

The Rise of Specific Crime Waves during the Pandemic and the Challenges Tackled By the Law Enforcement Agency of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Though the main focus was on the health sector and its enacted policies, the crime situation of our society which can also be portrayed as the health of our society was strategically managed by our law enforcement agency. The covid-19 pandemic has had a monumental impact on the contemporary criminal tendency over the whole world. As the majority was relocating from the metropolitan areas and for a lack of a capable guardian, several specific crime patterns were recognized along with some unique crime techniques. In this precarious situation of society, our Law Enforcement Agency officers on the ground had to take integrated patrolling measures for stabilizing the situation. The key purpose of our Research is to focus on the Crime Patterns during COVID and the future aspects of this context. This research will have a strong emphasis on the Crime Prevention Strategy implemented by our Law Enforcement guardians during the outbreak and the future approaches which may be followed for improved Crime Prevention and the restoration of society. Strain theory and Opportunity theory have a major focus on this study for understanding the shifting crime pattern. The Qualitative Research approach is utilized for acquiring data through Content Analysis and Interviewing our Law Enforcement Authorities. Through the Research, extra pressure was observed on Law Enforcement Agency members for Preventing crime and assuring that citizens follow health rules; in order to execute both duties, they had to endure extra duty hours, health risks, family pressure, and being introduced to Advanced Prevention Methods.

Keywords: Pandemic, Crime patrolling, Crime Pattern.

Background

COVID-19, a contagious respiratory illness that originated in Wuhan, a city consisting over 11 million people in China's Hubei region, has revolutionized the structure of our social lives (WHO, 2020). The Corona Virus Resource Center at John Hopkins University of Medicine reported

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260,247,181 confirmed cases and 5,186,088 fatalities globally as of November 30, 2021.¹ After the first case was officially confirmed on March 8, 2020, Bangladesh implemented a thorough lockdown on March 26, 2020, in accordance with WHO directives. After more than two months of restrictions, the Bangladesh government had finally lifted the COVID-19 General Holiday (lockdown) order from May 31, 2020. (Bangladesh Government 2020). While the lockdown order's main purpose was to contain the epidemic, it has the potential to have a significant impact on various socioeconomic factors, which, along with slowing economic development, might lead to an increase in criminal activity. (Cohen and Felson 1977).

The stay-at-home order limited people's movement, attempting to confine them to their homes; as a result, crimes like burglary were meant to diminish (Campedelli et al. 2020). On the other side, when work and education went online, new sorts of crimes emerged, such as cybercrime (Lallie et al. 2020). Scholars anticipated that movement limitations would lead to an increase in violent crimes including domestic violence and intimate partner violence, while robbery, theft, and serious assaults would decrease (Bullinger et al. 2020; Pearson 2020).

Amy Nivette and Manuel Eisner conducted interrupted time series analysis to examine daily counts of crime in 27 cities throughout America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. The number of daily offenses fell in the weeks following the adoption of lockdowns, according to their data. The total decrease in daily crime was -37 percent on average throughout the cities studied. There were, however, differences in crime categories and cities. Theft (-47%) and robbery (-46%) were the most common crimes on the streets, although the number of killings decreased significantly less (-14 percent). Amy Nivette and Manuel Eisner found that communities with strict stay-at-home orders had lower rates of street crime than areas with less prohibitions on public life. For example, in Stockholm, Sweden, where stay-at-home restrictions were minimal to non-existent, everyday crime decreased by 13% on average. In Lima, Peru, which had one of the most severe stay-at-home restrictions in the study, the daily frequency of street crimes fell by 78 percent on average in the weeks after the lockdown.

Objectives/ Research Question:

The lack of research on the implications of the COVID-19 lockdown on crime patterns in developing countries created an additional knowledge deficit. This research aims to eliminate the knowledge gap by examining crime rates in Bangladesh during and after the official lockdown imposed by COVID-19.

¹ Please visit <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>, for update.

