

EXPERIENCES OF RESTAURANT BUSINESS IN THE COVID-19: EVIDENCE FROM RAJSHAHI CITY, BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The restaurant business in Bangladesh has no institutional recognition. It has no mentionable business guidelines and juridical structures to combat any epidemic like coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19). Because of not having a legitimate basis this sector is suffering a serious financial crisis in the global pandemic. Revenues generating ability has drastically decreased when the government ordered for shutting down the non-essential organization to fight against the spreading the coronavirus. At the same time government also imposes stay order on various special programs like wedding, birthday, new-year celebration, and Iftar party which is directly related to restaurant business. This article, therefore, focuses on the impact of COVID-19 in the restaurant business in Bangladesh. Data were collected through purposive sampling method through a questionnaire. For analyzing the data the statistical package for the social science (SPSS) v. 24.0 was applied. Datasets were analyzed with a statistical tool named Pearson's correlation coefficient (PCC). Descriptive statistics such as the frequency distribution and graph were also used for presenting and interpreting data. One sample t-test and dependent sample t-test were used to test the hypothesis. The COVID-19 decreases the revenues drastically ($r = 0.904$, $p = 0.000$). This is leading to the severe sufferings of workers and owners of the restaurants both fast food and general hotels, the restaurants and convention centers. This

deteriorating condition will further be on the increase of the government incentives providing policy needs of the most vulnerable groups in the country in the coming months. Otherwise this small and medium sector will go out of the economy for sine die. From this research, it was apparent that if the educational institutions are not re-opened, the infections rate curve wipe out and the vaccine is not made the restaurant business will not see any good news for booming their business. Coordinated administrative systems, reinforce of the health sector, economy, industry, agriculture and food security should be focused on under the new normal standard of life.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Lockdown, SME, New Normal, Restaurant Business.

OVERVIEW

How are Bangladesh's small businesses like the restaurant business operating the economic upsetting resulting from COVID-19? How will the government's responses addressing the consequences and affect their prospect? To explore these questions, the researcher surveyed of 15 restaurants operated in Rajshahi city (Bartik, et al., 2020). To understand the impact there was a question to a restaurateur, how is your restaurant business going on during COVID-19? He replied our business died on the 26 March 2020 when the government declared a general holiday and enforced a countrywide lockdown. If we were born again, we could do better. This is the lamenting speech by the restaurateur of a fast food and Chinese restaurant in Rajshahi city. This is the true impact on the restaurant business of Bangladesh in the COVID-19 pandemic (Food Fair, 2020).

Ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has a bad impact on workers' economic securities such as earnings certainty, professional certainty, labor certainty, hiring certainty, representation certainty, labor market certainty and competency reproduction certainty (Hossain, 2012). Coronavirus is a sensational and remarkable crisis in every sphere of life. The community development process could inferior than the financial crisis that the world faced in 2008. The pandemic requires a united and harmonized response from not only governments but also private sector businesses that might have the ability, mastery, wealth to control and reduce the repercussion of the public health and economic crises on community. This pandemic sheds a light on a new meaning and purpose of businesses (Vu, 2020).

Bangladesh is facing the pandemic at the final stage. Now it is 122 days after the first corona positive case was detected on March 8 this year. Up to 21 July 2020 total confirmed positive cases are 2,10,510, death cases are 2,709, total cured cases are 1,15,399 and total test cases are 10,54,559 (Government of Bangladesh, 2020a). A true lesson from this global pandemic is that it has no demarcation where you come from, what language you speak, or your racial, cultural and religious backdrop. In this pandemic situation the restaurant and hospitality industries are facing ultimate provocations. The provocations include joblessness of workers, temporary location closures, protecting employees from the infection of COVID-19 in the workplace, ensuring financial security and ensuring family nutrition. The anticipated negative impact on the restaurant business is very high (Bass, Berry & Sims PLC, 2020).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

