

Undergraduate students' career perceptions due to pandemic: A study from Bangladesh

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| Article Info | Abstract |
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| <p>Research Article</p> <p>Received: 14 April 2024 Revised: 26 June 2024 Accepted: 29 June 2024</p> <p>Keywords: Bangladesh, Career, Covid-19, Job security, Undergraduate students</p> | <p>This study examined how the Covid-19 outbreak affected Bangladeshi undergraduates' career planning. The primary purpose of this qualitative study was met by 15 in-depth interviews, four key informant interviews (KIIs), one Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and illustrated case studies. During the Covid-19 outbreak in Bangladesh, many undergraduates worried about job security. Many undergraduates considered government professions the safest and most prepared for them. Another group prepared for higher education overseas and settled in a developed country. The study emphasizes the need for crisis-related professional development policies. Global emergencies affect career planning. This analysis will help stakeholders develop solutions.</p> |

1. Introduction

In December 2019, a novel coronavirus disease with symptoms like the flu was identified in Wuhan, China (Cuiyan et al., 2020). Thus, Wuhan played a pivotal role as the initial epicenter of the disease (Velavan & Meyer, 2020). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the disease exhibited a rapid rate of transmission not only within China but also across numerous other countries (Gilbert et al., 2020). Consequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced on 11 March 2020 that the ongoing outbreak of the novel coronavirus was a pandemic and a global public health emergency. This outbreak has led to the emergence of an epidemic called COVID-19 (Bahar & İlal, 2020; Canlı & Canlı, 2020). Bangladesh officially documented its initial verified instance of Covid-19 on 8 March 2020. The nation formally reported its inaugural fatality caused by COVID-19 on 18 March (Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research., 2020). To mitigate the spread of the virus within the community, the governing body implemented a comprehensive strategy known as a nationwide lockdown. This measure involved the imposition of stringent restrictions on inter-district movement, the temporary suspension of economic activities except essential services, and the complete cessation of all social gatherings. The implementation of these measures commenced on 26 March 2020. Like other countries, Bangladesh enforced the temporary shutdown of educational institutions as a measure to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 (Anwar et al., 2020).

The prolonged closure of educational institutions has significantly disrupted the established academic routines, resulting in financial hardships for families, limited personal space within residences, heightened risk of infection among family members, and reduced employment stability. These combined effects have consequently led to a diverse array of psychological consequences among students impacting their mental and physical health (Cao et

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al., 2020; A. B. Siddik et al., 2023, 2024; M. A. B. Siddik et al., 2023). Since the outbreak began, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a significant displacement workforce in Bangladesh. As the educational institutions remained closed for more than one and a half years, students faced severe mental health problems related to the uncertainty created by the pandemic in their careers (Alam et al., 2022a). Eventually, Covid-19 has significantly impacted the changes in undergraduate students' career choices in Bangladesh.

The major shift in career choice stems from the generation of mental anxiety during the pandemic lockdown periods. Covid-19 also caused severe mental stress among university students in Bangladesh. A recent study (Islam et al., 2020) reveals that the primary causes of human stress have been recognized as disrupting scheduled educational plans and future employment opportunities, as well as financial challenges. Moreover, another study from (Ela et al., 2021) reveals that the extended shutdown is to blame for the senior students' delayed graduation, causing them mental stress and frustration. Another study (Chinna et al., 2021) also explored that 21.9 percent and 13.7% of the students in this study had mild to moderate anxiety and severe to great anxiety, respectively, based on a sample of 3,679 students from seven different nations. Compared to less than 10% of students from Indonesia, Malaysia, and India, more than 20% of students from China and Bangladesh expressed severe to intense anxiety. Over 83 percent of individuals are experiencing mental stress because of Covid-19, which manifests as irritability, insomnia, and household instability. The association between human stress variables and discovered financial difficulties, daily expenditure reductions, and food crises all contribute to stress (Demir et al., 2021).

Additionally, interfering with students' formal education and future professional ambitions contributes significantly to mental stress (Amit et al., 2021). Moreover, another study (Alam et al., 2022) exposes that having family members infected with the coronavirus, experiencing insecurity, using social media, and smoking habits all contributed to students' mental health imbalances; in contrast, being concerned about studying, the future career, spending more time with family members, and participating in household chores all contributed to students' mental health imbalances.

