



The Impact of COVID-19 on Beauty Parlour Workers

A Thesis submitted by

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the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that:

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Glossary

RMG	Ready-made Garments
IFC	International Finance Corporation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Community
BIGD	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
VGCL	Vietnam General Confederation of Labour
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
BSOAB	Beauty Service Owners Association of Bangladesh
GO	Governmental Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
MNC	Multinational Corporation
KII	Key Informant Interview

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Abstract

Bangladesh has a rich history of growth and development, which has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has shaken the landscape of growth and development due to the six-month-long nationwide lockdown. The abrupt economic shock has resulted in the struggling lives of millions of people with prevalent financial vulnerability. Major sectors like healthcare, retail, and RMG with high government regulation have been tremendously impacted. Hence, the integral people of these booming industries have witnessed a greater colossal economic shock with no prior financial security. Like most government-regulated formal sectors, these industries had recovered quickly and managed to take back most of their employees due to the government's financial aid. However, the informal sectors with significant prevalent instability were put at severe risk; since, the beauty parlour industry was not allowed to re-open like various other workplaces and factories due to immense safety measures. Hence, this study aims to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the beauty parlour workers, who are the most integral part of the industry. For this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 participants from Kalachandpur who were asked to share their experiences throughout the pandemic. Mark Anner's theory of "Labour Market Despotism" has been used to understand the nature of labour responsible for the working conditions of beauty parlour workers during the pre and post COVID-19. The findings were skewed in one direction, which stated that the prevalent structural inequality and economic factors have pushed the workers' living standards and working conditions into a persisting cycle of suffering and hurdles. This study contributes to the literature on working conditions, informal economy and challenges of the pandemic.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Bangladesh has a rich history of growth and development; despite being considered comparatively a poorer country. The robust exports of ready-made garments (RMGs), remittances, demographic dividends, and stable macroeconomic circumstances have made it one of the world's fastest-growing economies in the last decade (World Bank, 2022). However, in 2020, the journey to being an economic miracle was abruptly halted due to the global outbreak of Covid-19. The nationwide lockdown continuing for more than 6 months has shaken the landscape of development and trade with extreme severity (Better Work, 2021). Bangladesh has witnessed various economic progress; however, its people had long been dealing with economic struggles before the Covid-19 crisis. According to the World Bank (2020), approximately 97% of Bangladeshis had lived on less than BDT 300 a day in 2020. As a result, most Bangladeshis were already living on low earnings before the crisis, and most households could not sustain a severe economic shock (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2020). Major sectors like healthcare, retail, and RMG with high government regulation have been tremendously impacted. Hence, the people who are an integral part of these booming industries have witnessed a greater colossal economic shock with no prior financial security. Like most government-regulated formal sectors, the industries had recovered quickly and managed to take back most of their employees due to the government's financial aid.

However, the informal sectors with significant prevalent instability are at severe risk. The personal care industry consisting of beauty parlours and men's salons has been hit the hardest due

to extreme social distancing measures. The pandemic has forced the closure of around 15,000 beauty salons throughout the country (Bangladesh Post, 2020). As majority of the workers in the beauty parlours are women, the abrupt shutdown of the massive revenue-generating industry has put thousands of women in a vulnerable socio-economic position. According to Bangladesh Post (2020), about 0.15 million women are employed by the beauty industry in Bangladesh each year, contributing an estimated BDT 5 billion (500 crores) to the national economy. Despite the substantial contribution to the economy, the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlours in Bangladesh yet remains unnoticed. There is hardly any existing research regarding Bangladeshi beauty parlours and their massive base of female employees, let alone the impact of COVID-19 focusing the beauty parlour industry. In this context, this dissertation aims to understand the impact of COVID-19 on existing labour laws and regulations as it attempts to find out the scenario of workplace conditions, health and safety measures during the pandemic, and the scope of incentive policies curated for beauty parlour workers.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of this thesis are:

- a) What are the challenges beauty parlour workers have faced during the COVID-19 lockdown?
- b) How has the pandemic affected the existing working conditions of beauty parlour workers?
- c) How have the workers adapted to the conditions pursued by the pandemic?

1.3 Research Objectives

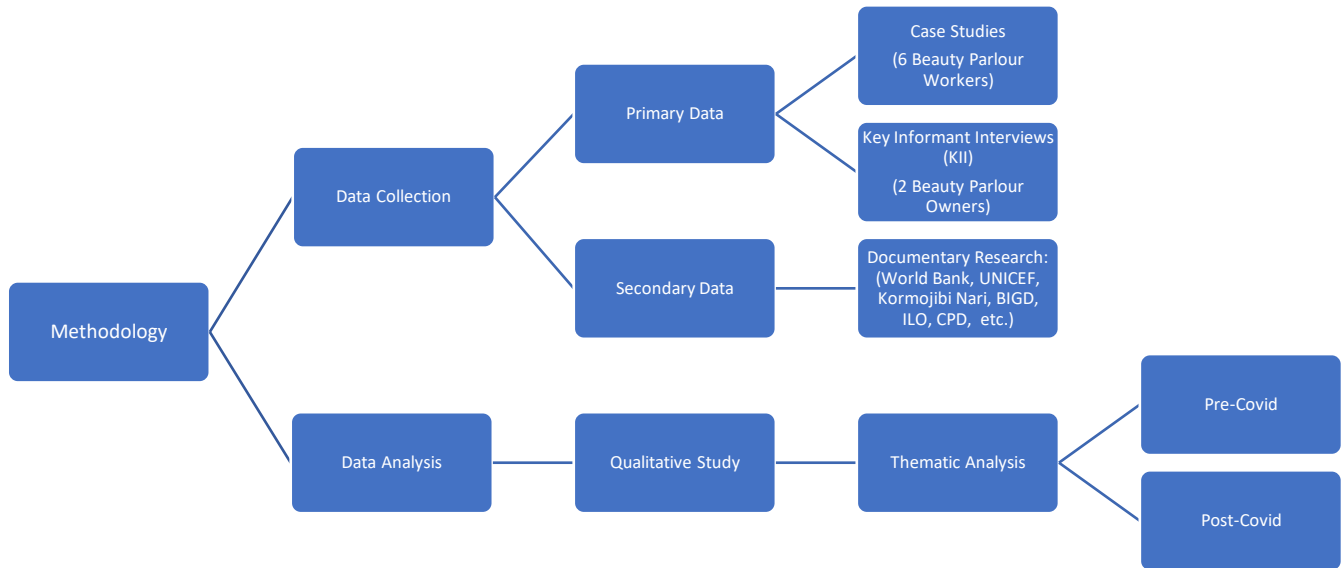
The research objectives of this thesis are:

- i) To analyze the challenges faced by beauty parlour workers during the COVID-19 lockdown;
- ii) To understand the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlour workers and their working conditions;
- iii) To explore the prevalent workers' rights for beauty parlour employees.

1.4 Methodology

The general objective of this study is to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlour workers focusing on their working conditions, labour structure, and living standards. The specific objective of this study is to identify the prevalent labour rights curated for beauty parlour employees further enabling the impacts of COVID-19. Moreover, this study aims to respond to these challenges faced by the beauty parlour workers and explore the existing factors behind the pandemic induced challenges.

Figure 1: Structure of Methodology



1.4.1 Data Collection

For the purpose of this study, this research has collected data through primary and secondary resources. For the primary data collection, the research has been conducted using a qualitative analysis. Hence, based on the specific objectives, this study has conducted the research in 3 ways:

- 1.4.1.1 Case Study

To understand the differences between pre-pandemic, during-pandemic, and post-pandemic scenarios for the beauty parlour workers, this study has constructed 6 case studies through conducting in-person interviews. For this purpose, during the interviews, the questionnaire has focused on factors like working conditions (wage, overtime, holiday bonus), labour structure,

and living standards. In order to truly connect with the interlocutors, a translator was present to help with any language barrier as all of the participants belong to the Garo community.

For this research purpose, a qualitative method for data collection is particularly appropriate as it seeks to identify the prevalent factors and overall experience of beauty parlour workers. According to Hammarberg, Kirkman, and de Lacey (2016), qualitative data is difficult to measure, but it is useful for answering questions about experience, meaning, and viewpoint. From this standpoint, social scientists are more likely to describe a concept than test old hypotheses (Flick, 2019). As the research has been conducted in a qualitative manner, the curated questionnaire was semi-structured and open-ended; because it aimed to focus on their life stories, their living conditions before the pandemic, and their overall experience throughout the pandemic.

This sort of inquiry is necessary because it allows respondents to define and frame issues from their own viewpoints, which will go beyond the framework and give in-depth information on a specific subject or produce new ones (Cohen-Cole, 2016). Furthermore, in terms of in-person interviews, researchers build a relationship with respondents and learn about their historical and social backgrounds, broadening their knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In social science, researchers directly participate in the examined phenomena which create trust and rapport with the respondents (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). As a consequence, researchers will be able to identify any underlying challenges or issues.

- **1.4.1.2 Key Informant Interviews**

To understand the overall functioning and structure of the beauty parlour industry before the pandemic and how the crisis has impacted the industry, the study has conducted Key Informant Interviews (KII). As I had chosen my respondents from both corporational and home-based beauty parlours; hence, I decided to interview owners of both beauty parlours. Conducting KII enabled me to find out the causes and significance of the issues raised by the respondents.

This discussion asked questions regarding the issues faced by the parlour owner due to the pandemic. It has also focused on the issues depicted by the beauty parlour workers and find out the reasons for it. Furthermore, the discussions have focused on wage distribution, stimulus packages curated for Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the overall impact of COVID-19 on the beauty parlour industry, employee management, staff deduction, and overall consumer demand throughout the pandemic. The KII information has helped the study to get an overview of the overall operation of the beauty parlour industry and how it has been affected due to the pandemic.

