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## A Phenomenological Inquiry Into the Freelancers' Work Motivation, Needs and Challenges: An Emerging Economy Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Freelancing has been assumed as a possible remedy for unemployment by the Bangladeshi youth for some time now. This research is conducted to investigate the profession of a freelancer in Bangladesh and focuses on the motivational stages undergone by freelancers and their plans. Moreover, the study attempts to explain to what extent the needs of freelancers are satisfied from the standpoint of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. For this purpose, a qualitative methodology i.e., phenomenology is used. Fifteen respondents working in different parts of the capital city took part in the interview for this study. The study has demonstrated that an overwhelming majority of the respondents acknowledged it as an opportunity at first that gradually helps to develop an entrepreneurial mindset. One striking feature of the findings, however, is that freelancing may be a solution provisionally but not in the long run due to unfulfilled dimensions of the need theory. A few directions for future works are also suggested in this regard.

### INTRODUCTION

Freelancing is the term that is frequently used for a person who is self-employed and not committed to a specific employer for a long term and works on completing a project/task-based work (Wood et al., 2018; Kuhn and Maleki, 2017; Kazi et al., 2014). According to Rahman and Rahman (2017, p. 02), "freelancers are not bound to work for any organization and to work for fixed time and region". Freelancing is therefore more like a project-based work, where the freelancers are employed on a contractual term with their payments contingent upon the completion of the specific task/project. Such kind of flexible work arrangements in the market form part of the gig economy (Hudek et al., 2020), where the organizations and the workers get involved on a short-term basis having little or no connection (Kalleberg and Dunn, 2016) with the latter often referred to as independent contractors (Friedman, 2014) or the freelancers (Gig Economy Data Hub, 2019).

According to World Trade Report (2023), over the last decade and a half, the total exports of services delivered through digital platforms have continued to grow at 15% in comparison to 11% for goods. It further presents that around 14% of online freelancers across the globe originate from Bangladesh, thereby making it a hub of the online workforce in creative and multimedia services. In recent years, a growing number of youths are choosing freelancing as a profession in Bangladesh (Zaman, 2019). They have been freelancing as web developers, programmers, graphics designers, and so on. The number has risen with the increasing availability of the Internet and other online marketplaces. The promotion of freelancing through different sorts of media played a major role as well. Termed as a type of self-employment of the population (Akhmetshin et al., 2018), the freedom and the flexibility of this profession as well as the convenient relationship between businesses and skilled workers are attracting the youth like no other profession before (Gubachev et al., 2018).

According to Buford et al. (1995), people instinctively work to obtain their unfulfilled needs; this drive can be termed as motivation. In his Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Abraham Maslow, an American Psychologist, proposed a model that says that humans are primarily motivated by five categories of needs: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Maslow organized several human motivations into 5 basic categories of needs. Psychological needs, i.e., food, water, warmth, etc are the first layer of the hierarchy. Safety needs come next, which denotes a secure environment, and feelings of safety. Human interactions and affections come in the category of belongingness and love needs. The fourth category is esteem needs which includes a sense of achievement and respect from others. The last one or the top one in the hierarchy is self-actualization, i.e., the feeling that one has lived up to his potential and creativity. Starting from the bottom, when one need is satisfied, the need for the next level, which is higher, intensifies and the need for the previous level tends to decrease. In an organizational setting, as the employees/workers proceed to the upper level, their security needs decrease and their need for attachments, esteem, and self-actualization starts to increase (Hall & Nougaim, 1968).

While there are several studies conducted elsewhere on this issue, there is a dearth of studies done in the context of Bangladesh (Sultana et al., 2019). This research thus explores an uncharted area to unravel what the freelancers view about this profession itself, their motivation for choosing this profession, the everyday challenges they face, the societal perception, their work environment as well as their plan for the future. Apart from these issues, it is also significant to delve into the needs being met by the people involved in freelancing. From a theoretical standpoint, the study will thus shed light on what extent or level the needs of freelancers are satisfied vis-à-vis Maslow's need hierarchy theory. In investigating the above issues, it applies phenomenology, a qualitative research methodology, providing a thematic analysis of the responses gathered from the study participants.

