

A Study on Devastating Economic Strains of Women in Bangladesh During COVID-19

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Abstract

Women comprise half of the population in Bangladesh, and their economic participation is substantially significant in the country's economy. However, unfortunately, women are the most vulnerable group in Bangladesh, considering their socioeconomic status. Significantly, women's economic situation is fragile due to their form of involvement. Besides, they are also socially helpless as they do not get sufficient support from family, society, or the state. This research hypothesises that at this critical juncture of the pandemic crisis, Bangladesh's women's economy faced higher strains than men's. This research argues that women in Bangladesh went through an intense time during COVID-19 due to financial and family stress. Considering their socioeconomic importance, women's struggle for their lives and livelihoods is perilous for Bangladeshi people and society. This research finds that women faced a pay cut, lost their jobs, returned from abroad, dropped family income, and consequently experienced enhanced stress. This research urges a holistic approach to women's support to overcome economic hurdles.

Keywords: COVID-19, impacts, gender, women, Bangladesh

Introduction

The SARS-Cov-2 (COVID-19) pandemic is the 'biggest shock since the Second World War (p.5)' (OECD, 2021) that devastated the whole world (Kania et al., 2021). The earth confronted severe economic, health and well-being adversity (Green & Loualiche, 2021; Greer et al., 2020). The COVID-19 preventive measures, lockdowns, shutdowns, stay-at-

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home, social distancing and isolations to control COVID-19 transmission diminished people's economic conditions, damaged psychological strength, produced social insecurity and caused various forms of violence as well as broke the governance system (Farid Uddin, 2021; Hamadani et al., 2020). Many people globally lost their income and faced economic loss because of COVID-19. Both male and female workers in the informal and formal economy were affected by the outbreak of the economic crisis. The concentration of family members at home and the COVID-19 consequences lifted worries about the consequences on financial situations (Hamadani et al., 2020). The entire society and all members of a family, including kids, teenagers, adults or elders, regardless of age and gender, faced challenges. However, O'Donnell et al. (2021) argue that the COVID-19 crisis has gendered effects, and the financial, societal, and well-being adversities have separate consequences for women.

Women are the most vulnerable group in society (Kania et al., 2021). Women in the economic sector are most helpless due to their pattern of business, jobs, and socioeconomic position. Evidence echoes that COVID-19 disproportionately crushed women's economy, whereas men's economy usually experienced more adversity in past crises than women's (O'Donnell et al., 2021). Besides, Carli (2020) studies on 129 nations claim that COVID-19 impacted women's work more than men's. Thus, the COVID-19 situation had a substantial and multi-dimensional impact on women, considering that their primary caregiver's role in the family and socioeconomic aspects were at a larger risk of social vulnerability and inequality (Kania et al., 2021).

The first epidemic of COVID-19 started in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019, killed thousands of people and devastated the global economy worldwide, also impacted Bangladesh hugely. The infection bred exponentially to the very corner of the world within three months, and consequently, the first cases originated in Bangladesh on 8 March 2020. The coronavirus cases increased radically, and it spread rapidly to every corner of the country. Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing economies among South Asian countries and has produced noteworthy socioeconomic progress in reducing poverty, gender gap, and socioeconomic inequality (Chakravorty, 2018; M. B. Chowdhury & Chakraborty, 2021; World Bank, 2020a). However, the coronavirus pandemic devastated the country's economy (Amit, 2020). Besides, the governance, health system, migrant workers and well-being also significantly impacted by the pandemic (Biswas et al., 2020; M. B. Chowdhury & Chakraborty, 2021; Cousins, 2020; Farid Uddin, 2021)

As the virus squeezed the economy of Bangladesh, the economic shutdown impacted both the male and female economies of Bangladesh

significantly. However, the study hypothesises that the waves of the coronavirus pandemic on women's lives and livelihoods were unlike in Bangladesh, as outlined by Carli (2020) and O'Donnell et al. (2021) studies on different countries. At this critical juncture of COVID-19, the research doubts that women in Bangladesh who depend on the formal and informal economic sector for their lives and livelihoods might also become exceptionally vulnerable.

