

Natasha Jha

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Employment

Assistant Professor Centre for Advanced Financial Research and Learning (CAFRAL)	Nov 2025 - Present
Postdoctoral Research Associate Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame	Sep 2023 - Oct 2025
Research Associate Indian School of Business	2016-2018
Research Analyst Barclays Shared Services	2014-2016

Education

Ph.D., Applied Economics and Management Cornell University	2018-2023
M.S., Applied Economics and Management Cornell University	2021
M.A., Economics Delhi School of Economics	2012-2014
B.A., Economics University of Delhi	2009-2012

Research Interests

Development Economics, Labor Economics, Environmental Economics

Peer-Reviewed Publications

- (1) Chaudhuri, K., Jha, N., Nilayamgode, M., & Suryanarayana, R. (2023). "Alcohol Ban and Crime: The ABC's of the Bihar Prohibition". *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 72(4), 2024.
[Link to paper](#)

Working Papers

- (1) Show Me the Dowry: How Traditional Customs Affect Education in Rural India. [Link to paper](#)

This study examines the impact of a law that increased penalties for dowry on rural households' educational attainment in India, using data from the Rural Economic and Demographic Survey. A difference-in-differences approach reveals that the law reduced dowry payments and female education, with the decline in female education being most pronounced in communities with higher dowry prevalence. This suggests that dowry payments

signal adherence to tradition, and reducing female education serves as an alternative signal in the absence of dowry. Hence, while the law combats an exploitative custom, it inadvertently depletes female human capital.

- (2) Agriculture and Arsenic: Can Over Extraction of Groundwater Make us Sick? [Link to paper](#)

This paper draws attention to an overlooked prospective impact of irrigation technology, namely Arsenic contamination of groundwater. Using historical geological variation in aquifer depth to instrument for groundwater irrigation, the paper finds higher community level Arsenic exposure in water abundant districts across India. Water abundant districts have 70% more habitats with arsenic exposure greater than safety levels. Combining insights from hydrology, historical deep tubewell groundwater extraction for irrigation appears as a primary driver for arsenic release in water sources over alternate pathways related to arsenic exposure caused by contemporary farming practices such as fertilizer or pesticide usage.

- (3) Minimum Support Prices in Indian Agriculture: Supporting Whom and at What Price?, with Shilpa Aggarawl, and Ishani Chatterjee. [Link to paper](#)

Distortions introduced by price-controls may be underestimated if controls are captured for uses beyond fixing market failures. We study India's minimum support prices (MSP) for food grains, and find that the central government announces a higher MSP for a crop when a larger area under cultivation for that crop is slated to go for state elections. Since the government's procurement price is the same across states, this blunt instrument is used more when other policy instruments are unavailable, i.e., when the incumbent state government is unaligned with the center. Higher MSP directly reduces welfare by increasing consumer prices.

- (4) Shaping Future Success: Evidence from an Early Childhood Human Capital Formation Intervention?, with Deepak Saraswat, Shwetlana Sabarwal, Lindsey Lacey, Nishith Prakash, and Rachel Chazan-Cohen. [Link to paper](#)

Nearly 250 million children under five in low- and middle-income countries face developmental deficits despite expanding access to early childhood services. We present evidence from a large-scale randomized controlled trial (N=3,131 children in 201 schools) in Nepal's government school system testing three implementation models that combine classroom quality improvements with parental engagement. Following a 15-day teacher training, schools were randomly assigned to deliver caregiver sessions through teachers alone, teachers with in-class helpers, or external facilitators. All three models raised children's developmental outcomes by 0.10–0.20 standard deviations and improved caregiver engagement by similar magnitudes. The helper model proved most effective, sustaining classroom quality while maintaining teacher-family connections. Benefits are concentrated among the most disadvantaged, households with lower baseline engagement, higher stress, and less education, with the largest developmental gains among children starting furthest behind. Mechanism analysis reveals that the intervention transformed home and school from competing substitutes into complementary drivers of development. These findings demonstrate that feasible interventions embedded within existing systems can deliver scalable gains in early childhood human capital while narrowing inequality.

Work in Progress

- (1) Job Amenities and Misallocation of Talent, with Patrizio Piraino, and Martin Abel.
- (2) Worker Sorting and Retention in Manufacturing: Study of Migrant Women in India, with Tarana Chauhan.

(Authors listed alphabetically with equal contributions for all papers)

Fellowships and Awards

- (1) Tata-Cornell Scholar, Annual Assistantship Award (\$35,000) 2019 - 2023

Policy Writing

- (1) [Arsenic and Agriculture: Is Our Growing Dependence on Groundwater Irrigation Poisoning Our Water?](#) Blog post for Tata-Cornell Institute, September 2023.
- (2) [Thinking About Soil from the Farmers' Perspectives](#) Blog post for Tata-Cornell Institute, April 2021.

Teaching Experience

- (1) Teaching Assistant - Contemporary Controversies in the Global Economy 2023
Prof. Chris Barrett, Cornell University
- (2) Teaching Assistant - Better Decisions for Life, Love and Money 2022
Prof. Robert Frank, Prof. Ted O'Donoghue, Prof. Jay Russo, Prof. William Schulze, Prof. Suzanne Shu, Cornell University
- (3) Teaching Assistant - Applied Econometrics 2019
Prof. Brian Dillon, Cornell University

External Conference Presentations

2025: Western Economic Association International

2023: Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Fall Conference, Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development at the Indian Statistical Institute

2022: Pacific Conference for Development Economics at the University of San Francisco, Midwest International Economic Development Conference at the University of Minnesota, 21st Summer School in International and Development Economics, North East Universities Development Consortium (NEUDC) at Yale

2018: NEUDC at Cornell University, Annual Conference on Economic Growth and Development at the Indian Statistical Institute, Southern Economic Association Meeting, International conference on South Asian Economic Development

2017: Winter School at the Delhi School of Economics, Human Capital Workshop at the Indian School of Business

Professional Service

Journal Referee:

American Economic Journal: Economic Policy, Journal of Development Economics, Journal of Development Studies, The World Bank Economic Review, Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, Economic Letters, China Economic Review, Economics of Education Review, Economic Modelling, PLOS ONE

Department and University Service (Cornell University)

(1) Member Graduate Students for Gender Equity in Economics, Cornell University

2022

Technical Skills

(1) **Languages/Software:** STATA, SAS, Python, R, Microsoft Office, L^AT_EX, QGIS, VBA

References

Christopher B. Barrett (Teaching Reference)
Stephen B. & Janice G. Ashley Professor of
Applied Economics and Management
Charles H. Dyson School of
Applied Economics and Management
Cornell University
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