International Labour Organization (2020) has threatened that 25 million employees will lose their jobs due to the new corona-virus (ILO, 2020). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the informal business sector is very high because many workers have already lost their employment. This has happened because 95 percent of restaurants are currently closed due to the novel

corona-virus (Bhuiyan, 2020). The nature and level of impact depend on the pandemic development policy responses and socioeconomic conditions of the country. There are around 30,000 small and big restaurants in the country. Of them, more than 10,000 are located in the capital city Dhaka. According to, Riaz Ahmed Khan, president of Bangladesh restaurant owners' association, Rajshahi district, there are nearly 2,000 restaurants in the Rajshahi district, of the approximately 70 or more restaurants are in the metropolitan areas. All of those are suffering a loss during the lockdown and now after re-opening, these restaurants are suffering from the scarcity of customers.

He said the accumulated loss of Rajshahi restaurants during the lockdown would surpass taka sixty crores so far. He further said it is not possible to recoup so huge amount of loss without any government incentives (Islam, S., 2020). About 1 million workers including chefs, waiter, cooks, servers and bread makers are engaged in this sector. Without a job, they all are at intolerable risk of COVID-19 (Islam, R., 2020). Restaurants industries are not just about recreation and culture. This sector is not limited to simply chefs, waiter and cooks. It is also linked with a large group of suppliers such as farmers, butchers, grocers, fishermen, cleaners and many more occupations involved in the supply chain. A heavy range of organizations is revolving around the core ecosystem. All of them are struggling through troubles of an unforeseen scale at the moment (Haider & Chowdhury, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic makes sense of uncertainty that looms over all stakeholders, from owners to employees, and customers to a certain extent. As the situation is deepening, most of the workers have been fired, many got to leave without pay, many were sent to furlough, some were compensated, some are in line to come back again to facilitate for takeaways.

The global pandemic scenario envisions that the gross domestic product (GDP) has fallen by 2 percent below the benchmark for the world as it is the standard level is 2.5 percent for developing countries. The standard level for industrial countries is 1.8 percent. The highest negative shock is recorded in the output of domestic services affected by the pandemic, as well as in traded tourist services (Maliszewska, Mattoo, & Van Der Mensbrugge, 2020). A survey report shows that the restaurant workers get Tk. 8,000-9,000 as wages per month, including the cost for their meal and accommodation. Their monthly income jumped to Tk. 12,000-15,000 summing up the amounts of customers' tips (Siddiqui, 2020). Now the question is what will make compensation for the restaurant business? What policy choice by the government will save this sector? What measures will take this sector into the new normal? The study was tried to find out the answer to some questions and exploring the facts regarding the impact of the COVID-19 in the restaurant business in Bangladesh. Besides these some specific questions were (Azam, 2014):

RQ-1: How is the online ordering and delivery systems effective in surviving the restaurant business in COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ-2: What are the adverse effects of COVID-19 on workers' salaries?

RQ-3: What is restaurateurs' expectation about government incentives to survive the restaurant business?

RQ-4: What policy measures have taken by the government to boost up the restaurant business?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Overall objective

The overall objective of the research is to find out the impacts of Covid-19 in the restaurant business in Bangladesh from the evidence of Rajshahi city.

Particular objectives

To achieve the overall objective the following particular objectives have been considered:

RO-1: To compare the number of order(s) obtained before Covid-19 and during Covid-19.

RO-2: To compare the revenues earning before Covid-19 and during Covid-19.

RO-3: To evaluate government initiatives for recovering the shocks of the restaurant business.

RO-4: To measure the performance of the restaurant who uses an online platform for delivering the order and who doesn't.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The coronavirus outburst has fatally affected the restaurant business. The number of customers has been falling at a panic rate since the first case of the coronavirus was recognized. The entire industry is in peril of falling down as party bookings are being canceled. People are restricting their movement to avoid public meetings lest they get infected by the coronavirus (Hossain, 2020). To know the importance of the study of this sector there was a conversation with a restaurateur at Rajshahi city and he talked as:

“Nothing to say about the problem of restaurant business because you have met in my chamber, Look at the dining table and count the number of tables vacant, look at the face of our waiters and chefs. Look at everything and write what you observe. Your observation is the present scenario of our restaurant business (Interview with a restaurateur TFC, 2020).”