There is a significant amount of research on COVID-19 issues in Bangladesh. Such as Amit (2020) explores the COVID-19's effect and possible economic losses in Bangladesh, and M. B. Chowdhury and Chakraborty (2021) investigate the COVID-19 impact on the migrant labour force and foreign remittances flux in Bangladesh. Besides, Ahmed et al. (2020) study the mental health impacts in Bangladesh due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and Cousins (2020) explores the government's COVID-19 testing attempt. However, there is a gap in exploring the COVID-19 impacts on women's economy. However, within this limitation, Hamadani et al. (2020) explore the instant consequences of COVID-19 restrictions on women and their descendants in rural Bangladesh. Their research concentrates explicitly on socioeconomic circumstances, food uncertainty, mental health, and domestic violence, not necessarily the general scenario of women's economic condition. While the maximum instant of research and practical urgencies lies on COVID-19 responses concentrating on health and general economies in Bangladesh, however, women economic fall-out and crisis in Bangladesh is essential to explore.

This research hypothesises that the pandemic hardly impacted women's economy in Bangladesh compared to men. Thus, this paper reviews the potential pandemic impact on women's employment businesses and advancement in Bangladesh. This paper examines the COVID-19 downturn effect on women's work and employment in Bangladesh, including jobs, wages, family life, and entrepreneurship. This paper also recommends encouraging women's economic prospects and empowerment to handle their numerous struggles. This paper is essential to understanding women's struggles, who comprise half of Bangladesh's population. This paper is significant evidence for the policymakers, development partners and stakeholders to understand and initiate necessary initiatives for the economic emancipation of women in Bangladesh. This paper also outlines other nations where women are battling to survive the disastrous global pandemic.

The below section features the methodological background of the paper. Then, this paper begins with a brief synopsis of the conceptual background of women's status in Bangladesh, including their prospects and challenges. Thus, the paper outlines several COVID-19 strains on women's economy with available evidence.

Study method

The research has chosen the qualitative method to discover COVID-19's devastating economic impacts on women in Bangladesh. The qualitative method delivers significant insights into multifaceted and complex issues (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative research method includes interviews, text or document analysis, and experiments (Winchester & Rofe, 2010). By considering the COVID-19 restrictions, availability of resources, and the work's nature, this study has considered the analysis of the document from various sources that help analyse and disclose the perceptions (Babbie, 2013; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). This paper has selected textual analysis of publicly available documents and websites, such as newspaper reports, websites, available academic pieces, and various research reports, to gather essential background information and supportive information (Table 1). Then, the NVivo software program was employed to code the analysis of the documents thematically. The content analysis and thematic coding have generated a broader scenario of COVID-19 gender impacts in Bangladesh. Besides, this study has obtained various statistics from the secondary sources, such as Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and various development organisation's reports. Below table outlines various sources and materials used in this study and their purpose or supports. However, all the sources are not essentially cited in the paper. The list of documents has supported hugely in generating background and conceptualise women, economic strains in Bangladesh.

Table 1: List of documents.

<i>Sources</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Supports</i>
Newspaper reports	45	It offered the opportunity to analyse the situation and supplied various evidence.
Books and articles	30	It generated a conceptual background of women's situation.
Websites	10	It supported the analysis of the situation and delivered various data.
Research reports	12	It endorsed the analysis of the COVID-19 latest condition and produced various information.

Women in Bangladesh: Progress and challenges

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with a population of 168.9 million people; women comprise almost half (men 84.6 and women 84.5 million) of the total population, and the majority of them live in the rural areas (BBS, 2021b). The Constitution of

Bangladesh (Ministry of Law, 1972) article 19(3) has recognised men's and women's equal rights in all spheres of life and activities. Women in developing countries like Bangladesh are influenced by socio-cultural norms, religious faith, economic complexes, and political dilemmas (Guelich et al., 2021). Although women constitute half of the population in Bangladesh, women's labour force participation rate is less than half of men's (Mujeri, 2021). The role of women in Bangladesh is dominantly considered as partner/wife or mother. Bangladesh has made tremendous economic, social and human development indicators (Chakravorty, 2018; World Bank, 2020a). However, women's economic progress is not up to mark compared to other countries (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018). Among most working women, 60% work in the agriculture sector, 24% in services, 17% in industry and 15% in manufacturing (Khatun, 2020). Thus, women's journey in Bangladesh is combined with progress and challenges.

