

Assessing the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women in Bangladesh

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List of Acronyms

<i>ADB</i>	<i>Asian Development Bank</i>
<i>BIGD</i>	<i>BRAC Institute of Governance and Development</i>
<i>BMP</i>	<i>Bangladesh Mahila Parishad</i>
<i>CHT</i>	<i>Chittagong Hill Tracts</i>
<i>CMSMEs</i>	<i>Cottage, Micro, Small and Medium-Sized enterprises</i>
<i>CPD</i>	<i>Centre for Policy Dialogue</i>
<i>FGDs</i>	<i>Focused Group Discussions</i>
<i>GDP</i>	<i>Gross Domestic Product</i>
<i>IFAD</i>	<i>International Fund for Agricultural Development</i>
<i>IPV</i>	<i>Inactivated polio vaccine</i>
<i>MCH</i>	<i>Maternal and Child Health</i>
<i>MJF</i>	<i>Manusher Jonno Foundation</i>
<i>NGO</i>	<i>Non-Governmental Organization</i>
<i>PPRC</i>	<i>Power and Participation Research Centre</i>
<i>SANEM</i>	<i>South Asian Network on Economic Modeling</i>
<i>SDG</i>	<i>Sustainable Development Goal</i>
<i>SMEs</i>	<i>Small & Medium Enterprises</i>
<i>UN</i>	<i>United Nations</i>
<i>UNFPA</i>	<i>United Nations Population Fund</i>
<i>UNICEF</i>	<i>United Nations Children's Fund</i>
<i>VAW</i>	<i>Violence Against Women</i>
<i>WHO</i>	<i>World Health Organization</i>

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated socio-economic inequality globally, particularly in developing countries. Considering the disproportionate health, social, and economic dangers that women face, the UN Secretary-General issued a warning that the progress made towards gender equality may be undone. Women already faced profound disparities in gender in several areas before the pandemic. It is crucial to analyse gender-disaggregated data, adopt gender-driven policies, prioritise women's rights, empower women's agencies, and develop more resilient societies globally to address these concerns.

This qualitative study examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in Bangladesh and their coping mechanisms. This study explores COVID-19's effects on women in an array of scenarios, including child marriage, violence against women, employment, education, and health. The findings indicate that women experienced a significant loss of income and occupation during lockdowns, leading to food scarcity and various challenges. While women employed survival strategies such as taking loans and reducing expenses, their overall livelihoods became increasingly vulnerable. By conducting a total of seven FGDs (Rajshahi, Rangpur, Barisal, Chattogram, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Sylhet) over 39 districts, primary data collection and analysis have been done.

These FGDs produced notable outcomes. Bangladesh has developed some initiatives, both small and large, to deal with the pandemic. For instance, prejudice against women in the workplace, marital strife after divorce, early marriage, poor treatment in the healthcare sector, victims of clerical sexual assault, and the "curse of the dowry." Another example is the sharp decline in girls' school enrollment due to the pandemic. One more example is misinterpreting a religious phrase. Some recommendations can be suggested because of these findings as, financial support for postsecondary education, acknowledging the contribution of women's proper implementation of law and digitalization of documents, changing the mentality of the parents and proper upbringing of children, recovery from the pandemic and the basic need for gipsy people, need of appropriate religious education, consciousness about reproductive health and nutrition, proper gender budgeting for reducing violence, changing mentality of women towards women empowerment, creating positive mindset about the transgender community, tarnishing indigenous people's hardship in basic need.

In Bangladesh, the COVID-19 epidemic has disproportionately harmed women and girls, having a detrimental impact on their social, economic, and health conditions. Existing response strategies lack comprehensive measures to address gender-specific risks. To protect women's rights and promote their empowerment, Bangladesh should prioritize gender-targeted policies, including job creation, improving data collection, access to information, protection against violence towards women, and support for childcare and mental health. To lessen the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on women's employment, income, and safety, immediate action is required by the government.

1. Introduction

The pandemic has caused significant socio-economic inequality all over the world, especially in developing countries. The UN Secretary-General stated that the pandemic could reverse the limited but crucial progress toward gender equality and women's rights over time. Data from the initial stages of the pandemic shows men facing a higher mortality rate because of the virus while women had a larger societal and economic burden. However, in the pre-COVID situation, women were already experiencing a significant level of gender inequality in the fields of finances, education, employment, unpaid work, and gender-based violence. As the COVID-19-induced pandemic affected everyone globally, women and girls are impacted and thus suffer from disproportionate health, social and economic risks. Such disproportionate effects arise due to entrenched inequalities, societal norms, and unequal power relations. Therefore, to understand the gender-differentiated impact of the COVID-19-induced pandemic, proper analysis of gender-disaggregated data is essential for designing policy responses that smoothen the condition for women, strengthen women agencies, and prioritise gender equality as their core objective. Gender-driven policies are important to implement to rectify long-standing inequality and construct more resilient societies around the world.

Consequently, this study intends to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in Bangladesh and their coping strategies to survive the pandemic situation. The study adopted a qualitative research design in which seven divisions of Bangladesh were chosen purposively for the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The results showed that the respondents were massively affected by to loss of income and occupation during the period of the lockdown. Besides, most people lost their source of earning entirely in this pandemic which bound them to starvation at mealtime along with several dynamic complications. Findings also revealed that they followed some survival strategies such as taking loans, reducing expenses, consuming less food, selling land, jewellery, relatives and neighbour support, and government relief. Although these strategies somewhat supported them in their struggle with the situation, their livelihood features became fragile immensely.

2. Literature review

Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the biggest disruption to Bangladesh's education system ever, affecting around 38 million students. Since March 17, 2020, Bangladesh has undergone the closure of all national schools and colleges. (Rahman & Sharma, 2021). By closing several institutions and temporarily limiting the majority of kids out of school, COVID-19 had an adverse impact on the global education sector. To counteract the COVID-19 pandemic, most nations have temporarily closed their educational institutions. About 40 million students in Bangladesh have temporarily stopped going to school until the pandemic. In addition to this common interruption, out-of-school learning deficit differs according to factors like socioeconomic level, access to technology, parental ability, and other factors. Many nations were reusing satellite television or online platforms to give education throughout the pandemic; however, it was inadequate to provide for the whole nation. Although industrialized nations (first and second world) were making progress with online education, the remainder were still having troubles (third-world countries) (Emon, Alif, & Islam, 2020).

Although the international community has pledged to end child marriage by 2030 by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.3, it currently appears improbably concerned with the impact of COVID-19. According to UNICEF, COVID-19 has increased the risk of child marriage by 10 million. Scientists presume that even though 25 million child marriages were prevented in the preceding ten years, minor girls are still in danger and it will be a serious obstacle to the achievement of the SDGs. School dropout rates and the risk of girls becoming child brides have increased worldwide, including in Bangladesh, due to the pandemic's detrimental consequences on poverty, famine, access to education, and unemployment. Since the pandemic started, millions of teenagers have missed school. According to the literature, most women get married off after finishing school, whereas boys start working to help support their families. This ultimately blocks the road of opportunity and leads to fewer employment options, unstable economic conditions, long-term independence, and the sustained development of the youth labour force. After 543 days of closure of academic institutions in Bangladesh, the frequency of vacant classroom seats indicated growing concern about dropouts, particularly in schools and colleges. (Hussain, 2021).

Health

Regarding overall coronavirus infections, Bangladesh was one of the worst-affected nations. The COVID-19 epidemic has adversely impacted the social, economic, and health sectors of the nation, impeding GDP growth and causing widespread poverty, inequality, and unemployment to soar (Kumar & Pinky, 2021).

Three key areas of work—productive, reproductive, and societal work—showcased women's triple burden. Disease outbreaks, natural events, and other catastrophes disproportionately add to women's responsibilities and make it harder for them to manage their time. COVID-19 imposed heavy, dangerous, and gender-specific burdens. Understanding how COVID-19 home confinement affected men and women differently is essential to comprehend the disease's overall effects. Families spent more time at home during the lockdown, which made women's already heavy loads even heavier and increased their dread of violent domestic abusers. Women's triple burdens during COVID-19 in three Asian nations were examined in a recent study. Home confinement may result in additional household chores, such as taking care of elderly family members, which may affect women more than males. This prospective increase in duties during the pandemic, together with other employment, may have caused women's already poor mental health worse. According to several research, women are more likely than men to experience sleep disturbances. Recent COVID-19 research on Bangladeshi citizens also revealed a greater frequency of general anxiety disorder among women (Ara, et al., 2020).

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic, mental health issues rapidly surged throughout the world. Early on in the outbreak, the Bangladeshi government enacted lockdown and quarantine measures to stop the virus's spread, which had an impact on people's everyday health and lives. In Bangladesh, the COVID-19 pandemic also had repercussions on people's access to healthcare, their economic situation, and other aspects of their way of life (Das, et al., 2021). In population-based research, it has been discovered that women, married people, the jobless, and members of the business community had the lowest mental health among Bangladeshi adults throughout the pandemic (Ali, et al., 2020).

Employment

Women across the nation have been experiencing an unheard-of unemployment problem because of the COVID-19 epidemic. The livelihood and income of the female population were more burdened consequently. In fields like the garment industry, the service sector, the lodging industry, SMEs, and other informal sectors—where employment is more likely to be held by women, the pandemic had a notably detrimental effect. SMEs contribute about 25 percent of the nation's GDP, which is a substantial contribution to the economy. SMEs were adversely affected by COVID-19, much like all other economic sectors. According to a poll by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), roughly 41 percent of female-led businesses had to shut down, 7 percent of female-led SMEs had to reduce the scale of their operations, and 3 percent of businesses relocated to a smaller location than previously. In addition, as the epidemic commenced, many women who worked in SME sectors lost their employment.¹

According to a UN Women study, women were more likely than men to have seen a decline in their income from jobs since the spread of COVID-19 in Bangladesh. The study also shows that women were more likely than males to have seen a decline in their income from farming and fishing after the distribution of COVID-19. There could be because of several causes. Firstly, the pandemic had a greater impact on jobs like housekeeping since houses with older members may be less likely to hire any maids until things return to normal. Second, compared to men, women have a worse likelihood of finding another work should they become jobless in industries like transportation, wholesale, and retail commerce. This was partially shown by the second poll that PPRC and BIGD performed. According to the poll, among female housemaids, 42 percent remained in their current jobs, 5 percent changed jobs, and the remaining 28 percent lost their jobs in June and July 2020.²

Child Marriage

Child marriage is an old tradition that has become less popular with time. In recent years, before the covid period, the young population of women who are married off as a child has decreased by 15 percent globally. This was notable progress and such achievement is under great threat, as the rate of child marriage is again rising due to the covid 19 pandemic. The risk of child marriage spikes due to several reasons such as economic shocks, closure of educational institutions, and interruption of services. Economic insecurity is a major reason for a rise in child marriage during the pandemic, parents marry their daughters off to relieve themselves from financial pressure. On the other hand, education is a protective factor against early marriage, and the closure of schools and colleges led guardians to push their girls toward marriage (UNICEF, 2021).

Bangladesh is listed among the top 10 countries with the highest rate of child marriages, according to the report published by the UN, the country has a 51 percent of the child marriage rate. To note, marrying girls before 18 and boys before 21 is stated unlawful in the country. Moreover, according to the report by the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) which surveyed 21 districts of Bangladesh at least 13,886 girls were married off before age between April to October of 2020. From them, 48 percent of the girls who were victims of child

¹<https://cgs-bd.com/article/9033/COVID-19-Impacts-on-Female-Employment-in-Bangladesh--An-Impediment-to-Economic-Development>

²<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/the-coronavirus-pandemic-hits-female-workers-the-worst-1602947436>

marriage were between 13 and 15 years old. Furthermore, according to the reports by UNICEF, the country has a record of 38 million child brides (Anadolu Agency, 2021).

Violence Against Women

The human rights of women are breached when they are subjected to violence, notably sexual and intimate partner violence. According to estimates from the WHO, around one in three (or 30 percent) of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence at some point in their lives. Nearly most of this violence happens between intimate partners. Approximately a third (27 percent) of women aged 15 to 49 who have been in a relationship worldwide contended to have encountered some kind of physical or sexual abusive treatment of their intimate partner.³ Records from helplines, police departments, and other service providers across several COVID-19-affected nations show a spike in the number of domestic violence incidents that have been reported, particularly child abuse and intimate partner violence against women (World Health Organisation, 2020).

