



## COVID-19 and suicide incidences in Bangladesh

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history

Accepted 14 August 2020  
Online release 27 August 2020

#### Keyword

COVID-19, Suicide,  
Fear, Mental health,  
Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has created an impact on everything in the world in a very small amount of time. Starting from people's physical health, their jobs, economic status to their mental health like depressing thoughts, overeating, an immense amount of stress and anxiety. As a result, Coronavirus not only taking lives only through its physical form, it is ruining their livelihood, their financial condition. It is also destroying people's mental peace, getting inside their heads, and ultimately making them take their own lives. The study was conducted to cumulate the suicide cases during the study period of March to June 2020. The data were collected from print and electronic media. A total of 10 cases have been mentioned in this paper where the majority have been caused by the financial crisis. Most of them were 24 to 40 years of age. Although suicide in Bangladesh due to economic issues is not new, COVID-19 might increase the suicide cases due to dramatic changes in lifestyle. Considering the present findings, it is essential to introduce a time-oriented policy, and implement care monitoring plans in the country, which may help in managing the pandemic as well as nurturing the public mental health to combat COVID-19 related financial and psychological challenges.

### INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a large effect on mental health globally and has led to individuals fearing COVID-19 infection alongside conditions such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and stress (Ahorsu et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2020; Sakib et al., 2020).

The effects of COVID-19 pandemic are not limited to health, but also have a major impact on the social and economic aspects. Meanwhile, developing and less developed countries are arguably experiencing more severe crises than developed countries, with many small and medium-sized businesses being disrupted and even bankrupt (Fernandes, 2020).

The current study using press media that has reported cases of suicide in Bangladesh. The similar suicide studies conducted in other

developing countries viz. India, (Dsouza et al., 2020, Armstrong et al., 2019) Bangladesh, (Mamun and Griffiths, 2020; Mamun et al., 2020a, Mamun et al., 2020b) and Pakistan (Mamun & Ullah, 2020).

Previous Bangladeshi COVID-19 suicide cases have reported that financial problems caused by the national lockdown are the most prominent risk factor followed by fear of COVID-19 infection (Bhuiyan et al. 2020; Mamun and Griffiths 2020a). Findings from Bangladesh's neighboring countries such as India and Pakistan also suggest causative reasons for suicide to be (i) testing positive with COVID-19, (ii) being quarantined because of being suspected as having COVID-19, (iii) loneliness due to lockdown, (iv) social boycotting of those suspected of being infected with COVID-19, (v) COVID-19 work-related stress, (vi) being unable to come back home because of lockdown, and (vii) the unavailability of alcohol for

individuals with alcohol use disorder (Dsouza et al. 2020; Mamun and Ullah, 2020; Shoib et al., 2020).

As the Bangladeshi people are under lockdown, or quarantine, or social distance since of March 2020, it is anticipated that the probable direct or indirect psychiatric sufferings can rise that was also reflected by COVID-19 related suicide occurrences in the country (Bhuiyan et al., 2020; Mamun and Griffiths, 2020a). Thus, the present study attempted to investigate the reasons for suicide during COVID-19 stress in Bangladesh, which can be helpful in facilitating mental health policies and strategies during the COVID-19 crisis period.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study followed to utilize the press media reported suicide cases like the previous retrospective suicide studies conducted in Bangladesh (Mamun and Griffiths, 2020; Mamun et al., 2020a, 2020b). The reports were collected from March to June 2020. We used a deliberate sampling method to select popular Bengali and English Bangladeshi online newspapers. Multiple reports that identified duplicates of the same report and suicide news not related to COVID-19 were excluded from the study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the 10 cases, it is observed that 8 cases were due to the financial crisis. One case was due to avoiding the tendency of family and neighbors for fear of COVID-19 transmission and another case was fear of death and frustration. Six male cases were reported and 4 female cases were reported during this time. In most cases, labor type young people have been suicided except for one policeman. Most of them were 24 to 40 years of age.

In addition, on 11 June 2020, a private university student (aged 22 years) and his mother (aged 47 years) from Bogra, Bangladesh, committed suicide together by ingesting poisonous gas tablets in a forest close to where they both lived (The Daily Campus 2020).

