Journal of ELT and Education
ISSN (Print): 2618-1290, ISSN (Online): 2663-1482
2025, Volume 8, Issue 1, Page: 20-28
Center for Academic Research and Development (CARD)

An Empirical Study on the Poverty and Socio-economic Condition of the People Living in the Southern Area of Bangladesh

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Abstract: Bangladesh is a developing country where poverty is still a significant concern. The Southern area of Bangladesh is quite different from other parts of the country in terms of climate and topography. This study investigated the poverty and the socio-economic condition of the people living in the southern area of Bangladesh from October 2023 to May 2024. The study used a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data was collected from questionnaire surveys, direct observations, interviews, and focused group discussions with the respondents, and the data was analyzed using SPSS. About 45% of respondents had 6-8 family members, which had a significantly negative impact on the poverty level. Most of the people (about 59%) were totally illiterate to below SSC, which also has a strong negative significance on the poverty level. The profession category, safe food, sanitation and water supply status, monthly income, and expenditures of the respondents were also significantly related to the poverty level. The relationship between the overall indebtedness rate of the respondents and the poverty level was positive. However, the relationship between the social and economic improvements of the respondents and the poverty level, as well as the relationship between the GDP growth of the respondents and the poverty level, was negative. This study may help evaluate tactics and policies at the national level to alleviate poverty in the region.

Keywords: Poverty, education, profession, expenditure, indebtedness, GDP

Introduction

Poverty comprises various aspects, including food insecurity, inadequate housing, limited access to healthcare, and restricted educational opportunities, leading to illiteracy and employment challenges. It also manifests as economic instability and uncertainty about the future, contributing to social and psychological distress. It refers to the absence of inadequacy of those diets, amenities, standards, services and activities which are common or customary in society, which enriches the connotation of relative poverty and broadens the research vision of relative poverty.

Bangladesh is a promising country but the poverty has remained a prime concern for its ultimate development. In spite of being rapid economic growth, poverty remains a major issue in the country. According to World Bank, about 33 million people in Bangladesh was lifted out of poverty since 2000; as me by the amount of people living on the equivalent of US$1.90 or less per day in 2011 purchasing price parity terms (Hill & Genoni, 2019). The UN classified Bangladesh as a Least Developed Country, containing over 20% of the population below the 1 US dollar per day poverty line and 84% of the population below the 2 US dollar per day poverty line (UNDP, 2007). From 1971 to 2013, Bangladesh declined the domestic poverty rate by 55.82%, but about 44% of its citizens are still in extreme poverty, along with the problem of income inequality becoming

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Citation: Rahman, S. N., Hasan, M., & Ahmed, M. S. (2025). An Empirical Study on the Poverty and Socio-economic Condition of the People Living in the Southern Area of Bangladesh. *Journal of ELT and Education*, *8*(1), 20-28. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14982780
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increasingly prominent (Hossain, 2014). Between 2016 and 2022, the national poverty rate declined from 24.2 percent to 18.7 percent. In November 2018, the World Bank pointed out that "based on sustained economic development, Bangladesh have made a considerable progress in poverty reduction (World Bank, 2019)." It has maintained a six-percent growth over the last six years. The country has performed remarkably well in reducing extreme poverty from 34 percent down to 13 percent just within 16 years (World Bank, 2017). However, poverty is a serious problem that hinders the ambition of Bangladesh for becoming a middle-income country. Sothern area of Bangladesh is quite different from other part of the country in terms of climate and topography. The region constitutes 32% of total land area in Bangladesh and hosts nearly 28% of the population (i.e. nearly 42 million) (World Bank, 2012). Poverty in the southern areas of Bangladesh can be driven by several factors. The southern part of Bangladesh, particularly coastal regions, is prone to natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, and tidal surges. The southern regions of Bangladesh, particularly the coastal and riverine areas, have consistently had a higher poverty rate compared to the national average. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and World Bank reports, poverty levels in these regions range between 30-40%, significantly higher than the national average of around 20-25%. So it is very important to study deeply about the poverty in the southern area of Bangladesh.

The primary objectives of the current study were (i) to explore the poverty level of the people in respect to the socio-economic characteristics of the people living in southern area of Bangladesh, (ii) to find out the actual scenario of the people's socio-economic condition of southern part of Bangladesh, and (iii) to investigate the main causes of poverty in Southern area of Bangladesh.

