

COVID-19 Monitoring Survey in Poor and Slum Areas of Dhaka and Chittagong

Bangladesh Food Security and Coping Strategies from Round 1

JUNE 10 TO JULY 10, 2020



To track the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on labor markets and household coping strategies, a rapid phone survey was implemented on a representative sample of households living in poor and slum areas of Dhaka and Chittagong City Corporations (CCs). This brief, the second in the series, summarizes results from the first round of the rapid phone survey, conducted from June 10 to July 10, 2020 (see annex 1 for details of the survey design). This brief focuses on food security and coping strategies.¹ You can find the first brief in the series in this [link](#).

Main messages

Respondents in poor and slum areas of Dhaka and Chittagong CCs reported that key food items were available in markets, but at higher prices. The majority of respondents (95 percent) indicated that key food products – rice, lentils, eggs, and fish – were available during the week preceding the interview. However, two-thirds of respondents reported observing higher prices. Respondents in slum areas were more likely to report price increases for those four food items, with 67 percent reporting higher rice prices.

Across areas, food insecurity was high, particularly in Dhaka and in slum areas of the two cities. Half of households living in poor and slum areas of Dhaka and Chittagong CCs reported having at least one member eating smaller or fewer meals in the two weeks preceding the survey because there was not enough food. Households in Dhaka and slum areas in both cities were significantly more likely to report eating smaller or fewer meals. In slum areas, 26 percent of households reported having at least one member going to bed hungry, while 4 percent reported at least one member not eating for a whole day at least for a day during the past two weeks.

The high share of households renting their place of residence is an added source of vulnerability. Around 76 percent of households rented their place of residence. For renters, 57 percent reported being unable to pay their rent in the past month. Missed rent payments were significantly more common among tenants

in slums than those in non-slum areas (63 versus 43 percent of tenants). Similarly, Dhaka presented higher rates of missed payments.

Analysis suggests that those whose jobs were impacted by COVID-19 were more likely to report worse outcomes in terms of food security and ability to pay rent. Adults who stopped working due to COVID-19 were 11 percent more likely to report food insecurity.² Tenants who stopped work due to COVID-19 were 18 percent more likely to miss their rent payments and 7 percent more likely to report eviction or having fears of eviction.³

High food insecurity and missed rent payments among respondents reflect their limited availability of coping mechanisms and public and private assistance. About 31 percent of respondents responded that they would not be able to obtain BDT 25,000⁴ in cash in case of an emergency. Residents in slum areas and female respondents were more likely to report not having ways to obtain such emergency funds. Those who reported being able to obtain such funds received them from friends or relatives. This highlights the largely informal nature of insurance sources available to those households. In fact, only 2 percent of households reported that they received any type of assistance (cash or non-cash) in the past week.

¹ For more details see <https://worldbankgroup.sharepoint.com/sites/Poverty/Pages/SARDataLabBD-05112020-164923.aspx>.

² Conditional on area of residence, demographics, and previous occupation.

³ Conditional on area of residence, demographics, and previous occupation.

⁴ This amount corresponds to about twice the upper poverty line in Bangladesh. The poverty line measures the costs of a basic food and non-food basket.