This paper is organized as follows: after this introduction, a brief literature review on freelancing is provided. This is followed by a research methodology that includes sample size and sampling method, data collection, and data analysis.

Next, research findings are provided with a discussion of those findings. Finally, this paper concludes with a few directions for future research.

There are a number of studies performed on this issue that are available in the existing literature. Below is presented a number of studies performed in different contexts in this regard.

Kovach (1987) conducted a study using a quantitative analysis method on industrial workers in the USA to determine what motivates the employees. He found out that interesting work, appreciation, and the feeling of being relevant or attached to work play major roles in motivating employees. According to Linder's (1998) study using a descriptive survey methodology on a research center's employees in Ohio, USA, in addition to interesting work & appreciation, good pay also plays a major role in employee motivation. However, Mahmoud et al. (2020) study using structural equation modeling (SEM) found that identified regulations act less as a source of motivation for Generation Y and do not act at all as a source of motivation for Generation Z.

Kaur (2013) discussed at large how the hierarchy of needs theory made a significant contribution to the employee motivational area and how it can be used to define and measure motivational factors for both researchers & managers. Sypniewska (2014) conducted a study in Poland using quantitative analysis to find out the contributing factors that affect overall job satisfaction the most. According to the researcher, the three most important factors that affect job satisfaction are the atmosphere of the work, stability of the employment, and good relationships with co-workers.

Karabulut (2016) conducted a study on 480 graduate students in Turkey using a quantitative analysis technique to find out the major contributing traits that lead to entrepreneurial intention. The researcher found that personality traits such as the need for achievement, risk tolerance, and locus of control have a positive effect on entrepreneurial intentions. In another study by Kirkwood (2009), the desire for independence and job dissatisfaction were contributing factors for the respondents to choose self-employment. The study was conducted using a semi-structured methodology on 75 entrepreneurs from New Zealand.

Suthaharan et al. (2017) carried out a study on the factors that influence online freelancing take-off in Sri Lanka. A mixed method that consists of survey-focused group discussions and in-depth interviews has been carried out to demonstrate the significant variables for the willingness to work on an online platform and the variables for not having the willingness as well. This study reveals the influencing factors in adopting freelancing with males having the most contribution in this particular field.

Kazi et al. (2014) explored the concept of freelancing in Malaysia. The authors shed light on the top hiring and freelancer countries and the fields where a freelancer could avail jobs. The study revealed a sustainable rise in the number of freelancers. The study also contained the key factors about how freelancing is different from entrepreneurship. According to the authors, entrepreneurs sell tangible products or services whereas freelancers sell their professional knowledge or skill. In their study on how local entrepreneurial activity is influenced by the platforms of the gig economy, namely, Uber X, Burtch et al. (2018) found that such platforms diminish lower-quality entrepreneurial activity, due apparently to the viable employment opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed.

Shevchuk & Strebkov (2015) studied the emergence of freelancers in Russian language-dominated countries. Researchers have adopted the purposive sampling technique and conducted 3 surveys in a 5-year duration among Russian freelance professionals. It was found that highly educated and entrepreneurially motivated people were found to be trying out this new line of work. Besides, the growth of freelancers was high in those regions with Russia becoming the hub for freelancers who speak native Russian. This is in line with Stupnikova et al. (2015) who revealed that freelancing has the potential to solve the employment problem for people who could not work in offices for numerous reasons and for people living in remote areas for whom finding a job was tough.

Born & Witteloostuijn (2013) carried out a study on freelancers to determine the factors behind their success in this career in the Netherlands. Data was gathered through conducting a survey among 1600 Freelancers along with 51 professionals' in-

depth interviews by the researchers. It was found that the external environment of the freelancers must be friendly and suitable for the professionals to be successful in this career since these environmental factors play a major role in their success.

