

## LIVELIHOOD OF STREET VENDORS DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN IN BANGLADESH: EARNINGS BREAK OFF EXPENSES REMAIN

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### ABSTRACT

On March 8, 2020, the first case of covid-19 was discovered in Bangladesh. As a result, the government decided to shut down all sectors for a certain period when the whole world was battling the first wave of Covid-19. After one year of the first wave, the second wave has recently hit the planet affecting almost all the countries including Bangladesh. Like all other sectors, street vending has been encountered and felt severe distress regarding the vendors' livelihood. This study aims to explore the livelihood of street vendors during covid-19 in Bangladesh. This study features an in-depth interview of 15 street vendors to document their experiences during lockdown due to covid-19. This study is based on a qualitative approach with a purposive sampling technique. This study found lockdown is a significant burden for street vendors, leaving them with no other choice for earning money. During the lockdown, they expend savings, borrow money from others, take out loans, sell home furniture, and obtain money from their parents to fulfil their needs and demands. In order to improve this situation of street vendors, the government should take necessary steps with adequate financial and food assistance so that the vendors can survive during this lockdown.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concepts of "street vending" and "street shopping," "hawking," and "peddling," among others, are often interchanged. Street vendors are those people who work on the streets

with their capital (Moniruzzaman et al., 2018). Street vendors, who sell everything from food to clothing, are a familiar sight around the country and serve as customers' first point of contact in the supply chain. They can be found selling on street corners, sidewalks, local markets, and even delivery carts (Pandey & Jaani, 2020). Street vending has become a global phenomenon in both developing and developed countries as an informal economic practice (Uddin, 2021). Several hawkers associations have estimated unofficially that about 2.5 lakh street vendors now ply their trade on public sidewalks in capital cities, up from 90,000 in recent years (Husain et al., 2015). They are the poorest and most disadvantaged segment of the urban poor. Despite this, they play a vital role in meeting the needs of Dhaka's urban dwellers by providing affordable and durable goods, as well as providing income and job opportunities for a large number of people, resulting in a significant source of income for their families (Suraiya & Noor, 2012).

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated losses (Sakamoto et al., 2020). In the aftermath of five deaths and 48 infections from COVID-19 in Bangladesh between March 24 and May 30, 2020, the government enforced a nationwide lockdown for the first time (Mottaleb et al., 2020), as lockdown is thought to be a good way to stop the coronavirus from spreading across the world (Vibha et al., 2020; Flaxman et al., 2020). After a year, the government has decided to reintroduce lockdown across the region, despite the fact that the second wave of the Coronavirus has revealed and increased the number of infected cases as well as deaths (Dhaka Tribune, 2021).

The Bangladesh government's lockdown strategy for Covid-19, on the other hand, has posed a major danger and significantly worsened the already precarious living conditions of street vendors (HBS Southeast Asia, 2020). The city's poor, who rely on street vendors, the daily wage labour market, and the informal economy as a whole to survive, have been hit the hardest by these steps to slow the spread of the virus. Street vendors in Dhaka have struggled not only to keep themselves virus-free in overcrowded and underserved settlements but also to get enough money (Taylor, 2020). The lack of state institutional capability, as well as the absence of social safety nets for low-income communities, has exacerbated the problem (HBS Southeast Asia, 2020).

Although the literature for this demographic is minimal, it focuses only on the fact that Bangladeshi informal labourers as a whole were affected by the lockdown of COVID-19, but does not focus on the living conditions of street vendors specifically. In this context, this study aims to add to previously conducted studies by being one of the first to investigate the effects of lockdown on the livelihood of Bangladeshi street vendors. Finally, the results of this study will assist administrations, government departments, and informal labour associations in taking time-sensitive and effective steps to ensure the safety of Bangladesh's street vendors during the COVID-19 outbreak. Furthermore, these results can be used to compare how street vendors are currently reacting to the unanticipated consequences of COVID-19.