- I. To focus on the crime patterns during COVID which has not been identified in the pre-COVID world.
- II. To focus on the motivational mechanisms which inspired non-violent people to indulge in crime during the situation.
- III. To get enlightened about the challenges the Law Enforcement Agency members had to face and their adopted strategies for tackling the challenges.
- IV. To suggest future crime prevention mechanisms during an emergency situation.

Theoretical framework

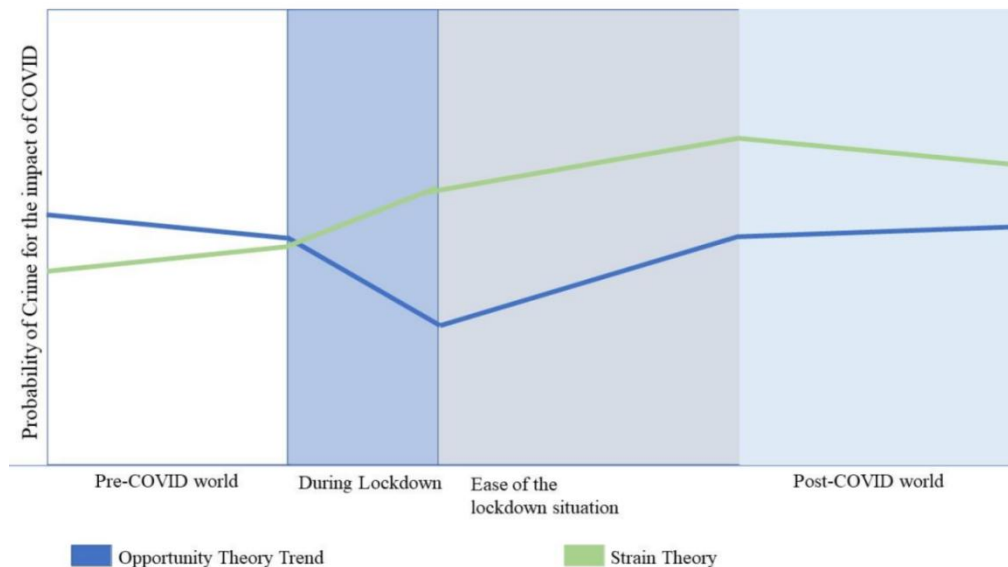
Many individuals in Bangladesh have lost their jobs as a result of the outbreak.² Many daily wage earners, who have been disproportionately affected by the epidemic, are becoming interested in criminal activities, according to experts, and since educational institutions have been closed for such a long time, young people were becoming more active in breaking laws (Amit Kumar, 2021)

Strong (1990) noted how epidemics might be described as an *"exceptional emotional maelstrom that causes plagues of fear, panic, distrust, and stigma."* Lockdown presented a rare opportunity to test the validity of 'Opportunity theory'. In criminology, the term 'opportunity' is related with the anomic hypothesis that the limited socioeconomic opportunities available to working-class drive illicit solutions to problems associated with attaining wealth and status (Merton, 1957; Cloward & Ohlin, 1961). When paired with preexisting conditions like as the prevalence of organized crime and gang violence, which differs by country, lockdown limitations may have a short-term influence on crime. When economic and social safety nets fail to safeguard lives by addressing organizational bankruptcies, the ensuing unemployment, and income loss, crime, particularly opportunistic and profit-driven crime, may increase.

The impact on crime in the short and long term can be explored using criminological concepts such as opportunity theory and strain theory. These models predict two distinct crime trends: According to opportunity theory, lockdown initiatives have had the capability to minimize the likelihood of criminal offenses being committed by limiting movement and social contact; According to strain theory, socioeconomic pressures that affect a wide proportion of the community, particularly the most vulnerable, have the ability to create a pressure environment that pushes people to conduct violent acts.

² According to ILO data, 44.3 percent of individuals aged 15 and over in Bangladesh were unemployed in 2020, up from 40.9 percent in 2019.