Popiel (2017) conducted a study on the scope of freelancing in the creative economy of the U.S.A by exploring the profession through a case study. The findings of the study suggest that although working from home, high-paying gigs and the flexibility of the work attract freelancers, they face significant drawbacks due to global competition, the requirement for skilled workers, etc.

Nawaz et al. (2019) explored the factors that led freelancers to stick in the e-lancing industry. Data have been accumulated through a mixed method that includes a survey and semi-structured interviews. The study demonstrated that freelancers gain six dimensions of value from freelancing platforms in return for services. The outcome suggested that by improving each of the value dimensions, the overall freelancer value proposition could be improved.

Sultana et al. (2019) conducted a study on the freelancers of Bangladesh if the IT Freelancers in Bangladesh increase their entrepreneurial behavior and performance by using social capital and IT self-efficacy. By analyzing the opinions gathered through an online survey among 130 IT freelancers in Bangladesh, it was found that the self-efficacy of the freelancers acts as the key antecedent to their entrepreneurial behavior.

Alam et al. (2021) conducted a study on freelancers in Bangladesh to assess the current status & future needs of the profession. Researchers collected primary data through a survey questionnaire, surveying 52 freelancers in the country, and secondary data were collected through websites, books, and existing publications. According to the study, it was found that 33% of freelancers would like to be entrepreneurs in the IT industry; moreover, most of the freelancers were content with their income, the government should develop more infrastructures for the freelance economy where more than 70% are part-time freelancers.

In a study carried out by Zawan et al. (2020) in the U.K. using multivariate analysis, it was found that when compared, the Free Willies (freelancers)

were significantly happier than the regular wage workers with the former's work satisfaction level found to be higher.

The preceding review of the existing literature highlights the fact that there is a paucity of research conducted in the context of Bangladesh, specifically from the standpoint of a qualitative investigation. This study has, therefore, undertaken this attempt to fill the lacuna through a phenomenological inquiry into the issue at hand. In doing so, it would add further novelty to the extant literature by shedding light on the needs of freelancers vis-à-vis Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theoretical standpoint.

## **METHODS**

Qualitative research seeks to answer 'why', and 'how' questions, rather than 'how often' or 'how many' (Buston et al, 1998). In qualitative research, broad and open-ended questions are put forward to the participants by the researchers that help to bring forth novel insights (Suddaby et al., 2015). This kind of research significantly helps in understanding the circumstances from a different perspective of a comprehensive phenomenon (Bengtsson, 2016). Several analysis methods such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, content analysis, hermeneutics, etc. can be used in qualitative research (Burnard, 1995). Phenomenology is the analysis of experience, perception, emotion, desire, awareness, etc from the individual's point of view (Fenyi & Morrison, 2022; Smith, 2006). This present research will apply this qualitative research methodology in its attempt to interpret various aspects of freelancing as a profession and understand the pertinent issues at hand. For this purpose, in-depth interviews of people having lived experience in this profession were carried out by which this understanding was portrayed in the language of the study participants as well as through their verbal and non-verbal gestures and expressions.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Method**

A total of fifteen respondents took part in the interview sessions from different parts of Dhaka city. The objective of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding which does not

necessarily need a large sample size (Boddy, 2016). To meet some particular criteria for interviewing the respondents, a purposive sampling technique was used. First, all the respondents must have at least one year of experience as a freelancer. Second, the respondents would be internet-based freelancers i.e., those who use an internet-based marketplace. Third, the respondents must either be web developers, programmers, or graphic designers.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

All the interviews were taken at the interviewee's convenient time and place. With permission from the respondents, all the sessions were recorded using a recording device. The full consent of respondents was earned ensuring that their anonymity would be kept and the respondents had no problems whatsoever with the recording of the interview. For the interview, a semi-structured questionnaire guide was developed. The interviews lasted around 40 minutes, on average. While conducting the interviews, the gestures and expressions of the respondents were also noted down. Each interview was concluded by thanking them for the time and effort they extended for this study.

