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### Poisoning the Mind: Arsenic Contamination of Drinking Water Wells and Children's Educational Achievement in Rural Bangladesh

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#### Abstract:

Bangladesh has experienced the largest mass poisoning of a population in history owing to contamination of groundwater with naturally occurring inorganic arsenic. Prolonged drinking of such water risks development of diseases and therefore has implications for children's cognitive and psychological development. This study examines the effect of arsenic contamination of tubewells, the primary source of drinking water at home, on the learning outcome of school-going children in rural Bangladesh using recent nationally representative data on secondary school children. We unambiguously find a negative and statistically significant correlation between mathematics scores and arsenic-contaminated drinking tubewells at home, net of the child's socio-economic status, parental background and school specific unobserved correlates of learning. Similar correlations are found for an alternative measure of student achievement and subjective well-being (i.e. self-reported measure of life satisfaction) of the student. We conclude by discussing the policy implication of our findings in the context of the current debate over the adverse effect of arsenic poisoning on children.

**Text:** See [Discussion Paper No. 5716](#)



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