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Contrary to opportunity theory, strain is likely to arise long after lockdowns are implemented, because people will be badly impacted mostly by lockdown's poor economic circumstances and may begin to lose trust in government efforts to manage the pandemic. For describing the above graph, during the lockdown, the crime may seem to start decreasing according to the opportunity theory, as there will be a smaller number of victims on the streets, and then again with the ease of the lockdown situation, the probability of opportunity will start going back to the previous trend. On the contrary, due to the continual socioeconomic collapse, many individuals will struggle to live a quality life even after the lockdown is lifted, as the impact of the strain will last for a long time, perhaps it may influence many people to commit crimes.

Methodology

Using the qualitative Research Approach, content analysis from internet news sources was utilized to explore the worldwide picture of crime trends during the Pandemic crisis, with a specific focus on crime data in Bangladesh during the COVID situation. Five law enforcement officials were interviewed in order to learn more about the primary issues they faced during the lockdown and the aftermath.

Key findings and discussions

Understanding the world scenario

The Covid-19 epidemic shook traditional criminal patterns with reversion (Boserup et al., 2020). During the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic, new forms of criminal behavior developed, and the conventional ones were revitalized. Media outlets all over the world have been screaming about the possible surge in various crimes, mostly related to coronavirus.

Shayegh and Malpede (2020) had used econometric time-series data analysis to evaluate the influence of imposed lockdown regulations in San Francisco and Oakland, finding a 40% decrease in crime across both cities but no decrease in domestic violence was found. Intense lockdowns have resulted in some unexpected effects in a number of nations. For example, cities in South Africa had fewer deaths during the first few weeks of lockdown than at any other period in recent history. Murder rates fell by 72 percent, rape rates fell by 87 percent, and assault rates fell by 85 percent. Carjacking and robbery were also down by roughly 80% and 60%, respectively (Aljazeera, 2020).

According to first information report statistics from Bihar, India, the COVID-19 lockdown reduced overall crime by 44% (Poblete-Cazenave 2020). In Pakistan, homicide, kidnappings for ransom, bank robberies, and drug-related crime all decreased in the weeks after the lockdown (Waseem, 2020).

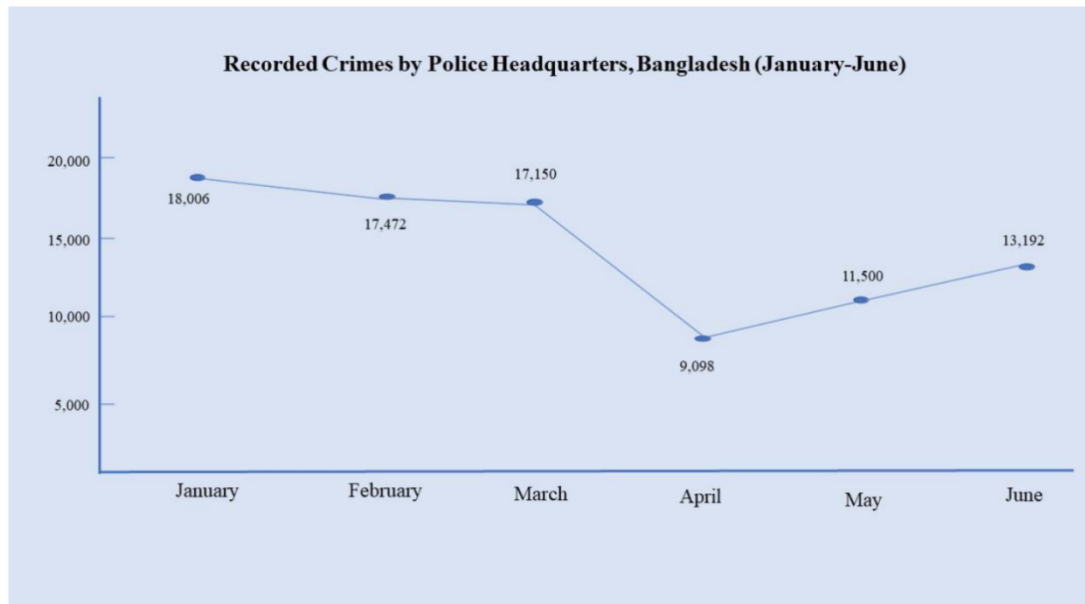
From the Eyes of Bangladesh

Newspaper stories abounded with predictions and reports regarding the pandemic's impact on crime all throughout the world shortly after the first lockdown was enforced. Many publications predicted a sharp reduction in street crime, but others predicted an increase in commercial property burglaries and domestic violence (Rashid, 2021).