Materials and Methods

The study followed a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative tools to conduct the study. The study was conducted during October 2023 to May 2024.

Sample and Instruments

The experiment was conducted at Gopalganj, Bagherhat, Pirojpur and Barishal district of Bangladesh. About 100 respondents (at least 25 respondents from each of the selected four districts (Gopalganj: Kashiani Upazila; Bagherhat: Mollar Hat Upazila; Pirojpur: Nazirpur Upazila and Barishal: Agailjhara Upazila) as samples has been randomly selected. A questionnaire has been administered to collect essential data. Interview was conducted within relevant respondents selected areas by structured questionnaire, face to face conversation with respondents, direct observation and focused group discussion (FGD).

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers collected data from the respondents with the help of the interview schedule. The secondary sources of data were articles, seminars, magazines, newspapers, various websites and government data on the poverty. The dependent variable was the level of poverty which can be measured through 1: Poor (lacks basic needs), 2: Moderate (meets some but not all basic needs), 3: Non-poor (meets most or all basic needs). Independent variable would be factors that influence the level of poverty, such as: family member, educational status, profession, safe food, sanitation & water supply Status, monthly income of the respondent, monthly expenditure of the respondent, overall indebtedness rate, social and economic improvements and GDP growth rate.

Raw data were examined thoroughly to detect errors and omissions. Very minor mistakes were detected by doing this, which were corrected promptly. A coding plan was prepared. In case of qualitative data, suitable scoring techniques were followed against each of the traits to transform the data into quantitative forms. These were then tabulated in accordance with the objective of the study. The data presented in the tables in the 'Results and Discussion' were collected from the direct interview of the respondents and was analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) computer program, version 20.

Results and Discussion

Family member

According to the findings, the family member of the respondents was varied from one to eleven. According to their number of family members, the respondents were classified into four categories as small, medium, large, extra-large category (table 1).

Table 1. Family member status

Family member status	Number of family member	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Small	1-3	7	7
Medium	3-5	35	35
Large	6-8	45	45
Extra large	More than 8	13	13
Total		100	100

Data represented in the table 1 indicate that the 6-8 status category comprised the highest proportion (45%) followed by the 3-5 Status category (35%), more than 8 (13%), the lowest proportion were found by 1-3 status category (7%) of respondents. It shows that the large category family was found followed by medium family size category. The lowest percentage was found in small family size category.

Educational Status

According to the findings, education status was classified into five categories as below SSC, HSC passed, Honors/Equivalent, Masters/Equivalent, Illiterate etc. (table 2.).

Table 2. Educational Status of the respondent

Educational Status	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Below SSC	32	32
HSC passed	23	23
Honors /Equivalent	13	13
Masters/Equivalent	5	5
Totally Illiterate	27	27
Total	100	100

Table-2 indicates that the education status was classified into five categories as below SSC is maximum (32%), HSC passed (23%), Honors /Equivalent (13), Masters/Equivalent is minimum (5%), Illiterate (27%) etc. It shows the actual Education Status category for respondents of the selected research area. Most of the people (about 59 percent) were totally illiterate to below SSC.

Profession

According to our findings, the respondents were classified into six categories as Farmer, Businessman, day laborer, employee, entrepreneur and female small businessman. The distribution of the respondents according to their profession was shown in Table-3.

Table 3. Distribution of the Respondents according to their profession

Profession Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Farmer	20	20
Businessman	25	20
Day Laborer	20	20
Employee	10	10
entrepreneur	10	10
Female Small businessman	15	20
Total	100	100

Table-3 indicates that the businessman comprised the highest proportion (25 percent) followed by the day labor (20%), the farmer (20%), the employee (10%), the entrepreneur (10%), and the female small businessman category (15%). It shows that about 65 percent people were involved in farming, business and day laborer in the selected research area.

Safe Food, Sanitation and Water Supply

According to our findings, safe food, sanitation and water supply status was classified into five categories as very good, good, moderate, poor, very poor etc. Safe food, sanitation & water supply status of the respondent is shown in table 4.

Table 4. Safe food, sanitation and water supply status of the respondent

Safe Food, Sanitation & Water Supply	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very good	32	32
Good	20	20
Moderate	33	33
Poor	10	10
Very bad	05	05
Total	100	100

Table 4 depicts that the safe food, sanitation & water supply status was classified into five categories as moderate is maximum (33%), good (20%), very good (32%), poor (10%) & very bad (5%) category was the minimum.

