

# Impact Evaluation – Mental Health Support for COVID-19 Affected Population



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# Background

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The fear of contracting COVID-19 along with various other factors associated with the pandemic-induced economic and social challenges was starting to take a toll on people's mental health (Singh et al., 2020; Holmes et al., 2020).

In Bangladesh, the National Mental Health Survey 2018-2019 shows that 17% adults and 14% children have some form of mental health problem.

About 92% of the adults suffering from mental disorders do not seek treatment for their condition, and 94% of the children with mental illness do not get any psychiatric care.

The situation, however, tends to worsen during the COVID-19 pandemic with the increase of stigma, stress and burn-out.

# Background (cont.)

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Sajida Foundation (SF) has taken a set of initiatives to provide mental health support during the COVID-19 crisis.

The interventions included –

- advancing psychological well-being using market insights;
- para counseling services and guided self-help materials as a means of building awareness and providing psychosocial support to community people;
- emergency psychosocial support to frontline healthcare workers and their family members.

# Objectives

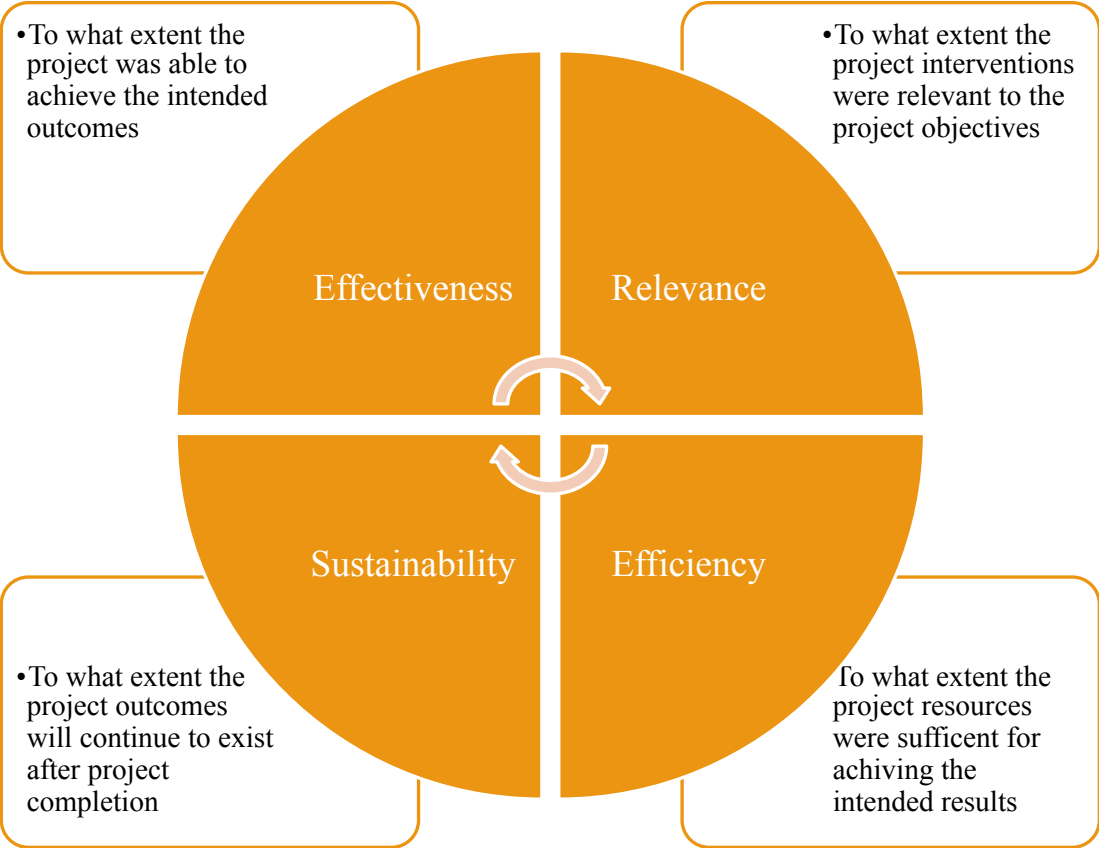
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The purpose of the current evaluation is to assess the performance of the interventions in contrast to the intended results. More specifically, the evaluation aims to –

- Assess the impact of the project;
- Assess the extent to which the project met intended objectives; and
- Capture the unanticipated benefits and adverse outcomes of the project and key lessons learned.

