Challenges and Prospects of Youth Employment in the Post-COVID Scenario

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Executive Summary

In developing countries like Bangladesh, where citizens received negligible support during the COVID-19 pandemic from the government and other agencies, the pandemic is threatening to revert years of progress made in poverty reduction and widen the existing socioeconomic inequalities. While older people face a higher risk of infection, younger people are facing a greater and longer-term economic risk—losing jobs, not finding jobs after graduation, facing long disruption with education, all of which further exacerbated by a high level of digital inequality. In the Youth Report 2021, we share the results from our survey with the youth in Bangladesh, conducted in March 2021. We assess youth’s employment and income, mental well-being, learning, perceptions of the future, and their willingness to vaccinate.

Lockdown measures taken since the pandemic has hampered youth livelihoods to great extents. However, our findings show, even after the economic activities resumed, a significant number of youth who were working before the pandemic were no longer in any income-generating activities (IGA). Youth affected with prolonged job loss belonged to mainly skilled professions, such as education, private firms, and handicrafts, compared to less skilled and essential professions, such as agriculture, day labour, or transport. Women suffered greater persistent job losses, considering more young women in our sample were working in sectors that were hit hardest. Working hours also reduced for youths working in both time periods, before the pandemic and after economic activities resumed; young women, however, faced a much greater loss in working hours compared to young men. Average incomes reduced for all youths, with young women facing greater reductions, despite them working after the pandemic.

The mental well-being of all youths improved since the lockdown period in April 2020; however, young women had consistently poorer mental health than their counterparts in all time periods. Young men were also more confident about getting new jobs in post-COVID times, compared to women. Interestingly though, the majority of the youths perceived the effects of the pandemic to be greater for men than for women. Only a small proportion of working women believed otherwise. The key takeaway from these findings was that young women, despite being more adversely affected in terms of both economic and mental well-being, believed the loss to be greater for men.

We asked youths what they thought were the societal impacts of exam uncertainties, school closures, and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) auto-pass granted to students; major concerns included backlog of academic sessions, reduced study motivation, increase in mental stress, and addiction to social media, among others. Almost all youths report an increase in household chores, reduction in study time, and increase in virtual communication. Digital use, mobile banking, and their costs have increased since the lockdown, with entertainment and social media purposes having the most likely uses. The majority of youths expressed their willingness to vaccinate; youths who transitioned from working before the pandemic to not working now were most willing. Youths with a greater number of family members above the age of 40, and those with higher education were also more willing to get vaccinated. A significant proportion of youths from our social media sample agreed to have undertaken training during the past year, while almost no one in the main survey did. Our social media sample, albeit subject to non-representativeness and only capturing a small cohort of more “connected” youths, reflects the state and perceptions of a particular group of youths and the possible inequality in this regard.
1. Introduction

Public health measures taken to contain the spread of COVID-19 have caused massive shocks to the global economy and all aspects of human lives. The pandemic is disproportionately affecting the youths, particularly in countries like Bangladesh where youths already struggle in the labour market because of limited experience and skills and with poor quality of education (World Bank, 2019). Because of the pandemic, youths are competing with more experienced candidates for fewer jobs. Additionally, in-person classes are postponed in all educational institutions since March 2020, increasing the uncertainty of future labour market outcomes of current students. Limitation in digital infrastructure and capacities of educational institutes and limited digital skills of and stark digital inequalities among the youths indicate a widespread disruption in education and possible long-term learning loss of the youth.

The collective disruption to business activities and education will have impacts on this “lockdown generation” for years to come; while some will struggle with the loss of job and income at the forefront, others might struggle in getting into the future job markets due to the interruption in education (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020a). Recognizing how easily youth’s voices can go unheard in a crisis like this, and the crucial part they are supposed to play in the country’s socioeconomic recovery from the pandemic, this report aims to highlight some key aspects of the youth in Bangladesh, namely employment and income, mental well-being, learning, perceptions on future outlook, and their willingness to vaccinate.

The first COVID-19 case in Bangladesh was identified on 8 March 2020, and the country went under a nationwide lockdown from 24 March till 30 May 2020 by closing down offices, non-essential stores, and educational institutions and imposing restrictions on transportation. This resulted in a complete halt in economic activities, with devastating consequences. A rapid study by the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) in urban slums and rural Bangladesh found earnings drop by 49% in informal occupations and 17% in formal occupations between February and June 2020 (Rahman et al., 2020). The youth unemployment rate in Bangladesh was already high—10.6%, according to the Labour Force Survey 2016–2017 (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2018), and almost 95% of all young workers are involved in informal employment, according to ILO (2016).² The economic disruption has only worsened their conditions, which calls for an immediate assessment of the extent of the damage and appropriate response.

There were glimpses of hope by December 2020 as the infection rate went down, and consequently, the government lifted most restrictions. What seemed to be a path towards recovery for the Bangladeshi economy—with businesses resuming and educational institutions about to reopen—now seems elusive because of the subsequent waves that hit Bangladesh since March 2021. Daily infection rates have been increasing exponentially at an all-time high from 5% in February to 25% in July 2021, which has been a real blow to the recovering economy. Against this backdrop, we hope our survey will provide some useful insights on how to support our youth in these difficult times, a third of our population and our future generation.

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¹ According to BBS, those aged 15–29 years are defined as youth.
² The data on the school to work transition survey (SWTS) refer to youth as 15–29-year-olds.
We conducted our rapid quantitative phone survey on youths aged 18–35 years from five regions across Bangladesh from 27 February to 7 March 2020. BIGD conducted a national survey in Bangladesh in 2018 and published the report in 2019 (Matin et al., 2019). In this study, we have followed up with the youths surveyed in 2018 and checked how they are doing in the COVID-19 context. The purpose of this report is therefore threefold:

- to provide an immediate assessment of the impact of the pandemic on the youth labour market and learning, and to provide observations on different segments of the youth population, including gender, occupations, and area of living;
- to provide an assessment into the mental well-being and how it has affected different segments of the youth population since the pandemic; and
- to provide insight into some of the youths’ perceptions and their willingness to get vaccinated.

Findings show 15% of the youth who were engaged in income-generating activities (IGA) before the pandemic were still out of IGA seven months after the economy resumed in January 2021. More youth in skilled occupations, for example, private tutoring, teaching, factory work, and handicrafts making, lost jobs than youths in unskilled occupations like day labouring and working in agriculture and transport sectors. Working hours and earnings in January 2021 were also much lower than the pre-pandemic levels.

