hire in two ways. First, NGOs are permitted to enroll refugees in cash-for-work programs, which is euphemistically referred to as "volunteering" and pays a wage of 350 taka (3.50 USD) per day, for a maximum of 32 days of work per quarter.

Refugees therefore rely on monthly e-vouchers worth about 1,050 taka at the time of the study (around US$10), exchangeable for a limited set of staple foods. Savings and asset ownership are extremely low; the median participant reports zero savings at baseline. Mental health burdens are high: around 21% of women and 55% of men are at least moderately depressed on the PHQ-9 scale.

3 Experimental Design

3.1 Sampling Strategy

We obtain permission to conduct our work in the camps from the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner and select households that meet predetermined criteria using a random-walk procedure. Enumerators inform each household that a work opportunity may be available – four hours per day, four days per week, over six weeks – but that limited funding means not all households can participate. Households are also told that if work is unavailable, participants could be assigned to one of the other treatment arms in the study (including an unpaid work opportunity, a cash transfer, or a group that completes a weekly survey). Households have to meet the following eligibility criteria: both male and female head's of household are aged 18–45, they are both able and willing to work, and not have worked more than 10 hours in the previous two weeks. We also verify that households arrive

after the 2017 influx and are not relatives of the majhi.

3.2 Experimental Design

Randomization We conduct the study in 280 sub-blocks, which serve as the unit of randomization. Within each sub-block, we recruit nine households and randomly select whether the husband or the wife will receive the intervention, yielding a total sample of 2,520 participants.

In control sub-blocks (40), participants receive 50 taka (USD $0.50) for meeting with the team weekly and conducting a small 10-minute survey. In work sub-blocks (80), participants are assigned four days of work per week, earning 300 taka (USD $3) per day, totaling 1200 taka (USD $12) weekly. In cash sub-blocks (80), participants receive the same 1200 taka (USD $12) weekly as an unconditional cash transfer. In unpaid work sub-blocks (80), participants engage in the same work activity for no pay besides the 50 taka (USD $0.50) allocated for weekly surveys. We make the randomized treatment allocation publicly known to all participants by displaying their randomized treatment status on the surveyors' tablet screens. All participants are informed of the six-week study duration of the study, with surveyors returning weekly for brief surveys and compensation.[1] Appendix Table A1 confirms that the randomization was successful, and the sample is balanced across the arms.

Employment intervention details Participants assigned to the employment intervention are scheduled to work four days per week across a six-week period (24 total workdays). The specific work dates are fixed in advance and recorded on a calendar distributed to all workers. Compensation is set at 300 taka per day. In comparison to the standard monthly assistance provided through the World Food Programme e-voucher program (1,050 taka), this intervention represents nearly a fourfold increase in potential monthly consumption. The daily wage is also in line with the limited paid employment opportunities available in the camps: among respondents with prior work experience, reported earnings range from 300 taka per day for unskilled NGO work to approximately 700 taka for skilled positions.

Before beginning work, participants view a short instructional video explaining the task, followed by an in-person explanation from enumerators. The assignment requires workers to identify fifteen neighbors of the same sex and record those individuals' activities four times per day using illustrated time-use sheets (Figure 1). Participants are told that the goal is to capture typical daily behaviors within the camp. No identifying information about the observed neighbors is ever collected, and their anonymity is emphasized throughout.

[1] At the end of the study, we compensate the unpaid group with the same amounts earned by the work and cash groups.

Completed worksheets are submitted at the end of each workday into a sealed drop box located at the home of a designated refugee "facilitator" within each sub-block. Facilitators are themselves members of the work treatment group and cannot access the contents of the box. To establish submission timing, facilitators place a dated cover sheet on top of the contents at the end of each day, ensuring that all materials beneath it correspond to that date. Facilitators receive an additional stipend of 50 taka per week for performing this role.

At the end of each week, participants return to the facilitator's home, where an enumerator reviews their submissions. Checks focus on completeness and consistency: verifying that all required sheets are present, that submissions were made on the correct days, that each sheet contains fifteen observations, and that there is no evidence of copying across days or of work being completed by someone else. To incentivize careful completion, we implement a quality-based payment rule: if errors occur in two consecutive weeks, the participant forfeits payment for the following week. These penalties apply beginning in week four. Importantly, participants are never dismissed from the program, nor are there additional sanctions beyond temporary payment withholding. Payments are disbursed after verification, alongside administration of a brief survey.

