

Analyzing the Impact of Covid-19 on the Mothers of Bangladesh: Hearing the Unheard

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Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this empirical study is to explore how Covid-19 pandemic has hit the mothers of our society, with particular emphasis on Bangladesh. The study also attempts to make their unheard voice reach both the national and international academic discourse which has so far been an unexcavated area.

Subject and Methods: The study adopted qualitative and interpretative methods of social research which include content analysis; perception study of 223 respondents through semi structured questionnaire survey, who were selected using purposive random sampling. The data obtained from perception study was further complemented through phone in interviews.

Results: The study has found that pandemic has not affected all the mothers uniformly, rather the intensity of its impact varied depending on factors like occupation of mothers and their husbands and their family pattern. Despite such variation, all the mothers experienced subsequent increase in workload, challenges while availing routine health facilities and higher level of stress, anxiety, depression, and certain behavioral changes.

Conclusion: However, the worst affected have been the mothers belonging to the lower socio-economic strata because the pandemic has made them and their husbands' jobless, leading them towards an uncertain future.

Introduction

The mankind has stumbled into one of its greatest crisis since World War II over the last few months. With over 21,912,154 cases already, and a death toll of more than 774,739 (Worldometer 2020a); the world is indeed fathomlessly struggling with epoch-making public health menace, the COVID-19, which originated in Wuhan, China during December, 2019 (Huang et al, 2019; Ghosh et al, 2020). The incidence and mortality of the coronavirus-2019 disease (COVID-19) have been increasing dramatically around the world (Fernandes, 2020). Bangladesh, a country of South Asia, has also fallen a victim to this pandemic. Till date, 279,144 people have been tested Covid positive and the dead toll has risen to 3,694 (Worldometer 2020b)

The effects of COVID-19 pandemic are not limited to health, but also have a major impact on the social and economic aspects. A global socio-economic deadlock has been created, which has propelled the lion's share of the population to home-confinement; while the rest have engaged them rather selflessly in an uneven mortal combat against it (Kickbusch et al 2020). Reports of abuse, negligence, exploitation and domestic violence are on horrendous rise at the time of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown (UNICEF 2020; New York Times 2020). Meanwhile, developing and less developed countries are arguably experiencing more severe crisis than developed countries, with many small and medium-sized businesses being disrupted and even bankrupt (Fernandes 2020). In addition, restraints' related to pandemic (e.g., social distancing, home quarantine, isolation etc.) is impacting on economic sustainability and well-being, which may induce psychological mediators, such as sadness, worry, fear, anger, annoyance, frustration, guilt, helplessness, loneliness, and nervousness (Mukhtar 2020; Mamun and Griffiths 2020a). These mediators are also distinctive features of psychological suffering that individuals can experience during and after pandemics (Ahorsu et al. 2020; Pakpour and Griffiths 2020; Bhuiyan et al 2020).

Since its outbreak, both scientists and social scientists have conducted many studies on Covid-19. From one end of the spectrum, the world has seen relentless, hair-splitting and scrupulous research by the scientists for developing a vaccine and very recently, there have been successful reports about Russia's breakthrough in discovering the vaccine for taming this deadly virus. Although the announcement was welcomed across the globe, it was not without skepticism as some scientists in Russia and other countries expressed concern over the vaccine's effectiveness and safety and so the hunt of vaccine is still going on (Dhaka Tribune 2020). From the other end of the spectrum, social scientists have conducted several studies for knowing the socio-economic aspects of Covid-19 covering various topics involving livelihood, children, refugees, migrant workers, gender disparity, livelihood, mingling with the new-normal etc. However, there is still dearth of literature on how Covid-19 has hit the mothers and expecting mothers. As the global pandemic has had negative impact on people of different ages and different professions, there is no doubt that mothers of different age groups and engaged in different professions have been affected in different ways (Robertson et al 2020). The blessing of motherhood naturally comes with a bunch of stress issue too. Every woman who has been dealing the natural hardships of a regular life, gains a lot of new challenges from bringing her little bundle of joy to the world and throughout the whole period of raising the child. This natural phenomena of motherhood has been highly confronted by the pandemic as much as it affected any other field. And along with all other social, political economic and dynamics, this particular issue should be thoroughly researched and need to be brought out to the world so that women who are giving birth and raising kids in this dark hour of the world, get the recognition they deserve. Hence, this paper is an attempt to unearth the added hardship of the mothers caused by the pandemic and make their unheard voices reach both national and international academic discourses.

Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature and data was collected using qualitative and interpretative methods of social research. Firstly, the researchers used content analysis method where various academic articles, newspapers, reports, web portals and other existing literature relevant to the research objective were thoroughly reviewed. This has helped the researchers for enriching their understanding of this topic. Secondly, a perception study was undertaken by the researchers using a semi-structured survey questionnaire having both open ended and close ended questions. The total sample size was 223 which was selected using purposive random sampling technique. The rationale behind using this sampling technique was to include mothers of various professions, age groups, family backgrounds and also to include a substantial number of expecting mothers. Such diversification has not only helped to enrich the

findings but also unearthed different narratives from these unheard mothers. The findings were further complemented with phone in interview technique for getting more insightful views from the respondents.

