

May 2021

Impact of COVID-19 on the Workers and Suppliers in Seafood Processing Industry

Mostafiz Ahmed

কর্মজীবী নারী
KARMOJIBI NARI

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Section one: Introduction.....	9
Background of the Study.....	9
Objectives	10
Study process and methodology	10
Section two: Impact on Life and Livelihoods.....	12
Demographic and personal information.....	12
Covid-19 and employment	17
Income and adaptation strategy	20
Covid-19 and family life	26
Role of stakeholders	27
Section three: Impact on Workplace Rights	29
Employment contract	29
Working hours, rest and leave	31
Income security	34
Health protection	36
Trade union (TU) rights	36
Special issues of women workers	39
Section four: The Covid-19 Impact in SPI: Suppliers' Perspective	42
Section five: Conclusions and Recommendations	48
Key findings	48
Recommendations.....	49

Executive Summary

This study—Impact of COVID-19 on the Workers and Suppliers in Seafood Processing Industry—has been carried out under a Karmojibi Nari (KN)-run project titled 'Promoting and Strengthening Women's Workers Capacity and Leadership in Seafood Processing Industries (SPI)'. The project's development goal is to contribute to social justice and decent work for women workers in the seafood processing industry. However, it is to be mentioned that both social justice and decent work have been seriously affected by the Covid-19. The present study specifically aims at exploring the livelihood vulnerabilities of the workers in the SPI during the Covid-19 period; assessing how Covid-19 has impacted the rights condition of workers; and examining the consequence of Covid-19 on the suppliers of this industry. The study employed a mixed-method approach. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data collection was done applying a questionnaire survey (on 150 workers), focus group discussion (FGDs) (two in Bagerhat), and key informant interviews (KIIs) with representatives of employers, civil society organisation (CSO) and labour rights NGOs.

Impact on Life and Livelihoods

Demographic and personal information

Workers are primarily women (70%), under the youth age (69.3%), and married (77.3%). 4.06 is the average family size, but many workers (35.3%) have large families. In each family, the number of dependent members is 2.1, whereas the number of income earners is 1.91. The SPI sector's job is the only income source for most workers (78.7%). Workers' families largely depend on this sector since other earning members are also primarily involved in SPI (76.8%).

Workers are predominantly contractor-supplied; many lack adequate understanding of employment status: Three in every five respondents work under the contractors. The ratio of workers employed permanently differs among men (80%) and women workers (40%). The proportions of contractual and daily basis worker are higher in both cases among the women workers.

Covid-19 and employment

A fall in monthly average working days, with notable variation between owner-hired and contractor-supplied workers: Before Covid-19, a worker used to work 25.89 days monthly; after lockdown, workers have worked on an average of 21.13 days. March, April, and May 2020 were the most crucial months when factories mainly were closed. The majority (55%) of the respondents claimed that their factories were closed for three (03) months. Half of the workers could not work for 3-4 months, 22.4% for more than five months. Loss of working days is slightly more among the workers recruited by the contractors.

Lack of alternative sources of income during factory closure: Only 22% of workers engaged in other occupations to ensure subsistence.

Formal to informal sector mobility: 26% of respondents have reported that they know workers who left SPI permanently due to lack of adequate income irregular payment amid covid-19.

Income and adaptation strategy

Declined income with an increased gender wage gap: Before Covid-19, the average income of the workers was BDT 6675, which declined to BDT 5146.33 post lockdown period. The gender wage gap is now BDT 2089.89, which was BDT 1402.38 at the pre-Covid period.

Widespread and frequent income-expenditure gap: Nine in every ten workers have experienced an income shortage. The most extensive section (46.3%) suffered the gap 3-4 times during the pandemic, followed by 5-6 times (23.1%).

Adaptation strategies are multiple, leading to new vulnerabilities: One in every three workers has borrowed money several times from various sources. The average amount of borrowing is BDT 19888.89. 90% of workers had to reduce the household costs, where the food cost remains at the top. 53.3% of workers have had the experience of skipping one/two meals a day for 2-3 months. About one-third (32%) of all workers have broken their savings. Besides, 34.7% of workers sold family assets, and 70% had to loan from formal and informal sources. The average loan taken by each family was BDT 33974.7.

Covid-19 and family life

All the respondents have claimed that none of their family members had been tested Covid-19 positive. However, 12.7% workers have reported that symptom of Covid-19 was observed among them/or their family members. The only measure they took was buying medicines from the nearby medicine shop after consulting with the shop's salesman.

Despite an income fall, most workers (90%) increased expenditure on health protection (e.g. purchasing soap/detergents, hand sanitisers, masks/gloves/cap, nutritious food), compromising the financial burden. During the lockdown/factory closure, workers spent their time for various purpose. However, the most extensive section (42%) claimed that they gave more time to family members.

Role of stakeholders

Inadequate support from the stakeholders: Only 12.7% of respondents informed that their employers provided them with cash and kind support. Cash support was provided twice, as they claimed, whereas food support for once. 22% of workers got some support, primarily food assistance, from the local government. Supports of the local NGOs were almost absent. 36% of respondents claimed that they received food assistance from the local humanitarian/philanthropic person.

Government-provided BDT2500 cash support almost did not reach the SPI workers: Only 4.7% (7 of 150) respondents received government-provided BDT 2500 cash support.

Impact on Workplace Rights

Employment contract

The presence of employment contract varies based on recruitment type and gender: 48.7% of workers lack any contract. The contract availability is relatively higher among the workers hired by the owners directly (57%) than those who work under contractors (46%). Women

workers (50%) lag behind the men (54%). The contract is not "written" always; 80% of men and 54.8% of women have an oral agreement only.

Appointment letter and ID card are not available for most workers: 37.8% of men and 22.9% of women workers have appointment letters. Gender differentiation is also marked for identity card—46.7% of men and 33.3% of women workers have an ID card.

42% of respondents have observed factories fired/terminated workers during the pandemic. Employers mostly retrenched women worker (81.0%) and workers with relatively shorter job-length (44%). Although 41.3% reported that terminated workers received their due wages and benefits, 30.2 % are not aware in this regard. 56.1% of respondents claimed that employers did not reinstate the terminated workers.

Working hours, rest, and leave

Rampant violation of legal provisions on working hours, rest, and night duty: 95% of workers work more than 8 hours. However, just 40 of 150 workers (26.66%) have claimed that the overtime is calculated/practised. 42.5% of them do overtime for more than two hours, which is a clear violation of labour law. For most of the workers, there is no specific time for rest. About 70% of workers work at night also; however, often, there is no time limit of night-duty, it is subjected to the availability of fish supply.

No significant changes in working hours, rest, and night duty practices in the post-lockdown period: 14.7% have reported a decrease, and in contrast, 4.7% has claimed an increase in daily hours. 95% has claimed that no change took place in the scenario of overtime. Only 12.5 per cent of workers have claimed that their rest period has been affected by the pandemic. 93.1% has noticed that the situation has remained the same for night duty.

Leave provisions are implemented at a varied level, with marked violation of legal provisions: Only 11.1% of workers used to get weekly holiday always. 80.7% of workers never get casual leave. 44% of workers never get sick leave. Only 10.7% of workers always get annual leave; 60% always get festival leave.

Leave practices have mostly remained unchanged: In the opinion of 92.7%, 96%, 77.3%, 93.3%, and 90% of respondents, the situations/practices of a weekly holiday, casual leave, sick leave, annual leave, festival leave have remained same.

Income security

No specific wage payment schedule for many workers; gender variation is evident: 28.9% of men workers have claimed that wage payment dates are not fixed, whereas 48.6% of women workers have the similar claim.

Wage payment has become infrequent for monthly basis workers but remains the same for daily-wage workers: Covid-19 has increased irregular wage payment incidents for the majority of workers (55.3%).

Wage due and wage cut for many workers: 28% workers' wage has been affected during the Covid-19 period—either was kept due amid covid-19 (22%) or wage was reduced (6%).

Evident impact on bonus and wage increment practices: About three-quarter (73.3%) of the workers did not receive the bonus, and others (26%) got it at a reduced rate during the pandemic. The majority, among those who have reported annual wage increase (26 of 35), further informed that the employer did not provide the annual increment amid Covid-19.

Health protection

Observable health protection measure in initial days of Covid-19 outbreak but lost the continuity: Four in every five respondents claimed that the factories had taken different special measures. The most common actions included handwashing arrangements (92.6%) and masks distribution among workers (86%). 38.7% of respondents consider these measures sufficient. In contrast, 34% of respondents deem these inadequate.

Trade union (TU) rights

The unavailability of TU and workers' lack of awareness both are remarkably high: 38.7% of workers report no trade union at their workplace, whereas 36% do not know whether TUs are present/available. There are allegations that unions in this sector are mostly employer-sponsored. Many members of the executive committees are not aware of their position in the union.

Incidences of TU-employer discussion amid Covid-19 are rare: Just 7.1% of respondents have reported such discussion, only on health protection issue. Critical issues like factory closure, wage payment, and bonus amount were not discussed.

Informal ways are predominant means to raise demands/issues to employers: The practice of raising issues through contractors is higher among women workers (47.6%) than the men (22.2%). On the other hand, the tendency of placing demands by the managers is higher among men (44.4%) compared to their women (18.1%) counterparts.

Workers' participation in workplace-related decisions during Covid-19 was rare: Only 5.3% of workers have informed that employers discussed with workers about workers' awareness on Covid-19, and wage.

Special issues of women workers

Maternity leave is not compliant with legal provisions always; many are not aware even: 60.7% of respondents have informed that women workers get maternity leave, and 19.3% are not aware in this regard. Regarding the paid leave, 58.7% have claimed employers pay wage, whereas 21.3% claim that wage is not given.

Instances of either stoppage or a reduction in wage during maternity leave amid Covid-19: 6.6% respondents have informed about a reduced amount of leave; 25% about stopping/suspending wage during leave; and 10% about reduced wage.

Diverse level of impact on gender-specific workplace facilities: 64.7% and 72.0% of respondents have mentioned the availability of daycare and breastfeeding facilities pre-

covid-19 period. At present, these facilities have been suspended/stopped according to the opinion of 26.8% and 13.0% of respondents. 93% has informed the availability of gender-segregated toilets, and 97%, among them, have noticed the facility is continuing. Arrangement of female doctors was available at workplaces of 46.7% of workers. However, 4.3% have claimed that this service has stopped. Only 3.3% of respondents have claimed the availability of sanitary napkin at a subsidised cost pre-covid-19 period; however, all of them have noticed that this arrangement has remained suspended during the Covid-19 period.

Inadequate attention to women workers during their menstruation and pregnancy period, and no noticeable changes during Covid-19: All (34.7%), who claimed some measures for women during menstruation, noticed that no changes happened in this regard during the covid-19 period. Regarding special treatment/facility for pregnant workers, FGD participants overwhelmingly claim that coworkers, not factory authorities, arrange facilities. During the Covid-19 period, no noticeable change took place in this regard.

The Covid-19 impact in SPI: suppliers' perspective

The covid-19 pandemic has affected the suppliers of the SPI sector in the following ways:

Declined demand in the international market due to lockdown: As an immediate response to the Covid-19 outbreak, many countries of Europe and America imposed a lockdown for several months. These countries are the destination of Bangladeshi seafood/frozen foods. The extended closure of restaurants and other business in these countries left Bangladeshi suppliers with various troubles and uncertainties.

No or few order, reduced order volume, and export fall: In April, May and June 2020, many of the suppliers did not get new orders, and some even had to wait until July/August. However, orders decreased by 20-30% compared to the previous year. Buyers' stoppage of placing new orders and reducing purchased volume resulted in a fall of export from the suppliers' end.

Refused to take pre-orders/order cancellation: In the buyer-driven supply chain, suppliers often become victims of many unethical practices of the buyers, including order cancellation, change in requirements, pressure for accepting a lower price. During the pandemic seafood/shrimp supply chain has also observed such practices. Some buyers cancelled their orders, and there were also instances of cancelling an order after receiving some consignments, and buyers requested the supplier to sell the rests somewhere else.

Lower rates offered for new orders: Suppliers have also claimed that a fall in the rate of the products has been a serious concern for them. Some buyers now offer lower rates than before; they are offering 20-30% less price.

Lockdown came at the beginning of the season for this industry: About 40% time of the whole season was under restrictions. It hampered the supply of raw materials and labour, and the production of the industry.

Lack of raw materials and high prices: Bans on vehicular movement and frequent checks on the streets during lockdown hampered raw material supply to the fish companies/suppliers. Supply shortage also increased the price of raw materials, about 20%, as suppliers claim.

Government incentives did not reach all suppliers: Suppliers expect extensive and robust support from the government to survive in the Covid-19 pandemic situation. Suppliers also feel the need for a more influential association to get proper incentives from the government.

Recommendations

This study recommends the following steps: i) ensuring adequate social protection of the SPI sector workers; ii) making a central database of the workers to identify them and provide them with necessary support when required; iii) developing a central fund for the workers of SPI to provide them with cash supports during their contingencies; iv) respecting worker rights and labour standards at factory level including rights implementation, monitoring, and awareness; v) developing a mechanism and SOP for equitable distributing of government stimulus among the suppliers; vi) suppliers' own capacity building for price negotiation and bargaining with buyers.

Impact of COVID-19 on the Workers and Suppliers in Seafood Processing Industry

Section one: Introduction

Background of the Study

In the world of work, the Covid-19 has brought unprecedented consequences in the lives of the working-class population. Along with the health consequences, the pandemic has immense implication for the economy of every country and the livelihood of millions of people, particularly for the working-class people. In response to the pandemic, various countries imposed 'lockdown', curfew; and issued a 'stay-at-home' order. The immediate and inseparable consequences of all these measures are job loss, unemployment and underemployment, and income loss. Both formal and informal sectors are bearing the impact of the pandemic, and the livelihood of workforces is now more vulnerable than ever before. An ILO report showed that almost 1.6 billion informal economy workers are significantly impacted by lockdown measures and/or working in the hardest-hit sectors (ILO, 2020). The report further informed a decline in the earnings of informal workers of 60 per cent globally in the first month of the crisis (ILO, 2020).

The Covid-19 has hit workers of the seafood processing industry (SPI) harshly. The SPI in Asia employed 58.3 million people worldwide in 2014, out of which 84% were Asians. The surge in SPI in Asia has been attributed to the abundant availability of cheap labour, land and other natural resources (FAO 2014). In Bangladesh, 80% of workers are women during peak season, and 70%-80% are hired as contract workers. Precarious working conditions are widespread in this sector, which has been more critical after the outbreak of the COVID-19 in 2020. The first Covid-19 positive case was identified on March 8th 2020. Following the surge in Covid-19 positive cases and the death toll, the government declared the closure of educational institution from March 17th. From March 26th, public holidays were declared, when public transports were shut down, and move from one district to another was restricted. The government declares lockdown/holidays/restriction continued until May 2020. The lockdown seriously affected both the workers and the suppliers in the SPI sector.

SPI is one of the export-earning sectors in Bangladesh. Decisions taken by the government to tackle/control the Covid-19 outbreak ultimately affected the manufacturing, service, and agriculture sectors employments. The workers and suppliers of SPI have experienced the impact severely. However, their condition is relatively less explored compared to the other export earning sectors in the country. The COVID-19 outbreak has already started to affect different sectors of the economy. Firstly, the immediate impact of the pandemic is the temporary shutdown of factories and businesses in an affected country; as a result, production declined. The pandemic has had a profound impact on the supply chain and demand for the apparel sector because of challenges of raw material source and cancelled orders. The apparel workers in Bangladesh Garments Industry are in the highest vulnerability situation due to the COVID-19. Due to the shortage of raw materials, the factory owners have to close down the factory. Moreover, global brands and retailers cancelled production orders and deferred the payment. As a result, the apparel workers

have to go back to their house without any payment. Further, during the lockdown, a few factories continue their production without ensuring safety.

At the very outset of the pandemic in Bangladesh, the apparel sector attracted the immediate attention of the policymakers, bureaucrats, and Bangladesh's media. The government declared supportive stimulus packages, the media published many reports, and several research/studies were also conducted to find the impact of COVID in the apparel industry and the workers of the industry. Nevertheless, both the workers and suppliers in the SPI sector have remained out of the center of attention. Initiatives to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the seafood processing industry, suppliers, and workers are largely absent.

Objectives

Against this backdrop present study was undertaken to examine the impact of Covid-19 on workers in the SPI sector. The study has been carried out under a Karmojibi Nari (KN)-run project titled Promoting and Strengthening Women's Workers Capacity and Leadership in Seafood Processing Industries (SPI)'. The project works directly with women workers of SPI sector Bagerhat district in Bangladesh and aims at helping them to become aware of their rights to enhance their leadership. The project's development goal is to contribute to social justice and decent work for women workers in the seafood processing industry. However, it is to be mentioned that both social justice and decent work have been seriously affected by the Covid-19. Hence, the broad objective of this study is to understand the impact of Covid-19 on the livelihood and rights condition of seafood processing workers and assess the impact on suppliers of this industry. Specific objectives include: exploring the livelihood vulnerabilities of the workers in the seafood processing industry during the Covid-19 period; assessing how Covid-19 has impacted the rights condition of workers; and examining the consequence of Covid-19 on the suppliers of this industry.