For the purpose of data analysis, each of the interviews was carefully transcribed, and records were listened to repeatedly to ensure the quality of the transcription. A few themes were drawn from the responses generated from the interviews of the participants of this study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section first presents the demographic profile of the respondents; this was followed by a thematic analysis of the interview responses on various relevant issues such as the reason for choosing this profession, challenges, work environment, and future plans. In doing this, the responses are quoted verbatim along with their nonverbal reactions.

### **Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

The demographic profile of the respondents includes their gender, age, education, experience, and level of income. This is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Respondents	Gender	Age (years)	Education	Experience (years)	Income Range (BDT '000)	Area of Work
R-01	Male	30	Master's Degree	5	40-45	Web Developer
R-02	Female	22	High school Degree	2	15-20	Graphic Designer
R-03	Male	25	Undergraduate	2	25-30	Graphic Designer
R-04	Male	25	Undergraduate	1.5	10-15	Graphic Designer
R-05	Male	27	Graduate	2	30-35	Programmer
R-06	Male	25	Undergraduate	3.5	35-40	Web Developer
R-07	Male	26	Graduate	4	35-40	Web Developer
R-08	Male	24	Undergraduate	1	10-15	Programmer
R-09	Male	24	Undergraduate	3	25-30	Programmer
R-10	Male	23	Undergraduate	2	10-15	Web Developer
R-11	Male	20	High school Degree	1	10-15	Web Developer
R-12	Male	23	Undergraduate	1	10-15	Web Developer
R-13	Female	24	Undergraduate	2	15-20	Programmer
R-14	Male	25	Undergraduate	1	10-15	Graphic Designer
R-15	Male	24	High school Degree	2	25-30	Graphic Designer

From Table 1, it was observed that an overwhelming number of respondents (13 out of 15) were male, their ages varying from 22 to 30 years. As far as their academic background was concerned, it was found that the majority of the respondents were currently studying undergraduate level (9 out of 15); only three of the freelancers have high school degrees, of whom only one might pursue higher studies. When it came to their experience, one of the freelancers had a maximum of 5 years of experience. Three of the respondents had 1-year minimal experience. Regarding the level of income earned by the respondents, it was seen that their level of experience has a positive correlation with their income; for example, the respondent (R-01), who has 5 years of experience, has the highest income in the range of 40000-45000 BDT. Of the total of 15 respondents, 6 were web developers, 5 were graphic designers and 4 were programmers.

The following sections present participants' opinions in their own words regarding the various facets of their profession.

#### **Motivation for Choosing the Profession**

When asked about their motivation for choosing this profession, the respondents offered a variety of reasons for doing so. They seemed to find the number of opportunities for having a stable job very low compared to the surplus labor force available in the country. Apart from that, the respondents tended to find the work very interesting, and that this line of work provided them exposure to technology as well as freedom and flexibility.

The following abstracts would depict respondents' motivation, in their own words, for choosing this profession because of the aforementioned factors: I was a fresh graduate back then. After several interviews, I wasn't offered a job still. Then I found out about a foundation where web developing skills were offered to young adults for free for freelancing. I saw it as an opportunity and enrolled soon after. After a few years, I realized it was a wise decision I made [R-01].

I didn't plan on being a Freelancer, to begin with. I was very interested in the computer and technology. And I knew some basic programming.

As soon as I found out that one can earn money from this skill, I started entering this profession [R-07].

I came to this profession because of the freedom and flexibility it had to offer, you can't get it in any other profession [R-10].

I was in an IT firm. They gave me the necessary training that was required for the job. After a few months working there when I saw that I can earn more by freelancing and I can work whenever I can, I left the job and became a Freelancer [R-14].