Main Text

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Synopsis of the respondents' profile

As it has already been mentioned, the total sample size for this study is 223. Before we move into discussion, it is important to give a synopsis of the respondents' profile which will clarify their diversification in terms of age, their occupation, occupation of their husbands and the type of family in which they reside. Most of the respondents (47%) belonged to the age range of (29-33), while more than a quarter of respondents (27%) belonged to the age range of (23-38). Very few respondents (2%) and (5%) belonged to age range (18-22) and (44-49) respectively. Around one third of the respondents(36%) were homemakers, 10% were government service holders, 12% were teachers, 7% were bankers, 5% were businessperson and 16% were engaged in some other profession like garments sector, domestic work, students etc. The respondents' husbands were also from different professions like teaching, government service, banking, medical sector, business etc. [Table 1](#) illustrates all these information along with the occupations of the respondents' husbands and family types.

Age of the Respondents	Age Range	Age Range	Age Range	Age Range	Age Range	Age Range			
	(18-22)	(23-28)	(29-33)	(34-38)	(39-43)	(44-49)			
	2%	27%	46%	12%	8%	5%			
Occupation of the Respondents	Government Service	Doctor	Teacher	Banker	Businessperson	Homemaker	Others		
	10%	12%	14%	7%	5%	36%	16%		
Occupation of the Respondents Husbands	Government Service	Doctor	Teacher	Business person	Banker	Others			
	16%	7%	8%	20%	8%	41%			
Family Type	Joint Family		Nuclear Family		Extended Family				
	41%		56%		3%				

Table 1: Profile of the respondents

Negative Impact on Availing Health facilities

In past epidemics, health systems have struggled to maintain routine services and utilization of services has decreased (Wilhelm & Helleringer, 2019). As WHO notes, "People, efforts, and medical supplies all shift to respond to the emergency. This often leads to the neglect of basic and regular essential health services. People with health problems unrelated to the epidemic find it harder to get access to health care services" (WHO, 2018). A study of the 2014 epidemic of Ebola virus disease estimated that, during the outbreak, antenatal care coverage decreased by 22 percentage points, and there were declines in the coverage of family planning (6 percentage points), facility delivery (8 percentage points), and postnatal care (13 percentage points) (Sochas, Chanon & Nam, 2017; Robertson 2020; Abbas et al 2020). During the 2003 severe acute respiratory syndrome epidemic, ambulatory care decreased by 23.9% in Taiwan

and inpatient care decreased by 35.2% (Chang et al, 2004). Simulated models of influenza pandemics also predict reductions in utilisation of health services (Rust et al 2009; Gilbert et al 2020; Robertson, 2020).

Already with COVID-19, we are seeing similar disruptions. The pandemic and the response to the pandemic are affecting both the provision and utilization of reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) services. Amid the pandemic, health workers, equipment, and facilities have been reassigned to address the influx of patients with COVID-19 (Gilbert et al 2020). Restructuring of the health system could result in the closure of peripheral health facilities, as seen in the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak (Brolin et al 2016; Gilbert et al 2020).

Similar restructuring of all the available health facilities has been done in Bangladesh for combating the pandemic. The pandemic has tremendously disrupted sexual and reproductive health services for long-term and ultimately lead to upsurge in unmet need for family planning, inappropriate contraception, unsafe abortion, unplanned pregnancy, increased rate of sexually transmitted infections and overall a mal-functioning fetal-maternal healthcare and reproductive health services (Hall et al, 2020). Around 92% respondents agreed to the fact that Covid 19 has had a negative impact on their availability of routine health facilities. Most of the respondents have agreed that pandemic has ripped off the entire health system of the country. More than one third of the respondents (around 40%) felt Covid 19 has adverse effect on their family planning. (See Figure 1)

When it comes to the prenatal and post-natal checkups of the expecting mothers and new mothers, Covid 19 again has severely disrupted these facilities. Almost 50% of the expected mothers and new mothers of the sample population strongly agreed that both their pre-natal and post-natal checkups were greatly affected, while nearly 39% percent of them were of the opinion that they were partially affected (see Figure 2). Papon Tabassum, a research officer in Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) who got pregnant during the Covid period shared her gloomy experience with us. *'When there was sudden lockdown from 23rd March, the whole country came to a total deadlock. As I am pregnant, I have to go for frequent checkups. But my regular doctor's chamber was closed as she was posted elsewhere to address the pandemic crisis. The situation one day got so worst that I was bleeding and immediately needed to do sonology but could not find any sonologist after roaming around 3-4 hospitals. I am very much concerned about the availability of doctor during my child birth'*

Dr. Tasmia Quadir, who recently gave birth to her daughter has also suffered owing to the disruption of the regular health facilities. She had to plan cesarean delivery instead of waiting for normal delivery considering the uncertainty of the availability of the doctors. Now, she is facing problems with post-natal checkups. Availability of blood donors is a very crucial during child birth. The pandemic again also created fear factor as well as various obstacles for the donors to reach hospitals timely as hospitals are still believed to be a hub of Corona virus. Nigar Sultana, who is an Assistant Manager of Nuclear Power Plant Company Bangladesh narrated her story with us. She said *'My EDD (expected date of delivery) was on 14th April. I managed 3 blood donors for me. One of them left Dhaka in fear. Another one was stuck in Old Dhaka as he didn't have personal vehicle and the last one was afraid to come to hospital. Finally I had to manage blood donor who walked just before 45 minutes. We were very worried that nobody might make it to the hospital'*.

