

# Influence of the Media on Female Menstrual Hygiene Practices: An Exploratory Study on Mirpur

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## Abstract

This study aimed to explore how media influences female menstrual hygiene practices in Mirpur Pallabi, Dhaka. To examine the deeper consequences and barriers caused by socio-cultural norms, two focus groups were conducted as well as to the semi-structured questionnaire that was used to gather data from 50 female participants from different households. Findings from thematic coding suggest that media plays a crucial role in building awareness and changing perception about menstruation. However, the word "menstruation" itself is still considered taboo. Content analysis of media advertisements shows menstruation being portrayed as a hygiene crisis, but also as a celebration of womanhood and female identity. Enhancing marketing and distribution channels, lowering the cost of feminine hygiene products, strengthening the brand image of feminine hygiene products, and placing greater emphasis on media platforms to promote female hygiene practices are all recommendations made by the study. Focus group discussions and promotional campaigns are also recommended.

**Keywords:** Menstruation, Media, Hygiene, Practice, Awareness, Accessibility.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Research paper

Received: 11 January 2025

Accepted: 04 March 2025

Published: 08 March 2025

DOI: 10.58970/JSR.1094

## CITATION

Rimu, K. A. & Emon, M H. (2025). Influence of the Media on Female Menstrual Hygiene Practices: An Exploratory Study on Mirpur, *Journal of Scientific Reports*, 9(1), 40-50.

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## Introduction

Menstrual hygiene is a topic that hasn't gotten enough attention or appropriate acceptance, in terms of hygiene practices (Ahmed & Yesmin, 2008). In middle-income and low-income countries like Bangladesh, vulnerable, marginalized women do not have access to the resources and social support they need to manage their menstrual hygiene practices. Due to this, teenage girls lack the proper knowledge and information to handle their periods hygienically and are unprepared for their first menstrual period. Menstruation is still a taboo issue in Bangladesh (Afiaz & Biswas, 2021). Only 6% of girls received any menstrual hygiene education at school, according to the (Bangladesh National Hygiene Baseline Survey, 2014), ritu project (BNHBS). 94% of people do not understand why girls menstruate. Also 66% of girls did not know what menstrual periods were when they started, according to the (National Hygiene Survey 2018, 2020). Statistics show that 86% of adolescent girl students wear an old piece of clothing during their period and out of those adolescents, just 12 percent properly wash it with soap and let it air dry. Due to poor sanitation facilities, 40% of Bangladeshi female students drop out of school during their periods, according to the survey (Alam et al., 2017). Adolescents who are menstruating for the first time have

challenges to proper menstrual hygiene management due to sociocultural norms, values, and health mediators. such as the price of packaged sanitary pads, lack of washroom and water, the unavailability of private rooms for changing sanitary pads, and a scarcity of information regarding the essentials of menstrual hygiene(Chabih & Elmasry, 2022).Not only are menstrual hygiene requirements important and an issue of concern for women and adolescents of reproductive age, but access to the same are essential. For women and girls, ensuring proper menstrual hygiene is essential to their wellbeing and sense of dignit. Additionally, it is necessary for providing the basic sanitation, hygiene, and reproductive health services to which all women and girls are entitled(Afiaz & Biswas, 2021). The lack of good sanitary facilities in Bangladesh makes it difficult for women, especially in urban slum areas, to practice proper hygiene or to follow the health recommendations (Rodrick, 2018). Maintaining proper menstrual hygiene can make women feel confident in a variety of situations and prevent more serious feminine issue while also making them healthier (Jahan & Opel, 2020).Today's technology is performing much better than we had anticipated. The media's role in promoting awareness, establishing connections with society and its people and motivating engagement on a variety of social issues is one example(Wakefield et al., 2010). However, data shows that social media platforms are frequently used to disseminate health information campaigns (Guse et al., 2012). However, this article focuses on how media can affect how people practice menstrual hygiene. Since media can influence all facets of a problem, this article will concentrate on media strategies that effectively spread awareness of women's hygiene practices to people who are unaware of menstrual hygiene difficulties and how menstrual issues are portrayed in the media (Courts, 1993).Nevertheless, research illustrates the widespread use of social media channels for spreading health information campaigns.