The design of the work task reflects several deliberate choices. First, to promote comparable participation by men and women, we select an activity that avoids heavy manual labor while still requiring sustained effort. The task involves repetitive outdoor movement and concentration and occupies roughly four hours per workday—substantial, but not full-time. Second, recognizing variation in literacy and numeracy, the task is designed to require no reading or arithmetic beyond simple counting. The time-use sheets rely on visual icons representing common camp activities (such as eating, resting, visiting the market, collecting rations, or praying), and workers record observations by placing tick marks beneath the corresponding images. Third, the task encourages workers to spend time outside their homes and in public spaces without mandating social interaction. Participants may quietly observe their surroundings or choose to interact with others, but neither is required.[2] Overall, the employment opportunity is designed to mirror the types of non-manual, publicly visible jobs occasionally offered by NGOs in the camps. It accommodates the constraints of the refugee context and is calibrated to be neither unusually attractive nor unduly burdensome relative to existing alternatives.

[2]Hussam et al. (2022) documents that workers did not engage in additional conversations on workdays, though they did so on non-work days.

4 Data Collection and Survey Instruments

4.1 Timeline and survey instruments

We begin the baseline survey in January 2023. One week later, households learn their randomized treatment assignments and complete the first midline survey. Over the subsequent five weeks, we administer brief weekly surveys to the participating household member and disburse payments. At the conclusion of this period, we conduct the endline survey. Endline attrition is low, at 3 percent, and we find no evidence of differential attrition across treatment arms (Appendix Table A3). Approximately six weeks after the endline, we conduct a follow-up survey to assess whether the conclusion of the work opportunity generates any adverse longer-run effects; we find no evidence of such impacts.[3] Finally, we field an additional survey fifteen months after the work ends to elicit participants' labor supply preferences.

4.2 Outcome variables

We focus on a core set of outcome variables, described below. Our survey questions draw on prior work in Hussam et al. (2022) and were extensively piloted with households outside the study sample. Appendix B provides detailed information on question wording and the construction of each outcome.

Finances and Time-use We first verify that the interventions operate as intended by affecting participants' time allocation and financial behavior. To capture financial responses, we measure three uses of funds: consumption, savings, and borrowing. To measure changes in time use, we use a survey module adapted from (Field et al., 2022) that classifies time into eight categories: sleeping; wage employment; self-employment; household chores performed outside the home; household chores performed inside the home; caregiving for family members; self-care; and relaxation.

Psycho-social wellbeing The psychosocial health index combines measures of depression (PHQ-9), locus of control (Levenson's scales), life satisfaction (Diener's Satisfaction with Life Scale), perceived stress (Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale), sociability (frequency of positive conversations), stability (Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale), purpose, and self-worth. We construct the purpose index by first asking respondents to identify the person in their community or family who contributes the most, and then to rank their own position relative to that individual (Hussam et al., 2022). Similarly, we construct the self-worth index by

[3]Results available upon request.

asking respondents to consider the person in their community or family whom they respect the most, and to place themselves relative to that individual (Hussam et al., 2022).

Multiple hypothesis testing to address concerns about multiple hypothesis testing, we summarize our primary outcome – psychosocial wellbeing – using an inverse-covariance–weighted index following Anderson (2008). In addition, we report sharpened false discovery rate (FDR) q-values in each table to control the expected share of rejected hypotheses that are Type I errors (Anderson, 2008).

Pre-analysis plan (PAP) This study was pre-registered on the AEA Registry. The primary deviation from the PAP is that this paper focuses entirely on the effect of work, cash, and volunteering on the worker's psychosocial outcomes. Analysis related to the partner of the worker is covered in a companion paper Hsu et al. (2026). Other deviations from the PAP are minor.