Even after giving birth, many mothers need medical assistance and follow-ups which has been a crucial issue now. An anonymous new mother shared with us that even after giving birth six months ago, she still has not recovered fully from the 'Episiotomy' wounds and still needs a stitch. But she is afraid to go to the hospital due to the pandemic. Besides the physical aspects, a lot of mothers go through post-natal depression which needs medical assistance too. But in our society post-natal health care for mothers, especially psychological care is still not acknowledged much. The pandemic has made it even harder for these women to seek medical help for themselves.

Apart from own health issues, many young mothers missed the regular vaccinations of their babies owing to country wide lockdown. Albeit the immunization program has gradually resumed again, the fear factor still remains very high for which many are reluctant to go to vaccination centers. Mothers have also complained about the unavailability of the child specialists and pediatricians during the lock down period and even now, in certain cases, child specialists are very hard to come by. Kohinoor Begum, whose husband is a driver by profession, expressed with grief, *'my daughter who is just 3.5 years old has been suffering from hernia. I was advised by doctor to undergo operation when she grows up. However, last month, one night she was groaning in pain and we immediately rushed to Comilla Zilla hospital for doctor. We were rejected on the ground that doctors have been prescribed only to deal cases related to corona patients. Next morning, we took our daughter to several hospitals in Dhaka but the result was no different.'*

Luckily many doctors have opted for online treatment services. This has benefited the mothers of solvent and educated families who are now consulting doctors online. But for the mothers of poor and uneducated families, this came as no help.

Impact on Job Sector

According to a report of ILO, about 40% female workers, that is 51 crore females have been affected badly due to pandemic. The pandemic has devastated service-oriented sectors that employ more women like restaurants, hotels and hospitality, leading to more job losses (Miller 2020). In context to Bangladesh, the Covid-19 outbreak is already having a significant impact on small businesses, with shops, restaurants and beauty salons closed, and limited number of restaurants doing delivery (UN Women 2020). More than two third of the total working mothers under this study (84%) agreed that since the outbreak of Covid 19 in Bangladesh, it had negatively impacted their respective job sectors (See Figure 3).

Due to Covid 19, a common world phenomenon has been the losing of jobs by many garments workers. However, reports suggest that women are losing jobs more than their male counterparts. For instance, Sharmin Akhter who has worked as a garments worker in Taketex Fashion Limited garments for last years was sacked without prior notice due to pandemic. (Rana 2020). This is just one of many similar cases which have been reported in various national dailies. Interestingly though there have been reports of few cases where working mothers voluntarily left the job for taking care of the children and family

without any helping hand, because of the pandemic. The case of non-government female journalist needs special mention here who had to voluntarily quit her job because someone has to stay back home to take care of the family and children. Thus experts fear that these women run high risk of regaining their lost job during the crisis situation. Concerns have also been raised if that happens, then all the limited development that has occurred in gender equation world-wide will be nipped in the bud. (Haque 2020).

Apart from contribution of women in formal economy, nearly 60 per cent of them around the world work in the informal economy, with low wages and less savings or safety nets. One of the professors of University of Dhaka rightly pointed out that during covid, women working in informal sectors have been affected mostly (Haque 2020). Majority of domestic workers are also women in Bangladesh. To stop community transmission of COVID-19, Bangladeshi families who had domestic workers have also let them go. For many domestic workers, this translates to no income and no food (UN Women, 2020). Three of the respondents under this study who worked as domestic workers lost their jobs since last March. During the entire lockdown period, their family had barely something to support with.

Online business now is a big platform for women to earn. Specially women with kids for whom it's hard to do corporate jobs, online business has come as a financial blessing. Many have invested all their savings and taken this as the main occupation. Though the pandemic has created huge dependency on online businesses for daily necessities, it has equally decreased the business of luxury items like jewellery, garments, cosmetics etc. Some respondents who have been involved in entrepreneurship and online business are also suffering due to pandemic. One of them said, *'Many shipments which my clients have preordered months earlier are either stuck in customs or the shipment is getting delayed. Shipment charge has unexpectedly rocketed in the last few months which I have to bear from my pocket. Many customers are understanding and bearing with us in this period of uncertainty. Nevertheless, some are losing patience and canceling their orders and claiming their advance payments. I don't know how to repay them now when I am myself under severe financial crises'*. On the contrary, women involved in online catering businesses are doing better in the pandemic because many are preferring online homemade food delivery option due to the workload, unavailability of maids, risk of transmission in restaurants etc.

Increase in Workload

In Bangladesh, as in the rest of the world, women are the primary caregivers of the young, infirm and the elderly. According to one of the recent studies of Amin (2020), women spend considerably more time on domestic work, care giving work in particular than men. As the pandemic strikes, this burden of care is likely to increase disproportionately for women. A survey conducted by UN Women (2020) has also come up with similar results that lockdown and social distancing have resulted in increased burden of unpaid work and household chores, with little to no shift in redistribution of domestic work as a result of the confinement.

