

# Coronavirus: A Social Science Explanation; Measuring the Social and Economic Impact of Lockdown in Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** This is a qualitative study of the impact of Coronavirus lockdown in Bangladesh. Along with the global epidemic, Covid 19, Bangladesh is experiencing a social change with religious threshold and an unprecedented economic crisis. This paper tries to write about the social and economic impact of Coronavirus in Bangladesh. To get a wider description, author has interviewed around 60 people from different professions located mostly in Dhaka and some nearby districts. This paper is arranged in three sections in narrating the impact of Coronavirus in Bangladesh. First part deals with the social impact with religious reasoning, second part is about the overall economic impact and last part comes with some suggestions of how to recover the crisis twisted with environmental connotation.

**Keywords:** Covid 19, Social Impact, Economic Impact, Bangladesh

## I. INTRODUCTION

‘What we are facing now, its a result of our previous deeds’ mentioned by one of the respondent of this research. Yes, we are experiencing the most contagious and ferocious global disease, Covid 19, caused by the newly member of virus family, Corona virus. While writing this paper, approximately, three million people have left the earth and thirty million people are suffering from physical damage and respiratory problems because of Corona virus in all over world.

*Coronavirus: On this website you can find information and guidance from WHO regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that was first reported from Wuhan, China, on 31 December 2019. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people who fall sick with COVID-19 will experience mild to moderate symptoms and recover without special treatment. The virus that causes COVID-19 is mainly transmitted through droplets generated when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or exhales. These droplets are too heavy to hang in the air, and quickly fall on floors or surfaces. You can be infected by breathing in the virus if you are within close proximity of someone who has COVID-19, or by touching a contaminated surface and then your eyes, nose or mouth.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup><https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus>

Because of the unknown shocking disaster, people all around the world are facing through tough times. My research interest grew from one particular incident of when I found many of my known people lost their jobs, problems in their family life, tremendous physiological trauma and many more. And rationality of this paper is herewith the content which is for all types of people in the society. Anyone can relate their story with this paper. Academically also I think this paper can aid to social science study to better understand the crisis with different perspectives. We can here find three mainstream ideas of the impact of coronavirus in Bangladesh. We can show:

- Social impact including family life, religious thoughts, psychological impact with overall society;
- Economic impact;
- Environmental impact;

After this we also like explain the global response to this crisis to learn something new forward to explaining the activities of Bangladesh Government.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method methodology is the primary structure of any research. I have conducted the research with qualitative method where I tend to search many information from participants and authors. At first, I have designed a questionnaire to serve the experience and opinion of random people. As a part of data collection, I rushed to 64 participants irrespective of profession like; Police, doctor, businessman, housewife, students, day labourer and many more. Here, I managed to reach 2 policeman of Bangladesh Police, 3 Doctors of Government Hospitals, 2 managing directors of RMG sector, 10 Housewives, 5 politicians of active government party, 12 students from universities and colleges, 12 day labourer, 10 garments workers, 5 academia from social sciences discipline, 3 government officials of Bangladesh Civil Service. All the participants are the citizens of Bangladesh particularly from Dhaka, Khulna and Narail districts.

All the medium of the taking interview was over phone interview, because we are experiencing social distance domain and author cannot manage to take face to face

interview. I had prepared a questionnaire of like 12 questions connecting to social, economic, religious and psychological impact of every participants. This interview was irrespective of gender where all of them were Muslim and aged from 20-45 year.

On the other hand, to explain my research philosophies I wish to intake some authors' ideas from different school of social sciences discipline. The time line of my research is April to June 2020. Major limitation of this research is connectivity with the participants, if that could be done more information can be extracted.

### III. SOCIAL SCIENCE EXPLANATION

This research tends to explain the running Coronavirus crisis with the insights from social science realm. Everyone is busy with finding a solution of this pandemic and looking forward to doctors and vaccine researcher. Author will like to see the changes of human life in social and economic consideration which abruptly influencing the daily life of every human being.

Here, we will discuss the paper in three sections: a) Social impact of coronavirus, b) Economic impact of coronavirus and c) Environmental impact of coronavirus.

#### a) *Social impact of coronavirus:*

From the very beginning of the coronavirus situation in November, it was quite discussed in Bangladesh media and many people get to know about this issue. But awareness was very low. When I first asked my participants about their primary knowledge of coronavirus I find that all had learned about it. Here 80% individuals learn from social media especially from Facebook, another 20% learn from news portal and television reporting. Important point to note is that, the news from social media is sometimes misleading which will come to know in later part. Most common one is newspapers. In Dhaka, my still browse the Daily Star and Prothomalo and some more. We still continue this old fashioned tangible dissemination of news as it has been a tradition in our house for many years. It gives people the covid daily statistics on the local and international arenas. Quick numbers in the morning to get a rough idea of where we stand today, compared to yesterday.