The business position of this sector is alarming day by day. To know the proper way of solution for the current problem of the restaurant business a scientific study is inevitable. This study will give light into the matter of the restaurant business. It will also help the government, respective authorities, and other stakeholders in formulating policy for the future development of this sector.

RELATED LITERATURE

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is vindicating the world. Respiratory disease of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, China, was first revealed to the WHO Country Office in China on 31 December 2019 (Geosslinga, Scott, & Hall, 2020). Bangladesh confirmed the first coronavirus case on 8 March 2020. In response to the COVID-19 epidemic, the Government of Bangladesh (2020b) announced outstanding “general leave” from 26 March in the name of “lockdown” and extended it up to 30 May 2020 in seven different time period. Both the words “general leave” and “lockdown” produced uncertainty among the most socio-economically endangered groups in the country. The artificial lockdown and the interpersonal distancing plan of action in an impenetrable populated country of more than 165 million did not work (Shammi, Bodrud-Doza, Islam, & Rahman, 2020).

Government responses to survive the pandemic can be discussed in three ways. Firstly, responses from the labor sides, secondly, responses from the government and thirdly, responses from social protection and employment institutions. Firstly, to fight against the impact of

COVID-19 the labor response on it is going to operate the restaurant business in an online platform. Taking orders online, making delivery and payment in online gateways make help the restaurant labors to survive in the global crisis. In that regard, some young entrepreneurs introduce a new concept called “*cloud kitchen*” to attract the customers who otherwise preferred to dine-in, under normal circumstances. According to the paradigm of cloud kitchen customers could no longer come to restaurant, the restaurateurs decide to reach them.

Secondly, the important responses from the government side in Bangladesh is to allot Tk. 103,117 crores under 19 packages which are 3.7 percent of GDP to fight the coronavirus pandemic and protect people from the probable crisis. From these stimulus packages Tk. 20,000 crores has been allocated for providing working capital to the small and medium industries. The interest rate of this incentive package will be 9 percent and the taker of the loan will pay 4 percent as interest and the rest of the 5 percent interest will be paid by the government as a subsidy (UNB news, 2020).

Besides this, the government has announced a “Ghore Fera” (Returning home) program for low-income people who have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19. Under this service low-incomers will get home assistance facilities, six months food and cash, free VGD and VGF, free medical treatment and Tk. 10 per kg, rice (The Business Standard, 2020).

The government also takes initiatives namely the “Kaan Pete Roi” helpline. The mission of the helpline during COVID-19 is to alleviate feelings of despair, isolation, distress, and suicidal feelings among members of the community, through confidential listening. The government also developed a website <https://corona.gov.bd/> for 24 hours service for sharing updated information about the coronavirus. Several hotline centers have been introduced for the treatment and information transmission to the citizenry such as national call center #333, Sastho Batayon #16263, IEDCR #10655, Specialists helpline #09611677777 and National helpline #109 (GOB, 2020). People can afford these services free of cost.

Responses from the various social protection and employment institutions are, Bidyanondo Foundation’s ‘Ek Takay Ahar’ team made one thousand Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) suits. They are also providing meals to poor families and daily incomers. Employment institution Pathao has re-launched “Tong”, an on-demand essential delivery service, in response to the coronavirus pandemic as it is committed to keeping customers, partners and communities safe.