#### **Work Environment & Work-life Balance**

Work environment having a favorable workplace and good relationship with co-workers positively correlate with the job satisfaction of an individual. When asked about the work environment of the freelancers, there were mixed reactions emanating from their opinions and expressions. These were captured in their own words presented below: As you know Dhaka is a very busy city and traveling to one place from another is pretty time-consuming due to traffic jams. In that context, I have a very nice and cozy workstation, which is my home. And the fact that anywhere I go, as long as I have my laptop with me and a secure internet connection, is pretty amazing for me.... [R-05]

However, despite how favorable their workstation was, the work environment was not all too favorable for the freelancers. As expressed in their words, they lacked peer relationships and felt lonely as time went by.

At first, it was okay but as time went by, it became quite hard for me to differentiate my time from work time. As you know my workloads aren't steady and pretty unpredictable. So, when I have more workload, I don't have much of my time for my own and this phase grows gradually [R-10].

Even though I have a very favorable work environment after a while I started to realize that I don't have any colleagues....and... I don't have anyone to discuss about work in break time, get a second opinion on my ideas.... And I don't have anyone to comment nice things when I do a good work or no one to discuss over my failures. this loneliness is quite heavy on me at times [R-11].

#### **Societal Perception towards Freelancing**

When asked about societal perception, their expressions conveyed a negative feeling regarding

this profession. They felt that society was not very supportive of this profession, at least not at the beginning. They had voiced their opinions thus:

The societal perception wasn't good at all. The fact that I am earning from home wasn't acceptable for people at all. They thought I was doing something illegal [R-5].

To be honest, my family has no idea about it. But they weren't very supportive of the fact that I work from home, they wanted me to have a regular job. But by the time I started earning a decent amount of money, they became a little more supportive [R-11].

My family wasn't very supportive at first. They still aren't fully. They want me to have a regular job. Well, I guess you can say that people who don't understand this profession aren't very supportive [R-12].

#### **Challenges Faced by the Freelancers**

Freelancers face challenges that are unorthodox compared to those faced by one in regular employment. Freelancing is a highly skill-demanding job and technology is evolving fast; besides, the frequency of the tasks they can obtain is unpredictable, unsteady, and sometimes scarce. Every respondent went through these challenges in their tenure. These uncertainties made these young professionals weary and leave them worried over time. When asked about the challenges, the freelancers had conveyed the above as follows:

Technology is always evolving, upgrading. Every day there is a new and better version of yesterday's technology. So, to be in this profession I always have to be up to date with the technology.... But even though when I am good with my skills, I don't always get the job. It is highly uncertain. The work isn't steady, so isn't the money. The days I have worked are the days I have money and the days I don't are the days I don't have money. It is indeed a challenge for me. And it is problematic as my income depends on my gigs [R-07].

The flexibility of this profession works both as a blessing and as a curse. For example, I don't have a steady work hour, I can take breaks whenever I want to but sometimes, I feel like it's hampering my productivity [R-01].

One respondent answered the following with a sigh, The paying method is the biggest challenge I face. Paypal isn't available in Bangladesh. So, I

have to use an alternative which isn't as good. [R-14].

**Plans for the Future**

Although freelancers seek this profession to achieve basic needs, they, however, did not seem to stay in this profession for a longer period. It is because of their belief that they have the capacity to achieve something better but cannot achieve it yet. Apart from that, being in such an uncertain environment their ability to take risks improved over time. Flexibility and the needs for independence were the major contributing factors for the freelancers to go for entrepreneurship instead of a regular job. Regarding their future plans, the respondents voiced their opinions as follows:

I think every freelancer grows an entrepreneurial mindset while being in this profession. I did too. I believe I can live upto my expectations if I choose entrepreneurship. I want to go back to my hometown and start my own business there. Of course, IT-related. I already have some web-based application projects. I want to make them come to life [R-07].

You see I think there is no place to grow in this profession. Even if there are, those are so rare. Hence, I want to start my own business someday [R-8].

