

# The Effectiveness of Social Protection Programs in Alleviating Poverty in Bangladesh: A Systematic Review

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**Abstract.** *The research objective of this study to assess the role of social protection in poverty reduction in relation to the context of Bangladesh. The research study used systematic approach that included 12 studies that used Quasi-experimental studies. This involved examination of poverty reduction schemes, which included cash transfers, food subsidy and the public works program to in as much as they influence income and food security. These statistics prove that introduction of these social protection measures has help in preventing poverty, boosting household earnings and food security. Nevertheless, the success of such programs depends on several factors such as, design, implementation, and population base. This paper calls for more research to inform the advancement of design and implementation of social protection in order to achieve maximum poverty reduction in Bangladesh.*

**Keywords:** *Social Protection Programs, Poverty Reduction, Bangladesh*

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## INTRODUCTION

Poverty is an urgent issue for many nations around the globe, including Bangladesh. In an effort to address this issue, vulnerable populations have been provided with support and assistance through social protection programs. These programs seek to alleviate poverty through the provision of income transfers, access to basic services, and other forms of assistance. In Bangladesh, social protection programs play an essential role in reducing destitution and enhancing the well being of its citizens. In recent years, the nation has made significant strides in implementing various social protection initiatives, such as cash transfer programs, food subsidies, and employment generation programs. These programs are intended to provide a safety net for the most vulnerable members of society, such as the impoverished, the elderly, the disabled, and the marginalized. In developing nations like Bangladesh, where about 24% of the population does, poverty is a major issue (World Bank, 2020; Fosu, 2017).

The government of Bangladesh has instituted social protection programs to help the impoverished and lower income citizens of the country lead more comfortable lives. Cash handouts, subsidized meals, and job creation initiatives all fall under this category. However, the efficiency of these initiatives to alleviate poverty remains unclear. If we are to assess how effectively these initiatives have reduced poverty in Bangladesh, we need to conduct a comprehensive literature study. Numerous reports have examined the efficacy of Bangladesh's social safety net initiatives. In a randomized controlled trial aimed at determining the efficacy of a cash transfer program in alleviating poverty, in research by Ahmed et al. (2019) and Ferraro & Simorangkir (2020) found that it greatly decreased poverty and raised household consumption. Hossain et al. (2020) and Parks et al. (2020) conducted an evaluation of a food subsidy program

and found that it was successful in reducing food insecurity and improving nutritional results for its recipients.

Despite these encouraging results, there are still obstacles to overcome in Bangladesh's social security program implementation. The proper beneficiaries must be identified, sufficient funding must be secured, and waste, fraud, and abuse must be kept to a minimum. As a result, it is crucial to conduct a comprehensive literature study in order to assess the efficiency of social protection programs in reducing poverty in Bangladesh and to determine where they can be enhanced. The purpose of this literature synthesis is to evaluate how successful social protection initiatives have been in Bangladesh at reducing poverty. The purpose of the study is to assess how alleviating poverty, increasing household consumption, increasing employment, and increasing income are affected by cash transfer, food subsidy, and job creation initiatives.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Poverty and Social Protection in Bangladesh**

Despite significant economic progress, poverty remains a persistent challenge in Bangladesh, affecting approximately 24% of the population, according to the Hossain (2021) and World Bank (2020). The government of Bangladesh has implemented a range of social protection programs aimed at mitigating poverty and enhancing the well being of its citizens, particularly the most vulnerable groups. These programs include cash transfers, food subsidies, and employment generation initiatives, which are designed to provide financial support, improve food security, and create job opportunities, respectively (Baird et al., 2018; Hajdu et al., 2020). The effectiveness of these social protection programs in alleviating poverty is influenced by various factors such as program design, implementation efficiency, beneficiary targeting, and resource allocation.

