

Pandemic and Governance in Bangladesh: Case of Field Administration

Tanjil Ahmed¹ Tamanna Akter²

Abstract

Currently, countries around the globe are simultaneously fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic. The government of Bangladesh has already taken and implemented several policies to control the spread of the COVID-19. Moreover, in building public awareness, the central and field administration has implemented several policies such as lockdown strategy, isolation, home quarantine, obligatory use of masks, ensuring social distance, etc. Conversely, due to being a densely populated country, most of the rural people in Bangladesh are not aware of the threat of COVID-19. In this regard, field administration (Upazila Administration) i.e UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) has been playing a significant role to make rural people aware from the very beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh. But in some cases, the Upazila administration faced some limitations. Thereafter, the study has identified the different roles of UNO in building public awareness at rural levels in Bangladesh. The study was conducted based on a quantitative approach of exploratory nature. The findings of the study demonstrated that a large group of rural people i.e 71% had the knowledge about the threat of the COVID-19, but 53.6% of rural people did not use masks, and 9.10% did not have faith in the physical distance that can eliminate the risk of COVID-19. As well, 50% of respondents argued that UNO played a significant role to enhance rural people's awareness amid the pandemic. Especially, 38% and 32.70 % of respondents argued that implementation of the 'No Mask, No Service' policy and 'monitoring initiative' was an effective mechanism to increase public awareness respectively. Thereafter, the authors illustrated several suggestions to enhance the rural people's awareness amid the pandemic in Bangladesh.

Key Words: *Pandemic, Governance, Field Administration, Public Awareness, Role of UNO, Monitoring.*

1. Introduction

The present world is passing through a terrible time due to the outbreak of COVID-19. It is a disease-causing virus called SARS-CoV-2 that has never been seen in the human body and it can infect humans very quickly through infection. World Health Organization (WHO) named it COVID-19 on 11th February 2020 and declared a pandemic on the 11th of March (WHO, 2020). Currently, all the countries of the world are concurrently fighting against the pandemic COVID-19. The first coronavirus cases confirmed in Bangladesh on March 8, 2020 (Banik et al., 2020).

¹ Lecturer, Dept. of Public Administration and Governance Studies, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh, Bangladesh.

² BSS & MSS, Dept. of Public Administration and Governance Studies, Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Trishal, Mymensingh, Bangladesh.

In this regard, to control the COVID-19 outbreak, and ensure the health service to the victims, the government of Bangladesh has already taken and implemented several initiatives such as heavy lockdown strategies; preparing the hospitals and emergency care with available testing kits, PPE, oxygen, N-95 mask, ICU bed, isolation center, emergency care, ambulance services; stimulates package; distribution relief goods to the backward sections; telemedicine opportunities; e-learning opportunities; signing for the vaccine, etc. (Chowdhury et al., 2020).

In this context, the local government particularly, Upazila administration is playing a significant role in terms of building rural people awareness amid the pandemic in Bangladesh. Local government is an administrative body as well as the sub-system of central government whose main purpose is to provide services within a certain territory (Akhter & Ahmed, 2022). There are three tiers of rural local government in Bangladesh i.e Union Parishad, Upazila Parishad, and Zila Parishad (Khan & Obaidullah, 2003). Since Bangladesh is an overpopulated country with the highest population-density, around 63.4% of the total population live in rural areas (Azad, 2020) where most of them are unaware of the World Health Organization's (WHO) guidelines regarding health safety on the COVID-19 issues. Therefore, public awareness is a big issue in the COVID-19 case. Public awareness is defined as the public level of understanding about the significance and consequences of a certain program or an activity, or issues. Moreover, it is the process of spreading knowledge to people so that people can make their own decisions about an issue (Teo et al., 2021). Public awareness levels are imperative for the long-term recovery tactics after the COVID-19 crisis (Rousseau & Deschacht, 2020). However, UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) as the administrative head of Upazila Parishad, plays a principal role to implement, monitoring, and supervising several government policies at the rural level in Bangladesh. Especially, amid the pandemic COVID-19, UNO has played a praiseworthy role in terms of building public awareness in the rural areas in Bangladesh. Correspondingly, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) has already implemented several innovative ideas to make rural people aware of the threat of the COVID-19. However, this study explored the existing scenario of public awareness in the rural areas as well as assessed the multiple roles of UNO in terms of managing the COVID-19 issues in field administration in Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

Field administration is a branch of central administration (IGI Global, 2021) that works on the ground to carry out government agendas and policies with a view to serving citizen at local level along with solidity (ALI, 1982). Upazila Parishad is an administrative tier of field administration that is consisted of an elected Chairman, two Vice Chairmen (one will be women), all Union Parishad Chairman, Mayors of concerned Municipality (if any), and female members in reserved seat. Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) is the Principal Executive Officer in Upazila Parishad whose main responsibilities are ensuring compliance with rules and regulations and upkeep of financial discipline. The general functions of the UNO are ensuring compliance with rules and regulations; maintenance of financial discipline; planning and implementation of development projects under UZP; planning and implementation of block grant supported projects; providing secretarial assistance to the UZP; increasing influence of political factors, etc. (Zamil, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, UNOs in Bangladesh are playing a significant role to make rural people aware of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensure the proper application of laws, as well as carry out the central government announcements through active cooperation and collaboration (Matin et al., 2020) From this point of view related literature has been illustrated below to assess the government

response as well as field administrators' contributions to address the drastic effect of COVID-19 in Bangladesh.

