

## COVID-19 and socioeconomic context in Bangladesh: Discussion from a gendered point of view

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### ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 affected communities and the economy beyond public health. The epidemic is expected to increase global poverty and inequality, making it crucial to study its effects. Several international organisations determined that a "new recession" was underway due to the global pandemic's destructive effects on the financial, social, and personal spheres. Despite their best efforts, many undeveloped nations are fighting the pandemic's aftereffects. Bangladesh is like other nations. Global economic and social changes will lead to new difficulties in the near future. Thus, studying COVID's effects from a variety of perspectives, including gender, is crucial and timely. This paper explores the aftermath of the epidemic, focusing on the plight of women workers. In doing so, it sheds light on a particularly marginalised group, including maids and housekeepers, who have been denied benefits and recognition for their job.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In addition to being a public health emergency, the COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching effects on the basic foundations of communities and the economy. It is projected that global poverty and inequality would rise as a result of the epidemic, making it all the more important to investigate its aftereffects. Several international organisations analysed the current scenario and decided that a "new recession" was in progress because to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak's devastating impact on the global economy. Nonetheless, the global pandemic has impacted not just the economy, but also social and personal spheres, among others. It has had a significant impact on the modern economy, culture, and social activities. Despite their best efforts, many underdeveloped nations are currently battling the pandemic's second and third waves. Bangladesh is comparable to all other nations. The pandemic prevention efforts have had a significant impact on the economic, social, and political conditions of emerging nations like Bangladesh. Changes on a worldwide scale have already occurred in terms of both the economy and society, and such a transition in social structures will bring about other emerging issues in the near future. Therefore, investigating the influence of COVID is a very essential and current topic, and what is even more required is to relate the impact from a wider range of societal viewpoints, such as gender views.

The primary purpose of this study is to provide a synopsis of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Bangladesh's economy and social milieu, and to assess these effects through the lens of gender. This paper is divided up into multiple parts. Following a brief overview of the research technique, the paper moves on to explore the economic impact of the COVID-19 epidemic in Bangladesh and the disproportionate impact on women in the workforce and the household, before wrapping up with a brief discussion and conclusion.

## 2. METHOD

The materials for this article came from secondary resources. This paper was written after the author conducted a comprehensive review of relevant materials, including newspapers, social and mass media, academic articles, and books on pandemic. The paper's discussion includes a compilation of several narrative approaches used by various authors (Rita, 2022; Toyon, 2022; 2021), along with an analysis of the resulting data.

## 3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### 3.1 Economic impact of COVID-19

The spread of COVID-19 has presented a significant concern for Bangladesh. Since the outbreak of the Corona virus, Bangladesh has been in the midst of a health, economic, social, religious, and political catastrophe. Indeed, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the national economy.

Economic conditions in Bangladesh have worsened as a result of the pandemic (Begum et al., 2020). Dairy farmers have appealed for immediate government assistance after being unable to sell milk and other perishable goods during the lock-down. Marginal dairy farmers lost over Tk. 5 million per day as a result of the nationwide shutdown, which affected about 12 to 15 million litres of milk (Begum, Farid, Barua, & Alam, 2020). Because of the lock-down, demand for chicken and eggs has dropped, putting a financial strain on Bangladesh's poultry industry, as noted by these authors (Sattar, et al., 2021; Begum, Farid, Barua, & Alam, 2020). Another report (Jamal, 2020) has detailed how the spread of the COVID-19 virus has caused an estimated 16.4 million people to slip below the poverty line. Of these people, nearly half had a reduced income, and more than 20% had a monthly income of less than Tk. 15,000. In his report, Jamal cites a summary of several recent surveys, one of which was conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, noting that 32% of respondents saw a decrease in income, 57% did not receive a wage, and 11% saw no change in their financial situation as a result of the pandemic (Jamal, 2020). China and other donor countries provide short-term financial and technical support for several of Bangladesh's biggest development projects, including the Padma Bridge, Padma Rail Link, Karnaphuli Road Tunnel, and the Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project. Several of these projects have been put on hold because of the epidemic, however Bangladesh has recently completed the 6.15-kilometer-long Padma multi-purpose bridge (SDR, 2022).