# Evaluation Criteria

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# Methods

Geographical Areas	Quantitative Samples	Qualitative Samples	
		FGD	KII
Narayanganj	100	4	2
Narsingdi	110	4	

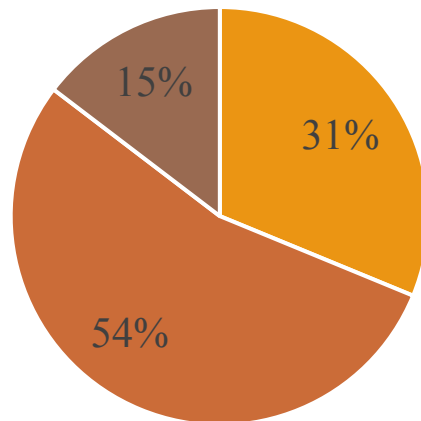
Of the total eight FGDs, two were conducted with beneficiary housewives, two with beneficiary mixed group including adolescent, service holder, and 45+ woman, two with nonbeneficiary women, and two with para counselors. Each FGD involved 8-10 persons.

Two key informant interviews were conducted with tele-counselors.

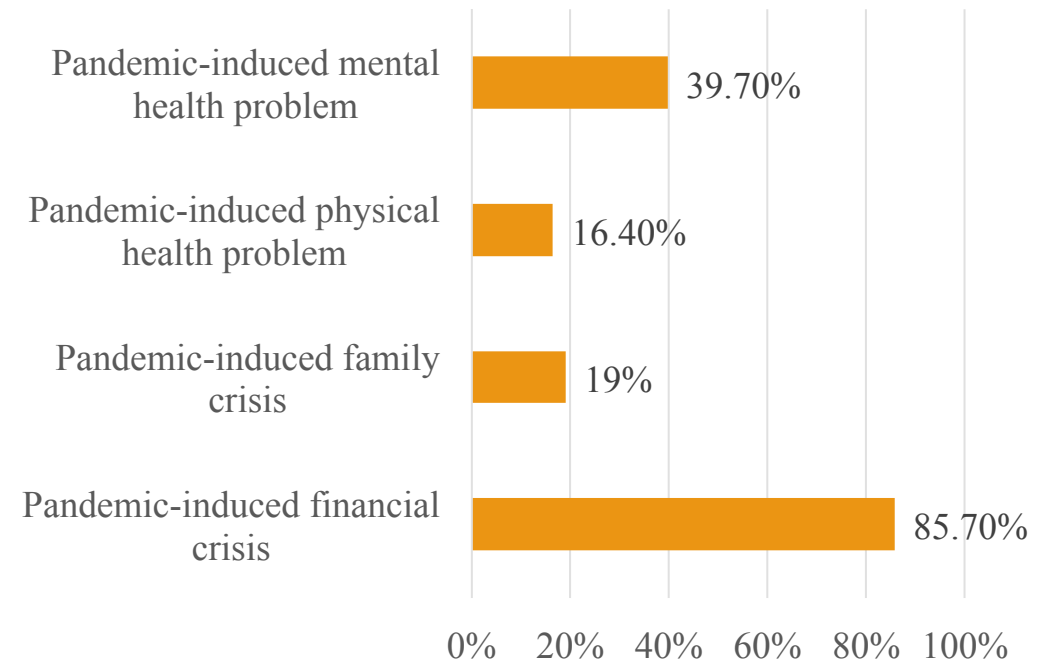
# Effectiveness

LIFE DURING COVID-19

- Extremely Stressful
- Stressful