I want to slowly get away from this profession. I don't mean to stop it though. I want to start my own business which needs a moderate amount of capital at least. I guess I'm just gathering the capital by being a Freelancer [R-09].

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed continual changes in the nature of work, career, and work environment in an evolving global economy (Barley et al., 2017; Fleming, 2017). With a population of about 170 million and a lack of sufficient entrepreneurial activities, Bangladesh is a labour-surplus country (Islam, 2015; BBS, 2022). Over the

past decade, Bangladesh's job market is not meeting the expectations of fresh graduates, which creates uncertainty among the youth about their careers (Rahman et al., 2019). According to Stupnikova (2015), freelancing has the potential of solving the unemployment problem. As revealed in the study, one of the prime inducements of the freelancers was securing a source of income; this apart, a knack in technology & yearning for independence attracted the professionals toward this profession. This concurs with the findings of Propiel (2017) who found flexibility as one of the key dimensions for choosing freelancing as a profession.

The study sheds light on the future plans of the freelancers where they conveyed their interest in being an entrepreneur later on after having gone through the initial uncertain phase of freelancing. From a managerial perspective, this bodes well as the freelancers are being viewed as an efficient and entrepreneurial workforce that would be a catalyst for growth and innovation in an increasingly dynamic economy (Gandini, 2016; Burke and Cowling, 2015). In this regard, as expressed by the participants, the study further reveals the challenging nature of the freelancing job which is also echoed in Kassi and Lehdonvirta (2018) that underscores the importance of continuously upgrading the skills on the part of freelancers in this evolving competitive market environment, specifically for those involved in the area of IT freelancing (Gusseck et al., 2023). As far as the uncertainty in getting jobs and irregular work hours are concerned, the findings fall in line with Ashford et al. (2018) and Das et al. (2018) which conducted a study on Bangladeshi IT freelancers.

As revealed in the study findings, freelancing does not fulfill all the dimensions of Maslow's hierarchy of needs that can be better understood as stated in the following Table 2:

Table 2. Freelancer's Need Fulfilment States vis-à-vis Need Hierarchy Theory

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs			
Particulars	Lower-order Needs	Intermediate Needs	Higher-order Need
Contents of Hierarchy	Physiological & Safety	Social & Esteem	Self-actualization
Scopes of Need Fulfillment	Yes	No	No

Although the respondents were found to be happy with their job in the beginning, as the next dimension of the need hierarchy is not fulfilled and/or is unlikely to be fulfilled, over time the

freelancers appeared to discontinue this profession. This finds resonance in another study (Alam et al., 2021).

Lack of self-actualization needs and their increasing personality trait, i.e., risk tolerance motivate the freelancers to pursue entrepreneurship full time rather than having a regular job. This finds concurrence with Karabulut (2016) who also found that the need for achievement, risk tolerance, and locus of control are the personality traits of an entrepreneur. The very key factor for the freelancers to choose entrepreneurship in the future, according to this study is concerned with flexibility; freelancers believed that they might not obtain their desired independence in a regular job. This finding mirrors that of Kirkwood's (2009) highlighting the fact that the desire for independence & job dissatisfaction are major motivational factors for entrepreneurship. According to this study, freelancers are not satisfied with their profession even though they believe in their capability to reach and fulfill their self-actualization needs. This is also in agreement with Sultana (2019) that holds self-efficacy of the professionals as a key antecedent for their entrepreneurial behavior.

To address the concerns of the freelancers, the findings have some implications for the stakeholders concerned. This is worth mentioning that Bangladesh has witnessed a rising trend in exports of digitally delivered services, with the contribution of professional services almost tripled during the past six years (WTR, 2023). With a growing number of people opting to engage in freelancing in Bangladesh, it should try to address the issue of the payment of the remuneration received by the freelancers. The authority has made a recent announcement that freelancers would be exempt from paying taxes and given incentives on remittances (DT, 2023). This would go a long way in motivating more people to engage in freelancing.