The top priority is to save lives now and flatten the curve of the pandemic. Priorities should be given on the innovating vaccine for controlling the coronavirus. Priorities in addressing the consequences of COVID-19 in restaurant labor can be discussed from the aspects of the state, social group, workers, employers and institutions. Value-added tax (VAT), income tax and all sorts of other utility expenses should be exempted to uplift the lives of the restaurant labors. The state should provide free safety equipment such as sanitizers, face masks, PPE and temperature screening tools to the restaurants which are in operation. Incentives must be allocated to the interested owners without any delay, easy conditions and harassment. Ministry of labor and employment should recognize and validate the papers of restaurant business, if need, the ministry can take initiative for passing a new law or ordinance for smooth running of informal sector business. Bangladesh’s labor welfare foundation should provide emergency funds among the restaurant labor to survive on the pandemic.

METHODOLOGY

Research Plan of Action

Acknowledging the effect of COVID-19 on the restaurant business in Bangladesh, this study pick out the numerous consequences of lockdown based on writings analysis, the lockdown situation in Bangladesh, and the small businessmen's ability to hold on without steering their business. A total of 23 questions and 7 utterances were used to prosper the questionnaire to realize the framework-based result appraisal and handling of the COVID-19 at the restaurant business in Bangladesh. The researcher has used 'Google Form' to construct the questionnaire and performing the online survey. The work out questionnaire with a preliminary section indicating the objective of the study was then shared through email, Facebook, Messenger with the particular and pertinent people considering the purposive sampling method. The questionnaire survey was administered from 18 July to 23 July 2020. A five-point (1–5) impact-based Likert scale was applied to test whether each respondent realize the utterances set out ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Research Sample and Population

The target populations were the fast food and Chinese restaurants, hotel and restaurants and convention centers having a capital of Tk. 50,000-50,00,000 which are operated at Rajshahi city (Bangladesh Bank, 2010). The answers to the survey questionnaires were a voluntary basis. A total of 15 responses were recorded during the survey in the purposive sampling method.

Data analysis

The data of the current research was analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics like frequency distribution, using percentages, and student t-test to know the participant's characteristics. The statistical package for the social science (SPSS) v. 24.0 was used for analyzing data. Datasets were analyzed through a set of statistical tools namely Pearson's correlation coefficient (PCC) and descriptive statistics. One sample t-test and dependent sample t-test were also used to test the hypothesis (Gaur & Gaur, 2009).

ETHICS

Before taking information from the respondents' they were informed about the particular aim of the research. Respondents' permission was taken before the survey and they remained anonymous. The survey was ended only once, and the survey could be finished anytime they desired.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Based on the above discussion, the study were suggested the following alternative hypotheses:

RH-1: H_1 : There is a significant relationship between COVID-19 and the average income of the Restaurant business.

RH-2: H_1 : There is a significant relationship between COVID-19 and the average number of orders of the Restaurant business.

RH-3: H_0 : $\mu =$ There is a significant relationship between COVID-19 and the average loss of the Restaurant business.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The restaurant business has mainly been suffered during this epidemic as the government decided on lockdown and interpersonal distancing around the world. This had led to a rapid shutdown of restaurants and hotels. Because of shutting down the restaurants most of the owners have made retrenchment of their workers. The following table of the descriptive statistics shows that 11 restaurants i.e., 73.30 percent made retrenchment their employees during COVID-19. The rest of the 4 restaurant that represents 26.70 percent didn't make retrenched but they were sent to furlough.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of Retrenchment

Retrenchments		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	11	73.3	73.3	73.3
	no	4	26.7	26.7	100.0
	Total	15	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

While asking the questions about do they have online ordering and delivery systems for selling their offered services? The following a simple bar diagram explains that 7 restaurants have no online delivery systems. From the total 15 restaurants of the study, 8 restaurants have online ordering and delivery services, of them, 6 restaurants operate it with the help of the third parties like food panda and others. Only two restaurants have own online ordering and delivery systems.