5 Experimental Results

5.1 Empirical Framework

Treatment effects are estimated using the following specification:

$$Y^1_{ibc} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Work_{ibc} + \beta_2 Cash_{ibc} + \beta_3 Unpaid_{ibc} + \gamma_c + \delta_e + Y^0_{ibc} + X_{ibc}\eta + \varepsilon_{ibc} \quad (1)$$

where Y^1_{ibc} represents the relevant outcome for individual i in sub-block b and camp c, X_{ibc} is a vector of sociodemographic controls selected via double-selection LASSO following Belloni, Chernozhukov, and Hansen (2014), and ε_{ibc} is an error term clustered at the block level. Also included are fixed effects for camp γ_c and enumerator δ_e.[4] When available, we control for the baseline value of the outcome variable Y^0_{ibc} (McKenzie, 2012). Our coefficients of interest are β_1, the impact of employment, β_2, the impact of cash, and β_3, the impact of productive activity alone. We are particularly interested in whether gainful employment provides psychosocial benefits beyond those associated with productive activity alone. We test this by examining the equality of β_1 and β_3. In addition, consistent with (Hussam et al., 2022), we assess the presence of non-pecuniary benefits of work by testing the equality of β_1 and β_2.

[4]We include enumerator fixed effects, following (Di Maio and Fiala, 2019), to account for the possibility that responses to sensitive questions are influenced by the identity of the enumerator.

5.2 First Stage

Time Use We examine whether the interventions meaningfully changed participants' time allocation. Table 1 shows that individuals in both the paid work and unpaid work groups devoted approximately four hours per day to the assigned tasks. Figure 2 further shows that completion rates among individuals assigned to the data-collection task are high. Each week, over 90 percent of participants complete their assigned work, with completion rates slightly higher in the paid work group.

This increase in work time came primarily at the expense of sleep (30–40 minutes), household chores performed outside the home (24 minutes), household chores performed inside the home (24 minutes), caregiving for family members (about 30 minutes), self-care (24–30 minutes), and leisure or relaxation (approximately 1.5 hours). The differences between the paid and unpaid work groups are neither economically meaningful nor statistically significant. As expected, we observe no changes in time use among individuals who received cash transfers.

Finances We also verify that the relevant treatments affected participants' financial portfolios (Table 2). In both the Work and Cash groups, we observe significant increases in savings and significant reductions in borrowing, with no meaningful changes in consumption or lending. Savings increase by approximately 150 percent in both treatment arms, while borrowing declines by 27 percent in the work group and 20 percent in the cash group. As expected, the Unpaid Work treatment does not generate meaningful changes in financial behavior.

5.3 Psychosocial wellbeing

The primary objective of this study is to determine whether engaging in productive activities generates the same improvements in psychosocial wellbeing as gainful employment. In other words, we ask whether volunteering opportunities in a context of widespread unemployment can deliver psychosocial benefits comparable to those of paid work (similar to effects documented in higher-income settings).

Table **??** presents impacts on our main psycho-social index. Individuals assigned to the work treatment experience a 0.089 SD improvement ($p = 0.004$) in their psychosocial wellbeing. This result is driven by a substantial reduction in depressive symptoms, decreased stress, improved life satisfaction, more social interactions, and a greater sense of self-worth and stability. In comparison, the unpaid work arm has no detectable impact on participants psychosocial wellebing, with insignificant effect sizes on the psycho-social index of 0.019. We can reject equality between the effect of work and cash (p-value = 0.007) and between work

and unpaid work (p-value = 0.002). This result indicates that unpaid work not only fails to generate the same effects as paid employment, but that its impact is remarkably close to zero. We also replicate the findings of Hussam et al. (2022), showing that the effect of cash transfers on psychosocial well-being is not statistically different from zero. Strikingly, we find that paid work generates an effect that is four times larger than that of cash transfers –exactly the same difference documented in Hussam et al. (2022) three years earlier. Finally, while we cannot reject that the effect work is larger than the *sum* of cash and unpaid work (p-value = 0.278), the point estimate from the work arm is more than double the combined effect of the other interventions.

6 Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the psychosocial benefits of employment cannot be replicated by unpaid productive activities (or cash) alone. Using a randomized experiment with 2,520 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, we show that paid work generates substantial improvements in psychosocial wellbeing, while an unpaid work opportunity (and an unconditional cash transfer) produce no detectable effects. The effect of paid work is approximately four times larger than either alternative, indicating that neither productive activity (nor income) in isolation can account for the wellbeing gains from gainful employment. These findings both deepen our understanding of the value of work and demonstrate that unpaid work opportunities (volunteering) are unlikely to replicate the benefits of paid employment for unemployed populations.