Impact varied across gender and area of living. Young women disproportionately lost job loss and income as well as working hours, compared to young men. Compared to their male counterparts, young women also suffered more from mental stress and were less optimistic about future entry to the labour market, as reflected by their lower confidence level. Interestingly, though young women faced a greater negative impact, most of the youths, both male and female, thought that the pandemic had affected young men more than women. Women themselves, regardless of their occupational status, perceived males to be more affected than themselves. As we will explain later, this perception is closely related to the gender norm in the society that predominantly defines men as breadwinners and women as homemakers.

The self-reported burden of housework increased for all youth; young women reported a slightly higher increase. Self-reported use of virtual communication increased for all youths; however, the discrepancy was large between young men and women. Youth’s digital usage also increased since the pandemic, in both cost of internet and hours spent, mainly for activities like work and entertainment. Most youths thought that school closures, uncertainties over exams, and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) “auto-pass” is hampering their education, demotivating them to study, increasing their mental stress, and increasing their addiction to social media, among others. We also asked youths about their willingness to vaccinate. We find differences in youth’s willingness to vaccinate across employment status over the two periods—February 2020 and January 2021.
2. Methodology and Sample Description

The rapid survey on youths took place from 27 February to 7 March 2021. We conducted a phone-based quantitative survey. Each survey took 30 minutes on average. We used a sample from the Youth Survey conducted by BIGD in 2018 on Bangladeshi youths (Matin et al., 2019) to administer this survey.

2.1. Sampling Technique

We adopted a multi-stage random sampling technique to select the target sample. During the 2018 survey, we divided Bangladesh into five distinctive regions for selecting representative samples of youth. The regions are: North (Rangpur & Rajshahi), South (Khulna & Barishal), North-East (Sylhet division), South-East (Chattogram division), and Central (Dhaka & Mymensingh divisions).

At the first stage of the sampling for the 2018 survey, we randomly selected 30 upazilas (subdistricts) from each region. At the second stage, we randomly selected two unions/wards from each upazila. Finally, we randomly drew one village or maholla (neighbourhood) from each union/ward. Therefore, we ended up with 150 subdistricts, 300 unions/wards, 300 villages/mahollas, and 4,200 youths aged 15–35 years. The samples were equally distributed across the five regions, with 840 youths from each region. We collected the phone number of the respondents with due permission during the survey.

2.1.1. Response Rate

For the 2021 survey, we extracted the sample from the 2018 survey, considering the 18–35\(^3\) age group as youths. After excluding the youths who fall above the cut-off age three years later, we ended up with a sample size of 3,795 youths. The response rate was around 51%. We surveyed the youth over the phone because of the pandemic. To maximize our success rate, we made a maximum of six attempts in three days at different times to reach a sample. As we can see from Figure 1, the majority of the attrition occurred because the phone was switched off (53%) or the number was wrong (21%). Fifteen per cent did not receive the call. Only in 8% of the unsuccessful cases, the youth did not agree to talk. For a detailed understanding of the patterns behind the unsuccessful response, refer to the Appendix.

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\(^3\) Several definitional discrepancies exist in determining the “youth.” We use this age group as defined by the Department of Youth Development, in accordance to the National Youth Policy (Department of Youth Development [DYD], 2016).
2.2. Sample Description

With a response rate of 51%, our analysis is based on a final sample of 1,929 respondents aged 18–35 years, from five regions across Bangladesh. The average age of the respondents is 24.8 years (Table 1).

Men have a slightly higher representation in the sample, 52% of the respondents (Figure 2: Panel A). The sample consists of youths primarily from the rural areas—78%, compared to 22% from urban areas (Figure 2: Panel B). According to the World Bank Development Indicators (World Bank 2021), 37% of Bangladeshis live in urban areas. As our current sample is a subsample of the nationally represented youth survey conducted in 2018, we expect it to be nationally representative as well. The highest proportion of youths in the sample were aged between 18 and 23 years, followed by 24–29-year-olds and 30–35-year-olds (Figure 3).

Table 1: Average Age of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average age of respondents</td>
<td>24.8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age of male respondents</td>
<td>24.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age of female respondents</td>
<td>25.1 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3. Youths’ Pre-Pandemic Occupational Status

We asked the youths what their main occupation was in February 2020, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. We used this data as the benchmark for the employment status of the youth prior to the economic shock. Almost 41% of youths in our sample were engaged in IGA, 25% were students, and 28% were involved in housework in February 2020 (Table 2).

| Table 2: Respondents’ Pre-Pandemic Occupational Status |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| **Total no. of observations**                          | 1,929 |
| Youths in IGA (Feb 2020) %                            | 41%   |
| Students (Feb 2020) %                                  | 25%   |
| Youths in housework (Feb 2020) %                       | 28%   |
| Youths unemployed: looking for jobs (Feb 2020) %       | 4%    |
| Youths unemployed: not looking for jobs (Feb 2020) %   | 2%    |

The percentage of youths in the sample who acquired at least a secondary level of education was four times greater (42%) than the percentage of youths who completed a tertiary level of education (10%). More young women have education up to class nine, but men are more likely to get higher education, Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and beyond. One-tenth of the male youths and 7% of the female youths have tertiary education (Figure 4).
Figure 4: Gender Distribution Across Educational Levels

Figure 5 shows a gendered distribution of youth’s occupational status. Forty-two per cent of the youths were engaged in IGA in February 2020; however, a greater proportion of young men (63%) were engaged in IGA, compared to only 19% of the young women (Figure 5). While the proportion of male and female students was quite similar, 56% of young women are involved in housework compared to just 1% of the young men. The percentage of young men looking for jobs was also greater than that of young women in February 2020.

Figure 5: Gender Distribution of Youths in IGA and Non-IGA in Feb 2020

2.4. Study Limitations

While nationally representative, our study is not devoid of limitations. Due to limited mobility during the pandemic, we conducted our survey via phone, which can result in reporting biases. Our response rate from the original sample from the previous survey was around 51%, as we could not reach many of the respondents over the phone. Many questions in the survey were based on recall data, which are prone to recall errors. Biases may also arise from seasonality or lack of sample size in each occupational category. Nevertheless, we believe the data to reflect the general status of youths during the pandemic and is a timely assessment of the state of youth in Bangladesh.
3. Employment, Income, and Working Hours

3.1. Youths in IGA

To understand the effect of the pandemic on youth employment, income, and working hours, we asked the youths about their IGA status in three time periods: February 2020 (just before the onset of the pandemic), April 2020 (during the nationwide lockdown), and finally in January 2021 (seven months after economic activities resumed).