Zakir Hossain (2021) conducts a study on the strategy of the local government regarding addressing the pandemic COVID-19 in Bangladesh. Particularly, the author explores the contribution of local government and its conversion to response the COVID-19. However, the study was conducted based on the primary data analysis where the findings of the study reveal that local government- as a field administrative unit played a noteworthy role to eliminate the drastic effect of COVID-19, such as ensuring the accountability and transparency of the local representatives; providing efficient services to the grassroots people through obtaining their consent, etc. As well, the findings of the study demonstrate the significance of the ICT intervention at local government to address the impact of COVID-19. However, the author of the study significantly illustrates the role of local government but specifically did not clarify the role of field administrator/Upazila Nirbahi officer (UNO) regarding addressing the COVID-19 in Bangladesh (Zakir Hossain, 2021). Besides, Noman et al. (2020) articulate that UNO has played a significant role to ensure the list of the marginalized and backward sections of the rural areas and proper distribution of government reliefs to those who are hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. In this regard, the authors articulate that Union Parishad cooperates with the Upazila Parishad to prepare the proper list of the marginalized where the tag officer verified it. They added that after ensuring the check and balance, UNO distributed the government cash relief to the poor (Noman et al., 2020). However, the authors did not illustrate the challenges of UNO regarding addressing the extreme effect of COVID-19 in Bangladesh. Moreover, Md Kariul et al. (2020) depict a study on assessing the level of response to eliminate the impact of pandemic COVID-19 Bangladesh. The authors expressively illustrate the economic status of Bangladesh amid the pandemic and purposively illustrate the impact of COVID-19 on the economy as well as all aspects of human life. The study was conducted based on the descriptive secondary literature review where the findings of the study demonstrate the drastic impact of COVID-19 on human life. Moreover, the findings reveal that males are more vulnerable than females in terms of the COVID-19 infection. Therefore, the authors articulate that government and non-government level initiatives could significantly control the community transmission of the COVID-19 in Bangladesh. However, the authors did not articulate the role of field administration to address the threat of COVID-19 in Bangladesh (Md Kariul et al., 2020).

Similarly, Panday (2021) demonstrates the significance of local government to address the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. The author articulates that as an important unit of the central government, local government plays a noteworthy role to attain the overall development of the country. Particularly, in the case of COVID-19 management, local government institutions have been playing a significant role since the very beginning i.e enhancing the awareness among the local people in Bangladesh. As well, the author argues that in terms of implementing vaccination programs, civic awareness-raising, forming local committees, volunteer supports, and etc. local government is playing a gigantic role. However, the author significantly illustrates the significance of local government to address the COVID-19 issues but specifically, he did not mention the contribution of the field administration in terms of pandemic management (Panday, 2021).

Correspondingly, Islam et al. (2020) explore a study on tacking the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. Principally, the authors elucidate the overview of the COVID-19 in Bangladesh and explain the government strategies to address this global crisis. However, the study was conducted based on the literature review where the findings of the study demonstrate the adopted strategies of the government to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly, the findings

reveal that the government of Bangladesh has implemented several effective strategies to eliminate the threat of COVID-19 including COVID test initiatives, quarantine initiatives, regional lockdown strategies, the shutdown of all offices, educational institutions, etc. The government has already declared several financial stimulus packages to tackle the drastic effect of the COVID-19. Conversely, the authors highlight several limitations and challenges of the government to effectively tackle the COVID-19 in Bangladesh including poor contact tracing, inadequate testing, poor emergency health facilities, etc. (Islam et al., 2020).

In addition, Anwar et al. (2020) depict a study on the challenges of the COVID-19 in Bangladesh and how to address such challenges! In this regard, the authors initially illustrate the drastic global scenario of the COVID-19 and globally adopted strategies. However, the study was conducted based on the secondary data analysis where the findings of the study demonstrate that as an overpopulated and developing country, it will be harsh for Bangladesh to implement strict country lockdown, social isolation, isolated office deeds, etc. Conversely, the authors argue that to eliminate the severe effect of the pandemic, the country can strengthen mobile sanitization services, transitory quarantine facilities, healthcare conveniences, etc. Moreover, the findings of the study recommended that effective collaboration among the administration, inhabitants, health professionals and foreign aid can abate the drastic effect of COVID-19 in Bangladesh. However, the author did not demonstrate the significance of field administration to tackle the impact of COVID-19 in Bangladesh (Anwar et al., 2020).

Conversely, Dutta and Fischer (2021) explore a study on the importance of local governance to COVID-19 management in terms of disease prevention and enhancing social security. The authors predominantly illustrate the unexpected challenges of COVID-19 on social security and virus control in third-world countries. The study was conducted based on the secondary data analysis where the findings of the study divulge the involvement of community administrations in synchronizing national response against COVID-19. Additionally, the findings of the study demonstrate that local government expands civic trust and value of response. Similarly, the authors argue that government can effectively recover the fragile economy, demography, and biology through active community engagement. However, the authors did not illustrate the significance of the field administration to address the COVID-19 threat (Dutta & Fischer, 2021). However, in the past few days, different scholars have extensively written about COVID-19 response strategy but preliminary literature review shows that no studies have been conducted yet about the comprehensive and sustainable contribution of field administration i.e roles of UNO in building public awareness in rural areas. Conversely, the previous studies are quite different from this study in the case of sample size, methods of research, research variables, and data collection process. Therefore, this study is very much significant to illustrate the contribution of field administration through the role of UNO in building public awareness at rural levels amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh.

3. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to illustrate the role of field administration i.e Upazila Administration in building public awareness amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The specific objectives are-

- a) To identify the role of UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) in building public awareness during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b) To illustrate the significance of public awareness regarding eliminating the drastic effect of COVID-19 in rural areas in Bangladesh.

4. Methodology of the Study

As the main aim of this study was to identify the role of field administration i.e UNO in building public awareness amid the COVID-19 pandemic, this research was exploratory in nature and ensured the application of a quantitative approach. The main reason behind the application of the quantitative method was to illustrate the roles of field administrator i.e UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) in building public awareness amid the COVID-19 pandemic in the rural areas in Bangladesh.

4.1 Data Collection Method: Quantitative Tool (Survey)

As a part of the quantitative mode of data collection, a sample survey was accompanied to serve the study purpose. As well, a structured questionnaire was applied to collect data. Particularly, 5 points Likert scale and closed-ended questions were applied for gathering quantitative data.

4.2 Study area

Since the study focused on the roles of field administrators i.e UNO in building public awareness amid the pandemic in the rural areas in Bangladesh, the selected study areas were the 5 distinct Union Parishads (i.e Amirabari Union Parishad, Bailar Union Parishad, Dhanikhola Union Parishad, Bali Para Union Parishad, Trishal Union Parishad) under Trishal Upazila, Mymensingh.

4.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

In this study, probability sampling (random cluster sampling) was applied to design sampling, and data were collected within the selected areas. However, the target populations were the general people in rural areas (Upazila level) under Trishal Upazila, Mymensingh. Especially, as a sample unit, 110 rural people in different groups (businessmen, day laborers, learners, teachers, job holders, etc.) participated to gather survey data.

4.4 Data Analysis

As the study was conducted based on a quantitative approach, collected data has been organized characteristically and the coding activities is done manually. Prepared data is analyzed statistically with data analysis software 'MS Excel' and 'Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)' and is presented in the report accordingly.

5. Findings of the Study

This section has significantly illustrated the overall findings of the study. Initially, it has described the demographic and socio-economic profile of the respondents. Thereafter, survey data (quantitative data) has been presented accordingly.

5.1 Demographic and Socio-economic Profile of the Respondents

The study depicts an overview of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that includes age, gender, education qualification, and profession of the respondents.

5.1.1 Age of the Respondents

The respondents were from various age groups. The following bar chart represents that 21.8% of the total respondents were 15-25 age group; 25.5% were 26-35 age group; 35.5% were 36-50 age group, and 17.3% were the 51-80 years age group. It is perceived that most of the respondents were middle-aged people.

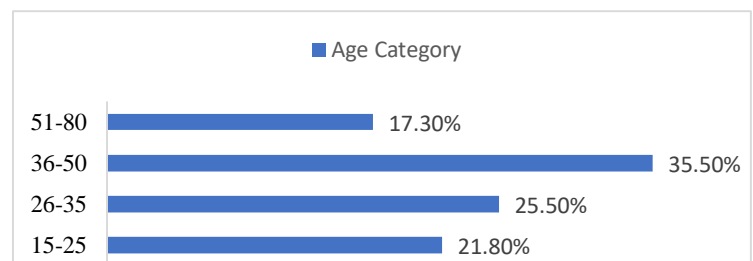


FIGURE 1: RESPONDENTS BY AGE GROUPS (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

5.1.2 Gender of the Respondents

According to the survey result, among the total respondents, 63.6% were male whereas the rest of them were female (36.4%).

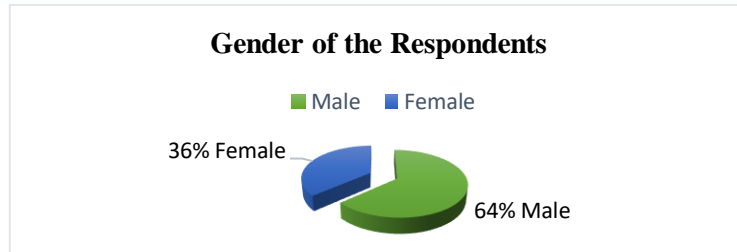


FIGURE 2: GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

5.1.3 Education Qualifications of the Respondents

The survey found that 75.5% of the respondents were knowledgeable who received education from different levels (Master’s, graduation, HSC, SSC, and JSC) whereas 24.5% had no educational qualification.

Education Qualifications of the Respondents					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Knowledgeable People	Higher Educated/Master’s Degree	10	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Graduation	14	12.7	12.7	21.8
	Higher Secondary	24	21.8	21.8	43.6
	Secondary	21	19.1	19.1	62.7
	Junior School Certificate	14	12.7	12.7	75.5
	Total Knowledgeable	83	75.5	75.5	-
Less Knowledgeable People	Less Knowledgeable	27	24.5	24.5	100.0
	Total	110	100.0	100.0	-

TABLE 2: RESPONDENTS’ LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

According to the survey, the above table illustrates the respondents’ level of knowledge where 9.1% of respondents had the Master’s Degree; 12.7% had the Graduation Degree; 21.8% had a higher secondary degree; 19.1% had a secondary degree; 12.7% had Junior School Certificate, and the remaining 24.5% had no educational knowledge.