#### **Cash Transfer Programs**

Cash transfer programs are a key component of social protection in Bangladesh, where eligible households receive regular financial assistance aimed at increasing consumption and reducing poverty. According to Ahmed et al. (2019) and Nawaz & Iqbal (2020), cash transfer programs have significantly contributed to poverty reduction and improved household consumption in Bangladesh. The study examined a specific cash transfer scheme and found that the program not only decreased poverty levels but also enhanced the consumption capacity of beneficiary households. This suggests that cash transfers can have a direct impact on improving the quality of life for impoverished families by enabling them to meet their basic needs. However, the success of cash transfer programs depends on several factors, including the accuracy of beneficiary targeting, the regularity of payments, and the adequacy of the transferred amounts. Ahmed et al. (2019) and Brown et al. (2018) also highlighted challenges in the implementation of these programs, particularly in identifying and targeting the right households. Ensuring that the most vulnerable groups are adequately reached is crucial for the effectiveness of cash transfer programs in reducing poverty.

#### **Food Subsidy Programs**

Food subsidy programs in Bangladesh aim to improve the nutritional intake of low income families by providing access to essential food items at subsidized prices. Hossain et al. (2020) and Nisbett et al. (2017) conducted a study on a food subsidy scheme in Bangladesh, which revealed that the program successfully reduced food insecurity among participants and led to better nutritional outcomes. The provision of subsidized food helps ensure that even the poorest households can afford basic food items, which is essential for their health and well being. The effectiveness of food subsidy programs in combating poverty and food insecurity is closely tied to the efficient distribution of food, the adequacy of the food basket provided, and the extent to which the program reaches those in need. Hossain et al. (2020) pointed out that while food subsidies have had positive effects, challenges such as corruption, mismanagement, and logistical issues can undermine the program's impact. Addressing these challenges is essential to

maximizing the benefits of food subsidy programs for the poorest segments of the population (Maestre et al., 2017; Osendarp et al., 2018).

### **Employment Generation Programs**

Employment generation programs are designed to create job opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed, thereby raising household incomes and reducing poverty. Rahman et al. (2018) analyzed an employment generation initiative in Bangladesh and found that the program had a positive impact on employment rates and income levels among participants. By providing skills training and job placement services, these programs help individual secure stable employment, which is crucial for long term poverty alleviation (Yang et al., 2020; Guo & Wang, 2021).

However, the success of employment generation programs depends on several factors, including the quality of training provided, the relevance of the skills to the labor market, and the availability of employment opportunities. Rahman et al. (2018) identified challenges in implementing these programs, such as inadequate training facilities, insufficient capacity building, and limited job opportunities in certain regions. Overcoming these obstacles is critical to ensuring that employment generation programs effectively contribute to poverty reduction in Bangladesh, in research by Khan (2019) and Alam (2017).

### **Impact of Social Protection Programs on Poverty Alleviation**

The effectiveness of social protection programs in reducing poverty in Bangladesh varies depending on the design and implementation of each program. Ahmed et al. (2019) demonstrated that cash transfer programs can significantly reduce poverty and increase household consumption when properly targeted and implemented. Similarly, Hossain et al. (2020) showed that food subsidy programs can reduce food insecurity and improve nutritional outcomes. However, the impact of these programs is contingent on various factors, including the precision of beneficiary targeting, the adequacy of resources, and the efficiency of program delivery.

According to Croppenstedt et al. (2018) the success of social protection programs in poverty alleviation also depends on the integration and coordination of different initiatives. A holistic approach that combines cash transfers, food subsidies, and employment generation programs may be more effective in addressing the multifaceted nature of poverty in Bangladesh (Sedlmayr et al., 2020; Kabeer, 2019). By ensuring that these programs complement each other and reach the most vulnerable populations, the government can enhance the overall impact of social protection on poverty reduction.

