

Shocks disrupt patience growth in children and youth

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Abstract:

Evidence from high-income countries consistently shows that patience tends to increase throughout childhood and adolescence. However, using novel longitudinal data from Bangladesh—a low-income country that is highly susceptible to natural disasters—we find a contrasting pattern: a declining age profile of patience between ages 7-18. We reconcile these, at first sight, contradictory patterns by showing that exposure to adverse shocks significantly reduces patience during key developmental stages, driving the overall negative age trend observed in Bangladesh. To assess the generalizability of this finding, we analyze variation in shock exposure within Germany, a high-income country, following a major flood in 2013. In both contexts, our results reveal that adverse shocks can flatten—or even reverse—the typical age trajectory of patience found in many high-income countries. These findings challenge the notion of patience as a universally increasing trait with age and underscore the critical role of environmental stability in shaping time preferences.