5.1.4 Nature of Employment

According to the given figure, it has been observed that 23% of respondents were housewives (women); 22% were day laborers; 14% were learners; 24% were involved with small business; 11% were involved in the teaching profession, and the rest of them (6%) were involved with government services. However, those people were the key respondents of this study.

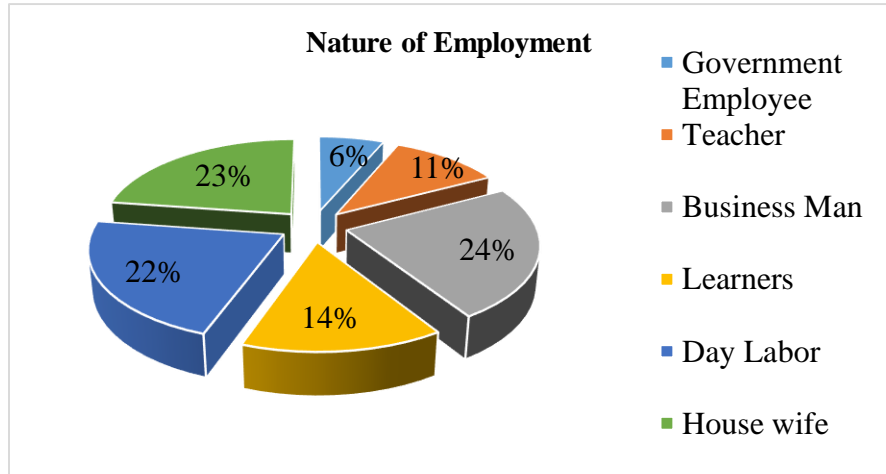


FIGURE 3: NATURE OF EMPLOYMENT (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

5.2 Knowledge of Citizen on the Declaration of World Health Organization (WHO) about Pandemic

According to the survey, it was found that 71% of respondents knew about the WHO’s declaration in terms of COVID-19 threats, but 29% of respondents had no knowledge about WHO’s declaration. Although the majority of rural people were concerned about the COVID-19 issues, a particular group had faith in superstition and ignored the COVID-19 related health measures. As a result, the Upazila administration is still struggling to make people aware at grassroots levels in Bangladesh.

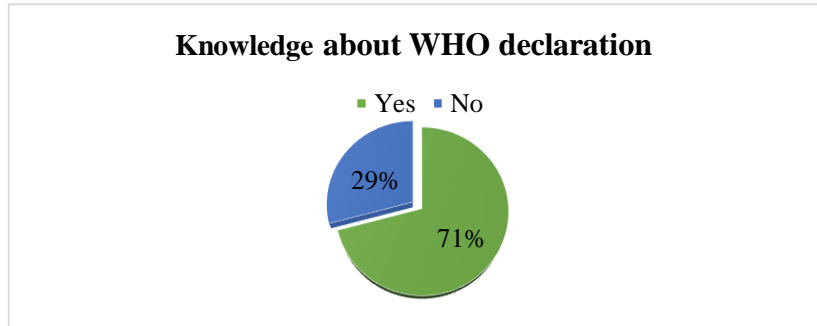


FIGURE 4: KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE WHO’S DECLARATION (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

5.2 Frequency of Using Mask

The following table represents that 53.6% of respondents did not use masks when going out from home. Conversely, the table also represents that about 46.4% of respondents used masks when going out from home. Although about a large group of rural people used masks, however, the given statistic demonstrates the drastic conditions of the rural areas

Frequency of Using Mask outside the Home					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	51	46.4	46.4	46.4
	No	59	53.6	53.6	100.0
	Total	110	100.0	100.0	

TABLE 3: FREQUENCY OF USING MASK OUTSIDE THE HOME (FIELD SURVEY)

where a majority of people ignore the using mask and avoid the WHO’s health-related declaration when they go out.

5.4 People's Perception of the Necessity of Using Mask

The survey report represents that 61% of respondents believed that using a mask can control the spread of COVID-19 whereas 20% of respondents supported this notion. On the other hand, 7% of respondents disagreed that masks can control the spread of COVID-19 because they believe in superstition. Therefore, the given statistic validated that a large group of rural people had no faith in using masks regarding controlling the spread of COVID-19.

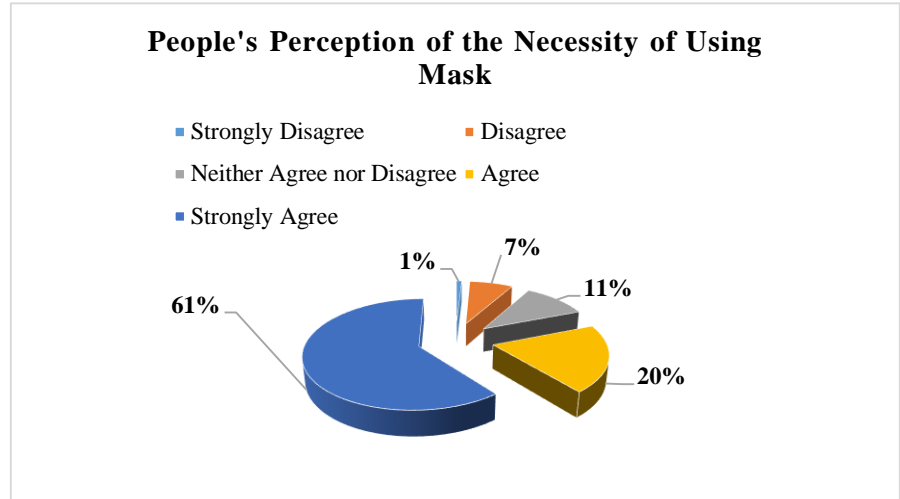


FIGURE 5: PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION OF THE NECESSITY OF USING MASK (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