Moreover, upon taking into consideration the effects of different marital types, the linked factors of IPV for groups of housewives or unemployed women are the husband's age, the husband's education level, monthly family income, and family income loss during the pandemic. For working women, the linked determinants of IPV are the kind of marriage, the age of the spouse, and a moderate to significant decrease in family income due to the pandemic. Therefore, it was revealed that the primary predictor of intimate partner violence across all groups was the pandemic-induced economic downturns (family income reduction throughout the pandemic) (Rayhan & Akter, 2021). In April 2020, at least 4,249 women and 456 children were victims of domestic violence in 27 of Bangladesh's 64 districts, according to a survey by the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), a local human rights organization. Among these victims, 1,672 women and 424 children experienced abuse for the first time in their lives (Islam, 2020).

Unpaid Care Work

Women in Bangladesh were expected to do unpaid care work due to the social norms, even before the pandemic the scenario was the same. Due to social and cultural norms, women are somewhat obligated to cook meals, clean, fetch water, gather wood and take care of children and the elderly. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the amount of unpaid working hours doing domestic chores for women has increased significantly. Due to the lockdown, everyone was stuck in their home, so the women in the households had more people to look after, even more, if someone in the household was sick. Due to COVID-19, hygiene became a priority, so women also had more workload as they had to fetch water and clean (Sarker, 2020; 2020). Different surveys and studies report that most women in Bangladesh had to do additional domestic work after the COVID-19 outbreak and were under mental stress and anxiety caused due to increased work pressure. A study done by Oxfam International found that 43 percent of the 3,558 women surveyed in five countries reported the extra work harming women's mental health and a survey done by BRAC in 2020 also had similar findings (Jahan, 2020; Sarker,2020).

³*Violence against women.* (2021b, March 9). World Health Organisation. Retrieved 28 June 2022, from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>

Every household is different, there were some households where men helped in domestic work however most women reported that the effect of the pandemic on them and the men in their household was disproportionate. Women with formal jobs in some cases were compelled to prioritise their domestic work. These led to dealing with additional stress for women as they were concerned about their productivity falling (Jahan, 2020). Moreover, female-headed households and single mothers (where responsible or adult males are absent) had to spend more time doing unpaid care work (Sarker, 2020). To end the discrimination policies and programs should focus on working with both men and women and men must be sensitized about helping and doing unpaid care work (2020).

3. Methodology

Considering the given objectives of this study, the research team has primarily followed mixed methodologies in presenting the deliverables. The methodology is based on two significant tasks in general:

- (i) Primary Analysis: primary data collection and analysis by conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for the study.
- (ii) Secondary Analysis: rigorous desk research of all relevant policy documents, literature, and secondary data

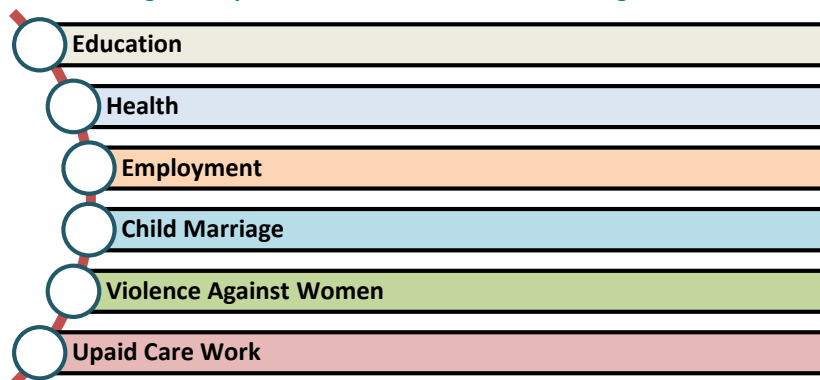
3.1. Primary Analysis

The study team will use a qualitative method to gather primary data. Qualitative data, which are anticipated to provide in-depth information on social dimensions and traits, can be used to address social issues that are largely underrepresented in quantitative data.

3.1.1 Focus Group Discussion

As part of the qualitative data, the team will conduct several Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The FGDs will be helpful for an in-depth understanding of the current situation of women, the impact of COVID-19 on women, and identifying gaps in policies regarding women. For this particular study, the research team will carry out a total of seven FGDs. During the FGD, the research team will follow various channels to identify the impact of COVID-19 on women (Figure 1). The details of the participants of FGDs are depicted in Table 1.

Figure 1 Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on women through various channels



Source: Authors' compilation

Table 1 Participation details of the FGDs

Data collection tool	Number of divisions and districts	Description of the participants	Number of respondents	Age of the respondents
Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guideline	FGD1: Rajshahi Total Districts: 4	Councillor, housewives, a representative from the transgender community, farmers, housemaids and a representative from Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Dhaka Branch)	There were 12 respondents during the FGD	15 to 55
	FGD2: Rangpur Total Districts: 5	Tribal women, housewives, working women, woman journalists, a woman editor and media representative from Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, general secretary of the Rangpur branch of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, councillor, day labourer and a representative from Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Dhaka Branch)	There were 12 respondents during the FGD	15 to 55
	FGD3: Barisal Total Districts: 9	Students, working women, councillors, a representative from the local community, women entrepreneurs, tribal woman farmers, a representative from the Vedic community and a representative from Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Dhaka Branch)	There were 12 respondents during the FGD	15 to 55
	FGD4: Chattogram Total Districts: 4	President of Patia Upazila and District member of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, women entrepreneurs, students, member of Chattogram branch of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, housemaid and a representative from Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Dhaka Branch)	There were 12 respondents during the FGD	15 to 55
	FGD5: Dhaka Division Total Districts: 9	Lawyers, teachers, housemaids, women farmers, day labourers, a representative from the transgender community, a representative from the local community, especially able women and a representative from Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Dhaka Branch)	There were 15 respondents during the FGD	15 to 55
	FGD6: Mymensingh Total Districts: 4	A representative from the transgender community, housewives, a sportswoman, a representative from the Dalit community and a representative from Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Dhaka Branch)	There were 12 respondents during the FGD	15 to 55
	FGD7: Sylhet Total Districts: 4	A seamstress, housewives, students, a representative from the local community and a representative from Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (Dhaka Branch)	There were 10 respondents during the FGD	15 to 55

Source: Authors' Compilation

Data management and analysis

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a useful method for bringing together individuals with comparable backgrounds or experiences to talk about a particular topic of interest. A moderator (or group facilitator) leads the participants' group, introducing discussion topics and assisting the group in having a dynamic, organic conversation among themselves.⁴ A senior research associate with training and expertise in moderating focus group discussions

⁴ <https://odi.org/en/publications/research-tools-focus-group-discussion/>

in various contexts led all the FGDs. Two research associates who were both proficient in transcription audio-recorded the FGDs and translated the transcriptions into the local tongue. Then, for analysis, transcripts were translated into both Bangla and English. Computers that were password-protected and encrypted were used to store data electronically.

Ethical considerations

All participants were advised of their ability to withdraw at any moment or to decline to answer any questions, and participation was completely optional. As was appropriate in a setting with low literacy rates, verbal consent was sought from each participant, and full secrecy was promised. Women were driven by vehicles belonging to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad to the study location. The participants received refreshments but were not paid for their participation. Prior to the start of the FGD, the officials from Bangladesh Mahila Parishad were consulted about and approved the research.

3.2 Secondary Analysis

Secondary analysis is a type of research that employs previously gathered secondary data to carry out a new study. Researchers may use quantitative or qualitative data that was obtained or produced for various purposes by another research team or agency and conduct fresh analyses of it.

3.2.1 Desk Review

Desk research entails reviewing pertinent documents and current works on the subject, looking through and analysing secondary data, and spotting any policy gaps between Bangladesh and the current global best practices. For desk review, the research team will concentrate on the following documents:

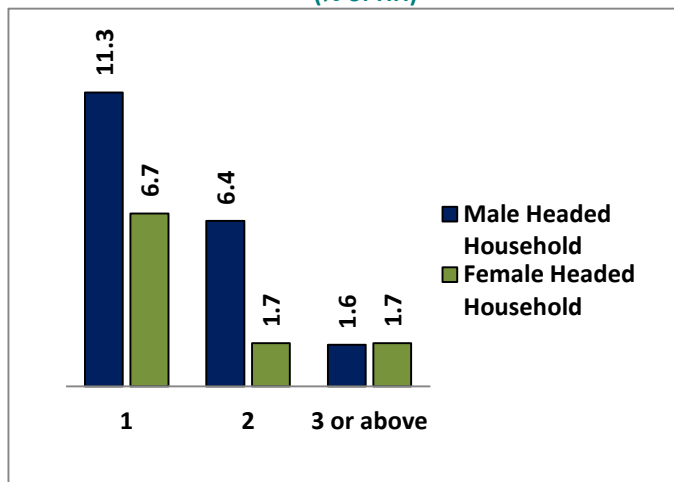
- *Documents of UN Women*
- *Documents of UNICEF*
- *Documents of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad*
- *Documents of Manusher Jonno Foundation*
- *Surveys of SANEM*
- *8th Five-Year Plan*
- *Bangladesh Second Perspective Plan 2021-2041*
- *Literature reflecting the current situation of women*
- *Literature regarding the impact of COVID-19 on women*

4. Appraising the impact of COVID-19 on women

4.1 Education

Participation in Education of New Poor Households

Figure 2 Number of students participating in TV/online classes (% of HH)



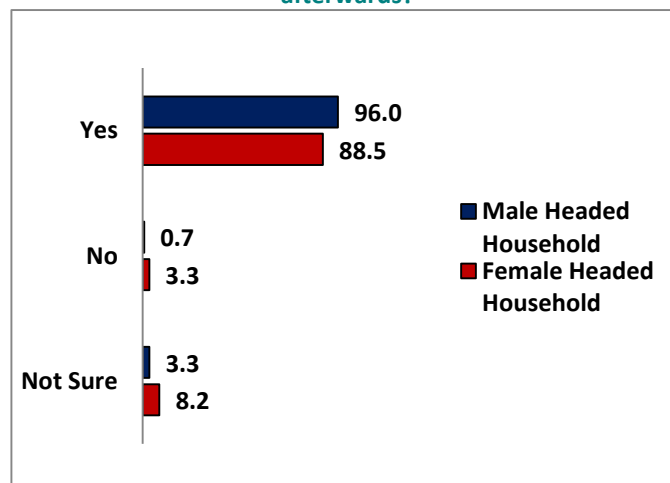
Source: SANEM Household Survey 2020

COVID-19 has dismantled economies across the world and like any critical sector, education has been hit hard. The government is making some swift decisions by introducing online classes. Therefore, this is an initiative that requires urgent attention, and collective action to execute is confirmed by the above analysis. The observation, presented in Figure 2, unveils that in male-headed households 1&2 student participating in online classes are 11.3 percent and 6.4 percent respectively exactly when those percentages for the female-headed household are lower. So, the pre-pandemic female education difficulties are getting more pathways through the ongoing pandemic as they are more sensitive to the changes created by the crisis.

Perception about going back to school

School closures in Bangladesh started on March 17, 2020, and have continued into 2021, affecting millions of students and teachers. However, within a couple of months of school closing, it was clear that student learning, especially among females, was in danger. The question is also clarified through the analysis which is depicted in Figure 3, by asking them about the student's continuation afterwards. From observation, it is seen that 0.7 percent of students from male-headed households will not continue their studies while it is true for 3.3 percent of students from female-headed households. The category which captures the uncertain group also shows the same results.