The coronavirus pandemic has placed one out of every six employees globally unemployed, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO). Bangladesh's situation was predicted to be dreadful, with one out of every four people losing their work. This was predicted to happen as a result of a significant spike in crime throughout the country, notably in the capital. As per the records from Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), there were 18 homicides in April of 2020, up from seven in March and twelve in February. These atrocities were carried out by family members. Experts believe that such killings are caused by stress, frustration, and dissatisfaction during coronavirus epidemics.

DMP Deputy Commissioner (Media) Masudur Rahman stated *"I believe this is the first-time following independence that crime is this low"*. Nevertheless, one-third of the cases filed with 660 police stations in June had drug-related offenses through the end of July 2020. In current history, there has been an increase in occurrences of violence against women, rape, and other domestic crimes (The Financial Express, 2020). In January 2020, 18,006 incidents were reported at police stations around the nation, followed by 17,472 in February, 17,150 in March, 9,098 in April, 11,500 in May, and 13,192 in June, according to the Police Headquarters.

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Decreasing crime trend during lockdown and again upward trend after the ease of lockdown

According to Zia Rahman, Professor of Criminology Department, University of Dhaka, the involvement of jobless people in crime during a pandemic was compatible with traditional criminological concepts. *"We already know that unemployed individuals are more likely to commit crimes. When a source of income is removed, petty crimes such as theft, snatching, and robbery becomes more prevalent in society."* According to Abdul Latif, the OC of the Mohammadpur Police Station, *"There were fewer people on the streets during the Lockdown. Almost everyone was compelled to stay at home. The crime rate improved as a result of this."*

Case study of Khulna

The rate of crime in Khulna increased from April to July 2020 when the lockdown was eased. While criminal conduct decreased significantly following the countywide lockdown imposed on March 26, 2020, the growing number of criminal cases in the district's eight police stations plainly shows a rising trend. In the previous four months, there were approximately 327 complaints filed by eight police stations. In April, 21 cases were filed, according to KMP sources, with seven drug-related offenses being registered. In May, however, 41 charges were filed, comprising four rape cases and five drug-related instances. In June, the number of cases reported increased to 73, with two murders, one rape, and 51 drug-related cases mentioned. In July, the numbers have increased even further, with two murders, three rapes, and 159 drug cases reported, the highest number of instances in the district since the Covid-19 epidemic hit (Hossain, 2020).

Increase in the Crime Patterns

Property crime

When there are fewer people on the streets, there are fewer witnesses in the instance of a crime, making it more difficult to find the perpetrators. Theft has also grown as a result of the lockdown, as stores, companies, and other organizations have stayed closed. Though the reduction in the number of complaints of criminal activity does not always imply that they did not occur.

Three armed robbers wearing masks and helmets raided the Uthali branch of Sonali Bank in Chuadanga in a heist on September 15, 2020. They kidnapped the bank manager and others and stole roughly Tk 900,000.³

Health sector corruption

According to a Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) report, Governance Challenges in Tackling Corona Virus, the coronavirus pandemic has uncovered extensive corruption in the Bangladesh health system and the crisis has also provided new probabilities for corruption in the country.

Regent Hospital supplied forged coronavirus test results, while JKG dumped the coronavirus sample collection down the drains. JKG then notified them at random whether they had tested positive or negative.⁴

Irregularities and corruption have eroded public faith in the health sector and the difficulties in completing laboratory testing, delivering healthcare services, and distributing help to financially impacted people continued through a long time. According to police authorities, people started committing fraud by distributing low-quality personal protective equipment (PPE) and lower quality masks to those living in panic under the name of N95 masks. They went on to say that rumors were being propagated in various ways with incorrect information, and that some persons had been jailed for disseminating false information about the coronavirus.