Study process and methodology

This study has employed a mixed-method approach. Both quantitative and qualitative aspects have informed the study. The whole study has followed a process in which three distinguished phases are identified. The first phase comprises brainstorming for finalizing data collection tools and has brought about a clear understanding of the issues involved. The second phase was the implementation phase which included data collection and preparation of this draft report. The third phase is the validation phase that would incorporate comments/feedback to finalize the study. The study started with the conceptualization and issue-identification brainstorming session. The session finalized the strategy, including methodologies and made an initial list of issues to be covered. This draft report has been prepared based on primary and secondary information collected through the active utilization of various research tools. Data have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. Books, research reports, journal articles, newspaper reports, government report etc., have been the source for secondary information. Primary information has been collected by applying a questionnaire survey, focus group discussion (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs).

A set of the sample survey questionnaire was prepared and administered to collect data from 150 workers (at 95% confidence level and 8 confidence interval) workers of Bagerhat. Please note that piloting was carried out to finalize the questionnaire. Two (2) FGDs, 8-10 participants in each group, were conducted at convenient places in workers' neighbourhood. FGD participants were selected purposively, considering the purpose of this study. They were notified about the place and time in advance. Both written notes and recording were used. KIIs included representatives of employers, civil society organization (CSO) and labour rights NGOs.

Finally, data have been analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics have been used to analyze the data at both univariate and bivariate level.

Section two: Impact on Life and Livelihoods

Demographic and personal information

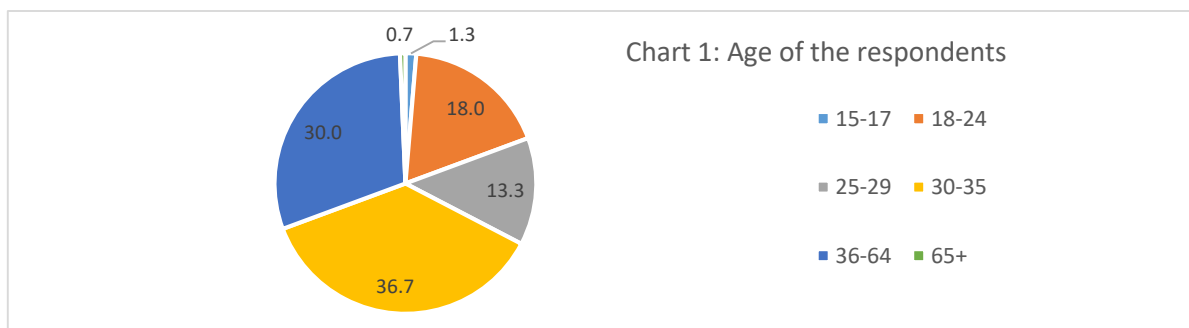
Workers are primarily women, under the youth age, and married

Of all the respondents under this study, majority were female (Figure 1). Their share was 70%, and the remaining 30% were male.

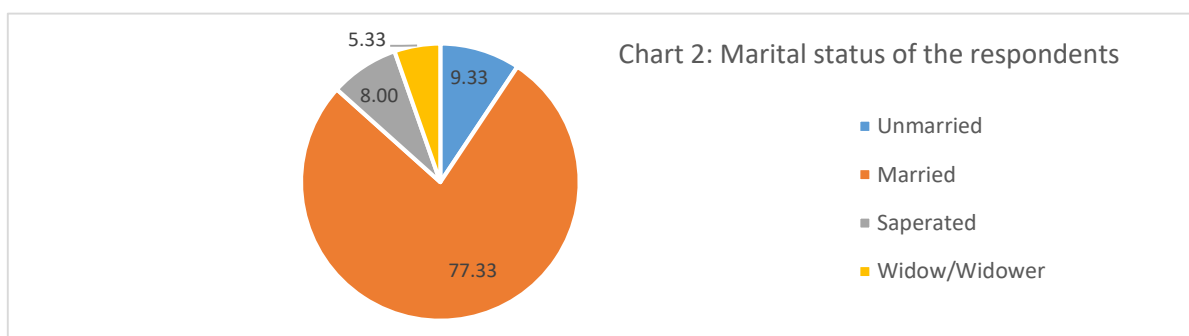
Figure 1: Gender of the respondents



SPI sector is predominantly occupied by the workers of youth age. Bangladesh labour force survey considers 15-29 years-aged workers as youth labour force. This survey finds that, about one-third of the SPI sector workers remains in this age cohort. On the other hand, according to Bangladesh National Youth Policy thirty-five years is the age limit for a person to be considered as youth. Accordingly, more than two-thirds of all the respondents are youth (Chart 1).

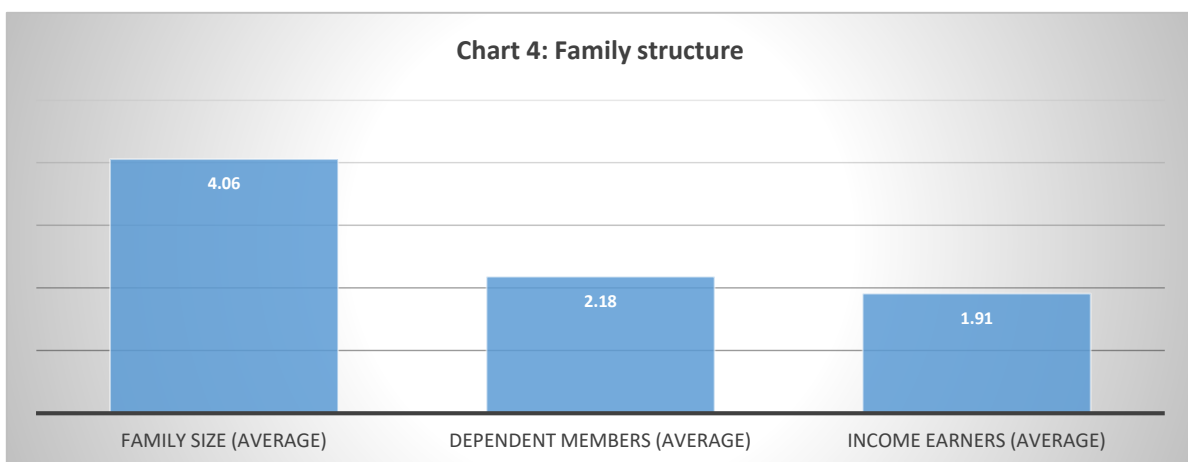
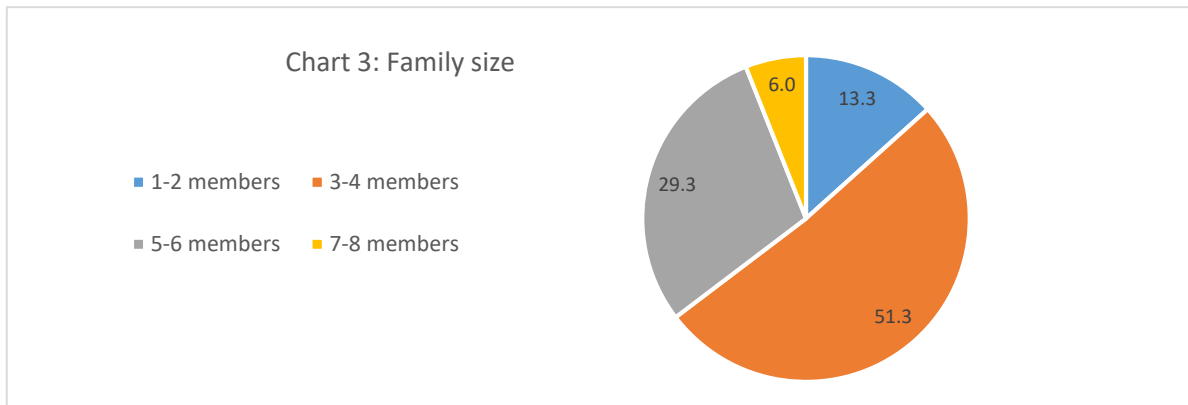


The civic status shows that most of the workers are married (77.3%). Unmarried workers are 9.3%. The remaining workers are either separated or widow/widower (Chart 2)



Many workers have large families with more dependent members than income earners

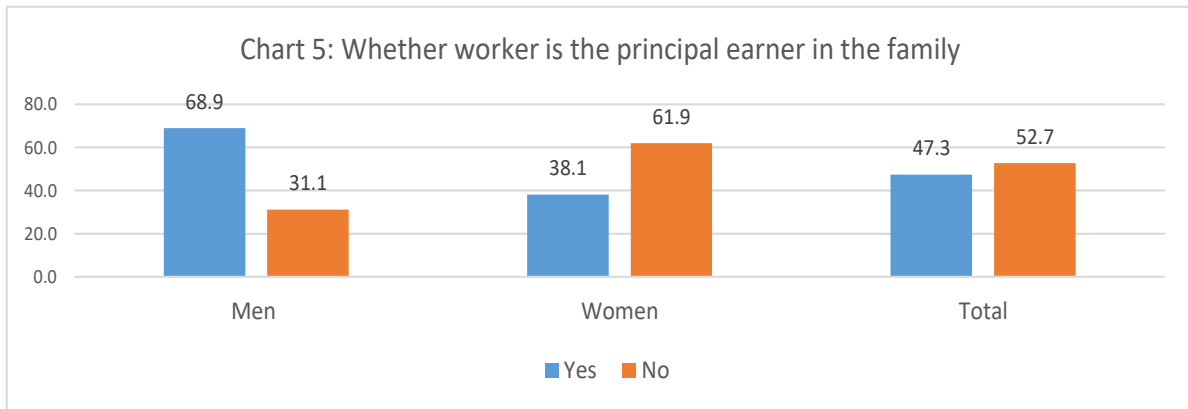
Workers have on average 4.06 members in their families/in each family. The majority of the workers (51.3%) have 3-4 members (Chart 3). 35.3% of workers belong to families that comprise more than four members. In each family, the number of dependent members is 2.1. Regarding the income earners, survey data reveals that each family on average has 1.91 earning-member (Chart 4).



Families largely depend on the SPI sector

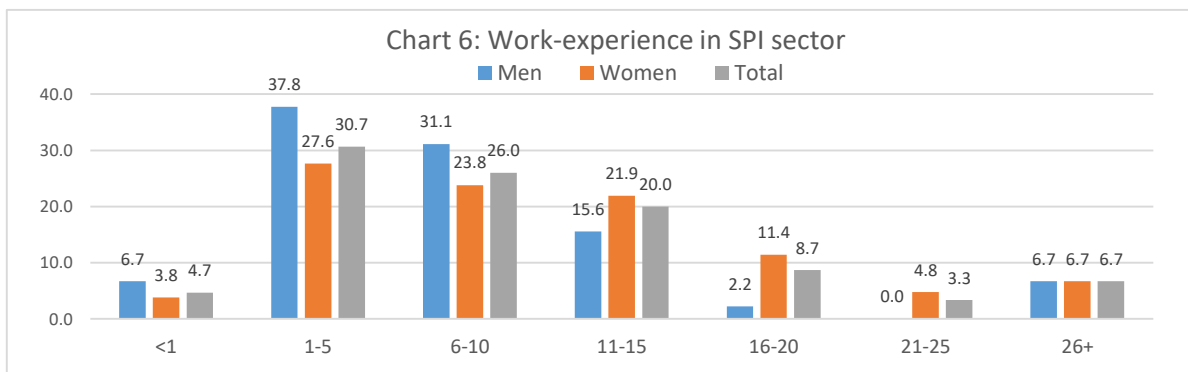
Other than the respondents themselves, the earning family members are also primarily involved in the SPI sector (76.8%). Besides, van-driving and day-labouring are other major livelihood options of SPI sector workers' family members. Income earners of 20.0% and 22.4% of families are engaged in these two occupations.

The majority of the respondents are not the principal income earner in their family, as the sector is dominated by women workers. On the other hand, 47.3% of respondents are the primary breadwinner for their families (Chart 5).



Notable gender variation in job-length

The average length of the job of the workers in the SPI sector is 10.3 years. Gender variation is remarkable; the average job length of the women workers is 10.91 years, whereas men's length of the job is 8.15 years. More than ten years-long jobs are more among the women workers (Chart 6).



Workers are predominantly contractor-supplied; many lack adequate understanding of employment status.

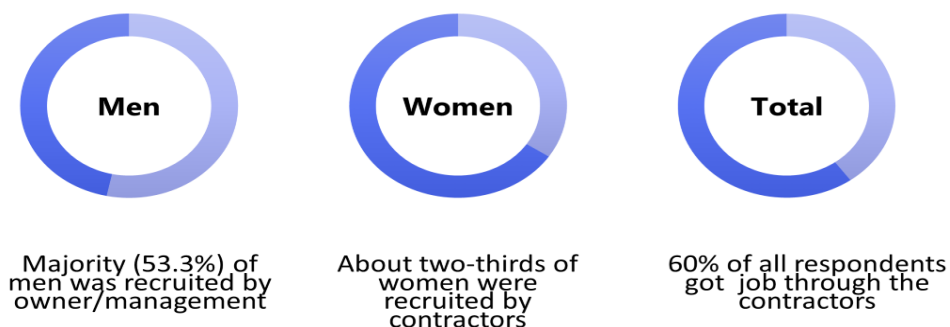
The majority of the respondents are recruited through contractors. Three in every five respondents under this study have informed that they work under the contractors. The recruitment channels/media differ significantly for men and women. About two-thirds (65.7%) of all women respondents have engaged in the job through the contractors. This type of recruitment has been reported by 46.7% of male respondents. In contrast, most of the male respondents (53.3%) were directly recruited by the employer/management. This happens in the SPI sector due to a gendered division of labour. In processing factory/plant there are some positions which are permanent and occupied by male workers, such as supervisors, scale-man, inventory keepers, store-in-charge, and administrative positions. The tasks like skinning, washing, deveining and de-heading are known as women's work in the factory are subject to the season/availability of fish. Thus employers/owners rely on labour contractors for required labour of women during the production seasons.

Several types of the employment status (e.g. permanent, contractual, daily basis, seasonal) have been observed. The majority (52.0 per cent) of the respondents has claimed that they were recruited permanently; 22% on a contractual basis, and about one in every five

workers is a daily worker. Besides, a few workers are seasonal. The ratio of workers employed permanently differs among men and women workers. 80% men respondents were permanent. For women, permanent workers' proportion is 40%. In contrast, proportions of contractual and daily basis worker are higher in both cases among the women workers. On the one hand, there is a preference for men in the permanent positions (e.g. supervisor, in-charge, scale-man) in factory, and on the other hand, many of the women workers prefer work under the contractor as it provides them with flexible hours and often with higher income opportunity since their work is piece-rated/production basis.

It is also noticeable that workers often lack adequate understanding of their employment status. 60% of all respondents have been engaged in the job through the contractors (Chart 7). However, while talking about the employment status, the majority has claimed that they work as permanent workers. It has been evident during the FGDs that many workers consider themselves as permanent workers when they work in the same factory for a relatively long period and get a document/paper where their attendance is recorded. They are not concerned about who is keeping the record. Even they are not aware of whether they are provided with an appointment letter.

Chart 7: By whom respondents got the job



The SPI sector's job is the only income source for most workers

The largest section (78.7%) of the workers does not have an alternative income source/activity other than working in the SPI sector. The scenario is almost the same for both women and men workers. In contrast, slightly more than one-fifth of all the workers have other income-earning activities under the wide variety of informal sector (Chart 8 & 9). Informal works include agriculture (21.9%), livestock rearing (12.2%), domestic work (12.5%), construction work (9.4%), tailoring (9.4%), poultry rearing (6.3%), grocery shop (3.1%), day labourer (6.3%), fish market (9.4%) etc. The availability of alternative income source is slightly more among the workers recruited through contractors than those employed by owners/management directly. Since many of the contractor supplied workers often do not have work for the whole month, they tend to ensure subsistence by income from other sources.

Chart 8: Alternative income sources of women

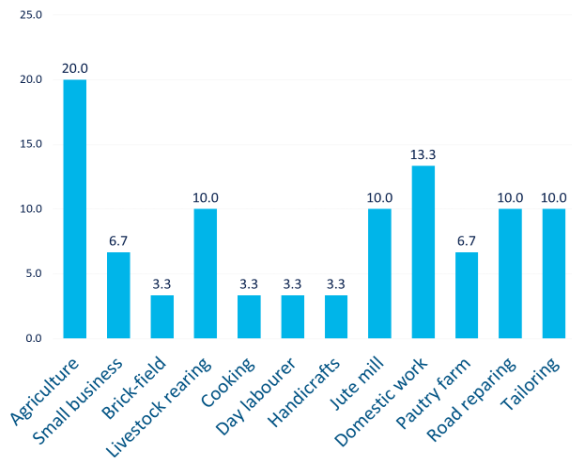
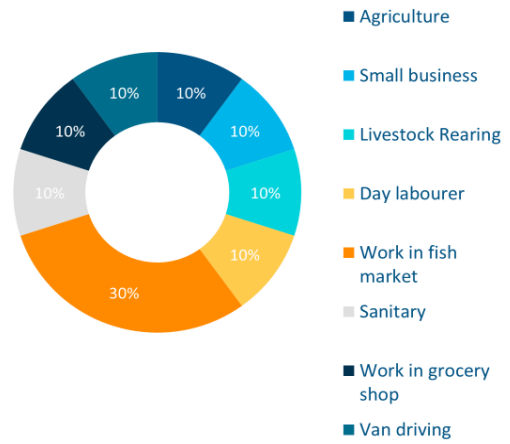


Chart 9: Alternative income sources of men



Covid-19 and employment

A fall in monthly average working days, with notable variation between owner-hired and contractor-supplied workers

The majority of the respondents have informed that their factory was closed for many days due to government-imposed lockdown/holidays during the pandemic. Many workers, on the other hand, claim that their factories were not closed completely during the lockdown. The responses of both permanent workers and workers under contractor are similar in this regard. During FGDs, many participants informed that they faced many hurdles on the streets while coming to factories when the nationwide lockdown was going on.