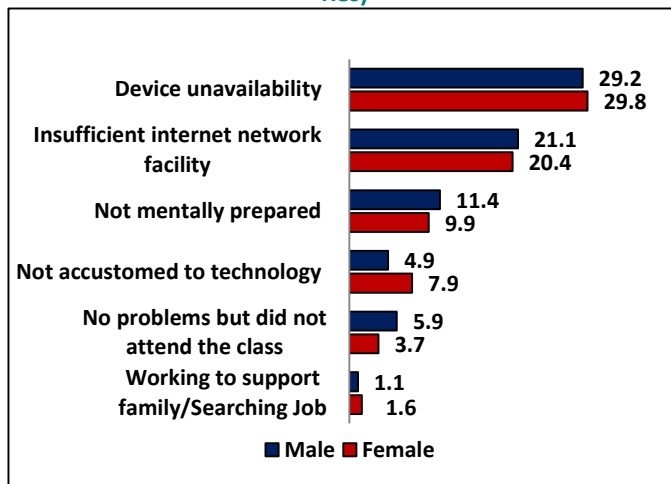
Figure 3 Will all of the students continue their studies afterwards?



Source: SANEM Household Survey 2020

Problems faced during online class participation

Figure 4 Problem faced in online class participation (% of Res)



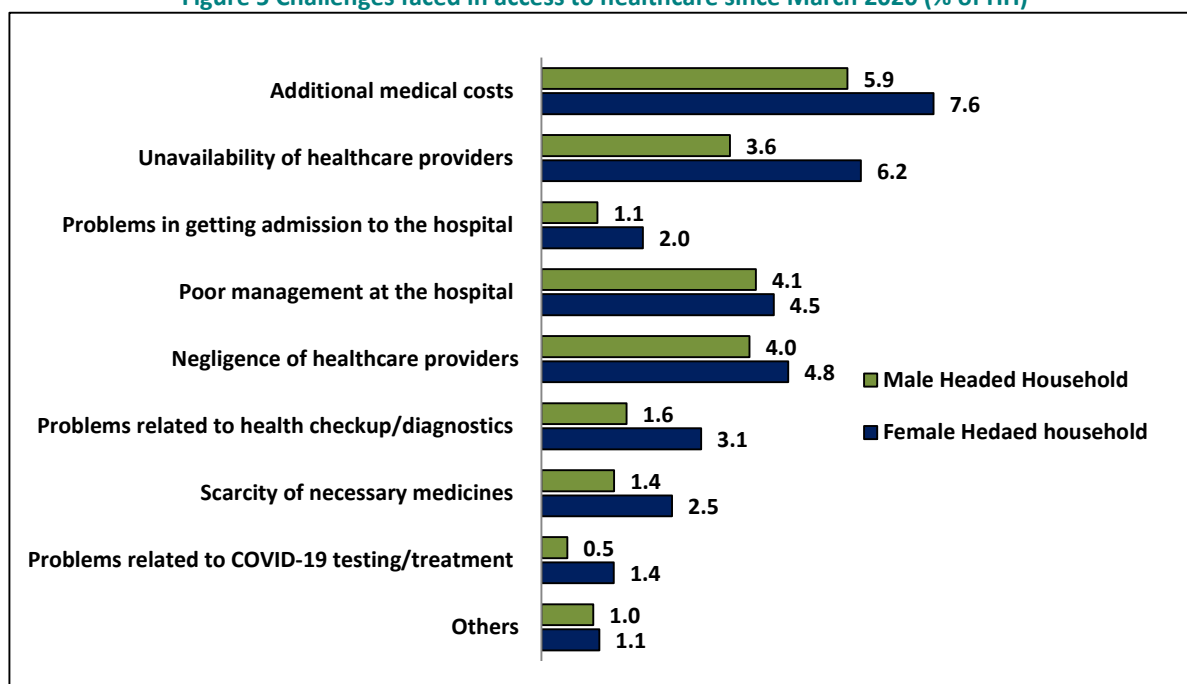
Source: SANEM-ActionAid Survey 2020

The government was taking initiatives to include all the students in the online education system. Although it was quite challenging for all the students to attend online classes because of device unavailability, insufficient network problems, some were not mentally prepared some students were not accustomed to the technology, etc. From Figure 4 we noticed that almost 29.2% of male students did not have a proper device to attend online classes whereas 29.8% of female students had device unavailability. Female students are more ignorant about using technology than male students. In the above figure, 7.9 percent of female students were not accustomed to technology while 4.9 percent were male students which is much lower. Additionally, female students (1.6 percent) were working more to support their families than male students (1.1 percent) during this pandemic. Some students revealed that they did not have any problems but they were not interested in attending online classes and surprisingly this percentage is higher for the male students than the female students.

4.2 Health

Bangladesh is one of the worst-hit countries in South Asia for the outbreak because of its limitation to well-equipped hospitals, inadequate testing facilities, lack of awareness, improper knowledge, attitude to and practice of rules, poverty, and precarious employment. Inadequate healthcare service is creating many hindrances for both male and female-headed households. In the analysis, it is detected that the intensity of facing obstacles for attaining health care service is always higher for female-headed households. Such as in the criteria of unavailability of healthcare providers, 6.2 percent of respondents encounter it who belong to the female-headed household while the percentage of respondents from male-headed households is 3.6 percent only. Similar incidents are visible for the additional medical costs, problems getting admission to the hospital, negligence in healthcare providers, and scarcity of necessary medicines concerns.

Figure 5 Challenges faced in access to healthcare since March 2020 (% of HH)



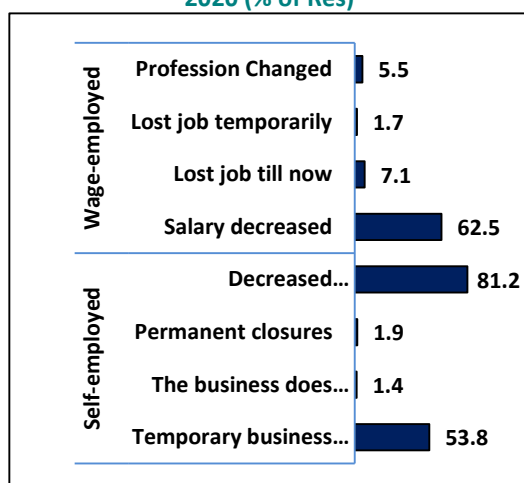
Source: SANEM Household Survey 2018 & 2020

On the other side, Bangladesh gathered successful stories in the case of child and maternity health care which can be reversed due to the aftermath of COVID-19. It can lead to a 50 percent plummet in maternal and child health (MCH) service uptake nationwide (UNICEF, 2021a). Another study unwraps that a 45 percent reduction in MCH coverage for 6 months could result in 30 percent additional maternal deaths (Robertson et al., 2020).

4.3 Employment

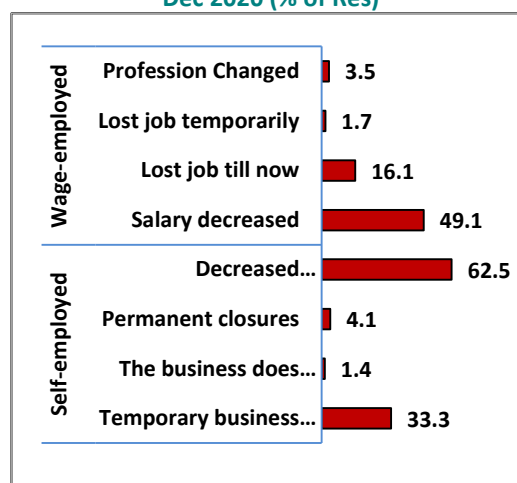
Due to the sharp fall in labour demand, the labour market was among the most struggling sectors during the earliest part of the ongoing pandemic (March-December, 2020). The nature of the economic shock associated with COVID-19 is highly unusual. It created great reparation for the existing labour force, both for the self-employed and wage employed. Major predicaments are highlighted in Figures 6 & 7 across the wage-employed and self-employed. For males, a reduction in salary for the wage employed (62.5 percent) and profit for the self-employed (81.2 percent) can be observed. Figure 7 shows a similar declining trend for females. Salary for the wage employed and profit for the self-employed females decreased by 49.1 percent and 62.5 percent respectively. Another crucial point is job loss where the rate of job loss for female employees is more than double compared to the male employees. Temporary business closure is another ramification of the pandemic which has hurt self-employed males more than female business holders.

Figure 6 Problem faced by males during March-Dec 2020 (% of Res)



Source: SANEM Employment Survey 2021

Figure 7 Problem faced by females during March-Dec 2020 (% of Res)



Source: SANEM Employment Survey 2021

Occupation-wise Vulnerability

COVID-19 has created tremendous impacts on livelihood, unemployment, and poverty among marginal people in both urban and rural areas throughout the country. The economic growth without inclusiveness in the last few decades could not save them from the vulnerability that arises due to the ongoing pandemic. Table 2 shows vulnerability and non-vulnerability across various occupations. Based on the analysis, it can be seen that the existence of female employment has a positive correlation with vulnerability. For instance, elementary occupation holders have been facing vulnerability at a significant level while this sector contains 47.21% female participation.

Table 2 Occupation-wise Vulnerability

Occupation Category	Non-vulnerable	Vulnerable	Percentage of female employed (%)
Business owners, managers	99.42	0.58	0.11
Professionals	99.78	0.22	0.54
Technicians and Associates	93.32	6.68	8.87
Clerks	92.66	7.34	0.27
Service workers	83.55	16.46	4.22
Skilled agriculture	67.21	32.79	22.23
Craft and related trades	79.33	20.67	10.28
Plant and Machine operators	78.39	21.6	2.06
Elementary Occupation	64.84	35.16	47.21
Small and Medium Business owners	82.18	17.82	4.0

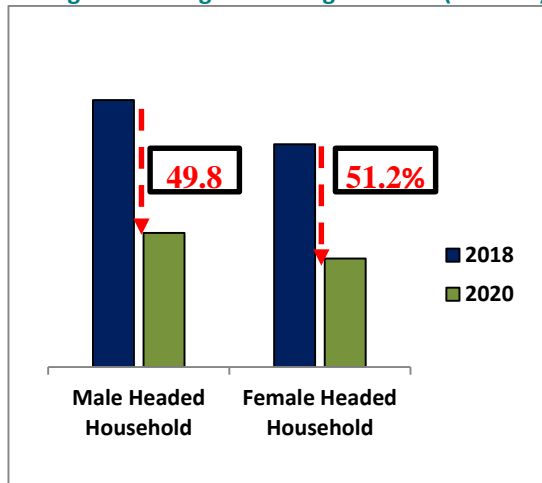
Source: Authors' calculation from Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2016

Household Expenditure & Poverty

Households have been facing economic hardship from the outbreak of the pandemic as it has left many people jobless, especially those belonging to low-income communities and informal economies. The trend in female-headed household income, as presented in Figure-3, reflects that during the time 2018 -2020, there has been a decrease by the amount of 51.2 percent while for the male-headed household is 49.8 percent. Likewise, according to the average expenditure pattern, depicted in Figure-4, female-headed household shows a larger

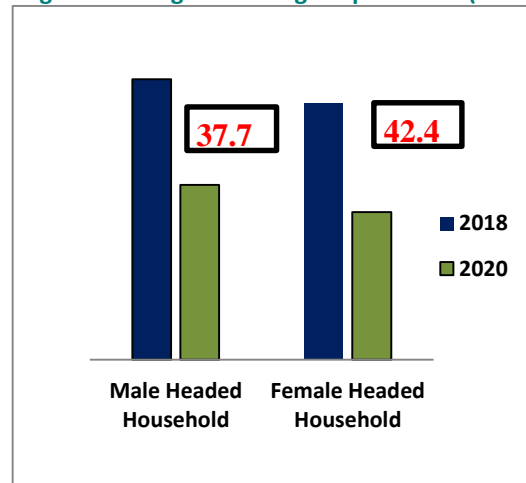
percentage decrease (42.4 percent) than male-headed households (37.7 percent). Both scenarios (Figure 8&9) indicate an undesirable condition of the female-headed household as it has come out as a highly affected household.