School and daycare closures during the orders of homestay further exacerbate the burden of unpaid care work on women who absorb most of the additional work of caring for children. Zmarro, a professor of University of Arkansas, rightly pointed out that, "Considering women already shouldered a greater burden for child care prior to the pandemic, it's unsurprising that the demands are now even greater," (Miller 2020). Although men are at home and sharing some responsibilities, women's household chores have not necessarily decreased (UN Women 2020). In addition to the care responsibilities, the directives about cleanliness and hygiene are also likely to intensify the workloads of women who are the ones implementing instructions on wiping down high touch surfaces, washing clothes, maintaining general hygiene as well as the creative management of dwindling resources to put food on the table as provisions dry up (Amin 2020)

A lion's share of the respondents (79%) strongly concurred that their workload has enhanced since the outbreak of Corona virus (See figure 03). As it has already been mentioned earlier that when country wide lockdown was declared, most of the families who hire domestic workers for doing the household chores asked them to discontinue in order to save themselves from transmission. Thus, it meant that women (both working and non-working mothers) had to bear the additional responsibilities which was previously done by domestic workers. The life becomes even more difficult when a woman is Covid positive in these circumstances. Chowdhury Farah Nawaz, who is a housewife and has survived the Covid scare, stated that - *'I have become sick more because of immense workload than Covid 19. My family is nuclear one and it totally depends on me. My little daughter cannot go a moment without me. I needed rest but was unable to do that.'* While Pushpa Rahman, a young mother who has now graduated from Dhaka University, stated that her whole family was infected while she luckily escaped the ill-fate. However, she had to take the risk for caring of all of them owing to unavailability of any close relatives.

Meanwhile, 10% of the respondents opined that covid-19 has not had a significant impact in the increase of their workload. While 11% totally negated that there was no difference on the amount of work which they did before and after the outbreak of pandemic (See Figure 4). This complexity can be explained by two factors. Firstly, the family type in which they reside, secondly the support of their husbands in sharing the workload. About two third of the respondents acknowledged the fact that they have been receiving ample support from their husbands and family members (See Figure 5). In this case, mothers and expecting mothers who belong to joint families were much blessed. For instance, Ayesha Akhter, an MA student of University of Dhaka and also a young mother did not face the same experience like most other women whose workload has immensely increased in the pandemic. Rather, she is getting adequate support from her mother-in-law.

Another sector where mothers' workload has increased is the online classes of their children. Almost all the children from kindergarten to secondary schools are now having online classes. While the grown up children can do that by their own, kids of kindergarten and primary levels need assistance and that mostly comes from their mothers. Moriam Sultana, a housewife shared that how her 6 years old boy falls asleep during the online classes and she is the one who continues on his behalf! For the house wife mothers, the added workload came with less acknowledgement than the working mothers. As all the family members stayed home during the lockdown period, their workload has increased many folds too.

Work from Home: Challenging or a Blessing in disguise?

Though the pandemic has made many working women jobless, it has added a new dimension for them as 'work from home'. Not every working woman who works in the formal sector fall within this classification. Women working as teachers, in research fields, government sectors and in certain non-government sectors had to adjust with this whole new concept of 'work from home'. Almost half of the total respondents (49%) perceived it to be challenging, 44% had mixed feelings about it while only 7% found it fascinating (See Figure 6). Why such a low amount of respondents have found it interesting to work from their own homes without the hassle of going out? The best possible answer to this query can be the nature of inertia. It is inherent nature of humans to continue the same old things which they were doing and most of them don't like changes because of uncertainty. However, this general explanation barely tells the inside story why most working mothers found work from home challenging. Mahmuda Akter, Assistant Professor of University of Dhaka opined, *'You need to have a proper working environment for working which you cannot always find at home. We are expected to do the same job at home but reality is that I have to maintain my little son at one hand and also maintain the other household chores at the other. And the post Covid workload is a worrying factor too'*.

Riffatt Farhana, Assistant Professor of Jagannath University, Dhaka, had mixed feelings about 'work from home' concept. She said, *'The reason I have mixed feelings is because I have found it both as blessing as well as challenging. I have a daughter who is 11 months old. I was in maternity leave for six months and joined University last January. I was so upset for my child when I had to rejoin my job but that's how life goes. I was praying if the leave could be extended! However, all the universities were closed under government directions from mid of March due to the pandemic. It came as an indirect blessing for me. Since then, I had been staying home with my daughter and have been able to spend more time with her which would not have been possible had the university was not closed. But then again, there is always other side of the coin as well. We were gradually advised to take online classes via Zoom and Google Classroom which is very alien to us. We were never accustomed to take classes online prior to this but we had to learn it and gradually got adapted. The most challenging part is that my family members don't understand that 'work from home' also requires efforts! When I used to go to university physically for taking classes, they understood my workload. But as now I am taking online classes from home, they have an assumption that perhaps that requires less effort than taking classes physically. Moreover, my daughter keeps on distracting me during classes and thus keeping concentration gets really difficult at times. On the other hand, my husband who is a faculty too, can conduct his online classes more smoothly'*.

Albeit work from home has been broadly perceived as challenging and with mixed feelings by respondents, few respondents like Mumtahn Elina, who teaches in British Standard School has found it rather fascinating. In her words, *'taking classes online has been a huge blessing for me. I am expecting so it has lessen my anxiety about going to school physically for taking classes'*.

Though for the academic mothers there is a privilege to schedule their classes according to their own convenient time, mothers in corporate fields and other jobs do not always have this luxury. The formal and timely meetings are often interrupted by the kids or any other family members and distraction is common. The business owner and entrepreneur mothers are facing challenging times as well. Not many of them have online platform.