Cyber Crime

Because educational institutions had been forced to close for an extended period of time, juvenile delinquency had become a source of concern. In

³ No one was able to tell the bike registration number of the robbers and the bank also didn't have any CCTV footage for which the law enforcement agency was not able to catch the robbers afterwards.

⁴ After Covid-procurement and other health-sector irregularities were discovered by the media and other sources from March 2020, the Anti-Corruption Commission had launched several inquiries: the N-95 mask scandal, Covid test forgery and several fund embezzlement occurrences are some of the cases.

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this epidemic, there have been allegations of people utilizing the internet to perpetrate different crimes. According to Najmul Islam, DMP's Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC), Cybercrime has surged dramatically because to the increasing use of internet during the epidemic. *"We received 15-20 complaints of cybercrime every day,"*

In 2019, Bangladesh's only Cyber Tribunal in Dhaka reviewed 721 cases. Between January and March of this year, the tribunal had received 111 complaints before it stopped operating in April due to the Covid-19 outbreak. The registrar of the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court stated that, 108 more cybercrime incidents were reported with various police stations around Dhaka between April and June.

Violence against women

Staying home during the present Covid-19 outbreak has reduced many forms of crime, but it has proved no effect in reducing violence against women (Rashid, 20221). The current wave of rapes in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak has generated great outrage in Bangladesh. According to figures obtained by the human rights group Ain o Salish Kendra from various media sources, 632 rape assaults occurred between April and August of this year.

According to data obtained by the police headquarters depending on complaints submitted at various police stations around the country, 6,555 rape incidences occurred in 2020. That equates to an average of 17 rapes every day in the country. There were 5,872 rape cases in the prior year, 2019.

Gender-based violence has increased in Bangladesh as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 epidemic, according to a BRAC report, with its Legal Aid Services receiving more than 25,000 complains in the first ten months of 2020. PolliShomaj, which is operating in 54 of the country's 64 districts and works in the purpose to prevent violence and empower women exercise their rights, reported a 219 percent rise of child marriages stopped in the third quarter of 2020 compared to the same time in 2019.

Changing Crime Patterns

Pandemics and other societal catastrophes not only generate unique combination of illegal behavior, but they also revive and alter the significance of earlier methods. Strong (1990, p. 255) For most of history, wars, for example, have driven 'criminals' who have utilized the prospect of changing or modifying their socioeconomic status (Basra and Neumann, 2016).

The obligation to wear a mask to avoid infection has proven to be a bonanza for criminals, since it allows them to efficiently cover their identities while committing crimes. To discover the culprits in a theft case, investigators had to overcome several obstacles.

- Monwara Medical Hall, a pharmaceutical business in Jatrabari's Mirhazaribag, was robbed of Tk 300,000 worth of products on May 3. Two masked individuals were seen invading the business and placing the stolen pharmaceutical boxes into a private vehicle, according to video footage. *"It's a little difficult to identify them since they were wearing masks"* Jatarabari Police OC Mazharul Islam remarked.⁵
- In another occurrence on May 16, a mugger on a motorbike snatched Tk 182,000 from a rickshaw rider in Bakshibazar. Three people wearing masks were spotted on CC camera footage in the area, but police were no closer to making an arrest following an investigation.⁶

According to police officials, common citizens are using masks and covers to shield themselves from the virus and lawbreakers are now taking full advantage of the cultural shift.

Police Pressure and Crime Control Mechanism during COVID

During the 65-day countrywide lockdown, a COVID-19 reaction team, made up of law enforcement organizations, was heavily involved in investigating and managing the issue. Police had to go to the front lines to execute the lockdown.

Performed duties

Law enforcement agencies in Bangladesh persisted the most vulnerable to receiving the novel coronavirus while operating in the field to assure people's safety regardless of the lack of sufficient safety equipment, according to all of the respondents of the study.