“Many workers had worked during the lockdown, though not regularly. When any supply of fishes arrived at the factory, the authority informed workers by the supervisors and other ways and asked them to come. Workers then used to come facing several difficulties on streets as transports were mostly unavailable. There was also fear of harassments since the police and army were checking in many spots to enforce the lockdown.” (FGD, Bagerhat)

Overall, the factory closure, complete or occasional, during the lockdown and its associated aftermaths decreased the work opportunity for the SPI sector workers. Before Covid-19, a worker used to work 25.89 days monthly, whereas the range was 12-30 days (Chart 10). The majority (57.3%) has claimed that they worked 27-30 days every month. Just more than one-fifth of workers used to work 24-26 days, and 14.7% for 20-23 days. The number of working days reduced to some extent after lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic (Chart 11). After lockdown, workers have worked on an average of 21.13 days during this pandemic. In post-lockdown period, the largest section had the opportunity to work for 26-30 days. One-third of all the workers could work for 10-15 days and 14% for 21-15 days.

Please note that permanent workers had the work opportunity for more days during the pandemic than the workers under the contractor. 60% of permanent workers worked for 26-30 days. The largest section of the workers under a contractor had worked for 10-15 days, and only 30% could work for 26-30 days.

Chart 10: Monthly working days before Covid-19

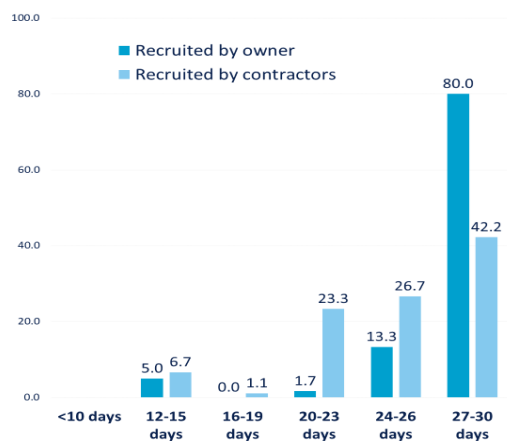
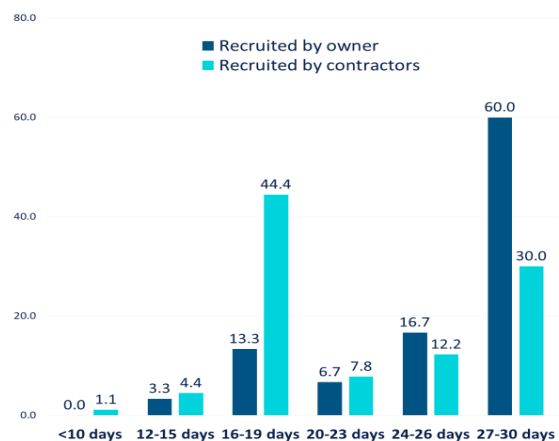


Chart 11: Monthly working days after lockdown

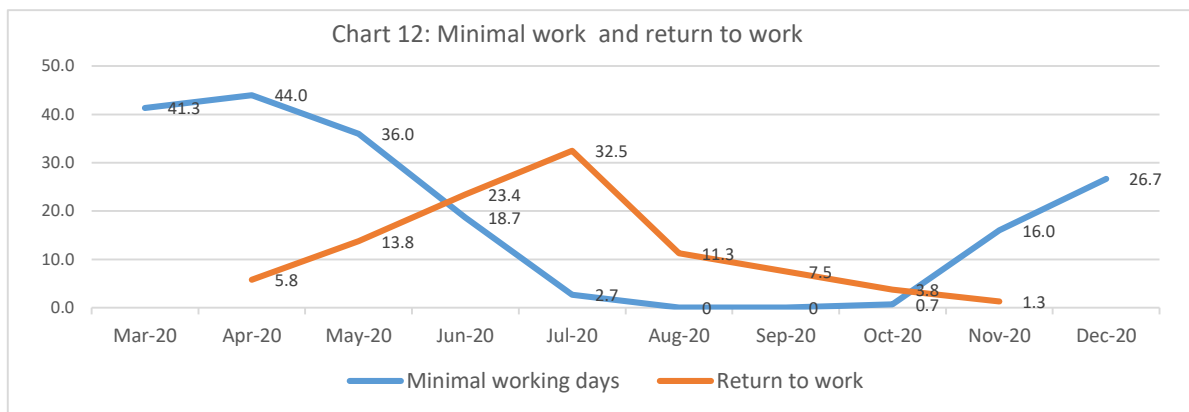


The peak of working-days loss was in April 2020, and the peak of recovery in July

Factories remained closed mainly in the initial months of the Covid-19 outbreak in the country. March, April and May were the most crucial months when factories were mostly closed. Consequently, workers had minimal opportunity to work (Chart 12). The situation then started improving gradually, continued until October. 41.3%, 44.0%, and 36% respondents respectively mentioned March, April and May as the worst-hit months. Almost all workers had an opportunity to work in October. Again, in November and December, many could not work, 16% and 26% respective.

The length of the factory closure varied remarkably. The majority (55%) of the respondents claimed that their factories were closed for three (03) months. 22.2% of respondents have reported factory closure for one month. 10% of respondents' factories were closed for two months, and another 10.1% of respondents' factories for more than three months.

The largest section (32.5%) was back to their regular work in July, after four months of the Covid-19 outbreak. Many even started work later. 23.4% started working after July. On the other hand, 13.8% of respondents have claimed that they started working in the factory in May, just one month after the outbreak. 23.4% restarted the job in June (Chart 12).

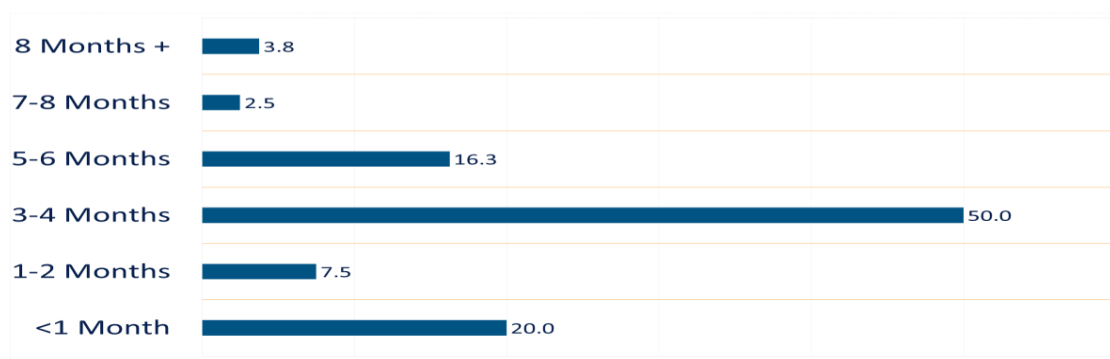


Half of the workers could not work for 3-4 months

It is evident that workers could not work for several months due to Covid-19. One in every two workers could not work for 3-4 months on average. 22.4% of workers could not work for more than five months and more. On the other hand, the loss of working days was less than one month for one in every five workers (Chart 13).

Regarding the loss of working days, gender-based variation is not remarkable. However, a slight difference has been observed based on the employment pattern. Loss of working days is slightly more among the workers recruited by the contractors.

Chart 13: Loss of working days during the pandemic

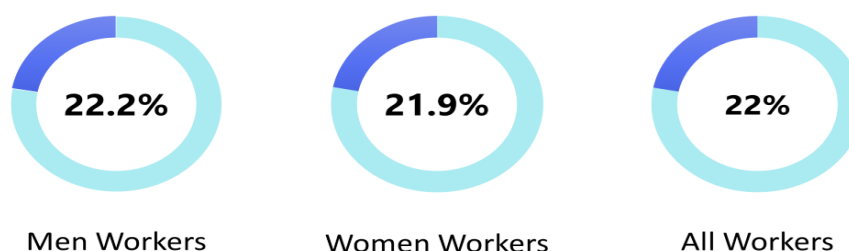


Lack of alternative sources of income during factory closure

Most of the workers did not have any alternative income when the factories were closed. 22% of workers engaged themselves in other occupations to ensure subsistence. The proportions of men and women workers who could manage some income from other sources were almost similar (Chart 14). However, due to inadequate income and uncertainty, many of them had to engage in multiple activities/occupations one after another. The typical works where they were involved included day labour, domestic work, poultry farm, tailoring, van driving, agriculture.

“We had no fixed work for earnings when factories were closed. We had done whatever was offered by others, from chopping woods in another person’s house to loading/unloading sand from truck.” (FGD, Bagerhat)

Chart 14: Workers involved in other income earning activities during pandemic



Formal to informal sector mobility

There are instances that SPI sector workers have changed their occupation permanently as consequences of Covid-19 (Chart 15). 26% of respondents have reported they know workers who left this sector permanently amid covid-19. They further informed that those who left now work as auto-driver (2.6%), shopkeeper (20.5%), mason/construction worker (12.8%), day labour (7.7%), rickshaw/van pulling (56.5%), garment worker (20.5%), agriculture workers (12.5%), small business (2.6%) (Chart 16). Lack of adequate income from SPI and irregular payment during the Covid-19 have motivated those to adopt new occupations.

Chart 15: Whether SPI workers left the sector

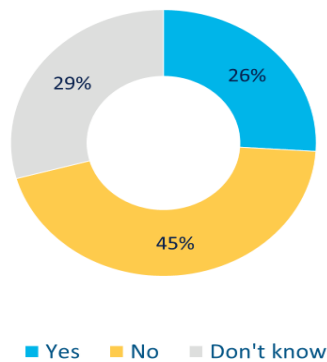
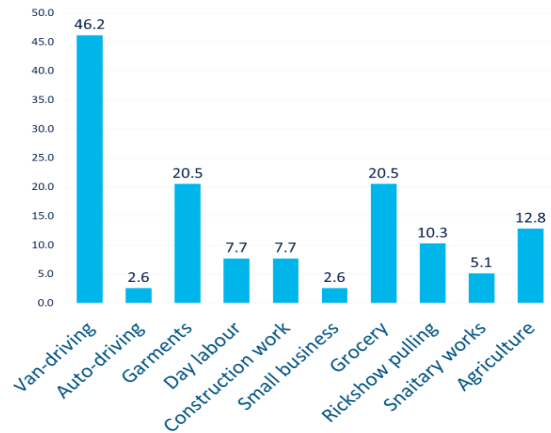


Chart 16: Where SPI workers have gone

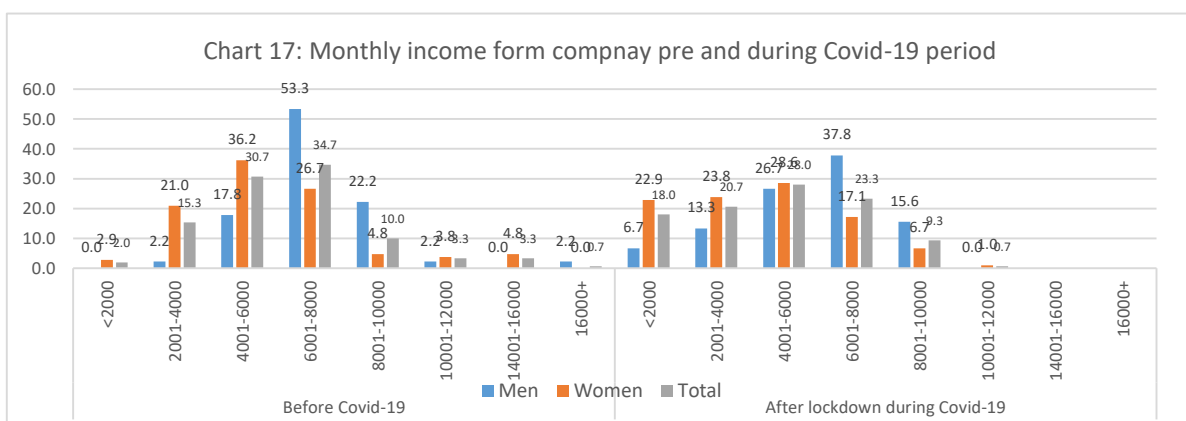


Income and adaptation strategy

Declined income with an increased gender wage gap

Before Covid-19, the most extensive section of the workers' income was between BDT 6000 and BDT 8000 (Chart 17). However, the average income of all the workers was BDT 6675. This amount includes overtime, although most workers could not separate their income from overtime and do not know how much they earn from wage and how much from overtime. Three in every seven workers' income range is BDT 4000-6000. Only 7.3% of workers' income was more than BDT 10000. Women's monthly income was behind the men's'. Men workers' monthly average income was BDT 7656.67, whereas women's average income was BDT 6254.29.

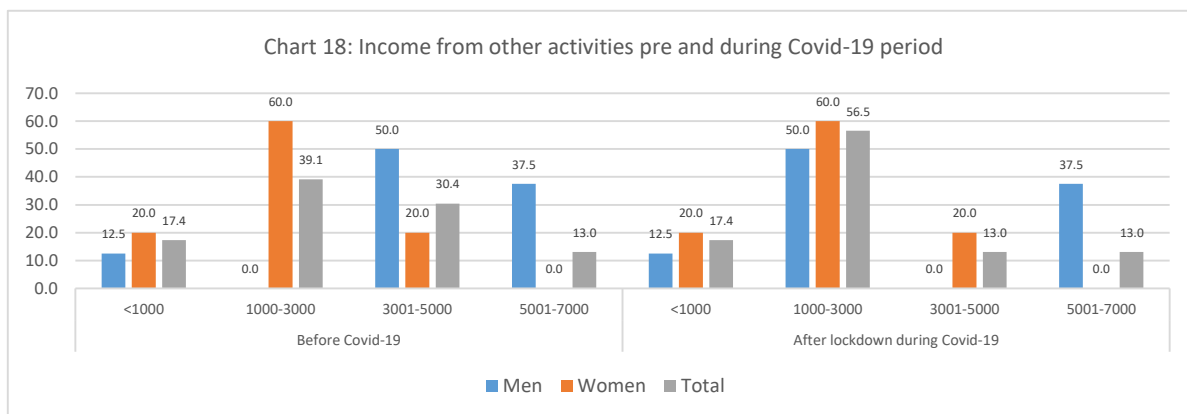
The post lockdown period has observed a fall in the income from the company. The average income has declined to BDT 5146.33, which is BDT 1529 less than pre-Covid-19 income. 2 in every three workers now earn a maximum amount up to BDT6000 (Chart 17). Just one in every ten workers has an income over BDT 8000. The gender wage gap is now BDT 2089.89, which was BDT 1402.38 at the pre-Covid period. It is to be mentioned that women's less income was an outcome of both gender discrimination and fewer working days than the men workers during the Covid-19 period.



Income from other sources: pre and during Covid-19

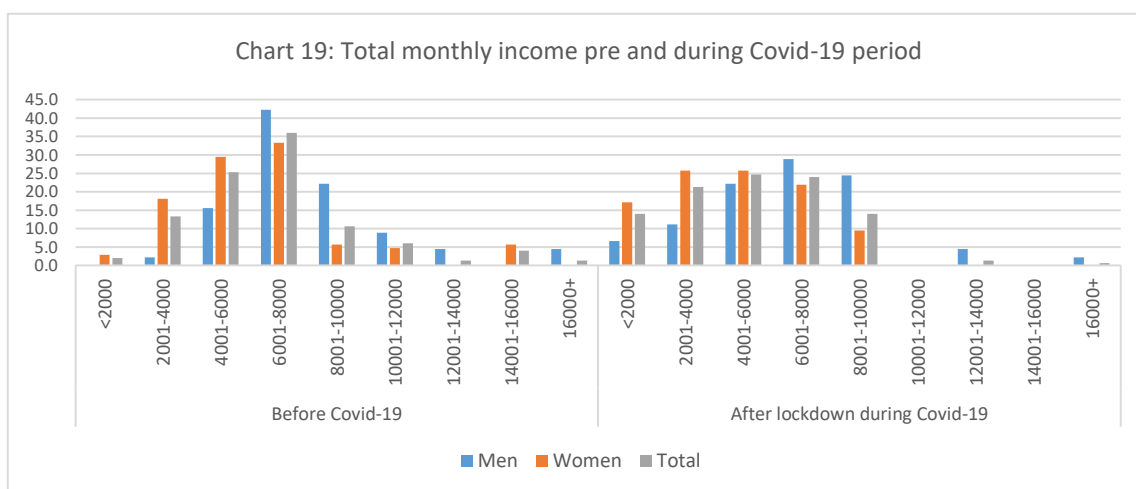
Only 23 respondents had income from other sources. The average income of these workers was BDT 3321.74. Four in every ten earned BDT 1000-3000, and 3 in every 10 of these worker’s income was between BDT 3001 and BDT 5000 (Chart 18). Gender variation is also remarkable here. The gender gap in income from sources other than the fish company was BDT 1998.33.