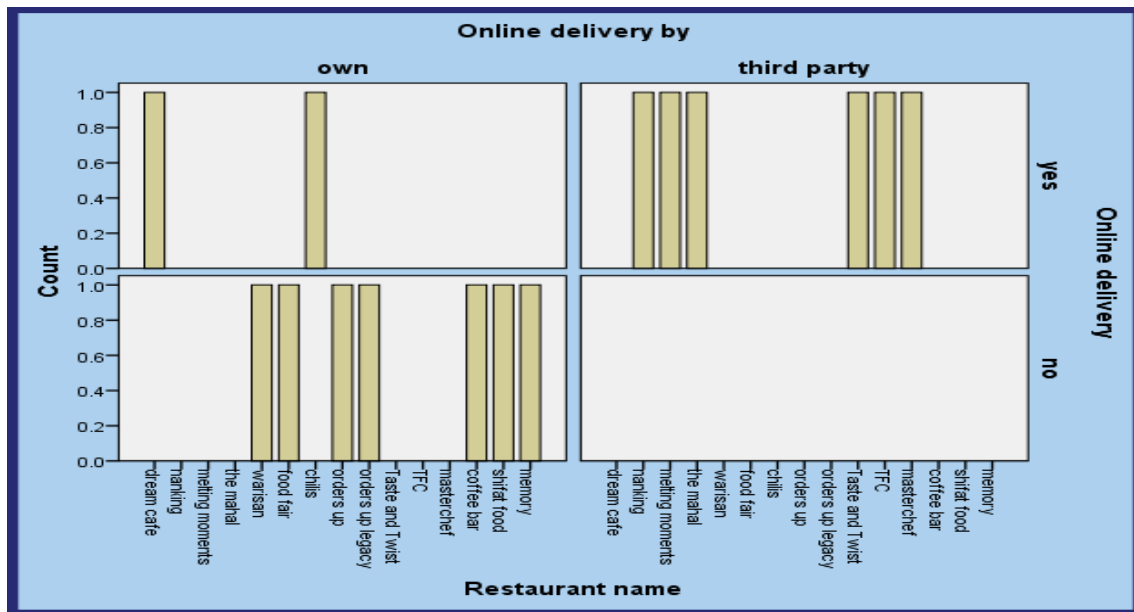


Figure1. Bar diagram.
Source: Field Survey, 2020

There is a research question How are the online ordering and delivery systems effective in surviving the restaurant business in the COVID-19 pandemic? At the same time, there is a research objective which states that, measuring the performance of the restaurant uses an online platform for delivering the order and who doesn't. A dependent sample t-test may give the comparative the result to make clear the questions. The result of the test shows that at the 5 percent significance level p-value obtained is .000 which is <0.05 of the significance level. As per the decision criterion, we cannot accept the null hypothesis. Here alternative hypothesis is accepted and hence, it can be said that there is a significant positive relationship between COVID-19 and daily sales of the restaurant business. The test result is shown on the following page:

Table 2. Paired Samples Test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Daily sales before covid-19 - Daily sales during covid-19	1.400	.632	.163	1.050	1.750	8.573	14	.000

Another objective of the research was to measure the adverse effects of COVID-19 on workers' salaries. From the One sample t-test, it is seen that at a 5 percent level of significance our calculated p-value is .000 which is <.05. So, as per the decision rule, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypotheses. From the test result, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between COVID-19 and the decreasing of workers' salaries during the pandemic.

Table 3. One-Sample Test

One-Sample Test							
		Test Value = 0					
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Salary of workers		29.000	14	.000	1.933	1.79 2.08	

While conducting the research it was seen that most of the restaurants losing their average daily income. In that regard, a hypothesis was developed to measure the relationship that is there

any positive relationship between COVID-19 and an average reduction of revenues in restaurant business? The test result is given below:

Table 4. Paired Sample Correlations

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Average daily revenue before covid-19 & Average daily revenue during covid-19	15	.904	.000

Table 5. Paired Sample Test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Average daily revenue before covid-19 - Average daily revenue during covid-19	1.400	.828	.214	.941	1.859	6.548	14	.000

From the above-paired sample correlations test it is seen that the correlation coefficient is $(r) = .904$ which indicates that there is a strong positive correlation between COVID-19 and an average decrease of revenues. Besides the test result we can take the decisions about rejection and acceptance of our hypothesis from the paired sample test. From the paired sample test it is seen that, our calculated p-value is .000 which is $<.05$ of the significance level. As the p-value is less than the significance level value of 5 percent hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. So, there is a significant positive relationship between COVID-19 and the average revenue of the restaurant business.