### **Challenges in Implementing Social Protection Programs in Bangladesh**

Social protection initiatives have had a positive effect in Bangladesh, but there are still obstacles to their full implementation. The proper beneficiaries must be identified, sufficient funding must be secured, and waste, fraud, and abuse must be kept to a minimum (Mugarura, 2017; Gantchev, 2019). Challenges in implementing a cash transfer program in Bangladesh were highlighted in research by Ahmed et al. (2019), specifically in the areas of household targeting and identification. Rahman et al. (2018) conducted a similar study, finding that training and capacity building for program beneficiaries posed significant challenges when trying to implement a job generation program. When taken as a whole, social security program in Bangladesh have the potential to greatly lessen poverty and raise the living standards of the poor. The success of such initiatives, however, hinges on the specificity with which they are developed, implemented, and targeted (Larrue, 2021; McConnell, 2019). To measure how effective these initiatives have been in reducing poverty in Bangladesh, a comprehensive literature study is required.

The creation and implementation of these programs, the selection of recipients, and the availability of funding are all critical to their ultimate success. Implementing these programs faces many obstacles, including finding the appropriate people to help, providing enough money, and

preventing waste and fraud. (Ahmed et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2018). Ultimately, social security programs in Bangladesh can have a major impact on lowering poverty rates if they are well planned, executed, and targeted. An in depth evaluation of these programs contributions to reducing poverty in Bangladesh, as well as suggestions for how to enhance their efficacy, can be gleaned from a thorough examination of the relevant literature (Banerjee & Jackson, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2018).

## **METHODS**

This research adopts a systematic review methodology to thoroughly synthesize existing studies on the effectiveness of social security programs in Indonesia, aiming to reduce bias and enhance objectivity by applying standardized criteria for study selection and assessment. The search process will involve an extensive review of electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and the Web of Science, using targeted keywords like "social security", "poverty reduction", and "Indonesia," focusing on English language articles published between 2017 and 2022. The inclusion criteria are stringent, allowing only studies that focus on poverty alleviation through social protection programs in Indonesia, use experimental or quasi-experimental designs, report empirical findings, and are published in peer reviewed journals. The review will also include a manual search of reference lists to ensure comprehensive coverage. Data will be systematically extracted using a standardized form, capturing essential study details, populations, interventions, and outcomes, and analyzed through narrative synthesis to integrate findings across studies. Quality assessment will be conducted using Cochrane's Risk of Bias tool for randomized trials and the ROBINS-I tool for quasi-experimental studies, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. Qualitative content analysis will further identify common themes, providing a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of these programs. While this study does not require ethical approval due to the absence of human participants, we will verify that all included studies have obtained appropriate ethical clearance and informed consent from participants.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Search Strategy and Selection Criteria**

The systematic review process began with an extensive search of electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and the Web of Science. A total of 237 studies were identified through database searches, and an additional 8 studies were identified through manual review of reference lists. After removing 54 duplicates, 191 studies remained. Following a screening of titles and abstracts, 34 studies were selected for full text review. Ultimately, 12 studies met the stringent inclusion criteria and were included in the metaanalysis. The included studies employed either Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs) or quasi-experimental designs and evaluated various social protection programs such as cash transfers, food subsidies, and public works programs.

### **Quality Assessment and Data Synthesis**

Quality assessment using the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool for RCTs and ROBINS-I for quasi-experimental studies indicated that several studies had moderate to high risk of bias. The most commonly reported biases included incomplete outcome data, selective reporting, and confounding. Nevertheless, the evidence gathered suggests that social protection initiatives in Indonesia have significant potential to reduce poverty and improve economic well being. Most studies show significant poverty reductions, whether in terms of income, household expenditure, or a combination of both. In addition, benefits in terms of increased employment and food security are also noted in these studies. However, the effectiveness of social protection programs varies depending on the type of program and target group.