SPI sector workers' income from other/alternative sources has also fallen during the Covid pandemic. The majority is now earning BDT 1000-3000, and the average amount is BDT 2590.91 (Chart 18). Income from these sources is now on average BDT 731.64 less in comparison to the pre-covid situation. The gender gap in income is now BDT 1961.9.



Total monthly income: pre and during Covid-19

Combining the income from both the fish company and other sources, a worker's monthly average earning pre-Covid-19 period was BDT 7184.33. The largest segment's income was BDT 6001-8000. One in every four workers used to earn BDT 4001-6000 (Chart 19). Gender variation shows that women's income was BDT 1849.37 less than men. In the months after the lockdown, total income has fallen to BDT 5526. About half of the workers' income was Between BDT 4001 and BDT 8000 (Chart 19). Just 2% of workers income crossed BDT 10000. The income gap between men and women workers increased to BDT 2419.52.

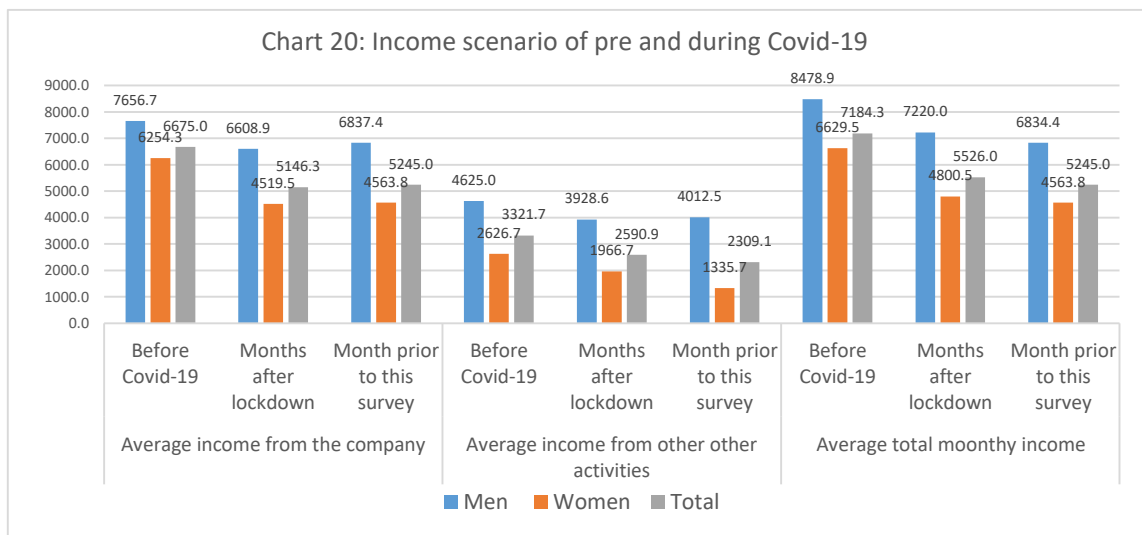


Income in prior month of the survey

In the month before this survey, the average income from fish company/factory was BDT 5245. 31.3% of workers, the largest segment, earned BDT 6100-8000. One in every five respondent's income was BDT 2001-4000, and 22.7% of respondents' income was BDT 4001-6000. The men workers' average income was BDT 6837.44, whereas, for women workers, it was BDT 4563.81 (Chart 20). Therefore, the gender wage gap was BDT 2274.44.

In the previous month, the average income from other sources was BDT 2309.09. 43.5%, the largest section earned BDT 1000-3000. Women's average income was BDT 1335.71, whereas men's was 4012.5 (Chart 20). Therefore, the difference was BDT 2676.79.

Regarding the total income, a worker's monthly average earnings was BDT 5245 (Chart 20). About one in every three workers earned BDT 6001-8000, and only 4% of workers earned over BDT 10000.



Not only personal income but also family income has reduced for many workers

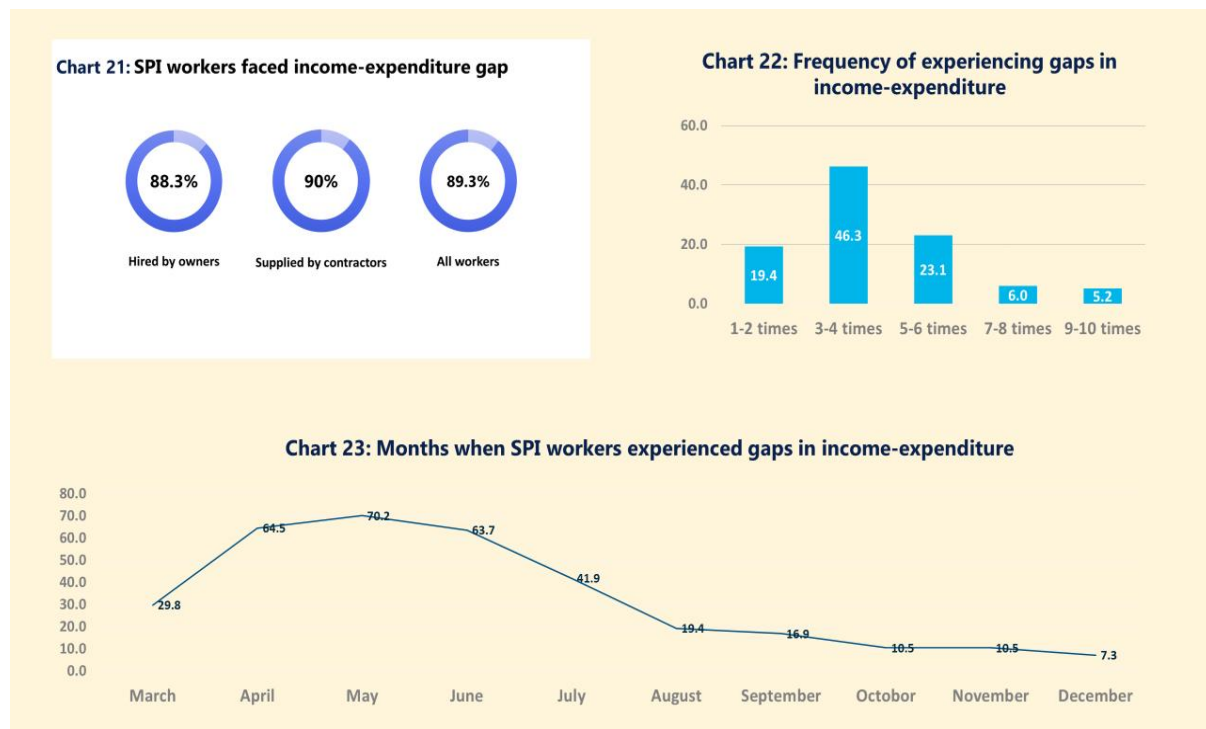
In the months after lockdown, 44% workers claim that their monthly total family income has decreased. Income has decreased from 10% to 80%. Income of majority workers has reduced by 10-30%. More than one in every three workers income has reduced by 31-50%, and 11% of workers income has reduced by more than 50%.

Widespread and frequent income-expenditure gap

The income-expenditure gap was pervasive among the workers in this sector. Nine in every ten workers have experienced an income shortage (Chart 21). The most extensive section claims that they suffered from an income-expenditure gap 3-4 times during the pandemic, followed by 5-6 times (23.1%). One in every five workers experienced this for 1-2times. On the other hand, the gap was for more than six times (months) for 11.2% of workers (Chart 22).

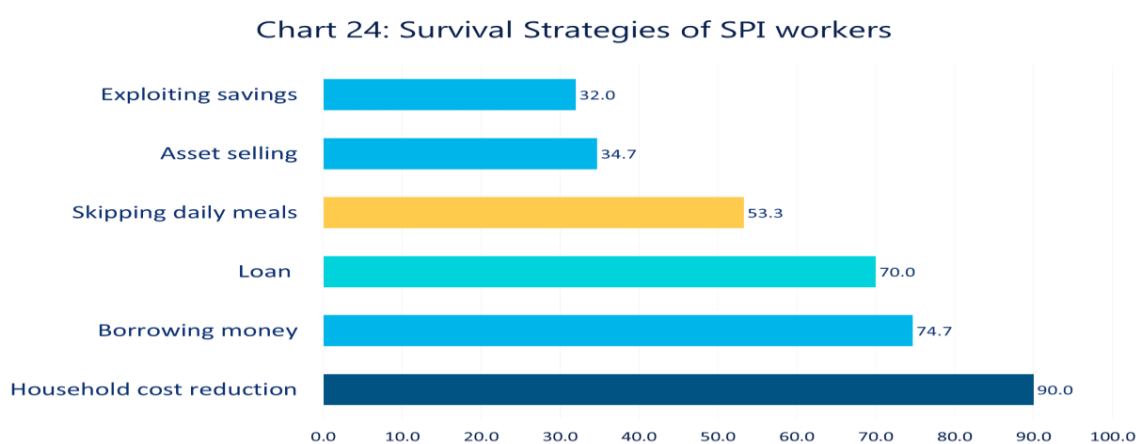
It is important to note that the proportion of workers who experienced the gap varied in different months throughout the Covid-period (Chart 23). The most significant proportion

experienced the gap in May 2020; 70.2% of workers' expenditure was more than their income. In the earlier month, 64.5% of workers faced an income-expenditure gap. In June 2020, 63.7% of workers faced the gap. A gradual recovery trend has been evident in the following months. Since the work and income scope has increased gradually, it resulted in a lesser proportion of workers with the income-expenditure gap.



Adaptation strategies are multiple, leading to new vulnerabilities

Workers adopted multiple strategies to cope with the working days and income loss, and the income expenditure gap (Chart 24).



Borrowing money: One in every three workers has borrowed money several times from various sources. The largest section (42.0%) has borrowed money 1-2 times. 3-4 times and 5-6 times of borrowing have been reported by 27.7% and 13.4% of workers. 17% of workers have borrowed money more than six times during the pandemic. The average amount of borrowing is BDT 19888.89, where the range is BDT 1000 to BDT 80000 (Chart 25). They

borrowed money from relatives and neighbours. Three in every five respondents borrowed money from their relatives, whereas one in every two from neighbours. Besides, 21.4% of respondents borrowed from their friends (Chart 26).

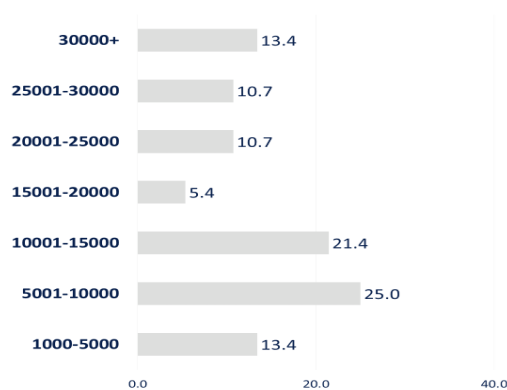


Chart 25: Amount (BDT) borrowed

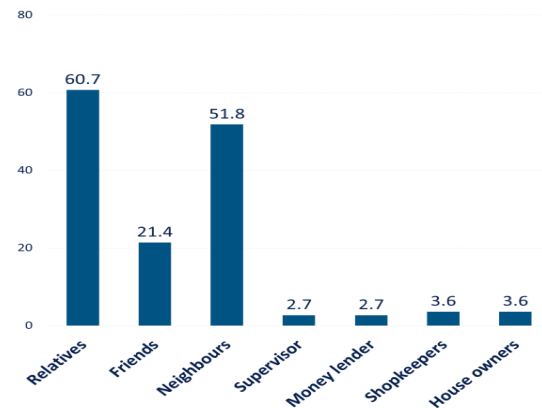
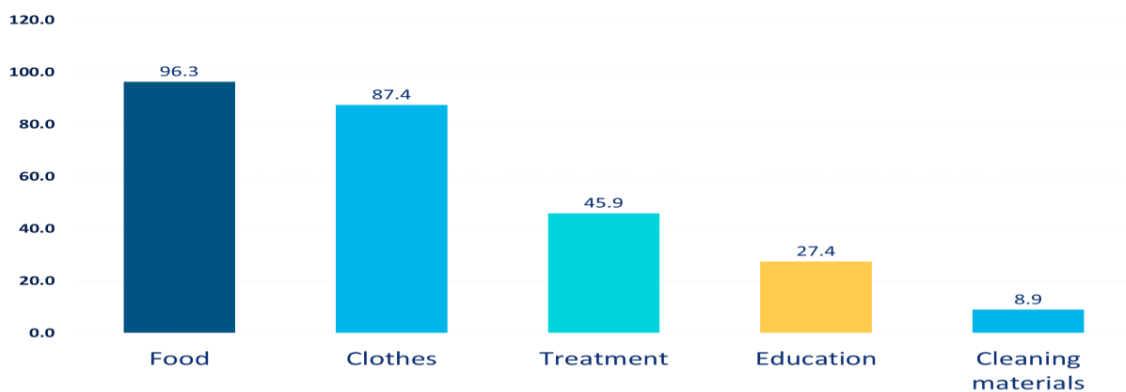


Chart 26: Where workers have borrowed from

Household cost reduction: Nine in every ten workers had to reduce the household costs during the pandemic. In the list of cost reduction, food cost remains at the top, followed by expenditure on clothes/dress (Chart 27). A large number of workers had no option but to reduce treatment cost. Besides, 27.4% of workers reduced expenditure on education.

Chart 27: Items of household cost-reduction



Skipping daily meals will impact health and nutritional condition: To cope with the income loss and the income-expenditure gap, many workers even reduced the number of daily meals. 53.3% of all workers have had this experience during Covid-19 who took one/two meals instead of three meals a day. The largest segment (31.3%) had to go through this experience for 2-3 months. One in every five workers had had the experience for 15 days to one month. 35% of workers claim that they skipped at least once daily for more than three months.

Exploiting savings and selling off assets has exposed them to future adversities: About one-third (32%) of all workers have broken their savings (Chart 28). Adopting this means is more among the employer-recruited workers than the contractor-supplied workers.

Overall, they have broken savings several times--23% for 1-2times and 43.7% for 3-4 times (Chart 29). The savings amount they lost/broken was BDT 5000-20000 for 77.1% of workers, and 16.7% of workers lost BDT 20001-40000 (Chart 30).

Chart 28: Exploiting savings

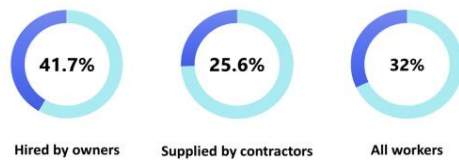


Chart 30: Amount (BDT) of savings exploited

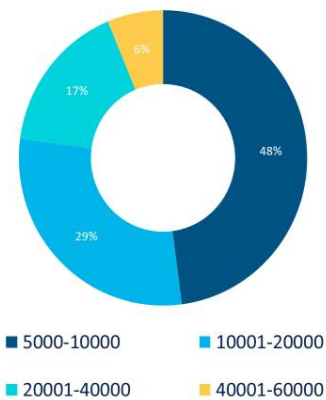
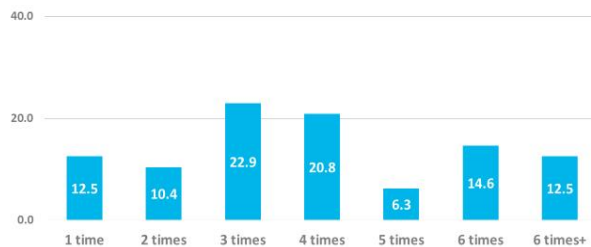


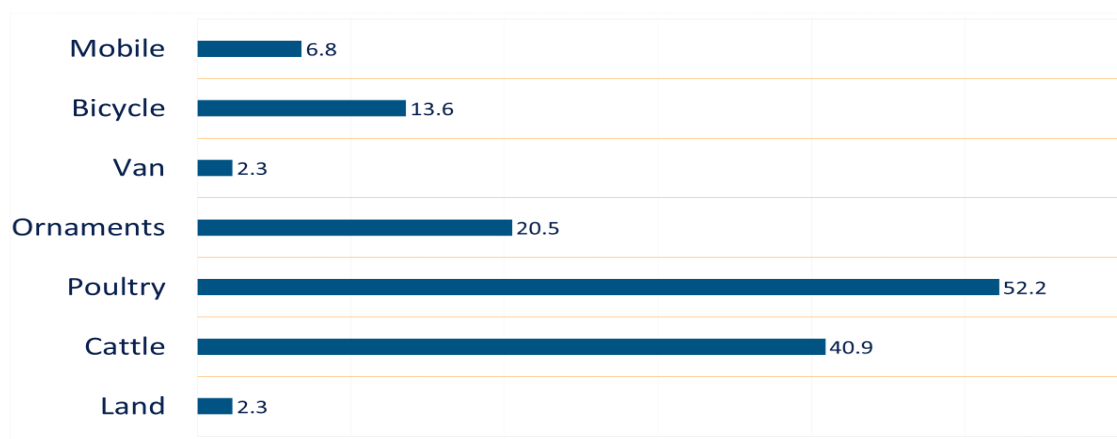
Chart 29: Frequency of exploiting savings



From a livelihood framework perspective, assets are crucial means of living. Krantz (2001) argue that among the various components of a livelihood, the most complex is the portfolio of assets out of which people construct their living. Asset portfolio comprises, as Krantz explain, both tangible assets and resources and intangible resources such as claims and access (Krantz, 2001).