At present, there are eleven sectors in Bangladesh in the area of freelancing; however, there are a large number of sectors where freelancers with the requisite skills can operate and excel (Haider, 2023). Among various freelancing services, web designing is of very high demand. The curricula in higher education need to be updated to cater to the rising needs and demands of the coming days. The government should pay adequate attention to tap the underdeveloped area of its economy (a2i, 2023).

Despite the fact that the participants possess technical skills, they were concerned about the

uncertainty they experience in their profession that may sometimes stem from information asymmetries (Rosenblat and Stark, 2016) or the discriminatory nature of hiring of foreigners by the clients (Galperin and Greppi, 2017). One way to address this issue is to cultivate on the part of the freelancers themselves a collaborative approach through networking and social interactions (De Stefano, 2016). With the rise in the freelancing economy, professionals need to forge greater connectivity and trusting relationships through digital platforms (Sodurland and Borg, 2017). This may considerably diminish their sense of loneliness and crisis of identity (Selenko et al., 2018; Petriglieri et al., 2018), as perceived by the participants of the study. The uncertainty that revolves around getting irregular assignments may be offset to a great extent if the freelancers remain updated about the technological platforms that match them with their clients (Spreitzer et al., 2017) and focus on utilizing their skills through productive use of those platforms (Sutherland et al., 2020).

As revealed in the study, freelancers currently suffer from a negative societal perception about their profession. This finds traction in Hudek et al. (2020) highlighting the lack of sufficient recognition by society. With a view to embracing the freelancers into the regular workforce, it needs to play a positive role in this regard. This would gradually change if there is greater recognition of the freelancers by the policymakers at the institutional and governmental levels. The concerns vis-a-vis their occupational well-being need to be seriously addressed (Tran and Sokas, 2017). In this regard, the policy guidelines offered by Graham et al. (2017) in addressing the livelihood of digital workers through certification schemes and regulatory measures are worth considering.

## **CONCLUSION**

Freelancing has been an attractive profession for the youth and the unemployed till date. The present study is conducted among the freelancers based in different parts of Dhaka. A total of fifteen respondents took part in this qualitative study. A phenomenological inquiry into the 'lived experiences' of the study participants has been made. The study reveals that freelancers choose this profession for three major reasons, unemployment,



flexibility, and interest in technology. Once they are in this profession, they start to gain a sense of satisfaction because they have a source of income that makes them feel secure and they have independence in their work. However, after a while, they start to feel lonely and isolated and the flexibility puts them into a state of uncertainty vis-à-vis their income and low frequency of gigs. Later they realize they do not have the societal appreciation and feel that they have the potential to reach greater heights which freelancing cannot provide them with. While being in this uncertainty, the participants grow their risk tolerance ability and locus of control, and the unfulfilled needs and their skills motivate them to pursue entrepreneurship. All the freelancers who participated in this study would rather choose to start a business than get into a regular job. With regards to Maslow's need hierarchy theory, the study shows that freelancers have been satisfied with the two lower-order needs, namely, physiological and safety, at most.

The findings of the current research are based on opinions and verbal and non-verbal expressions offered by fifteen Freelancers around Dhaka. During the study, a few limitations were faced. For future research, a few recommendations are proposed: (1) In our study, fifteen people were taken as a sample size. Future researchers may conduct some Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) or take a few more interviews. Besides, we conducted only a qualitative study. So, in any future study, a mixed-method approach can be used; (2) This study has applied Maslow's need hierarchy theory to delve into the participants' fulfillment of the needs attained through this profession. Future studies might apply other theories, such as Herzberg's two-factor theory of job satisfaction to shed light on the professional satisfaction of the freelancers; (3) The respondents were all based in Dhaka city. In future studies, respondents from all over the country could be chosen. Besides, the respondents' area of work could take other specializations apart from their IT background.

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