In Bangladesh, decades ago, agricultural activities were one of the main activities and income sources for females; however, women's role in Bangladesh's national and local level socioeconomic and leadership occupations increased gradually (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018). Nowadays, Bangladeshi women are essential to our society as teachers, business owners, factory workers, remittance fighters, and so on (N. Hossain, 2021; Ramos, 2020). Women's participation in labour forces increased from around 8% in the mid-1980s to almost 36% in 2016-17, and the rising trend of women's participation in the labour market is observed as one of the most noticeable shifts (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018).

Women's economic contribution can be understood by categorising them into two major divisions: productive and reproductive (Benería, 1979; Joshi, 2002) and socioeconomic stratification, such as upper-class, middle-class, and lower-class (McGinn & Oh, 2017). The upper-class roles are independent individuals who can control their efforts, while lower-class roles refer to those individuals who rely on others for work (McGinn & Oh, 2017). It is very noticeable that the consecutive influx of female labour in different industries has dramatically increased over the years (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018). The upper-class women-led top institutions ranging from financial to large industries and paved the way for massive socioeconomic changes (World Bank, 2020b). While upper-class women tend to contribute to the socioeconomic sector of Bangladesh on a larger scale, individually, middle-class women act as a group of individuals and deliver a significant amount of economic contribution in Bangladesh's socioeconomic sector through their involvement in the service sector and small businesses (F. D. Chowdhury, 2010).

The below-standard or lower-class women are the less educated, rural or peri-urban individuals. They primarily work in the ready-made garments sector, contributing 80% of all total export earnings; an estimated 50 billion is to be earned by the year 2050 through around 5000 ready-made garments industries (Rahman & Siddiqui, 2015). In recent times, Bangladeshi women are also engaged in national policymaking. Since democracy was established in Bangladesh, all the Prime Ministers are female and leading the major political parties. Besides, they also play a significant role in participating in the national parliament and cabinet (Panday, 2013). The transformation of women's status has been making economic progress as well as social development. Consequently, rural women have also come out from ignorance and social stigma and ended the different social barriers, helping to become entrepreneurs, workers, and contributors to the economy (Rahmatullah & Zaman, 2014) and over time, people's perception of the role of women gradually gained traction as a significant contributing component in Bangladesh. As a result, over the past two decades, Bangladesh has made impressive progress on several socio-demographic indicators, such as the fertility rate, infant and child mortality, maternal mortality, etc. (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018).

Although Bangladesh women have progressed a lot, they still struggle to ensure equal participation in its economy. The role of women has always been a disputed concern among the predominant mainstream society of Bangladesh. In contrast, males are considered vital decision-makers in a male-dominated patriarchal society like Bangladesh (Cain et al., 1979). Women's involvement in Bangladesh's labour force has soared gradually, from 24% in 2000 to 36% in 2020 (Khatun, 2020). However, the proportion of females is significantly low (Table 2).

Table 2: *Employed Population aged 15 to 65 more by age group and gender.*

Age Group	Bangladesh		
	Male (In 000)	Female (In 000)	Total (In 000)
15-19	2869	1035	3904
20-24	3775	2009	5783
25-29	5373	2892	8265
30-34	5481	2962	8443
35-39	5713	3017	8730
40-44	4461	2043	6504
45-49	4280	1921	6201
50-54	3289	1227	4516

55-59	2793	853	3646
60-64	1985	397	2382
65 +	2163	290	2452
Total	42182	18646	60828

Source: Organised by the authors based on (BBS, 2021a)

Though the economic involvement of women has increased a lot, the portion of influential and higher-ranking jobs are far lower than that of men.

Table 3 shows that a significant number of countries' workforces are engaged in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sectors where women's representation is double that of men. In managerial jobs, women comprise around 25% of the total, which shows that women's involvement in managerial positions is abysmal. Surprisingly, women have higher representation in professional jobs. This is because women have higher involvement in various women-friendly professional services, including teachers, doctors, and nurses. Besides, women also have good representation in the craft and related trading sectors as this kind of work is home-based and women-friendly.

Table 3: Major Occupation data by sectors and gender.