### **1.1. Prevalence of Covid-19 in Bangladesh**

Most countries of the world are in a state of flux in terms of socio-economics, socio-politics, culture, education, food and nutrition, and so on as a consequence of Covid-19 (Pogue et al., 2020; Mannan & Farhana, 2020). The epicenters of Coronavirus are now the major cities around the world since they are known as the entry point to the international arena (Asante & Mills, 2020; Haque, 2020). The second wave of Coronavirus in Bangladesh peaked in the first week of April and has wreaked havoc on all sectors across the region (Mamun, 2021; Khan, 2020). As a result, on April 5, 2021, the government was forced to enforce a severe lockdown for the second time to protect human life and livelihood from the spread of COVID-19.

According to the DGHS Press Release, there were 718 950 COVID-19 cases confirmed by RT-PCR, GeneXpert, and Rapid Antigen tests between March 8, 2020, and April 18, 2021, with ten thousand three hundred eighty-five (10 385) deaths linked to the virus (CFR 1.44 percent). Bangladesh is one of the top 33 countries with 0.51 percent of the world's COVID-19 incidents (World Health Organization, 2021). Bangladesh announced 34 194 new cases in the previous week (epidemiological week 15, 2021), down 27.8% from the previous week; the case per 100000 population per week is 20.1. (IEDCR, 2021). According to the DGHS, the nation experienced a 36.6 percent rise in new deaths, with a death rate of 0.4 per 100,000 people per week. The weekly average number of new tests is 167 202 (daily average: 23 886), down 23.8 percent from the previous week; tests per 100 000 per week is 98; and the weekly average test positivity rate (TPR) is 20.5 percent, down 5.3 percent from the previous week. The overall case fatality rate (CFR) is 1.44 percent, up from 1.42 percent the previous week (World Health Organization, 2021).

Table 1 Division wise distribution of COVID-19 cases and deaths (as of 18 APR 2021)

Division	08 MAR 2020 – 18 APR 2021			Week 15, 2021 (12 APR - 18 APR 2021)		
	Cases	Death	CFR %	Cases	Weekly Change	Death
Dhaka	512805	6048	1.2%	24627	-34%	426
Chattagram	88359	1873	2.1%	4634	-12%	119
Rajshahi	29895	549	1.8%	1392	11%	20
Khulna	29233	637	2.2%	1072	-3%	24
Sylhet	18960	349	1.8%	758	-17%	11
Rangpur	17317	397	2.3%	434	22%	11
Barisal	13363	310	2.3%	822	-14%	21
Mymensingh	9018	222	2.5%	455	21%	14
N=Total	718950	10385	1.4%	34194	-27.8%	646

Source: 19 April 2021, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Update (MMWU) No60\*, WHO

In this dire situation, hospitals are pressed to provide beds for the large number of people who have been affected, and reports of bed-sharing and health-kit supply and stock are common in Bangladeshi hospitals (Faiaz, 2020). There is not enough ICU space for both corona patients and other critically ill patients. Bangladesh's government has introduced apps and websites that enable people to use corona from the comfort of their own homes. In hospitals, there is insufficient oxygen. There are 178 HFNCs in these hospitals, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), which experts now say are unable to support any vital Covid patient.

As a preventive measure, Bangladesh, on the other hand, began a COVID vaccination trial program on January 27, 2021, and the nationwide vaccination program began on February 7th. This vaccine was part of the Serum Institute of India's initial shipment of five million doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine (Kamruzzaman, 2021). Currently, confusion surrounds COVID 19 vaccination in Bangladesh due to the spread of India's worst condition Corona on its second wave. As a result, starting April 25th, the health authorities will temporarily stop administering the first dose of the vaccine (Dhaka Tribune, 2021). Up until April 26, 2021, a total of 8,398,700 vaccine doses were administered, according to the WHO. To ensure a timely supply of vaccines, Bangladesh approved Russia's Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccine for emergency use, which has a 91 percent efficacy rate. Bangovax by Globe Biotech, on the other hand, is expected to be approved next week, according to a news item on Jamuna TV on the 25th instant, and BMRC will decide on its application in the human body (Sujon, 2021).