- **1.4.1.3 Secondary Resources**

This dissertation has also incorporated secondary data for background information. Journal articles, books, newspapers, GO¹/NGO² reports, and the internet has been used to conduct a comprehensive literature review. To determine the key concerns of the research challenge, primary data has been integrated with secondary data. Moreover, as this is an undergraduate dissertation, the interviews were conducted on a very small scale. Hence, in order to bring the study together, information from secondary resources was crucial to establishing the significance of primary data.

¹ Government Organization

² Non-government Organization

The secondary data will be retrieved from organizations like BRAC, BIGD (BRAC Institute of Governance & Development), ILO (International Labor Organization), World Bank, ethnography papers based on the informal sector's labour rights, and various other sources.

1.4.2 Data Analysis

During the in-person interviews, the interviews were recorded. All of the recorded interviews were 40-50 minutes each. Moreover, there were follow up interviews which were either conducted in-person or via phone calls. Before conducting the interviews, they gave me consent to record and note the conversations and anonymously use the necessary quotes in publications. All of the respondents agreed to participate voluntarily and had the option to withdraw at any moment. The interview questionnaire was semi-structured to evaluate the respondents' situations better and ask further essential questions. I tried to evaluate their comforts and discomforts throughout the interviews through participant observation.

After conducting the interviews, firstly, the recordings were transcribed and then translated into English as necessary. Secondly, the interviews were curated into individual case studies for all the participants (beauty parlour workers). Since the questionnaire was semi-structured and open-ended, it was easier to get to know them better and reflect on their life stories. Hence, it allowed the respondents to define and frame their struggles from their perspectives, which enabled me to think beyond the planned framework and understand the similarities and discrepancies among various aspects. Thirdly, the constructed case studies were analysed and utilised as findings that aligned with the research objectives of this dissertation. Since the interviews focused more on

the respondents' life stories, new themes were generated as similarities and discrepancies were found during the analysis.

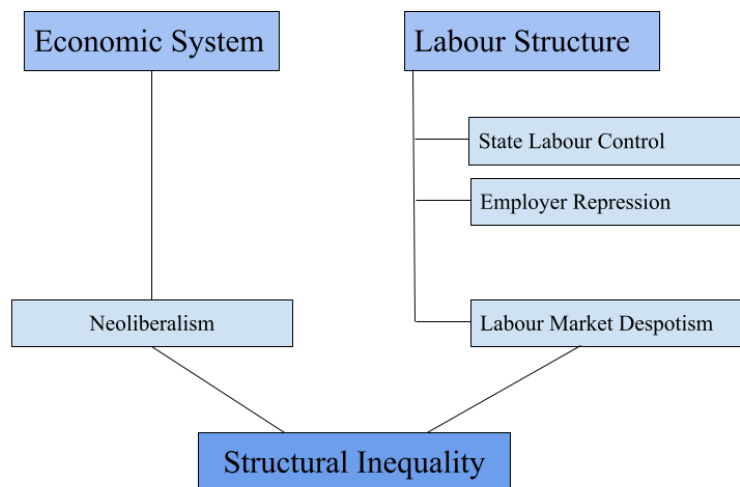
A thematic analysis was conducted for the cumulated findings, which focused primarily on two themes: pre-pandemic and post-pandemic. However, as evaluating the working conditions is one of the objectives of this dissertation, the respondents' experiences in their workplaces made me look into the existing labour structure in the beauty parlour industry, which later became another theme for analysis. Upon having conversations with the respondents, their socio-economic demography seemed to influence the challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, these aspects have acted as variables during the thematic analysis. Moreover, it was possible to analyse these aspects to further understand how they have been impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Anner (2021) argues that there are three types of labour structure: a) state labour control, b) employer repression, and c) market despotism. During state labour control, the government has excessive regulation over labour which is evident in Vietnam. Here, the law provides for just one national labour central, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL), to which national leaders are appointed by the Communist Party (Anner and Liu, 2015). Business unions do not organize strikes. They must be linked with the VGCL and adhere to the Communist Party's demands for social control and harmonious industrial relations. On the other hand, employer repression regulates the labour market with repressive techniques such as violence which further curtail efforts to unionize workers (U.S. Department of State, 2009). This type of labour structure

is prevalent in Honduras. There is a prevalent use of violence to control the labour market in this country. Some union officials experienced repeated death threats during significant drives to organize workers in the garment industry. Many more were sacked and later blacklisted (U.S. Department of State, 2009). Lastly, due to market despotism, the labour market tends to be dictated by the owners and industrialists. Anner (2021) argued that the market despotism labour structure in Bangladesh induces a higher rate of unemployment and underemployment, which further enables structural oppression within the economy. In the context of Bangladesh, this dissertation has focused on the theory of market despotism.

Figure 2: Theoretical Framework



According to scholars, Bangladesh has "market despotism" (Burawoy, 1985), in which there is a high incidence of unemployment and underemployment, as well as a lack of robust governmental social safety. These lackings hinder workers' capacity to organize and demand

greater salaries. Under such conditions, workers' control (or discipline) is imposed through the threat of dismissal and unemployment (Burawoy; Webster, Lambert, and Bezuidenhout 2008). The fragility of the labour market has also contributed to a fragmented labour movement, which has severely limited labour's capacity to organize and seek increased social protection from the government (Anner, 2021).

According to Anner (2021), the labour structure and working conditions significantly altered after the Rana Plaza incident. He further added that to establish a secure working environment, Bangladesh conducted to a particular form of "social governance" encompassing local and global civil society groups, such as labour unions, environmental rights organizations, and advocates for gender equity. Anner's approach to social governance is based on two of the six trajectories coined by Gereffi & Lee (2016), which include a cluster-driven path and a multi-stakeholder path. In a cluster-driven path, national business clusters (or associations) take the initiative to improve labour conditions. Moreover, in a multi-stakeholder path, cooperation between private and non-private actors is required to ensure compliance monitoring while strengthening capacity.

In the context of market despotism labour structure, the probability of having a better working condition depends on the level of contribution to the economy and intensity in the global market of the particular sector in the regime of neo-liberalism. Before explaining this process, we need to understand the mechanism and consequences of neo-liberalism. According to David Harvey (2007, P: 64-65), neoliberalism is an economic system that ensures privatization, deregulation, free capitalism, and above all, limited or almost no control of the government. As a

consequence of neoliberalism, we have witnessed economic disparity in the last three decades (Atkinson, 2015; Dorling, 2011; Oxfam, 2019; Piketty, 2014; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2011). Many studies link rising inequality to free-market capitalism (Amis, 2020). According to research from Huang (2020), deregulation, when viewed from a neo-marxist viewpoint, may result in decreased job quality and an increase in indecent employment opportunities. Hence, capitalist enterprises that are primarily motivated by profit have little incentive to improve the social advantages of their employees. Because the development of work quality is not a self-sustaining process but rather a product of institutional factors, deregulation will tend to erode employment benefits. As mentioned above, neo-liberalism can lead to structural inequality.

Structural inequality is described as a condition in which one group of people is treated unequally compared to other groups of people. This relationship is perpetuated and reinforced by the influence of unequal relations in roles, functions, decisions, rights, and opportunities. Structural inequality refers to inequalities that are systemically embedded in the normal operating conditions of dominant social institutions and can be classified as residential segregation, healthcare, employment, and educational discrimination (ESCWA³, 2016). Many sociologists believe that inequality perpetuates when a specific group of individuals are unfairly treated due to their personal beliefs or socio-economic status. It can occur in various ways, both domestically and institutionally, to benefit the dominant groups. As a result, minorities often get excluded from participating in institutions or gaining access to resources. In the context of a neo-liberal economy, since there is a prevalent bias toward more revenue-generating sectors; hence, some industries may remain underprivileged.

³ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

In the macro-level narratives, deregulation and bias among sectors have created informal corporations and their employees mostly invisible; they are portrayed as rational entities with impartial structures and procedures. Therefore, there is no minimum threshold for workplace environment, minimum wage, or overall security for beauty parlour employees in Bangladesh without organized employment. As a result, it becomes problematic for structural inequality since organizations establish employment and other possibilities, which define most individuals' socio-economic status (Atkinson, Piketty, & Saez, 2011). Hence, for an informal industry consisting of most individuals victimized by structural inequality, it seems convenient enough not to regulate. With an approach through the lens of structural inequality, informal sectors saturated with marginalized populations, such as beauty parlours, might not receive the required attention and adequate opportunities. As a result, these industries' prevailing structural labour precariousness may never cease to exist.

1.6 Significance of the Research

Despite contributing approximately 500 crore BDT to national economy every year, the impact of COVID-19 beauty parlours in Bangladesh yet remains unnoticed (Bangladesh Post, 2020). As a result, there is an existing gap in terms of research and studies conducted for beauty parlor workers. Hence, this dissertation will contribute data to future research focusing on the Bangladesh beauty industry. Since, this thesis aims to conduct qualitative research through conducting in-person interviews; therefore, the light will be shed on the daily lives and struggles of beauty parlor workers. Furthermore, the result of this study may have a significant contribution to structuring the labour conditions in the informal sector; as the beauty industry is a significant part of this sector. As 99% of the workers in the beauty industry are female (Akter, 2008), this

research focusing on the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlour workers and their employment conditions will also contribute to shaping the female workers' rights by considering factors, such as- gender bias struggles, societal barriers, and prevalent societal stigmas.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This dissertation discusses the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlour workers and the existing labour conditions curated for workers in the beauty industry. The organization of this thesis is as follows- Chapter 1 introduces the background contexts, including research questions and objectives, methodology followed by theoretical framework, the significance of the research, and the organization of the thesis. Chapter 2 focuses on reviewing another scholar's research and identifying the research gap. Chapter 3 provides the findings from case studies and key informant interviews (KII) that I have gathered regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the beauty parlour workers and their labour conditions. In chapter 4, I analyze the finding and make the interlinkage with the existing literature and KIIs⁴. As the finding consists of in-depth interviews, it will enrich the data information and provide the supporting items to the existing studies in this area. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the overall summary, along with recommendations, limitations, and further research section.