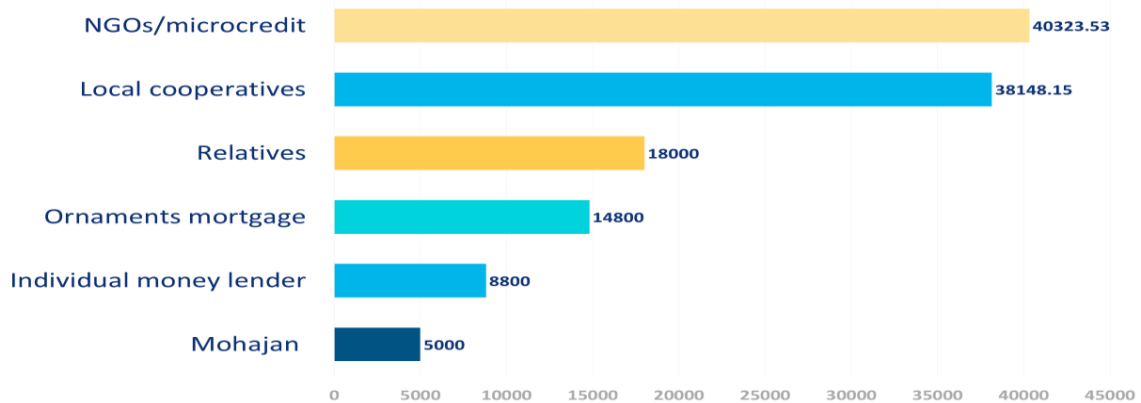
A harsh reality is that 34.7% of workers have reported selling family assets to cope with the situation. They have sold their livestock (40.9%), duck-hen/poultry (52.3%), ornaments (20.5%), and bicycle (13.6%). Some workers claimed that they even sold a portion of their land (2.3%) (Chart 31).

Chart 31: Assets sold during the pandemic



Trapped in the vicious circle of loan: Seven (7) in every ten workers had to loan from both formal and informal sources (Chart 32). The institutional sources of loan included local micro-credit providing NGOs and local cooperatives. Traditional money lender and relatives, on the other hand, represent informal sources. The loan amount varied based on sources. However, the average loan taken by each family was BDT 33974.7.

Chart 32: Average loan amount (BDT) from various sources



Covid-19 and family life

All of the respondents have claimed that none of their family members had been tested Covid-19 positive. However, 12.7% workers have reported that symptom of Covid-19 was observed among them/or their family members. None of them consulted with registered doctors, nor had they taken advice by calling the government provided helpline. They even did not give a sample for the diagnostic test. The only measure they took was buying medicines from the nearby medicine shop after consulting with the shop's salesman.

Despite income fall, most workers increased expenditure on health protection, compromising the financial burden

From the beginning of the covid-19 in the country, there was a publicity campaign from the department of health and IEDCR that all should maintain hygiene, frequent washing of hands with soap, wearing a mask, and taking nutritional foods. No doubt that all are crucial, however practicing all these requires the capacity to spend more money which the workers lack greatly.

Covid-19 has increased the expenditures of SPI workers to maintain hygiene and health protection. Nine in every ten workers have claimed that they spent additional money for health protection purposes. The costs have increased for purchasing soap/detergents, hand sanitizers, masks/gloves/cap, fruits, and milk/meat. It is easily understandable that additional expenditure for health protection has caused a financial burden on the workers since working days and income both fell considerably during the pandemic. Additional costs on fruits, milk, and meat/fish increased remarkably.

On the other hand, 9.3% of workers did not spend additional money on health protection measures. All of them have claimed that they could not take measures that would boost health protection amid the covid-19 pandemic due to the financial crisis.

Time used for household purposes and beyond

During the lockdown/factory closure, workers spent their time for various purpose. The most extensive section (42%) claimed that they gave more time to family. One in every five workers spent more time on household work. 10% of workers gave more time for poultry rearing.

Role of stakeholders

Inadequate support from the stakeholders

Different support mechanisms functioned/were available during Covid-19. The Government, NGOs, employers, local philanthropists, and voluntary organisations moved forward with various cash and kind support. However, the case of SPI sector workers is quite different. Most of the workers did not get any support from their employers. Only 12.7% of respondents informed that their employers provided them with cash and kind support. Cash support was provided twice, as they claimed, whereas food support for once.

22% of workers got some support from the government (Chart 33). Food assistance is the primary support in this regard. 31 respondents out of 150 received food support twice, and two respondents received cash support once (BDT 1750 on average).

Supports of the local NGOs were almost absent for the workers of the SPI sector. Only one (1) respondent received support from local NGOs. All of the respondents informed that they did not receive any assistance from TU during the pandemic.

On the other hand, 36% of respondents claimed that they received food assistance from the local humanitarian/philanthropic person. The support came case as one-time assistance, like a food basket that included rice, edible oil, lentil, onion, potato, salt, and other commodities.

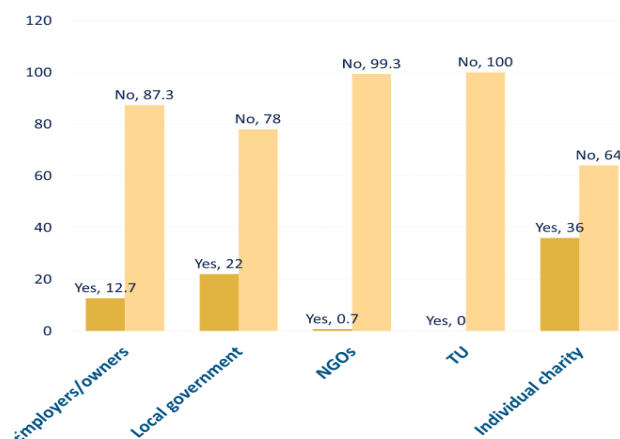


Chart 33: Supports received from stakeholders

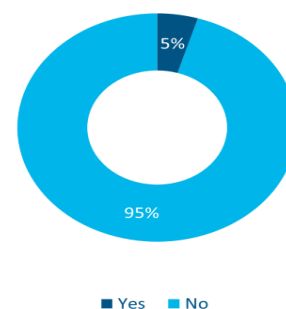


Chart 34: BDT 2500 cash support

Government-provided BDT2500 cash support almost did not reach the SPI workers

One of the remarkable cash supports of the government was BDT 2500. Families affected by the Covid-19 crisis through mobile financial services (The Daily Star, 11-05-2020). Initially, the government planned to provide this support to 50 lakh families. However, it has not been possible to distribute it among all the families; 35 lakh families received this support till September (The Daily Star, 29- 09-2020). This support could not reach the SPI workers broadly (Chart 34). Only 4.7% (7 of 150) respondents have informed that they received government-provided BDT 2500 cash support. Out of these seven workers, four workers received support in May and another three workers in June through mobile banking (Bkash). Important to note that they have not faced any difficulties to get the benefit. However, during FGDs, participants have talked about the process of getting this support that was, in participants' view, not transparent always. Many participants informed that the photocopy of their national ID card and mobile numbers were taken, but finally, they did not get it and do not know what went wrong. Out of more than 20 participants in two FGDs, only one, known to the local union council member, received the support.

Section three: Impact on Workplace Rights

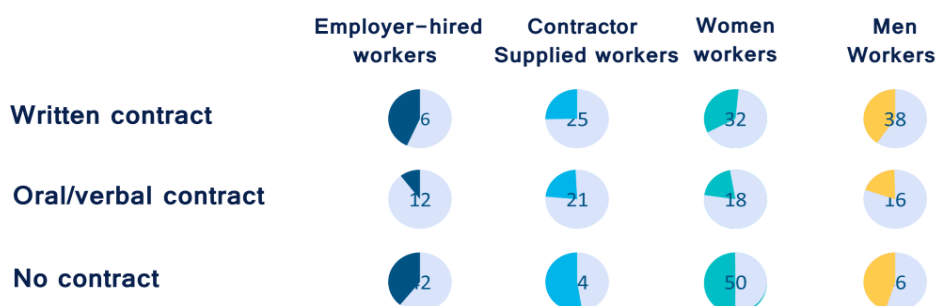
Employment contract

Presence of employment contract varies based on recruitment type and gender

A large number of workers work without any contract with their employers (Chart 35). Although the majority (51.3%) has claimed contract availability, 48.7% of workers still lack it. The contract availability is relatively higher among the workers hired by the owners directly (57%) than those who work under contractors (46%). Regarding the availability, women workers (50%) lag behind the men (54%).

The contract is not "written" always. 33.8% of those who claim the presence of a contract has an oral agreement. On the other hand, gender variation is remarkable regarding the presence of a written contract. 80% of men and 54.8% of women have this type of agreement. As they claim, contracts include clauses like wage amount of wage (66.1%), amount and types of leave (26.0%), terms of resignation (7.1%), and facilities (0.8%).

Chart 35: Availability (%) of employment contract



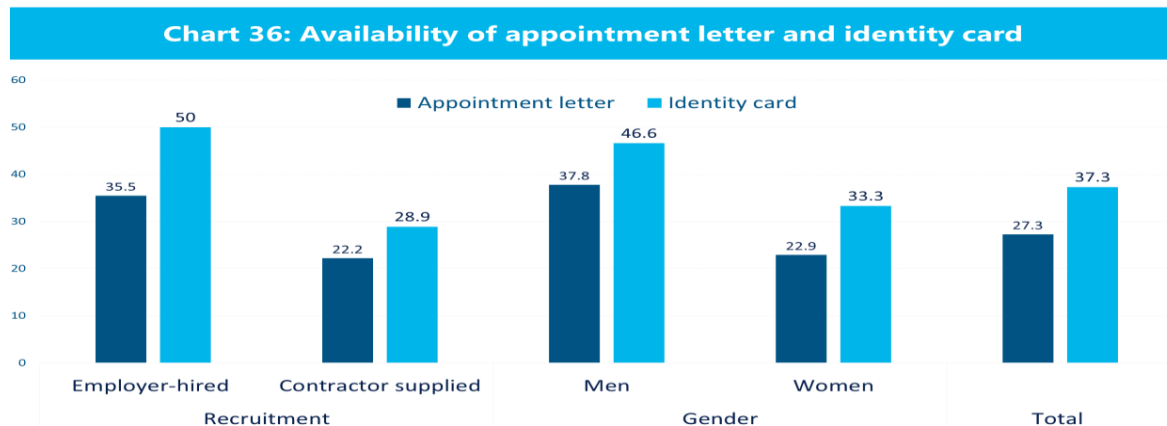
Appointment letter and ID card are not available for the majority workers

Workers are entitled to get appointment letter and identity card from their employers¹. The survey on the workers reveals that only 27.3% of respondents have appointment letter. Availability of appointment letter is more among the employers/management-recruited workers (35%) than contractor-supplied workers (22.2%). Availability of appointment letter is also proportionately higher among the men (37.8%) than women (22.9%) workers.

37.3% of workers have identity cards. Like appointment letter, ID card availability is more among the employers/management-recruited workers (50%) than contractor-supplied

¹ No employer shall employ any worker without giving such worker a letter of appointment and every such employed worker shall be provided with an identity card with photograph. [BLA 2006, Sec 5]

workers (28.9%). Gender differentiation is also marked here. 46.7% of men workers have an ID card, whereas 33.3% have an ID card among women (Chart 36).



Many examples of termination; women and newly recruited workers are mainly the victim

Amid the Covid-19, worker retrenchment/termination in the industrial sectors has been a serious concern. Forty-two per cent of respondents have claimed that during the pandemic, they have observed that factories have fired/decreased workers (Chart 37). Lack of awareness among the workers is also considerably high. One in every four workers does not know whether retrenchment took place in their factories.

Both owner/management-hired workers and contractor-supplied workers have provided more or less similar information. Primarily women and newly recruited workers were the victims of retrenchment (Chart 38). 81.0% and 44% of those who reported retrenchment have respectively claimed that employers mostly retrenched women worker and workers with relatively shorter job-length. 27% have also mentioned that temporary workers lost job more than the other workers.

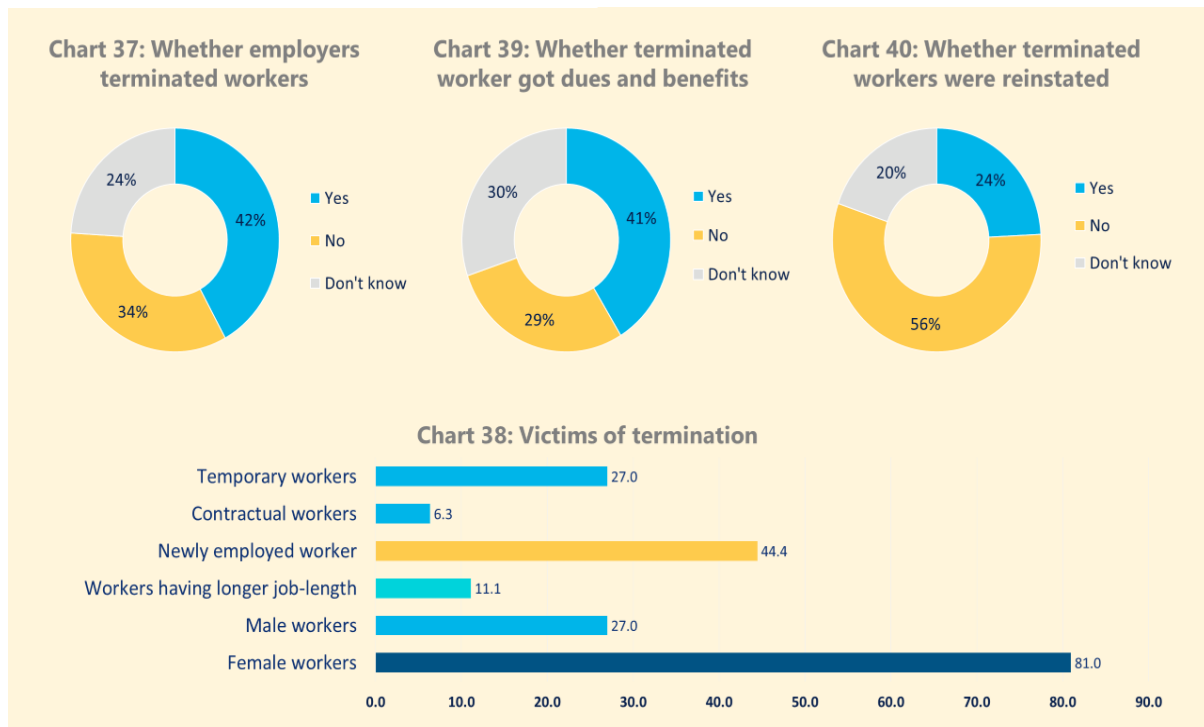
Many of the terminated workers did not get due wages and benefits

Although a significant segment (41.3%) reported that terminated workers received their due wages² and benefits, a large proportion of workers (30.2 %) are not aware in this regard (Chart 39).

The majority (53.8%) further claim that those who received dues/retrenchment benefit did not face troubles in the process of getting it. 15.4% of the respondents are not aware whether they faced troubles in this regard. In contrast, 30.8% have claimed difficulties related to the uncertainty of wage payment and lack of specific time of payment.

Although the factories opened gradually after the lockdown of initial months, retrenched/terminated have not been reinstated in most cases. 56.1% of respondents claimed that employers did not restore them. One in every five workers is not aware of the issue (Chart 40).

² Where the employment of any worker is terminated by retirement or by the employer, whether by way of retrenchment, discharge, removal, dismissal or otherwise, the wages payable to him shall be paid before the expiry of the thirty working days from the day on which his employment is so terminated. [BLA 2006, Sec.123]



Working hours, rest and leave

Rampant violation of legal provisions on working hours, rest and night duty

Long working hour is an indivisible characteristic of this sector. 95% of workers work more than 8 hours³. On average, they work about 10-11 hours daily, where the range is 6-15 hours. The most considerable segment work 8-10 hours, followed by 11-13 hours. Overtime provision is not widely practised. Just 40 of 150 workers (26.66%) have claimed that the overtime is calculated/practiced at their respective factories. Variation is evident in terms of employment type. 35% of employer-recruited workers and 21.11% of contractor-supplied workers have reported overtime hours. The majority of these workers claim that they work extra 1-2 hours beyond their regular working hours. On the other hand, 42.5% of workers do overtime for more than two hours, which is a clear violation of labour law.