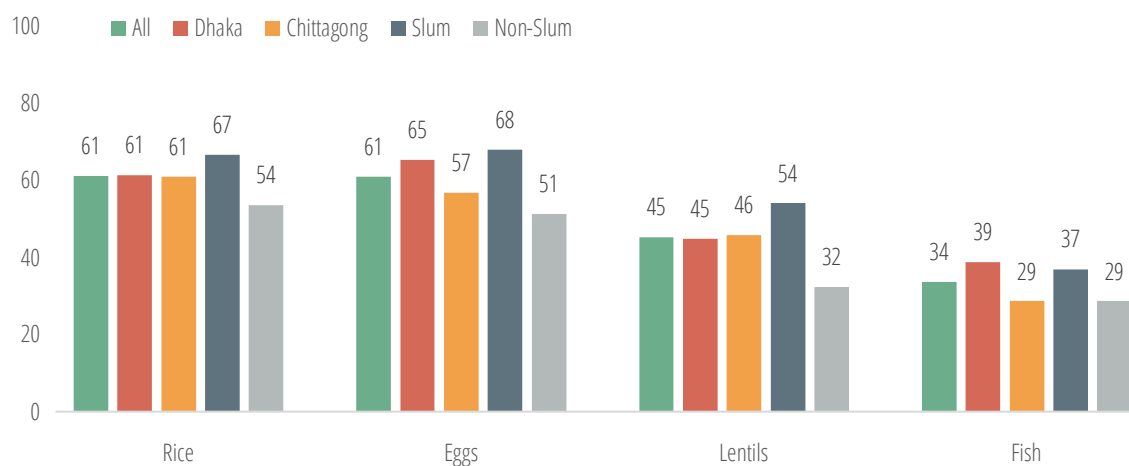
Findings

Respondents indicated that key food items were available in markets, but at higher prices. The majority of respondents (95 percent) indicated that key food products – rice, lentils, eggs, and fish – were available during the week preceding the interview. However, two-thirds of respondents observed higher prices: 61 percent reported higher rice and egg prices, 45 percent higher lentil prices, and 34 percent higher fish prices (figure 1). While respondents in Dhaka and Chittagong were equally likely to report increases in the prices of rice and lentils, Dhaka showed higher increases in the prices of fish and eggs. Overall, respondents in slum areas were more likely than those in non-slum areas to report price increases for the four food items surveyed. The price increases reported in the monitoring survey are consistent with inflation data from markets collected by the Department of Agricultural Marketing (DAM) for Dhaka and Chittagong divisions.⁵

was not enough food during the two weeks preceding the survey. Comparing geographically, Dhaka showed a higher percentage of households consuming fewer meals than Chittagong (53 versus 46 percent). Households in slum areas were significantly more likely than those in non-slum areas to report eating smaller or fewer meals, with the rate in slum areas higher by 14 percentage points (figure 2). Conditional on basic demographics and labor market characteristics, Dhaka residents were 10 percent more likely to report eating smaller meals, and residents of slum areas were 8 percent more likely to report eating smaller meals.

For households eating smaller meals, the degree of food insecurity varied. Fifteen percent of households reported just eating smaller meals, 9 percent eating smaller meals and not being able to buy any food, 22 percent going to bed hungry, and 3 percent spending 24 hours

Figure 1. Respondents reporting increases in prices by item and geographic area (%)



Across areas, self-reported food insecurity was high⁶, particularly in slums, where 3 in 10 households had members going to bed hungry or not eating for a whole day. Half of households reported having at least one member eating smaller or fewer meals because there

without eating. Again, Dhaka and slum areas across both cities presented higher shares of households reporting food insecurity. In slum areas, 26 percent of households had at least one member going to bed hungry and 4 percent at least one member not eating for a whole day at least for a day in the two weeks preceding the survey.

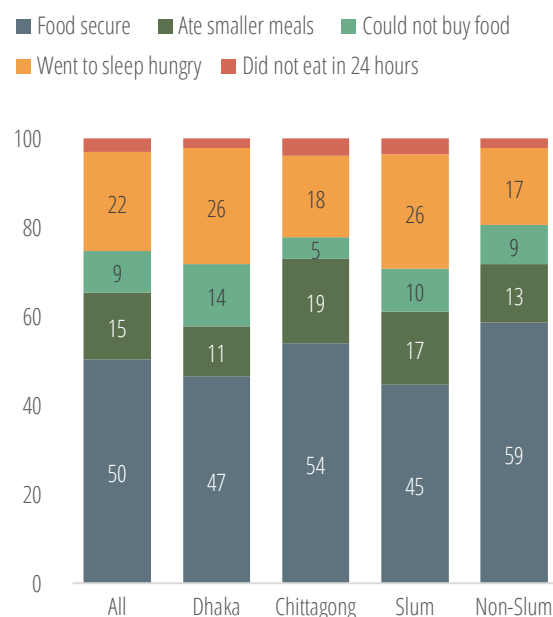
⁵ See [price monitoring dashboard from DAM](#).

⁶ Food security questions were collected following international standards based on self-assessments of current food security status in a recent recall period. The questionnaire focused on capturing moderate hunger (having to consume smaller or fewer meals than usual) and severe hunger (having no food at home, going to sleep hungry or going days without food). The recall period was two weeks.

Adults who stopped working due to COVID-19 were more likely to report food insecurity. Around 23 percent of adults living in poor and slum areas of Dhaka and Chittagong CCs stopped actively working between March 25

and the time of the interview (June 10–July 10, 2020), largely due to COVID-19 disruptions.⁷ Adults stopping work were 11 percent more likely to report eating smaller meals in their households, conditional on their area of residence, demographics, and their previous occupation. Since food security information was not collected at baseline before the COVID-19 crisis, we cannot attribute the high food insecurity levels to the ongoing crisis. Yet, the findings highlight substantial vulnerability and poverty in the areas surveyed and for those experiencing job losses.