## 1.2. Lockdown and Street Vending in Bangladesh: A Reverse Relationship

The government has imposed a lockdown to restrict people's movements to monitor the spread of Covid-19 infection, which is spreading at an alarming pace. Some people profit from this decision, but it is a cruel one for others. It is the worst decision for daily wage earners such as street vendors selling vegetables, tea, phuchkas, and other similar products (Hasan, 2020). The livelihoods of the majority of street vendors have been seriously harmed. Due to the lockdown, street vendors were unable to earn money (Shahedul, 2020). To deal with their financial situation during the arduous lockdown, they used a variety of survival tactics including spending savings, borrowing from informal sources, and seeking financial assistance from parents. When the government lifted the lockdown, the vendors returned to work despite the danger to their health in order to prevent more poverty and hunger (Kazi & Mia, 2020).

Besides, female street vendors in Dhaka are often primary breadwinners, single mothers, or widows. Their whole family depends on their income to eat and survive, but the COVID-19 pandemic has wiped them out (Rodoshee, 2020). As a result of social distancing policies that prevent them from working and make life more difficult for them, they now live in poverty. Many citizens have already depleted their personal savings to get through the lockdown, but they are still unable to fund their companies (Givengain, 2020). For anyone from shopkeepers to street vendors, the two Eids are the busiest shopping time of the year. Many plans and life goals depend on making a good profit during the festivals. With proceeds from the Eid-ul-Fitr shopping spree, several vendors decided to pay off all of their debts (Islam, 2020). However, their plans have been put on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic, which has brought public life to a halt. In the capital, about four lakh hawkers are struggling to make ends meet. The majority of them received no help (Alam & Mollah, 2020).

In another situation, police observed street clearing, crime, and intimidation of street vendors after the lockdown was lifted. "Everywhere in this country, vendors, hawkers, truckers, bus drivers, commuters, pedestrians, landlords, homeowners, beggars, the guilty and the innocent alike have stories to say. They can attest to how conniving cops are still squeezing them for cash (Ahsan, 2021). As a result, many vendors who came from villages in search of work are returning home, and people who have nowhere else to go are fighting every day for a chance to live another day, and they are living hand to mouth. "It's quite easy to declare a 'lockdown.' However, it is people like us who bear the brunt of the consequences. Give us food, then impose a curfew," Md Hossain, who sells wallets and sunglasses on the Firm gate sidewalk, agreed (Saad, 2021).

## 2. METHOD

The research has been conducted based on a qualitative method of social research. This cross-sectional study was conducted in Dhaka City, Bangladesh, between July 01, 2021, and July 15, 2021. Inductive reasoning was used to gather evidence from 15 street vendors from various parts of the city through an in-depth interview. These 15 respondents were selected through purposive sampling techniques. Different types of street vendors have been selected as samples like; street food sellers, street cloth sellers, street fruit sellers, street vegetable sellers, street handicraft sellers, etc. Their experiences during lockdown were documented through addressing some questions i.e. how many members in his family? How much did he earn before corona? How much does he earn now? How is he leading his family and his life now? What are the problems he is facing now? What does he want? Interviews were first transcribed in Bengali language and then translated into English. The important statements coming from the respondents were quoted in the text. In addition, data triangulation has been

reviewed extensively using secondary materials from different journals, studies, conference proceedings, newspapers, and government records. To identify similarities, the participants' viewpoints were continuously balanced. The following figure shows the stages beginning to ending of this study.

