

Title: Economic Burden of Covid-19 in Bangladesh: Health Perspective

Study Team: Dr. Abdur Razzaque Sarker

Executive Summary

The World Health Organization (WHO) defined coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) as an infectious disease caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and declared COVID-19 as a public health emergency of international concern and finally declared a global pandemic. COVID-19 has a negative impact on people's health and lives and on economies around the world including Bangladesh. From an economic perspective, the spread of COVID-19, the ever-increasing number of patients, and the complications of the disease have imposed significant direct medical and indirect costs on patients which pushes those households to catastrophe and financial distress. However, the pandemic situation of COVID-19 imposes an enormous economic burden on both the households and health care systems for developing countries like Bangladesh. In this context, this study aims to estimate the economic burden of COVID-19 in Bangladesh from a societal perspective.

This study was a cross-sectional survey conducted both in selected hospitals and at the community level. A combination of three different surveys were conducted to address the study objectives; (i) the hospital-based COVID-19 patients survey to see the economic burden, catastrophe and financial distress at the household level, (ii) a community-based household survey to find out the factors liable for spreading COVID-19 in Bangladesh, and (iii) hospitals survey to capture the provider cost of COVID-19 patients. The sample size calculation strategies were adopted from the guidelines proposed by the World Health Organization for the economic burden of illness study. For country representativeness of the study, six administrative divisions of Bangladesh were selected randomly and considered for both hospital and community surveys. To assess the economic burden of COVID-19 in Bangladesh, a total of 553 patients' data were collected from the public (n=351), the private (n=100) and the NGO (n=102) hospitals. The

patients who suffered from COVID-19 disease in between January to December 2021 and were confirmed as 'COVID-19 cases' by a registered physician after laboratory tests were our target group. And a total of 1,177 households from six divisional districts (i.e., Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Khulna and Sylhet) were randomly selected using the Systematic Sampling Technique (SST), i.e., one after every 5th household for each interview with an assumption of normal distribution to find out the factors liable for spreading COVID-19 in Bangladesh. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and data were collected by a structured questionnaire through Kobo Toolbox software. The findings of this study recognized the substantial economic burden of COVID-19, which underscores the urgent need for an effective national strategy targeted to mitigate the OOP expenses as well as the catastrophic healthcare expenditure. The policymakers and the concerned authorities should focus on the higher treatment costs in private facilities and upgrade the healthcare financing strategy of the Government for monitoring the progression towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in Bangladesh. Further, implementing additional preventative measures such as awareness program, large-scale vaccination is vital in reducing direct and indirect medical costs, decreased productivity, and GDP losses.