For the majority of the workers, there is no specific time for rest⁴. 42.7% has claimed the availability of specified rest time. However, the rest period is usually short. The largest segment (37.5%) (N=64) gets 10-15 minutes' rest, and 28.1% gets 16-30 minutes. One in every three workers claims that their rest period is more than 30 minutes.

³No adult worker shall ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than eight hours in any day. No adult worker shall ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than forty-eight hours in any week. Provided that the total hours of work of an adult worker shall not exceed sixty hours in any week and on the average fifty-six hours per week in any year. [BLA 2006, Section 100 & 102]

⁴ Any worker in any establishment shall not be liable to work either-(a) for more than six hours in any day unless he has been allowed an interval of at least one hour during that day for rest or meal; (b) for more than five hours in any one day unless he has been allowed an interval of at least half an hour during that day for rest or meal; or (c) for more than eight hours unless he has had an interval under clause (a) or two such intervals under clause (b) during that day for rest or meal. [BLA 2006, Section 101]

Work at night is a usual event for workers in the SPI sector. About seven in every ten respondents informed that at their workplace, they work at night also. One in every three workers has claimed that the length of night duty is 7-8 hours. Others claim that they even work for more than eight hours when they need to work at nights. Discussions from FGDs have revealed that often there is no limit of work during nights, it is subjected to the availability of fish supply.

“The length of work at nights depends on the supply of fishes in the factory. During pick season, often we work 16-20 hours and even for more hours in a row. At that time, we just take a short-break/rest at the factory premises”. (FGD, Bagerhat)

No significant changes in working hours, rest and night duty practices

Covid-19 pandemic has an impact on the working hours of the workers. One in every five workers has claimed that their working hours have been affected. 14.7% has reported a decrease, and in contrast, 4.7% has claimed an increase. On the other hand, 80% workers have claimed that working hour has remained same. Overtime hours have remained almost the same. 95% of those who reported overtime claimed that no change took place in the scenario of overtime. On the other hand, just two respondents, both are recruited by employer/management, have noticed an increase in overtime.

For most of the workers, Covid-19 has not brought any remarkable impact on their rest time and night duty. Only 12.5 per cent of workers have claimed that their rest period has been affected by the pandemic. On the other hand, 93.1% of those who reported night duty at the workplace has noticed that the situation has remained the same.

Leave provisions are implemented at a varied level, with marked violation of legal provisions

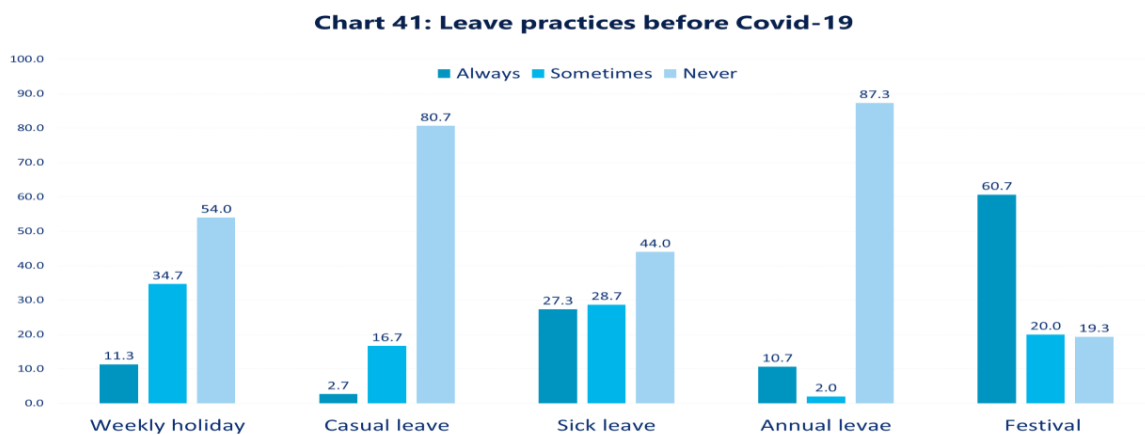
The country's labour law has entitled workers with various leaves, including weekly holiday, casual leave, sick leave, annual leave, and festival leave.⁵ This study has explored a dismal picture of workers' leave enjoyment condition (Chart 4.1). Weekly holiday is rarely provided regularly. Only 11.1% of workers used to get weekly holiday always. More than one in every three workers reported that the weekly holiday is irregular for them, and the majority (54%) never gets a weekly holiday. FGDs have revealed a peculiar practice of weekly holiday for many permanent workers, they get two days-off in a month and additional day-off is given if workers asked for.

“In our factory, we get weekly-leave for two days every month. We will not come to the factory for those two days. If we require any additional leave for a particular day, we would inform the authority, and the authority then grants the leave. However, our leave is for four days monthly on papers, but we are getting two days. Everything is shown correctly in the official documents.” (FGD, Bagerhat)

⁵ A worker is entitled to enjoy a weekly holiday, compensatory weekly holiday, 10 days of casual leave every year, 14 days of sick leave, annual leave (one day for every eighteen days of work), and 11 days of festival leave. [BLA 2006, Section 103, 104, 115, 116, 117 & 118]

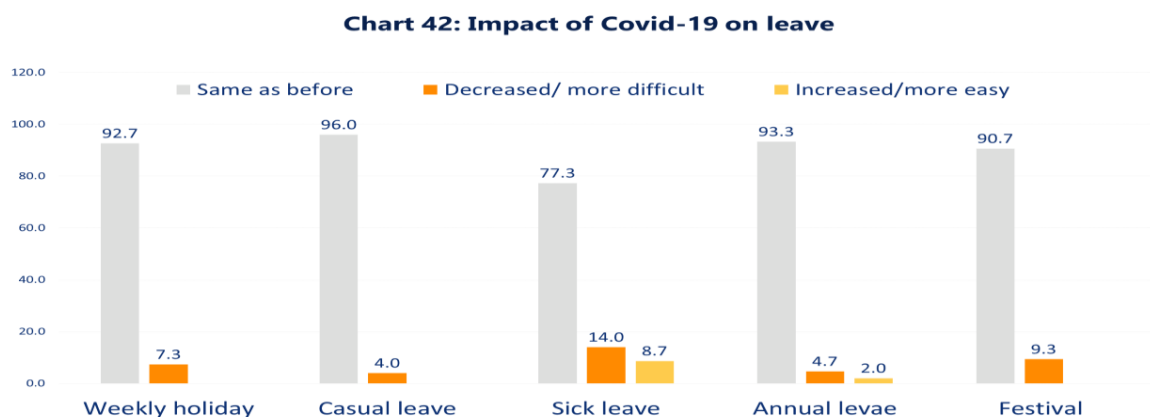
80.7% of respondents have claimed that they never get casual leave. The response pattern is similar among both employer-recruited and contractor-supplied workers. Only 2.7% always get casual leave.

The largest segment of the workers (44%) never gets sick leave (Chart 41). The proportion of workers getting a chance to enjoy sick leave 'always' and 'sometimes' are almost the same, 27.3% and 28.7% respectively. No remarkable differences have been observed among the workers based on their recruitment pattern. Only 10.7% of workers always get annual leave, and 87.3% get this leave never. Many workers are even deprived of enjoying festival leaves. Although 60% of workers always get the leave, 20% get this leave 'sometimes', and the remaining section (20%) 'never.'



Leave practices have mostly remained unchanged

During the Covid-19 period, the weekly holiday practice has remained almost the same (92.7%). Practice regarding casual leave has remained unchanged, according to 96.0% of workers. For sick leave, the situation is the same according to the opinion of 77.3% of respondent. 14% of respondents perceive that the scope of getting sick leave has become more difficult now. With regards to annual leave, 93.3% of respondents think that condition has remained unchanged. 90% of workers claim that during the pandemic, festival leaves practice has remained unchanged (Chart 42).



Income security

No specific wage payment schedule for many workers; gender variation is evident

Regarding the wage payment⁶, although the majority (57.3%) has claimed that they are paid on specific dates, for a large number of workers (42.7), the wage payment schedule/dates are not specific. Gender variation is remarkable in this regard. 28.9% of men workers have claimed the non-specific dates for wage payment, whereas the same claim has been raised by 48.6% of women workers. Although the majority informed about the specific/fixed wage-payment dates, those are not legally compliant always. 54.6% of workers, of those claimed fixed dates, get wage within ten days of the following month (Chart 43). Therefore, for 45.4% of workers, the legal provision is not followed.

Wage payment regularity: become infrequent for monthly basis workers, but remains same for daily-wage workers

Covid-19 has increased irregular wage payment incidents (Chart 44). The majority (55,3%) of the respondents has claimed that during the Covid-19 pandemic, wage payment has been irregular (the date is not specific). For the daily basis workers, the wage payment scenario has remained the same. Before covid-19, most daily workers (77.5%) used to receive wage every day, and the rests (22.5%) at the end of the week. The practice has not changed during the pandemic.

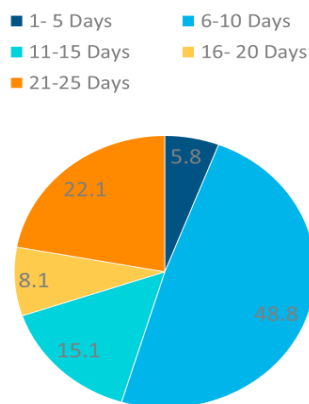


Chart 43: When workers get wage in the following month

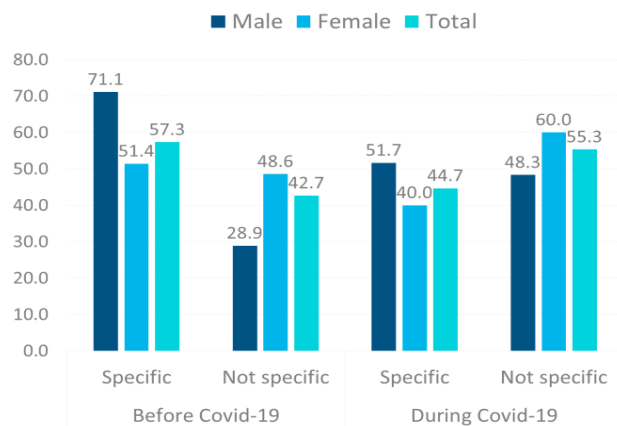


Chart 44: Wage payment regularity before and during Covid-19

Wage due and wage cut for many workers

28% workers' wage has affected during the Covid-19 period. 22% of all respondents have claimed that their wage was kept due amid covid-19. Further, 6% have claimed that wage/salary was reduced (Chart 45). Both keeping wage due, and deduction were relatively

⁶ The wages of every worker shall be paid before the expiry of the seventh working-day after the last day of the wage period in respect of which the wages are payable. [BLA 2006, Sec. 123]

more among the employer-recruited workers than the contractor-supplied workers. The wage was kept due for 1-3 months. On the other hand, the average amount of wage deduction was BDT 3416.67, and on average, wage/salary was reduced for 2-3 months. Both wage due and wage deduction were most frequent/highest in April, May and June.

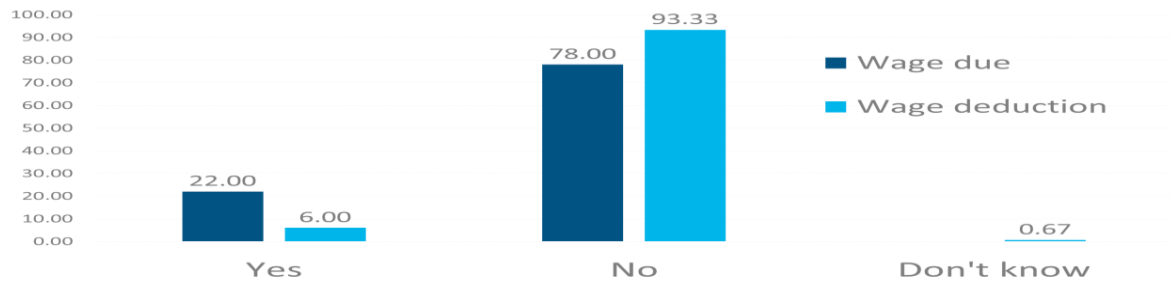


Chart 45: Wage due and wage deduction during Covid-19

Evident impact on practices of bonus and wage increment

Although the majority (52.7%) of the SPI workers get the festival bonus, many workers (47.3%) are still deprived of it. The non-availability of festival bonus is higher (54.4%) among the workers hired by the contractors. During covid-19, about three-quarter (73.3%) of the workers did not receive the bonus. Although 26% of all respondents received the bonus, they got it at a reduced rate in comparison to the pre-covid-19 period (Chart 46).

More than three-quarters (76.0%) of the respondents have informed that there is no arrangement of annual wage/salary increase. In contrast, 23.3% of the respondents have claimed that authority does increase wage/salary yearly (Chart 47). The incidences of increase are more among the employer–recruited workers.

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the practice of wage/salary increment. The majority of these workers (26 of 35) have reported that employers did not provide the annual increment at their respective workplaces. Six others have claimed that increment was given to some workers at their factories, not for all who were eligible.

Chart 46: Bonus: Pre and during Covid-19

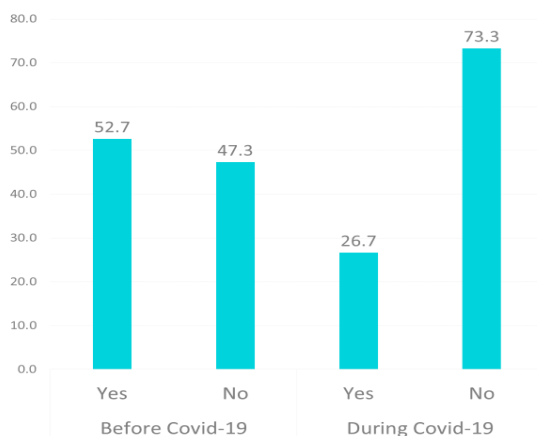
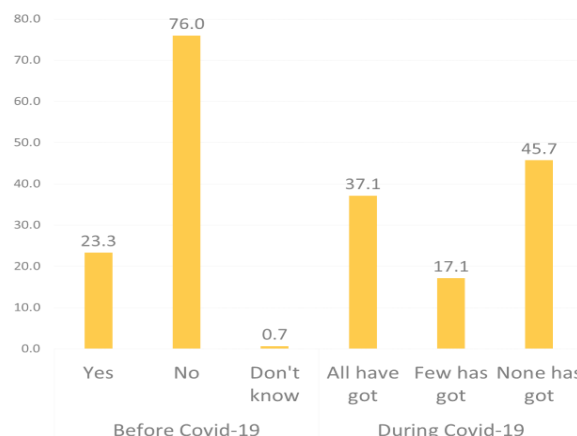


Chart 47: Wage increment: Pre and During Covid-19



Health protection

Observable health protection measure in initial days of Covid-19 outbreak, but lost the continuity

Four in every five respondents claimed that the factories had taken different special measures to protect the health of the workers in the initial months during the Covid-19 outbreak. However, it must be mentioned that these initiatives have reduced gradually (FGD, Bagerhat). On the other hand, one in every five respondents informed that there were no measures for health protection at their workplaces.

The most common actions included handwashing arrangements (92.6%) and masks distribution among workers (86%). Arrangements for checking the body temperature and supply of hand sanitizers have been reported respectively by 74.4% and 75.2% of respondents. Physical distancing among the workers, while they are at work, was increased/expanded at 53.7% of respondents' workplace, and 35.5% mentioned that awareness-raising information was provided.

A diverse opinion on the adequacy of health measures

The perception among the workers regarding the adequacy of these arrangements is mixed. 38.7% of respondents consider these measures sufficient. In contrast, 34% of respondents deem these inadequate. Besides, these measures have been treated as somewhat sufficient by 27.3% of respondents.

Trade union (TU) rights

The unavailability of TU and workers' lack of awareness both are remarkably high

38.7% of workers report no trade union at their workplace, whereas 36% do not know whether TUs are present/available⁷ (Chart 48). The level of unawareness is slightly higher among the women workers (38.1%) than their men counterparts (31.1%). On the other hand, 25.3% has claimed TU's presence at their workplaces. They have claimed their membership to TU. Although apparently, this may be an optimistic scenario compared to the national situation of union density, discussions of FGDs have revealed another side of the coin. Most workers do not know what positions they hold in the union. Even many members of the executive committees are not aware of their position in the union.