Major Occupation	Bangladesh (per 1000)		
	Male	Female	Percentage
Managers	2.3	0.7	1.8
Professionals	4.7	5.6	4.9
Technicians and Associate	2.4	0.9	1.9
Clerical Support Work	1.8	0.7	1.5
Service and Sales Workers	20.6	3.7	15.6
Skilled Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries	25.2	50.8	32.8
Craft and Related Traders	16.7	14.9	16.2
Plant and Machine Operators	9.3	3.5	7.5
Elementary Occupation	16.7	19.3	17.4
Others	0.3	0.0	0.2
Total	100%	100%	100%

Source: Organised by the authors based on Labour force survey Bangladesh, 2016-17, (BBS, 2018b)

Bangladesh's socioeconomic power approach and social barriers hinder women's productivity and contribution to the financial system

(Mujeri, 2021). Women face broad discrimination as they are considered a minority group in Bangladesh (N. Hossain, 2021). Besides, they are neglected in the different sectors of society, and one of the significant challenges for Bangladesh is to engage women in all aspects of development. The women's labour force has increased, whereas most workers are in the ready-made garments sector (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018). Besides, women garment workers are often discriminated against by the owner, considering their poor socioeconomic condition (M. I. Hossain et al., 2013).

Besides, women's role in various socioeconomic settings of Bangladesh is often overlooked and neglected. Many women are involved in informal or unpaid jobs, unpaid homemakers and day labourers in urban and rural areas (Mujeri, 2021). The role of women was hardly recognised by society, and their role was confined to domestic household activities and reproductive activities (Biswas et al., 2019; Rashid, 2006). Most women living in rural areas are actively working in many socioeconomic activities in Bangladesh, including household chores, caring for their family, and managing agriculture, which is still uncounted (Khatun et al., 2016). Another of the biggest challenges is violence against women, which is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. Their partners abuse 70% of married women in Bangladesh, and half of them are assaulted physically (HRW, 2020). Women face different types of violence in Bangladesh and socioeconomic difficulties.

Within the limitations, opportunities, and changing socioeconomic situation, women have already come out of the shell of social prejudice and contributed to the economy (T. Y. Chowdhury et al., 2018). Over the last decade, the substantial enfranchisement of women has made Bangladesh a country with the fastest economic growth globally (Bhuiyan & Abdullah, 2007; D. S. Chowdhury, 2017; N. Hossain, 2021). Besides, Ramos (2020) claims that during the covid 19 pandemic, women played vital roles in battling against pandemics by providing healthcare facilities. Many women also work in the health sectors of Bangladesh, significantly contributing to the epidemic. Besides, Bangladesh's women are responsible for caring for their children and maintaining household activities. Despite women's significant contribution, the COVID-19 economic shock worsens the women's economy in Bangladesh (Khatun, 2020). It can be argued that the decade's achievement of economic involvement of women is in crisis.

The added challenge and COVID-19 impact on women economy in Bangladesh

The massive participation of women in economic activities has been a momentum to display how women can contribute directly to the

economy. Due to COVID-19 disruptions, economic activities dropped substantially, significantly impacting women's economic safety globally (Nanthini & Nair, 2020). With the global economic shock, Bangladesh's gross domestic product growth is projected to fall significantly (Khatun, 2020). The economic disruptions led to a dampened impact on women's economic condition in Bangladesh. The COVID-19 epidemic forced Bangladeshi women to abandon small economic activities, such as small businesses or jobs, that caused a loss of income (UN Women, 2020). The impacts ranged from the loss of employment, business shutdown, and the consequent reduction of household expenditures.

From 1990 to 2019, the role of women in economic activities rose from 25% to 36% (Raihan & Bidisha, 2018). Women mainly contributed to agriculture, industry, service, small business and other sectors. In 2018, the number of women present in the garment industry was more than 3.20 million (BBS, 2018a). According to a survey by UN Women 2020, many women have lost their jobs due to COVID-19, and working hours are gradually decreasing. In the early stages of COVID-19, more than 20% of garment workers, including women, had to give up their jobs (UN Women, 2020). Before COVID-19, women worked in agriculture, education, healthcare, supervision, small-scale industry, garments, factories, and manufacturing. However, due to various lockdown measures, they became unemployed and lost income opportunities from various sources (Sarker, 2021). Besides, many jobs were abandoned because of the pandemic's need for social distancing, and men could be employed in employment that required the skill to work from home during COVID-19 (Carli, 2020).

Presently, Bangladeshi women become self-employed and self-employed by participating in small industries such as handicrafts, tailoring, agricultural products, and the cotton industry. Women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh have experienced severe challenges and failed to yield significant income (Sultana, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic severely damaged female entrepreneurship, causing many unemployment losses and financial uncertainty. A survey report shows that 70% of women entrepreneurs in 2020 and found that nearly 41% of women entrepreneurs were forced to close small businesses, 23% of women entrepreneurs have insufficient income to pay their employees, and nearly half of them were unable to pay rent (Khatun, 2020).