According to one survey of New York Times, it is the mothers, not fathers, who have historically shouldered the vast majority of the childcare burden, and continue to do so during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in an era where parents, particularly women, are expected to achieve a perfect balance between work and childcare, and for basically the first time in human history, they're expected to do it on their own. (Dickson, 2020). Thus, many (40% of the working mothers of sample population) are struggling to strike proper balance between new work lives. While 38% of the working mothers of the sample population felt that they were somewhat being able to cope with the family life and new work life in the pandemic (See Figure 7).

But all these challenges brought one blessing with them. The working mothers are now being able to spend more with their children which they have always dreamt of. Moreover they can also get some quality time with their partners who too have been home during the lockdown. The working mothers who breast feed their kids, are seeing this as a great blessing. The homemaker mothers generally stay alone during the school and office hours. They are now having her full family together at home.

Level of Stress and Anxiety of Mothers during Covid Period

From having a very competitive busy life to suddenly staying at home, stress and anxiety level among people have increased many folds. Few earlier studies have investigated the impact of quarantine which was adopted in severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and Middle-east respiratory syndrome (MERS) and reported high prevalence of psychological symptoms, which included depression, low mood, irritability, anxiety, stress, emotional disturbance (Hawryluck et al., 2004; Liu, et al., 2012; Yoon et al., 2016). Similarly, analysis of the 2014 outbreak of Ebola virus in West Africa showed that the indirect effects of the outbreak were more severe than the outbreak itself (Elston et al, 2017). It is very much obvious that women and children would be the most vulnerable section who would be facing similar psychological problems in the present pandemic (Spinelli et al 2020). Almost all the respondents, (98%) excepting few agreed that their level of stress and anxiety have increased since the outbreak of Corona virus (See Figure 8). However, the factors behind increased level of stress and anxiety were not uniform for all respondents. Rather, variation was found across working and non-working mothers, professional differences, new and expecting mothers and so on.

Where normally human remain worried for thysel the most, for a mother, her kids remain her prime concern. Thus the stress level of mother increased a lot during this pandemic centering their child's health and wellbeing. As discussed earlier, most of them got stressed and anxious thinking whether it would be safe for them to take their child for giving vaccinations; what if they get affected; and again, if they were not given regular vaccinations, how much would

that affect their babies; whether the essential items for babies like formula milk, diapers, feeding bottles, clothes be available or not, whether pediatricians would be available for regular checkups; and when the world will get back to its previous color so that they can show the sunshine to their toddlers without fear of Corona virus. Situation is worse in case of pregnant mothers. Some of the prime reasons behind stress and anxiety of the expecting mothers were whether the doctors would be available for regular checkups and at the time of child birth and emergency, what will happen if they get infected with Corona virus, whether their newborn be able to see this world. One of our respondent, Nigar Sultana Assistant Manager, Nuclear Power Plant Company Bangladesh Limited, shared her terrible experience - *"I went to labor on 13th April. We tried to hire car for emergency. Everybody refused to go to hospital. So, I had to take rickshaw and I had to walk from Uttara police station to Uttara Crescent Hospital with labor pain. It was horrible."* New mothers already have high chance to fall in post-natal depression. Thus, mothers who are giving birth during this pandemic have higher probability of going to post-natal depression due to the added stress of the present context.

Again, the factors which stressed working and non-working mothers were different. Non-working mothers predominant ground of getting stressed was the thought that someday their husband might get infected and transmit the virus to their family. However, the rationales which caused higher level of anxiety and stress in working mothers **were** again diversified and it varied from one profession to another. Those who used to work on non-formal sectors like garments and as domestic workers got stressed due to economic scarcity and uncertainty of rejoining their old jobs which they have left very recently.

The doctors, who are the frontline fighters against the pandemic, were found to be stressed thinking about their children and other family members being affected by them. Dr. Sharmin Sultana, who is working in Dhaka Medical College Triage department, where Corona patients are immediately brought after being tested positive stated- *"I am not worried for myself. I am seriously concerned for my children. What if I become a carrier and then they get infected? Will I be ever able to forgive myself for that?"* Moreover, another reason for higher level of anxiety among doctor mothers was insufficient supply of masks and gloves and poor infrastructural facilities in the hospitals. For instance, Dr Dilruba stated- *"As an emergency doctor of Upazila (sub-district) Health Complex (UHC), I've to serve lot of patients including suspected Covid-19 ones. Many of them become positive after RT-PCR testing. But there is no sufficient infrastructure in our hospital premises to protect ourselves. There is no donning & doffing room, even there are not sufficient supply of good quality masks & gloves. So, the biggest challenge is to protect ourselves from the virus as well as our children."*

Similar concerns were also raised by bankers who had to serve twice a week even in the midst of lockdown. Situation for government service holders are also more or less same. Kazi Nurunnahar (Deputy Secretary, Defense Ministry) informed us that even in the pandemic, she had to travel to Faridpur district due to her job commitments. Her twelve years old child was home with old grandmother so she made sure she could come back within the same day from Faridpur.

Again, the reason of stress for a mother who is raising her kid alone and whose husband is a migrant worker is quite different to that of a single or divorcee mother, who are the sole provider for their children. Whereas the latter mother's reason of anxiety is thinking about the health status and job security of her husband, the later mother's principle reason of stress is how to manage both children and job properly as they neither have the supporting hand of their partner nor they have the option to quit the job so financial reasons. Furthermore, the divorcee mothers who do not have the custody of their kids had a yet different rationale for being anxious as the prolonged lockdown made them wait for a long time meeting their children.