⁴ Key Informant Interviews

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter examines relevant studies by different scholars who have focused on the topics and aspects related to this dissertation. The first section focuses on the existing labour structure of Bangladesh. Grounding on this matter, I shed light on the existing structural inequality between sectors like the beauty parlour industry and the garments industry. The second section provides the pre-pandemic scenario of beauty parlours which covers aspects like monthly wage, working hours and existing working conditions. The third section demonstrates the existing literature regarding COVID-19's impact on beauty parlour workers. Lastly, the fourth section addresses the unexplored research area.

2.1 Labour Structure

Firstly, to understand the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlour workers, we need to understand the labour structure and regulations prior to the pandemic. It will help us understand the differences between pre-pandemic and post-pandemic scenarios. As this dissertation focuses on the labour structure, working conditions, and living standards of the beauty parlour workers, we need to figure out the prevalent conditions of these aspects.

The total labour force in Bangladesh is 69816252, according to a study report by World Bank (2021). With a vast labour force, in order to maintain basic labour standards, Bangladesh requires an inclusive labour law. However, after looking into the Labour Act 2006, the labour codes seem too generalized and do not mention beauty parlour workers. Nonetheless, the labour codes curated in the aspect of the wage distribution and working conditions provide a generalized

idea about the pre-pandemic scenarios of the Bangladeshi labour structure, which focuses mainly on the Ready-made Garments Sector (RMG).

The wages under the new labour code are defined under Sections 2(45) and 120 of the 2006 Labour Act. Section 120 stipulates that salaries must include:

"(i) any bonus or any additional compensation due under the terms and conditions of employment, (ii) any payment due during leave, holiday, or overtime, and (iii) any payment due under a court order, award, or settlement." (iv) any amount due to layoff or temporary suspension, whether arising out of a contract or under the law, and (v) any amount due to dismissal, discharge, retrenchment, or termination of employment." (ILO, 2009)

The 2006 Act identifies the individuals accountable for paying the worker's salary. They are the company's proprietors, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), manager, other appointed individuals, and the contract labourer. The Act also requires the major owner, CEO, and others to pay contract labourers' salaries directly and enables them to deduct them from the contractor's payment (ILO, 2009). Another significant alteration concerning wages is establishing a wage period and payment schedule. Section 122 limits the payment term to 30 days, while section 123 stipulates that payment must be made within seven working days after the salary period's expiration (ILO, 2009).

In terms of termination policy, section 26 permits an employer to terminate a worker's employment for convenience. Under this section, an employer may terminate the employment of

a permanent worker by providing him/her with a written notice of 120 days if s/he is a monthly rated worker and 60 days in all other cases. Additionally, if it is impractical to provide the employee with notice, the employer may provide pay in place of notice. In the event of such a termination, the employee must be compensated at a rate of 30 days' salary for each completed year of service or gratuity, whichever is more (ILO, 2009).

Moreover, as the focus of this dissertation is the beauty parlour industry which is evidently female-dominated, it was crucial to look into maternity benefits. However, the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 stated that, if a woman did not provide notice prior to childbirth but does so after the event, she might take up to eight weeks of maternity leave. The issue in this clause was whether or not the maternity leave would be compensated; the legislation was silent on this matter (Mondaq, 2019). On a positive note, the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 was amended in January 2019 with some significant changes. The most notable change brought about by the newly revised labour law is the provision of post-partum financial benefits to new expecting mothers. Most importantly, the modified Labour Law clarifies that a woman's post-partum maternity leave would be compensated in addition to other employment perks (Mondaq, 2019)

2.2 Beauty Parlour

The number of women running salons has increased dramatically during the previous two decades. The beauty sector, which employs an estimated 0.1 million people, 99% of whom are women, is critical for women's empowerment (Akter, 2008). By introducing services with an affordable price point, the beauty parlour industry has gained popularity over the decades (Akter, 2008). Additionally, this industry has been instrumental in relocating women from minority

communities, especially the Garo community, to cities (Gulrukh, 2004). With an increasing emphasis on physical beauty and self-care, the number of beauty parlours and spas in Bangladesh has increased. Hence, the migration from indigenous matrilineal communities increased with a spike in demand for beauty services. At the moment, there are approximately 350,000 salons registered (Rahman, 2020). Nonetheless, the beauty-care business in Bangladesh has remained mostly untapped in research and study.

Since the emergence of the country's very first beauty parlour in 1963, the Bangladesh government has finally recognized the beauty sector as an industry after 57 years (Rahman, 2020). The trend of self-care and numerous luxurious beauty services have already gained popularity for being introduced at a reasonable price point throughout the period. However, the pressure of keeping the services affordable comes with an opportunity cost of extremely cheap labour, which is possible due to being an informal sector. According to Amin (2016), even though beauty parlour is not typical of informal sector employment; yet, employment practices in such sectors by no means fulfil formal employment criteria. Research on Worker's Rights in Bangladesh's Care Economy reported that most workers in the personal care industry did not sign contracts when hired. Many workers lack an ID card and a service book. The study also found that 46% of respondents in the personal care sector lack an ID card, and almost two-thirds lack a service book, as required by the labour law (Hossain & Akhter, 2021). As an employee of the informal sector, a beauty parlour worker's average monthly salary is around 8921 BDT (110 USD) (Amin, 2016). However, as long hours and overtime are standard practices in this sector; especially during holidays and wedding seasons, the working hours mostly exceed the legal limit for informal employees.

2.3 COVID-19

Bangladesh confirmed its first COVID-19 outbreak on March 8, 2020, and over 1.5 million people have been infected since then. Three nationwide lockdowns occurred, interfering with routine public and economic activity. Due to the nationwide lockdown, the RMG⁵ industry has been facing a substantial loss, further contributing to workers' decreasing wages and deterioration of living standards (BIGD⁶, 2021). Hence, this has had a detrimental effect on most workers' job security, working conditions, health & welfare, and employment rights. In particular, small and micro enterprises (SMEs) have been severely hit by lockdown and social isolation policies. They account for a sizable share of production and employment in developing countries like Bangladesh (BIGD, 2021). With the pandemic intensifying, work from home was an option for MNCs⁷ and Corporates; however, small enterprises like beauty parlours and salons had to be shut down immediately to mitigate the spread of the novel Coronavirus. However, Bangladesh began lowering lockdown measures in 2021, although travelling and economic activities are projected to remain limited for the foreseeable future, as the number of COVID-19 cases has not yet diminished.

A study by Karmojibi Nari (2021) shows the workers lost their jobs due to a lack of clients, employers unable to pay, and establishment closure due to government-mandated holiday/lockdown. However, to reduce rising inequality not just between wealthy and poor but also between men and women, the government has issued credit-based stimulus packages to impacted industries, including small and medium-sized businesses such as beauty salons (Khatun, 2020). In contrast to male-dominated sectors such as RMG and export-oriented companies,

⁵ Ready-made Garments

⁶ BRAC Institute of Governance and Development

⁷ Multi-national Corporations

however, a recent CPD⁸ study found that banks add unnecessary difficulty to the loan application process, discouraging women from asking for loans (Khatun & Saadat, 2021). According to Khatun (2020), a significant number of micro and small businesses lack documentation of bank loans, loan servicing, and bank relationships. Due to pervasive social stigmas, many banks are hesitant to lend to female entrepreneurs, resulting in a time-consuming and laborious loan application procedure. Financial institutions do not consider women's company proposals bankable since they increase operating costs.

Many of these employment losses went unnoticed because beauty salons alongside other care facilities were closed during the government-imposed nationwide lockdown. Workers also complained that terminated colleagues did not get their due wages or service benefits for the month prior to lockdown (Hossain & Akhter, 2021). In addition, the government declared the minimum wage applicable to the beauty parlour industry, although it has not been revised in many years. The study found that informality, low or irregular pay, long hours, inadequate workspaces, and hazardous and unhealthy working conditions were typical in the personal care sector. It also revealed that employees in the industries had little or no collective representation with employers or the government.

2.4 Unexplored Research

Even though a handful of research was conducted regarding the labour conditions of beauty parlour workers; however, few of them only shed light on the COVID-19 impact of the existing structural inequality. In addition, it is necessary to find out the COVID-19 induced circumstances

⁸ Centre for Policy Dialogue

from the perspective of both the employer and employee. From the reviewed literature above, Khatun and Saadat's paper and the report of Karmojibi Nari⁹ provide a general idea of the current scenario of beauty parlours in Bangladesh. Here, Khatun and Saadat's research population consisted of entrepreneurs, which only depicts one side of the scenario. Moreover, the report of BIGD (2021) sheds light on the entire labour market and the overall impact of COVID-19 focusing on working conditions, living standards, health and welfare, and the existing labour rights. However, it focuses mostly on the RMG industry and its challenges faced during the COVID-19. On the other hand, Karmojibi Nari's report focuses solely on the labour conditions; however, the report focused on workers from both the beauty parlour and non-clinical healthcare sectors, which might skew the findings into a generalized arena.

This dissertation focuses on the prevalent structural inequality, how it has reproduced further inequality due to COVID-19, and how the existing labour conditions have impacted the pandemic induced scenario of the beauty parlour industry. Moreover, this thesis focuses on both the industry's employer and employee aspects, which further explains the connection between prevalent structural inequality and how it reproduces systematic discrimination through scarcity of government incentives, eventually leading to an influx of pandemic-induced unemployment among the beauty parlour workers.

⁹ Non-profit organization in Bangladesh

Chapter 3

Findings

To understand the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlour workers, I have gathered information from two different sources: interviews and secondary sources. By taking all considerations into account, my interviews focus on how beauty parlour workers have been affected in various periods of the pandemic; and what are the possible scopes for developments in the beauty parlour sector. This research, specifically, one-on-one in-depth interviews, used qualitative methods. The interviews were semi-structured to follow up and collect additional information about particular topics by asking more detailed questions. I used study reports and journals published by international and local research and development organizations and articles from newspapers and reports published by scholars for secondary resources.