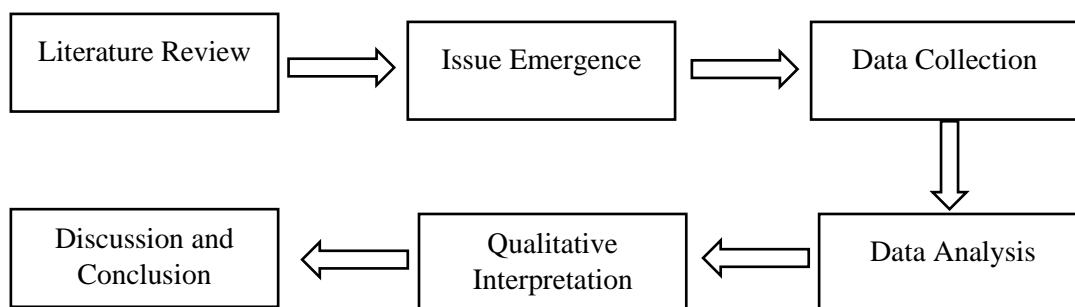


Figure 1 Cycle of this Research

Regarding ethical issues, this study has no ethical committee approval. But consent from all respondents was obtained before participating in the study. All subjects were also informed about the (i) nature and purpose of the study, (ii) procedure of the study, (iii) right to refuse, and (iv) right to withdraw from participating in the study. The participants did not gain any financial benefit from taking part in the study. Confidentiality of data and anonymity to the participants were ensured.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Results

The pandemic of the Coronavirus has altered our everyday routine. COVID-19 is having a huge effect on everyone's lifestyle in Bangladesh, including street vendors. During the COVID-19, street vendors' earnings were adversely affected, as they could only receive a fourth or half of what they could before the pandemic. The pandemic's severe economic and social consequences, as well as increased mental stress, could exacerbate the issue. We used an open-ended questionnaire to collect data on the overall effect of the lockdown on the livelihood of street vendors in Bangladesh. The following is a summary of their experiences (R=Respondents):

**R1 said:**

"I sell fuska.' In my family, there are five of us. My monthly income before Corona was about 1600-1800 tk per day, and before the lockdown began, I was earning 500/600 tk per day, but now I only earn 200/300 tk during this lockdown. However, doing anything on such a limited income is extremely difficult for me. We requested government assistance in this situation in order to ensure three meals a day at least."

**R2 said:**

"I work as a fruit vendor. My family consists of four people. My monthly income was 2600/3000 tk per day before Corona, but it has been reduced to just 400/500 tk per day during the lockdown. I currently sell fruits from the side of the road in baskets. I occasionally have to deal with police obstruction. Ignoring this, I am shifting locations and selling fruits in various locations. I hardly ask the government to lift the siege so that we can at least live with our families."

**R3 said:**

"By selling *Jhal Muri*, I can support my four-member family. Before Corona, I used to make a decent living from my *Jhal Muri* Cart, earning about 15,000 tk a month. However, due to the strict lockdown, I am currently unable to earn any money. I'm totally helpless now and looking for regular jobs, but it's difficult for an elderly person like me to find. Many student and volunteer organizations have continually aided me, but what I really need is a source of income, not assistance. I'm aware that I won't be able to survive off of government assistance indefinitely. I'd like to see the lockdowns lifted as soon as possible."

**R4 said:**

“I sell street food to help my family of seven. I used to make 500 to 600 Taka per day before Corona, but now I only make 250 to 300 Taka per day. I am unable to pay the installment money, which I received from a local NGO, on time. My food spoils because people do not come to buy as much as they used to. I'm looking for government assistance and loans to help me re-establish my companies.”

**R5 said:**

“I'm a hawker on the city road. Before Corona, I was earning at least 400tk per day, but now it's just 150 to 200tk per day. I had a small savings account, but it was depleted quickly. My mother's care is beyond my means. I'm looking for assistance from both the government and financially secure individuals. It's certainly in our best interests to lift the lockdown as soon as possible.”

**R6 said:**

“Before corona, my brother, everything was going well, this corona kicked us in the stomach, I used to earn 1500 taka the day before, but people don't come to us anymore. After that, there was a lot of fighting, but the government defeated us with this lockdown. Now I earn 300-400 tk in a day. What should I do? If I stand on the street, the police will run after me. Family members are not good enough in this situation. I am sustainable in my life because I had saved some money; otherwise, it would be very difficult for me to continue my life. Even then, the way Allah is keeping it, *Alhamdulillah*.”

**R7 said:**

“Brother, my family consists of six individuals. My father works/ed as a street vendor as well. He makes his living as a shoe salesman. My mother serves as a housekeeper for other people. My other brother is employed by a small firm. The four of us make enough money to support the whole family, but I can't get out on the street because of the lockdown, which is causing some issues. My income used to be between 1000 and 1200 tk, but it is now between 300 and 400 tk. I was looking for something to do. In this context, I request the government to make everything normal.”