Our results carry important implications for social protection programs in contexts of widespread unemployment. While volunteering programs may generate benefits in high-income settings where participants are already employed and motivated by civic engagement, unpaid work opportunities do not appear to substitute for paid employment among jobless populations in low- and middle-income countries. Rather, the experience of earning income through one's labor appears essential to the wellbeing gains from work. As governments and organizations face budget constraints, these findings underscore that cost-effective alternatives to paid employment – such as volunteering programs – may not replicate all of the benefits of gainful employment.

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Tables

Table 1: Time use components, treated men and women

	(1) Sleeping	(2) Daily Wage	(3) Self-employed	(4) Chores Outside	(5) Chores Inside	(6) Care Family	(7) Care Self	(8) Relaxing
Work	-0.718***	4.363***	-0.119**	-0.483***	-0.402***	-0.558***	-0.521***	-1.562***
	(0.087)	(0.250)	(0.058)	(0.063)	(0.055)	(0.057)	(0.047)	(0.140)
Cash	-0.029	-0.067	0.095	0.041	0.005	-0.087*	-0.055	0.098
	(0.077)	(0.141)	(0.064)	(0.063)	(0.058)	(0.046)	(0.047)	(0.119)
Unpaid	-0.521***	4.035***	-0.119**	-0.490***	-0.418***	-0.529***	-0.401***	-1.558***
	(0.084)	(0.225)	(0.058)	(0.068)	(0.053)	(0.050)	(0.049)	(0.131)
Control Mean	8.084	0.539	0.640	2.736	2.389	2.736	2.156	4.720
Shrp. q-val Work	0.001	0.001	0.006	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Shrp. q-val Cash	1.000	1.000	0.972	1.000	1.000	0.957	1.000	1.000
Shrp. q-val Unpaid	0.001	0.001	0.006	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001
Observations	2425	2425	2425	2425	2425	2425	2425	2425

Notes: We ask about the number of hours that respondents engage in the following activities: (1) Sleeping; (2) Income generating work specific to daily/regular wage; (3) Self-employed income generating work; (4) Household chores/unpaid work outside the house; (5) Household chores/unpaid work inside the house; (6) Actively taking care of sick/elderly/children; (7) Actively taking care of oneself; (8) Relaxing/leisure. All outcomes are in hours. Regressions include camp and enumerator fixed effects, controls selected by lasso, and the baseline value of the outcome variable. Standard errors are clustered at the block level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 2: Financial portfolio, treated men and women

	(1) Total Consumption	(2) Savings	(3) Borrowing	(4) Lending	(5) Can Spend 1000
Work	-54.4	557.3***	-664.1***	0.1	11.4***
	(267.9)	(81.5)	(254.5)	(1.4)	(2.4)
Cash	73.3	519.0***	-508.2*	-1.0	11.0***
	(275.5)	(82.6)	(270.9)	(1.3)	(2.5)
Unpaid	9.3	20.3	89.5	-1.9	0.6
	(282.9)	(81.0)	(257.3)	(1.2)	(2.6)
Control Mean	4140.8	375.9	2479.3	5.2	73.9
Shrp. q-val Work	0.613	0.001	0.010	0.613	0.001
Shrp. q-val Cash	0.463	0.001	0.065	0.306	0.001
Shrp. q-val Unpaid	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Observations	2429	2264	2424	2426	2426

Notes: All outcomes are unstandardized; (1)-(3) are in taka, and (4)-(5) in percentage points. (1) is the total amount of money the respondent has spent in the last two weeks. (2) is the total savings the respondent holds. (3) is the total amount the respondent is currently borrowing. (4) is whether the respondent currently has money lent to anyone. (5) is whether the respondent can currently cover an emergency expense of 1000 taka. Regressions include camp and enumerator fixed effects, controls selected by lasso, and the baseline value of the outcome variable. Standard errors are clustered at the block level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3: Psychosocial wellbeing, treated men and women