Present undergraduate students are considered the skilled labor force of a nation. Any shift in their career choice has a significant impact on the labor market as well as the human resource development of the nation. Since the pandemic has stopped the everyday academic life of the students, their career thoughts and plans of the students are likely to be changed (Demir et al., 2023). As a result, to formulate respective policies by the concerned authorities requires a scientific investigation into the issue. The study is important because it explored the significant shifts in the career choices of undergraduate students in Bangladesh because of the pandemic. Following the introduction, section two presents a brief literature review of the study, followed by the methodology part. Then the results of the study are presented, followed by the conclusion.

2. Literature review

The effect of the pandemic on students' career choices largely depends on the common factors affecting career destination selection. Due to the pandemic, mental stress, uncertainty, lack of motivation, and many other factors have added to the career choice behavior of the students everywhere and Bangladesh in particular. Various studies have revealed different dimensions of the career choice pattern of the students both pre-pandemic period and during the pandemic time.

Given the Covid-19 context, (Siddiky & Akter, 2021) studied the factors determining the students' career choices and their job preparedness strategies. According to the survey results, the majority of respondents self-study to pursue their desired careers. Even though career development training plays a crucial role in enhancing students' job readiness, most participants do not have such training. Moreover, according to the study (Hossain et al., 2020) reveal that personal characteristics, institutional characteristics, educational arrangements, and socioeconomic status all significantly impact finding the desired profession in Bangladesh. Another study, (Ashraf, 2019) concludes that the work environment plays an essential role in mediating the relationship between supervisor collaboration and employee job satisfaction. While selecting entrepreneurship as a career choice among Bangladeshi students, study findings reveal that perceived desirability is highly influenced by attitude and subjective norms. Additionally, it was discovered that subjective norms and PBC have a beneficial effect on perceived feasibility (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Bangladeshi students, however, in their career choice, consider a position that brings respect, an attractive starting salary, excellent promotion prospects, a safe job, and a pleasing working environment as important factors (Ashif & Hoque, 2020). In the case of Bangladesh, it is easier for employees of organizations to remain proactive and motivated when their careers are managed and supported by the organizations (Andalib et al., 2019).

Although all the above studies cover various aspects of the career choice behavior of Bangladeshi graduate students, none of them investigated the changes in the career choice of undergraduate students from a qualitative perspective, as qualitative research has some degree of superiority over quantitative studies (Sogunro, 2002; Tewksbury, 2009). The present study tries to fill the knowledge gap in the existing literature and suggest policies for the concerned authorities to design appropriate action plans to help undergraduate students make better choices in their careers.

3. Methodology

All parties were involved in the research of their own free will. Ethics committee approval was declared in accordance with the applicable rules in the authors' countries, and the corresponding author will provide detailed information upon request.

The ethics of qualitative research has been maintained strictly. At the beginning of interviews and FGDs, respondents were informed that data and information gathered through this process would only be used for research purposes. No harm or benefit would be done to the respondents. The case studies have been developed after getting permission from the respondents. Fictitious names have been used for those respondents who were not permitted to publish their names.

3.1. Research design

The research is exploratory, analytical, and descriptive. It attempted to study and analyze the process of changes in undergraduate students' career perceptions owing to the pandemic scenario in Bangladesh descriptively, based on robust content analysis, literature studies, and the current nature of career shifts.

3.2. Data collection

The study is based on both primary and secondary information. Qualitative research tools collected primary data from 15 October to 05 November. Apart from analyzing existing theories and literature, the authors must understand the underlying facts to develop a plausible model of undergraduate students' career changes in Bangladesh due to pandemics. It is better to know experience, observations, understandings, interpretations of related stakeholders, and qualitative data can reveal more significant findings in such a situation (Crowther & Lauesen, 2017). We conducted one Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) from 01 November to 07 November, of which one consisted of four university students who observed these changes very closely. Moreover, we developed two case studies and interviewed 13 undergraduate students from different universities and three scholars using a non-probability sampling technique (convenient sampling). Because in-depth interviews reveal individual observations and experiences that might have a significant impact on policy formulation (Osborne & Grant-smith, 2024).

3.3. Data analysis

To analyze qualitative data, we first recorded the interviews and FGDs and then transcribed them into English. Later, the summary of the significant issues raised in the interviews and FGDs regarding changes in career perception in Bangladesh was discussed in the findings part of the study report.

4. Results

4.1. Changes in a career plan

4.1.1. Changes toward higher study abroad

Studying abroad is a global phenomenon, with students crossing countries, continents, and oceans to get the best education possible. But why has choosing to study at a university in another country become so popular? The truth is, that studying overseas has many fantastic benefits, from helping one to find an excellent job to improving one's social life.