In order to make sure an improvement in infections, it is essential to analyze the role that the media has had in promoting proper awareness and adoption of healthy menstrual hygiene practices. After reviewing several literatures, it has observed that a lot of research work has been done on menstruation. A very few researches have done based on Media influence on female menstrual hygiene. However, it is not found any study done on particularly in the context of the perception of women residing in Mirpur area. The usefulness of electronic media on menstrual hygiene practices and the function of media on the representation of menstruation have also not been highlighted in the numerous studies on menstrual practice health management. Moreover, media has evolved into a powerful tool for shaping perceptions and influencing societal norms regarding menstruation. By providing a platform for open discussion, it fosters awareness and challenges long-standing taboos associated with menstrual health. The increasing accessibility of digital platforms allows women to engage with educational content, share personal experiences, and seek support, contributing to a shift in attitudes toward menstruation. Media campaigns have not only promoted hygienic menstrual practices but have also played a crucial role in advocating for policy changes related to menstrual health and hygiene. Despite these advancements, challenges remain in ensuring that media representations of menstruation are accurate, inclusive, and free from commercial biases. The portrayal of menstruation in advertisements, often focused on discreetness and cleanliness, reinforces the notion of menstruation as a problem rather than a natural bodily function. Therefore, while media continues to play an instrumental role in menstrual health education, a more balanced and realistic representation is necessary to further dismantle the stigma and empower individuals with knowledge and confidence regarding menstruation.

### **Literature Review**

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) remains a significant public health issue, especially in low- and middle-income countries. The lack of proper menstrual products and education can lead to health risks, social stigma, and limited opportunities for women and girls. Recent studies have highlighted the barriers and challenges women face in maintaining menstrual hygiene, ranging from cultural taboos to inadequate infrastructure, especially during displacement or in rural areas. Additionally, factors such as socio-economic status, education, and access to media have

been identified as crucial determinants in menstrual health practices. Media interventions have been proposed as a potential tool to address these challenges, raise awareness, and promote healthier practices. This study aims to explore the role of media in improving menstrual hygiene management and its effectiveness in different socio-economic contexts. Several studies have explored the relationship between media exposure and menstrual hygiene management. Afiaz and Biswas (2021) highlighted the potential of mass media in raising awareness about MHM in Bangladesh, particularly among women with regular access to mobile phones and media outlets. They found that media exposure significantly increased the likelihood of using modern menstrual absorbents, thus emphasizing the role of media in educating and changing menstrual practices. Similarly, studies on displaced women, such as Hirani (2024), pointed out the challenges faced by women in disaster-prone areas, where lack of infrastructure and sanitation facilities exacerbate menstrual hygiene issues. In contrast, research by Türker et al. (2023) focused on adolescent girls with cerebral palsy, revealing that menstrual health is often overlooked in these populations, indicating the need for inclusive media campaigns. Finally, Chauhan et al. (2021) identified key socio-economic factors influencing the use of sanitary napkins, suggesting that education and media exposure are essential to improving menstrual hygiene practices among adolescent girls. These studies collectively underscore the critical role of media in shaping menstrual hygiene behaviors and the need for targeted interventions to address gaps in knowledge and access to menstrual products.