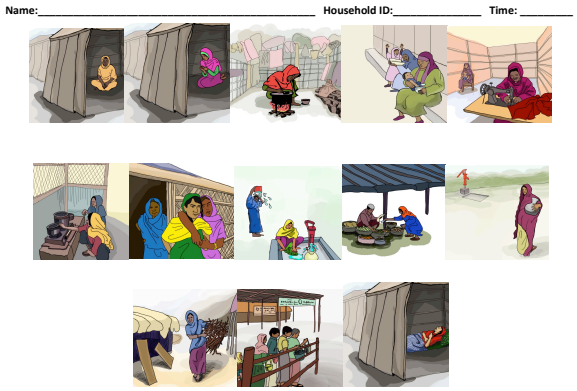
	Panel A: Treated	Individual Components of PS Index							
	(1) **PS Index**	(2) PHQ	(3) Stress	(4) Life Sat.	(5) Social	(6) Purpose	(7) Self-Worth	(8) Control	(9) Stability
Work	0.089***	0.164**	0.099	0.099**	0.060	0.093	0.088	0.089	0.060
	(0.031)	(0.065)	(0.063)	(0.048)	(0.044)	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.055)	(0.056)
Cash	0.028	0.022	-0.066	0.091**	-0.083*	0.081	0.093	0.006	0.006
	(0.032)	(0.065)	(0.062)	(0.045)	(0.046)	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.053)	(0.056)
Unpaid	0.019	0.072	-0.042	-0.021	0.017	0.050	0.033	0.081	-0.059
	(0.032)	(0.065)	(0.060)	(0.046)	(0.050)	(0.055)	(0.053)	(0.055)	(0.057)
Control Mean	0.004	0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	0.000	-0.000
Shrp. q-val Work		0.110	0.165	0.154	0.179	0.165	0.165	0.165	0.193
Shrp. q-val Cash		0.835	0.398	0.372	0.372	0.372	0.372	0.835	0.835
Shrp. q-val Unpaid		1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Observations	2429	2429	2425	2425	2425	2425	2425	2425	2425

Notes: All outcomes have been standardized against the respondent's gender. (2) is an index created from the nine-question PHQ-9. (3) is an index of three questions inspired by Cohen's Perceived Stress scale. (4) is an index created from Diener's Satisfaction With Life Scale. (5) is how many people the respondent had conversations with yesterday. (6) is an index of the respondent's self rating of relative to the person who does the most in their family and community. (7) is similar to (6), but relative to the person who is respected the most. (8) is an index created from Levenson's Multidimensional Internal Locus of Control Scales. (9) is an index assessing stability by asking respondents how secure they feel at the moment and expect to feel in the future. The overall index (1) is an inverse covariance weighted sum of the previous seven outcomes. Regressions include camp and enumerator fixed effects, controls selected by lasso, and the baseline value of the outcome variable. Standard errors are clustered at the block level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Figures