In this chapter, the findings are arranged and portrayed in a thematic method consisting of four timelines. Here, the first period is before the pandemic; the second period was the first lockdown in March 2020; the third period was during the second lockdown in 2021; and lastly, the fourth period is from after the second lockdown till the present. Throughout these four timelines, the topics in focus are- prevalent salary structure and working conditions before the pandemic, salary deduction during the pandemic, salary discrepancy among workers, working conditions, festival bonuses, and changes in the lifestyle of the beauty parlour workers. These aspects will then be evaluated in terms of corporational beauty parlours and home-based beauty parlours. Here, corporational beauty parlours refer to prominent beauty salons of the country which has been in the industry since the beginning. On the other hand, home-based beauty parlours refer to the beauty parlours which run on a small scale in a homely environment, specifically located in

residential buildings. Lastly, throughout the findings from case studies, relevant KII information will be demonstrated as needed.

All interviews were conducted in person. However, few of the follow-up interviews were conducted via phone calls, as a few of the respondents were not available for in-person follow-up interviews. As all my respondents working in beauty parlours belong to the indigenous (Garo) community, there was a significant language barrier between my respondents and me. Hence, I asked one of my friends who belongs to the same community to be there as a translator. With the translator's help, I connected with the respondents, and the interviews were conducted successfully. All the respondents are looking for a better work environment, a government-acknowledged organization focusing solely on beauty parlour workers and their labour rights, and a better living standard.

3.1 Socio-economic Demography of Participants

I conducted the research interviews with the Bangladeshi beauty parlour workers in Kalachandpur¹⁰, where most people from the indigenous, specifically the Garo community, reside. The total number of participants for the conducted interviews was six beauty parlour workers, of which two were seniors, two were juniors working in corporational beauty parlours, and two were employees of home-based parlours. Furthermore, to back up the findings from conducted research, two parlour owners (a home-based beauty parlour owner and a prominent corporational beauty parlour owner) were interviewed to understand the minor differences between both.

¹⁰ Area in Dhaka city

Table 1: Socio-economic Demography of Participants

No	Name (Pseudonym)	Age (Years)	Type of Beauty Parlour (Area)	Type of employment	Marital Status	Number of family members	Monthly income (BDT)
1	Latika	37	Corporational (Gulshan - 2)	Senior Beautician	Widowed	3	24000
2	Sara	35	Corporational (Banani)	Senior Beautician	Married	4	25000
3	Shanu	25	Corporational (Gulshan - 2)	Junior Beautician	Married	3	10000
4	Mala	27	Corporational (Gulshan - 2)	Junior Beautician	Married	5	13000
5	Chandrima	27	Home-based (Banani)	N/A	Single	2	20000
6	Chaya	30	Home-based (Gulshan - 1)	N/A	Married	4	23000

3.2 Pre-pandemic Working Conditions and Living Standards

Before getting onto the main research questions, I asked the respondents about their lives before the pandemic. This broke the ice between the respondents and me, which helped me understand the severity of the pandemic in their lives. Considering my research focus, I asked them about their pre-pandemic way of life, monthly salary, bonus distribution, day-to-day working environment, and overall working conditions.

For senior workers employed in a corporational beauty parlour, the average monthly salary range between 20,000 BDT - 25,000 BDT without overtime and bonus. They get two bonuses

during the two Eids, which reside between 5,000 BDT - 8,000 BDT for each holiday. For overtime, they usually do not get paid; however, if they reach their monthly threshold for client services, they get an additional 150 BDT for each extra client. Both of the respondents employed as "senior beauticians" admitted that their holiday workload goes way beyond their average daily workload; however, they barely get paid for it except during two Eids. One of the senior respondents, 37 years old Latika (pseudonym) said,

"There are days when we work for more than 10 hours non-stop. We do not get to choose when to end our shifts. Hence, working overtime is mostly not our choice, as we do not even get paid."

For junior workers employed in corporational parlours, the average monthly salary range between 9000 BDT -13000 BDT without overtime and bonus. They also get two bonuses during the two eid holidays, and the bonuses range between 3,000 BDT - 5,000 BDT. Moreover, for overtime, they usually do not get paid; however, similar to the senior beauty parlour worker, when they reach their monthly threshold of clients, they do receive a commission of 50 BDT - 60 BDT per client; which does not justify as the number of services is way higher than the number of clients. One of the respondents working as a "junior beautician" said,

"Even though parlours have cleaning and maintenance staff, sometimes junior employees are asked to complete the cleaning chores during the end of the shifts."

Usually, home-based parlours do not have employment positions, such as senior and junior beauticians. Hence, the employees have to be skilled in most services, which can be stressful for

individual workers due to excessive workload. However, the average salary of a home-based beauty parlour located in tri-state areas ranges between 20,000 BDT - 25,000 BDT, depending on the acquired skills of the beauty parlour worker. One interesting fact about the home-based beauty parlour workers is that they tend to receive bonuses during their own religion's holidays. Furthermore, they get a certain commission during Eid and other holidays, depending on overall client engagement. One of the respondents mentioned,

"I have worked in beauty parlours before. Nevertheless, my salary satisfaction was not up to the mark like I have here."

3.3 Post-pandemic Working Conditions and Living Standards

In order to understand the actual discrepancies between pre-pandemic and post-pandemic circumstances, it was crucial to observe the surroundings of the research participants. As one of the methods for primary data collection was through curating case studies, I focused on the interlocutors' life stories and attempted to identify the circumstantial differences. Hence, I opted for a semi-structured questionnaire that enabled interactions personally. There were plenty of unsaid yet significantly noticeable aspects, such as a change in living conditions and lifestyle deterioration. Hence, during the interviews, I also asked the respondents questions according to my observation, which enabled me to understand a more in-depth picture of their lives alongside their working conditions. Furthermore, to better grasp the impacts of COVID-19 on the beauty parlour worker, I focused on breaking down the entire period of the pandemic into three timelines.

3.3.1 First Lockdown (March 2020 - August 2020)

As soon as the lockdown was announced in March 2020, the beauty parlours were shut down immediately without any prior notice. For an industry which runs on in-person client services, the workers and the owners hit rock bottom as the income stream shut down completely. Hence, upon asking the respondents regarding salary disbursement during the first lockdown, their answers were skewed towards not receiving any percentage of their salaries. However, when it came down to the home-based beauty parlour workers, they recall receiving an allowance of 4000 BDT - 5000 BDT after three months into the lockdown. One of the respondents, Chandrima (pseudonym), who worked in a home-based parlour, mentioned,

"We had been struggling a lot during the lockdown. Our salaries were cut off without any notice. However, our madam¹¹ was kind enough to provide us with some allowance to get by."

On that note, upon asking about the experiences of the first lockdown, the owner of the home-based parlour mentioned,

"The first lockdown had a huge impact on us as it lasted for more than six months which consisted of our busiest season of two Eid holidays. Among the whole year, the holiday seasons are the most revenue-generating. Unlike many organizations and companies, there was no way for us to operate online. Furthermore, as social distancing was crucial for reducing the number of cases, we had to shut off all our services. Hence, there was no way to pay our employees their full salary."

¹¹ Beauty parlour owner

On the other hand, Mala, working in a corporational beauty parlour as a "junior beautician", mentioned,

"I had lost my job without any prior notice. When the lockdown started, we were told that we would get our salaries when the beauty parlour re-opens. However, when they opened, I never got a call from them like my other colleagues did. I lost my job even after waiting for six months to get my salary. It is not just a salary for us; it is our livelihood, not just mine, but my family's. I was pregnant during the first lockdown; hence, I really needed my salary to take care of the newborn. I told my madam that I was pregnant and asked for some financial support during the lockdown as I was not getting my salary. However, I had not received any help later; I was even fired, making my financial struggles worse."

When talking to the owner of a corporational beauty parlour, she mentioned,

"I feel like the pandemic has set us back a lot, which might be difficult to recover if we do not adapt to more feasible structures for conducting businesses. Hence, we had to forgo some of our employees who were not experienced enough".

When I asked about the revised salary structures, she added,

"When a company has no way to operate for more than six months, how will it pay its workers? We do understand the severity of not providing a salary for straight 6-7 months; because, for the workers, it is their livelihood. It might be their only source of survival. However, for the company itself to sustain itself, there were some opportunity costs we needed to consider, such as letting go of some of the employees, salary reduction and bonus deduction. Hence, in the present, we are

being able to pay our workers their usual salary and operate with utmost client satisfaction."

Another respondent working as a "junior beautician" mentioned,

"I was scared of losing my job as most of the workers getting sagged were working as junior beauticians. They preferred the senior workers as they were skilled in more services."

During the first lockdown, as the government had curated stimulus packages for SMEs which could have been applied through banks, I asked whether they could apply for it. They both answered that they could not apply for that as the procedure was too lengthy and complicated. Furthermore, the owner of the home-based parlour mentioned,

"If there were ways to influx cash flow during the lockdown, we would have definitely paid our workers during these struggling times. For all of us, it was challenging to cope. For government acknowledged sectors, I feel it was easier to get help through stimulus packages. Hence, for sectors like RMG¹², they could pay their workers. For months, we had struggled due to no external support; whenever the parlours re-opened, we could not take in all of our previous employees. It was necessary to run smoothly and maintain the quality of our services."

After the first lockdown, when the beauty parlours re-opened, all respondents agreed upon not receiving their full salary. For the remaining of 2020 and the first three months of 2021, employees of corporational beauty parlours received 40% of their monthly salaries without any

¹² Ready-made Garments

payment for overtime and festival bonus. However, "senior beauticians" received 50% of their monthly salary depending on the client engagement. One of the respondents, Sara (pseudonym), working as a senior beautician, mentioned,

"I was already in so much debt when I started working again. I thought I would be able to pay off little by little once I started receiving my salary again. As there was a significant reduction in our monthly salary, my family of five had to move to a sublet; since we could not afford to stay in a house anymore."