Figure 2. Self-reported food insecurity in the two weeks preceding the interview (% of households)

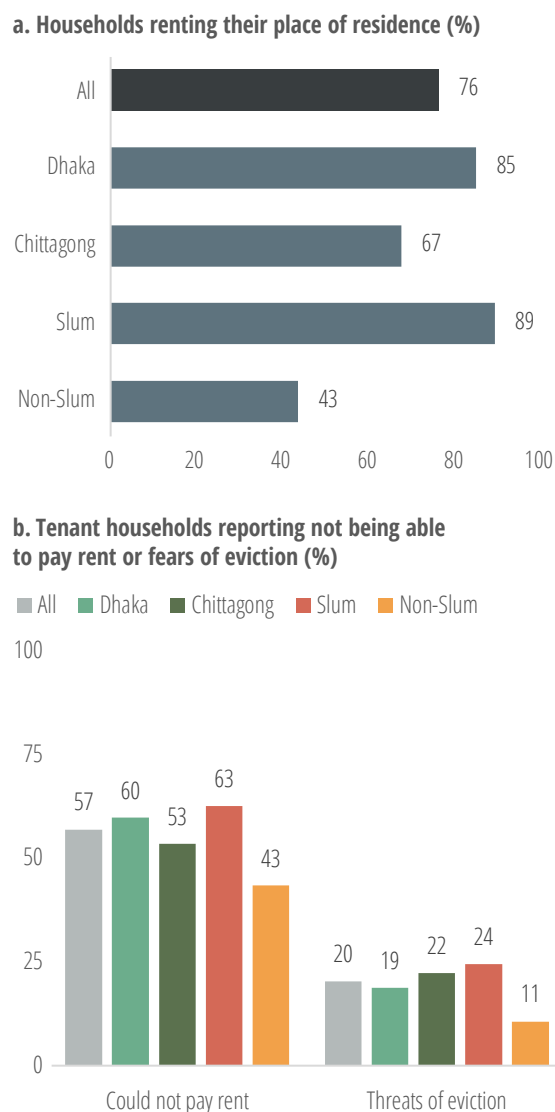


The high share of households renting their place of residence is an added source of vulnerability, especially in Dhaka, for slum residents in both cities, and for those who stopped working due to COVID-19. Around 76 percent of households rented their place of residence (figure 3). In slums, 9 in 10 households were renting, while in non-slum areas this was true for 6 in 10 households. Dhaka residents, both in slums and non-slum areas, were more likely to be tenants. Among those renting, 57 percent reported being unable to pay their rent in the month preceding

⁷ Actively working respondents are those who report working for income in any type of activity (formal or informal, full- or part-time) in a reference period. For more details see [Labor Market Brief](#).

the interview. Missed rent payments among tenants were significantly more common in slums than non-slum areas (63 versus 43 percent of tenants). Similarly, Dhaka presented higher rates of missed payments.⁸ The high share of tenants missing payments has translated into 2 in 10 cases reporting eviction or threats of eviction (1 in 4 cases for slums). In addition, tenants who stopped work due to COVID-19 were 18 percent more likely to miss their rent payments and 7 percent more likely to report eviction or fears of eviction, conditional on area of residence, demographics, and previous occupation.

Figure 3. Households renting and not able to afford rent



Note: Reference period is the month preceding the interview.

⁸ Comparisons are statistically significant.

High food insecurity and missed rent payments, particularly for those losing employment due to COVID-19, reflect their limited availability of coping mechanisms and public and private assistance About 31 percent of respondents affirmed that in case of an emergency that would require paying BDT 25,000 in cash, they would not be able to obtain those resources (figure 4).⁹ Residents in slum areas were significantly more likely to report not having ways to obtain emergency funds, 38 percent compared to 21 percent of non-slum residents. In addition, female respondents were less likely than men to report having options to obtain emergency cash (23 versus 42 percent, respectively). For those who reported being able to obtain the emergency cash, the most frequently mentioned sources were friends or relatives (without interest),

followed by friends or relatives (with interest) (table 1). This highlights the largely informal nature of insurance available to households. In fact, only 2 percent of households reported receiving any type of assistance (cash or non-cash) in the week preceding the interview.

Figure 4. Percentage of respondents unable to obtain BDT 25,000 in cash in an emergency

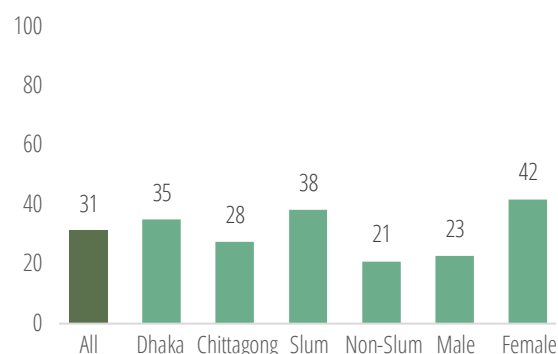


Table 1. Sources of emergency funding (% of adults).