Figure 8 Change in Average Income (% of HH)



Source: SANEM Household Survey 2018 & 2020

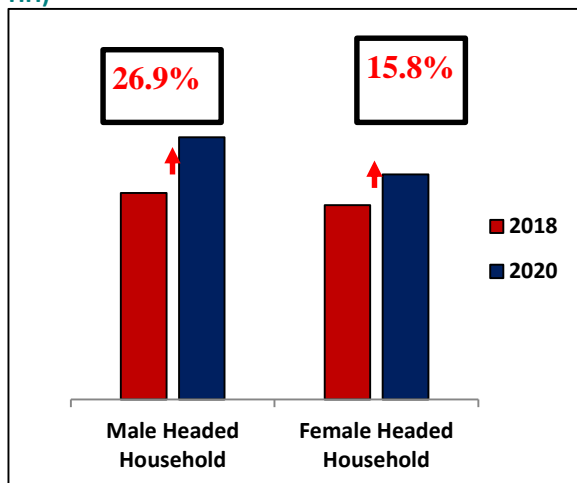
Figure 9 Change in Average Expenditure (% of HH)



Source: SANEM Household Survey 2018 & 2020

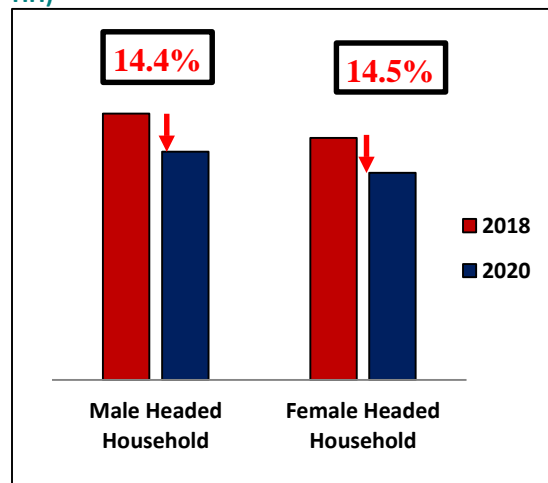
The surge in average food expenditure and the reduction in non-food expenditure exhibit the household strategy to cope with the economic adversity induced due to pandemics. Male-headed household's average food expenditure reflected in Figure 10, increased by 26.9 percent while female-headed household average expenditure shows a lower association with an increment by the amount of 15.8 percent. In the case of non-food expenditure, depicted in Figure 11, it can be observed that the reduction in expenditure for the male and female-headed households is identical.

Figure 10 Change in Average Food Expenditure (% HH)



Source: SANEM Household Survey 2018 & 2020

Figure 11 Change in Average Non-food Expenditure (% HH)



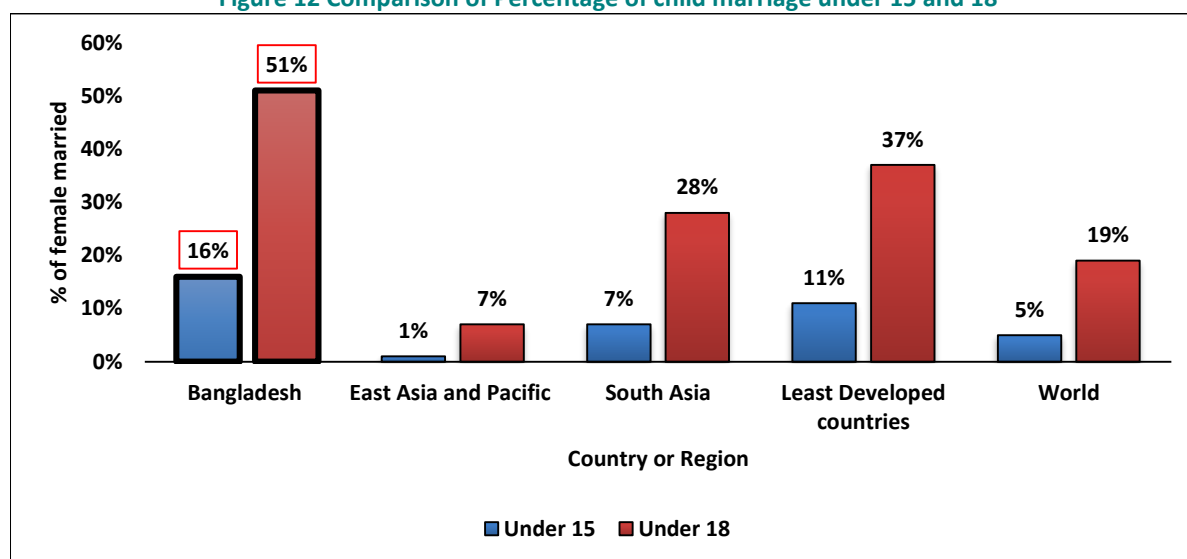
Source: SANEM Household Survey 2018 & 2020

4.4 Child Marriage

When analyzing the developing countries and their existing phenomenon of child marriage, it can be said that the traditional patterns of early marriage for women are changing as women are marrying at later ages at first marriage. However, the age at which women marry continues to vary widely both across the countries and within the countries (Singh & Samara, 1996). The issue of child marriage is now firmly considered on the global development agenda since it is included in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.3. Hence, the primary aim of the SGD is to eliminate the practice by 2030 (UNICEF, 2020). In recent years, the COVID-19-induced pandemic has accelerated the rate of child marriages in Bangladesh, raising concerns that Bangladesh might not meet its goal of child marriage elimination anytime soon.

Experts fear those child marriages may force girls to abandon schools during the pandemic and urge immediate actions including offering financial measures, to aid in stopping the practice. Reports suggest that Bangladesh is among the top 10 countries in the world for child marriage, according to the UN report, the country has a 51 percent child marriage rate. To note, under Bangladesh's law, "The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017" marriage before 18 for girls and 21 for boys is unlawful. From the figure, it can be inferred that the child marriage rate in Bangladesh is higher for both the average rate of females getting married under the age of 15 and 18 in different regions and the global average.

Figure 12 Comparison of Percentage of child marriage under 15 and 18



Source: Compiled from UNICEF, 2021

Accordance to the analysis released by UNICEF, it is expected that 10 million additional child marriages may occur in Bangladesh before 2030. Interestingly, around 650 million girls and women have married in childhood with half of these cases occurring in Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. During the pandemic, due to school closures, economic stress, pregnancy, service disruptions, and parental deaths are putting these most vulnerable girls at the risk of child marriage as the families seek to ease their financial burdens. The pandemic resulted in travel restrictions and physical distancing making it difficult for girls to access social services, health care and community support that protect them from child marriage, sudden and unwanted pregnancy, and gender-based violence (UNICEF, 2021).

New campaigns have been launched over time to prevent child marriage. An initiative such as “Actions to Prevent Child Marriage in Bangladesh” is designed to support the female population and their best interests to help advance the objectives of Bangladesh's 10-year National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage for the period 2018 to 2030. Such campaigns also aim to generate awareness about the current law in Bangladesh that strictly prohibits child marriage and provide general people with the proper mechanism of reporting such incidents in the community (Dhaka Tribune, 2021). As the rate of early or child marriage has spiked during the pandemic, government, NGOs, and society, in general, should all work together and engage in various initiatives to put an end to this menace.

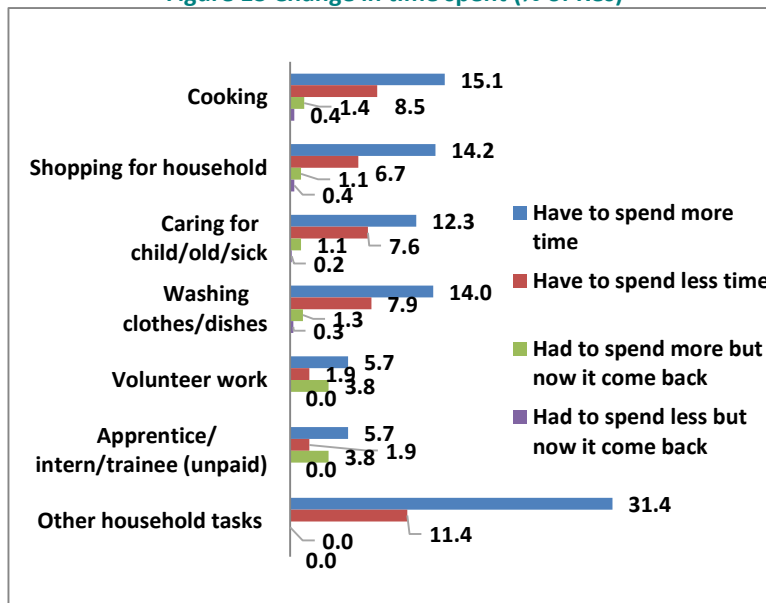
4.5 Violence Against Women

There is no denying that like many countries around the world, Bangladesh's people were encouraged or required to stay at home during lockdown. As a result, disruption of social and protective networks, distress, loss of income and decreased access to services exacerbated the risk of violence against women including intimate partner violence. In addition, access to sexual and reproductive health services such as hotlines, crisis centres, shelters, legal aid, and protection services also shortened, making it excruciating for women to reach the few sources of help that would usually be available. Besides, there are many studies which reveal the situation of the women folk in the economy during the pandemic. The findings of the BRAC exemplify that 24 percent of incidents of VAW and 68 percent of child marriages increased in 2020 compared to 2019. Approximately, a 70 percent increase in VAW in March and April 2020 compared to the same time last year (BRAC, 2020b). Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) shows that 98 percent of surveyed women were victims of domestic violence and 34 percent of women and children experienced violence for the first time during the pandemic (MJF, 2020b). According to Bangladesh Mahila Parishad study, 3440 children and women have been the victim of violence in 2020 and 306 children and women suffered violence in March 2021 (BMP, 2020). The majority (58 percent) of the respondents who reported increased VAW incidence think that this increase is due to the poverty intensified by the Pandemic (BRAC, 2020a). Another aftermath of COVID-19 is likely to cause a one-third reduction in progress towards ending gender-based violence by 2030 (UNFPA, 2020).

Moreover, there can be unwanted pregnancy, unsafe childbirth, and impact on the nutrition of the mother and girl child in particular. Some of the impacts can be long-term, e.g., impact on skill formation, labour force participation, and dropout from education, child marriage and some of them are difficult to quantify due to lack of information e.g. intimate partner violence. Some are underreported, e.g., mental health. Women who are pregnant, postpartum, miscarrying, or experiencing intimate partner violence are more vulnerable to mental health issues (Almeida, 2020). Women from the COVID-19 cohort as compared with pre-COVID-19 women showed higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms (Thibaut, 2020). In the COVID-19 cohort, women with previous psychiatric diagnoses or low income were at higher risk of elevated distress and psychiatric symptoms. The longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return. A one percentage point rise in poverty leads to at least a 0.7 percent increase in child labour (UNICEF, 2020) 10 million additional child marriages might take place between 2020 and 2030 (UNICEF, 2021b). With 3 month lockdown and low health service disruptions 325,000 unwanted pregnancies may occur (UNFPA, 2020)

4.6 Unpaid Care Work

Figure 13 Change in time spent (% of Res)



Source: SANEM-World Vision Survey 2021

they had to spend more time but now they come back to normal flow is not satisfactory. For instance, only 1.4 percent, 1.3 percent, and 1.1 percent of the respondents come back to the normal time they drain for cooking, dishwashing, and caring for child/old/sick consecutively.⁵

Moreover, various evidence is provided with the scenario that depicted how the pandemic exacerbates the condition of the unpaid care work economy. As an illustration, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) unveils that 53.8 percent of women in urban areas and 45.6 percent of women in rural areas are engaged in unpaid care work, which was 42.5 percent and 34.9 percent respectively before the pandemic (MJF, 2020a). According to the BRAC findings, 91 percent reported higher amounts of unpaid care work during the pandemic, and 89 percent reported having no leisure time (BRAC, 2020a). On top of that, 51 percent of women and 31 percent of men reported increased unpaid care work since the pandemic (UN Women, 2020a). Though the sharing responsibilities of men such as children's education etc. are noticeable women's household chores have not decreased (UN Women, 2020b).