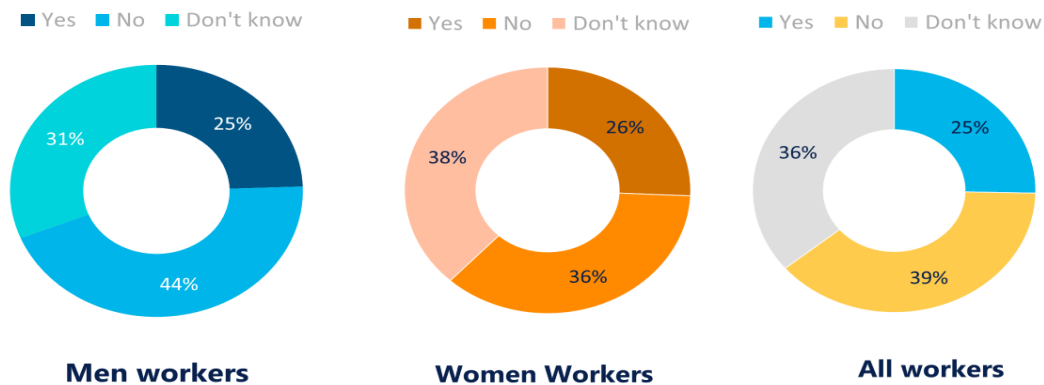
During an FGD in Bagerhat, a participant initially informed that he was the union's general secretary at their factory. Then another person claimed himself as general secretary and corrected the first person as organizing secretary. Another participant of the same FGD was also an executive committee member of the same union. However, he could not mention his position even, and then other members helped him remember his post. The participants finally have informed that the union is not functional; position/post in the union does not mean anything since the factory management selects these. *"I knew that I was the general secretary, and it was all*

⁷ Workers, without distinction whatsoever, shall have the right to form trade union primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workers and employers or workers and workers and, subject to the constitution of the union concerned, to join trade union of their own choosing

set. But when we went to the office room, then I was declared as organizing secretary. This is why I could not remember my position correctly.” – explained the participant who failed the mention his position at the beginning of the FGD. He further added, “unions in this sector are like a mobile phone set without battery and SIM card.”

A key informant also notices that unions in this sector are most employer-sponsored.

Chart 48: Whether TUs are available at the workplaces

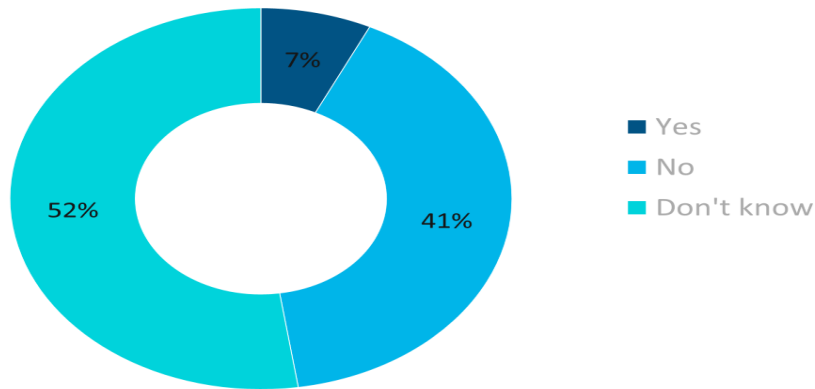


While talking about the TU role during Covid-19, most (71.4%) mentioned that it took awareness-raising activities. Welfare and safety measures activities have been reported by 10.7% and 17.9% of respondents. Another 17.9% of respondent claimed that TU did nothing at their workplaces. Also, 7.1% have further claimed that there is no work scope for TUs at the factory.

Incidences of TU-employer discussion amid Covid-19 are rare

Employers usually did not discuss with TU when they took the workplace-related decision during the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of the respondents even are not aware in this regard. Only 7.1% of respondents have reported such discussion (Chart 49). They further have stated that employers discussed with TU the issue of health protection. Critical issues like factory closure, wage payment, and bonus amount were not discussed, and employers never discuss these with TU (FGD, Bagerhat). They also have claimed that the situation has not altered during the covid-19 pandemic.

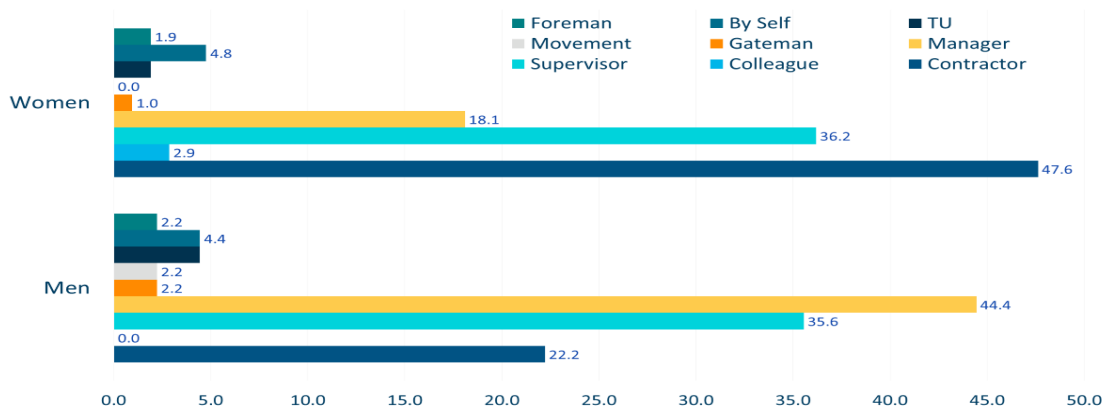
Chart 49: Whether owners discussed with TU about the workplace issues during Covid-19



Informal ways are predominant means to raise demands/issues to employers

The absence of trade union and non-functional TU force workers to raise their issue and demand employers in various informal ways (Chart 50). The largest segment presents their demands by the contractors. The other two frequently explored channels/media to place demands are supervisors (36%) and factory managers (26%). The practice of raising issues through the contractors is higher among women workers (47.6%) than the men (22.2%). On the other hand, the tendency of placing demands by the managers is higher among men (44.4%) compared to their women (18.1%) counterparts.

Chart 50: Ways/media to raise demands/issues to employers



Workers' participation in workplace-related decisions during Covid-19 was rare

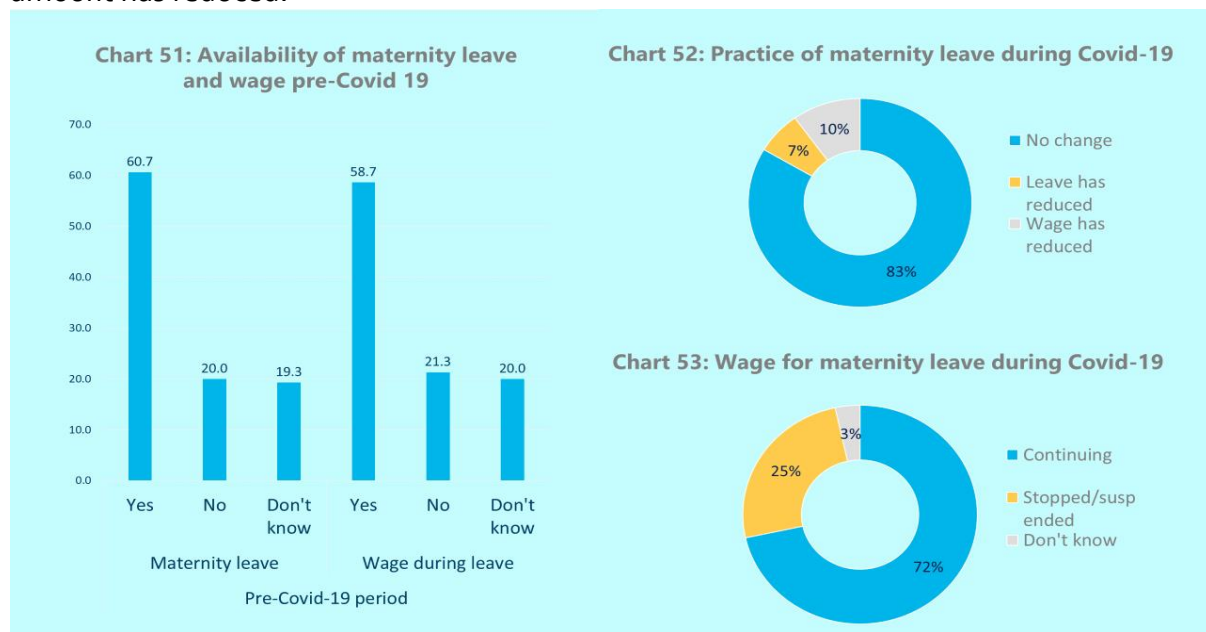
Instances of discussion between employers and workers to take the workplace-related decision affecting workers was very minimal. About three-quarter of respondents claimed that no such discussion and meeting was held. Workers' unawareness is also essential to mention. 21.3% of respondents do not know whether such discussion took place. Only 5.3% of workers have informed that during the Covid-19 pandemic, employers have discussed with workers. Out of 8 respondents, who reported the discussion, six have mentioned that it was about workers' awareness on Covid-19, and five (5) have talked about wage as the discussion issue.

Special issues of women workers

Maternity leave is not compliant with legal provisions always, many are not aware even Maternity leave⁸ is not provided in all factories. Even if leave is provided, the applicable legal provisions are not entirely followed in many factories. 60.7% of all respondents (including both owner-hired and contractor-supplied) have informed that women workers at their respective factories get maternity leave. In contrast, 20% of respondents claim that factories do not provide maternity leave. On the other hand, 19.3% are not aware in this regard. Regarding the paid leave, 58.7% have claimed employers pay wage, whereas 21.3% claim that wage is not given (Chart 51).

Some respondents have reported either stoppage or a reduction in wage during maternity leave

Covid-19 has brought no remarkable changes concerning maternity leave practice (Chart 52). Nevertheless, many workers are not aware of the issue. Survey data show that 83.5% of respondents have noticed no change, and 6.6% talked about a reduced amount of leave. Regarding the wage during leave, 25% of respondents have claimed that it has been stopped/suspended (Chart 53). Further, about 10% of workers also notice that the wage amount has reduced.



Diverse level of impact on gender-specific workplace facilities

Not all factories provide daycare⁹ and breastfeeding corner¹⁰ facility. 64.7% and 72.0% of respondents have mentioned the availability of these facilities pre-covid-19 period. At

⁸ No employer shall knowingly employ a woman in his establishment during the eight weeks immediately following the day of her delivery; every woman employed in an establishment shall be entitled to and her employer shall be liable for, the payment of maternity benefit in respect of the period of eight weeks preceding the expected day of her delivery and eight weeks immediately following the day of her delivery. [BLA 2006, Section 45& 46]

⁹ In every establishment, wherein forty or more workers are ordinarily employed, there shall be provided and maintained a suitable room or rooms for the use of children under the age of six years of such women. [BLA 2006, Sec. 94]

present, these facilities have been suspended/stopped according to the opinion of 26.8% and 13.0% of respondents, respectively (Chart 54 & 55).

During the fieldwork of this study, after interviewing management personnel of a factory, we wanted to visit the daycare. We found the daycare service closed; the room was empty as furniture and toys have been relocated somewhere else at the factory premises. *"Since workload is now few and women workers are not coming largely, we have shifted the furniture."* - the management personnel explained.

Most of the factories have an arrangement of a separate toilet¹¹, and the facility continues during the pandemic. 93% has informed the availability of gender-segregated toilets, and 97%, among them, have noticed the facility is continuing.

One in every two respondents has claimed that their factories did not arrange female doctors for women workers before the pandemic. This facility was available at workplaces of 46.7% of workers. Employers of these workplaces are continuing this service mostly. However, 4.3% have claimed that this service has stopped (Chart 54 & 55).

Providing women workers with a sanitary napkin at a subsidized cost remains a rare practice (Chart 54). 71.3% of respondents informed that this facility was not provided at their factories. The lack of awareness among the workers is also relatively high. 25.3% of respondents do not know whether the facility is provided. Only 3.3% of respondents have claimed the availability of such a facility. However, all of them have noticed that this arrangement has remained suspended during the Covid-19 period (Chart 55).

Chart 54: Availability of gender-specific facilities at pre Covid-19 period

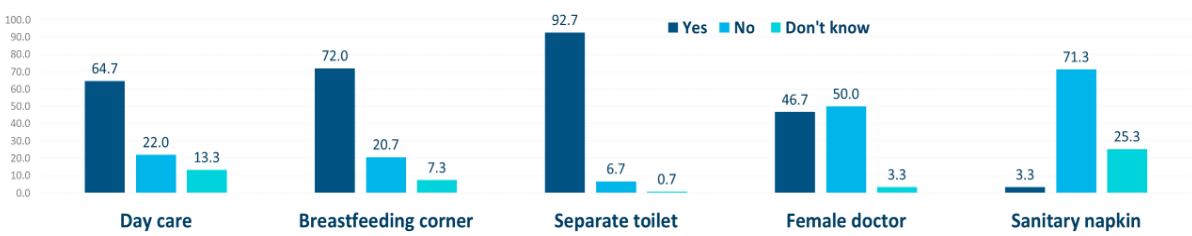
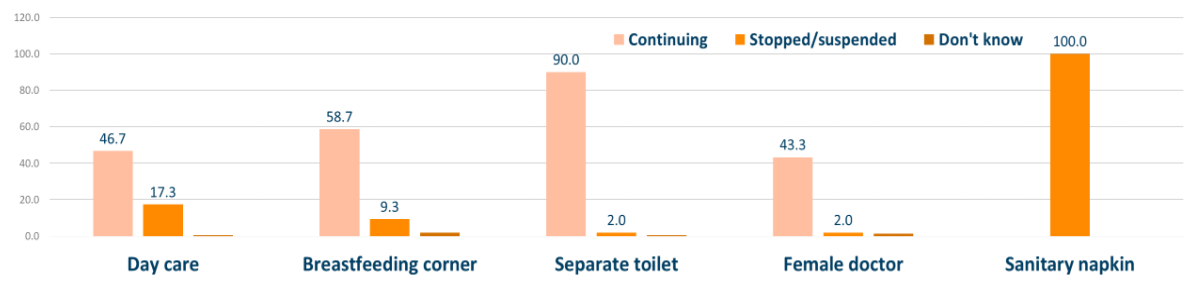


Chart 55: Availability of gender-specific facilities during Covid-19



¹⁰ The High Court ordered authorities concerned of the government to set up breastfeeding and baby care corners at all mills and factories across the country. [The Daily Star, February 18, 2020]

¹¹ In every establishment sufficient latrines and urinals of prescribed types shall be provided and such latrines and urinals shall be provided separately for male and female workers. [BLA 2006, sec.59]

Inadequate attention to women workers during their menstruation and pregnancy period, and no noticeable changes during Covid-19

Women workers generally do not get any special treatment during menstruation. Lack of awareness among the workers has also been evident (Chart 56). 31.4% of respondents indicated no special provision or treatment, and 34% do not know whether any facility is provided. In contrast, 34.7% of respondents shared information about some sorts of measures taken for women workers. The most commonly mentioned measures include reducing the workload (31.3%) and work-break (22%). Other measures, which are comparatively less frequent, include leave (6.7%), changing the sitting arrangement (8%), providing medicine (painkiller) 5.3%. All who claimed availability of some measures noticed that no changes happened in this regard during the covid-19 period.

Chart 56: Whether women workers get special treatment during menstruation

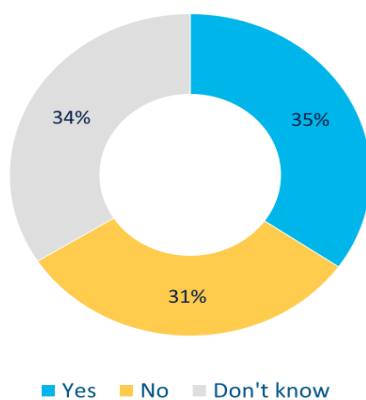
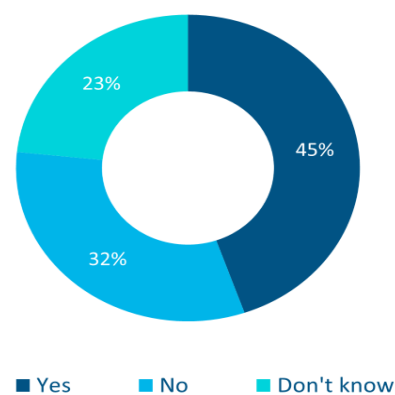


Chart 57: Whether pregnant workers get any special facility



44.7% respondents shared that women workers get special attention/treatment during pregnancy. The facilities/ measures taken for the pregnant workers include rest period (34%), suitable sitting arrangement (16%), the scope for walking for a while (38%), and health checkup (5.33%). On the other hand, 32% of respondents have mentioned the absence of any such measures, and 23.3% are not aware of whether any particular treatment is taken for pregnant workers (Chart 57).

FGD participants overwhelmingly claim that many of these facilities are arranged by coworkers, not factory authorities. During the Covid-19 period, no noticeable change took place regarding the treatment of pregnant workers.