Figure 6 shows the proportion of the total sample who were engaged in IGA in three time periods. The percentage of youths engaged in any form of IGA almost halved between February 2020 and April 2020. This was clearly the effect of lockdown measures taken in March 2020 to contain the spread of the pandemic. A large proportion of youths in almost every occupation, except agriculture, lost their livelihoods in April 2020.

Figure 6: Percentage of Youths in IGA in Three Time Periods, by Each Category

As illustrated in Figure 6, the overall percentage of the youths in IGA went back to the pre-pandemic level by January 2021 (41%). The percentage of males in IGA increased by 1% in January 2021 (64%) from February 2020 (63%). However, the overall percentage of female youths in IGA in January 2021 was slightly lower than that in the pre-pandemic levels.

3.2. Youths’ Pre-Pandemic Engagement in IGA

While it might seem like a full recovery in employment levels by January 2021, such is not the case; an autonomous fresh entry into the labour market occurs each year, especially among the youth, which should result in a much higher IGA participation among the sample youth in case of a full recovery. According to the World Bank (2013), it is estimated that 2.1 million people will enter the working-age group per year between 2013 and 2023. Our figures include both the autonomous entry of new entrants, along with the exit of those who did not recover their job losses. Therefore, we zoom into the IGA status of only those who were engaged in IGA pre-pandemic in February 2020 to understand the real impact of the pandemic on the youth of Bangladesh.
We see that among respondents who said they were working before the pandemic, only 48% of them remained in IGA during the lockdown period, and even seven months after the economy resumed, only 85% of them got back to IGA in January 2021 (Figure 7). This means that among the youths who were in IGA before the pandemic, almost 15% were out of the labour market as of January 2021.

This population includes mostly youths working in the education sector as private tutors and teachers. As we know, all educational institutes in Bangladesh have remained closed since March 2020, which explains the high unemployment rate among teachers. On the other hand, private tutoring, like other services, requires close contact and is not deemed “essential”; thus almost half the youth involved in private tutoring have remained out of work. Additionally, many youth making handicrafts or working in private firms and factories remained out of work, possibly because many firms in these sectors produce non-essential products or services (Figure 8). Overall, youths in sectors that involve skilled workers (education, private firms, and crafts) were more affected and faced persistent job loss, compared to sectors with less-skilled workers, such as day labours, agriculture, and transport.

This percentage is based on the sample of youths who were in IGA in February 2020, i.e., 41.5% of the entire sample.

We also had relatively smaller sample sizes of miscellaneous occupations, such as barber, brokers, security guards, contractors, etc. We accumulated them into “others” category and refrained from drawing conclusions on them due to sample sizes in each category.
3.3. Youths’ Pre-Pandemic Engagement in IGA: Rural-Urban

Disaggregating youths by rural and urban samples, we find that a greater percentage of working youths living in urban areas lost jobs during the lockdown compared to those living in rural areas. Among youths engaged in IGA before COVID-19, 44% of the urban youths were in IGA in April 2020, compared to 49% of the rural youths (Figure 9).

However, in January 2021, a higher proportion of urban youths from this group were in IGA (88%) compared to rural youths (84%). As the urban sectors were hit harder than the rural ones, at least in the beginning, more urban youth lost their livelihoods. We cannot explain from our data why the recovery rate among the urban youth was higher. One possible reason could be the higher cost of urban living. The urban youth had to find whatever income-generating opportunity they could just to survive in the cities. We will try to explain this further in the section on income.

Figure 9: Percentage of Youths in IGA, of Those Who Were in IGA in Feb 2020

3.4. Working Hours of Youths in IGA (Working Pre-COVID and Now)

We asked youths engaged in IGA about their working hours in all three time periods—February 2020, April 2020, and January 2021. With so many young people out of IGA during the lockdown, the working hours of most youths reduced in April 2020. We focus our analysis here on youths who were in IGA in two periods—pre-pandemic in February 2020 and seven months after the resumption of economic activities in January 2021.

Table 3 shows the percentage change in average weekly working hours. Total working hours reduced by 3.1% between the two periods. Albeit small, the decrease in average weekly working hours was greater for youths living in rural areas (3.3%), compared to those in urban areas (2.6%).
Table 3: Percentage Change in Average Weekly Working Hours, by Area of Living, Between Feb 2020 and Jan 2021 Among Those Working in Both Periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage change in average weekly working hours between Feb 2020 and Jan 2021 among those working in both periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>-3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>-3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>-2.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5. **Income of Youths in IGA**

A large number of job losses coupled with a decrease in working hours among those who were working throughout reduced youths’ income as well. Income reduced for most working people during the lockdown period—a joint survey by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and BIGD (2021a) found that per capita income was 7% below pre-COVID levels.

We analyzed youth’s individual income from all occupations in the three different time periods. Income fell by large amounts during the lockdown in April 2020. Hence, we mainly compare the average change in individual youth income in two time periods—pre-pandemic in February 2020 and seven months after the resumption of economic activities in January 2021. For the two time periods, we compared the change in average monthly income between two groups: (i) youths who were in IGA in February 2020 (could be still working or not working in January 2021) and (ii) youths who were in IGA in both time periods—February 2020 and January 2021.

*Youths who were working before the pandemic faced an 18% decrease in the average monthly income between February 2020 and January 2021 (Figure 10).* We found in the previous section that 15% of youths working before the pandemic were no longer in IGA. Hence, this figure reflects the fall in the average income of those youths and those who were working in January 2021 as well.

In contrast, the percentage decrease in the average income of youths who were working in both time periods was 11%. Although lower than the decrease in the full sample, the data imply a substantial income loss even among youths who were working in both time periods. These youths working in both periods have had income losses during the pandemic which they still have not been able to fully recover even seven months after economic activities resumed. We also find that youths living in urban areas faced a greater decrease in average income between the two periods.

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6 By full sample, in this case, we mean the youths who were working before the pandemic (regardless of whether they were working or not in January 2021).
### 3.6. Earnings Gap Across Locality

Among youths who were in IGA in February 2020, youths from urban areas faced a greater decrease in income (21%), compared to rural youths (18%)—of approximately two percentage points (Figure 11).

The pattern is similar among youths who were employed in both periods; however, the gap is much wider for this category. Youths in urban areas who were in IGA faced a 15% decrease in average income, compared to youths in rural areas (9%).