	All	Dhaka	Chittagong	Slum	Non-Slum	Male	Female
Relatives/friends, without interest	39	38	40	36	44	47	29
Relatives/friends, with interest	19	23	14	19	19	20	17
NGO/CBO loan	13	14	12	13	12	16	9
Selling assets	10	9	11	7	14	17	1
Informal money lender	8	8	8	8	7	12	2
Own cash savings	5	6	5	4	7	5	5

Note: Based on a hypothetical question where respondents are asked to assume that they needed BDT 25,000 in cash for an emergency expense right now. Multiple options are allowed, so percentages do not add to 100 percent.

⁹ The BDT 25,000 amount corresponds to about twice the upper poverty line in Bangladesh. The poverty line measures the costs of a basic food and non-food basket.

ANNEX 1.
Survey
Details

The monitoring survey built on baseline surveys conducted before the COVID-19 crisis. The monitoring survey sample for Dhaka is a follow-up of the DIGNITY (Dhaka low Income area GeNder, Inclusion, and poverTY) survey, which was representative of low-income areas and slums of the Dhaka City Corporations and an additional low-income site from the Greater Dhaka Statistical Metropolitan Area, following a two-stage stratification design. The primary sampling units were selected during the first stage using probability proportional to size (PPS), stratified by the poverty headcount ratio estimated using small-area techniques. All the households in the selected enumeration areas were listed during the second stage, from which 20 households were selected for interviewing based on demographic stratification. The second level of stratification was defined as follows: (i) households with both working-age male and female members; (ii) households with only a working-age female; (iii) households with only a working-age male. Households were randomly selected from each stratum with the predetermined ratio of 16:3:1.¹⁰ The DIGNITY survey, administered between July and September 2018, collected information from 2,376 individuals across 1,302 households.

The monitoring survey in Chittagong is a follow-up of the CITY (Chittagong Low Income Area Inclusion, and PoverTY) survey carried out in Chittagong City Corporation following

¹⁰ Kotikula, A.; Hill, R.; Raza, WA (2019). What Works for Working Women? Understanding Female Labor Force Participation in Urban Bangladesh. Report. Washington, DC: World Bank.

the same sampling strategy as in the DIGNITY survey. Data was collected from 1,289 individuals across 805 households between September and October 2019.

For the monitoring survey, a representative sub-sample of 1,500 households out of a total 2,107 baseline households was targeted. The recontact rate was 1,483 households (99.5 percent). In this first tracking survey, 1,483 out of the 3,665 adults surveyed in baseline were covered. It is important to note that, at the moment of the follow-up, 2.3 percent of adults had moved residence from their baseline location. The analysis includes those adults even though they are currently located outside the City Corporations. Given the small share of the sample that moved, the results are not affected.

Table A1 presents some descriptive characteristics by area and gender. The adults interviewed were 35 years old on average, and 45 percent of them were female. Approximately 57 percent of the adults interviewed were the main breadwinner of households with an average household size of four people. On average, 1.4 household members generate income. Respondents from Dhaka are more likely to be living in slum areas than those located in Chittagong (70 versus 52 percent, respectively). Chittagong households are larger (0.4 members more on average) and therefore show higher dependency ratios. Fifty percent of slum residents are women, on average, contrasting with a lower percentage in other areas (40 percent).

Table A1. Descriptive characteristics of adults living in poor and slum areas of Dhaka and Chittagong

	All	Dhaka	Chittagong	Slum	Non- Slum	Male	Female
Female (%)	44.8	45.3	44.2	48.7	39.4		
Age (mean)	35.0	35.1	34.8	34.7	35.6	37.1	32.5
Breadwinner (%)	57.4	58.7	56.2	56.9	57.6	92.1	14.7
Household members (#)	4.3	4.1	4.5	4.2	4.4	4.2	4.3
Members who contribute to HH earnings (#)	1.41	1.43	1.38	1.44	1.36	1.43	1.39
Slum (%)	61.1	70.4	52.0			57.0	65.9
Dependency ratio (Members 15-64/Members <15 and 65+)	0.59	0.57	0.61	0.60	0.57	0.55	0.63
Observations	1483	836	647	951	493	770	713

Note: Information from Round 1 collected between June 10 and July 10, 2020. Figures are weighted.