In a separate study (Miah, Islam, Anika, & Swarna, 2020), it was discovered that 95% of respondents lost income, 51% of households had their income drop to nearly nothing, 28% of respondents stopped working altogether, and 3% of households were starving. Corona's effects have been felt most keenly by the working class, while the middle and upper classes have stopped employing maids and nannies in order to keep their social distance. In the wake of the pandemic, almost 80% of day labourers have lost their employment and become unemployed (Jamal, 2020).

While there were 62% of women working in the apparel industry before the COVID-19 epidemic, that number has since dropped to 57% (Ahmed, 2021). Exports from Bangladesh's garment industry dropped by 89% in the first half of April, while the industry as a whole had \$2.3 billion in orders cancelled due to the corona virus epidemic; important customers, especially those in Europe, cancelled \$25 billion in garment orders (Nazir, 2020). The cancellation of garments orders led to the closure of many small merchandising or buying companies, and the loss of employment for many textile workers. Many textile mills, teetering on the brink of insolvency, have had little choice but to lay off their staff as well. Bangladesh's commerce minister was quoted as saying the country had seen cancellations of orders worth \$2.6 billion in the garment industry, with more expected (Begum, Farid, Barua, & Alam, 2020). The closure of these factories has had a direct impact on the lives of 1.96 million individuals (Begum et al., 2020). The garment sector was severely impacted by the first corona wave, but with the aid of government programmes, it has been able to stay operating, albeit not at full capacity (Huq, 2021). There is a pressing need to shield this sector from further pandemic strikes, since it is already reeling from the effects of the current outbreak. Restructuring the labour support in this industry with both financial and policy backing would make life more secure for millions of workers.

Disruption in remittance flows in Bangladesh was the second economic hit after the decline in the garment sector (e.g., Hossain & Mavis, 2022). The tragic epidemic has badly impacted such a blessing sector, which

accounts for 8.8 percent of GDP and is crucial to the country's wider economy, fiscal health, and ability to alleviate poverty (Rashid, 2020). The recent crisis has resulted in the loss of employment for about 11.38 percent of migrant workers worldwide, a number that is anticipated to rise in the coming months (Rashid, 2020).

### *3.2 The gender implications of COVID-19*

Feminist writer (Lewis, 2021) has pointed out that women's experiences can be understood from many various perspectives. It is a reality that men and women react differently to epidemics. Many famous figures, such as William Shakespeare and Isaac Newton, are said to have created their best works during the 1660 plague pandemic in England, and this fact has been remembered throughout history. Historical evidence is brought in support of the claim that males' freedom from domestic responsibilities allows them to pursue creative pursuits; for instance, Shakespeare endured the plague in London while his wife and girls remained in Warwickshire, and Newton was a loner in his day. When men were forced to spend time at home, they often engaged in artistic pursuits like making music, writing, or even going live on Facebook. Women, on the other hand, have very little free time to devote to any interests they may have. Since there is a scarcity of housekeepers because of the epidemic, working women are expected to take on all of the responsibilities of running a household by themselves. Cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly fall under this category. Working women often experience marital strife as a result of the additional load of unpaid labour.

Because of the profound effect the Corona crisis has had on Bangladeshi women and the ways in which it has transformed gender relations in both the workplace and the home, it is possible to gain a new perspective on the country's social and economic dilemma by looking at it through the lens of gender. When various COVID measures were implemented, such as the lockdown, it had an impact on the women of the working poor, particularly on pregnant women and children who were unable to afford the services of midwives, maids, and nannies. Food and nutrition shortages were especially hard on pregnant women and children, raising fears about future maternal and infant death rates. A recent report estimated that 31 million women, out of a total of 44 million employees in the informal sector, are at risk of losing their jobs (Business Insider, March 25, 2020). As a whole, women in Bangladesh have a low rate of involvement in the labour force. The percentage of men working in 2020 was 84%, while the percentage of women working was only 36%. (Mujeri, 2021). Women's rate of employment fell even further as a result of the Corona period's lockdown. Since many orders in the ready-made garment industry have been cancelled, many women have lost their jobs. Industries including textiles, clothing, and footwear, as well as the telecommunications sector, employ a disproportionate amount of women. Since the fortunes of these sectors have been dwindling, it follows that women workers have felt the pinch as well (Suraiya & Saltmarsh, 2020).