**Figure 10: Percentage Change in Average Income Between Feb 2020 and Jan 2021, Across Different IGA Status**

**Figure 11: Percentage Change in Average Income Between Feb 2020 and Jan 2021, Across IGA Status by Locality**
3.7. Confidence in Getting Into IGA in the Post-COVID Scenario

Young people’s aspirations and confidence about future career prospects also play an important part in determining a successful recovery and their mental wellbeing. Most youths have had their future plans impacted by the pandemic, through school closures, uncertainties with examinations, and a contraction in the labour market. Many cross-country studies have found these to be detrimental to youth aspirations—the uncertainty and constant fear of what comes next is most likely to have long-term negative implications for youth (Eurofund 2020; ILO 2020c). A study by ILO (2020b) found 38% of young people globally were uncertain of their future career prospects.

Our findings are similar to the ILO findings—*62% of respondents report being confident in getting into IGA in the post-COVID scenario.*
4. Effects of COVID-19 on the Mental Wellbeing of the Youth

COVID-19 has been as much of a mental health crisis as it has been an economic one. The halt in activities, followed by job losses and drop in income and working hours, coupled with social isolation and the fear of the virus are likely to have far-reaching impacts on youths' mental health. In addition to the economic shock faced by all, young people are also disproportionately affected by the closure of educational institutes, a narrowing job market for new entrants, and social isolation, which plays an important part in their mental wellbeing. As such, we anticipate a negative impact of the pandemic on the mental health of the youth. According to the Global Risks Report 2021, 80% of youth's mental health deteriorated during the pandemic (World Economic Forum 2021a).

We used the Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS)\(^7\) to better understand the mental wellbeing of the youth. This mental well-being test is framed by seven positively worded statements with five possible responses, ranging from “none of the time” to “all the time.” Respondents’ final answers were aggregated on a scale of 7–35, with higher scores representing better mental wellbeing. Scores between 7 and 17 reflect probable depression or anxiety, 18–20 reflect possible depression or anxiety, and scores above 20 indicate possibly no anxiety or depression.

We calculated average mental health scores in the two time periods, which illustrates an overall picture of youths’ mental health state. We also calculated the percentages of youths who fall into the category of different types of depression/anxiety levels. While we do not have a benchmark for the pre-pandemic scores of mental health, comparing the two time periods—during the lockdown and after the economy reopened—can provide us with a picture of change in mental health state in the two post-pandemic periods.

4.1. Average Mental Health Score

The average mental health score of youths during the lockdown period in April 2020 was 21.38, which increased to a score of 25.1 in February 2021, indicating an improvement in mental well-being nine months into the pandemic. A global study conducted by ILO (2020c) that used the same module found the average mental health score of youths aged 18–29 years to be 21. Our estimates for youths aged 18–29 is similar to the overall score in both periods. A higher score indicates better mental well-being, which means that as restrictions loosened and the economy reopened, youths’ mental well-being improved.

4.2. Percentage of Youths in Possible Anxiety or Depression

We analyzed the percentage of youths in probable, possible, and no depression/anxiety to find out how many youths are at risk and who they are. Most of the youths in our sample were under the category of no depression/anxiety in both periods (Table 4). Understandably, depression/anxiety was higher during the lockdown in April 2020; 90% of the youth had no depression/anxiety in February 2021. Youths under

\(^7\) https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-experience-measures/short-warwick-edinburgh-mental-wellbeing-scale/
the category of probable depression/anxiety were the lowest in our sample, and hence we focus our
discussions primarily on the possible depression/anxiety category.

There were no significant differences between different age groups, occupational status, or other
demographic characteristics. But we found a significant difference between female and male youth—
young women consistently reported lower mental well-being than young men. In April 2020, the
percentage of young women with possible depression or anxiety was 31%; 25% of young men were in
this category. While this percentage decreased in February 2021, a greater proportion of female youths
(11%) were still in the category of possible depression or anxiety than male youths (6%).

Our findings support most studies worldwide; COVID-19 is disproportionately affecting women’s mental
health. The need to invest in youth’s mental health support has been identified as one of the most
crucial short-to-medium term policies to help young people recuperate the negative impact of the

Table 4: Percentage of Youths in Probable, Possible and No Anxiety/Depression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Probable anxiety/depression (%)</th>
<th>Possible anxiety/depression (%)</th>
<th>No sign of anxiety/depression (%)</th>
<th>N in each row</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Apr ‘20 25</td>
<td>Apr ‘20 163</td>
<td>Apr ‘20 170</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>326</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>1026</td>
<td>1700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16% 1%</td>
<td>25% 6%</td>
<td>59% 93%</td>
<td>975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19% 2%</td>
<td>31% 11%</td>
<td>50% 87%</td>
<td>913</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Scores are based on the SWEWMBs and range from 7 to 35. Higher scores indicate higher positive mental
well-being. Scores of between 7–17 represent probable depression or anxiety, scores of between 18–20 suggest
possible depression or anxiety, and scores of between 21–35 give no indication of anxiety or depression.
4.3. Response to Statement on “I’ve been feeling anxious”

We asked respondents how often they felt anxious, on a five-point scale—ranging from none of the time, rarely, some of the time, often and all the time. The figure shows the percentage of youths\(^8\) in different employment status—*who felt anxious some of the time, often, and all the time.*

![Figure 12: Percentage Who Reported Feeling Anxious Some, Often or All the Time in Feb 2021, Across Various Employment Status](image)

Youths who were not in IGA in both periods—February 2020 and January 2021—were more likely to report feeling anxious sometimes, often, and all the time, 60% of youths in this category. Fifty-five percent of youths who were in IGA pre-pandemic but are now out of the labour market are also more likely to report feeling anxious sometimes, often, and all the time compared to those who continued working during the period (employed since February 2020 or those who got into the labour market during the period).

---

\(^8\) This sub-sample does not include youths who were students or engaged in housework; it includes youths who were either engaged in IGA pre-pandemic or those who were looking for jobs during that time.
5. Are Female Youth Facing the Brunt of the Economic Impact of COVID-19?

5.1. Greater Burden of Loss in Employment, Hours of Work, and Income on the Female Youth

A gender-disaggregated analysis shows a disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the young women compared to young men. Forty-seven per cent of the male youths working before the pandemic were still working in April 2020, the rate is 52% for the female youth (Figure 13). Though a larger percentage of working female youth could retain their livelihoods during the lockdown, the difference was minor.

However, by January 2021, many more male youths managed to recover their livelihoods compared to the female youth. Of those who were involved in IGA before the pandemic, 89% of the young men and 71% of the young women got back to IGA by January 2021. Almost a third of the female youth working prior to the pandemic did not manage to find jobs seven months after the extended lockdown was lifted. This rate is almost three times as high as the male youth working before the pandemic.