It's a Challenge

There are unique challenges to studying overseas, but that is all part of the fun and the experience. Stepping outside of one's comfort zone is one of the things that makes the whole experience so valuable and worthwhile. After all, if one can travel overseas to study, one can do anything! In this pandemic situation, getting excellent academic

results, getting a good score in IELTS or GRE or TOFEL, getting a fully funded scholarship, and managing professors are all challenging. Here in Bangladesh, undergraduate students want to move on to this challenge.

Case study 1

Mr. 'A' is an undergraduate student studying at a private university. His father was a traditional businessman; he always wanted me to do business like him. Mr. 'A' said my father was my primary source of inspiration most of the time. Before the pandemic, he planned to open a business, but the pandemic changed his mind; now, he is thinking about pursuing a master's degree from abroad to make an implacable career in MNC or any other business firm. It is more likely working for others as their employee.

From the above case study, undergraduate students want to take on the challenge of higher study abroad and want to make a career in a highly competitive MNC.

Experience a different culture

One of the most significant advantages of studying abroad for many international students is the chance to become immersed in a different environment. This enriching experience will enable one to see and do things one would not expect and meet people who have grown up in a different culture. For instance, while living abroad, one will be able to try new foods, hear traditional music, go to local activities, and explore everything else one's host country has to offer.

In the FGD-1, Participant said that he wanted to get experience from different countries and different cultures. Before he completed his speech, Participant 2 added that he had connected to higher studies in many groups via social media. There are lots of students from Bangladesh. Whenever they upload any travel-related photos on social media, they get motivated and want to explore this beautiful place with a different culture.

Career opportunities

Of course, the main reason for getting a degree in the first place is to improve one's career prospects. Employers increasingly value graduates with international experience and education in a globalized, well-connected world. Studying abroad helps one learn new languages, appreciate other cultures, overcome the challenges of living in another country and gain a greater understanding of the world.

In the FGD-1, one participant added that one student could quickly settle his career in foreign countries because of enlarged career opportunities. To get a job in any firm, there needs to be more quota system and partiality. So, one can easily prove his quality skills. So, in this pandemic situation, he is preparing himself by taking necessary IELTS tests and trying to study abroad, where there are lots of opportunities. During the conversation with KI, Mr. 'A' revealed similar facts Mr. 'A' is a PhD student at X University. He voluntarily works with various career development organizations and provides career counselling to Bangladeshi students. He added some comments and his point of view on the changing trend of a student's undergraduate career.

He said that he was pursuing his PhD, but at the time, his friends were still studying for their masters, most of them at the last stage of doing their masters. Due to Covid-19, Bangladeshi public university students lost their years while in foreign universities, academic activities were still going on during the pandemic, so there was no year gap arising in those countries' education systems. Thus, there are many countries where Covid-19 has affected much. It spread rapidly in those countries, and the daily number of dead people was increasing, but their educational system for activity was not off for a single day. So Bangladeshi undergraduates can learn about this matter more closely.

Mr. 'A' added that due to the loss of an academic career, most undergraduate students might have to change their plans for higher studies as there is no year loss in any disaster. If a further pandemic arises, there is no career loss.

One student realizes that there is a part-time job facility abroad through which they can survive by continuing their studies and contributing some amount to their family. So, this is a factor for undergraduate-level students looking to change their careers.

At that time, many students, primarily undergraduate students, grabbed this opportunity. Students related to agencies that helped them travel abroad in the past. However, now, some organizations, like UniV, provide all kinds of scholarship and higher study-related information and conduct some courses regarding research, IELTS,

and necessary information regarding higher studies. They prepare themselves by taking many courses that did not exist before Covid-19.

In the case of Bangladeshi students, most students fear language tests like the GRE or IELTS. Most universities waive their IELTS score or GRE scores due to pandemics. So, students of an undergraduate in the last stage of graduation make their plans for higher studies.

4.1.1. Skill development

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has damaged economies and societies worldwide, there has been an extraordinary drop-in economic activity, reduced working hours and income, and a significant increase in unemployment. So, in this pandemic situation, most of the undergraduate students in this study try to develop their skills. Some are trying to develop IT skills with the necessary soft skills.

IT skill

A shift in employment resulting from Covid-19 containment measures has increased the percentage of job advertisements specifying that "working from home" is a requirement. According to this finding, remote working methods are widely used. So, one cannot cope with this situation without having IT skills.