**R8 said:**

“I am a vegetable vendor living with a family of 5 members. I have earned 800-900 tk per day before lockdown but now the earning is 200-350 tk per day. With 200-350 tk income per day and some days' zero income also, it is very tough for me to run a family of five members. I have taken microcredit from NGO to make my home but now I cannot pay the installments as my income has been decreased.”

**R9 said:**

“I'm a fruit vendor on the highway. My family's only source of income is me. However, my current income is insufficient to support a large family. My daily income used to be 1000-1200 tk, but it has now dropped to 400-500 tk. As a result, I'm forced to use my deposited funds to support his family. However, I'm not sure how long it will last. Thus, I began working as a late-night cleaner in a garage. I still receive very little food and financial assistance from various charities and individuals.”

**R10 said:**

“I work as a greengrocer and live with a family of five. I used to make at least 700/800 tk per day before the lockout, but now I just make 400/500 tk per day. In this situation, I am unable to handle all of the costs associated with sustaining a five-member family. I owe rent on my home. I had to sell two of my cows at home to cover my living expenses. I'd like the lockdown to be lifted.”

**R11 said:**

“My family lives outside Dhaka, and I am a butcher living alone in Dhaka. I give money to them in order for them to be able to meet all of their needs. Many of my family members are reliant on me. Due to my present circumstances, I am barely making ends meet. My daily salary used to be between 800 and 1500 tk, but now it's between 500 and 600 tk. I'm finding it more difficult to submit money to my family. Owing to the limitation on my travel, my sales and customer base have dwindled. I'd like to see the lockdown lifted as soon as possible so that we can resume our usual lives. Otherwise, we'll have a hard time surviving.”

**R12 said:**

“I have been selling *jhal muri*. My family consists of 5 members. I have earned 3/4 hundred taka per day before lockdown but now it is zero. I am leading my family by savings now. I can't sell my products during this pandemic. I have three daughters. I saved money for their marriage expenses. Unfortunately, I am running out of this savings.”

**R13 said:**

“I am a street food seller living with my family. A few months ago I earned 700-1000 Taka. I was very happy with my daily income, but I am selling 100 taka today. The pot is still full, no one eats. I live in a rented house with my two daughters and a son but couldn't pay rent for the last three months. This time I had to borrow 10 thousand taka. Allah! Knows in how many days everything will be fine.”

**R14 said:**

“I am a cycle maker and live with my five-member family. I used to make 1000 taka per day on average before the lockdown, but now I only make 200-300 taka per day. My life is more difficult now than it was before. We are passing our lives through financial uncertainty because finance is regarded as the backbone of a family. Furthermore, we are unable to go outside or interact with people as we would on regular days, posing a barrier to our source of income. We are bringing suffering into their lives.”

**R15 said:**

“I’m a street food vendor who isn’t doing too well right now. Because it is a pandemic, it is very random because everybody is affected. My family consists of three children, and my wife’s health is deteriorating. Before the pandemic, I earned 6/7 hundred taka every day. I could barely keep my family afloat on this income. Now that I am unemployed, I must spend at least 5,000 taka of my savings to support my family. I’m in a lot of trouble right now; my savings are almost depleted. I’m unemployed, and I couldn’t afford to buy medication for his wife during this lockdown.”

**3.2. Discussion**

People from all walks of life have been affected by the global corona pandemic. Because of the Corona pandemic, people of all economic backgrounds are at risk of losing their jobs. The Corona epidemic has become a burden, particularly for those who live on a shoestring budget. The Bangladesh government has declared lockdown twice in response to the Coronavirus outbreak, which has robbed low-income people, especially street vendors in Dhaka, of their livelihoods. The findings of this study have been categorized in four parts based on the field data presented above: Street Vendor Earnings, Current Status, Difficulties, and Expectations.