![Figure 13: Percentage of Youths in IGA, of Those Who Were in IGA in Feb 2020, by Gender](image)

Even among those who maintained their livelihoods in both periods—February 2020 and January 2021, we see a large gender gap. Young women working in both periods faced a 15% reduction in working, while their male counterparts faced a decrease of 1.5% only (Table 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage change in average weekly working hours between Feb 2020 and Jan 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total                                          -3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males                                         -1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females                                       -15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consequently, we see a negative disproportionate impact of the pandemic on young women’s income. Figure 14 illustrates the percentage decrease in income for both groups. Among those who were in IGA
in Feb 2020, young women’s average income decreased by 38%, more than twice as much as their male counterparts who saw a decrease of 17%.

In the case of female youth who were working in both periods, the percentage decrease in average income was also more than twice as high as their male counterparts—21% vs. 10% (Figure 14).

![Figure 14: Percentage Change in Average Income Between Feb 2020 and Jan 2021, Across IGA Status by Gender](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IGA status</th>
<th>In IGA in Feb 2020</th>
<th>In IGA in both periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>-17%</td>
<td>-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-38%</td>
<td>-21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2. Young Women Are Also Less Confident About Joining IGA in Future

Young women are also far less likely to be confident about joining IGA in the future. Only 52% of the young women said that they are more confident (Figure 15). Conversely, 71% of men expressed their confidence. While this could be mainly because a large proportion of female youths in our sample are engaged in housework who have not been in involved IGA previously (56%, refer to Figure 5), female youths displayed much lower confidence even among those who were in IGA as well as students (Figure 16).

![Figure 15: Confidence in Joining Future IGA, by Gender (%)](image)
Among those who were in IGA in January 2021, 62% of the females reported having higher confidence to get into future earning activities, compared to 74% of males. Among students, the percentage of young men expressing higher confidence was greater (66%) than their female counterparts (61%).

![Figure 16: Percentage of Youths in Different Occupational Status, Who Are More Confident About Joining Future IGA, by Gender](image)

There are many reasons behind the lower confidence of young women—ranging from women’s own perceptions of having lower capabilities in securing jobs to actually having lower opportunities to enter the job market (Matin et al., 2019). Young women already in IGA also exert much lower confidence than men, which could be due to the nature of the jobs. Studies have shown that worldwide women are engaged in more non-permanent job contracts, more informal, and often at the lower level of hierarchy (UN Women, 2020).

### 5.3. Urgency of Addressing Challenges in Skills and Employment Faced by Young Women

As we see, young women are not only struggling much harder than young men in finding and maintaining their livelihoods, but also facing a much greater reduction in their working hours and income than the male youth. They are also much less confident about joining IGA in the future.

All of this is bad news as the female labour force participation rate is already very low in Bangladesh. According to the Labour Force Survey 2016–17, only about 36% of working-age women participate in the labour force, compared to 81% of the working-age men (BBS 2018). Yet, the unemployment rate among women is much higher than that of men. According to BBS (2020), the estimated unemployment rate for young men was 10%, which is much lower than that of young women, 14%. In this survey as

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9 The sample size for men who were engaged in housework is quite small, and hence we refrain from drawing conclusions on males’ confidence among those who were engaged in housework.
well, only 19% of the young women were engaged in IGA pre-pandemic, whereas 56% were engaged in housework (Figure 5). A lower recovery of IGA for the female youth indicates the greater obstacles women face in the job market. Long-term unemployment, as many young women are facing, may also motivate many women to permanently leave the job market, as women often face a tough choice between career and family responsibilities, posed by prevalent gender norms (Kabeer et al., 2021).

The gendered nature of work across industries along with the lack of systemic progress in resolving women’s societal barriers may partially explain why the livelihoods recovery among young women is so low. According to a global study conducted by UN Women (2020), women are overrepresented in many of the hardest-hit industries during COVID. Findings from our study support the UN study. Occupations that typically have greater female participants in Bangladesh—for example, private tutoring, teaching, handicraft making, and factory work—were hit the hardest (Figure 8 & Table 6).

Table 6: Percentage of Youth in Each Occupation, by Gender (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation in February 2020</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private tutor</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private/NGO worker</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory worker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day labour</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant business</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport helper</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled worker</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bangladesh performs much better in gender parity in the region, according to the Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2021b). But women in Bangladesh are concentrated in certain sectors, 92% of the working women in Bangladesh work in the informal sector, the rate is 85% for working men (BBS, 2018). Thus, a minuscule 8% of working women are in the formal sector, less than half the rate of working men (BBS, 2018). Ready-made garments (RMG) is the main source of formal employment for women—60.8% of RMG workers in Bangladesh are women (CPD, 2018). Women’s over-representation in the most unprotected and vulnerable sectors, as well as non-essential sectors, is partially responsible for the slow recovery of their employment. Because of the cancellation of RMG orders when COVID-19 hit, women in the RMG sectors lost jobs, and ILO predicts that many low-skilled women in this sector may never get back their job (ILO 2020b).

Predominant gender norms are making this worse. Women share an extremely high burden of household responsibilities, which often forces them to choose housework even when they have outside livelihoods opportunities (Rahman & Islam, 2013). For women who are out of work for an extended period due to the pandemic, getting back work as the economy reopens may be much more difficult than it is for men. A PPRC-BIGD (2021a) survey also found sticky unemployment rates for women, which was five times as high as men in March 2021.
5.4. Perception: Which Gender Was Most Affected by the Pandemic?

Although most evidence portrays the stark difference in the negative impact that the pandemic had on young men and women, the perception of the youths in the survey seemed to point otherwise. Almost 93% of the youth in our sample believed that male youths were more inversely affected due to the pandemic compared to female youths, in terms of social, economic, and other factors.

The variation in response across gender was not large; however, a slightly higher percentage of female youths reported that the impact was greater on females (11%), while only 4% of male youths in our survey opined so.

![Figure 17: Perceptions About Who Was More Affected During COVID, by Gender (%)](image)

Since a large proportion of young women and almost no young men in our sample are engaged in housework, we compared between females who were in IGA in February 2020 and females who were engaged in housework. **Young women who were in IGA in February 2020 were more likely to believe the impact to be greater for females (17%), compared to those young women who were in homemaking (7%)** (Figure 18). Yet, an overwhelming majority of both young women and men, irrespective of their involvement in IGA, believe that the men were worse affected.
Figure 18: Perceptions About Who Was More Affected During COVID, by Females in IGA and Females in Homemaking in Feb 2020 (%)

The data further strengthen our assumption about the gender norms in our society that creates a steeper barrier for women’s labour market participation. As men are considered the primary breadwinners, their families and the society, in general, expect them to have a job. Because of their gender role, they are also more likely to be affected financially as well as socially due to job and income losses. Conversely, women’s primary role is care and housework, as per prevalent gender norms. This is a likely reason why most youth in our survey, irrespective of their gender, thought that men were more adversely affected by the pandemic.