In the first case, a police constable committed suicide. He had symptoms of being infected, so his family started to avoid him. Even though he was tested negative, his frustration got to him and he ended up taking his own life by jumping from the 5<sup>th</sup> floor. In the second case, a poor van-puller, father of four committed suicide because his family was facing food problems for weeks and they didn't receive any reliefs either. In the third case, an infected patient fled from the hospital and hung himself. The irony here is that he was afraid of dying and started panicking which ultimately led to his demise. Then we have the heartbreaking case of the suicide of a 10-year-old child as she was scolded by her father after asking for food. The family had been out of business because of the pandemic and starving for days. In the fifth case, we have a mother who couldn't bear the sight of her children starving in front of her eyes. So, she attempted to commit suicide, but luckily her sons found her before it was too late. In the next case, a man struggling with poverty, starvation, and recent separation from his wife committed suicide. In case seven, a woman attempted to kill herself as well as her two children. She and her husband lost their jobs and on top of that, her in-laws forced her whole family to leave the house. In the next three cases, all three people tried to take their lives because of their financial condition and debt problems.

The mother and son's suicide due to COVID-19-related online learning issues in Bangladesh has been reported and analyzed by Mamun et al. (2020). However, this is an unusual case report.

The reasons underlying COVID-19-related suicide previously reported include (i) fear of COVID-19 infection, (ii) financial problems, (iii) being socially boycotted by others, and (iv) not being able to return home from abroad (Griffiths and Mamun 2020).

The coronavirus-19 disease (COVID-19) pandemic is causing economic problems for those individuals whose livelihoods have been affected due to the lockdowns occurring in many countries around the world including Bangladesh (Banna 2020).

**Table 1:** COVID-19 suicide cases in Bangladesh

Cases	Date	Location	Gender	Age	Occupation	Reason for suicide	Press Media
1	April 8, 2020	Dalbhangra village, Maheshpur upazila	Male	30	Van-puller	Financial crisis	<a href="#">The Business Standard</a>
2	April 11, 2020	Belkuchi, Sirajgonj	Female	10	NR	Financial crisis	<a href="#">Kaler Kantho</a>
3	April 13, 2020	Cox's Bazar	Female	35	Homemaker	Financial crisis	<a href="#">Campus Today</a>
4	April 13, 2020	Noldangga village, Natore	Male	27	Day laborer	Financial crisis and loneliness	<a href="#">Kaler Kantho</a>
5	April 14, 2020	Dhamrai, Dhaka	Female	NR	Worked in tea-store	Financial Crisis and abandonment by family	<a href="#">RisingBD</a>
6	April 16, 2020	Bashkhali Upazila, Chattogram	Male	30	Auto-rickshaw driver	Financial crisis	<a href="#">The Daily Star</a>
7	April 24, 2020	Keshapur	Male	30	NR	Financial crisis	<a href="#">Manab Zamin</a>
8	April 24, 2021	Keshapur	Female	24	NR	Financial crisis	<a href="#">Manab Zamin</a>
9	May 4, 2020	Khilgaon, Dhaka	Male	40	Police constable	Being avoided by family and neighbors after showing symptoms of Covid-19.	<a href="#">The Daily Star</a>
10	June 20, 2020	Adabor, Dhaka	Male	NR	Building caretaker	Fear and frustration	<a href="#">The Business Standard</a>

NR - Not reported.

## CONCLUSION

An interesting, yet unfortunate pattern can be observed from the cases shown above. 8 out of 10 suicides were committed because of the financial crisis. We already know that the current outbreak of COVID-19 is creating an economic crisis especially for third world countries, and now we can see the outcome of the crisis. In a research report by UNU-Wider, a subsidiary of the United Nations, it has already been stated that the pandemic and lockdowns will not only make the poor poorer, they will also make some 400 million more people in the world extremely poor (Bangla Tribune, 2020). Other reasons behind this new outbreak of suicides include mental health issues

like frustration, depression, fear, and anxiety. Another issue that has become evident is that many people are not being supported by their own families. Due to the fear of getting infected, many people are abandoning the patients. People have gone to the extent that a 50-year-old mother was abandoned by her children in a forest because she had symptoms of COVID-19 (Islam, 2020). Several other patients have expressed similar regrets that they were abandoned, locked up in a room with no food or water, and no one to take care of them. If a person who is already fighting a deadly disease is treated like that by family members, the person will indeed lose their will to live. However, the study comprised press reports only. Some reports may be absent in the press, as

all suicides are not reported in Bangladesh due to societal norms.

**Funding Source:** None

**Financial disclosure:** Not applicable

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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