5. Coping strategies during pandemic

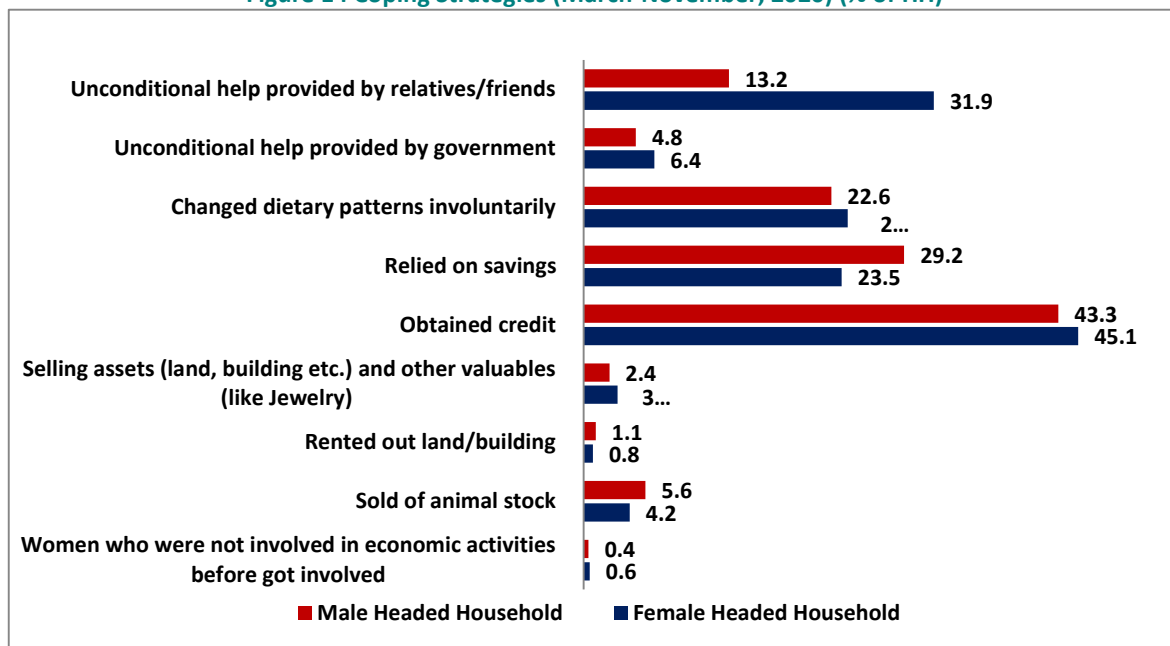
5.1 Micro perspective

As the coronavirus outbreak quickly surged worldwide, like many countries, Bangladesh-a lower-middle-income economy with one of the world's densest populations, was also adopting non-therapeutic preventive measures, which included travel bans, remote office activities, country lockdown, and most importantly, social distancing. Nonetheless, these measures faced challenges such as social distancing being difficult in many areas of the country, and with the minimal resources it has, it was extremely challenging to implement

⁵ Some of the respondents reported that their work time did not change, the above figure is not considering the actual percentage of respondents in this category.

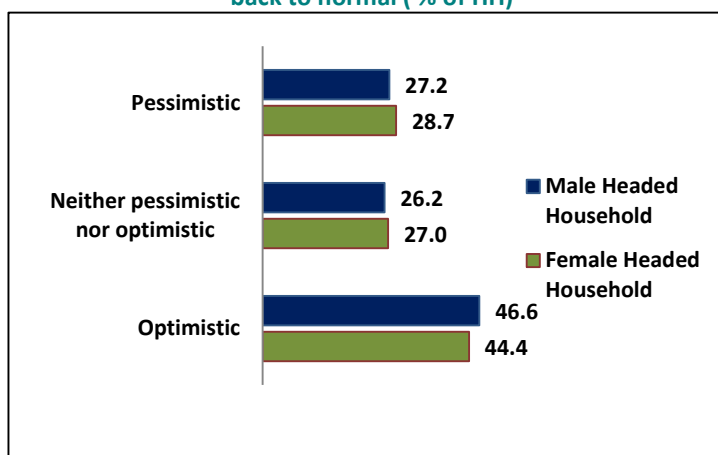
the other mitigation measures. Like the whole nation, household-level obstacles were more prominent as they had to cope with the crisis with their available resources due to this unprecedented shock. However, they were struggling to reduce their loss in various ways like unconditional help from relatives/ government, changing food habits, relying on savings etc. Form Figure-14 it is sighted that maximum strategies are obtained by the female-headed household for example, female-headed household (31.9 percent) get more unconditional help and more than doubled help from relatives then the male-headed households (13.2 percent). Most importantly, 29.8 percent of male-headed households relied on savings while the percentage is 23.5 percent for the female-headed household. Thus, depicting how households were trying to navigate the crisis and trying to come back to the normal state of life.

Figure 14 Coping Strategies (March-November, 2020) (% of HH)



Source: SANEM Household Survey 2020

Figure 15 Perception about coping with the pandemic and getting back to normal (% of HH)



Source: SANEM Household Survey 2020

Amid the mounting human toll and global economic fallout triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bangladesh government is trying to grab the fastest economic recovery by curving health emergency and other measures. However, the household-level perception of the economic recovery is not convincing. In Figure 15, it is seen that female-headed households are more pessimistic than male-headed households about coping with the pandemic and getting back to normal.

Maximum females did not believe that they could get back to a

normal situation like pre-pandemic rather 28.7 percent of them are pessimistic about coping with the pandemic while the percentage is 27.2 percent for the male-headed households. Additionally, a few male and female-headed households were neither pessimistic nor optimistic. It is also observed that fewer female-headed households (44.4 percent) recover. Considering the hard-hit economy, there is no alternative to strengthening healthcare facilities and preparedness for the potential humanitarian crisis. Finally, resolving longer-term structural challenges and addressing gender balance could accelerate the post-COVID-19 recovery.

5.2 Macro perspective

Social Protection Scheme

Article 15(d) of Bangladesh's National Constitution contains a provision for social protection (1972). It serves as the cornerstone of both the National Social Security Strategy (2015) and its accompanying Action Plan (2018), both of which outline plans to establish a National Social Insurance Scheme that will provide benefits for workers in the formal economy in the event of sickness, maternity pay and protection, old age pensions, workplace accidents, and unemployment. Bangladesh now has 114 different social protection programs, most of which are focused on providing food and monetary transfers. To provide inclusive coverage of disadvantaged populations and reduce social economic risks, food shortages, and related sufferings, these programs need to be better coordinated and integrated within a cogent institutional framework.⁶

To expand the availability of high-quality inclusive services, more funding and preparation are needed. Programs for urban children should receive more funding. To combat child marriage and child labour, more measures are needed. In accordance with the 2013 Children Act, more emphasis should be placed on initiatives to reduce undernutrition, build caregiver skills, and create outside-of-institution care options for orphans.⁷ A \$250 million policy-based loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been granted to help Bangladesh implement social protection reforms that will shield its most vulnerable citizens from socioeconomic hardships. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that social protection mechanisms must be improved to better assist individuals in coping with and managing emergencies.⁸

Stimulus Package

Numerous research conducted since the coronavirus epidemic have shown that the pandemic is not gender-blind. They have shown how the hardship endured by women is greater than that of men. Women have suffered the most from both economic and social hardship. Women are having to suffer the weight of the coronavirus epidemic more strongly than anybody else since they are on the front lines of the disaster as healthcare providers, domestic carers, and household managers. In Bangladesh, more than 85 percent of women work in the unorganized sector to support their families. As a result, when the nation went into lockdown,

⁶ <https://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Areasofwork/social-protection/lang--en/index.htm>

⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/scaling-social-protection>

⁸ <https://www.adb.org/news/adb-approves-250-million-bangladesh-social-resilience-program>

many women workers lost their jobs overnight. The government of Bangladesh has taken steps to support the afflicted economic sectors through various stimulus packages in light of the detrimental effects of COVID-19. It has made a series of stimulus announcements totalling more than one trillion takas, or around 3.7 percent of Bangladesh's GDP. The export-oriented industries, the service sector, cottage, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (CMSMEs), large businesses, the agricultural sector, and pre-shipment loan refinancing have all received funding from these packages, which are primarily credit facilities provided to businesses by banks.⁹

Food Security

In the context of COVID-19 in Bangladesh, where food insecurity was prevalent, it is predicted that more food-insecure women will feel a higher stress level during the lockdown. In the latter half of 2021, females experienced a higher level of food insecurity and significant psychological anguish and worry. The agricultural and food sectors are essential to food and nutrition security, especially in emerging nations, because they not only provide food but also significantly increase the employment ratio of both men and women. The COVID-19 crisis was anticipated to have a significant impact on food systems at all scales—globally, domestically, locally, and the household. Women and men who worked in the production, processing, and trading of food would probably be affected in different ways. Policy interventions to lessen the effects of these crises or shocks can either increase or decrease gender inequalities. On how the COVID-19 problem and solutions to the crisis could be a setback or present chances for gender equality, we provide some viewpoints and relevant national examples (Ragasa et al.2020). The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) found that acute food insecurity has been on the rise globally since 2014 and that the COVID-19 pandemic will probably make the situation even worse. Due to debt, a temporary or permanent job loss, or a catastrophic sickness, the current pandemic crisis is also having an impact on households that were not already food insecure.¹⁰

⁹<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/macro-mirror/news/womens-access-stimulus-packages-and-post-covid-19-gender-equality-1953693>

¹⁰<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/open-dialogue/news/food-insecurity-increases-amidst-the-latest-covid-19-spike-2087621>

6. Findings and recommendations from FGDs

Barisal Division

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Limited access due to discrimination Dalit people experience limited access to education, employment, and other social sectors due to widespread discrimination, negligence, and exclusion. In education, financial problem is an iron curtain to educate Dalit people, especially girls.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Education for Dalit People Nowadays, people understand that to become self-dependent and economically independent one should have to be educated and aware of various rights and rules. In this regard, Dalit peoples' views are also changing for education which is undoubtedly a good sign. But they aren't getting rid of new problems in this field. Child – marriage, superstitions regarding girls' education and post-marriage roles keep Dalit girls from entering education. Authorities must take sustainable measures to stop this bad practice so that girls can pursue their dreams without fear of being married off. In health, the sector didn't face mentionable problems. Like everyone, we also face common problems like waiting in long queues, scarce doctors, and nurses, etc.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Change the mentality of the Women For progress, improvement, empowerment, and employment women should change their attitude, should change their perspective in which lens they are viewing society. From many obstructions and obstacles school dropout, child marriage, economic hardship, and superstitions are the frontrunners in barring and preventing women's inclusion with society. Poverty, lack of awareness, superstition, and insecurity often work as driving forces for child marriage and school dropout.</p>
<p>Invalid restrictions on education Though many Dalit people want to educate their children due to various restrictions and valid reasons they couldn't afford it. Increment in admission fees frustrates and discourages guardians from enrolling children in school. On the other hand, a large sum of form-fill-up fees explicitly inhibits those who enrolled in school, and completion of SSC or equivalent exams.</p>	
<p>Discomfortable reaction from society As a working woman, many women often face embarrassing questions from their husbands, family members, neighbours, and society. The next-door neighbours always stayed suspicious and inquisitive about where they go, when they go, what they do when they return and even analyze their motives. If it becomes a little bit late from returning work everybody asks what happened. Why so late? Where do I go? If a man and a woman miss a family program, approximately all will take it normal to skip a family program by a man, but a woman has to go through a rigorous process. Many will suspect her, suspect her loyalty. The woman faces rebuke as well as snide comments for the same reason a man has faced almost nothing.</p>	
<p>Negative mindset toward sportswomen A sportswoman said that from her childhood, she was passionate about sports, and she didn't face any obstructions or snide comments becoming a sportswoman. She played long tennis and basketball. She played for the national tennis team and lifted several trophies. But it would be unwise to say that like her other girls didn't face any obstacles. People don't take it positively that girls will play in the field, girls will play football and cricket, etc. People say girls are soon to be housewives, so why do they need to be involved with sports? They will cook, take care of an elder member of the family give birth to babies and bring up them. So, it's a total waste of time and energy to send girls outside of the home.</p>	
<p>Income disparity in sports Though girls love sports, in return they get nothing from authority. There are huge income disparities between male and female athletes in the country. Male athletes' salary is much higher than female athletes.</p>	
<p>Corruption with the retired sportswoman Generally, for the sports person authorities allotted yearly benefits, cash, and kind support for retired athletes. Unfortunately, due to corruption and mismanagement among the administrations, the benefits and other relief didn't reach them. Middlemen and arbitrageurs exploit the opportunities, and they get nothing.</p>	
<p>Absence of social standards in sports Other sportswomen always encourage girls to engage in the workforce and extracurriculars like basketball, football, cricket, tennis etc. However, at the end of the day what they got was negligence and bantering; they neither got their due respect nor the due payment.</p>	