Section four: The Covid-19 Impact in SPI: Suppliers' Perspective

Bangladesh's seafood processing industry is linked with the global supply chain since the industry is export-oriented. Seafood and frozen foods that primarily include fish and fish products are important export items of the country. Bangladesh now ranks 3rd in producing fish from inland water bodies, 5th in aquaculture production, and 11th in marine fish production. The average growth of inland fisheries is 6.7 per cent against 3.25 per cent for marine fisheries. (GOB, 2020a). According to Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association, seawater fishes like Pomfret, Jewfish, Indian Salmon, Shad, Catfish, Ribbonfish, Mullet, Tuna, Mackerel, Cockup, Red Snapper are processed in whole, headless, belly clean (IQF) state or sliced/fillets/steak in Block Frozen state for export purposes¹². Besides, shrimp is also an important frozen food item. Around 70 to 80% of the shrimps produced are exported each year (GoB, 2020b). important

More than 50 factories/companies process the seafood/seawater fishes and play a key role in export earnings from this sector. The covid-19 pandemic has affected them in several ways. The following sections have analyzed the consequences of the pandemic on these actors of the seafood/frozen-food supply chain. Findings are based on the export data and discussions with the management authority of several fish processing companies located at Khulna and Bagerhat.

Declined demand in international market due lock-down

Covid-19 reduced the global demand for seafood. As an immediate response to the Covid-19 outbreak, many countries of Europe and America imposed a lock-down for several months. These countries are the destination of Bangladeshi seafood/frozen foods. Bangladesh exports fish and fishery products to more than 50 countries, including the European Union (EU), USA, Japan, Russia, China. However, EU countries are the major importers of these products. The country exports over \$700 million worth of processed food and beverages, of which over 60 per cent are shrimp and fish products (GoB, 2020b). In 2018-19 Bangladesh earned BDT 4,250.31 crore by exporting 73,171.32 metric tons of fish and fishery products, of which BDT 3,088.85 crore (USD 365.54 million) was due to exports of frozen shrimp (GoB, 2020a).

Table 1: Export of fish and fisheries product

Financial year	Amount (MT)	Earnings (Crore Taka)
2009-10	77643.29	3408.51
2010-11	96469.23	4603.67
2011-12	92479.18	4703.95
2012-13	84904.5	3412.61
2013-14	77328.86	4898.22
2014-15	83524.37	4662.6
2015-16	75337.93	4282.82
2016-17	68305.68	4287.64
2017-18	68935.45	4309.94
2018-19	73171.32	4250.31

Source: Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) of Bangladesh.

¹² <https://www.bffea.net/product.php>

Due to the lockdown, restaurants and other businesses in most destination countries of Bangladeshi seafood/frozen foods were closed. The lockdown prolonged gradually, and there were instances of re-imposing of lockdown¹³. The extended closure of restaurants and other business in the destination countries of Bangladeshi seafood impacted the Bangladeshi suppliers. An administrative officer of a seafood processing industry, located in the Bagerhat area, describes:

"70% of our export goes to EU, mainly in Netherlands, Belgium, and France. 20% export goes to Russia and rests 10% to USA and Asia. We were affected since most restaurants were closed during the lockdown in Europe."

The lockdown-led demand decrease left Bangladeshi suppliers with various troubles and uncertainties. While discussing the declined demand in the global market and its implication for Bangladeshi suppliers a AGM of a fish processing factory, located in Rupsha area of Khulna district, stated:

"A coronavirus infected those who eat shrimp and other seafood abroad, markets closed, and restaurants were shut down. Who will buy our fish? Our condition is like that we are buried under soil/earth. "

No or few order, reduced order volume, and export fall

Since the demand in the international market fell, many buyers stopped placing new orders. Although some of the buyers continued purchasing, the purchase volume decreased significantly. A market insider explains- "It was natural that since the buyers could not sell their product, they decreased purchasing. Why would they keep purchasing, when their business was uncertain?". In April, May and June, many of the suppliers did not get new orders, and some even had to wait until July/August. Although the buyers started placing new orders in the following months, the volume of orders decreased. While talking about new orders amid the pandemic, the management authority of a factory informs that they received just 20-30% order compared to the previous year. Buyers' stoppage of placing new orders and reducing purchased volume resulted in a fall of export from the suppliers' end. Following are some statements of the management personnel of several factories about their export during the pandemic period¹⁴:

"Every year, 60-80 containers are exported from our factory, but last year we exported only 13 containers."

"From our factory, we could export 70-80 containers yearly. But just 11 containers we could export last year".

"As per our capacity, we can export 100-150 containers every year, and usually we export 100+ containers. However, last year was different. We could export 58 containers."

¹³ On 16 March 2020, France announced mandatory home lockdown for 15 days starting at noon on 17 March 2020. This was extended twice and ended on 11 May 2020 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_France#cite_note-independent9405136-16); On 9 March 2020, Italy imposed a national lockdown or quarantine, restricting the movement of the population except for necessity, work, and health circumstances, in response to the growing pandemic of COVID-19 in the country.

¹⁴ During the interviews, all of them requested not to disclose their names and the companies' names.

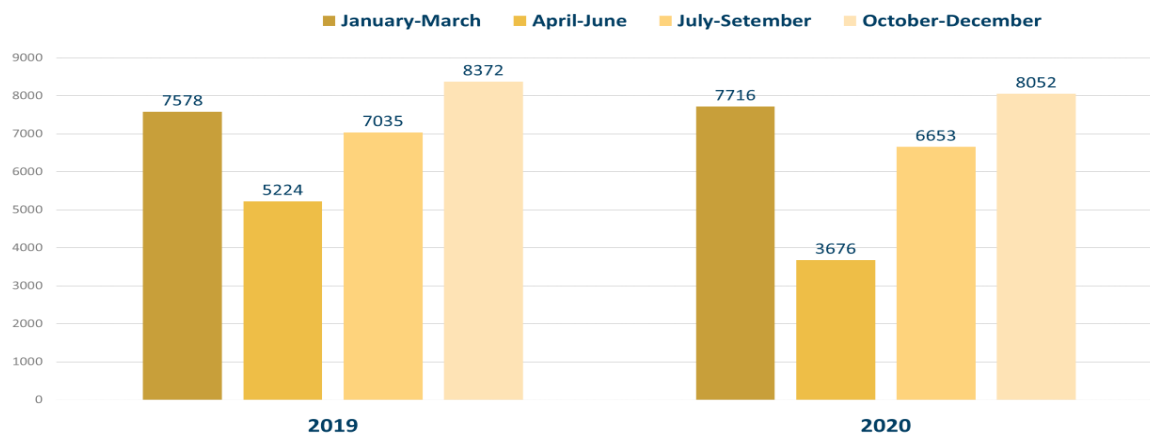


Chart 58: Export Receipts of Bangladesh from Shrimps and Prawns (Taka in Millions)

Source: Bangladesh Bank

Refused to take pre-orders/order cancellation

By nature, the seafood/shrimp supply chain is buyer-driven. In the buyer-driven supply chain, suppliers often become victims of many unethical practices of the buyers, including order cancellation, change in requirements, pressure for accepting a lower price. During the pandemic seafood/shrimp supply chain has also observed such practices. Some buyers cancelled their orders, leaving their suppliers under great uncertainty. Following are information on order cancellation as revealed during interviews with factory/company management:

- A managing director of a company located in Khulna claimed that 8-10 orders were cancelled.
- An administrative officer of a Bagerhat-based company informed that 50-60% of their total orders were cancelled during the pandemic.

There were also instances when buyers cancelled the order after receiving some consignments of the whole order and requested the supplier to sell the rests somewhere else. Due to this type of practices of some buyers, suppliers had to suffer financial losses.

“After sending two consignments, the buyer told us that they would not receive any more consignment due to the Covid-19 related health protection safety reasons. They told us to sell it somewhere else. We sold that package to another country. However, we had to sell it at a relatively lower rate. Moreover, for repackaging, reprinting and extra labour, we suffered a big amount of loss”. [AGM of a company in Khulna]

It must be mentioned that it has not been possible to know the buyers who cancelled those orders and the total cancelled amount (BDT). Company management did not disclose those terming them as ‘confidential’ and part of their ‘buyer policy’.

Lower rates offered for new orders

Suppliers have also claimed that along with no/few orders, order cancellation and reduced order volume, a fall in the rate of the products has been a serious concern for them. Some buyers now offer lower rates than before; they are offering 20-30% less price.

It has also been claimed, by the suppliers, that some international buyers are taking advantages of the pandemic situation. Buyers who have a vast capacity to stock are buying at lower prices by exploiting the suppliers' vulnerable condition during the pandemic. Despite knowing the actual price of a product, they often offer a lower rate. On the other hand, suppliers are selling because they have no option; if they store the product for a more extended period instead of selling at a lower price, the quality of the product will fall, and they would face more losses.

"Buyers always understand business. No matter, we, the suppliers, live or die. It is not the issue that they are concern about or interested to know. It is not their concern."

Lock down came at the beginning of the season for this industry

Although work in the seafood/fish processing industry continues throughout the year, there is a seasonal pattern/nature. The season starts at the end of March/beginning of April and continues until October in each calendar year. Coincidentally, the covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown in the country started at the same time when the season just started. The lockdown/holidays started from 26th March 2020, the government extended its period gradually, and finally, lockdown and its associated restrictions were eased from early June. Therefore, about 40% time of the whole season was under restrictions. It hampered the supply of raw materials and labour and the production of the industry.

Lack of raw materials and its high prices

The restrictions on transportation during the lockdown hampered the supply of raw material to the fish companies/suppliers. There were bans on vehicular movement, and there were frequent checks on the streets. Consequently, the cultivators could not supply fishes on time, which created a shortage of raw materials for the companies.

"If we do not get raw materials timely, we will not be able to process those. We are just the processing industry. Since we did not get sufficient and timely supply of fishes, we could not process and export those according to the buyers' requirements".

There was a chain effect; since cultivators could not supply, they suffered losses, and the cultivators could not start cultivation timely for the next season. That also has affected the supply of raw materials for this industry and created a supply shortage.

However, there is also allegation from workers that often, many companies received fish at midnight, violating the restrictions during the lockdown. When suppliers could ensure the availability of fishes, they asked workers to come and work. On the other hand, workers

came to work facing many difficulties on the streets, often tried to avoid the police's eyes and armed forces that were deployed to enforce lockdown.

Supply shortage also increased the price of raw materials. Suppliers have claimed approximately a 20% increase in the price of raw materials amid the pandemic. They further claim that in order to meet the export deadlines, often they are buying raw materials at higher rates, experiencing a 20-30% loss. However, as they claim, they are doing so with the hope to establish sustainable relations with their buyers.

Government incentives did not reach all suppliers

At the very advent of the Covid-19, the government allocated an incentive package for export-oriented industries to pay the salaries and allowances of workers and staff.¹⁵ Under this package, exporters were given loans of BDT 5,000 crore at a 2% service charge. BDT Tk 5,000 crore support has been fully disbursed, and the number of beneficiaries was 1992¹⁶. However, this incentive did not reach the suppliers of the SPI sector largely. The responses and opinions of the suppliers are mixed in this regard. Following are some statements of the management/authority of some companies:

"We received three months' salary loan from the government so that workers termination and retrenchment could be stopped. The support was helpful for us". (An administrative officer of a company)

"We did not get the support. We submitted our necessary papers through our association but did not get them. I do not know why we were not provided with it. There might be a possibility that who are more inclined to the political party in power have the chance to receive government support more". (A AGM of a company)

"I prepared and processed all documents. I collected mobile numbers and managed to open the mobile bank account of workers and submitted those to the bank. Nevertheless, I did not receive money to pay workers' salary. Somehow I arranged money from other sources and paid workers the salary". (MD of a company)

Suppliers expect extensive and robust support from the government to survive in the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

"It is a big problem to survive in this situation. The government does not have enough attention to this sector. If the owner cannot profit, how would he provide the wage and salary of the workers and staffs? Ultimately, a time may come when owners would close down the factory. In the present context, it becomes

¹⁵ <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/economics/news/stimulus-bangladeshs-export-oriented-enterprises-1889563>

¹⁶ <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/covid-19-stimulus-package-disparity-disbursement-1969109>

challenging to do well and overcome the situation overnight. The industry could at least survive with proper incentives from the government”.

Suppliers also feel the need for a more influential association to get proper incentives from the government.

“We do not have a strong association like BGMEA, and this is why we cannot attract the attention of the government and do not get policy support as the RMG sector is getting.”

“We feel the absence of a strong association that will fix the price of fishes, and all will sell at the same rate”.

Section five: Conclusions and Recommendations

Key findings

The impact of Covid-19 on the SPI workers has been explored in this study. The findings clearly show that the pandemic has pushed the life and livelihood of workers in this sector into multiple vulnerabilities. The immediate consequence of covid-19 on these workers is the loss of working days and loss of income. The monthly average working days in the seafood company has declined during Covid-19. Besides, a lack of alternative income sources was also remarkable.

The declined income has resulted in an income-expenditure gap for most workers. Furthermore, additional expenses for health protection measures during Covid-19 have become a new financial burden for most workers. Although they adopted multiple strategies to overcome the condition, all of those have put them under new vulnerabilities and are a threat to their sustainable livelihood. Workers and their families have fallen into the vicious circle of the loan trap; about 70% of workers have taken new loans, and the average amount of loan has increased during the pandemic. Many have sold their family asset and have broken the savings will pose future vulnerability. Reducing the number of daily meals will impact the health and nutritional condition of the workers and their family members.

Inadequate social protection measures and support services from the stakeholders have made the SPI workers more vulnerable. A tiny proportion of workers have been benefited from the government provided food and cash supports. Even, supports of them did not reach timely, when the condition was worst. On the other hand, NGO, employer, and TU supports were not remarkable. The overall condition is unbearable for most workers, which even has forced some to leave this occupation.

Regarding the impact on workplace rights condition, the findings of this study provide a mixed picture. For most workers, working hours, rest, and various leaves have remained unchanged. However, employment and income security have been affected considerably. 42% of respondents have observed that factories have terminated/retrenched, and not all of them received due wage and benefits. 28% workers' wage has affected during the Covid-19 period. Their wages were either kept due or reduced/cut short. Even the timely payment of wage has been irregular for many workers. About three-quarter (73.3%) of the workers did not receive the bonus. Workers were deprived of the annual wage increment, and there were instances of discriminatory practices in wage increment.

Although in the initial months of the Covid-19 outbreak, most workers were provided with several health protection measures, those were not sufficient always and reduced gradually in the following months. Even there were also instances that no measures were taken.

The unavailability of TU and workers' lack of awareness both are remarkably high. The Covid-19 situation has not had a noticeable impact/influence on TU rights practice in this sector. Although many workers claim the availability of TU, these are mainly employer-sponsored and remains non-functional. Employers mostly do not consult with TU while

making workplace-related decisions. During the pandemic, the situation has remained the same.

Many of the gender-related rights/issues have been affected remarkably. Wage during maternity leave has been either stopped or reduced in many cases (35%). Daycare and breastfeeding corner and arrangement of female doctor have been suspended/stopped in some factories. Although a tiny proportion of workers claimed availability of sanitary napkin at a subsidized cost pre-Covid-19 period, all of them have noticed that this arrangement has remained suspended during the Covid-19 period.

The overall impact of the Covid-19 on the suppliers is diverse and have come from both international and national circumstances. Among the factors associated with international connections, the declined demand in the seafood/frozen food market due to the prolonged lockdown in Bangladeshi products' destination countries was prominent. However, the weaknesses of the typical buyer-driven supply chain have also been exposed during the pandemic. Many buyers cancelled the order, and some even refused to take the entire consignment after receiving it partially. Some buyers even are now offering lower price rates than before. Besides, suppliers are also suffering from decreased order volume. On the other hand, domestic issues that have affected the suppliers' condition during the pandemic comprise lockdown during the peak season; shortage of raw materials due to transportation ban; price hike of raw material; and government incentives that did not reach all suppliers

Recommendations

In the light of the findings, this study recommends following steps:

- ***Ensuring adequate social protection:***
 - Design special social safety net considering the needs and vulnerabilities of workers in this sector.
 - Complete assessment of the vulnerabilities and needs of the workers in SPI sector.
- ***Central data base of the workers:***
 - Developing a complete central database of the SPI sector is needed. It will be helpful to identify workers and provide them with necessary support.
 - This database may be instrumental for calculating the due benefits of the workers especially in cases of termination/retrenchment.
- ***Developing a central fund for the workers of SPI:***
 - Like the central fund formed for RMG workers, a fund could be established for SPI sector also. Workers should be provided with cash supports during their contingencies.

- ***Respects of worker rights and labour standards at factory level:***
 - Ensuring employers responsibility for implementation of rights provisions including weekly holiday, working hours, wage payment regularity, maternity leave, safe and healthy workplace, and trade union.
 - Stronger monitoring from DIFE and DoL to look after at what extent the legal provisions are being implemented
 - Rights awareness among workers and employers.
 - Labour contractors play vital role in recruiting workers in the fish processing companies. Most of them are not aware about the worker rights issues. Therefore, awareness raising activities on worker rights should also target the labour supply contractors.

- ***Suppliers' perspective:***
 - Increasing their price negotiation and bargaining capacity with buyers. The association of the exporters need to play proactive role in price negotiation, at a common level, with the buyers.
 - A mechanism and SOP should be established for equitable distributing of government stimulus among the suppliers.
 - There is a complaint from some suppliers' side that banks did not cooperate during the pandemic. Therefore, determining role/guidelines for banks while financing during pandemic situation is necessary.