In the FGD-1, one participant added that he gets enough free time because university remains off due to pandemics, so, in this free time, he is learning necessary IT skills that will help him ensure to get a job after graduation. In a domestic or foreign career, it will help him a lot.

Graphics designing, web development & Freelancing.

Individuals who are creative thinkers who appreciate art, technology, and communication will thrive in graphic design. Every industry has design requirements, which means Graphic Designers have many opportunities to work on various exciting and challenging projects. It may also be a gratifying career because Graphic Designers can see the actual results of their efforts in the real world.

Case study 2

Mr. 'X' is a university student studying in his 4th year. His father is a businessman who always motivates himself to get a job in a reputed organization. Before Covid-19, he had planned to do a job after his graduation, but when he saw some friends of his who had learned web development, graphic design, and Freelancing, he used this time to take many courses regarding Freelancing. He saw that he could earn money rather than do a job before graduation. That is why he took Freelancing as his career, but before Covid-19, he aimed to do a job.

In the FGD-1, one participant added that he also plans to do a job after graduation. During this pandemic, he also learned about graphic design. He has made designs for some institutions without any cost. However, when he became proficient in this skill, he entered the freelancing market & earned money. Now, he planned that besides doing a job after graduation, he would continue freelancing to earn extra cash.

4.2.1. Domestic career

From the perspective of undergraduate students, a good job leads to a higher quality of living, as it gives higher earnings, more significant potential for earnings growth, and greater job satisfaction than a bad one. According to the findings of this study, many students who had planned to settle in a foreign country have changed their minds and are now attempting to settle in their home country of Bangladesh.

Career in public sector

Social status, prestige status, financial advantage, and a stable career have become significant concerns for many undergraduates. Additionally, current socioeconomic and political trends indicate that most students are trending toward government jobs.

Job security

This is a significant component in determining one's career path. Private industries have cut off many staff in recent years and during Covid-19 removal from employment. One cannot guarantee that one's job will continue

for five years. However, government workers are more stable. According to the survey, some undergraduate students feel more secure and plan their careers more effectively with a government job.

Case study 3

Mr. "D", a last-year university student, has decided to rethink his professional goals. It was only after the pandemic that he realized there was no guarantee of employment in the private sector, which he had previously expected to work in before becoming Covid-19. To prepare for government employment, such as a BCS and public bank position, he is now taking classes.

As a result of the preceding case study, there is a growing tendency to leave the private sector and join the public sector.

In the first FGD-1, a participant mentioned that government employees often come with additional benefits, such as free accommodation, transportation, and free medical. Additionally, there are several incentives for employees to make use of. Only private-sector workers are affected by the Covid-19 epidemic, although there are no changes in government job facilities.

Better workplace balance

Most government offices have a 7-hour workday, while most private offices have 9-hour working hours. As a result, government jobs have shorter workdays than those in the private sector. Additionally, a government worker will enjoy more time with family members because of the additional time at leisure.

When a survey was conducted, only one person mentioned his desire to start a business before graduation. He ran a business during this pandemic. However, he believes he needs a job since he needs more funds. So, he has taken a new path in his career, one that combines business and employment. In addition to running a business, he plans to work as an education cadet. Aside from the additional income from the job, he said that working for the government would free him significant amounts of time, which would allow him to continue running his business and become more financially stable.

People's mindset & stability

The government employs a stable workforce. In Bangladesh, acquiring a government job is much more complicated than getting fired from it.

In the FGD-1, a participant noted that Bangladeshis regard public university teachers more highly than private institutions. In the market for a new marriage, they are also more valuable. He also noticed that public university students hold greater significance than those who attend private universities. In some workplaces or employment, students from private universities receive less support than those from public universities.

Compared to other service members, we can conclude from the data collected and analyzed that BCS cadres enjoy a significantly higher level of facilities.

The BCS cadre is the most vital, most powerful, and most enlightened profession to serve society with honor and to live a financially secure life. Administration may be modernized if the BCS cadre is passionate about their work.

According to data gathered throughout our research project, one respondent stated that he was confused between a public sector or private sector career path. He has noticed that the pandemic has resulted in the loss of employment for most private-sector workers. However, job hunting in BCS is more difficult because of the high level of competition. Because of this, he wants to take on new challenges, achieve power, and make a significant impact on the community of all people. He believes he can perform at the highest level possible if provided with the chance. In addition, the BCS cadres have star power here to enjoy the freedom to be as straightforward as it does not agree that private-sector jobs. Employees of job seekers and even he listed the BCS as his top choice.