Figure 1: Work task worksheets

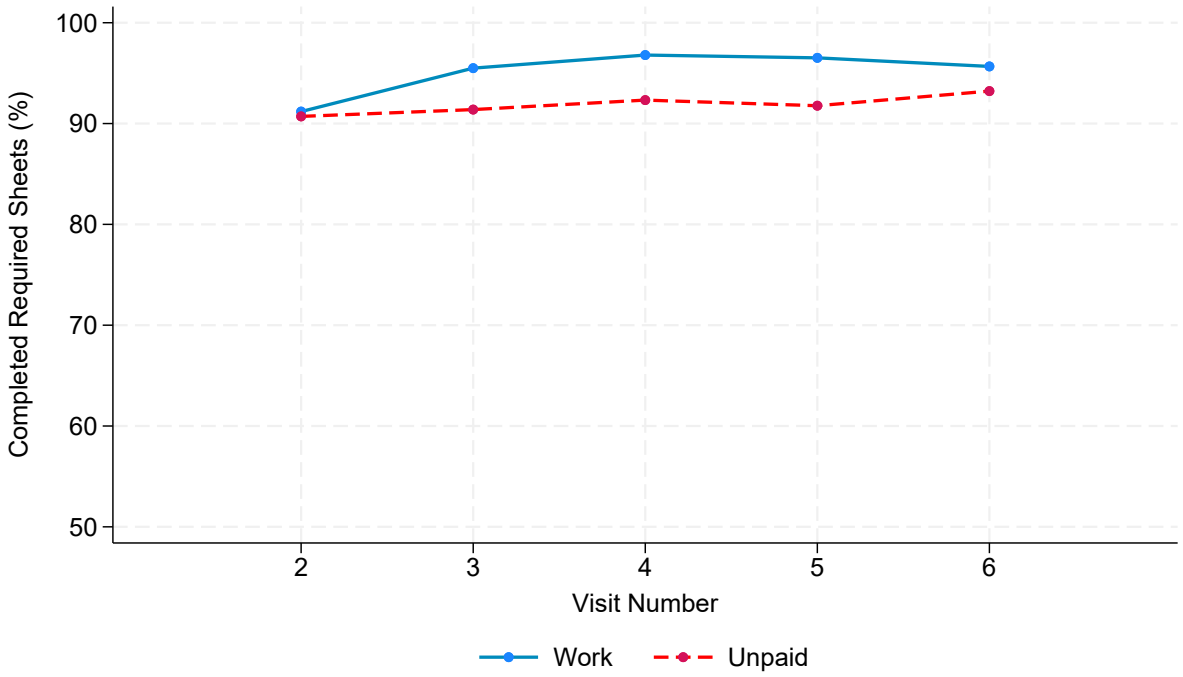
(a) Female



(b) Male

Notes: This figure presents the time sheets provided to the women (Panel A) and men (Panel B) who were randomized into the employment intervention. Each individual received four identical sheets per work day, with the time of day they were intended to be completed pre-filled on the top right, and space to put tally marks below each picture. Each sheet includes an exhaustive pictorial list of the activities one might be engaged in within the camps. For women, from top left to bottom right: being idle, praying in the tent, coking in the tent, caring for children, sowing in a women's center, cooking in a cooking center, spending time with friends or family, washing clothes or bathing, going to the market, fetching water, fetching firewood, waiting in line for rations, or napping. For men, from top left to bottom right: being idle, sitting in a tea stall, bathing, going to the market, napping, doing agricultural labor, praying at the mosque, doing construction labor, waiting in line for rations, eating, or feeding children/spending time with children.

Figure 2: Task completion



Notes: This figure plots task completion rates for men and women in our sample over the six-week study period. Visit 1 is omitted because participants learned their treatment assignment during that visit and had not yet completed any work. The blue line represents completion rates for participants assigned to the Work arm, while the red line represents completion rates for those in the Unpaid Work arm.

Is it all about the work?
Online appendix

Yueh-ya Hsu, Reshmaan Hussam, Erin Kelley, and Greg Lane

Contents

A Appendix Tables and Figures

A.1 Tables

A.1.1 Balance

Table A1: Balance in observables across treatment arms

	(1) Control	(2) Work	(3) Cash	(4) Unpaid	(5) (1) vs. (2)	(6) (1) vs. (3)	(7) (1) vs. (4)
Age	29.69	29.32	30.10	29.78	0.37	0.36	0.67
People in HH	5.40	5.39	5.45	5.44	0.64	0.98	0.89
Pct. Formal Educ.	0.37	0.38	0.29	0.37	0.85	0.01	0.92
Math Literacy Index	-0.00	0.03	-0.05	-0.00	0.85	0.58	0.66
Digit Span Index	-0.00	0.02	-0.04	0.09	0.79	0.31	0.63
Life Satisfaction Index	-0.00	-0.05	-0.11	-0.04	0.42	0.09	0.71
Self-Worth Index	0.00	0.06	0.12	0.03	0.38	0.34	0.34
Purpose Index	-0.00	0.03	0.11	0.02	0.94	0.86	0.93
Work Last 30 Days	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.69	0.78	0.28
Worked Myanmar	0.33	0.32	0.33	0.34	0.43	0.73	0.87
Hrs Idle/Day	3.94	3.85	3.98	3.87	0.65	0.34	0.86
Locus of Control	15.04	15.01	14.90	15.03	0.80	0.56	0.69
Healthy Days	24.84	25.17	25.32	25.24	0.28	0.12	0.51
PHQ Index	0.00	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.66	0.62	0.66
Stress Index	0.00	-0.04	0.02	-0.03	0.98	0.50	0.90
Diff. Conversations	12.56	12.63	12.55	12.29	0.26	0.84	0.22
Savings (BDT)	276.73	379.43	251.44	345.63	0.29	0.81	0.47
Consumption 2 Wks (BDT)	3710.52	3459.56	3645.39	3687.83	0.23	0.73	0.58
IPV Verbal Index	0.00	0.08	0.08	0.18	0.23	0.25	0.45
IPV Norms Index	-0.00	-0.10	-0.10	-0.05	0.65	0.13	0.76
Men in Home Norms Index	0.00	-0.05	-0.16	-0.16	0.72	0.00	0.02
Women at Work Norms Index	-0.00	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.87	0.84	0.56
Aspirations for Working Daughter Index	-0.00	-0.02	-0.00	0.10	0.58	0.92	0.57
Observations	360	717	720	716			
Joint F-Test					0.18	0.74	0.47