1.5 People’s Perception in terms of Maintaining Social Distance

According to the survey data, 39.10% of respondents thought that maintaining physical distance can control the rapid spread of COVID-19 in rural areas in Bangladesh whereas 26.60% of respondents supported this statement. Conversely, about 9.10% of respondents articulated

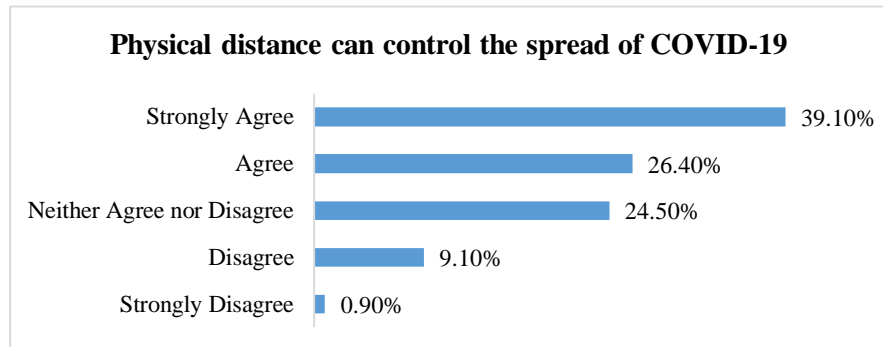


FIGURE 6: IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL DISTANCE (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

that maintaining physical distance alone could not control the spread of COVID-19 in the rural areas in Bangladesh. Therefore, the above statistic demonstrates that there was a dilemma among the rural people about maintaining physical distance amid the pandemic in rural areas.

5.6 People’s Perception of the Importance of Public Awareness

The above pie chart illustrates that 52% of respondents strongly agreed that public awareness can significantly control the outbreak of the COVID-19 in rural areas whereas 27% of respondents supported their opinion. As well, 18% of respondents have neither agreed nor disagreed about this issue whereas 2% of respondents disagreed about this issue. Therefore, the given statistic validates that the majority of rural people believed that public awareness could be an effective mechanism to control the spread of COVID-19.

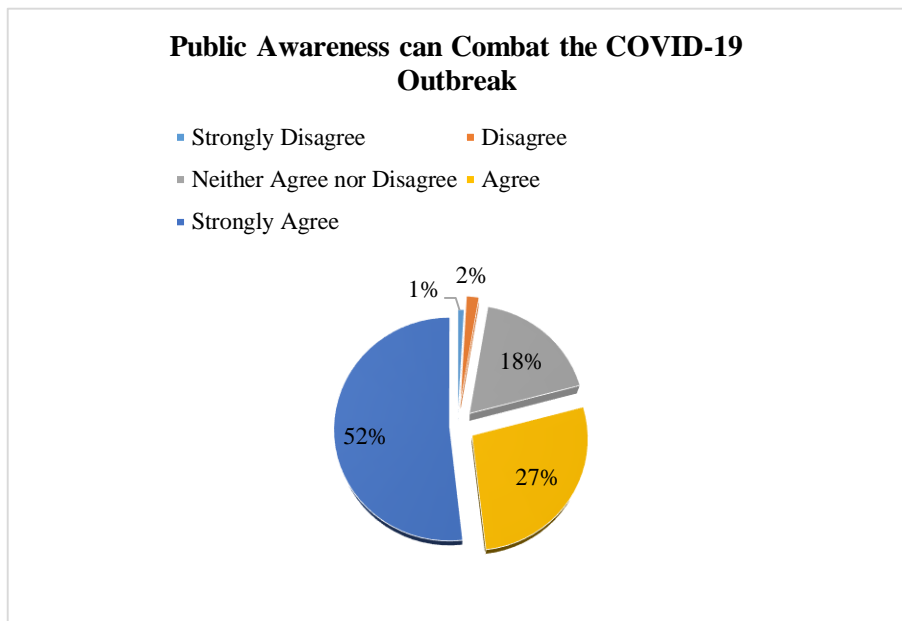


FIGURE 7: IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC AWARENESS (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

5.7 Role of UNO: Monitoring Activities

According to the following bar chart, 19.10% of respondents argued that in terms of enhancing public awareness amid COVID-19, the highest monitoring area of Trishal Upazila was the open market whereas 13.60% of respondents articulated that the second-highest monitoring area was the different shopping mall under Trishal Upazila. Consequently, 41.80% of respondents claimed that UNO of Trishal Upazila supervised the mixed area (roads and highway, open market, shopping mall, and bus terminal) at a time in terms of building public awareness amid the COVID-pandemic. However, remarkably 18.20% of respondents debated that they did never see any monitoring activities of UNO under the different Union Parishad of Trishal Upazila.