*3.2.1. Street Vendor’s Earnings*

The Street Vendor’s quality of living was not so bad prior to the Corona pandemic, as evidenced. Most street vendors are unable to make ends meet as a result of the pandemic and lockdown. Earnings are this group’s only source of income. However, a significant drop in street vendors’ earnings has rendered them powerless in their battle (Deka, 2020). Table 2 depicts the shifts in street vendors’ earnings in Dhaka. According to the findings, the majority of people have a low income that is insufficient to cover three meals per day. On the other hand, some of them now have no jobs, which makes their lives a living hell.

Table 2 Comparison of earnings of street vendors

Vendors	Earning before Lockdown (Per day)	Earning During Lockdown (Per day)	Changes
R1	1600-1800tk	500-600tk	1000-1200tk
R2	2600-3000tk	400-500tk	2000-2500tk
R3	500 tk	-	500tk
R4	500-600tk	250-300tk	250 to 300tk
R5	400tk	150-200tk	200-250tk
R6	1500tk	300-400tk	1100-1200tk
R7	1000-1200tk	300-400tk	700-800tk
R8	800-900tk	200-350tk	550-600tk
R9	1000-1200tk	400-500tk	600-700tk
R10	700-800tk	400-500tk	300tk
R11	800-1500tk	500-600tk	300-900tk
R12	300-400tk	-	300-400tk

R13	700-1000tk	100tk	600-900tk
R14	1000tk	200-300tk	700-800tk
R15	600-700tk	-	600-700tk

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Source: Field Data

### 3.2.2. *Street Vendor's Status*

The latest COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted and even stopped the majority of street vendors' business operations (Kaur et al., 2020). Most respondents said they had customers all day before Corona and lockdown, according to the results. Their families were doing well by *Allah's* grace with their regular income, but they have been unable to raise any money since the start of Corona. Even before the lockdown, they were selling their wares, but their profits were less than half of what they had been. Following the start of the lockdown, their companies were forced to close. They will no longer open the shops because they are unable to do so. The majority of them are the sole breadwinners in their families, and they are responsible for all of the household expenses. Without earnings, they couldn't support their families, so they looked for other day labor jobs, which they couldn't find. Their livelihood status has been affected by uncertainty and hardship.

### 3.2.3. *Street Vendor's Difficulties*

Many street vendors were forced to close their businesses, jeopardizing their financial stability and resulting in income losses, which exacerbated their debts as they struggled to meet basic needs. It is self-evident that their families cannot survive on their current income. They can no longer afford to eat two meals a day like they used to. Food is not being adequately handled with the money they receive as day labourers. As a result, the majority of them are forced to go a day without eating. The street vendors are depressed as a result of the Covid-19 situation. We discovered that certain vendors, as well as other family members, are sick. As a result, they were forced to take out loans from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or others in order to get adequate care and medication. Due to a series of lockdowns, they are unable to pay their loan installments on time, causing more mental stress.

### 3.2.4. *Street Vendor's Expectation*

Street vendors want to get out of this dreadful situation and resume their regular lives. Some of them even want to follow the lockout and remain at home. At the same time, they want assurance that they will receive regular food and financial assistance from the government in order to sustain their daily lives. In fact, the majority of street vendors have stated that they do not want such a ban. They are not afraid of dying in Covid-19, but they are concerned about how they can provide for their families. They say that lockdown is more dangerous than COVID-19 for people who live on the edge. They also want the government and other wealthy members of society to support them by offering daily food and financial assistance.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The informal sector contributes significantly to poverty alleviation and jobs in Bangladesh. Street trading, in which street vendors are the main players, is a major part of this sector. During this pandemic, street vendors bear the brunt of the costs, as the lockdown has



made their entire income structure inoperable. Most street vendors have stopped working and switched careers. Many vendors are still remaining at home because the majority of their wares are still unsold. According to a recent report by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and the Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies (BILS), the pandemic resulted in over 3% of the labor force losing their jobs and 16.38 million people becoming newly poor. The Bangladesh Labor Force has taken many steps to ensure social security for street workers, including organizing street vendors to speak out about their rights and negotiate on legal issues. Bangladesh's government should assist them and their families with financial and nutritional assistance. This research will help future research and their researchers to get proper knowledge of the condition of street vendor's lifestyle during covid-19 lockdown in Bangladesh.

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