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Living place inadequacy for gipsy people Gipsy people are huddled in tents at one place and somewhere else the next day. As they have no permanent living place, income and profession are also influenced by these. Lack of a stable income source leads to living hand to mouth. In monsoon, life becomes bad to worse. Poverty forced them to send their children into nomadic business instead of sending them to school.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Point out the Basic needs for gipsy people During the whole winter, needy people didn't receive a simple shawl let alone a blanket. Just imagine how much misery they were suffering. If the government come forward and help them in this regard, they would be to educate our children and make them proper citizens of the country. They didn't issue NID and birth certificates for our children and ourselves. But recently it has changed totally. Now almost every gipsy people have NID and Birth certificate.</p>
<p>Scarcity of business opportunities for gipsy people Gipsy people want to do business. For this, they need capital, a permanent place, and a home. If authority inspects their condition sincerely and provides them with this necessary aid, they can turn their life from this condition to the general level. After all, they are living out of abject poverty and have become accustomed to this. Nobody knows if ever they will be led out of this cycle of misery.</p>	
<p>The underprivileged Barguna Indigenous Community Adivasis who live in the Barguna area aren't as privileged as those Adivasis who live in Chittagong Hill Districts (CHT). There are special quotas in many sectors for CHT Adivasis from which they are excluded discriminately. Because of the lack of a quota system in government and the non-government sector, Adivasi people are lagging in labour force participation, especially in the formal sector. As most of the Adivasi communities are matriarchs, husband-wife violence is much lower here than in other communities. Early marriage is also not at a severe level among the Adivasi community.</p>	
<p>Political affiliation with child marriage Who worked for an NGO that deals with numerous social problems, tries to figure out causes, and makes a solution? In most of the cases, when they went to inhibit weddings for underage girls they faced threats, rebukes, and snide comments from family members and also from politically affiliated people. So, sometimes it becomes impossible to thwart an underage girl's wedding function. Lack of awareness, misuse of mobile phones, bad company, and disobedience of parents are working as driving forces in child marriage. Once two female students of the same school were married off, knowing that several people visited their in-laws' house.</p>	
<p>Land ownership issue of Women in agriculture Most of the women who are engaged in the agriculture sector don't own any land or don't have any land in their name. So, whenever they intend to collect money through borrowing or taking a loan from a Government/Private bank they face the bulwark of frustration. As women rarely owned land they didn't take a loan in their name and had to turn to their husbands for landowners' documents. Importantly, the lion's share of farmers both, male and female, didn't own any land in the outskirts part of the country. Being turned away by the government and private banks from taking loans they have to take a loan with a higher interest rate from Mahajan and other local lending organizations.</p>	
<p>Unfair price system towards Farmers In harvesting season paucity of market monitoring by authority led the middlemen to exploit every opportunity. As a result, farmers didn't get the fair price that they deserved. Disbursement of government relief for poor and needy farmers has always been a source of corruption and discrimination for administrative officials. The one who needs stimulus or relief has always been avoided by distributors. Female farmers are the worst victims of this discriminatory practice.</p>	
<p>Deprivation of ancestors' wealth</p>	

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>In the Hindu inheritance distribution system, women are usually deprived of their father's wealth. Similarly, they didn't get any property from their husbands either. So, a Hindu woman didn't own any land. As a result, being Hindu, women couldn't take any loans from the Bank because of being unable to provide land documents. The respondent strongly thinks and suggests this system needs to be amended or abolished for the sake of the well-being of all Hindu women and better inclusivity in society. I always feel inferiority and sorrow whenever see a Hindu woman get an inheritance neither from her father's property nor from her husband's property. As she is a well-earner she bought land in her daughter's name but everybody is not so fortunate. So, she earnestly requests the government and the authorities to address this problem and find a social and acceptable solution.</p>	
<p>Societal negativity towards women entrepreneurs When I started doing business everybody was puzzled and ashamed that being a woman is doing what a man generally does. Many relatives and neighbours kept their distance from me for I was then doing the non-women job. But for the grace of the almighty, she did well in the past and is doing fine right now. The entire path I had walked wouldn't have been possible if my husband hadn't stood by my side. He always supports me and encourages me to do what she loves to do. Every one of us would be surprised to know that she recruits 6 people to run and administrate her business and to expand. What she started as a lone woman has turned my life and livelihood into something blessing. She bought land in my name, built a house, lent money, and made savings for the future all by running my business.</p>	

Source: Compiled by authors

Chattogram Division

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Deterioration of the early marriage during the pandemic Early marriage has taken an alarming shape in Bangladesh especially since, during the COVID-19 period situation has deteriorated sharply. Panchayat, often, paved the way for early marriage. But after marriage when problems, conflicts and violence break Panchayat gives cold shoulder.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Proper implementation of the law Proper implementation of existing laws. The financial stimulus for the financially insolvent people. Create awareness in the family, society especially, among the parents.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The sincerity of local representatives Irresponsible behaviour by local representatives, duplicating Birth Certificates misuse of available technology etc. are responsible for Child Marriage. However, due to online procedures, things have become a little bit harder for arbitragers.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Changing the mentality of the parents Since marriage registration is optional for the Hindu community</p>
<p>Bantering and mocking induce child marriage Bantering and mocking often inspire guardians to arrange an early marriage for their children. Many neighbours say that no need to waste so much money and time on girls because, at the end of the day, they are going to other people's houses.</p>	
<p>Post marital conflict After that post-marriage conflict between husband and wife often leads to lake legal action. At that time the local representatives, Chairman and members, often favour the male member. There is a hidden interest in this; in attracting voters of their respective areas.</p>	
<p>Factors behind early marriage There are several factors behind this bad practice, some are: financial insolvency, social attitude, lack of security, availability of counterfeit birth certificates, lack of awareness, lack of goodwill from the public representatives and upper-class people, societal and familial superstitious attitude, the tendency of school-going boys and girls to tie the knot ignoring their family's will, power exercise of the political</p>	

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>leaders. Many guardians lost their jobs during the lockdown and many of them think that marrying off their daughters will lessen the burden on the financial status quo.</p>	<p>things are easier for them to arrange early marriage. Parents are deciding to marry off their daughter out of financial burden thinking of getting rid of the burden as soon as possible. Especially, parents were compelled to know that their soon going-to-groom was an expatriate. They think marrying off their daughters to an expatriate will alleviate hardship and will come forward with financial help in family functions.</p>
<p>Eve teasing as a barrier to education Girls are lagging in their education too. Financial insolvency and lack of awareness are the main problems here. Eve-teasing has become one of the severest barriers to girls' education.</p>	
<p>Lack of access to online education During the lockdown, many participated in online classes, and guardians handed over mobile phones, smartphones, and laptops to their children.</p>	
<p>Waste of time through social media In the meantime, what is noticed is that even after ending their online class children started to waste time on Facebook, Instagram and other social media by scrolling and chatting. Many students have wasted hours after hours in online gaming, especially in PUBG, Free-Fire etc.</p>	
<p>Expensive education School and college didn't grant fees and other costs. Many have lost interest in their studies. Many students didn't have smartphones/mobile phones to attend online classes.</p>	
<p>Not getting justice about security issues No regular classes and exams during the post-COVID-19 period. Often girls had to tolerate eve-teasing, slang and bad words on the way to school. When informed family about the incident like eve-teasing, mimicking etc. they are told to consult with Senior citizens and teachers. Sometimes they get the solution and sometimes don't. Authority should throw the eve-teasers behind the bars even if possible, for 5/6 days.</p>	
<p>Mistreatment in the health sector The health sector is affected by numerous problems. Doctors and nurses sometimes mistreat the patient. The hospital authority didn't provide any medicine. A long queue is another suffering. Mismanagement is everywhere. Often demand money to complete any surgery or simple surgery.</p>	
<p>Women entrepreneurs' hardship due to lockdown Women entrepreneurs have gone through a difficult time during the lockdown. Shops were closed and the supply chain was disrupted. Though shops were closed they had to pay rent, labour wages, electric bills and other costs. If there is another lockdown it will be the final nail in the coffin for entrepreneurs.</p>	

Source: Compiled by authors

Dhaka Division

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Negligible Budget allocation for especially able people Budget allocation for a disabled person is negligible. Only a 700-taka allowance per month isn't enough to survive for a person let alone a whole family. I have discussed the mentioned matter with many seniors and official people, but every meeting and discussion ended up in vain.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Opportunities for especially able people I am a disabled person, who has completed a Master. Currently, I am involved with an NGO that trains, inspires and facilitates Disabled Women in Faridpur. Along with that I also do business related to the bed-</p>
<p>Reduction of girls' participation in higher education</p>	

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Early marriage is the number one problem and obstacle for girls' education. Reduction of girls' participation in higher education. Health materials like the pad, toilet paper and napkins during the period aren't available in institutions. Dirty toilets, unhygienic environment and lack of proper space.</p> <p>Experience from the respondents</p> <p>All are the main hindrances in enrolling girls into education. Women who work in the Garment sector are often deprived of basic needs and rights, lower salaries, fewer holidays and no maternal leave. I think Bangladesh Mahila Parishad should come forward in this regard and work more to raise awareness among mass people.</p> <p>As a teacher, I didn't face any discrimination or objections in my institutions. All my colleagues are very helpful. Thank you all. Early marriage during the COVID-19 period, dropout from study and financial hardship resulting from lockdown are the great barriers to the post-COVID-19 scenario in the education sector.</p>	<p>sheet, Nakshi Kantha etc. Women/ girls should become self-reliant and independent in society as well as in the family. Should have to be self-reliant otherwise violence against women will increase.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Awareness among mass people Should raise awareness among mass people especially, among the parents. Authority should practice and implement existing laws. Lax implementation of laws is highly responsible for preventable problems. BMP did its best to thwart early marriage through convincing or with the help of the legal system. Our Police force should play a greater role in this regard.</p>
<p>Ineffective law especially able person</p> <p>Bangladesh has a law for Disabled persons but unfortunately, that's only on paper there is no implementation of that law.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Responsibilities of local representatives</p>
<p>Absence of disabled friendly Hospitals</p> <p>In terms of the Health Sector, they had to face numerous problems. There is no space for the disabled person to sit in and wait for a doctor's call. Hospitals aren't disabled-friendly. As a wheelchair-using person, I have to face lots of problems when going out. Our transportation system is not designed per disabled persons' needs. Though there are rules for making disabled-friendly buildings in reality that's almost absent everywhere.</p>	<p>As women, we face various kinds of challenges and so we must overcome those obstacles too. As local representatives, I would say several factors play a crucial role in expediting early marriage; lax implementation of the law is one of them. Early marriage often results in health risks for under-aged girls in having children, dropout of students and even suicide. We don't want such things to happen in our society.</p>
<p>Undeveloped education system</p> <p>In the education sector, there has been a wind of changes since 2014 but still room for further improvement. In previous days, many institutions denied admission to disabled people but that has changed now.</p>	
<p>No rules for marriage registrars</p> <p>Marriage Registrars often keep two registry books, one for official data and another one for semi-official. In exchange for a large amount of cash, they register under-child girls' marriage information in the latter one. After a particular time when the girl's age crosses the threshold level of age, they register the information in the official registry book. The notary public isn't marriage registration at all, it's illegal but the registrars complete the registration procedures somehow.</p>	
<p>Living place for housemaids</p> <p>Work as a housemaid living hand to mouth. Due to an accident, my husband became disabled. Got cash and kind help from my employer but didn't get any government help. Since prices of necessary goods have risen, our salary should have been increased too. I have passed SSC and am glad to inform here that my daughter is studying in class eight. I want my daughter to be a doctor when she grows up. For my occupation, my daughter didn't face any discrimination, banter or mocking because she told me that "my mother works in a Hospital".</p> <p>I have no intention of marrying her off early. I want her to become a doctor one day. All my blood relatives advised me to complete my daughter's education but because of their financial hardship, they</p>	