On the other hand, respondents working in home-based parlours received 60% of their monthly salary. Furthermore, respondents from this group also received 25% of their total yearly bonus dispersed between holidays. When asked regarding their living conditions, Chandrima replied,

"Obviously, it was challenging to get by. However, I think our hands were tied. It was better to work through a salary deduction than completely losing my job."

On this note, all of the respondents agreed that it was easier for them to work for less money than to be unemployed.

3.3.2 Second lockdown (April 2021 - August 2021)

As the first wave of the outbreak eased down, beauty parlours started to operate in their usual ways; however, the workers were not paid fully even after that. However, as the pandemic worsened with a new variant outbreak, the government had to impose another lockdown from April 14, 2021. Hence, every beauty parlour had to be shut down again. During this second lockdown, the salary disbursement among the respondents stopped again. Only the two

respondents from home-based beauty parlours mentioned getting a small allowance from their madams.

Even though the second lockdown did not last as long as the first one; however, during the time, some respondents disclosed that their workplaces remained open despite the nationwide lockdown. One of the respondents from home-based beauty parlours mentioned,

"We used to get calls from our madam whenever there was an appointment. We operated on a very small scale during that time to maintain social distancing. Due to Eid, the demand was very high at that time. However, we only gave service to clients who made a prior appointment." She added, "Even though we had to go to work when needed, we neither got our full salary nor any bonus for working during the lockdown. However, our madam gave us a small allowance."

For corporational beauty parlours, it was not possible to operate on a small scale, according to the respondents from that group. One of the respondents, Shanu, mentioned,

"At one point, it started feeling like there was no way out of the poverty. It felt like the sky shattered on our heads, and we will never be able to recover from this. My family and I have been struggling for a long time, and sudden lockdowns like this pushed us into a total destitute. I had not been able to provide for my mother since the lockdown started. As she could not have her medicines, she got sicker over time. In December 2021, we lost her. I feel like I killed my mother, even when I know there was nothing we could do."

3.3.3 Post Second Lockdown

As the second lockdown started to ease in August 2021 and workplaces started to operate, the beauty parlours also started to operate more regularly. However, all respondents mentioned working overtime due to staff shortages in their workplaces. Shanu from a corporational beauty parlour mentioned,

"Many of my colleagues had been sacked due to lockdown. When the parlour re-opened, the workload was too much for the remaining employees. We had to work overtime and, at times, even on our weekends to fulfil the demand. However, we did not even get our full monthly salary till 2022."

Another respondent, Mala, mentioned,

"I have been struggling since the beginning of the pandemic. After my child's birth, I started looking for jobs. However, due to the pressure of working overtime, I immensely struggled with giving my newborn child proper care. On top of that, the financial vulnerability made it challenging to afford necessary food items and medicines for my child and me. Even after working overtime when necessary, I have never financially struggled like this before. I go to work every day and do not have any holiday. Hence, I can barely give my family the time that they need. I feel like as I can barely support my family anymore, I have been facing too much pressure from my husband to quit the job and start working as a house-help."

One of the respondents, Chaya, mentioned,

"For months, I did not get paid, and when I did, it was half my usual salary. Due to the ongoing financial struggle for more than a year, my family and I had to take loans from many people to get by. As I have started to receive my full salary from

2022, I have been using that money to pay off my debts so far. I feel like what this one year did to my family and me, and it would take years to recover from this financial burden."

From these circumstantial findings, it is evident that all respondents struggled financially, and some were even pushed into poverty. The sudden emergence of the pandemic fuelled their prevalent financial insecurity and structural inequality. The findings show an apparent existing inequality within the beauty parlour industry. For instance, due to understaffing, there is a significant bias towards senior beauty parlour workers as they are more experienced. Furthermore, the structural discrepancies among corporational and home-based beauty parlours constitute a significant factor enabling inequality among industry workers. This structural discrepancy creates a significant gap in working conditions, salary structure, and employee satisfaction between these two types of beauty parlours. These factors will be further analyzed in the next chapter with the help of existing literature, key informant interviews, and the curated theoretical framework.

Chapter 4

Discussion & Analysis

In the previous chapter, I illustrated the respondents' struggles throughout the pandemic and how it has affected their lives. Moreover, I portrayed their difficulties at the workplace due to the restructures imposed on them. Lastly, I attempt to find the causes of their struggling experiences by comparing the cumulated data with KII information. This chapter demonstrates how my results compare with the existing labour laws and how the patterns vary based on other female-driven sectors like RMG. In addition, I compare the situations focusing on working conditions and salary structures during pre-pandemic and post-pandemic in the light of existing literature, KII information, and the curated theoretical framework for this dissertation.

In this chapter, the first section highlights the discrepancies between pre-pandemic and post-pandemic circumstances. It attempts to identify the prevalent factors which played a significant role in the deterioration of workers' living standards and working conditions. The second section discusses the reflection to existing labour laws of Bangladesh and how they have been affected throughout the pandemic in the context of the beauty parlour industry. It further discusses the overall contribution of the labour laws in the structural construction of this integral part of the informal sector. In the third section, the analysis takes a turn toward existing structural inequality among sectors and compares the RMG and beauty parlour industries. Lastly, the fourth section discusses how the prevalent structural inequality results from neoliberal economy and market despotism, with the help of the constructed theoretical framework.

Table 2: Summary of Analysis

Themes in Focus	Findings
Discrepancies between pre-pandemic and post-pandemic circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Receiving no salary during the first lockdown; ii) An evident salary deduction after re-opening the beauty parlours; iii) Receiving no overtime payment and festival bonus till the end of 2021; iv) 50% of respondents mention moving to smaller houses; v) All of the respondents mention taking loans during lockdown to meet basic necessities.
Reflection to Bangladesh Labour Act 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Lack of existing labour structure prior to the pandemic; ii) 1 out of 6 respondents mentioned being terminated without prior notice; iii) Evident violation of further labour laws during the pandemic.
Comparison with garments sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Lack of structure in the beauty parlour sector compared to the garments industry; ii) Complications in applying for SME¹³ stimulus packages for beauty parlour owners, leading to revised salary structure and employee dissatisfaction among the beauty parlour workers; iii) Lack of workers' associations for the beauty parlour workers; iv) Existing structural inequality among the garments sector and the beauty parlour industry.
Theoretical application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Existing structural inequality against the beauty parlour industry and capitalistic bias towards the garments industry caused by neo-liberalism and labour market despotism.
Validity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Salary deduction is evident in the study by Karmojibi Nari (2021) and all the cumulated findings from the fieldwork.

¹³ Small and Medium Enterprises

4.1 Discrepancies Between Pre-pandemic and Post-pandemic Circumstances

Considering the discrepancies with the existing labour laws and the prevalent bias towards male-dominated and export-oriented sectors like RMG, the beauty parlour sector was specifically at risk during the abrupt economic shutdown. Due to the difficulty of applying for loans, the inability to operate online or remotely, and being a part of the informal sector- the beauty parlour industry had to be held down for months. The beauty parlour owners may have been affected during this time, but thousands of women have been hit hard with no financial security whatsoever. All respondents employed in the beauty parlours have mentioned experiencing significant financial challenges.

One of the respondents has mentioned being terminated with no prior notice after the economy re-opened. According to Dhaka Tribune, women employed as beauticians in numerous cities and towns are now employed as temporary farmhands for landowners, collecting daily wages to help feed their families during the Coronavirus pandemic (Ahmed, 2020). Due to the difficulty of applying for SME Stimulus Packages. Everything is coming down to the prevalent structural and gender inequality among sectors fueled by the two-year-long global pandemic. During this time, 5 out of 6 respondents from the study have mentioned taking informal loans, for which, till this point, they are in debt. One of the respondents, Shanu, mentioned,

"No matter what I do, I face too many obstacles to pay off the debt. From 2022, I have started to receive my full salary; however, I am nowhere near paying off the loan I took during the first lockdown."

Beauty parlour employees generally belong to lower-middle-income families. The sky-rocketing inflation and existing debt is crippling them financially, which may take years to be recovered.

This has disrupted their socio-economic position and tremendously lowered their living standards. 3 out of 6 respondents mentioned moving to smaller houses after the pandemic; 1 out of 6 respondents mentioned moving back to their hometowns. The gradual decline of the workers' socio-economic position is evident, further putting the entire beauty parlour industry at risk.

From working overtime with no pay to receiving 50% of the monthly salary have cumulatively impacted the workers' lives and forced many of them to switch jobs. One of the key informants mentioned,

"Indeed, we had to cut down on the number of employees due to cost deduction. Nevertheless, when we re-opened the beauty parlours, many workers did not rejoin as they were forced to switch jobs during the lockdown. This has created a scarcity of skilled workers in the beauty parlour industry, further causing revenue losses, making it extremely challenging for our companies to recover from the prior losses."

Hence, beauty parlour owners are forced to forgo employee satisfaction, violating the labour law.

From the research findings and existing literature, it seems to be the case that beauty parlour workers have been way more affected compared to the beauty parlour owners. However, both of these factors disrupt one another, which is only a significant example of existing structural inequality fuelled by socio-economic crises like the COVID-19. The inequality among men and women, rich and poor, Bengali and non-Bengali; lack labour rights awareness among beauty parlour employees; pandemic-induced challenges have cumulatively impacted the lives of beauty parlour workers and their working conditions. This is to note that beauty parlour owners have their association called the Beauty Service Owners Association of Bangladesh (BSOAB), which has

been recognized by the Ministry of Commerce (Anika, 2022). However, there is no association for beauty parlour workers; on that note, all of the respondents mentioned that having a specific association for beauty parlour employees will surely educate them regarding their labour rights.

4.2 Reflections to Bangladesh Labour Act

The findings indicate that, even during the pre-pandemic period, working conditions for beauty parlour workers were not fully structured. Because the beauty parlour industry has yet to be recognized as an integrated part of the formal sector, the findings are skewed towards the workers having bare to no idea about the labour rights of Bangladesh. Hence, according to the law, they do not acquire enough knowledge about their minimum wage, overtime payment, and average working hours. However, like most informal industries, an average wage is fixed for the beauty parlour workers depending on their workplace and level of experience.