Despite such variation in factors behind stress and anxiety, monetary stress had a rather significant impact on all the respondents. Many had their or their husband's salary cut down, in many cases. We found respondents who experienced salary cuts during pandemic which led to of higher level of stress, anxiety and also depression. Nihar Sultana mentioned that her husband had 27% salary cut due to pandemic which affected them quite badly.

The end result of such high level of stress and anxiety leads different psychological behavioral changes like depression, rudeness, irritation, shouting with children, insomnia, getting annoyed at little things etc. In extreme cases, few find no other alternative but to commit suicide. For instance, on 12 April, a woman and mother of five children (aged 35 years) from Cox's Bazar attempted suicide by hanging, although she was rescued by one of her sons. Her husband also lost job in the pandemic. Despite government was providing relief for the poor, they did not receive any such funds. The mother could not bear to the scene of her children starving and thus attempted suicide thinking if that could bring food for her family by dragging public notion (Campus Today 2020; Bhuiyan et al 2020). Such cases have become a common phenomenon in the pandemic albeit national dailies and electronic media do not even report a quarter of those suicides. Additionally, the families also do not want the death of loved ones to be reported as suicide news in Bangladesh to avoid the suicide-related social and criminal complexities (Mamun et al. 2020a, 2020b; Bhuiyan et al 2020).

The Impact of Violence against Women on Motherhood

There have been reports that domestic violence are on horrendous rise at the time of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown (UNICEF 2020; New York Times 2020). Particularly anxieties over health, finance, partial inactivity of several welfare organizations due to lockdown and frustration encircling forced home-stay are factors behind this rapid soaring of domestic violence at the time of COVID-19 (Usher et al, 2020). In the context of Bangladesh, where there is already high prevalence of violence against women, the risk is clearly greater. This leads to the legitimate expectation that there would be stronger commitments towards mitigating these risks in our national response to Covid-19. However, in the national-level actions and strategies pursued so far to address the pandemic, there has been very little emphasis on the issue of gender-based violence, or so it seems from the publicly available information, reflecting a lack of concern at the policy level (Yasmin 2020).

According to a recent survey by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), a local human rights organization, at least 4,249 women were subjected to domestic violence in 27 out of 64 districts of Bangladesh in April, with 1,672 women facing violence for the first time in their lives. The survey further revealed that 848 women were abused physically and 2008 were abused mentally by their husbands. Shaheen Anam, the executive director of MJF opined that the situation is similar in the other districts of Bangladesh as well. The women, who faced domestic violence for the first time, blame the lockdown for their

situation. They said that their husbands are becoming increasingly frustrated at home due to a lack of social interaction. Arpita Das, a coordinator at the MJF stated that *"Men are angry about losing their jobs due to the COVID-19 lockdown. They cannot go out to meet friends. Some are venting their frustration by torturing their wives"* (Islam 2020)

But protesting emotional and physical violence is still not common in our society. When the respondents were asked had they faced any such case of domestic violence in the form of physical, verbal or mental form, they totally disagreed about it. Few respondents even gave reactions with frowned eyebrows which reflected how much social taboo still it is to ask such a question in our society. Only two respondents, who did not give their consent to disclose their identity agreed that they were victims of domestic violence in the pandemic. One of the respondents who work as domestic worker stated that *'My husband has been beating me since we got married. At times he used to beat me so much that I could not go to my workplace. Now, in the pandemic he isn't earning much. Hence he is beating me more. I have accepted it as fate. We poor women have no right to complain.'* The domestic worker women became more vulnerable after losing their earning source during pandemic. The effect of such violence on children is immense. Women facing violence, often vent out their anger on their kids. Moreover the kids who are seeing such violence against their mothers are growing up with terrible mental scar.

Has the pandemic made the lives of mothers totally gloomy?

There is no denying from the fact that pandemic has so far had relatively high costs on socio-economic, psychological aspects of most of the women and mothers in particular, but it is not totally grey there. Rather, the pandemic has come as a blessing for some. Modernization is literally compelling parents in rat racing at the opportunity cost of spending quality time with their children. However, the countrywide lockdown for containing the transmission of coronavirus turned out to be golden opportunity for these deprived children who were able to spend abundant time with their parents. Home education from parents and endearment are sine qua non for positive growth of a child (Ghosh et al, 2020). Work from home has also been a great booster for working mothers. Some respondents said that they have used the period of lockdown and quarantine days for developing their skills, particularly in IT, doing IT courses. Many are learning baking and developing cooking skills. Some women along with motherhood, came forward to social development works too. The case of Banani Biswas, executive director of NGO 'Obhijan' needs a special mention here. She went to visit her in laws house in Jessore last March when the country wide lockdown was declared. Rather than panicking and getting distressed, she worked out what she could do to use all her past experience of 10 years in the field of development. She formed a cooperative of women named 'Olkapuri' and its main purpose was to create awareness among the village people 'Egarokhan' regarding coronavirus. They showed the villagers how to wash their hands properly and disinfect objects using detergents. These women of the newly formed cooperative under the leadership and guidance of Banani also created blockade with bamboo so that people from other village might not enter into their place. Moreover, the teenage girls who belong to the 'Yellow gang' of this cooperative have cut crops in the fields as hiring day laborers in the midst of pandemic was getting very much taxing for the village farmers. Furthermore, the women of the cooperative arranged a village fair every Saturday where goods produced by the members of the cooperative was on display for take away by the village people and that to free of cost. Her cooperative is doing wonders in that village and till date no case of corona patient has still been reported. Banani Biswas rightly said, *'There is no point in sitting idle saying corona virus has come. Yes it has arrived and we have to adapt to the new normal'* (Hossain 2020).