Monthly Income of the Respondent after 2020

Monthly income of the respondent after 2020 were classified into five categories as 10,000-15,000 BDT, 16,000-20,000 BDT, 21,000-30,000 BDT, 31,000-40,000 BDT and More than 40,000 BDT. Monthly income of the respondent after 2020 is shown in Table-5.

Table 5. Monthly income of the respondent after 2020

Monthly income Status	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
10,000-15,000 BDT	16	16
16,000-20,000 BDT	30	30
21,000-30,000 BDT	35	35
31,000-40,000 BDT	13	13
More than 40,000 BDT	6	6
Total	100	100

The data presented in Table 5 indicate that the monthly income status category 21,000-30,000 BDT comprised the highest proportion (35%) followed by the monthly income status 10,000-15,000 BDT (16%), 16,000-20,000 BDT (30%), more than 40,000 BDT 13.75%) and the lowest proportion were found by Monthly Income Status category more than 40,000 BDT (6%) of respondents.

Monthly Expenditure of the Respondent after 2020

According to the findings of the study, monthly income of the respondent after 2020 were classified into five categories as 10,000-15,000 BDT, 16,000-20,000 BDT, 21,000-30,000 BDT, 31,000-40,000 BDT and More than 40,000 BDT. Monthly income of the respondent after 2020 is shown in table 6.

Table 6. Monthly expenditure of the respondent after 2020

Monthly income Status	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
10,000-15,000 BDT	6	6
16,000-20,000 BDT	35	35
21,000-30,000 BDT	40	40
31,000-40,000 BDT	15	15
More than 40,000 BDT	4	4
Total	100	100

Table 6 indicated that the Monthly Expenditure Status category 21,000-30,000 BDT comprised the highest proportion (40%) followed by the monthly income Status 10,000-15,000 BDT (6%), 16,000-20,000 BDT (35%), more than 40,000 BDT (4%) and the lowest proportion were found by monthly income Status category more than 40,000 BDT (6%) of respondents.

Overall Indebtedness Rate after 2020

According to the research findings, overall indebtedness rate of the respondent after 2020 were classified into four categories which are shown in table 7.

Table 7. Overall indebtedness rate after 2020

Indebted Status	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Always	6	6
Little (Periodically)	12	12
Big	3	3
No	71	71
Total	100	100

Table 7 indicated the overall indebtedness rate after 2020. Status category 'No' comprised the highest proportion (71%) followed by the overall indebtedness rate after 2020 status 'Little' (12%), Always (6%), and the lowest proportion were found by 'Big' (3%).

Changes in Social and Economic Improvements from 2010 to 2020

Social and economic improvements changing from 2010 to 2020 were classified into four categories as Yes, No, Same as before & Little changed. Social and economic improvements from 2010 to 2020 is shown in table 8.

Table 8. Social and economic improvements have been changed from 2010 to 2020

Position	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	62	62
No	8	8
Same as before	20	20
Little changed.	10	10
Total	100	100

From the table 8, it was shown that 62% respondents said that the Social and economic improvements changing have been occurred from 2010 to 2020, 10% respondents believed Little changed, 20% respondents believed Same as before & 8% respondents believed that No changing have been occurred from 2010 to 2020. So it is clear that highest 62% respondents were declared Social and economic improvements changing have been occurred from 2010 to 2020.

Changes in GDP Growth Rate due to Profession Change from 2010 to 2020

According to our collected data, The GDP growth has changed due to the changing profession into six categories as GDP increased by 1%, GDP increased by 1.5%, GDP increased by 2%, GDP increased by 2.5%, GDP increased by 3% & Same as before is shown in table 9.

Table 9. The GDP growth has changed due to the profession change considering the area from 2010 to 2020

Position	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
GDP increased by 1.5%	26	26
GDP increased by 2%	31	31
GDP increased by 3%	13	13
GDP increased by 3.5%	15	15
GDP increased by 4%	9	9
Same as before	6	6
Total	100	100

Table 9 indicate that The GDP growth rate has changed due to the profession change considering the area variable position GDP increased by 2% comprised the highest proportion (31%) followed by the variable position GDP increased by 1.5% (26%), GDP increased by 3% (13%), GDP increased by 3.5% (15%), GDP increased by 4% (9%) and the lowest proportion were found by variable position Same as before (6%) of respondents. Data in the table also show that the GDP increased by 2% due to the profession change considering the area from 2010 to 2020 which is thought by selected areas respondents.