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>are unable to offer cash support. I don't want my daughter to go through all the problems I have been experiencing. Early marriage is very negligible in our village, Elishpur, Narsingdi. Since I have no inheritance like land, house etc. from my father, mother and husband at the end of the month, all my earnings vanquished in a few days. That's why it would be very helpful if the authorities managed a house for us. Indeed, my husband didn't agree with me on everything. But in the end, he helps me. Otherwise, I couldn't survive and come here.</p>	
<p>Contribution to decision-making My younger daughter is very ambitious about her studies. She always talked about studying at a renowned University and dreamt of being a BCS cadre. But I feared whether I could afford to fulfil her dream.</p> <p>I make most of the major decisions in the family along with my husband. I took all my decisions about where to spend my income. Generally,</p> <p>I bear the major costs of children's study such as admission fees and registration fees and my husband bears other costs.</p> <p>During covid-19 lockdown cow milk demand was high. So, I earned a good amount of money by selling cow milk and didn't face any problems regarding this.</p> <p>Since vegetable prices have increased income has improved significantly. It's true that due to higher prices of fertilizers, seeds and land production costs have also increased.</p>	
<p>Victims of child labour As a school teacher, I know some in-depth causes that are the main barriers to girls' education and women's empowerment. Many of the girls enrolled on study after growing up. An incident like a girl's marriage in class three has transpired recently there. Mothers are enough cooperative, but they often succumb to family pressure.</p> <p>During school closure during the lockdown, many boys have been victims of child labour. Whatever the amount they earned, they contributed to the family financially in a time of crisis. So now, how will we convince the guardian that education is better than income for their children when we are unable to provide any sort of financial assistance? Who is working as a tailor and giving money to the family, how will we convince him to come back?</p> <p>Effective measures should be taken to return the dropout students.</p> <p>In terms of government relief and assistance distributions are faulty and corrupt. Some are getting too much on the other hand others getting almost nothing. Financial hardship and problems worsened significantly and contributed to family conflicts.</p>	
<p>Linkage with the heinous act Lawyers are somehow linked with this heinous act. They are helping evade legal action and utilizing loopholes. For those who issue affidavits, we have warned them. Most of the institutions didn't follow the 2009 High Court rule regarding forming a committee. Though there was a committee in successive years like 2010 and 2011, and regular meetings were held in judge court and Zila court unfortunately all are past now. There has been no activity lately. Institutions said that they were forming but didn't. I think they should follow the high court role and should form the committee.</p>	

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Domestic Violence Act 2012 is very helpful for women. Unfortunately, people didn't sue. There are districts where only 10 to 20 complaints are registered and even there are districts where there have no complaints at all. These lawyers are also responsible because they don't want someone being benefit by avoiding their interests. That's why they didn't inform the victims about such a necessary act. Because the act decrees that the responsibility of continuing the suit will be bestowed upon an organization. So, lawyers often think about what is their benefit here. Many times, the victims didn't show interest, they became afraid. Sometimes, when the severity of suicide, rape and other social issues sharply increased the government formed new laws and decrees like the death sentence for the rapist. But the brutality of the law couldn't prevent crime even if it made it harder for the victims to get justice because the local political leaders, representatives from Union Parishad and other powerful people forced the victims to accept the locally announced verdict and come to an agreement. But it's not the solution.</p> <p>Another one is when a woman is killed; very shrewdly Thana police lodge a complaint by article 306 that the woman committed suicide. I have asked many of such victims why they have signed in that paper. They often replied that they didn't notice what paper it was at that moment we would be mourning if at that time a government delegation visited us, we believed that they would help us so we signed any paper they gave us.</p> <p>In our country, we have thousands of NGOs that are working for women and girls but the outcome of all those NGOs is negligible. Changes should be brought out by the family. Family should teach education, etiquette and other basic functions of daily life. Not only the mother but also other members of the family should cooperate. As district president of BMP, I always try to present in every meeting at grassroots levels to talk about health, education, discrimination, and violence against women. We inform facts and figures about basic laws and acts that are necessary for our daily life. Especially, a notary's marriage isn't marriage and divorce isn't divorce. We explain misconceptions like if women divorce, they will not get Denmohor. These basic things should have been known by every woman. Maa o Shishu Kollen Kendra under the Directorate General of Family Planning is an adaptive and timely initiative. They even conduct surgery with care and caution. But lack of information, reach and trust people barely know about this. Many people doubt this thinking that public service may not be so good. Violence against women is happening here too but I will say that concerning Child marriage and dowry, Munshiganj district is in a better position.</p> <p>We have laws, but financial status often prevents us from reaching out to the court, lodging complaints, and suing someone because there is at least a minimum cost that has to pay for a lawyer. Lack of family support is another factor why women skip litigating. The courtyard isn't women-friendly. In court, women often had to tolerate hassles where male members outnumbered the female members.</p>	

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>When a complaint is made at the police station, not just one policeman comes from the police station; they almost come together in groups. People get interested when they see such a police car in front of someone's house. Without knowing, they often make offensive comments.</p> <p>It is not true that the people of Bangladesh do not know the law. Rather, they know how to break the law and how the law has to be misused.</p> <p>Women often go through emotional turmoil after divorce. The Demohor money that she received goes to her family, not to her. The moment when a woman needs reassurance and support is nowhere to be found.</p> <p>Lack of family support often leads to a second marriage. Even if she is unwilling to engage in a second marriage, for the sake of family members she has to agree. It is undoubtedly mental torture for women. Torture is not only done by the people of the in-law's house, but sometimes the people of the father's house also do torture.</p> <p>Unfortunately, that tyranny goes unpunished and it has no official recognition. Due to financial reasons, many times the case cannot be managed even after filing the case.</p> <p>It is not only child marriage girls who are victims of domestic violence. Almost all women are victims of domestic violence. In this case, we must first understand whether what is happening to us is violence or something else. It has been seen that most of the women outside Dhaka do not consider the violence that happens to them as violence. Also being educated is very important.</p> <p>We always teach girls to respect their husbands and serve them after marriage. Teach girls that they have to follow their husband's words. He cannot be abused in any way etc. But the family never teaches a boy to respect his wife. It's our inborn habit that we are teaching our sons to naturally dominate women. We are teaching male members of the family that men are superior to women. Men are created to dominate and administer women.</p> <p>There is no legal remedy for mental torture. There is no escape from it even if you are staying far away from your in-laws' house. If you are educated but your in-laws are less educated, or you are less educated and your in-laws are more educated, still mental torture is happening here and there is no solution to this torture.</p>	

Source: Compiled by authors

Mymensingh Division

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Accessible work opportunities for third-gender Since 70 percent of third genders are illiterate, they can be given jobs such as traffic relief work government garden gardening work, government office cooking work etc.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Third gender villages Creation of Hijra villages, provision of</p>

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>The dearth of healthcare service If you are sick, can you get support from the hospital? We are neglected, do not give seats even if there is a seat, and don't get any assistance.</p>	<p>employment, provision of education from the government for those who cannot study due to lack of money. Child marriage must be stopped. Government action is required for this purpose.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Facilities for sportswomen The government should provide facilities for all kinds of sports to the girls of every district, there should be a good transportation system, and in this case, bicycles can be given to the female players.</p>
<p>Discrimination at education - It can be seen that at the end of high school, many people stop studying because their families can no longer support them. Sometimes they get bullied at school too, but they don't care that much.</p>	
<p>Lack of proper transportation system for sportswomen I have been playing since childhood. I play football, and my journey is very difficult. My father is a farmer, so they can't help me with sports. Sometimes, I had to go far away to play. There is a problem covering my transport costs as my parents' income is very low. When I go to play far away, food and drink are also a problem.</p>	
<p>Obstacle to become a sportswoman Since my childhood When I went to play somewhere, my family and I were told different kinds of things, for instance, why I play as a girl why do I study so much, and why not get married soon. But I must explain to my family why I need to study more, I need to be self-sufficient. I am now playing in Netrakona under nineteen. Here there is no discrimination among players, equal opportunities, remunerations are also equal.</p>	
<p>Experience of Harijan Community Getting 3000 takes a month, can't live with it properly. I educated my only daughter till class 10 and got her married at a young age. The women of our community are being abused. Since we don't have education, we don't have qualifications, we always have to keep quiet, we can't go out and work like you, whose husbands earn less, and there are fights and disputes in their family.</p> <p>There are two ways of being discriminated against. Firstly, people from other sections of society cannot accept us easily, even in their communities women are being discriminated against. Birth control is not yet aware because the husbands do not want to take it.</p> <p>Our children used to face a lot of discrimination in school, but now it has reduced though it is still difficult to get higher education. The educated children who are in our community, when they try to work elsewhere, they are left out at some stage only because they see the Harijan community. But the situation is better now than before. 10 percent change is observed.</p> <p>Government hospitals are also looked down upon. Sometimes you can get good treatment by going to a private hospital, that too through request. We and people from other communities are also working in this place, we have no separate quota. There is a lot of work being done by our community about this situation; writing, human chaining, protesting in person and on social media. This resulted in one gain, from 20 percent to 80 percent quota in government jobs. Children of Sweeper still have a low education rate and are progressing towards education lately, so they are not getting many job placements for the time being. And getting kids interested comes slowly because parents are all illiterate. Even the teachers do not want to come to teach our children. The condition of the residence is also very deplorable, only assurances are given from the government. There are some leaders of our union council, who are talking to the government and agitating. A lot of child marriages of children are still seen in our community, 90 percent of childbirths are in hospitals, and 10 percent are still at home.</p>	

<i>Findings from the discussion</i>	<i>Recommendations</i>
Drug use is still seen, 100 percent of the male body consumes alcohol under the pressure of poverty, even by selling household goods. They can vote and have a National ID card.	

Source: Compiled by authors

Rajshahi Division

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Retrospective mentality Even though the country is developing, the mentality is stagnant in viewing girls as a burden. Society has a discrepant attitude toward girls than boys which is up surging the rate of early marriage of girls during the pandemic.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Financial support for postsecondary education It is crucial to raise young females to be educated, which calls for financial support. For secondary, higher secondary, and higher education, especially at the university level, allot stipends with a concentration on girls.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledgement of the contribution of women The government should recognize women’s 24/7 work and should include it in the national GDP.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Proper upbringing of children Children should be taught by their parents about morals, family duties, responsibility, and care labour. They should also be informed that certain tasks are not appropriate for female family members. These things should be done by both men and women.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Digitalization of documents Authorities should initiate immediate and effective action, including financial measures, to help families stop the practice of early marriage. Proper implementation of law in regard to counterfeit documents so that perpetrators couldn’t use this opportunity to avail early marriage. Digitalization of birth certificates has a positive impact as this prevented the change (increase) in the age of girls so that they are eligible for marriage.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate gender budgeting Need gender budgeting targeting gender-related issues and needs.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Positive mindset about the thirdgender community Authorities may step forward to oversee thirdgender communities' housing facilities. To ensure that they can live their lives without hindrances, people may accept them into society with open arms.</p>
<p>Curse of dowry Dowry is a widespread practice in the rural areas of Bangladesh prior to the pandemic period, older girls are the victim of this curse typically. Neither governmental nor private law supports it, in fact, the “Dowry Prohibition Act” made dowry illegal in 1980.</p>	
<p>Misleading information use To start a child marriage, the parents fill out fake information on the marriage applications. Since COVID-19 made their parents extremely pessimistic about the future, they desire to do their duty before passing away. As a result, school-age girls are married off frequently.</p>	
<p>Oppression in the male-headed household Some families have a male head of household who is unemployed and has no source of income. Family members who earn the family's living are women. She gives her entire money to the family and even silently endures all the domestic abuse and arguments with the male.</p>	
<p>Social standing as a barrier Despite experiencing various forms of domestic violence, women nevertheless choose to remain married since marriage offers social security and is good for their reputation.</p>	
<p>Drugs induced violence Although there are many causes of domestic violence, the husband's excessive drug usage has been a major contributing factor in the rise in violent incidents.</p>	
<p>Dearth of awareness People are not aware of and educated about the laws that assist women who are having problems at home. Since most women are not aware of these regulations, knowledge of them is unable to assist in preventing violence.</p>	
<p>Absence of self-reliance Since most women believe their husbands are always veritable in making decisions, the husband often makes decisions for the family. Despite being the primary earners, they lack that unique right.</p>	
<p>Unbecoming perception of society The government created a Gazette for the benefit of third-gender people, though it was never put into use. They encounter various issues such as they have to rent homes for twice the standard rent amount. Additionally, they experience bullying at school, during job interviews, and on other social platforms.</p>	
<p>Financial instability amid the pandemic Many women from low-income families work as housemaids, bringing in money for their families. Families with a woman who works as a housekeeper during COVID-19 struggle financially because she may have lost her job.</p>	