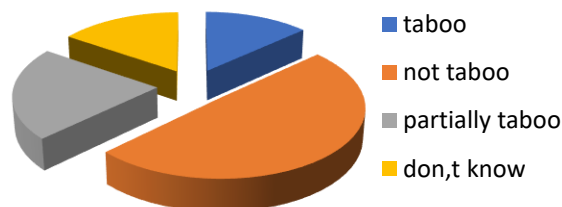
Manzoor & Khurshid (2021) argues that the applications of media have picked up pace in the last two decades, especially in disseminating female health information. The use of different health technologies involving the use of mainstream media has been quite instrumental in delivering the required information to the different stakeholders. Due to the convenience of use and particularly targeting women, media has been efficiently used to raise awareness concerning menstruation amongst females and to encourage menstrual healthiness. The discrete nature of media allows women to procure information and knowledge on such a sensitive issue. Media furthermore plays a vital role in eradicating the social myths associated with menstruation, which allows achieving behavioral intercession in women required for reaching the desired results. Chaudhary (2021) integrated that Young women's perception about menstruation may vary in their acceptance of media advertisements. Understanding how young women's perspectives of menstruation are constructed is the objective of this study. Second, the study is to examine how young women see print media advertisements for menstrual products. Menstruation is not portrayed in the media as a maturing process, but rather as a "hygiene crisis." Nisman et al. (2019) addressed that Practicing good menstrual hygiene can help prevent infections of the reproductive system and abnormal discharge from the vagina. Adolescents' level of menstrual hygiene knowledge will depend on how simple it is for them to get the information. Rodrick (2018) reviewed that Before adopting any changes to girls' menstrual practices, they should be informed about the physiological effects of menstruation. They should receive information on the importance of menstruation, the emergence of additional sexual behaviors, how to choose a hygienic menstrual absorbent, and how to dispose of it properly. This can be accomplished through educational television shows, school nurses and health professionals, curriculum-based instruction, and informed parents. This will prevent her from experiencing psychological distress and, in turn, dispel any outdated misconceptions she may have and allow her to talk freely about menstruation. Wong et al. (2014) demonstrated how the media has given women new ways to access and share health information that used to be regulated by social and cultural barriers, values, and norms, as well as health facilitators. When women look for health information online, disintermediation has occurred to varied degrees. Women's individual searches for sexual health information and the information they find online yet share in private, discreet, and confidential face-to-face conversations are probably the most creative and challenging social norms.

## Research Methods

The study was conducted in Mirpur Pallabi Dhaka. Study's goals and objectives were fulfilled using a qualitative methodology. The study mainly focused on female participants, aged 12 to 40, who reside in the Mirpur Pallabi area of Bangladesh, in order to figure out the effects of different media on female hygiene practices during the menstrual cycle. Open-ended and closed-ended questionnaire are used to gather personal data about the participants' ages, the age at which they menarched, and the knowledge of teenage girls about menstruation. It was then purposefully distributed to 50 participants. It has been used to discuss how women generally manage their menstrual hygiene, including their knowledge, attitudes, and practices. It has also been used to discuss how electronic Medias (TV, social media) have an impact on this process. To investigate women's viewpoint of the media's impact on menstrual hygiene practices, two focus groups with female inhabitants of the Mirpur Pallabi region were held. To gather supplemental information the study employed qualitative content analysis techniques. Various TV and social media (Facebook, YouTube, etc.) advertising have been evaluated using the content analysis method to examine how menstruation-related concerns are portrayed in media advertisements. All information was kept private and secure, it was assured to the participants, who came from varied socioeconomic backgrounds and agreed to participate in the study. At last, all the data were analyzed with thematic analysis using N vivo 14 software.

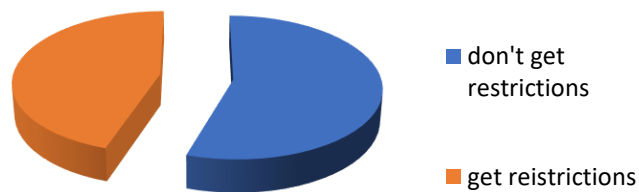
## Results & Discussion

Among 50 participants around 86% of women consider menstruation as a taboo in society. Most women, 90%, believe that it is a natural process, but 10% consider it a disease. The majorities of women are aware of menstrual hygiene management and practice it. 85% use pads during menstruation, while 9% use cloth. When no pads are available, 70% of women use cotton to control their periods. 85% dispose of used pads in the trash, 5% flush them, and 10% find alternative ways. Most women, almost 80%, agree that menstruation is healthy and normal, but girls find it hard to discuss openly still now.



**Pie Chart 1.** Perception about menstruation

The study findings also showed that 90% believe it is a natural process. The majority of women (85%) use pads during menstruation, and 80% are aware of menstrual hygiene management. 55% dry their reusable absorbents at home, and 85% wash them with soap. During menstruation, 60% of women feel irritated or unwell, and 55% seek advice about menstrual problems. 75% of women are not restricted from attending college or doing outside work during their period, but 45% face restrictions on clothing or movement.



**Pie chart 2.** Changing perception about menstruation

Focus group discussion was conducted to find out the deeper answers of the study. Here among the respondents, a few women showed their interest to sit on group discussion and there are some points that reflect the objectives of the study.