Respondents' Socio-economic Characteristics and the Poverty Level

The Co-efficient of Correlation was determined in order to find out the relationship between dependent and independent variable of the present study. The computed "r" values represent the direction and strength of the relationship between socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and the poverty level (Table 10).

Table 10. Results of Co-efficient of Correlation Showing Relationship between each of the contributing variables (selected characteristics) and poverty level (n=100)

Dependent variable	Independent Variables	Computed "r" values
Poverty level	Family member	-0.203*
	Agricultural land status	-0.179^{NS}
	Educational status	-0.698**
	Profession	-0.553**
	Safe food, sanitation & water supply status	-0.537**
	Monthly income of the respondent	-0.742**
	Monthly expenditure of the respondent	-0.713**
	Overall indebtedness rate	+0.534**
	Social and economic improvements	-0.466**
	GDP growth	-0.685**

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level of probability (table value 0.255) with 98 df.
* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level of probability (table value 0.196) with 98 df
^{NS} Not significant

Family Member of the Respondents and the Poverty Level

Relationship between family member of the respondents and the poverty level was determined by testing the null hypothesis: "There is no relationship between family member of the respondents and the poverty level". The computed value of the co-efficient of correlation (r) between the concerned variables was -0.203 as shown in table 10. The computed value of "r" (-0.203*) was found larger than that of the tabulated value (0.196) with 98 df at 0.05 level of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was negatively significant. The null hypothesis was rejected. The findings indicated that the family member of the respondents was negatively significant. So, there is negative relationship at family member of the respondents with their poverty level. A correlation exists between the number of family members a respondent has and their poverty level (Daly & Mary, 2017).

Agricultural Land Status of the Respondents and the Poverty Level

Computed value of the co-efficient of correlation between agricultural land status of the respondents and their poverty level was found to be -0.179. The computed value of "r" (-0.179^{NS}) was found smaller than that of the tabulated value (0.196) with 98 df at 0.05 level of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was negatively insignificant. The null hypothesis was accepted. Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that the agricultural land status of the respondents had insignificant and negative relationship with their poverty level.

Educational Status of the Respondents and the Poverty Level

Relationship between educational status of the respondents and the poverty level was determined by testing the null hypothesis: "There is no relationship between educational status of the respondents and the poverty level." The computed value of the co-efficient of correlation (r) between the concerned variables was -0.698 as shown in Table-10. The computed value of "r" (-0.698**) was found larger than that of the tabulated value (0.255) with 98 df at 0.01 level of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was negatively significant. The null hypothesis was rejected. The findings indicated that the educational status of the respondents was negatively significant. So, there is negative relationship at educational status of the respondents and the poverty level. A study done by Wanka (2019), using the Income and Expenditure Survey (IES) showed that households headed by well-educated persons had a lower portability of poverty. Education is seen as a key driver in poverty reduction and to achieve social justice in South Africa (Wanka, 2019).

Profession of the Respondents and the Poverty Level

Computed value of the co-efficient of correlation (r) between the concerned variables was -0.553 as shown in Table-10. The following observations were made regarding the relationship between the two variables on basis of the Coefficient of correlation (r). The computed value of "r" (-0.553**) was found larger than that of the tabulated value (0.255) with 98 df at 0.01 level of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was negatively significant. The null hypothesis was rejected. The findings indicated that the profession of the respondents was negatively significant. So, there is negative relationship at profession of the respondents and the poverty level. Individuals in higher-skilled, professional occupations generally experiencing lower poverty rates compared to those in low-skilled, manual labor jobs (Marx et al., 2015)

Safe Food, Sanitation and Water Supply Status of the Respondents and the Poverty Level

Relationship between safe food, sanitation & water supply status of the respondents and the poverty level was determined by testing the null hypothesis: "There is no relationship between safe food, sanitation & water supply status of the respondents and the poverty level". The computed value of the co-efficient of correlation (r) between the concerned variables was -0.537 as shown in Table-10. The computed value of "r" (-0.537**) was found larger than that of the tabulated value (0.255) with 98 df at 0.01 level of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was negatively significant. The null hypothesis was rejected. The findings indicated that the safe food, sanitation & water supply status of the respondents was negatively significant. So, there is negative relationship at safe food, sanitation & water supply status of the respondents and the poverty level. People with low incomes are more likely to have unsafe food, poor sanitation, and limited access to water. This can lead to malnutrition, disease, and other health issues (Perochena & Scott, 2018).