Table 1. Summary of Included Studies

Study	Study Design	Sample Size	Intervention	Outcome Measures
Smith et al. (2021)	RCT	2,000	Cash transfers	Poverty reduction
Rahman et al. (2020)	Quasi-experimental	5,000	Food subsidies	Income, food security
Ahmed et al. (2021)	RCT	3,000	Public works program	Employment, poverty reduction
Khan et al. (2019)	Quasi-experimental	10,000	Cash transfers	Income, poverty reduction
Hossain et al. (2018)	RCT	1,000	Health Insurance	Reduced health costs, increased access to care

The findings of the included studies in the systematic analysis are summarized in Table 1. This table summarizes the results of studies that analyzed the efficacy of social security programs in Bangladesh. These studies used a variety of research methods, sample sizes, and interventions. Ahmed et al. (2021) used a randomized controlled experiment to assess the efficacy of cash transfers in reducing poverty. With a sample size of 2,000 people, the study revealed that poverty rates among the population as a whole dropped by 12% as a result of cash transfers. The second study, by Rahman et al. (2020), analyzed the effect of food subsidies on income and food security using a quasi-experimental methodology. Participants' income increased by 20% and their food consumption rose by 10% thanks to the food subsidies, according to the research of 5,000 people.

In a third research, Hossain et al. (2018) used a randomized controlled trial design to assess the value of medical coverage for patients. Out of pocket medical costs were found to be cut in half for the study's sample size of 1,000 people who had health insurance. The results of cash transfers on income and poverty reduction were examined in quasi-experimental research by Khan et al. (2019). Based on data from a sample of 10,000 people, the researchers concluded that cash transfers reduced poverty by 10% and increased revenue by 15%. Poverty alleviation and enhanced economic and health outcomes in Bangladesh are possible thanks to social protection initiatives. However, the success of these initiatives differs from program to program and population to population. Findings also show the need for rigorous research designs and quality assessments to reduce bias and guarantee accurate findings.

The findings of the review indicate that social protection initiatives have the potential to reduce poverty in Bangladesh. Included papers analyzed how social protection programs like welfare, food stamps, and health insurance affected poverty levels, earnings, and health. Ahmed et al. (2021) showed that cash transfers significantly reduced poverty among the study's participants. Khan et al. (2019) research also discovered that cash transfers helped raise revenue and decrease poverty. These results provide strong evidence that monetary transfers may be an efficient method for alleviating poverty in Bangladesh.

Rahman et al. (2020) research looked at how food aid programs affected household revenue and nutrition. The results demonstrated that participants' income and food intake increased noticeably as a result of food subsidies. These findings provide supporting evidence that food subsidies may be a successful strategy for enhancing food security and decreasing poverty in Bangladesh. Hossain et al. (2018) examined how having health insurance affected patients health results and their ability to pay for medical care. Results revealed that participant out of pocket healthcare costs were significantly reduced and their health seeking behavior was significantly enhanced after obtaining health insurance. These findings provide further evidence that health insurance has the potential to be a successful strategy for enhancing health outcomes and decreasing poverty in Bangladesh.

Evidence based social protection initiatives have been shown to be effective in reducing poverty in Bangladesh, which is why their implementation is emphasized by the review's findings.



The results also imply that policymakers should take population and intervention type into account when developing social security programs. However, the findings may not be generalizable because studies used a wide variety of study designs and interventions. The efficacy of social security programs in Bangladesh is best understood, however, when a variety of study designs and interventions are taken into account. Beneficial cash transfers, food subsidies, and health insurance coverage are all examples of social security programs that could help Bangladesh's economy and population. The results of this study have significant ramifications for researchers and practitioners in Bangladesh who are interested in developing and implementing social security programs based on empirical evidence.

## CONCLUSION

Findings of the systematic review of global literature show that the social protection interventions in Bangladesh such as cash transfers, food subsidise and public work have significant influence in poverty decrease. These programs have increased the availability of food and health care and decreased people's share of costs for such services. However, there are still question in putting the programs into practice, especially on how can the target group be reached, and how the program can sustain itself financially in the future. Based on the study, social protection interventions have a great potential of reducing poverty but more research needs to be done to determine the suitability of the programmes in the long run. It is suggested that the policymakers should improve the approach to program design and implementation which will increase accessibility to the poorest and most vulnerable populations in Bangladesh.

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