Notes: Columns (1), (2), (3), and (4) show the average value of the variable in the respective treatment arm. Column (5) shows the p-value of the difference in means between the control and work treatment groups, Column (6) shows the p-value between control and cash, and Column (7) shows the p-value between cash and unpaid.

A.1.2 Pre-Specified Outcomes

Table A2: Physical health, cognitive health and risk preferences, treated men and women

	(1) Days Healthy	(2) Cognitive Index	(3) Risk Tol.
Work	0.075	-0.024	0.036
	(0.056)	(0.048)	(0.067)
Cash	-0.148**	-0.085*	0.095
	(0.060)	(0.049)	(0.061)
Unpaid	-0.023	-0.020	0.062
	(0.059)	(0.048)	(0.066)
Control Mean	0.0	0.0	0.0
Shrp. q-val Work	1.000	1.000	1.000
Shrp. q-val Cash	0.042	0.087	0.087
Shrp. q-val Unpaid	1.000	1.000	1.000
Observations	2425	2425	2425

Notes: All outcomes have been standardized. (1) is the number of days not sick in the past 30 days. (2) is an inverse covariance weighted sum of the digit memory game (sum of level reached) and the number of math questions answered correctly. (3) is the inverse (tolerance, instead of acceptance) of the level at which the respondent was willing to accept the risk game bet. Regressions include camp and enumerator fixed effects, controls selected by lasso, and the baseline value of the outcome variable. Standard errors are clustered at the block level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

A.1.3 Attrition

Table A3: Attrition, endline survey

	(1) Treatment	(2) Partner	(3) Male	(4) Female
Work	0.001	-0.011	-0.012	0.002
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Cash	-0.001	-0.005	-0.009	0.003
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Unpaid	0.001	0.014	0.002	0.013
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.013)
Mean in Control	0.033	0.056	0.053	0.036
Observations	2515	2519	2518	2516

Notes: This table reports attrition for the endline survey in the treatment arm relative to control. The four columns are different sub-samples: Column (1) reports attrition for treated individuals (both men and women). Column (2) reports attrition for their partners. Column (3) reports attrition of male respondents (both treated and partner). Column (4) reports attrition for female respondents. Standard errors are clustered at the camp level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

B Details on outcome measures

Outcome Variable Descriptions

Psychological Well-being	
PHQ9	The standardized total score of 9 questions from the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ9). Inversely coded so a higher score indicates less depression.
Locus of Control	The standardized total score from responses to four locus of control questions (Levenson's Scales). "In the last 7 days, how many days did you feel that to a great extent your life is controlled by accidental/chance happenings..."
Life Satisfaction Index	A standardized average of survey responses to four questions from Diener's standardized scale, responses made along a six-point Likert scale.
Stress Index	The standardized total score from three elements of adapted from the Cohen Stress scale. "How many of the last 7 days have you [been able to fall asleep peacefully / felt nervous / felt frustrated]?". Inversely coded so a higher score indicates less stress.
Sociability	The number of conversations with other adults in the previous day.
Stability Index	The standardized total score from responses to two stability questions using a Cantril ladder. "How secure [do you feel / think you will feel] [at present / five years from now]"
Purpose	Index of the respondent's self rating of relative to the person who *does the most* in their family and community (as in **?**).
Self-Worth	Index of the respondent's self rating of relative to the person who is *respected the most* in their family and community (as in **?**).
Intimate Partner Violence	
Psychological Abuse	Index of the frequency of seven (four for men) psychological abuse IPV actions, including jealousy, humiliation, and insulting, with a higher score corresponding to higher frequency. See Table **??** notes for exact questions
Physical Abuse	Index of (a) the frequency of threatened physical abuse and (b) two questions about whether physical abuse should be tolerated/is justified (How often should a wife tolerate being beaten by her husband in order to keep the family together; How often should a husband have the right to beat his wife)
Bargaining and Norms	
Bargaining: Wife Participated	Bargaining game: Wife participated in decision making process (binary)
Bargaining: Success	Bargaining game: Received at least desired bargaining amount (binary)