### **Challenges of menstrual practices facing by women in terms of social stigma**

Many girls and women experience menstrual discomfort and inadequate access to menstrual hygiene products, negatively affecting their health, education, and financial support. Lack of knowledge, societal stigma, and hygiene taboos contribute to poor menstrual hygiene. One respondent disregard societal stigma but sometimes faces awkward situations.

*"In some situations, it comes with shame because, for example, I am on your period and I can't stop it, but if I spill, people will stare at me and ask, 'What the hell is wrong with me' as if it's my fault," (Participant 4, focus group 1)*

Another respondent stated that women how much conscious regarding societal believes, women if they have ever faced any leakage of menstrual blood people sees menstruation blood as a fault of that menstruator.

*"If I have white on and I accidentally create a spot, I can still claim its dirt or mud. However, if I wear red, people might not believe me. They might think I did not protect myself well, and it was a mistake to wear white". (Participant 1, focus group 1)*

*"During my period, I was told not to perform religious rituals like prayer, fasting, or touching holy texts like the Quran. I am judged "ritually impure" throughout my menstrual cycle due to the presence of blood, according to prevailing interpretations of hadith and other texts in Islam. After my period is over, I may resume my holy practices by washing every part of my body". (Participant 1, focus group 1).*

The research also found the negative effects of menstrual stigma on women, including isolation, negative stereotypes, exclusion from activities, and feelings of shame and embarrassment. The media's representation of menstrual products is helping women become more confident.

### **Problems during menstruation**

The study identified three problems faced by women during menstruation: physical, psychological, and societal stigmas, as well as financial problems. Despite awareness about hygiene, many women cannot afford sanitary napkins, leading to the use of old clothes or cheap, harmful napkins. Insufficient knowledge about menstrual hygiene and sexual and reproductive health can also interfere with access to education and financial independence for parents, educators, and students. one respondent said,

*"Using ordinary cloth, I always have to be afraid about the absorbent, if it gets leakage, everyone will laugh at me. I want to use senora but my mother doesn't allow me to buy this, as she says sanitary napkin are expensive, and we cannot reuse this." (Participant 5, focus group 1)*

The taboo around menstruation affects both physical and mental health, as it can lead to girls feeling unable to express their emotions and struggling with menstrual-related issues. Hormonal changes during menstruation can cause mood swings and depression, potentially leading to severe mental health issues. One respondent said,

*"In my period days, I feel like horrible; I cannot concentrate on anything. Sometimes I feel cry." (Participant 3, focus group 2)*

Menstrual cycle is a natural and healthy process, but it can cause some physical symptoms such as headaches and mood swings. Some women may experience more severe symptoms like irregular periods, heavy bleeding, and menstrual cramps. Symptoms can vary from person to person.

*"I feel like my whole body doesn't working when my period cramps start. I remain into fear about my period pain in every month". (Participant 1, focus group 2)*

*"It's like someone cut down my vagina and my legs are broken. I cannot do anything on my period days." (Participant 2, focus group 1)*

Most of the time women face restriction on going out or wearing particular wear on period days.

*"My mother said not to go after magrib during period days, she believes that something supernatural may harm me." (Participant 4, focus group 1)*

*"I don't get any restriction on my period days, I don't believe on that" (participant 5, focus group 2)*

### **The role of other family members (male members)**

The study findings emphasize on the importance of involving men in menstrual health education and awareness, as they are decision-makers in reproductive health but often lack knowledge about menstruation. Men can support women during menstruation, and both men and women need to be targeted to change their views and behaviors towards menstruation. The respondents had varied opinions on this matter.

*"Even going near to my father or sibling makes me uncomfortable. Simply said, I would rather keep it (menstruation) a secret and don't want anyone to know". (Participant 3, focus group 1)*

*If a man were present, I would be more aware of how I spoke because I do not want him to learn personal information about me, but as we are female and have experienced it, we obviously have a shared knowledge of what is going on. (Participant 3, focus group)*

### **Perception about media advertisements in creating awareness**

Media advertisements for pads usually include information about menstrual awareness, knowledge, and hygiene. They are essential in changing the stigma associated with menstruation. People readily understand the message and are influenced by media advertisements for pads that encourage them to end the stigma surrounding menstruation and practice better hygiene.

