

American Institute of Pakistan Studies

AIPS Grantee Final Report

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Doctoral Research Grant

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Host Institution:
Affiliated with Aga Khan
Education Service, Pakistan

Home institution
Department of Geography
University of Colorado
Boulder

Field of study
Early Childhood Diarrhea
and Primary School Performance

Grant Period from Sept 10, 1997 to Sept 9, 1998

A: Professional Aspects of Grant Experience

Being affiliated with the Aga Khan Development Network has been one of the most professionally rewarding experiences I have had. At the Aga Khan University in Karachi Dr. Zulfiqar Bhutta in the department of pediatrics took a keen interest in my study and made his personal library as well as the university library open to me. He also gave me access to the resources of AKU's data processing section which was invaluable to me. Furthermore it was through AKU that I was able to participate in the IVth Annual International Conference on Diarrhea in which most of the main international players in diarrhea and nutrition were in attendance, something which was very valuable for my area of research.

In Gilgit the Aga Khan Health Service and Aga Khan Education Service were incredibly helpful, giving me access to all their publications, research and data. Their staff took a keen personal interest in my study and assisted me far beyond what one would normally expect.

The Directorate of Education in Gilgit was also very helpful, though their data was less organized than that of the AKDN institutions.

The study turns out to be the first that I know of (or that people at AKHS,P, AKU or AKES,P know of as well) which demonstrates strong negative associations between early childhood diarrhea and primary school performance. The 12 months for which AIPS supported me enabled me to gather and analyze the data which should not only enable me to complete a dissertation but also to publish in international medical and educational

journals as well. Others who are knowledgeable in the field have described the findings as "astounding".

B: Details of Academic Assignment

My time in Pakistan was strictly research oriented, though I was able to share my findings with AKU and AKES,P and AKHS,P. The political situation, which included the evacuation of many Americans, near the end of my stay in Pakistan prevented a series of lectures I would have liked to deliver at USIS and a number of other venues.

The AKDN institutions had a wide variety of valuable materials for my research. Otherwise, however, library resources in the Northern Areas of Pakistan are very limited. Also, from the Northern Areas, internet access is not available making access to that resource impossible without travel to Islamabad or Karachi. Fortunately, email is possible from Gilgit early in the morning using a very slow modem (1200 baud max), making communication with the rest of the world a bit easier.

Before coming out to Pakistan it would be worthwhile for any researcher to find out what is available here, and bring with them that which is not readily accessible. I found that most institutions of higher learning (Qiad-i-Azam University etc.) to be woefully short of materials, though this will obviously vary from discipline to discipline. I brought out many materials with me. Being in contact with specific people ahead of time is very valuable as many academics have personal libraries which are often far better than what is available in public libraries. I found the AKDN institutions particularly helpful in this respect after I found individuals with a personal interest in my research. It opened many doors and opportunities which greatly enriched my experience.

C: Administrative Aspects of Grant

I found the AIPS office in Islamabad to be very efficient and organized. They anticipated my every need and often phoned to check on how things were going. They answered questions promptly and forwarded correspondence very quickly. If only the rest of the country worked as well.

Grant payments were sometimes a bit late, but this did not affect my research. One word of warning though, dollar accounts in Pakistan are not safe – mine were frozen without warning and I lost a substantial sum as a result when I had to withdraw my balance at the official rate and repurchase dollars on the open market.

While Gilgit is a bit isolated, in Islamabad nearly everything necessary for comfortable living is available. The only hassle was the unavailability of 8 ½ by 11 paper! They follow English sizes here, but most dissertation guidelines refer to American dimensions,

but this is a rather minor issue. I would not recommend that grantees bring household items or even large amounts of clothing as all this is available in Islamabad at far lower prices than in the West. One exception is shortwave radios – the little Sony digital models are fantastic as you can jump from frequency to frequency at the touch of a button to find the best reception. I found this to be the best source of news. London duty free shops have the best selection I know of.

For medical services, the US Embassy medical unit is rather pricy – several thousand dollars per half year. Al-Shifa hospital in Islamabad is good, but the competence of the doctors is variable. AKU Hospital in Karachi is the best institution in the country, with the best doctors, facilities and labs. It is also very cheap by western standards and it is worth the travel to Karachi to see someone good.

D: Overall Critique and Commentary

I was very pleased with the support from AIPS, both by the Islamabad office and by Hank Kennedy. AIPS very kindly extended my grant by three months which proved very valuable for my study.

One suggestion for improvement would be for grantees to receive a list of other grantees to facilitate sharing of information. I don't suggest the retreat approach which Fulbright does as this requires extensive travel for many grantees and there is often little in common in the variety of sponsored research. On the other hand, I found out that another AIPS grantee had been in Gilgit and I didn't know till after the fact.

AIPS is sponsoring a wide range of interesting research in Pakistan. It could probably do more to publicize this. I certainly plan to give AIPS prominence in any publications which result from my research.