Even among the women who are working and are the primary earners in their households, the societal norms seem to have overshadowed their perception about those who were more affected.

Another possible explanation, an extension of the explanation above, could be the lower opportunity cost of women’s jobs and income loss. Most women are involved in low-paid, vulnerable occupations. In addition, their burden of care and housework is very high.

Women in our country enjoy very limited mobility. In 2016, 62% of the working women worked from home, whereas almost all men were working outside their homes; while 84% of men went outside their communities every day, only 40% of women did the same (Kotikula et al., 2019).

For all the above reasons, men’s job and income losses may be much more noticeable than those of women.

Although women have faced greater and more persistent job loss, greater loss of earnings as well as working hours, and are also subjected to lower mental well-being and confidence compared to men, a majority of them still perceive the pandemic to have affected males more.
6. Perceptions on Social Impacts of COVID-19

Since the pandemic hit Bangladesh in March 2020, all educational institutions have remained closed as of June 2021. Though the government started, early on, broadcasting distant classes for primary and secondary students, a large number of students do not have access to these classes. Our studies have found that even when the students have access, the majority do not attend the distant classes (PPRC-BIGD, 2021b). Moreover, those who attend, many find it difficult to follow. Public colleges and universities are trying to take online classes. But because of technological limitations, at both institutional as well as at student level, they are finding it challenging to continue education distantly. Perhaps only well-endowed private institutions in Bangladesh are being able to offer regular, acceptable online education. The Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) public exam was cancelled, with the board granting an automatic pass to all students. This situation is likely to have a grave impact on the learning outcomes and future job prospects of the students. In our survey, we asked about the youths’ perception of these issues.

6.1. Perceived Social Impacts on the Uncertainty Over Examinations

We recorded multiple responses from the respondents. The majority of the respondents (42%) perceive that it has demotivated students to study, followed by another 14% of responses perceiving it to cause a loss in students’ talents/skills (Table 7). Other prominent perceived concerns include an increased backlog of academic sessions (11%), followed by an increase in student’s mental stress (6%), depression (4%), and addiction to social media (4%).

Table 7: Perceived Effect of Delayed School Exams on the Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per cent of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased backlog of academic sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased engagement in unethical activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demotivated students’ will to study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ social gathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of students’ talent/skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ mental stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ addiction to social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2. Perceived Social Impacts of School Closures

Table 8 reports the respondents’ perceptions about the effect of school closures during the pandemic on society. Amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, all educational institutions have been closed since March 2020. These extended periods of school closures have caused huge impacts in societies globally.
As we recorded multiple responses during the survey, most of the respondents (34%) believed that long-time school closures had demotivated students' will to study and hampered youth’s education (9%). Other perceived concerns include increased addiction to social media (9%), increased depression (9%), and an increase of unnecessary social gatherings (9%). Increases in mental stress, criminal activities, drug use were also among other concerns.

Table 8: Perceived Effect of School Closures on the Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Per cent of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hampering youth's education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ depression</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ addiction to social media</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ unnecessary social gathering</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased criminal activities in the society</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demotivated students’ will to study</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ mental stress</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ drug use</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased students’ involvement in household chores</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased occurrences of child marriage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.3. **Perceived Social Impacts of Granted Auto-Pass in HSC**

Amidst closures of educational institutions, the HSC examination in 2020 was cancelled, and students were given an auto-pass. The majority of the youths (38%) perceived this caused good students to lose out on differentiating themselves. Besides, the respondents also thought all students lost out on the experience that the testing provides in overcoming obstacles (11%). Other concerns include an increase in unemployment (9%) and increased competition in university admissions (5%).

Unlike the other two issues, some respondents perceived the positive effects of granting and HSC auto-pass. While some mentioned there are gains for students from getting a certificate easily (12%), some also perceived increased opportunity to get future jobs due to an easy pass for all (5%).
Table 9: Perceptions on HSC Auto-Pass

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Per cent of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased competition in the job market</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing out on a testing experience</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased opportunity to get future jobs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gains from getting an easy certificate</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No comments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in unemployment</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing competition university admissions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good students losing out on differentiating themselves</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.4. Youth’s Self-Assessed Changes in Activities

We asked youths about changes in certain activities in their lives in the last one year.

Household chores

Fifty-five per cent of the female youths and 525 of the male youth in our sample reported an increase in household chores (Figure 19).

However, this measure reports the self-assessed increase in activities, and does not reflect the amount of work done by the individual at the baseline. Women are traditionally known to have a greater burden of household chores, and studies have shown that even before COVID-19, worldwide women spent 4.1 hours per day on average in doing unpaid household work, while men spent 1.7 hours a day (UN Women, 2020). The difference in the time men and women spend on household chores is likely to be higher in Bangladesh, where women’s time is usually allocated primarily to household chores and childcare (Rahman & Islam, 2013).

So, even though both men and women reported an increase, women may still be continuing to shoulder the bulk of the work. For women who are already burdened with chores, even a marginal increase may have an adverse impact on their lives, yet they may not recognize it because of societal expectations. On the other hand, it is possible that men, who traditionally shouldered fewer chores, find a marginal increase of work as a drastic change.

To conclude, keeping in mind the underlying implications behind the self-assessed activities, both young men and women have faced an increased burden of chores during the lockdown. The magnitude and exact hours are, however, beyond the scope of the study.
Figure 19: Self-Assessed Change in Activities

**Study time**

Study times reduced or drastically reduced for all youths. Overall, 78% of all youths reported a decrease in study time. A slightly higher percentage of male youths reported a decrease in study time (81%), compared to female youths (77%). The reduction in study time is primarily due to the closures of educational institutions. But the students also possibly faced several obstacles in studying at home: increase in household chores, improper study environment at home, or an obligation to work to support the family financially distressed by the pandemic.

**Frequency in going outdoors**

Almost all youths reported a decrease or drastic decrease in their frequency for going outdoors (80%); however, the percentage of young women reporting so was higher (85%) than that of young men (77%). Health concerns and movement restrictions naturally reduced time spent outdoors for everyone, but the decrease was greater for young women. Women are already less mobile and stay indoors more...
compared to men (Kotikulu et al., 2019), and albeit a self-assessment measure, the pandemic seems to have widened the gap further.