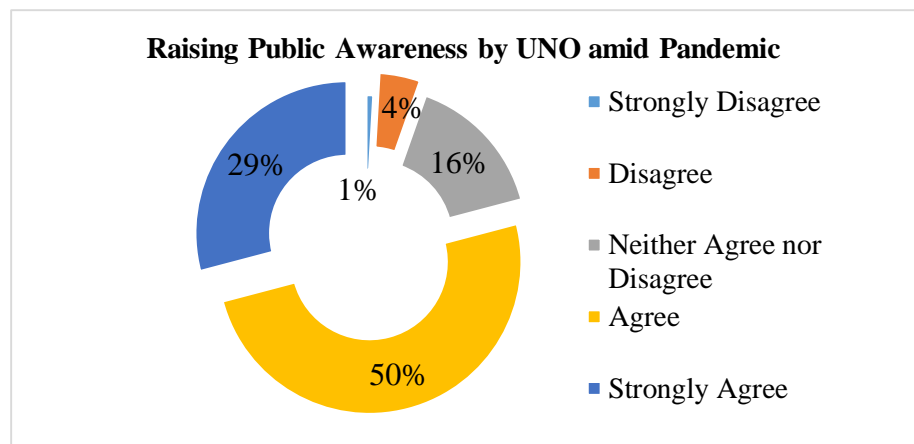


FIGURE 8: MONITORING ACTIVITIES OF UNO (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

5.8 Role of UNO: Raising Public Awareness activities amid Pandemic

In a question about regular awareness-building activities by the UNO of Trishal Upazila, different data have been found. The above pie chart denotes that only 29% of respondents strongly agreed about the regular awareness-building activities by the UNO whereas 50% of respondents supported this statement. Conversely, 18.2% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed about the role of UNO amid the pandemic COVID-19. However, 4% of respondents totally disagreed about the public awareness-raising activities of UNO under Trishal Upazila. They debated that UNO's awareness-building activities were uneven.

5.9 Role of UNO: Imposing Punishment

The given bar chart demonstrates that 33.60% of respondents agreed that UNO imposed financial penalties in terms of enhancing public awareness amid the pandemic in rural areas in Bangladesh whereas 25.50% of respondents strongly supported the UNO's initiatives.

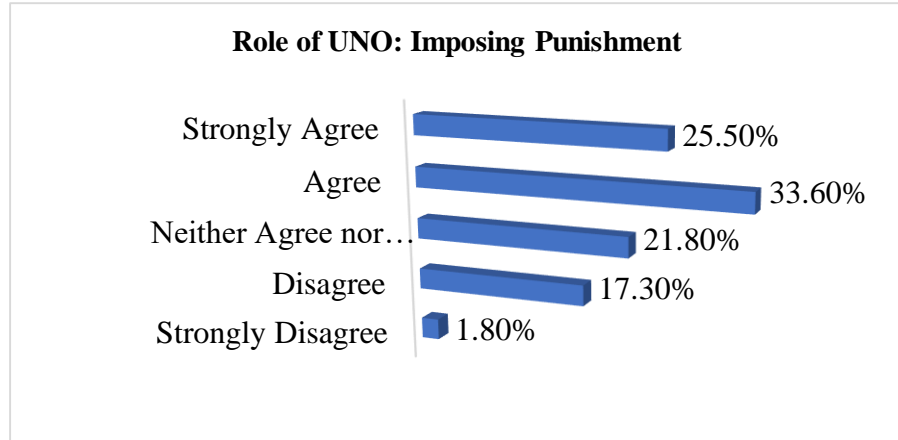


FIGURE 10: IMPOSING PUNISHMENT (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

However, 17.30% of respondents articulated that financial penalties were not effective to enhance public awareness amid the pandemic. Therefore, the given statistics clarify that there were mixed reactions among the rural people in terms of imposing financial penalties amid the pandemic to enhance public awareness.

5.10 Role of UNO: Consistent Monitoring Activities

According to the given line chart, 19.10% of respondents strongly argued that UNO at field administration ensured consistent monitoring activities amid the pandemic to enhance public awareness about the threat of the COVID-19 whereas 25.50% of respondents validated this statement.

Conversely, a group of respondent i.e 20.90% debated that UNO did not ensure the persistent monitoring activities amid the pandemic. Since the majority of respondents supported the UNO's role amid the pandemic, however, the given statistic validates that

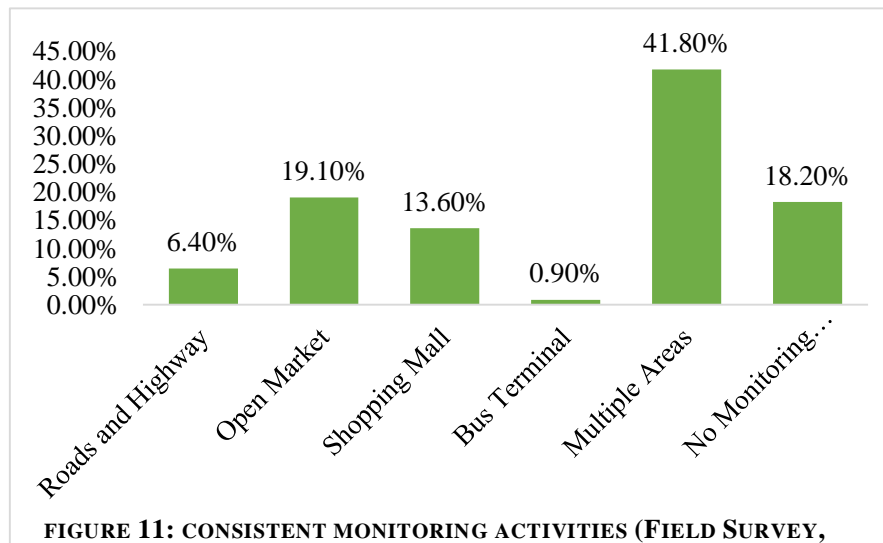


FIGURE 11: CONSISTENT MONITORING ACTIVITIES (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

there was an active engagement of the UNO to eliminate the risk of COVID-19 in field administration in Bangladesh.