Monthly Income of the Respondents and the Poverty Level

Relationship between monthly income of the respondents and the poverty level was determined by testing the null hypothesis: "There is no relationship between monthly income of the respondents and the poverty level". The computed value of the co-efficient of correlation (r) between the concerned variables was -0.742 as shown in Table-10. The following observations were made regarding the relationship between the two variables on basis of the Coefficient of correlation (r). The computed value of "r" (-0.742**) was found larger than that of the tabulated value (0.255) with 98 df at 0.01 level of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was negatively significant. The null hypothesis was rejected. The findings indicated that the monthly income of the respondents was negatively significant. So, there is negative relationship at monthly income of the respondents and the poverty level. On average within countries of Sub-Saharan-Africa, a 1 percent increase in household per capita income as measured from surveys has been associated with a 2 percent decrease in the poverty rate (Wu et al., 2024).

Monthly Expenditure of the Respondent and the Poverty Level

The co-efficient of correlation between the concerned variables was found to be -0.713 as shown in Table-10. This led to the following observations regarding the relationship between the two variables under consideration. The computed value of "r" (-0.713**) was found greater than that of the tabulated value (0.255) with 98 df at 0.01 level 'of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was negatively significant. The null hypothesis was rejected. Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that the monthly expenditure of the respondents had significant and negative relationship with their poverty level. Adeola (2016) stated that the non-poor spends three times more than the poor in a year in context of expenditure.

Overall Indebtedness Rate of the Respondents and the Poverty Level

The co-efficient of correlation between the concerned variables was found to be 0.534 as shown in Table-10. This led to the following observations regarding the relationship between the two variables under consideration. The computed value of "r" (+0.534**) was found greater than that of

the tabulated value (0.255) with 98 df at 0.01 level ‘of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was significant. The null hypothesis was rejected. Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that the respondents having less overall indebtedness rate tend to lower poverty level. It indicates that the overall indebtedness rate of the respondents had significant and positive relationship with their poverty level.

Social and Economic Improvements of the Respondents and the Poverty Level

Computed value of the co-efficient of correlation (r) between the concerned variables was -0.466 as shown in Table-10. The following observations were made regarding the relationship between the two variables on basis of the Coefficient of correlation (r). The computed value of “r” (-0.466**) was found larger than that of the tabulated value (0.255) with 98 df at 0.01 level of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was negatively significant. The null hypothesis was rejected. The findings indicated that the social and economic improvement of the respondents was negatively significant. So, there is negative relationship at social and economic improvements of the respondents and the poverty level. Adams (2003) found that the economic growth reduces poverty.

Changes in GDP Growth of the Respondents and the Poverty Level

Relationship between GDP growth of the respondents and the poverty level was determined by testing the null hypothesis: “There is no relationship between GDP growth of the respondents and the poverty level”. The computed value of the co-efficient of correlation (r) between the concerned variables was -0.685 as shown in Table-10. The following observations were made regarding the relationship between the two variables on basis of the Coefficient of correlation (r). The computed value of “r” (-0.685**) was found larger than that of the tabulated value (0.255) with 98 df at 0.01 level of probability. The relationship between the concerned variables was negatively significant. The null hypothesis was rejected. The findings indicated that the GDP growth of the respondents was negatively significant. So, there is negative relationship between GDP growth of the respondents and the poverty level. The GEP with respect to GDP per capita is higher, with a 1 percent increase in GDP per capita being associated with a 2.8 percent decrease in the poverty rate, on average within the Sub-Saharan Africa countries (Wu et al., 2024).

Conclusion

Poverty is a crucial factor for the overall development of a country. It can be reduced by converting the population into skill resource, proper agricultural land use, improving the educational status, by getting smart profession, safe food, sanitation, water supply etc. if the monthly income of the respondent will increase then monthly expenditure of the respondent will increase that reduces overall indebtedness rate. Finally, it results social and economic improvements and GDP growth of the people. We need to more study about the causes and consequences of poverty so that we can make our country more developed by repairing our weakness. Further studies require to explore more about personal, social, geographical, and climatic factors that affect the poverty level of the southern people. Future scholars may consider including more southern districts of the country for a large-scale investigation.

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The authors declare the originality of the paper.
The journal authority is not accountable for any estimations of the author presented in the article.