*"I should wear white, be bold, attempt to challenge myself. These advertisements are encouraging me to put myself to the test" (Participant 2, focus Group 1)*

*"I believe commercial advertisements are also attempting to promote womanhood, as the advertisements want us to realize that being a woman does not make us inferior to men or make us less powerful or capable of bearing children, respectively. Therefore, I believe they are attempting to spread a message of hope" (Participant 3, focus group 2)*

### **Perception about maintaining hygiene without pads**

Media influences women to raise voice against the existing taboos. Here media are influencing women to buy sanitary pads, showing it is essential for maintaining hygiene. Most of the women respondent shows interest about using sanitary pads. Because of the price issue, sanitary napkins were seen as a product that was necessary but not necessary.

*"I want something that will protect me, whatever what type of pad I'm wearing. I still feel the need to be conscious of and take care of myself throughout my period, though". (Participant 4, focus group 2)*

*"I also prefer sanitary pads but I cannot afford it. Also, I used to take cloth pad which is washable and cheap." (Participant 6, focus group 3 )*

### **Perception about menstruation products advertisement**

The media has a significant ability to shape and influence society. This power is shown in advertising by following the path of the product through production to consumption. In this sense, goods escape manufacturing facilities and modern production to become a part of media culture. Although the primary goal of commercials is to simply increase sales, there are none that merely provide consumers with information about a product in order to encourage them to purchase it.

*"I think the advertisements are just trying to sell the things. They don't accurately depict the struggles I face. Selling the product is the main goal of both radio and television. It doesn't talk about how I feel or how I go about my everyday activities, such as going to work and managing my period". (Participant 1, focus group 1)*



**Figure 1:** sunburst tree model using thematic analysis

From this thematic analysis (Figure 1) of sunburst model it can be say that during menstruation women faced problems most in terms of managing menstruation and maintaining hygiene also

they faced challenges most on that times as common shyness and stigmas works behind this process.

Content analysis findings analyzed some aspects (presented in figure 2) those are given below

Name	Description
<b>Educating people about environmentally harmful effects of disposables and sustainable solutions</b>	<b>Social media has highlighted the environmental impact of single-use pads and tampons and promoted sustainable options like menstrual cups, period underwear, and cloth pads</b>
<b>Establishing a safe environment for learning and eradicating cultural taboos</b>	<b>Giliyapa's "The Period Song" on YouTube</b>
<b>Men's period education</b>	<b>"Guys Experience Periods for the First Time"</b>
<b>social media helps to normalizing menstruation</b>	<b>#Tweetyourperiod and #Happytobleed</b>

*Figure 2: codebook on social media content analysis*

### **Social media helps to normalizing menstruation**

Social media has provided a platform for discussing menstruation openly and positively, with hashtags such as #Tweetyourperiod and #Happytobleed becoming popular. Art on social media also helps to start conversations about menstruation. However, there has been a history of negative reactions towards menstruation in traditional media and online, as seen in the case of Louelle Denor, who faced harsh criticism and even violence for sharing a photo of her menstrual cup on Instagram.

### **Establishing a safe environment for learning and eradicating cultural taboos**

Although there are taboos around the world around menstruation, internet usage gives menstruators a safe environment to learn about their cycles. Doula Nour Emam and Dr. Deemah Salem, two Arab women, use Instagram to spread knowledge about reproductive health. STDs, unintended pregnancies, and other health problems can result from a lack of health education. Additionally, Giliyapa parodies menstrual taboos in "The Period Song" on YouTube. Period blood artwork contributes to lessening the stigma and suffering associated with menstruation.

### **Men's period education**

A viral TikTok video in 2020 showed a girl teaching her boyfriend about pads, while a BuzzFeed video from 2016 called "Guys Experience Periods for the First Time" helped men gain a better understanding and respect for menstruation.

### **Educating people about environmentally harmful effects of disposables and sustainable solutions**

Social media has highlighted the environmental impact of single-use pads and tampons and promoted sustainable options like menstrual cups, period underwear, and cloth pads. It has also brought attention to the fact that menstruation connects people regardless of their location, through shared experiences.

### **Applications**

This study has several practical applications across various sectors, particularly in public health, education, media, and social advocacy. Policymakers can utilize the findings to advocate for subsidized menstrual products, ensuring accessibility for economically disadvantaged women,



while governments and health organizations can implement awareness campaigns to break menstrual taboos and promote better hygiene practices. Schools can incorporate menstrual health education into their curricula, equipping young girls with essential knowledge about reproductive health and hygiene management. Additionally, NGOs and community-based organizations can develop training programs to foster open discussions and reduce stigma, encouraging both men and women to support menstrual health.