COVID-19 presented a challenge for start-ups or entrepreneurship. Due to the outbreak of coronavirus disease, female entrepreneurs experienced huge hurdles in continuing their businesses. As face-to-face trading halted, many entrepreneurs shifted to the digital platform; however, all women entrepreneurs could not adapt to the changing

situation. Rabbani et al. (2020) claim that more than 80% of digital enterprises faced reduced income than last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. In addition, generally, women were responsible for caring for family members, raising, nurturing, feeding children, etc. Because of social and cultural values, they were accustomed to performing these household chores. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, women's responsibilities at home increased significantly (Sarker, 2021). Women enterprises faced crises more than men because of their additional caring responsibility (O'Donnell et al., 2021).

Women are highly engaged in domestic work and have less time to spend on official and commercial work. Carli (2020) claims that women in most countries have higher caring and other family obligations than men, irrespective of personal situation. Besides, women's mental state deteriorated due to staying at home for a long time. Before being escaped in lockdown, female entrepreneurs spent 2.5 hours doing housework, and now they spend an average of 4 hours at home every day for daily household tasks (Rabbani et al., 2020). A survey (The Daily Star, 2020) by 'PPRC and BRAC (Non-Government Organization in Bangladesh)' argues that 95 per cent of the individuals surveyed across the country faced income deficits due to the COVID economic shutdown. The loss of income inevitably impacted the household income that generated insecurity, particularly of low-income people.

In 2020, 121,940 women immigrant employees worked in various works in the Middle East, specifically in Saudi Arabia, Italy, Spain and other European states (UN Women, 2020). When the coronavirus started, these countries struggled a lot, pushing the Bangladeshi migrant workers into hurdle conditions. Due to the severity of COVID-19, migrant workers are at the forefront of returning, which has also worsened women's unemployment. The COVID-19 worldwide outbreak significantly affected the recruitment, income, remittance flow and travel movement of Bangladeshi migrant workers (M. B. Chowdhury & Chakraborty, 2021; UN Women, 2020). Many women workers who had been working in various countries were also severely affected by the coronavirus travel restrictions and economic shocks. Therefore, women experienced a notable impact of COVID-19 on the economy. Besides, many women in Bangladesh internally migrate from rural to urban areas for work. Migrated women who work on the domestic scale or construction site have the worst economic experience. 95% of female construction workers were the primary victims who could not earn money for their families (BRAC, 2020).

Although women have made considerable contributions to the country's overall economy, many are involved in informal economic

activities, including street sellers, home-based workers, waste collectors, domestic labourers, and short-term wage workers. In Bangladesh, women employed in the informal sector always have low incomes and sometimes cannot get regular wages (Huq-Hussain, 1995). According to the Bangladesh Labour Force Survey 2016-17, more than 90% of women belong to the informal sector, higher than men (BBS, 2017). The lockdown blockade during COVID-19 had a significant economic impact; women in the informal sector across the country faced challenges (UK Aid, 2021). Besides, women workers who work in the informal economy as part-time domestic workers in households have no work and struggle to manage their daily food (UN Women, 2020). The informal sector's women employees and labourers faced enormous hurdles by losing their jobs and income, pushing them to an uncertain life.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic primarily spawned challenges to women's progress (Carli, 2020). Women also confronted numerous personal hurdles, carrying added household and family obligations (Sultana, 2021). In particular, women conventionally conveyed a more considerable duty for family care and further domestic work (Carli, 2020). To cope with the extra family works and to maintain their economy, women shifted their businesses into their residences and also moved to digital podiums; however, the added family caring jobs took away time from their job or businesses and forced them to work extended time after finishing the household duties (Sultana, 2021). Besides, women are more involved in essential jobs than men, which has exposed them to additional infection risk and psychological stress (Carli, 2020). The more extended stay-at-home actions also imposed an enormous financial and mental load on women and elevated domestic violence (Hamadani et al., 2020). According to a Bangladesh legal aid and human rights organisation, at least 235 women were murdered by their husbands or husband's family members during COVID-19 in nine months (ASK, 2020). In addition, the minimum scope of socialisation also shrinks the opportunity to handle the various hurdles (Sultana, 2021). Thus, it is highly prevalent that the pandemic hugely impacted women's progress, lives and livelihoods. Bangladesh's women have progressed significantly compared to their earlier socioeconomic position; however, COVID-19 increased their risk of stress, economic exhaustion, and worse emotional and mental health.