Actions: Influence Index	Inverse covariance weighted index of (a) how often the spouse takes the respondent's input into consideration, how often the respondent expresses their disagreement, how often the respondent tries to change their spouse's mind, and how often the respondent changes their mind in response, and (b) who makes the final decision in case of disagreement.
Actions: Decision Index	Inverse covariance weighted sum of (a) an index of who decides how much to spend on a set of five item types (small/large household purchases, child, health, and luxury), (b) an index of what percentage of the household's monthly budget they can spend, and (c) an index of who decides who performs a set of four time use categories (such as raising children). A higher index value means that the respondent holds greater sway over decision-making.
Norms: Actions	Inverse covariance weighted sum of (a) an index of who should decide how much to spend, (b) an index of what percentage of the household's monthly budget they should be able to spend, and (c) an index of who should decide who should do the task. A higher index value means that the respondent believes they should hold greater sway over decision-making.
Norms: Men in Household	Index of level of disagreement with the statements "A husband who helps his wife with the household chores should not be respected" and "A husband who makes important decisions jointly with his wife is weak".
Norms: Women at Work	Inverse covariance weighted sum of hours women should be allowed to work in/outside the block, level of disagreement with the statement "A wife who prioritizes work outside the home over household-chores is not a good wife".
Aspirations for Children	
Eldest Daughter	Preferred level of education for the oldest daughter. Raw score: 0 for no education, 1 for Grades 1-5, religious or vocational education, 2 for Grades 6-10, 3 for Grades 11-12, and 4 for university or higher.
Eldest Son	Preferred level of education for the oldest son, with scoring as above.
Daughter-in-law	Preference for daughter-in-law who wishes to work outside the home. Raw score: -1 for a daughter-in-law who does not want to work, 1 for one who does, and 0 for no preference.
Son-in-law	Preference for son-in-law who allows his wife to work outside the home, with scoring as above.
Disaggregated Consumption	
Better Food	In the last 2 weeks, how much did you spend on daily groceries (rice, lentils, oil)?
Paan	...paan, cigarettes, tea and coffee?
Education	...education (private tutor)?

Healthcare	...healthcare?
Give Loans	...giving loans?
Festivals	...festivals/dawat (eid, funeral, wedding, ear piercing)?
Small Household	...small/regular (non-food) household expenditures (phone bill, mosquito nets, kitchen materials)?
Other Outcomes	
Days Healthy	Number of days not sick in the past 30 days
Cognitive Ability	A standardized weighted index of the number of correct responses to i) a digit span (forward and backward) memory test and ii) basic arithmetic problems including addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.
Risk Tolerance	Button "gambling" game: 10 minus the button level reached, so that a higher value indicates greater risk tolerance.
Labor Supply Exercise	
Preference for Women	Indicator with value 1 when the respondent prefers that the woman of the household works at parity (200 taka/day).
Value of Woman Working	Additional daily wage required for the man to work. For example, if the respondent only prefers that the man work at 300 Tk (when the woman makes 200 Tk), the value of a woman working is +100 Tk. A negative wage premium indicates that the respondent prefers the man to work.

C Deviations from Pre-Analysis Plan (PAP)

Below we note the deviations in the analysis from the PAP; available here.

C.1 Pre-specified outcomes no longer in the main paper

- The following outcomes are no longer in the main text. We provide justifications for these decisions in what follows, and present the associated tables in the next section.
- While we pre-specified **physical wellbeing** (in the form of sick days in the past month), **cognitive ability** (through a digit span and arithmetic test), and **risk preferences** (through a risk-elicitation game) as dimensions of well-being, in retrospect we do not think these outcomes belong together as measures of wellbeing. Instead, we think these outcomes are likely downstream of pyschosocial improvements (as discussed in **?**), therefore we do not report them in our main wellbeing analysis.