Case study 4

According to one responder in an in-depth interview, Mr. "R[1]" worked for a private company for many years. His Covid-19 and Covid test symptoms resulted in his becoming positive one morning. The four family members, including his mother, who was in her 90s, and two children, were shocked by his death.

The family's only source of income was Mr. "R". There was little money to go around for the entire family. Like most Bangladeshi people in the private Sector, he survived on handouts and had no savings.

"Mr. R" represents the masses of private-sector employees who work long hours for companies but cannot provide for their well-being. That was only compounded because the company Mr. "R" worked for did not offer any security or post-service benefits. After his death, the family was left miserable with no sense of how to get by.

The scenario might not have appeared if Mr. "R" had been employed by the government. As a result, this circumstance may affect our families and communities. Students at the undergraduate level, it appears to them, may consider a future as a government service holder.

Career in the private sector

A private institution is a company or organization that has entered the industry to generate revenue. Because private businesses employ far more people than governmental bodies, the private sector has a much larger workforce. Many undergraduate students choose careers in the private Sector, such as banking, or in the development sector, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both nationally and internationally. Most of them choose MNC positions because they provide higher salaries, bonuses, and other advantages.

The respondent did not permit the publication of the name.

Faster recruitment process

Private organizations' recruitment processes are typically significantly speedier due to their quickness in making decisions. For instance, we have seen that people immediately found work. On the other hand, the public Sector's job procedure can usually be lengthy.

In FGD-1, one participant stated that he was aware of the private sector's faster recruitment process. He planned to work in the private Sector for a small quantity of terms right after graduating. However, he desired to remain a government employee permanently. As he was aware, obtaining employment in the Public Sector is considerably more time-consuming. He could not bear the prospect of unemployment at the time, so he selected the private sector as a temporary profession.

Salary increases

While government entities are eager to invest in their employees' abilities, their progress might be highly delayed. On the other hand, private employers are significantly more sensitive to market opportunities. Sometimes, private corporations pay more than public-sector organizations.

From the primary data collection, one of the respondents said that he aims to do a job in a bank. He wanted to become a Banker. However, due to the Pandemic, he has changed his decision. As his subject is Accounting, he now wants to become a Chartered Accountant. He thinks that if he became a specialist in his subject, like a Chartered Accountant, he might earn more money than the bank job. Thus, Due to the Pandemic, he changed his career track from Banker to CA. KI Mr. "A" also commented on his experience with the situation. He said that most of the students lost their tuition during the Pandemic, so he is seeking any kind of job like food delivery.

A trend of e-commerce-based platforms is emerging among most undergraduate students. Most of them are trying to be entrepreneurs. Most of the students continue their studies while also doing a small business. In a pandemic situation, most of the student's family members are affected by Covid-19 or have died, so undergraduate-level students are forced to earn money besides studying. Where an undergraduate level student should be supported by their family; at that time, he must support his family by contributing money. Thus, his career choice may be hampered due to Covid-19. Most of the students are trying to be entrepreneurs. Most of the students continue their studies while also doing a small business. In a pandemic situation, most of the student's family members are affected by Covid-19 or have died, so undergraduate-level students are forced to earn money besides studying. Where an undergraduate level student should be supported by their family; at that time, he must support his family by contributing money. Thus, his career choice may be hampered due to Covid-19.

4.2. Career plan unaffected by pandemic

We discovered that Covid-19 has yet to have a significant impact on the careers of many undergraduate students. They are still constant in their career decisions. Those who plan to set up their career in the government sector are

still trying to make the necessary preparations. Our research also identifies those who plan to continue their education after graduation and are steadfast in their career choice. Those who intend to do business after graduation or be entrepreneurs are still constant about their career plans. Thus, Covid keeps its career plans the same.

Case study 5

Mr. "S" is currently enrolled in his third year of education at the University of Chittagong. He stated that he intends to seek higher education in Europe or Canada after graduation. As a result, he has been preparing and accumulating information about higher studies since the beginning of the outbreak. His response to the situation was described in an interview as "kind of a blessing for me." Because the university is closed, there is no academic pressure on him, and he has additional time on his hands. In his spare time, he continues to gather information about higher education. He has gained a great deal of heretofore unknown knowledge by engaging in various online courses, seminars, and webinars provided by a variety of organizations. He has gained a great deal of self-assurance. He is merely waiting for his graduation to be delivered.

