

15pc youth lost jobs during C-19 pandemic: BIGD survey

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Due to the impact of Covid- 19 pandemic, around 15 percent of the youth who were employed before the outbreak, have lost their jobs, according to a survey of the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) conducted in January this year. The youths already face many challenges in the labour market due to poor education quality and limited experience and skill, as well as limited job opportunities. During the pandemic, their struggles have become more difficult, according to the survey report revealed on Tuesday.

The report was disclosed in a webinar held in Dhaka on the day.

According to the study findings, youth employed in skilled professions like education, private firms, and handicrafts, are experiencing more prolonged unemployment compared to those in less skilled and essential professions like agriculture, day labour and transport.

Even among those who managed to retain or regain employment, average incomes reduced by 11 percent that the pre-Covid levels. Youth from urban areas suffered greater income loss (at least 15pc) than those from rural areas (9pc), it added.

The report said that the scenario is more concerning for women. One third of the young women employed before the pandemic were out of jobs in January 2021, which is three times higher than the rate among young men.

Moreover, income loss for young women working in both periods was twice that of men- average incomes decreased by 21pc for young women and 10pc for young men. Young women in the study sample were employed in the most hard-hit sectors during the pandemic, sectors like private tutoring, handicrafts, and private organizations or NGOs, which are some of the hardest-hit sectors.

As a result confidence about future job prospect is particularly low among young women. Women in Bangladesh are already far behind men in higher education, labour market participation, employment, and income. The Covid -19 shock may further depress this scenario, threatening to undo much of the progress made around women's empowerment, unless corrective measures are taken, it added.

Joining the event, Director General of the Department of Youth Development Azharul Islam Khan highlighted the necessity for Bangladesh to fully utilize the youth dividend.

Dr Jennifer Seager, Assistant Professor of Global Health and Economics at George Washington University, remarked that financial constraints have also resulted in decreasing job and education aspirations among the youth.

She said Covid has had an impact on the mental health of all; youth, who are facing multiple challenges brought by the pandemic, are likely to suffer more.

The survey found that though the mental health of the youth improved substantially from the lockdown, a fifth of the young women and 12pc of the young men who were possibly suffering from depression or anxiety during the first lockdown were still experiencing the same in January 2021.

Dr Imran Matin, Executive Director of BIGD, mentioned gender disparity dimensions of the pandemic become more evident in the longer term, and it is the same among the youth, which is very concerning.

Young people are also disproportionately affected by the long closure of all educational institutions. It is reasonable to expect that many would take other training, especially online, to compensate for learning loss, the survey mentioned, adding only five percent of the youth mentioned taking any new training courses during this time, indicating a severe lack of human capital development during this period.

Prolonged closure and limited alternative learning may have a long-term impact on the country's economic growth and future economic wellbeing of the youth, it added.

Dr Munir Hussain, National Programme Officer at UNFPA, remarked that there is a huge demand for skills training among youth, as seen from UNFPA programs, but increasing access and affordability is the key.

Agreeing with this sentiment, Joydeep Sinha Roy, Head of Operations of Skills Development Programme at BRAC, highlighted that it is more challenging to provide skills through online media.

The webinar was moderated by Dr Imran Matin. Other noted researchers, development practitioners, and media persons were present at the online event.