According to the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, any amount due to layoff or temporary suspension shall be included in the wage, whether out of a contract or under the law. Considering a global pandemic as an exceptional circumstance, the minimum wage must be paid to every employee. However, during the pandemic, all respondents from the study mentioned receiving no salary at all during both nationwide lockdowns. Furthermore, even after the economy re-opened following the first lockdown, all the respondents mentioned receiving only 50% of their monthly salaries until the second lockdown. In addition, since any termination is subjected to 60 or 120 days of notice, or payment of monthly salary, terminating employees without prior notice is a violation of this law. One of the respondents, Mala, mentioned that she was terminated without prior notice. Moreover, as she was pregnant during the time, according to the maternity benefits

section of the Labour Act 2006, she was supposed to receive paid maternity leave, which she did not.

Moreover, the respondents seem not to care regarding the average working hours as working for 10-12 hours a day, particularly during holidays and wedding seasons, appears to be the norm throughout the beauty parlour industry. As per the Labour Act 2006, this is to note that no worker shall work more than 8 hours unless being paid for overtime. Surprisingly enough, no respondents from home-based beauty parlours have admitted to not experiencing working overtime without any payment during the pre-pandemic period.

On the other hand, overtime payment varies from one beauty parlour to another. From the findings, respondents from home-based beauty parlours tend to receive a higher payment for working overtime than those from corporational beauty parlours. In terms of the corporational beauty parlours, the employees generally receive their overtime payment based on the number of clients they have attended, not the number of beauty services they have completed during the extra hours.

Table 3: Key Differences Between Corporational and Home-based Beauty Parlours

Corporational Beauty Parlours	Home-based Beauty Parlours
No salary disbursement during lockdown;	Disbursement of 4000-5000 BDT of allowance three months into the first lockdown;
No payment for overtime and festival bonuses;	Reduced payment for overtime and festival bonuses;
50% of salary deduction after re-opening;	20% of salary deduction after re-opening;
Values senior workers compared to junior workers.	Does not have employment positions for beauty parlour workers; however, has one/two management positions.

4.3 Comparison with the Garments Sector

As the COVID-19's impact on Bangladesh's economy is becoming more prominent, the government of Bangladesh has offered several relief measures for the impacted local and export-oriented enterprises and vulnerable people. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has issued 10,500 crore BDT as a bailout/stimulus plan for export-oriented industries like RMG to help the country's economy recover from the coronavirus. The premier highlighted that the funds might only be utilized for staff pay (Fair Wear, 2021). These plans aim to increase public expenditure, extend the social security net and enhance cash flow in the short, medium, and long run (Moazzem & Taznur, 2021). However, in the government stimulus package, no funds are allocated to the informal sector, employing 87% of the workers in the labour force (ILO). Hence, there is structural inequality in the informal sector compared to major industries like the RMG. During one of the KIIs, one of the respondents shared,

"For government acknowledged sectors, I feel it was easier to get help through stimulus packages. Hence, for sectors like RMG, they could pay their workers."

Furthermore, a policy brief of ILO (2021) suggests that during COVID-19, female labour-intensive enterprises have been impacted the hardest, resulting in an increasing number of job losses and widening the gender wage gap. Except for a few urban households, families are typically hesitant when a woman proposes to become an entrepreneur. As a result, many do not receive financial assistance from their family. Due to their limited financial and operational resources, women-led businesses have been in a precarious position throughout the pandemic (Khatun, 2020). On that note, from the KII, one of the key informants mentioned,

"As there are so many home-based beauty parlours nowadays, an economic shock like COVID-19 put us in a very vulnerable position as our revenue generation is way lower than corporational beauty parlours. Moreover, as women entrepreneurs are still discouraged by the mass practice of misogyny in our society, it is difficult for most to receive financial support for building our careers."

In order to minimize escalating inequality, not only between rich and poor but also between men and women, the government has offered credit-based stimulus packages to affected industries, including SMEs like beauty parlours (Khatun, 2020). However, A recent CPD research discovered that banks added unnecessary hassle, discouraging women from applying for loans compared to male-dominated sectors like RMG and export-oriented industries (Khatun & Saadat, 2021). According to Prothom Alo (2020), beauty parlours are mostly owned by women. On the other hand, men majorly owned RMG factories and consisted of 95% of male employees in management positions (New Age, 2022).

According to Khatun (2020), Numerous micro and small-sized enterprises lack documentation of bank loans, loan servicing, and bank connections. Because of the persistent societal stigmas, many banks are reluctant to lend to female entrepreneurs, which leads to a lengthy and tedious loan application process. Women's business plans are not considered bankable by financial organizations since they raise operational costs (Khatun, 2020). In addition, banks are worried about timely loan repayment since female entrepreneurs lack collateral to acquire funds due to the discouragement from their families. Hence, the beauty parlour being a female-dominated industry, it seems more challenging to apply for the government-provided stimulus packages than

male-dominated industries like the RMG sector. Hence, due to the complication in receiving the stimulus package, the beauty parlour workers have been impacted by the deterioration of their working conditions and salary structure, which eventually declined their living standards and quality of life.

4.4 Theoretical Application

From the last section, it is evident that there is a prevalent structural inequality between the RMG and the beauty parlour industry. According to International Financial Corporation (2021), Bangladesh has generated around 31.45 billion USD in the fiscal year 2020-21. On the other hand, the beauty parlour industry contributes around 5 billion USD yearly to the national economy of Bangladesh (Bangladesh Post, 2020). Since the RMG sector generates a significantly higher amount of revenue, the beauty parlour industry tends to be cornered in the economy. As the economy of Bangladesh falls under a neoliberal regime, market despotism has been ingrained in the labour structure (Anner, 2021). As a result, owners and industrialists have a profit-focused approach which automatically forgoes fair working conditions as opportunity costs. Due to the neo-liberal policies, the capitalistic approach toward the economy is shifting the focus towards more revenue-generating sectors. Thereby industries like beauty parlours remain unnoticed despite having substantial opportunity to grow.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the situation even further with the prevalent conditions. As the beauty parlour industry belongs to the informal sector, the Labour Act (2006) barely focused on this industry by providing a generalized set of regulations. The beauty parlour industry remains an untapped research area with the existing instability, market despotism,

and prevalent structural inequality. Hence, the lack of background information is refraining the beauty parlour workers from being aware of their labour rights. Consequently, the market despotism focused labour structure is further causing a violation of labour rights. Therefore, the combination of a neo-liberalistic economy regime and induced market despotism negatively impacts the beauty parlour workers, their working conditions, and their living standards amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Especially for the Bangladeshi economy and labour structure, Anner's theory of social governance indicates a solution-based strategy. His work on the Bangladeshi RMG sector portrays the industry's recovery after the Rana Plaza¹⁴ collapse by enabling and strengthening labour associations. It further discusses the contribution of workers' participation in improving the overall working conditions by educating the workers about their rights. With global and national support, the RMG sector paved its way to recovery after the dreadful incident of Rana Plaza. According to Anner (2021), there was a lack of a strong labour relations regime and a viable public governance option in Bangladesh. However, worker engagement, public outrage over the Rana Plaza tragedy, and transnational mobilization for workers' rights contributed to a Global Binding Agreement (GBA) involving multiple actors on the social governance path, which was ultimately successful. Hence, considering the vulnerable position of the beauty parlour industry due to prevalent structural inequality and COVID-19, it has become crucial to establish a workers' association for the beauty parlour employees. This will enable opportunities for a better working environment and, consequently, a slightly higher living standard for the beauty parlour workers.

¹⁴ Former Dhaka-based garment factory focused commercial building which collapsed in 2013

Chapter 5

Conclusion

As history says, pandemics are not a once-in-a-lifetime crisis. Global crises like these lead to a devastating loss and substantially disrupt our lives. From people losing their lives to their jobs, this pandemic has pushed us into total destitution. From various research, it was evident that the pandemic has shaken the landscape of development and trade across the country. There was plenty of existing research regarding major sectors like RMG and healthcare; hence, majorly contributing informal sectors remained unnoticed. Hence, with this opportunity, it was crucial to identify the challenges beauty parlour workers have faced, the effects on the existing labour conditions for beauty parlour workers, and how they have adapted to the conditions induced by the pandemic. By centring a group of beauty parlour workers residing in Kalachandpur, this dissertation studies the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlour workers using qualitative methodology. It aims to analyze the challenges faced by the beauty parlour workers during the COVID-19 pandemic; understand the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlour workers and their working conditions, and explore the prevalent workers' rights for beauty parlour employees. Besides, the labour rights activists working towards establishing more inclusive and fair labour rights, and the researchers relevant to this field interested in neoliberalism and market despotism induced, and gender-based structural inequality will benefit significantly from the findings of the research, as this thesis focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on a less focused and female-dominated sector like the beauty parlour industry.

5.1 Summary of Findings and Discussion

According to the thesis findings, COVID-19 has had a significant and negative impact on all respondents who work in beauty parlours. Their lack of understanding of labour rights, the absence of a solid organizational framework throughout the industry, and the prevalence of structural inequity compared to other major sectors have contributed to their plight as absolute destitute. The findings indicate that the working conditions of beauty parlour employees were not well-structured even prior to the outbreak of COVID-19. There is a lack of awareness about labour regulations among beauty parlour employees in Bangladesh since their industry has not yet been recognized as a part of the formal sector. As a result, individuals are victims of the law violation; because they are not adequately informed about their rights to a minimum wage, overtime pay, and standard working hours. As with many other workers in the informal sector, beauty parlour employees get a basic salary with variable earnings determined by where they work and their level of experience. Hence, with no prior structure in salary, the COVID-19 pandemic has burdened the beauty parlour workers with massive financial pressure, which will be hard to recover from.