- As usual/Normal



REASON FOR STRESSFUL LIFE



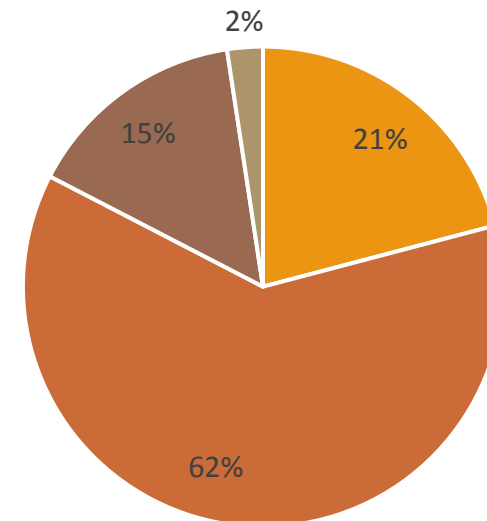
# Effectiveness (cont.)

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“I believe that sharing the internal struggles, which were raging through my mind, with the para counselors greatly helped me reduce my stress” – Halima, a housewife.

## SATISFACTION ABOUT PARA COUNSELORS

■ Extremely satisfied ■ Satisfied ■ Somewhat satisfied ■ Dissatisfied

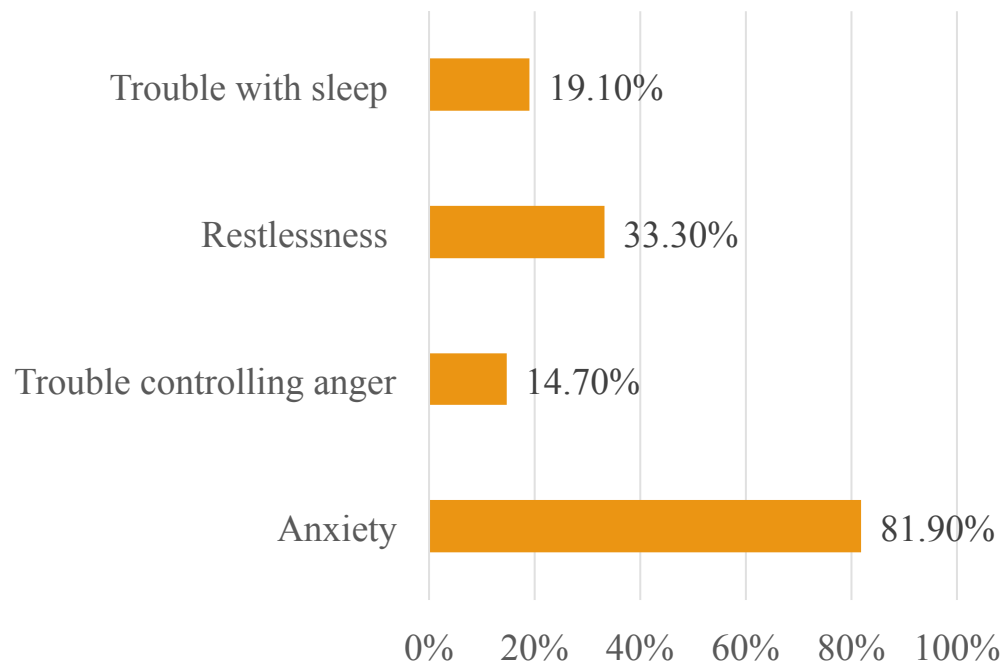




# Relevance

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## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES OVERCOME WITH THE SUPPORT FROM PARA COUNSELORS