Concluding Remarks

The pandemic has hit the world so hard that researchers from different corners are analyzing the socio-economic and political scenario to predict the aftermath. But amid this, a large community has been almost left out. Though many are working on the impact of pandemic on women, there isn't much empirical work on how this pandemic of 21st century has hit our mothers in particular. Hence, this paper sought to portray the unheard voices of Bangladeshi mothers. The findings of this study has revealed that impact of Corona virus on Bangladeshi mothers has not been a uniform one rather variations were reflected in case of social hierarchy of mothers. Whereas the anxiety for mothers of solvent class is the fear of their family getting infected by the virus; the fear of the insolvent working class mother is to keep her family fed. To most of the slum dweller mothers, this global pandemic is just a 'rich man's disease' and their foremost enemy is hunger. The study further found that where the stress owing to the ongoing pandemic in upper class mothers leads to various psychological problems like depression, insomnia, behavioral changes; the stress resulted in suicide or attempt of suicide in extreme cases for mothers belonging to lower strata due to the fiscal crisis.

Nevertheless, the bridge that connects the mothers of both these class is the sense of fear, fear to lose their child and their family. Another interesting finding that this study has unearthed is related to physical and emotional violence between the mothers of these two class. It is a common phenomenon for women belonging to lower strata to speak out about their husbands' violent behavior to other women of their kind. However, when it comes to the mothers of upper strata who faced violence in their family during the pandemic, they hesitate to bring those to broad day light due to the fear of losing so called 'social image'. Though Bangladesh government is taking a lot of measures to secure the nation from the clutches of this deadly pandemic, it's has relatively remained silent in securing the women from violence.

If we consider the broader area, in every national or international crisis period, women are the most hit in both personal and public life. The condition of mothers in Bangladesh, in fact, all around the globe is no different right now. Besides violence, loss of career, increase in workload, these factors with the already existing hurdles of motherhood and proper balance of personal and professional lives have made the pandemic even more worse for the mothers. Like many cases as this study has shown, even if the mother is a Covid positive patient, she has to take care of the house. Again, if any other family member is affected, she has to take care of him/ her too without fearing the contamination chances. World Health Organization (WHO), government and health experts have been suggesting that isolation is the best measure for Covid patients, but haven't answered to the question that how the mothers who are the sole-carer of their families health and hygiene, can maintain this isolation policy if they require to do so; and if they do, who would take care of their

family? Perhaps, social scientists and policy makers are still pondering answers of these questions. The mothers have no rest, not even in the pandemic and that is where their strength lies.

Despite so many negativities which the pandemic has brought for most of mothers, the study also found that it has worked as an indirect blessing for a certain section. The country wide lockdown and closure of schools provided them the opportunity to spend quality time with their children, family members that has helped to strengthen their bondage more than earlier. Again, few mothers got ample time to develop their skills or work on their passions. However, pandemic did not bring any indirect blessing for mothers from lower socio-economic strata. Rather, financial crisis, the struggle to feed their family along with the fear to survive this critical period added more tolls on them and their lives have turned more miserable, challenging and very much stressful. It is still unknown exactly how the workload or stress of these mothers can be lessened. The least that can be done is letting the world hear their unheard stories and narratives and accordingly, acknowledging their contributions.

Declarations

The author and co-author, here by declare, that ethical approval was taken for conducting this study. They also, declare that the participants gave their consent to participate in this study. They have mentioned the name of the participants in the manuscript who have agreed to disclose their names and details.