Source: Compiled by authors

Rangpur Division

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Getting rid of the burden Dowry is a common factor among the poor and lower sections of society. There is a fear among them that the amount of dowry will increase with the age of their daughter. So, economically insolvent families treat their daughters as a burden and think of getting rid of them by marrying them off as early as possible.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Need for Appropriate Religious Education Improper religious activities may drive the mentality of the young generation to different norms.</p>
<p>Wrong explanation of the religious term Theocratic thinking also plays an important role in early marriage; due to a lack of proper knowledge, lots of girls become the victims of early marriage, and wrong explanations of religious terms prompt children's marriage even before they attain puberty.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Budget allocation for reducing violence The budget is important for women's empowerment. In modern times, Health, education, and violence against women are important issues and need further discussion. Thus, the government must act and place a specific amount of budget to avoid such violence.</p>
<p>Inadequate security Generally, girls receive lower social security in the social environment. Even though girls are willing to study further they are married off earlier than the legal marriage age.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Recovery from the Pandemic Growing concerns regarding food scarcity, fear, insecurity, joblessness, and poverty among parents due to the pandemic are blamed as a push factor in surging child marriages, especially among the poor, uneducated, and rural families. The government may take initiatives to reduce these to recover from the pandemic as soon as possible.</p>
<p>Conflicting impact of religious activities The bride and the groom are both newlyweds. It's interesting to note that parents are more likely to send their daughters to a Madrasa, promote their participation in religious activities, and encourage them to dress modestly. After grade, these girls are married off. More boys and girls than ever before are enrolling in Madrasa in recent years. However, when these girls are given money, they would prefer to visit salons and beauty parlours than attend school.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Reduction of the disparity in public health The poor and lower sections of society always face discrimination and negligence in public institutions' hospitals. Female members face more discrimination in the health sector than male members in society, institutions, and public places. Authorities may take initiatives concentrating on women's health care.</p>
<p>Disparity in the same roof If a middle-class family has one girl and one boy- the girl is not given the same resources as the boy even though the girl might be more academically driven than the boy. The boy in general gets more opportunities to study further even by sacrificing/selling his parents' property. To note, the Government provides free education for girls for primary and secondary education. Hence, soon after secondary education girls are married off.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Tarnishing indigenous people's hardship in basic needs Members of indigenous communities face hardship in education, employment, and everyday life. The lands of the indigenous peoples have been encroached upon and settled by</p>
<p>The impetuous decline in girls' enrolment due to pandemic During COVID, more girls got married young and hence the education rate for girls decreased by a large margin. On the other hand, the boy in the same village is encouraged to study. During the COVID-19 period, both rural and urban areas of Rangpur faced a high rate of girls dropping out of schools and colleges and hence, are all married off earlier than they should be.</p>	
<p>Discrimination at Union Parishad Elected women members of the Union Parishad aren't spared from discrimination either. Male members of the Union Parishad, especially the Chairman, often dominate in decision-making, relief card allocating, and distributing. Female members are always kept on the dark side in times of decision-making. Though they get manifold votes compared to their male colleagues they have little value and, male Parishad members don't consider their achievements because of their gender. So, they are confronting biasedness and discrimination sitting in an empowered chair for women. Women face discrimination in and out of the house in every walk of life.</p>	
<p>Yellow journalism and antifeminist sentiment The media's role is vital in preventing violence and crimes, especially Gender-Based Violence. However, it can play the opposite role too. Misogynistic and clickbait news coverage by online and print media are</p>	

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>fueling anti-feminist sentiment in the country. Many reporters don't assess the veracity of the news and ignore victims' opinions to print or publish on their platforms. Ignoring professionalism many journalists didn't hesitate to publish fake news to gain public attention and PR Stunt.</p>	<p>newcomers now and then. With little legal protection and lax law, indigenous peoples can rarely recover the lands they traditionally occupied.</p>
<p>Dearth of justice A girl who works in the NGO sector where the girl is blackmailed and forced to do an unconsented act and the girl is revolted and files a GD in their local police station. However, she did not receive justice and the offender got unlimited/unconditional bail. Such an unlawful act is carried out because of the offenders providing proper funds.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Removing communal violence and political influence</p>
<p>Confusion and suspicion as driving factors Confusion, suspicion, and distrust among family members are the driving forces of violence against women. Intimidation and the threat to withdraw complaints against powerful people often make the victim stressed and mentally upset. Many times, the perpetrators offer cash and luxurious goods to lure the victim to settle the complaint in the local Union Parishad.</p>	<p>There have also been other fears, such as communal violence, and intimidation. If a politically powerful person likes a place or land, he/she will seize that place or land today or tomorrow by hook or by crook. They will not hesitate to kill or set ablaze people to meet their greed. Balance among the communities is a must so that they can live peacefully. Authority may take care of this communal conflict with introducing new security force.</p>
<p>Misconception between local and indigenous group There are always misunderstandings and misconceptions between local people and indigenous people. Local people often think indigenous people aren't friendly, patriotic, and social. Indigenous people are getting more opportunities and facilities than local people. They are receiving more relief and government help than local people.</p>	
<p>Indigenous people living with fear Local people say that indigenous people are unable to do hard work and they will not work with indigenous people. Indigenous people live in fear and intimidation for 24 hours even in their land and own country. It's a matter of great sorrow that after 50 years of independence, they are unable to live a normal life in their own country. In indigenous people's communities re always exists the fear of losing land and house, being killed by local people, being raped, and tortured by perpetrators, being caught between big guns, and animosity of extremists. If someone has rage or becomes angry with any indigenous people, they can easily take revenge by blaming them for religion. Truly speaking, they are always vulnerable to violence, confiscation, and even death by their fellow countrymen.</p>	
<p>Indigenous people and poverty Though Bangladesh is a poor country indigenous peoples are by and large the poorest among the poor. Years of discrimination have made the indigenous people victims of poverty, further suppressing their chances at empowerment and opportunities to improve their lives and livelihoods.</p>	

Source: Compiled by authors

Sylhet Division

Findings from the discussion	Recommendations
<p>Harassment through side-talking Supported the family with government vocational training, educated the children, and had a sick husband at home. Heard a lot of harassing talk from people about doing this. What do you think should be done for those who want to work but do not work because they think about the side talk of their surroundings and other problems?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Need to ensure Quality Education Though Bangladesh is doing great in the case of ensuring participation in education, quality education is not ensured yet. The government may focus on the quality the education, as with quality education, youth cannot perform well in the workforce. To remove the unskilled manpower from the economy, the government need to change the pattern of education and make it more effective for the future betterment of the youth.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Consciousness about reproductive health and nutrition In the context of nutrition, Bangladeshi women are still not getting the sufficient nutrition they need. In the hospital, women do not feel comfortable sharing anything with the doctor about their reproductive health, especially those who are housewives. Women need to change their minds while going to the hospital for their health care services.</p>
<p>Income reduction during the pandemic Work is reduced, and income is reduced too. Children should be educated, her boys passed degrees, girls passed only matric, due to poor economic conditions, and girls cannot be educated anymore. They are doing well in their in-law's house; they are also earning income by sewing.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Taking the benefit of demographic dividend As a benefit of the demographic dividend, there is a big portion of the people belong to the youth group. Moreover, there is more than 50 per cent of them are a female who can be a big asset to the economy by participating in the labour force.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The necessity of appropriate role model Both men and women need to play an active role. In our parliament there are 50 seats reserved for women, so we need to look at what role these women occupying these 50 seats have played in presenting the issues women are facing or are these women just occupying these to do so and are not taking responsibility for representing women and becoming a role model. The seats are reserved so that they can rise and talk about women-related issues but if they do not play an active role. They need to take responsibility and become role models.</p>

Source: Compiled by authors

7. Conclusion

Women and girls are experiencing unique health, economic, and social repercussions that require focused policy measures, from disproportionate employment losses to increased gender-based violence. However, data reveals that many COVID response strategies have fallen short of fulfilling this need: only a few national-level policy initiatives have been created to address gender-specific risks and difficulties. Without comprehensive measures to lessen the pandemic's effects on women, COVID-19 may cause severe reversals in the hard-won advancements made for women's rights. Building global resilience and avoiding a repeat of 2020 will require reevaluating how the government care for and protects women and other vulnerable people. The government must give top priority to measures that increase the number of jobs available to women. Numerous policy decisions, such as the relaxation of formal documentation requirements and the provision of loans at lower and more flexible interest rates for female entrepreneurs, are crucial because many women might not have the necessary documentation to be eligible for the government's incentives.

In the future, more gender-targeted policymaking will be necessary to lessen the consequences of such shocks on women and girls and to provide them with better safety at home and in the workplace. There will also be a need for specialized investments for young and teenage girls. In Bangladesh, particularly considering COVID-19, there should be stronger systems for gathering gender-disaggregated statistics and guaranteeing better access to information for women. In terms of services and information available, better protection should be put in place for persons experiencing heightened violence and abuse. The 10 percent employment quota set aside for women in the public sector is still mostly unfilled. The requirements and standards for female work might be loosened, with a focus on indigenous women in particular. Furthermore, a certain percentage of technical-level jobs in a field like RMG may be reserved for women. Along with providing direct financial assistance, the government can support women who do vital tasks by promoting flexible work schedules or providing public childcare. Instead of concentrating such policies and programs exclusively on women, efforts need to be made to work with males to reduce gender-based violence. Men also need to be made more aware of the importance of performing more unpaid care work. Additionally, both men and women need more programs focused on mental health.

Finally, in Bangladesh, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on women's employment rates, incomes, and exposure to violence, increasing the risk to their livelihoods. We need to start addressing these issues in Bangladesh and recognize the tremendous snowball consequences they have there.

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Annexe

Table 3 Key Data Sources

	Data type	No. of observations (Female ratio)	Sample size
SANEM Household Survey, 2020	Non-roster	475 (9.06%)	5240
SANEM-ActionAid Survey, 2020	Roster	577 (45.94%)	1256
SANEM Employment Survey, 2021	Roster	247 (8.68%)	2845
SANEM-World Vision Survey, 2021	Roster	1921 (52.98%)	3626

Note: This study uses both roster and non-roster data. Maximum data are taken from different SANEM surveys like SANEM Households Survey, SANEM- ActionAid survey, SANEM Employment Survey etc. This analysis mainly focused on the female ratio from the sample size.

About SANEM

SANEM, launched in January 2007 in Dhaka, is a non-profit research organization registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms in Bangladesh. It is also a network of economists and policymakers in South Asia with a special emphasis on economic modeling.

SANEM aims to promote the production, exchange and dissemination of basic research knowledge in the areas of international trade, macro economy, poverty, labour market, environment, political economy and economic modeling. It seeks to produce objective, high-quality, country- and South Asian region-specific policy and thematic research. SANEM contributes to governments' policy-making by providing research support both in individual and organizational capacities.

About Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) is a non-governmental, mass women's organization dedicated to advancing women's human rights, empowerment, and gender equality. The organization was founded in 1970 based on the idea of poet Sufia Kamal, a pioneering figure in the fight for women's liberation and the independence of all men and women in the state and society.

The main mission is to establish substantive equality between men and women by aiding in the transformation of long-entrenched patriarchal social norms, rituals, regulations, and practices that discriminate against women and girls. Moreover, the broad goal includes the emancipation of women through gender equality within the home, community, and in a noncommunal and democratic state in which the government operates honestly, follows the rule of law, and is accountable to the people.



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