While measuring the policy steps taken by the government it is very much negative result obtained which is given below in the pie chart that is from the 15 restaurants only one restaurant got government incentives for operating their business. The rest of the 14 restaurants didn't get.

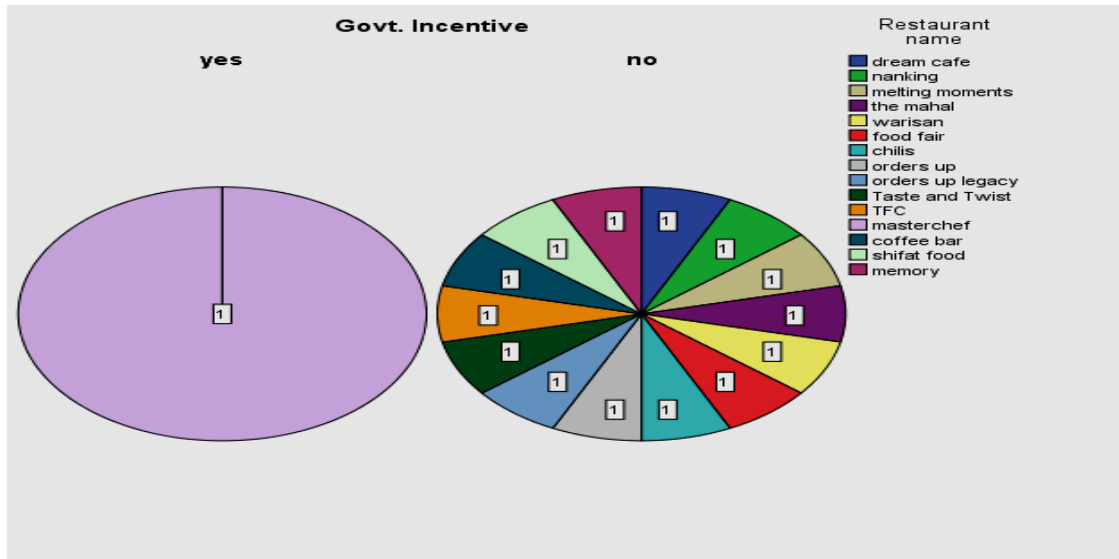


Figure 2. Pie diagram
Source: Field Survey, 2020

There were 7 statements for investigating the respondents’ attitude towards the impact, responses and priorities of the restaurant business in COVID-19. These seven statements are mentioned here as the rent of the space should be reduced, government incentives should provide, COVID-19 shocked the restaurant business, COVID-19 cause the joblessness of many workers, the restaurant may open by maintaining health rule and social distancing, closing restaurant for a long time causes the disrupts of customers’ entertainment, the policy needed for addressing the socio-economic losses and employment crises and state, social group and employer should move together for reducing the shocked of CCOVID-19. In all cases, five-points Likert scale measurement process was used as stated strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. The following pie chart shows the result of respondent attitude towards the impact, responses and priorities of the restaurant business in COVID-19.

