

## **Investigating the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Women Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh**

**Keywords:** Women entrepreneurship, Gender stereotypes, patriarchy, Covid-19, Bangladesh

Over the years, Bangladesh has suffered due to political instability, intense population growth and extreme poverty. However, in recent years, the economy has shown remarkable improvement with steady economic growth, reduction in poverty and improved health and education conditions (BBC, 2019). Bangladesh showed a steady positive economic growth during past 10 years until Covid-19 pandemic started in 2020. Since Covid-19 started, the poverty reduction declined as job creation slowed and country's economic growth slowed. The lack of job creation has increased youth unemployment rate and among them most affected are females (World Bank Group, 2021).

The economic and social benefits of women's involvement in business and entrepreneurial activity is immense. Women represent 49.4% of the total population in 2020, but their participation in the labour force is low (WorldData.info, 2021). In Bangladesh, although 99.93% are cottage or micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), women owned businesses are only 7.2%, as per a study conducted in 2016. Although Bangladesh Bank ensures a significant portion of credit funding goes to women entrepreneurs, introduced "Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Credit Policies and Programmes" in March 2010 (Rahman, 2018), however, research suggests that women business owners confront a range of patriarchal and gendered problems in Bangladesh which hinders entrepreneurial activity (Jaim, 2020a, b).

The study proposes to conduct 35-40 semi-structured interviews either face to face or online involving women entrepreneurs both in rural and urban areas in Bangladesh to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

Undertaking this research will help to understand the experience of women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh and ways to support them. This is in line with UN sustainable goals – reducing gender inequality through enhancing women entrepreneurial activities, therefore, benefitting the country economically and socially. This research will be beneficial for government and policy makers to understand how women entrepreneurs can be supported to flourish in Bangladesh context. The research will provide food for thought for academics and future researchers to undertake further research in this area.

## References

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