Some also subscribe to the online version of the New York Times, which gives ample numbers, charts, diagrams, and plenty of academic view points on the coronavirus. Though a lot of the information is America-centrist, it is still based on facts and provides insightful, meaningful and professional discussions on the most crucial angle of the day regarding the covid pandemic.

Secondly, there are cable news channels on television ongoing throughout a good part of the day. One participant feel the most unbiased reporting *com\o\ijjomhnmuk,ik.klos* from the international BBC. They also mention watching CNN a lot too and less frequently, Al Jazeera. This is where one can get the

bulk of my covid information: where the spread is most rampant now, where the hotspots are, where the surge has been contained, how geography plays a role; what the experts have to say, especially scientists about the spread and how to tackle it plus where we are with vaccine progress; what the economists predict for the impact on our world economy, industries, businesses, GDP etc.

Thirdly, and probably most persistent form of information people get is from social media.

Gradually, people used to get almost one covid related message once every 10 min in social media. What the worldwide numbers are, what has closed down, what restrictions there are, how to provide the best defences against covid, how to handle lockdowns, how to exercise, what to eat, and how to restructure our lives to work at home; basically, everything you can think of! All covered online.

Then I moved to know about their ideas of epidemic and pandemic of coronavirus. Most people called it as epidemic and merely some called it as pandemic. The sheer definition of "epidemic" leads me to conclude that this is exactly what this is. Wikipedia defines an epidemic as the rapid spread of disease to a large number of people in a given population within a short period of time. If we look at the statistics, in the US, for example, the number of cases went from 6 cases at the end of January 2020 to over 1 million cases by the end of May - clearly the definition of an epidemic. When similar patterns erupted in a large number of countries around the world, in most of the continents, which is then the clear definition of a pandemic.

What that means people were really anxious of the crisis only, not on the real time emergency. We can explain this behaviour with shock responsive social protection approach. This approach aims to focus on the evidence noticing when and how the social protection systems can better respond to shocks in developing and low income economies. It also extends the urgency of minimising negative shock impacts and encouraging the need for collaborative humanitarian responses.<sup>2</sup> This approach can opens up the collative actions taking by different non-governmental institutions in Bangladesh right now. People are coming forward with food, economic incentives and free medical consultation. On the other hand, some self-motivated institutions are taking the responsibility of dead people who died of Coronavirus to bury them systematically. For example, 'Bidyandondo' who provides free food to poor people in this pandemic. There is enough information to discuss charitable activities by the government of Bangladesh or other non-government organizations. I see some reports in the local media about

<sup>2</sup>This research - led by Oxford Policy Management (OPM) in consortium with the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) and INASP - is funded by UK Aid from the UK Government, as part of the UK Department for International Development's (DFID's) Humanitarian Innovation and Evidence Programme (HIEP). <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/shock-responsive-social-protection-systems-research-literature-review-2nd-edition>

charitable institutions and government distributions of rice and or essentials, but these are very informal actions that are not well structured and there is not enough information about what impact exactly these actions are having in Bangladesh. I believe they have consciously made a dent in the necessary requirements. Therewith, Bangladesh government also come with million dollar economic incentives for farmers, cottage industry owners and import depending factories.

*The Social Distancing Approach in Bangladesh:* Bangladesh has a population of 160 million and the healthcare infrastructure is in no way equipped to deal with a massive strain on its services and doctors. Similarly, there are not enough testing kits to know exactly where Bangladesh is in terms of numbers of cases. Official covid related death rates are just over 300 but the number of affected cases has shot up in recent days to cross the 20,000 threshold range. Of most concern though is that the number of cases is easing upward in a vertical slope at the rate of about 1000 new cases a day. People also believe that this is because the government continues to ease the lockdown restrictions, the cases are spiking upward. This is not a coincidence. Hence there should be a very carefully coordinated easing of restrictions needs to be drawn up in order to ensure that this spike is not as devastating.