According to the report (Ahmed, 2021), the salary gap between men and women in Bangladesh is widening, and as a result, less chances exist for women to work in the official sector. Women make up a larger proportion of the workforce in service sectors like tourism and the travel service business than males do, yet they have seen their incomes plummet as a result of travel restrictions imposed due to the corona virus pandemic. Women have had less options to earn money as a result of school and child care closures. Because of these factors, working women have little choice except to alter their work schedules and decrease their hours or face unemployment. Businesswomen in rural areas have also been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left them without a source of income. Small business owners who lose their jobs often squander their life savings trying to make ends meet, eventually falling into a cycle of debt. Some of the business owners may have to return to being unemployed if things do not improve.

After the pandemic expanded throughout the country, all schools and universities were forced to close, leading to an increase in the rates of both girl dropout and child marriage. Dropout rates among school-aged youngsters, especially among females, are predicted to rise. Many families are unlikely to afford the education of their daughters because of declining incomes and an ever-increasing poverty rate, leading to a rise in the incidence of early marriage among girls. During the course of the epidemic, gender-based violence in Bangladesh has escalated at a shocking rate. Within a sample of 7,000 rural families, the report found that 4,500 women had been assaulted (Sifat, 2020). There has been a rise in domestic violence across the country as a direct result of the economic downturn.

## **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Covid-19 has had serious repercussions on Bangladeshi society and the economy. The United Nations has recently given Bangladesh the green light to be removed off the list of least developed countries by the year 2026. The World Bank is only one of many institutions that has predicted that growth in the economy this

coming year will be below 3%. If this is the case, then it is true that the pandemic will not strike all socioeconomic strata in the same way. This does not mean, however, that the situation of the wealthy and the middle class will improve overnight. Small professional groups across the country, especially those led by women, are suffering from severe financial hardship. We can single out women workers as an example. Corona's influence on the economy of the country, how much individuals of various classes and professions are affected, has begun exposing its figures. However, the impact on women employees, especially those who are maids and housekeepers, may take time to show.

Women, and especially women business owners, face societal and economic challenges during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. If the government's incentive package isn't tailored to women, there's a risk that it will go to men and not the small business owners who are more likely to benefit from it (for example, women who have never taken out a loan before). Many women have lost their jobs since the Corona period; in this case, only the clothing sector is mentioned in the media, but there is little coverage of the large number of women who have lost their jobs in the vast informal sector; for instance, many women work in agriculture, but the pandemic has also negatively impacted them.

Women in the workforce have, perhaps, been given a unique form of vulnerability. When the pandemic hit, many women in patriarchal societies like Bangladesh lost their chance to join the workforce. Inadequate facilities likely force many women back inside their homes because they have no idea if they will be able to return to their previous careers. There is a lot of labour for women to perform throughout the corona period, and it's not just in the home and in the workplace. Women are expected to fulfil a wide range of roles, from service workers to housekeepers. Although the lockdown has been lifted, many women are still unable to go to work since essential services, such as day care centres, remain closed. Lifestyle monotony and sense of loss are inevitable for women. While social isolation and isolation may be necessary in the short-term, they have long-term psychological consequences. As a result of social alienation and dehumanisation, people experience feelings of despair, dread, panic, resentment, rage, isolation, loneliness, neglect, humiliation, and futility. This is a major factor in why women are subjected to violence. During COVID-19, violence against women skyrocketed.

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