5.11 Role of UNO: Consistent Announcing (Miking) Activities

According to the survey data, it was found that 38% of respondents strongly agreed that with a view to enhancing public awareness in rural areas, UNO ensured consistent announcing (Miking) activities amid the pandemic whereas 12% of respondents disagreed. In this regard, 29% of respondents were neutral about this issue.

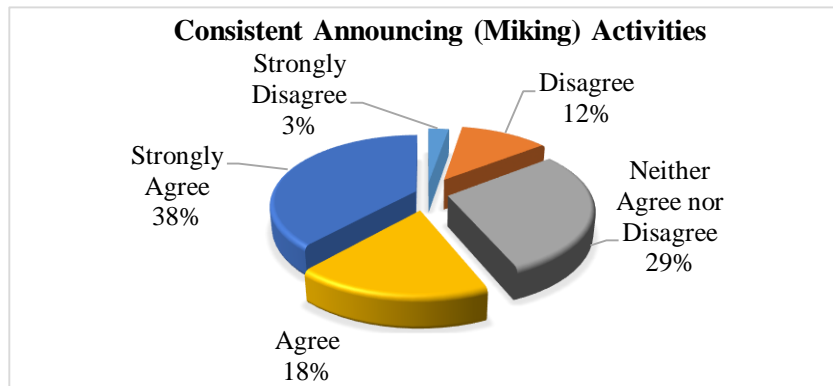


FIGURE 12: ANNOUNCEMENT ACTIVITIES (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

5.12 Role of UNO: Distributing Leaflet

According to the survey, only 16.40% of respondents strongly articulated that distributing leaflets by UNO was an effective method to enhance public awareness amid the pandemic whereas the majority of respondents i.e 28.20% of respondents debated that people do not read the leaflet and it could not be the best method to enhance public awareness at the rural areas in Bangladesh.

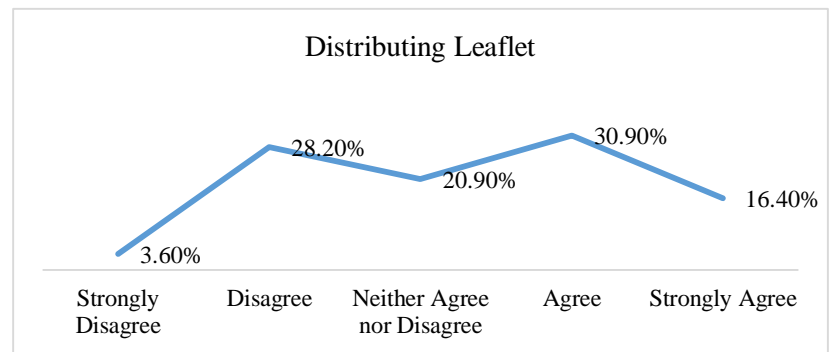


FIGURE 13: DISTRIBUTING LEAFLET (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

As well, the above line chart validated that 20.90% of respondents were neutral about this matter. However, the above statistic demonstrates that since most of the rural people were less knowledgeable, the leaflet could not be an effective mechanism to enhance public awareness amid the pandemic in rural areas in Bangladesh.

5.13 Role of UNO: Implementation of ‘No Mask, No Service’ Policy

The given pie chart exhibit that ‘No Mask, No Service Policy’ was one of the best methods of building public awareness at the field administration levels in Bangladesh. According to the survey, 38% of respondents argued that UNO implemented ‘No Mask, No Service Policy’

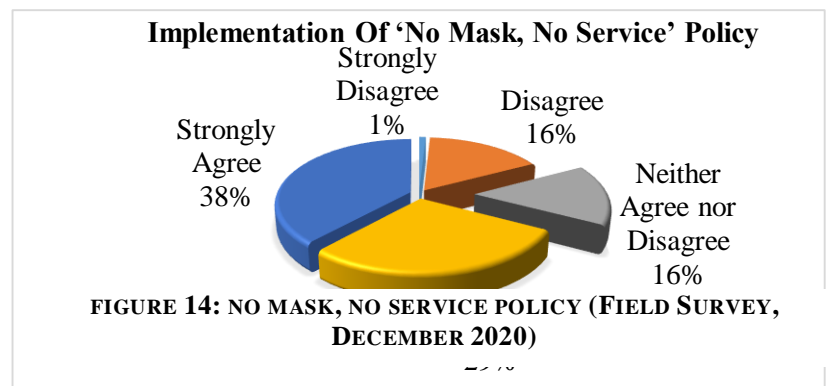


FIGURE 14: NO MASK, NO SERVICE POLICY (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

at the field administration i.e all offices under Upazila Parishad while people taking services from these offices whereas 29% of respondents supported this statement. Conversely, only 16% of respondents disagreed that UNO did implement the ‘No Mask, No Service’ policy at the field or rural level.