Moreover, social distancing is a total transformation for most people I interviewed! Most of the men are not used to being in the house 24/7 where some housewives are used to it. Interestingly, wives are enjoying this time as they can share their works and pass times with their beloved men and children. Yet, scene is not really same in every case because apart from my interview there are hundreds of cases of domestic violence. Very popular newspapers of Bangladesh have reported of this cases where domestic violence both common to educated couples and illiterate ones, rich to poor class as well. There is an institution who works for women rights called NariShramik Kendra (BNSK) who carried out a survey on a limited number of families counting 154 families in total. They conducted this because they wanted to have an idea of how working women mostly engaged in informal workforce like cleaners, garment workers, vendors fare in this regard. In the time of lockdown in Dhaka, they have lost their jobs, tent to less income and more physical torture from their husbands. This is worse for those who face such abuse not to fulfil the demand of money to buy drugs<sup>3</sup>.

In Dhaka, people go out usually every second day to meet friends, visit kith and kin, or go to the shops. None of these are essential services but it feels very strange indeed to not able to do these. There's a kind of monotony that builds from being in the house all the time. Its' not that people have to do things outside of the home, but to be told people cannot resist themselves, is another matter. The feeling of losing one's choice to decide when and not to go out is new for every

individual. On the other hand, it has been a sudden change to slow down, not travel and be in one place for more than a few weeks.

People have also learned to appreciate different spaces in my house. Like, one participant claim to set up a makeshift office in one of the living rooms with a beautiful view of garden, a place she had not appreciated too much before. They have discovered the art of working from home, only a couple of hours a day but that in itself is a new experience. People have also become adept at Zoom conferencing. Interestingly lockdown makes that work front, social life and family life - have all intertwined and revolve around one place, one house. Some reported that this is acceptable in the short term, but many more months of the same may be confusing and may not be healthy.

*Religious outlook:* There was a common question to all my respondents about their religious believe regarding this pandemic. Around 95% participants called it as a result of our evil deeds on earth which comes from God or Almighty' decision. Though my participants were Muslim, this proportion think that Covid 19 is a religious punishment (Gajab) from Allah. Many a them pointed that people are abusing the world blessing for a long time, they do not obey to the guidelines of Allah and with the increasing evil deeds happening right now brings down this pandemic. When it was spread in China at November, people asked this disease as a result of torture of Muslim Chinese in Uyghur province concentration champs. Some of my respondents also acclaim that this disease is just for non-Muslims in the world. Continuously, religious leaders in Bangladesh do claim that this a punishment for those who disobey Allah in various ways.

Here, I would like to add another interesting fact given by one participant who is a public university student right now, mentioned that we can remark most effected states as Italy, USA, UK, other some European states after China. He told that there are some specific religious reasons on that note, there was a public museum where a satirist cartoon was published mocking Prophet Muhammad (SA), the highest praised person in Muslim religion. And it is a heinous crime for all the Muslims and it's also a breach to individuals' right to perform any religion. Alike there were many same cases in USA and some European states and that's why my respondent think that pandemic has severely occurring on this place. Many families gather for common prayers and they seek safeguard from the Almighty in this regard in Bangladesh as well.

#### *b) Economic impact of coronavirus:*

Here we would like to describe the economic crisis that has been caused by global pandemic in Bangladesh. That is very difficult question to answer as there is not enough data. The best indicator of the size of economy is obviously the GDP growth rate and what we do know from the first quarter of this year is that it has fallen to about 2%. Earlier, 2019 numbers

<sup>3</sup><https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/editorial/domestic-violence-during-lockdown-1589989400>, retrieved on 10.06.2020

rested at about 8%. Considering the current scenario, it is predicted that Bangladesh's growth will not move beyond 2% in this whole year.

Further, any discussion of Bangladesh's economy must focus largely on the Ready Made Garments RMG industry. The total garments export volume for 2019 was over US\$34 billion. As Bangladesh is not well diversified, this figure accounts for 85% of the country's export earnings. This heavy dependence on the RMG sector can prove to be disastrous at this time. Global trade and business has been disrupted in almost unparalleled fashion since World War II. There is no supply chain whatsoever, as there is a worldwide transportation shutdown, so how can the RMG sector operate? Orders in the sector were cancelled across the board in the billions (\$US) at the onset of covid 19. The resulting decrease in foreign remittance numbers continues to affect Bangladesh's foreign reserves dramatically.

All import export oriented companies in Bangladesh are suffering similar fates, though numbers are not yet published and the full extent of the damage to the economy will not be quantified for some time to come. In terms of jobs, with that lockdown in effect, jobs are at a standstill. Look around, you will have seen in the last 6-7 weeks, no shops or businesses or much traffic was out and about. Production services are created in most part through linkages to the main city, Dhaka. It has been quite quiet of late and non-productive for the most part. According to recent reporting from Bangladesh Economy Association about 3.5 crore people have lost their jobs during lockdown.