Conclusion and recommendation

Over the past decades, Bangladesh's women's progress narrative has resulted in colossal success; the women have primarily driven the country's numerous socioeconomic and political revolutions. The socioeconomic changes instigated by women have contributed immensely

to the country's overall economic growth. However, men are usually dominant over women and maintain power and resources in the family in a patriarchal society like Bangladesh. The portion of women's economic contribution is meagre compared to men in Bangladesh. The regular wages, salaries, businesses, and relative working prospects extend significant prospective advantages for women. Women's higher contribution to the country's economy is essential for women's emancipation, boosting socioeconomic status and fostering gender equality. Besides, advancing women's participation in the country's economy generates practical and optimistic outcomes on social development, social resiliency, economic growth, and sustainable development.

The study is limited to its resources, time and analysis. The paper's primary author is a woman and mother who is also substantially burdened with COVID-19 homeschooling and household tasks. The paper could not adequately assess women's COVID-19 economic challenges due to the resources, such as time, primary data, and field study. However, within the short time and COVID-19 adverse consequences, the paper is a valuable background to understand women's socioeconomic condition and their significant risks for the coronavirus crisis. The study can serve as a template to conduct further study. The study findings show that Bangladesh women face significant economic challenges due to COVID-19. The research argues that the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 global outbreak have created a significant pause in women's progress, especially in a developing country like Bangladesh, where women are still struggling for equal social and economic rights. The Bangladesh government has declared several COVID-19 support sets amounting to US\$12.11 billion, which is equivalent to 3.7% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP); however, these incentive packages have not focused on the women's economy sufficiently (Khatun, 2020). This study urges that in improving women's economic condition, women need significant attention from Bangladesh's public and private sectors. The extended and supported economic opportunities for women are essential for Bangladesh's general progress.

It is essential to facilitate women's condition and address several attributes to improve social, cultural, technological, and economic constraints to overcome COVID-19 adversity. This study outlines below suggestions for women's economic support.

Government and financial institutions should ensure the necessary support to women entrepreneurs to continue their business. Women entrepreneurs can be offered loan packages with no interest or shallow interest to recover from the COVID-19 disaster quickly. The affected

women entrepreneurs must be ensured easy access to finance to return to their businesses at maximum capacity and recover their attainments that will substantially enhance the country's economic progress.

During COVID-19, online business shows a prospective future. Women entrepreneurs should be given proper informational and technological infrastructures and training to operate their businesses successfully. The government can establish a support centre to get assistance for women entrepreneurs.

Due to COVID-19, many migrated women lost their jobs and were forced to return to the village from the urban job location. In that case, the government should provide social services, economic security, safety, and protection so that migrated women can survive and rejoin their work.

Bangladesh's women work diligently in the garment industry to contribute to the national economy. The government should negotiate with the garment industry and factory owners to ensure women's rights, job security, and a safe working environment.

The participation of women in jobs in Bangladesh is comparatively lower than that of men. Meanwhile, COVID-19 has exacerbated the ongoing progress of women. The government should prioritise the working women in the mass vaccination program to join their jobs more rapidly.

With many women losing their jobs and sources of income, the government should foster job diversification and open new working opportunities in different sectors to survive.

Violence against women has been raised worryingly during the pandemic time. Law enforcement agencies should be more active and supportive of safeguarding women and ensuring that the offenders are punished quickly.

In Bangladesh, society patronises the culture of masculinity, which has burdened women with added family responsibilities. Society should change its mindset and ensure women's working opportunities in the country's economy. Besides, society should be more supportive in ensuring women's rights in the family environment to decrease their family caring loads.

Finally, women's economic empowerment requires a holistic approach that recognises the importance of societal, political, and individual encouragement of women's economic involvement and contribution as essential factors to overcome economic hurdles. Modern skill development, economic diversification, productive economic endeavour, technological empowerment, social protection and social safety net

initiatives can heighten the capability of women's economy. The government should partner with private organisations, business community development groups and non-government organisations (NGOs) to improve women's socioeconomic resiliency. Thus, the study argues that the achievements made by Bangladeshi women can be reversed by considering the various strategies effectively.

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Ethical issue

This research analysed secondary sources of publicly available materials. Thus, it did not require ethics approval.

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