"Furthermore, police have been associated with disinfecting streets, assisting working people- to maintain social distance during the lockdown- needed to transport people to hospitals for treatment, and tracking down people who had escaped quarantine, leaving us highly vulnerable to the virus because we were not equipped with all necessary safety equipment."

Crime tackling challenges in the COVID-world

⁵ In virus-hit Bangladesh, masked criminals add to woes of police. (2020, June 9). bdnews24.com. <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2020/06/09/in-virus-hit-bangladesh-masked-criminals-add-to-woes-of-police>

⁶ Ibid

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One respondent mentioned the convenience of having empty streets in the objective of the patrolling system. *"There are fewer criminals on the streets because there are fewer victims. Furthermore, due to a lack of public transportation, police can go anywhere in a short period of time."* Another Respondent mentioned about the difficulty of recognizing a thief for wearing a mask *"In majority of our cases reported, the victims cannot even specify how the culprit looked like therefore, it becomes a bit challenging for us to really locate them"*

Another Respondent spoke about the challenge of not recognizing the culprit while obtaining CCTV footages, *"I have all the proof of the crime occurring, but since the perpetrator was wearing a mask and a helmet, it takes a bit longer to discover them if the criminals adopt various disguises."* Another responder expressed his similar opinions, *"It is not difficult to arrest a criminal who is wearing a mask, but it makes the process more difficult."*

Causes of stress in police may be categorized into two major groups (Shane, 2010): those resulting from "job-content" that include daily schedule, work hours, high workload, judicial work and traumatic incidents and potential dangers to bodily and psychological health; and those caused by "job context" sometimes referred to as organizational pressures, which involves the aspects of an organizational and behavioral pattern that generate stress (e.g., bureaucracy and co-worker interactions)

The primary sources of stress for police officers, according to respondents, was public criticism of their performance. *"We used to stay on duty for 24 hours, but when I went on social media at the end of the day, we saw a lot of negative comments from the public,"* one of the respondents explained. Same opinion shared by another respondent *"We had to conduct field responsibilities for tackling the general public and we had to ensure that the people were wearing masks. We didn't do it for ourselves, we did it for people, but we had to hear a lot of unpleasant comments from them."* One of the respondents claimed while conducting a health security duty *"In our police station, we had the task of searching for two suspected COVID positive patients who had run away from quarantine. This was a lot of work, and we had also put ourselves and our family at risk."*

Most frequently reported crimes during COVID

Most respondents mentioned cyber-crime occurrences when asked about the most often reported crimes during the COVID situation. *"We had to keep track of cybercrime complaints from our online helpline service on a regular basis. When we got any such complaint, we referred the victims to the cybercrime tribunal"* one of them said. Another respondent linked the issue of enjoying free time to the fact that *"Educational institutions*

and workplaces were closed, which led some individuals to contribute their time in illegitimate use of the internet."

When questioned about domestic violence issues, as a high spike of such breaches was outlined in the literature review, most of them said- Amongst all of the cases reported, domestic related violence incidents were the lowest, but they assumed those cases were under-reported, but they shared suggestions about having a helpline where victims might call for support and they would respond according to the call.

Another respondent expressed his thoughts on the most complicated issue, saying, *"It was not within our capabilities to avoid the occurrences that happened within the four walls. Because violent crimes have been moving indoors, we have only been able to take action after the offense has been reported. It's not like patrolling the streets."*

Health insecurity

"We have been on the front lines to halt the epidemic of the novel coronavirus throughout the nation" one respondent remarked when asked about their health concerns. *"However, the only Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) we've received from the government is raincoats and basic face masks. In actuality, officers without coronavirus symptoms were not supplied with personal protective equipment and must had to purchase their own, such as face masks and gloves. Those allocated to the coronavirus team for emergency service, such as transporting patients to hospitals or dead corpses for funerals, have only been given one pair of PPEs, what's more concerning is that we have to reuse those PPEs after washing them, despite the fact that PPEs are no longer protective after a single usage"* says the Respondent.