**Face-to-face vs. virtual communication**

As expected, while the frequency of face-to-face meetings decreased for most (81%), the frequency of virtual communication with friends increased (53%). Almost 30% of youths reported having no change in virtual communication. This discrepancy is even sharper between male and female youths: while only 22% of male youths reported no change in their virtual communication, this was the case for 39% of female youths. On the other hand, 64% of male youths reported an increase, compared to only 40% of female youths.

This could stem from the underlying digital gender divide that exists in our society. According to the Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA)’s Mobile Gender Gap Report 2019 (GSMA Intelligence, 2019), 86% of the adult men in Bangladesh own mobile phones and 30% use the internet, while the numbers are only 58% and 13% for women, respectively. A study by BIGD (Huq et al., 2020), found that adolescent girls from middle-class backgrounds and especially from rural areas face heavy restrictions from their parents in using mobile phones. Reasons for these are rooted in deep-seated gender norms and greater freedom for men in our society. For similar underlying reasons, we also see the disparity in youths’ virtual communication changes in our study.
7. Willingness to Vaccinate

Bangladesh began the nationwide rollout of the first dose of vaccine on 7 February 2021 for citizens aged 40 and above. We asked youths about their willingness to get vaccinated if one became available for them and 66% responded with a “yes.”

7.1. Employment Status and Willingness

Among youths from different employment status, those who were not in any IGA in January 2021 were most willing to get vaccinated. Youths who were involved in IGA before the pandemic but were not involved in January 2021 were the most willing to get vaccinated (77%) (Figure 20). A possible reason could be that they believed their vaccination will facilitate finding a job.

The desire to get vaccinated, among youths who were not in any IGA in February 2020, but got into IGA over the past year, albeit high, is the least among all the categories (61%). This could indicate that they are comparatively less affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19, and thus do not find vaccination as necessary for otherwise health concerns.

![Figure 20: Percentage of Those Willing to Get Vaccinated Across IGA Status](image)

7.2. Private Tutors and Willingness

Among the youths who were working in February 2020 but did not manage to get back to work by January 2021, the percentage of private tutors who are still not in IGA is the largest (48%), indicating this sector is one of the hardest hit in terms of youth jobs. As private tutoring requires close and frequent interaction and is not necessarily deemed essential service by the guardians, this group has been hit hard. Of private tutors who continued working and who are still out of work in 2021, the latter is more willing to get vaccinated (89%), probably with the expectation of getting back their work.
7.3. Household Size and Willingness

Youths who reported having a greater number of household members above the age of 40 years were more willing to get vaccinated. Willingness was greatest among those who had more than three household members above the age of 40.

7.4. Education Level and Willingness to Get Vaccinated

Willingness to get vaccinated also varied among youths with different educational attainment. The higher the educational attainment of the respondents, the greater the proportion of youths willing to get vaccinated.
Figure 23: Percentage of Youths Willing to Get Vaccinated, Across Education Levels
8. Youth’s Digital Life

8.1. Duration and Cost of Using the Internet

Bangladesh has been experiencing an impressive growth in internet use since the last decade, and the youth are at the forefront of technology use. Our study finds that 50% of the surveyed youths are using the internet. They use it mainly for social media, study, business, and entertainment. Youth also spend a long time on the internet. Fifteen per cent of the youths in our study use the internet on average 5–15 hours per day (Figure 24).

![Figure 24: Duration of Internet Use (Hours Per Day)](image)

After the nationwide lockdown was announced in March 2020, the use of online platforms has changed drastically. Zooming into the nature of internet use, we find that the per capita cost of using the internet increased in April 2020, after the restrictions imposed amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The cost increased by 23% among the male youths and 42% among the female. Males, however, paid more per capita price per month for the internet than females (Figure 25).

![Figure 25: Per Capita Cost of Using the Internet Per Month](image)

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10 We asked youths about their cost of mobile data per month in February 2020, April 2020, and January 2021.
8.2. Purposes of Using the Internet

During the pandemic, the youths have increased their use of the internet for all types of purposes. We asked the respondents how the use of online applications changed after the pandemic started. The responses were recorded on four-point scales: drastically reduced, reduced, no change, increased, and drastically increased. For the analysis, we merged "reduced" with "drastically reduced" and "increased" with "drastically increased."

More than 85% of the youth mentioned that their use has increased for social media and entertainment. However, the use of the internet for business, study, and office work also increased in the last year. Our analysis did not find any significant differences between male and female youths in this respect. The increase in the use of the internet for business, however, was higher for females (63%) compared to males (56%).

![Figure 26: Changes in Purposes of Using the Internet](image)

8.3. Mobile Banking

The use of mobile banking has also taken a leap in Bangladesh in recent years as more and more people get accustomed to using digital platforms. With the COVID-19 restrictions in place and health hazards associated with in-person contact for transaction purposes, mobile banking became a prominent alternative. The government used mobile banking accounts to provide cash to low-income households, motivating many to open an account.

Our findings show, an overall of 19% of the youths opened a new online banking account between March 2020 and February 2021; the percentage of male youth who opened an account was higher (24%) than that of the percentage of female youths (13%) (Figure 27).

We also asked youths how the use of mobile banking accounts changed over the pandemic period; 41% and 56% of male and female youths, respectively, responded that it remained the same as before. However, 38% of male respondents reported that it had increased, compared to 23% of females who also reported an increase (Figure 28).
Figure 27: Percentage Who Opened A Mobile Banking Account in the Past Year

Figure 28: Changes in Use of Mobile Banking Account in the Past Year
9. Social Media Survey

9.1. Methodology and Descriptive Statistics

We conducted a social media survey using a small section of the questionnaire used in our main survey. Although limited to specific communities in social media, we tried to capture the dynamics of this small group of youths. The online survey was conducted from 12 to 31 March 2021. We used Facebook as it is one of the most widely used social media platforms in Bangladesh. We used a snowball sampling technique, by reaching out to known communities and shares via Facebook. In total, we had 538 responses, of which approximately 69% were male respondents and 31% were females.

This sampling technique and method produces a non-representative sample for various reasons. Internet penetration levels vary widely across the country, and are lower among certain segments of the population, notably people living in rural areas and those with limited digital literacy. Youths from households without digital access or with little or no education were autonomously excluded. Using a particular platform also limited representativeness to only those in a certain community. Although we are unable to correct for the biases introduced by these factors, and thus results are not directly comparable with regular surveys; the social media survey provides useful insights on the impact of COVID-19 on the relatively more educated, urban, and lower to upper-middle-class group.

