

**Timeline**

April-May 2020

**Study Type**

Descriptive / Surveillance

# Safety Nets and the Pandemic: The State of Social Benefit Payments during COVID-19 in Bangladesh

## Researchers

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## Abstract

From April-May 2020, researchers surveyed 7,338 beneficiaries of two government safety-net transfer programs in Bangladesh – the Old Age Allowance and the Widow Allowance – supported under the Department of Social Services. The survey took place during the government-mandated lockdown period to control the spread of the coronavirus. Their analysis suggests that beneficiaries of these programs suffered significantly during the COVID-19 induced mobility restrictions, with 51% of respondents forced to reduce medication consumption and 22% forced to reduce food consumption (based on a one-week recall period of the rapid phone survey). The median household reported having earned zero income in the two weeks prior to the survey. While the timely payment of benefits is crucial during crises of such scale, 41% of beneficiaries reported not being paid the full benefit amount, despite such payments being due before the COVID lockdown. The study's estimates also demonstrate that those who had access to digital safety-net payments were more likely to receive transfers timely and suffered lower consumption and income vulnerability. These findings highlight the importance of regular and timely disbursement of safety-net payments, to promote food security and basic consumption for vulnerable populations. Widespread adoption of digital financial services, such as mobile money, could work as a viable platform to ensure that payments are transferred on time to safety-net beneficiaries.

## Project Outcomes of Interest

Food security; Basic goods consumption; Financial security

## Partners

MOMODa Foundation (Bangladesh)

## Key Findings

- Beneficiaries of these programs suffered significantly during the COVID-19 induced mobility restrictions, with 51% of respondents forced to reduce medication consumption and 22% forced to reduce food consumption (based on a one-week recall period of the rapid phone survey).
- The median household reported having earned zero income in the two weeks prior to the survey. While the timely payment of benefits is crucial during crises of such scale, 41% of beneficiaries reported not being paid the full benefit amount, despite such payments being due before the COVID lockdown.
- The study's estimates also demonstrate that those who had access to digital safety-net payments were more likely to receive transfers timely and suffered lower consumption and income vulnerability.
- These findings highlight the importance of regular and timely disbursement of safety-net payments, to promote food security and basic consumption for vulnerable populations. Widespread adoption of digital financial services, such as mobile money, could work as a viable platform to ensure that payments are transferred on time to safety-net beneficiaries.

## Impact Goals

- Build resilience and protect the financial health of families and individuals
- Improve social-safety net responses
- Improve women's health, safety, and economic empowerment

## Project Data Collection Mode

- CATI (Computer-assisted telephone interviewing)

## Implementing Organization

MOMODa Foundation

## Results Status

Results

# Results

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