In the RMG sector, specifically, about 4 million people depend on this sector exclusively for their livelihood. It is believed that right now, at least half of these have suffered or continue to suffer some adverse effect of the covid 19 lockdown. Although factories have begun to reopen, wages are still not reconciled in full. A large percentage of Bangladesh's population lives hand to mouth, in that sector.

Banking is another sector which is suffering under the corona virus pandemic. 59 commercial banks and general insurance companies rely heavily on the garments sector and its related industries, to survive. Under the covid government-imposed lockdown, and the inevitable slowdown in the RMG sector and its backward linkages as a result, there has been a corresponding slowdown in the banking sector, too. In a worst case scenario, an alarming number of non-performing loans could bring a collapse to the banking sector in that case.

However, there are different opinions on possible impacts of Coronavirus lockdown on the Bangladesh economy. The big financial institutions, World Bank and IMF have reported the economic growth may slide down to just over 2.0 per cent during this fiscal year. According to news daily the growth prediction given by these institutions appears to be realistic in developing state like Bangladesh. Here one of my interviewee added that, Bangladesh government is really working hard as

an optimistic leader to tackle the calamity depending on its bureaucratic and civil forces in together.

Here, the rootless or poor class are the worst sufferers because this economic stagnation is really having a tremendous effect on livelihoods who lives from hand to mouth. And reality is a large portion of people in Bangladesh belong to this category. Losing their jobs and running out of money, numerous people are leaving the capital with bag and baggage returning to their native village. Around 34 million people, or 20.5% of the population, live below the poverty line, according to BBS (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics).<sup>4</sup> This means that more people are going to be poor in near future. Most of the housewives who were my respondent, they actually worried about their family income. Since all of them stay in home without any professional job or business, so they have to manage their household with their husbands' income which is running low day by day. Some of the service holders do not get their full time salary because of this crisis which extends to their family life as well. Some are facing very difficult time with three or four children in economic crisis.

#### c) *Environmental impact of Coronavirus:*

Firstly, the air quality index on the news shows that the air is, to a greater degree, cleaner than it was even two months ago. The lack of cars and industrial pollutants has cleaned up our worldwide air to a considerable extent. This is supported by the fact that I can hear birds chirping and the sky here looks much more blue and clean. That cloud of black smog that used to be seen from afar, is no longer there at all. Also, I have seen online videos from around the world that reveals how animals have gained the confidence to come out into spaces once dominated by humans. Over the past century, we have taken over most of their habitats and they have now reclaimed some of it.

On the other hand, the tragic and disturbing other reality is that, in anti-covid protection, we are using more plastic and disposable gloves, masks, gowns, and other one-time gear. The very same ones we have been, for years, trying to abolish. These greatly add to the pollution and plastic levels and I fear for where these will be eventually piled up and discarded. Once again, they may end up in mountainous landfills, or worse, the world's oceans.

#### IV. PICTURE OF WORLD LEADERS

There are too many countries to address and each country has handled their covid 19 response differently. Most notably we would like to applaud many countries in Asia, like Malaysia and Vietnam, which have undeniably managed to keep the Covid related deaths to a minimum, especially in terms of the size of their populations. Australia and New Zealand also must be applauded and took action very quickly and so were also able to contain the spread of the virus quickly.

<sup>4</sup><https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/covid-19-economic-challenges-facing-bangladesh-1592064588>



Germany has a huge population (83 million) and yet has relatively one of the best contained outbreaks in Europe. I think this is due largely to Angela Merkel's strong stance in terms of enforcing the lockdown and social distancing.

China must be congratulated as they were the first epicentre of the corona virus and what could've been a national disaster with hundreds of thousands of deaths, was controlled effectively and decisively by the Chinese government. Kudos also to the Chinese population, especially in Wuhan, who, for the most part, heed the warnings of their government and respect their government's safety guidelines.

On the other hand, the leaders of the United States and Brazil have both shown how negligent and indecisive governments can be in times of major crises. Furthermore, I believe there was a lack of acknowledgment on the part of both of the presidents of these nations, that the coronavirus is a pandemic at all and an unknown, unfamiliar disaster taking shape and could potentially cause thousands of deaths. They also demonstrated that there is lack of a coordinated response and effective leadership and decisionmaking about the coronavirus. In the USA, medical supplies ran into shortfall, there was no coordinated federal response and states were left effectively to fend for themselves, often bidding against each other for scarce medical resources. Congress could not agree for quite a few days on the stimulus package terms and wasted precious time debating during the key period in the initial stages of the outbreak. This is unacceptable.