5.2 Recommendations

After a critical analysis of research data, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- The formation of a labour association specifically for beauty parlour workers ensures these people's labour rights.
- Collaboration with the international organizations for workplace safety with associations of beauty parlours' workers, owners and unions, similar to Accord & Alliance.
- There is a need to raise public awareness regarding the rights of beauty parlour employees.

- Adequate allocation of resources such as financial support from the government for the beauty parlour workers.
- The involvement of GOs¹⁵ and NGOs¹⁶ in the capacity building of beauty parlour workers.
- Similar to the RMG sector of Bangladesh, the beauty parlour industry needs to be brought to the attention of international research organizations.

5.3 Limitations

The following limitations of this dissertation are hereby made:

- Firstly, there has been a lack of existing secondary data. Hence, this limitation has made it extremely challenging to construct a background study on the research topic.
- Secondly, this research was conducted within roughly 2-3 months, limiting the scope of exploration in selecting respondents. Hence, it was challenging to have a broader array of research participants. For instance, the research has focused only on the few beauty parlour employees living in Kalachandpur, where all the respondents worked in beauty parlours situated in Gulshan, Banani, and Baridhara areas. In my perspective, these research locales fail to portray the true essence of the struggling Bangladeshi class. Furthermore, it was impossible to collect quantitative data to support the qualitative results due to the time constraint.
- Thirdly, even though this dissertation attempted to explore the discrepancies among corporational and home-based beauty parlours; yet, it could hardly comprehend the heterogeneity of the sector itself.

¹⁵ Government Organizations

¹⁶ Non-government Organizations

- Fourthly, as the language barrier was a significant issue between my participants and me, it was very time consuming to break the ice. Moreover, as a translator was present during the in-person interviews, the interviews became very lengthy and had difficulties with time management. Due to this, I had to go back a few times and continue the interviews.
- Lastly, as beauty parlour workers have a hectic schedule for their work and household chores, the interviews were cancelled or rescheduled multiple times, which took up a hefty amount of time.

5.4 Further Research

The study's limitations indicate research circumstances that should be addressed in the future. More time should be spent on fieldwork and participant observations to fully grasp and comprehend the actual situation. As a result, a bigger sample size would be strongly proposed for a future study on this issue to discover further discrepancies. Furthermore, prior to performing fieldwork, future research should explore any potential structural and attitudinal barriers and how they might be addressed. It will be immensely appreciated if future studies consider this research by replying to any unresolved elements of this research problem and developing a relevant hypothesis and theory. Another interesting field of further research is identifying the indigenesness induced structural inequality in this sector as most workers belong to the minority indigenous community. Additional research is encouraged to establish the same research problems in a new context and location. I believe that the findings of this study will be valuable to anyone who are interested in this issue, and I hope that future research will provide even more significant results.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire (Key Informant Interview)

- During the first lockdown, what are the challenges you had faced?
- Were you able to apply for any loans curated for SMEs?
- If yes, then was the procedure complicated?
- If no, then what was the reason that you couldn't?
- As the economy reopened, what was the marginal loss you had faced?
- In your beauty parlour, were the workers paid amid the lockdown?
- In order to cut down on losses, what are the implications did you take?
- Did you face any problem regarding under-staffing?
- Do you think the lack of employees contributed to a further loss?
- What do you think regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the overall beauty parlour industry?
- During my interviews with the beauty parlour workers, I happened to come across an issue of salary deduction. In terms of your organization, how did you handle it? Do you think the deduction was justified?
- How do you think the pandemic situation could have been handled better?

Questionnaire (Beauty Parlour Workers)

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- How many members are in your family?
- Are you married?
- Do you have children?
- Where do you work?
- Where is your beauty parlour situated?
- How long have you been working for?
- Are you aware of your minimum wage and working hours?
- Are you aware of your labour rights?
- What is your employment position at your workplace?
- How many days did you work for prior to the pandemic?
- Are you working at the same place where you did before the pandemic?
- During COVID-19, did you stay in Dhaka? Or did you go back to your hometown?
- Did you work anywhere during the lockdown?
- Are you the sole earner of your family?
- What is the range of your family's monthly income?
- What is the range of your monthly income?
- How many weekends do you get after the beauty parlours reopened?
- How many hours do you work daily?
- Did your workplace follow the government-imposed safety precautions?
- How was your salary disbursed during the lockdown? Did you even get paid?
- How did you cope during the lockdowns?
- After the first lockdown, what is your monthly income now?

- Was your salary deducted after the first lockdown?
- What was the percentage of deduction?
- What is the payment structure for extra hours at your workplace?
- Did you receive any holiday bonus after the pandemic?
- From when did you start receiving your full salary?
- Do you get paid for working overtime now?
- Do you receive holiday bonuses now?
- How has the pandemic affected your personal life?
- Did you take any loans during the lockdowns? Could you pay off the debt?
- Do you still struggle financially? How do you cope with the lost incomes?
- How has the pandemic affected your living standard and quality of life?
- Do you think you can cope with the lost aspects of your lives?
- Do you think, the pandemic would not have affected your lives so much if you were aware about your labour rights?
- Do you think there should be labour associations for beauty parlour workers?
- Do you think being a part of a labour union would have helped you during the pandemic?
- From now on, would you be more interested to be aware about your labour rights? For that, are you willing to attend workshops?
- Is there any suggestion would you like to address to make your working conditions and living standards better?

Appendix 2

Case Studies

Case Study 1

Participant's Name and Age: Latika (37 years)

Latika is a "Senior Beautician" working in a corporational beauty parlour situated in Gulshan-2 of Dhaka city. As a beautician, she has been working for over 13 years. After losing her husband due to the pandemic, she lives in Kalachandpur with her child and mother. She said,

"As I was not receiving my salary, I could not even take my husband to the hospital. I saw him dying in front of my own eyes. I was completely helpless. I tried to contact our madam to get my salary or at least some support from her. However, she did not help me. Life was already hard with no income at all. How can one survive like this? It would have been better if I had died with him."

After her husband's death, she has become the family's sole earner, and her monthly income is 24,000 BDT. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, her life has changed drastically. From losing her husband in the cruelty of the novel virus to losing her monthly income, she has been struggling immensely over the past two years. With her only 11-year-old daughter and her 63-year-old mother, she has been trying to take responsibility for the whole family. During the interview, she mentioned,

"When I lost my husband during the first lockdown. I felt extremely helpless at that time. I was shattered, and I could not think of anything to support my family. As I was not receiving my salary during the lockdown, I had to take loans from here and there. To put food on the table, I had to ask for help from my relatives; but they

could not help me. Hence, I had to take loans from "loan sharks" with extremely high interest. I thought I would be able to pay them off as soon as I started receiving my salary. However, in my parlour, none of us received our full salary. As a result, I could not pay off a penny in due time, and now the loan amount has been doubled. It was impossible to return the money I lent with such high interest with a reduced income. This year, I can finally return some money as I have started receiving my full salary. However, it will take longer to pay him off this hefty amount. I feel trapped and helpless."

Latika and her family are stuck in this cycle of debt. Six months of lockdown has pushed her into a poverty-ridden life. She might be able to pay off the loan at some point in her life; however, it will be immensely challenging for her to get out of the trauma she has been through.

Case Study 2

Participant's Name and Age: Sara (35 years)

Sara is a "Senior Beautician" working in a corporational beauty parlour in Banani, Dhaka. As a beautician, she has been working for 11 years. Her monthly salary is 25,000 BDT. She lives with her husband and two kids in Kalachandpur, Dhaka. She and her husband provided for the family until the pandemic happened. Due to the nationwide lockdown, Sara's workplace was abruptly shut down like the rest. However, even though she was employed, she stopped receiving her salary. In this situation, she and her family struggled to continue education for their children. Hence, they were forced to forgo their children's education only to put food on the table. Her husband works as a mechanic in a workshop near Kalachandpur, but his earnings were not enough to provide for the entire family during the lockdown. During the interview, Sara mentioned,

"As a mother, I feel like a failure who could not even provide education for her children. During the lockdown, my husband worked really hard to provide for us. As a mechanic, how much could he even earn? We had struggled so much during the first lockdown; to this day, we cannot recover from it. My children's education has stopped, but I want to send them to go to school again. They do not deserve to lose their future like this"

When the lockdown was lifted, Sara started going to work again. However, she did not get her full salary till 2022. In the meantime, she had been immensely struggling to meet her family's basic needs. Most of the money she earned was spent paying off the loans she had taken during lockdowns. The primary issue was not being able to save up anything for the lockdown periods with a reduced income. She said,

"During the first lockdown, I did not receive any salary. When the lockdown was lifted, and I rejoined, I thought I would receive my full salary; instead, I was only paid 50% of my monthly salary. Any amount I received was used for the money I borrowed from my relatives. We barely had the money to feed all of us. Hence, even after I started working, I could not send my kids to school. It has been two years that they have been at home. Now, my daughter helps me out with household chores and takes care of her younger brother."

Sara wanted to work overtime to earn extra; however, from 2020-to 21, she did not get paid for overtime. During the rush seasons, she had to work for 12 hours a day; however, she did not even receive her full salary. In September 2021, her entire family was infected with COVID-19, including herself. She mentioned,

"When we were infected, my 8-year-old son had to be hospitalized as he is an asthma patient. I asked the manager for an advance salary. However, she refused, even though I was the one to get sick first. All of my family members were infected. She refused to provide me with any financial support. I could not even have the necessary medicines during my sickness. I borrowed some money for my son's treatment, and I am yet to pay it back. Due to the last two years' financial crisis, my family and I were forced to loan too much money. Now we are still struggling to pay it off."

Case Study 3

Participant's Name and Age: Shanu (25 years)

Shanu is a "Junior Beautician" working in a corporational beauty parlour in Gulshan-2, Dhaka. As a beautician, she has been working for three years. Her monthly salary is 10,000 BDT. She and her husband have been providing for their family of three. Her husband works as a shop-helper in Kalachandpur; however, that job pays very little. Hence, when she stopped receiving her salary during the first lockdown, she started to look for jobs as a house-help. Even though she failed to get a new job, she kept trying. After all her failed attempts, she decided to move to a tiny room (sublet) which did not even have a window. Just to put food on the table, she had to ask for groceries from her neighbours. She added,

"My neighbours have been immensely accommodating towards me. However, how long could you ask for help? My neighbours were struggling too. It was not very comfortable for me to ask them for help every day. Hence, I stopped taking the medications for my spine injury. Life seems meaningless when you have to choose between eating and receiving medical treatment."