5.14 Best Method of Ensuring Public Awareness

According to the survey data, the above figure represents the best method of increasing public awareness of the COVID-19 in rural areas in Bangladesh. Based on the survey, 32.70% of respondents argued that the UNO’s monitoring role was the best method of building and

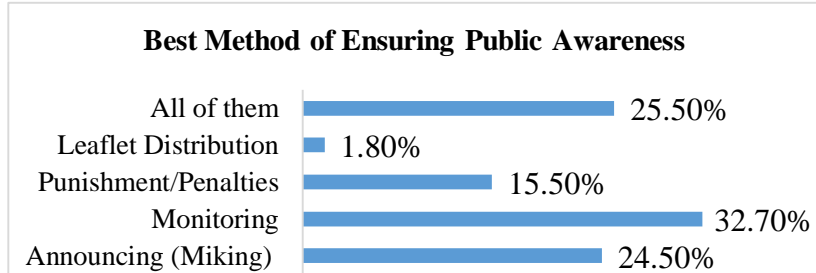


FIGURE 15: BEST METHOD OF ENSURING PUBLIC AWARENESS (FIELD SURVEY, DECEMBER 2020)

enhancing public awareness amid the pandemic whereas 24.50% believed that announcing (Miking) could increase public awareness. Besides, 15.50% of respondents thought that public awareness can be increased by imposing penalties against uneven activities of the general mass.

6. Discussion of the Study

Since the COVID-19 is a disease-causing virus and infects people very quickly, public awareness is the best way to control the outbreak of the pandemic. However, the findings of the study demonstrate that rural people are less concerned about the threat of COVID-19 than the city people due to the practice of superstition, unawareness, poor practical knowledge, and cultural differences. In this context, this study explored the role of field administration/administrator i.e UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) in terms of enhancing the public awareness amid the pandemic. One of the most important findings of the study reveals that more than half of the total study respondent i.e rural people knew about the danger of the COVID-19 but they ignored the regular use of masks and did not maintain physical distance to keep them safe from contamination. These findings validated that rural people were unconscious of the threat of the pandemic. Hassan et al. (2021) clarify a similar argument in their study which determine the public awareness level between the rural and urban areas in Bangladesh. Particularly, Hasan et al. (2021) articulate that recent COVID-19 statistics enhanced the consciousness among the rural people in Bangladesh (Hasan et al., 2021). As well, Bakebillah et al. (2021) also highlighted that there was a great misconception among the community people about the COVID-19 which also supported the findings of the given study whereas it was found that the most rural people believe in superstition (Bakebillah et al., 2021). Correspondingly, the principal findings of the study demonstrate that local government administration, as well as field administrator i.e UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer), played a substantial role to control the outbreak of COVID-19 in rural areas through the enhancement of public awareness. In this regard, Panday (2021) clearly demonstrated the significance of local government i.e field administration in terms of enhancing civic awareness, volunteer supports and implementing vaccination programs amid pandemic which clearly supported the given findings (Panday, 2021). Similarly, Zakir Hossain (2021) elucidated that in terms of ensuring the accountability and transparency of the local representatives as well as providing efficient services to the grassroots people amid the pandemic, field administration played a gigantic role (Zakir Hossain, 2021). However, it has already been perceived that without public awareness, controlling the drastic outbreak of the COVID-19 in rural areas was a very tough

job. As a result, based on the findings, in terms of enhancing public awareness amid the pandemic in rural areas, UNO applied several strategies including announcing activities, distributing leaflets, imposing penalties, and consistent monitoring activities. Banik et al. (2020) supported such findings and clearly demonstrated that to reduce the harshness of the COVID-19 pandemic, an immediate public health response, as well as rapid public awareness at all levels, is very essential (Banik et al., 2020). From the overall discussion, it can be said that in terms of building public awareness among the rural people amid the pandemic, UNO's role was considerably appreciable.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Field administration is the extension of central administration at the field level to implement government programs and policies. UNO is the chief administrative person in the Upazila administration who holds the monitoring and supervision authority as well as scrutinizes all functions under Upazila Parishad. From the 1st wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNO has been playing a praiseworthy role at rural areas in terms of building public awareness. However, the findings of the study represented the existing role of UNO in terms of enhancing rural people awareness through various means including announcing (miking) activities, imposing penalties, distributing awareness-related leaflet, and active monitoring, etc. Conversely, practice of superstition, illiteracy, cultural diversity, unawareness, and rigidity of the rural people posed several barriers in terms of carrying out UNO's role in field administration. Therefore, the UNO's roles in field administration should be regular, enhanced, and strengthened to increase public awareness amid pandemic. However, the following recommendations will be helpful to enhance public awareness amid the COVID-19 pandemic in rural areas in Bangladesh.

- a) Monitoring and observation activities of the Upazila administration on the open market, shops, bus terminal, and other crowded places should be increased on a regular basis in order to ensure physical distance.
- b) Announcing (Miking) activities should be prolonged at regular intervals so that rural people can increase their awareness amid pandemic COVID-19.
- c) UNO should take innovative initiatives to ensure obligatory mask use for all rural people.
- d) The roles of the Upazila COVID-19 Prevention Committee should be strengthened and visualized so that people can be inspired to cope with the new normal by following all health measures.
- e) Service delivery system (in possible cases) of Upazila Parishad should be transformed into an online system to avoid public gatherings.
- f) 'No Mask, No policy' strategy should be implemented strictly at all service receive points so that people can use masks purposefully.
- g) The performance of the volunteer groups should be enhanced so that they can make people aware of COVID-19.
- h) Finally, the cooperative and friendly relationships of the Upazila administration should be improved so that people's interest and esteem increase towards maintaining the health measures amid this pandemic.

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