Table 10: Sample Description (Web Sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average age of respondents</td>
<td>24.8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age of respondents: Male</td>
<td>24.8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age of respondents: Female</td>
<td>24.8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of observations</td>
<td>538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of youths in IGA in January 2021</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of students in January 2021</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of youths in housework in January 2021</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of youths unemployed and looking for a job in January 2021</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of youths unemployed and not looking for a job in January 2021</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 presents the basic description of the social media sample. Among those engaged in IGA, the gap between male and female youths is narrower in this sample than that in our phone-based survey. Forty-six per cent of the male and 31% of female youths in the social media survey were engaged in IGA (Figure 29). Thirty per cent of the male respondents and 44% of the female respondents were students. Only 4% of females and no male youth in the sample were engaged in housework. A larger share of male respondents (22%) than that of female respondents (17%) were looking for a job. The rest 2% of the male and 4% of the female youths were unemployed and not looking for jobs.
9.2. Mental Well-Being

Four in five social media survey respondents said they are facing mental health issues since the onset of the pandemic. A greater percentage of female youths (85%) reported facing mental health issues compared to male youths (78%).

Across occupational categories, a similar percentage of students and those engaged in IGA reported facing mental health issues in the past year (77%). A greater percentage of the unemployed and job-seeking youth (92%) reported facing mental health issues (Figure 31).
From our social media sample, 27% of the youths mentioned that they took part in some form of training/online courses between March 2020 and February 2021. There was some gender difference in this case. A greater percentage of youths engaged in IGA took new training (35%), compared to students (25%) and those unemployed and looking for jobs (16%).

The most popular types of training included online academic courses (55%), management courses (20%), and information and communications technology (ICT)-related courses (15%) (Figure 32).
Motivations for taking these additional courses include an attempt to do better in their current job (33%), to make better use of their time (32%), to gain expertise in areas increased job opportunities (14%), and out of interest (13%).

Eighty-five per cent of the youths also believe they require some new form of training to help get jobs in the post-COVID job market—34% of youths mentioned the need for ICT-related training, followed by online academic courses (20%) and management-related courses (13%) (Figure 33).

![Figure 33: Types of New Training Needed](image)

### 9.4. Perception: Which Gender Was Most Affected by the Pandemic?

In contrast to what we found in the phone survey, a much greater proportion of youths surveyed online perceive that women are more affected than men by the pandemic.

Overall, 23% of the youths said females were more affected due to the pandemic, compared to 77% who said males were more affected.

Figure 34 shows this perception across gender—a greater percentage of female youth believed women were more affected compared to males.
These findings are in stark contrast with our representative national phone survey, where a very small proportion of youths took part in any form of new training, or even believed new training would help them get a job in the post-COVID period. Less than 5% of the youths in the phone survey took any new training in the past year, and less than 50% of the youths in that sample thought there was a need for one in the post-COVID job market.

Our social media survey sample also includes very few young women who are involved in housework and many more who are working. We also found little difference in their participation in new training and a much higher level of concern about the impact of COVID-19 on women.

Our social media survey sample is not representative. However, the biased nature of our sample, more educated and likely from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, highlights the existing inequality as well as the possibility of the pandemic increasing the inequality. Greater digital access and greater awareness about the emerging need for higher-level skills is likely to help this group to better weather the pandemic and prepare better for the future job market.
10. Conclusion

In our study, we attempted to assess the impact of the pandemic on some important aspects of the lives of Bangladeshi youth—a third of our population and a critical asset for our long-term growth and human development.

We find that many youths who were working before the pandemic are still out of work. Working hours and income are still much lower than the pre-pandemic levels. We also found that despite school closure for more than a year, very few have taken any new training, except those in our social media survey, more than a quarter of whom took new training courses during the pandemic. Even among them, only 15% of the students took new training.

COVID-19 has accelerated the process of the “Fourth Industrial Revolution,” defined by powerful technologies transforming the world of work. To survive and thrive in this new world of work, higher-order skills will be in high demand and many lower-order skills will lose their relevance. In the recent report on the future of work after COVID-19, McKinsey Global Institute has identified three broad trends accelerated by the pandemic that are going to continue: (1) remote working, (2) e-commerce, and (3) adoption of artificial intelligence and automation (Lund et al., 2021). Jointly these trends will, the report predicts, further dampen the demand for low-skilled jobs and force 25% of the workforce to switch jobs—predominantly to sectors requiring a higher level of technological and cognitive skills. Considering these trends, our survey indicates that our youths, on average, are not well-prepared for the post-pandemic job market.

Another worrying trend in our survey is around women employment. Bangladeshi young women, who already lag far behind young men in labour market participation, employment, earning, and education, are facing the brunt of the pandemic. Compared to young men, a much greater share of women lost their livelihoods and did not manage to recover, and working women have experienced a much higher cut in their pay-check. Young women are also much less confident about finding work after the pandemic. These trends are extremely worrying, which may undo many years of progress in women empowerment in Bangladesh. These have several policy implications, especially at a time when one year after the first lockdown, the country is facing a second wave of infections and lockdowns.
References


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Department of Youth Development. (2016). Department of Youth Development.  
http://www.dyd.gov.bd/site/page/57f039b0-3112-4b5c-a071-2b300e8317af/Background

https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/working-papers/iser/2020-08.pdf


### Table A1: Attrition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of household members</td>
<td>-0.01**</td>
<td>-0.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>-0.06***</td>
<td>-0.03**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty status = 2, Higher middle class</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty status = 3, Middle class</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty status = 4, Lower middle class</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty status = 5, Poor</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.09)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty status = 6, Ultra-poor</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender HH = 1, Male</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion of the respondent (Reference: Muslim)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>0.06**</td>
<td>0.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coefficient</td>
<td>Standard Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender of the respondent (Male = 1, Female = 0)</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of the respondent</td>
<td>0.01***</td>
<td>(0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status of the respondent (Reference: Single)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>(0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational status of the respondent (Reference: No formal education)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>0.08**</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma/Vocational</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.88***</td>
<td>(0.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>3,795</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

To explore the potential pattern of not success, we run two linear probability models where the dependent binary variables are (i) “success,” i.e., it takes the value of 1 (one) if the enumerators successfully completed the survey and 0 (zero) otherwise, and (ii) “agree to talk,” i.e., it takes value 1 (one) if the youth agreed to talk to the enumeration and 0 (zero) otherwise. Table A1 describes the findings from the regression models. We can see from the table that larger family size and higher income are negatively associated with the success rate. The success rate was also higher the younger the participant was. Religion was also an important factor in both youth’s willingness to participate in the survey. The success rate was also better for Hindus than Muslims. Young men were more likely to agree to talk compared to young women.