This case study can conclude that Covid-19 does not affect career choices due to Covid-19. In an in-depth interview, one respondent stated that Covid-19 had not made any changes to his career. Before the Covid-19 situation arose, he had a plan for doing business and, until now, after his graduation. He planned that he would do business.

Thus, there are many cases in which there are no career plan changes for undergraduate students.

4.3. Students unaware of career

One of the most significant factors contributing to undergraduate students' difficulties finding work is a need for more understanding regarding the job choice provided to them after completing their undergraduate studies. Most people are even unaware of their career aspirations. We discovered that undergraduate-level students need clarification about what job roles exist and which ones to pursue to build a career of choice. They become even more frightened when the Covid-19 situation arises. Most undergraduate students need to be made aware of the many job profiles required in the Sector and the existing ones. The logical implication is that many people need clarification on the types of skill sets they should develop. According to the results of our study, practically all students were uncertain of which technologies to learn or which skills to acquire to advance their careers.

The figures above suggest a high level of knowledge about specific career objectives. Many students are engaged in studying outdated content to obtain a graduate degree rather than selecting career pathways and developing core skills that will allow them to access good jobs.

According to the primary data collection, one respondent stated that he has yet to have a specific career path. His father has a business. He would willingly accept if his fathers ordered him to run the business after graduation. If his father permits him to do the job, he will search for jobs. Nonetheless, he is not planning for a particular one as a future career path. We also received responses from individuals who had yet to specify their career, indicating that their career choices are subject to change.

Beginning with FGD, when we talked about the unemployment rate and the factors that contribute to unemployability, one of the respondents remarked that the young mind is full of uncertainties and confusion. They can choose what they want to pursue, but they will need some direction in exploring their passion. It takes time for someone to discover what they are enthusiastic about and what they should pursue as a career. After waking up, people do not suddenly realize what they want to achieve with their careers. Instead, it needs some analysis, some learning from mistakes, as well as some successes and failures. Sometimes, a student's educational decision does not match the demands of his or her family.

5. Conclusion

When the educational institution remained closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, students at the undergraduate level suffered greatly. Some students at the last stage of graduation suffered because they did not move on with their specific career goals. Some of them need help with their career goals. Unemployment during pandemic situations hampered their ability to choose their career goals. Some students are forced to change their career choices due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, some students get advancements in their careers. They have gathered their knowledge and skills in that free time. On the contrary, students in their final year of graduation endure significant hardship in

making a career choice. We found that students in the 1st and 2nd-year stages of their graduation in that pandemic situation have less impact on their careers. Besides, students who have a family business or a solid financial stability background are less concerned about their careers. In this study, both theoretical understandings and qualitative data are considered. However, it does have limitations in terms of time and sampling. Using a large sample and an in-depth investigation of students' opinions on career-changing patterns resulting from the Covid-19 virus in Bangladesh, additional research can be carried out in the future. Because the paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing undergraduate students' career perception due to the pandemic in Bangladesh, various stakeholders working as policymakers can benefit from the study by adopting appropriate policies. Even though the study experimentally focuses on Bangladeshi undergraduate-level students, the arguments and conclusions can be applied to a wide variety of other graduate students. However, future studies can be conducted using a quantitative survey with a standard sample size.

5.1. Implications

This study investigates the changes in how Bangladeshi undergraduate students view their careers due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It highlights significant implications for those involved. To promote job security and provide stable employment, policymakers should focus on increasing public sector job possibilities and assisting in expanding small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These strategies are not just suggestions but a call to action for policymakers. Educational institutions should revise their curricula and career services to incorporate preparatory courses for government positions and provide complete assistance with international educational opportunities. Career counselors should offer evidence-based advice on current trends in the job market and enhance students' abilities to bounce back from challenges and adapt to new situations. This study will help inform policy responses based on solid facts, aiming to support students' career paths and build a strong and adaptable workforce in Bangladesh.

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Author contribution statements

Mohammad Ahsan Habib: Writing – original draft, data collection and curation, data transcription, formal analysis, Writing – review & editing.

Zobayer Ahmed: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, supervision, Writing – review & editing.

Md Abu Bakkar Siddik: Writing – review & editing and supervision.

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No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.

Ethical committee approval

All parties were involved in the research of their own free will. Ethics committee approval was declared in accordance with the applicable rules in the authors' countries, and the corresponding author will provide detailed information upon request. All responsibility belongs to the researchers.