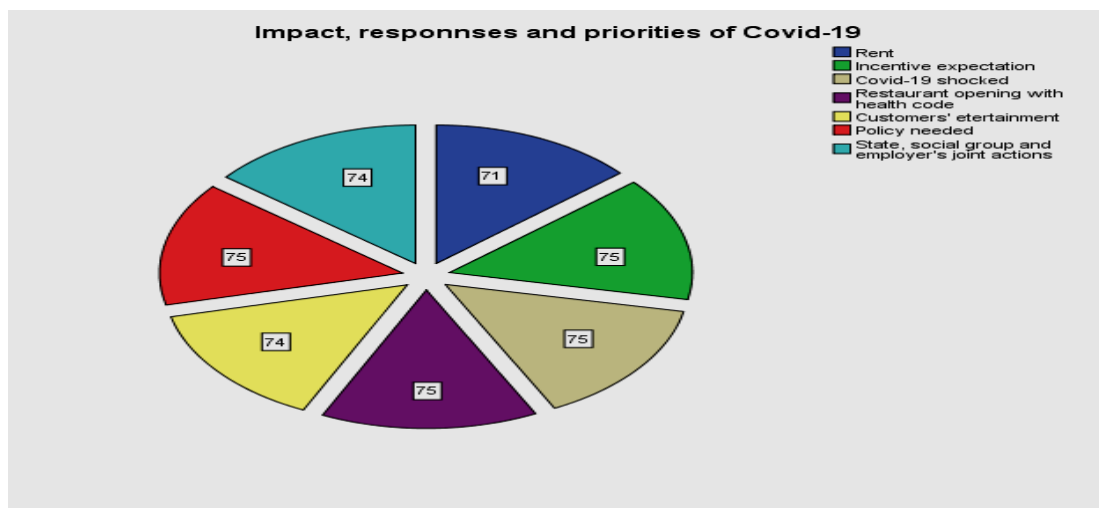


Figure 3. Pie diagram
Source: Field Survey, 2020

From the above graph, it is seen that 75 percent of restaurants have given priority on policy formation for getting government incentives and the same percentage have also given their consent for reducing the rent of the space in COVID-19. For improving the condition of restaurant labor more than 70 percent of restaurateurs have also given the emphasized on the state, social group, employers joint actions and government assistance for the joblessness of this hospitality sector. 74 percent of respondents think that closing restaurants for long period have a bad effect on customers' entertainment.

Table 6. Results of Hypothesis Test

Hypothesis	Comment
There is a significant relationship between COVID-19 and the average income of the Restaurant business	Accepted
There is a significant relationship between COVID-19 and the average number of orders of the Restaurant business	Accepted
There is a significant relationship between COVID-19 and the average loss of the Restaurant business	Accepted

Table 7. Correlation Matrix

Correlations			
		Average daily revenue before covid-19	Average daily revenue during covid-19
Average daily revenue before covid-19	Pearson Correlation	1	.904**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	15	15
Average daily revenue during covid-19	Pearson Correlation	.904**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	15	15

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the above table, it is seen that the correlation coefficient between the average daily revenue before covid-19 and the average daily revenue during covid-19 is $r = 0.904$ and the p-value is 0.000. So the relationship between the average daily revenue before covid-19 and the average daily revenue during covid-19 is very strong positive and significant at 0.01 significance level. So there is an association between covid-19 and the average daily revenue in the restaurant business.

CONCLUSIONS

The restaurant businesses has experienced the effects of the disease and lessening the production of 144 million workers in the COVID-19 pandemic in the world (UN news, 2020). If the situation is prolonged further more than 50 percent of restaurants will be shut down forever by the end of 2020 due to lack of capital. So, the government and the respective authority of the

restaurants should ensure that their workers are beyond just complying with the law and regulations. Workers can get fair and humane behavior from the state and employers as well as social institutions. Without appropriating policy measures, workers in this sector will face a high risk of falling into poverty. It may face greater challenges in retrieving their livelihoods in the recovery period. The major priorities in addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 are policy formation for government incentive packages, restoring the economy and employment, subsidizing business, keep up jobs and incomes, protecting workers in the workplace, engaging business with an online platform and arranging regular social discourse for solutions.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest to report.

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