Bangladesh's police force has over 200,000 members, according to ProthomAlo daily, and most of them live in police headquarters in districts where 8 to 12 members share a single room, increasing the danger of viral transmission if one of them becomes infected. *"It is practically difficult for police to maintain social distancing while doing their responsibilities since citizens were not yet conscious enough to maintain the appropriate distance rather they used to wander in local marketplaces, and police were most often contaminated with COVID-19 from such circumstances."* Another respondent shared about his own covid survival story, *"I have been infected previously, but I have no idea from where I might have been infected, as we law enforcement officials always used to maintain the health rules but the fact that we always had to work in crowded places, me and many of my co-workers have been infected"*

Crime prevention strategy (monitoring)

The Respondents shared about their adopted strategies, *“We had the orders of maintaining check-posts in all the important parts of the city, so whenever we used to find any civilian not maintaining health guidelines, we used to impose a fine on them so that the other civilians can be aware about maintaining the guidelines properly”* Another Respondent expressed the drawback of the law enforcement agency for not being able to monitor in the small roads of the city for the lack of manpower, *“During the time of May-August, 2020, more than 50% officers of my police station had been covid positive, so the whole pressure was on some of us, we then focused on the main parts of the city for the lack of manpower”*

Though all the Respondent police officers were from Dhaka but one of them shared about the patrolling techniques in the rural area, *“We who were doing our duties in the urban areas, we could somehow manage because of having specialized branches but as we know that most of the COVID positive people who came from outside the country resided outside Dhaka, and also for the lack of awareness in the rural area people, it was much dire on the Police staffs who have been performing their duties.”*

Future strategy

The Government of Bangladesh initiated an endeavor to enhance allowance for police officers. The allowances, which included a special allowance referred to as risk allowance, as well as other monthly allowances such as (Unconditional conveyance allowance, Telecom allowance, Motorcycle allowances) will significantly assist about two lakh Law Enforcement officers ranging from Constable to ASP. On March 16, this year, the Ministry of Finance published a Gazette to increase the allowances of Police forces, recognizing the crucial function that police officers perform in promoting the security of people and property (GovtHikes Allowances for Cops, 2020).

All the respondents of this study shared about the sudden challenge which they had to face because of the pandemic situation. *“We as the law enforcement officers always have to handle extra work load but the in this pandemic situation, it was totally different. Assuring social distancing of the general people and also handling the daily crime issues was something very challenging”* From the learnings of COVID situation the respondents have suggested about some future strategies, which can be adopted in an emergency situation if arises-

- Focusing on the health safety of the Law Enforcement officers by providing appropriate number of PPEs, masks or other necessary

tools. If the Health safety issues are not focused properly the officers do not stay motivated to perform their duties.

- During such homebound situation, where the whole world has switched online but the crime reporting system remained in the traditional method, it had increased chances of under reporting incidents. Similar to the online helpline number 999, online crime reporting platforms can be introduced so that we can have the exact picture of the crime patterns.
- As there have been a high number of reported cybercrime incidents, Bangladesh police has modern technological mechanism for finding the culprit but the respondents have claimed about having very few numbers of cybercrime experts in the agency, increasing technological manpower could have made the situation easier.
- Generate a backup plan for manpower constraints. Not involving the same officials in diverse activities like patrolling crime and ensuring health measures of the general people at the same time. Rather, we have to prepare our law enforcement agency in terms of making different specialized branches, which can play their role in any emergency state of the country.

Conclusion

Natural catastrophes have shown to be amplifiers of change, whether good or evil, throughout social beings, effectively altering the status quo and bringing rise to multiple revolutions (Patel, 2020; Witte, 2020). This whole transformation nevertheless takes a considerable amount of valuable human lives, families being sheared apart and extreme psychological suffering (Silver, 2020). The epidemiological psychology underlying pandemics produces an ambiance of anxiety and terror that can accelerate proposed laws and enable criminogenic interpretive engagement.

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