There is no single point of leadership to tackle the coronavirus and no federal master plan to field the coronavirus, either. The President of the United States is neither a scientist nor a medical expert, yet he refuses to accept the warnings, advice, data or expert testimony of the experts who are and who are appointed to lead the covid battle. Hence the US numbers skyrocketed to over 313,000 covid- related deaths from an outbreak of close to 5 million cases right now. That is the among the highest rate per capita in the whole world and it is unacceptable in a country that is among the most technologically advanced - especially in the realm of medical science. And I think that is largely owing to the ineffective leadership of its current administration.

Similarly, Brazil is another frightening example of poor leadership of the ruling government. Brazil's Covid cases went up dramatically in the last few weeks, with over 15,000 deaths just recently and over 233,000 cases affected. President Bolsonaro failed to acknowledge the very real threat of the coronavirus in its initial stages.

I understand that the pandemic is new territory for the world leaders; there is no blueprint for how to deal with it and in that situation, some chaos can set in. But level headed calm is required at that time and a counsel of informed experts must be consulted. I found it very immature and a waste of time and resources arguing over where the pandemic originated and who should take the blame. Those issues can be dealt with in the future, with an independent investigation, but I believe the

time now is to coordinate internationally and get the virus in check first.

It is also encouraging that over 100 countries put their resources into a coronavirus vaccine effort. And at least eight nations have begun human testing of the vaccine, including USA, The United Kingdom, Germany and China, making it very hopeful that a vaccine can be found by the beginning of 2021.

#### V. THE GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH AND A PATH AHEAD

Some intellectuals' think of the government has drawn an effective master plan on fighting the coronavirus but failed to maintain that. As I stated previously, every government has to take charge and make an informed plan with the expertise of the related scientists and specialists. We cannot follow the examples of other countries, as social distancing has not been enforced properly here, it has not been accepted by the people and clearly it's not working, except for a few areas within Dhaka. It just isn't possible with the mindset our population has, with our general lack of education and lack of resources to enforce such a densely populated country.

So I think Bangladesh needs a different solution to deal with the pandemic, not based on any other country's strategy. Many people in our population of 160 million live hand to mouth and depend on their daily or monthly salary to get through the following day or month. I think shutting down businesses and offices and schools is not an option. For example, in our country where 4 million people are dependent in one way or the other on the RMG sector, we can't afford to keep that sector closed. We need an acceptable "new normal" to open up the economy. That "acceptable" number refers to the number of acceptable cases and deaths we are willing to bear in order to ensure job preservation, prevent mass starvation and get the economy back on track. Experts have to agree on what these numbers could be. I don't think we are going back to the way we used to live pre-covid, in the next one year or more.

Similarly, it's not feasible to keep the educational institutions closed indefinitely. It's OK in many cases who have access to online education. But this is not a reality for most students in Bangladesh. They don't have computers in most cases. Even if they have data on their phones, they can't afford the amount of data needed to complete an education at home as it requires quite a bit of data each day. So educational institutions cannot close down. I think the government must find another way to deal with the coronavirus pandemic in our country. A delicate balance between saving lives and saving livelihoods.

In terms of financial input, the government of Bangladesh has pledged and disbursed a 5 crore stimulus package during this lockdown. However, this 5 crore is only 2.52% of the country's GDP. It is not nearly enough to get us through the 6-7 weeks we, as a country, have lost in production to date. What about the upcoming few weeks or months? So I believe

that if there is a much longer lockdown, things will really get desperate for a large proportion of the population, even catastrophic. Again, a new normal plan has to be researched and implemented.

This was my overall understanding of Covid 19 lockdown crisis in Bangladesh. It is mostly an explanatory observation taken from the primary data collection thanking all of my respondents. The effected and death number of people are increasing day by day in the world. While I am writing this paper some 20-30 people may get affected and some died. We still do not know when this will end and monotonous lockdown is getting harder gradually which might eventually increase the potential social and economic crisis in the world.

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#### ANNEX

##### Sample Questionnaire:

1. When and which media helps to you know about the Coronavirus?
2. What do you think why this virus is considered as an epidemic?
3. Do you find any religious reasoning in this case?
4. How would you like to describe the economic crisis that has been caused by global pandemic in Bangladesh?
5. How would you like to define the charitable activities running by the government and other non- governmental institutions?
6. Do you think the social distancing approach is making a rapid change in the society?
7. What are the changes come to your daily life because of this lockdown and social distancing?
8. Do you think this crisis simultaneously is beneficiary to some extent considering the environment and social life?
9. What is your opinion about the world leaders' action on this crisis?
10. How would like to evaluate the multiple actions taken by Government of Bangladesh?