Media and communication strategies can benefit from this study by guiding advertisers to create more inclusive and realistic portrayals of menstruation, addressing the physical and emotional struggles associated with it. Social media campaigns can further spread awareness and promote sustainable menstrual products, while content creators and influencers can leverage digital platforms to debunk myths and normalize discussions around menstruation. In the healthcare sector, the study highlights the importance of promoting safe menstrual practices, encouraging the development and distribution of affordable, eco-friendly alternatives such as reusable cloth pads and menstrual cups. This research also contributes to gender equality by emphasizing the role of men in menstrual awareness and breaking societal stigmas. Workplaces can implement menstrual-friendly policies, such as providing free sanitary products and allowing flexibility during menstruation. Religious and cultural leaders can use these findings to challenge outdated taboos and encourage progressive attitudes towards menstrual health. Furthermore, researchers can build upon this study to explore menstrual health challenges across diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts, paving the way for future advancements in hygiene products, healthcare services, and social policies. By applying these findings, stakeholders can contribute to improving menstrual health awareness, accessibility, and inclusivity, ultimately fostering a more informed and supportive society.

### **Conclusion**

Research finding shows that girls and women can learn about the newest menstrual products, different manufacturers, legislation and regulations, and other subjects through media advertisements. Menstrual products should be eligible for subsidies so that every girl and woman can afford them. Given that the majority of respondents learned about menstruation from television advertisements, teenagers get messages about menstruation from media sites as they are engaged with internet most of the hours in a day. Media advertisers should place more emphasis on developing advertisements that promote good hygiene and health. Parents, civic leaders, and representatives from the religious community should speak up for open discussion of menstruation. The Ministry of Education should include comprehensive health education and awareness programs on menstrual physiology and menstruation hygiene management in the curricula of primary, secondary, and upper secondary schools. Implementing a course on menstruation and menstrual hygiene management will help to promote effective menstrual hygiene. In order to encourage more open discussion about menstrual health and to encourage men and boys to rationalize their roles in supporting the menstrual health of women and girls, communication and behavior change programs are being developed to overcome stigma and taboos. Finally, yet importantly, more research on females' menstrual hygiene and reproductive health should be done in order to improve maternal health.

### **Limitations and future research directions**

This study, while offering valuable insights into menstrual health awareness, societal stigmas, and media influence, has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size may not be representative of the broader population, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The study primarily relies on self-reported data, which can be influenced by personal biases, recall errors, or social desirability, potentially affecting the accuracy of responses. Additionally, cultural and regional differences in menstrual perceptions and practices were not extensively explored, making it necessary to conduct further research in diverse settings to capture a more comprehensive understanding of menstruation-related challenges.

Another limitation is the study's focus on qualitative data, which, while rich in detail, does not provide statistical analysis that could establish broader trends and correlations. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative narratives with quantitative surveys to strengthen the reliability of findings. Furthermore, the study mainly examines the role of media in shaping menstrual awareness but does not extensively analyze the effectiveness of specific campaigns or the extent of behavioral change resulting from media influence. Longitudinal studies could help track shifts in perceptions and practices over time to assess the lasting impact of awareness initiatives. Future research should also explore the intersectionality of menstrual health with other factors such as economic status, disability, and rural-urban disparities to understand the unique challenges faced by different groups. Investigating the impact of menstrual health education programs in schools and workplaces could provide deeper insights into policy effectiveness. Additionally, studies on sustainable menstrual products and their accessibility, adoption rates, and long-term benefits would contribute to the growing discourse on environmentally friendly menstrual management. Expanding research on male involvement in menstrual health discussions could further aid in dismantling societal taboos. By addressing these gaps, future studies can provide more actionable recommendations to improve menstrual health policies, awareness campaigns, and overall well-being for menstruators worldwide.

### **Acknowledgement**

*We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Associate Professor Al Jamal Mustafa Shindaini, from the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Bangladesh University of Professionals, for his invaluable contribution to this study. His insights, guidance, and support have been pivotal in shaping this research. We truly appreciate his dedication and commitment throughout the project.*

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