For Shanu and her family, there were days when they did not have anything to eat. All they had was some tap water and puffed rice borrowed from their neighbours. Due to the lack of proper diet and necessary medicines, Shanu's health deteriorated. As a result, she was not even fit enough to look for a new job at some point. She said,

"During the first six months of the pandemic, my health had deteriorated a lot and made me extremely unfit to work. I could not even do my household chores. I had to lie down all day as it was even more difficult to stand still. In that condition, who would even hire me to work? I was not even fit for taking care of my child."

Shanu's 4-year-old daughter had gotten sick a few times due to the lack of proper nutrition. During the first lockdown, her child was only two years old; and was of breastfeeding age. Due to Shanu's lack of proper diet, she could not even breastfeed her child. She tried to seek help from her madam, but that was no outcome. She mentioned,

"My husband and I could bear our hunger. Nevertheless, when we saw our child suffering because of us, we felt so helpless. I tried to contact my madam back and forth for some financial help. There was not one time she received my calls. We have sold most of our belongings just to buy my child's milk and baby food. I even sold my clothes to get some money when we had nothing to eat at home. I often went to get food from organizations that distributed free food. However, it was not possible every time as I was on bed rest for a long time."

Shanu and her husband used to bear the expenses of her mother, who lives in Netrokona. She added,

"At one point, it started feeling like there was no way out of the poverty. It felt like the sky shattered on our heads, and we will never be able to recover from this. My family and I have been struggling for a long time, and sudden lockdowns like this pushed us into a total destitute. I had not been able to provide for my mother since the lockdown started. As she could not have her medicines, she got sicker over time. In December 2021, we lost her. I feel like I killed my mother, even when I know there was nothing we could do."

Case Study 4

Participant's Name and Age: Mala (27 years)

Mala is a "Junior Beautician" working in a corporational beauty parlour in Gulshan-2, Dhaka. She has been living in Kalachandpur with her husband and three kids. During the first lockdown, she was pregnant with her third child. However, as she did not receive any salary, she could not even take the necessary medications and receive proper care during her pregnancy. Life became so difficult for her that she considered abortion an option. Luckily, her husband received some financial support from his family, and she could give birth to her child. Nevertheless, due to the forced negligence during her pregnancy, her child was born premature and needed medical attention. Due to her pregnancy, she was terminated from her workplace without prior notice. She was left with an immense financial burden with a premature child. Even though her child survived, he is still sick from the natal deficiencies. She said,

"I had lost my job without any prior notice. When the lockdown started, we were told that we would get our salaries when the beauty parlour re-opens. However, when they opened, I never got a call from them like my other colleagues did. Even after waiting for six months to get my salary, I lost my job. It is not just a salary for us; it is our livelihood, not just mine, but my family's. I was pregnant during the first lockdown; hence, I needed my salary to take care of the newborn. I told my madam that I was pregnant and asked for some financial support during the lockdown as I was not getting my salary. However, I had not received any help later; I was even fired, making my financial struggles worse."

As she was terminated with no prior notice, she started looking for jobs in other beauty parlours. However, since the majority of the beauty parlour industry was struggling due to no

revenue generation for six months, no one wanted to hire, especially junior beauty parlour workers. Mala mentioned,

"It was tough to get a job after the delivery. No one wanted to hire me as I was physically weaker than usual due to childbirth. Then I finally got a job where the pay was way less than I was receiving before. However, I had to settle for my children."

In her new workplace, she had been working overtime. However, she did not receive any payment for working extra hours till the end of 2021. With working overtime and a newborn baby with natal sickness, Mala struggled both personally and financially. There has been immense pressure on her to quit her job as a beauty parlour worker and work as a house-help. She mentioned,

"I have been struggling since the beginning of the pandemic. After my child's birth, I started looking for jobs. However, due to the pressure of working overtime, I immensely struggled with giving my newborn child proper care. On top of that, the financial vulnerability made it challenging to afford necessary food items and medicines for my child and me. Even after working overtime, when necessary, I have never financially struggled like this before. I go to work every day and do not have any holiday. Hence, I can barely give my family the time that they need. I feel like as I can barely support my family anymore, I have been facing too much pressure from my husband to quit the job and start working as a house-help. I hope I am in a better situation in the future, financially and personally. It feels like this pandemic has pushed us into constant sorrow and hurdles for a lifetime."

Case Study 5

Participant's Name and Age: Chandrima (27 years)

Chandrima works in a home-based beauty parlour located in Banani, Dhaka. She has been working as a beautician for six years. She used to work in a beauty parlour located in Chittagong at first. However, in 2019, she came to Dhaka with her mother and started a job in a home-based beauty parlour. Shortly after her joining, the lockdown was imposed. As a result, she stopped receiving her salary. However, during the second lockdown, the owner of her workplace used to provide the workers with a monthly allowance of 5000 BDT for necessities, which was not enough for Chandrima and her mother. Hence, her sick mother had to get a job as a sweeper in a local super-shop while she was looking for a way to earn money. Even though she got a job as a nanny, she was asked to leave due to the rapid nationwide spread of the virus. She mentioned during the interview,

"My mother and I have been doing everything to get by. During the lockdown, it became difficult just to provide food. My mother has severe chronic back pain. She had to work as a sweeper to earn money in that condition. I feel like a failure for letting my sick mother work. I could not even imagine affording her expensive medicines during those six months. Now that the beauty parlours have re-opened, I can take care of her again. However, the physical stress during those few months has worsened her condition. I hope she recovers soon."

After the first lockdown, when workplaces re-opened, Chandrima started to receive 80% of her monthly salary, making it a little difficult for her to afford all the necessities. With the financial burden from the first lockdown, she had to use a significant salary to pay off the loans she took from here and there. Nevertheless, as her workplace started to recover with more client

engagement, the owner started paying all the workers some bonuses for overtime. However, this lasted for a limited time as the second nationwide lockdown was imposed.

"We started struggling again during the second lockdown. Our salaries were cut off again. However, this time, our madam was kind enough to provide us with some allowance to get by. Since my mother worked with chronic back pain, she became ill during the second lockdown. As a result, she stopped working, and we had only 5000 BDT to spend every month. I had used up all my savings during the first lockdown. Hence, I had to take loans to buy my mother's medicines this time. For nearly six months, I was borrowing money from people. I tried to pay off the loans when the beauty parlours re-opened after the second lockdown. However, with the expense of costly medicines and prior loans, I am still financially struggling even after receiving my full salary. I hope to recover from these hurdles soon and get back to a normal life with my mother. "

Case Study 6

Participant's Name and Age: Chaya (30 years old)

Chaya has been working in a home-based beauty parlour for the last three years. Before the pandemic, her family income was 40,000 BDT per month, with her salary being 23,000 BDT. However, she stopped receiving her salary due to the nationwide imposed lockdown, just like many other beauty parlour workers. As a result, her family of four has been struggling since the pandemic's beginning. As her family income reduced drastically, her 16-year-old had to quit school and start working as a house-help. After the first lockdown was lifted, Chaya started receiving only 50% of her salary. As a result, a significant amount was spent paying off the debt she had taken during the first lockdown. Chaya mentioned,

"For months, I did not get paid, and when I did, it was half my usual salary. Due to the ongoing financial struggle for more than a year, my family and I had to take loans from many people to get by. When I started to receive 50% of my salary after the first lockdown, I had to spend that money to pay off the debt. Hence, my daughter had to keep working as a house-help to support all of us. I feel like what this one year did to my family and me, and it would take years to recover from this financial burden."

Chaya's daughter's education became an opportunity cost to the financial support Chaya received during the lockdowns. During the second lockdown, she received monthly allowances of 4000 BDT from her madam, yet her daughter had to continue working as a house-help to support her parents and siblings. As the second lockdown was lifted, Chaya started going to work again and receiving 80% of her monthly salary in 2021. From the beginning of 2022, she started receiving her full salary with overtime and holiday bonus payments. Chaya mentioned,

"My daughter became a saviour for our family during the crisis. It kills me that she had to forgo her education because of me. I feel like I have taken away her future. I hope she forgives me for this. Now that I have started working again, I thought I could ask her to resume her education. However, due to substantial financial debt, I do not think it is time yet. The pandemic has not only crushed our lives; it has shattered our dreams, especially my daughter's."

Chaya and her family seemed to struggle the least financially throughout the pandemic compared to the other respondents. Upon asking her how she plans to cope in the future, she mentioned,

"I do not want my daughter's life to be like mine. I want her to have a stable future where she does not need to worry about money, which can only come from a good education. I plan to enrol her in school very soon."

Appendix 3

Consent Form

(The form has been translated from Bengali to English)

Title of research study: **The Impact of COVID-19 on Beauty Parlour Workers**

Name of Researcher: Faiza Farah

Position: Student

University: BRAC University (Dhaka, Bangladesh)

Department: Department of Economics and Social Sciences

School: School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Please read this document carefully, your signature is required for participation. If you desire a copy of this consent form, you may request one and I will provide it.

This is a study regarding the impact of COVID-19 on beauty parlour workers. The aim of this study is to identify the challenges induced by COVID-19, and understand how the working conditions and living standard of beauty parlour workers have been impacted. To achieve the objectives of this study, I will ask you to give one on one interviews with me. You will be asked to provide your demographic profile, your opinions/feelings and knowledges.

I confirm that I have read and clear the aims, objectives of this study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

1. I agree to take part in the study.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
3. I give my consent to record the voices and notes.
4. I agree to the use of anonymized quotes in publications.

Name of participant: _____

Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Signature: _____