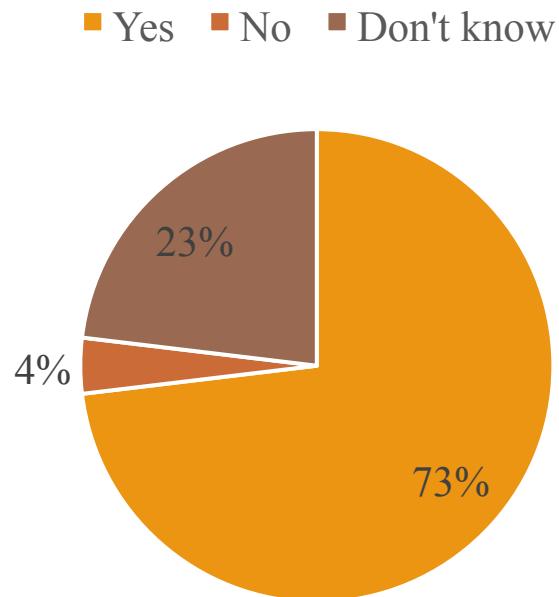


“I felt so frustrated thinking about my future as I was losing concentration from my studies due to the closure of school for a long time in the time of COVID-19. After talking to the para counselor and sharing my thoughts and frustrations with her, she gave me some useful advice on how to stay calm and remain focused on my studies” – Nargis, an SSC candidate.

# Sustainability

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## USEFULNESS OF PARA COUNSELING SERVICES IN THE FUTURE



“I never thought that mental health mattered. After getting to know the para counselors, I learned a lot about the subtle mental health issues that eventually caused various familial, social, and behavioral problems. From now on, I will keep in mind those new lessons on managing mental health crisis and will evoke them in the future whenever I am in need” – Kohinoor, a housewife.

# Efficiency

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“We were initially hesitant about interacting with or seeking assistance from the para counselors. However, once we got to know them more closely, we enjoyed talking to them entirely as they were so friendly and helpful. It would have been more beneficial to us if we would be able to meet them more frequently and share our mental sufferings that we were not able to share with anyone else” – Fatima, a housewife.

“The frontline healthcare workers, who were infected with COVID-19, often suffered from considerable emotional and psychological distress. Despite their sufferings, they tried to ignore the importance of mental health. Sometimes they were also fearful of expressing their psychological illness as they assumed that if they report their mental health problem, they might lose their jobs or face difficulty in maintaining their social lives” – Sharif, a tele-counselor, on efficiency loss.

# SWOT Analysis of the Program

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ A timely initiative to address the pandemic-induced mental health challenges</li><li>○ Well-designed project interventions based on need assessment</li><li>○ Internal arrangements for training the mental health service providers</li><li>○ Diverse intervention strategies for covering different groups of beneficiaries under the project</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Limited geographical focus leaving out a true rural outreach</li><li>○ Too many interventions to be implemented in a very short period of time</li><li>○ Highly female beneficiary-focused interventions leaving out potential male beneficiaries</li><li>○ Insufficient human resources compared with a large number of target beneficiaries</li><li>○ Little scope for follow-up on the implementation of the project interventions</li></ul>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Scaling-up of the project interventions at the national level in collaboration with the government given the significance and relevance of the project</li><li>○ Utilize the skills and experiences of the para counselors who already received hands-on training in providing mental health support</li><li>○ Increasing interest of the international development partners or donor agencies in the provision of mental health services especially in the time of COVID-19.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Resistance from local people especially when large-scale outreach interventions are introduced</li><li>○ Limited infrastructure for the provision of mental health services at the national level</li><li>○ Inadequate emphasis from the domain of public policy on the importance of mental health vis-à-vis physical health</li><li>○ No follow-up interventions together with the evolving challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic likely to threaten the successes achieved so far</li></ul>

# Recommendations

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Given the importance and magnitude of the project interventions, we recommend that the project be extended for at least two years so as to allow the para counselors sufficient time to follow up on their initial counselling sessions with the beneficiaries.

It would be beneficial if the future project design involves provision of financial incentive, i.e. one-off payment of a sum of money to be invested in an income generating activity, alongside para counselling services.

The 20 para counsellors, who were one of the key actors of the project, are now highly skilled professionals. The Foundation should, therefore, consider retaining the para counselors and re-employ them in any possible capacity.

In order to build rapport with the beneficiaries quickly, the para counselors might offer some primary physical health check-ups, e.g. measuring blood pressure, blood sugar etc., as icebreaker.

The current project mainly serves women. However, in order to make the mental health support program more impactful, men must also be reached out with counseling services.