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Figures

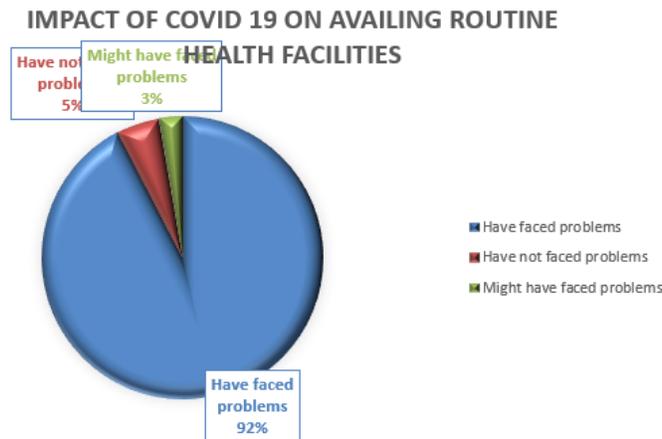


Figure 1

Impact of Covid-19 on availing routine health facilities

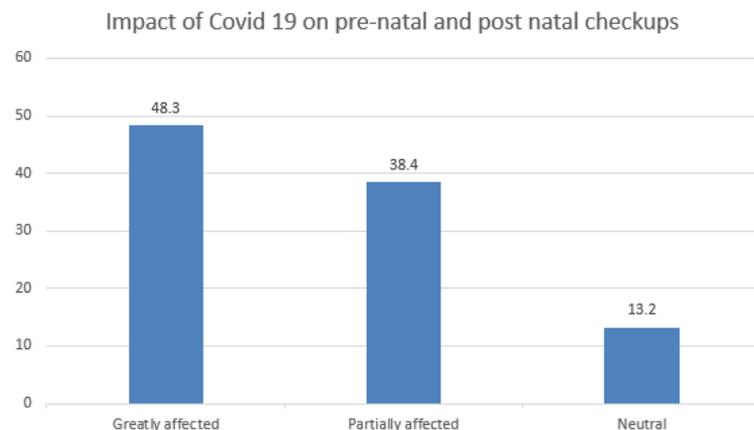


Figure 2

Impact of Covid-19 on prenatal and post-natal checkups

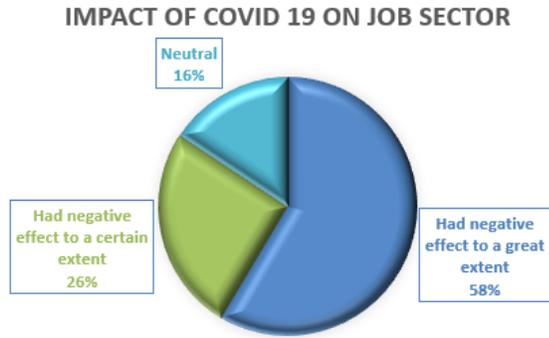


Figure 3

Impact of Covid-19 on Job Sector

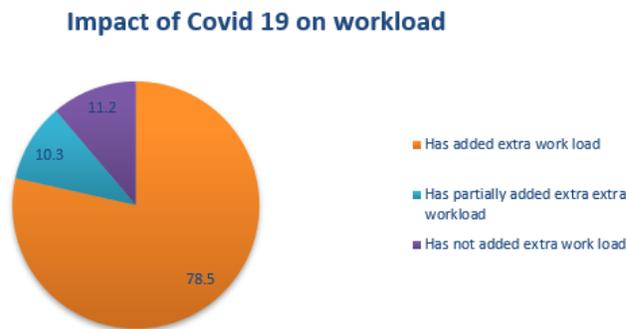


Figure 4

Impact of Covid-19 on workload

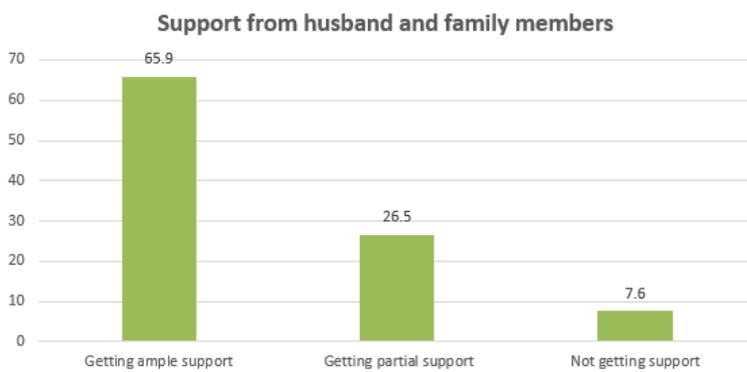


Figure 5

Support from husband and family members

**PERCEPTION OF WORKING MOTHERS REGARDING
'WORK FROM HOME'**



Figure 6

Perception of working mothers regarding 'work from home'

Maintaining proper balance between work life and family life

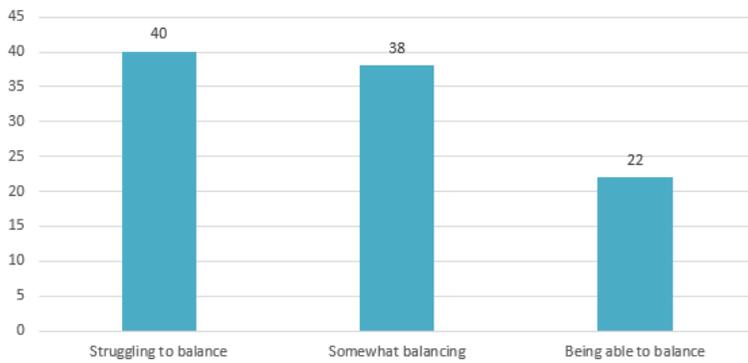


Figure 7

Maintaining proper balance between work life and family life

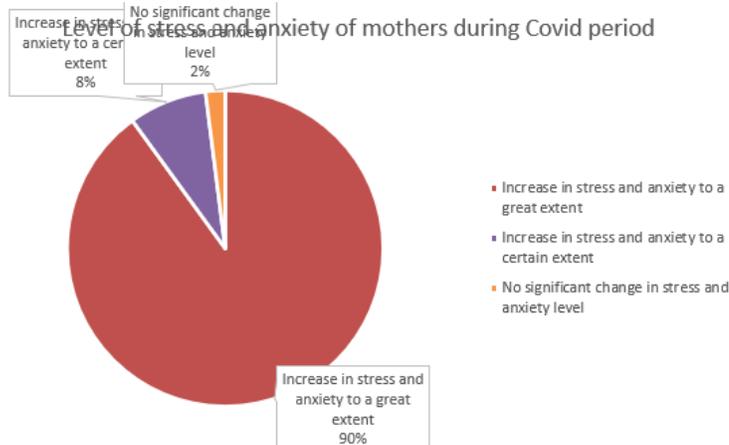


Figure 8

Level of stress and anxiety of mothers during Covid period