

Understanding the Socio-Economic Status and Compliances of Women Garment Workers in Dhaka City

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Abstract

Predominately, the garment industry accounted for a large share of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and offered jobs for half a billion people, 85% of whom are women. The purpose of this research is to examine the work environment & compliances of women garment workers in Bangladesh. In addition to that, the work-life balance is a major issue in their lives. To achieve the research objectives, the study has taken 160 women garment workers as samples by using a convenience sampling method from Dhaka city, particularly in Mirpur. A detailed close-ended questionnaire has been made for the collection of primary data, which were adopted from the extensive literature review. The study's findings indicate that most of the time, women workers do not receive the necessary rights and facilities in general. They are often denied their rights, resulting in a state of anxiety, vulnerability, and dissatisfaction. The positive aspects that the study found, women are empowered in the family and society after joining garment compare to the situation when they were unemployed. The current paper makes an effort to comprehend the compliances along with economic and social situations for women garment workers, followed by recommendations for overcoming these circumstances.

Keywords: Socio-economic status, compliance, women garment workers, readymade garments, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

The garments industry is playing a pioneering role in the development of industrial sector of Bangladesh. It is the main source of earning foreign currencies in the economy of Bangladesh. In 2019–2020 financial years this

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sector accounts for nearly 83% of total export earnings of the country. (BGMEA, 2020) At present there are now 4,825 garment industries in Bangladesh and around 4 million garment workers are working in this sector, more than 83 percent of these workers are women. (EPB 2021) In Bangladesh the industry was expanded mainly on the easy availability of labor especially of the women labor accessibility. The RMG industry created employment opportunities, especially for women workers and now this sector is considered as one of the main sources of employment for women workers of Bangladesh. This industry has provided the largest employment opportunities for women in the industrial sector where more than 85 percent of the production workers are women (Islam and Zahid, 2012). Employers prefer women workers not only because they are cheaper and abundantly available, but also because they possess amiable disposition, sincerity and manageable characteristics than male workers. Most of the women workers are poor, uneducated, unskilled and untrained (Uddin, 2023). They do not have not any comfortable habitats. While the women get engaged in economic activities, they become exposed to outside environment which remains completely absent in the case of their limited exposure. In addition, they are accorded some sort of training which develops their skill and dexterity. Besides, women are getting benefits from the garment sector in terms of money. They are spending their income for their children's maintenance and family's living standard. Women workers not only increase their own income level, living of standard, consumption power, they also contribute to the GDP of the country which results in the improvement of balance of trade, enhancement of export earnings and acceleration of investments leading to overall development of the country. It is evident from the statistics that around 50 percent of total population are women, who can substantially contribute to the economy by earning from different sources. If these segment of population remains unemployed, the nation is likely to be deprived of the contribution of the women workers. This apparently leads to dependence of women on male population for their maintenance and livelihood. This present situation in Bangladesh as such necessitates involvement of women in activities yielding earning as far as practicable.

In this perspective the present study aims at examining socio-economic condition and the compliances regarding women garments workers in Bangladesh.

Objective of the Study:

The main objective of the study is to assess the socio-economic conditions of the women garment workers employed in the garment industries located in Dhaka city. In addition to this the study has been secured some other objectives like:

1. To identify the factors that affects the socio-economic conditions of the women garment workers.
2. To assess the compliance practices concerned with women garment workers.
3. To identify the problems of women garments workers.
4. To recommend measures to be taken for improving the socio-economic, compliance issues and overcoming the problems of the women garment workers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many reports have been produced in Bangladesh on garments industry but most of these reports did not focus on the present status of socio-economic conditions of the women employees of garments industry.

Report titled “Impacts of COVID-19 on the garment sector of Bangladesh” prepared by Sharif Hossain, et. al. (March-2022) looked at the COVID-19 outbreak, total export values, sales revenue of the garment sector, remittance inflows, unemployment rate and econometric techniques. They stressed that these factors have to be improved in the garment sector of Bangladesh for taking econometric techniques and employment in the garment sector. Mohsina Begum, et. al (22, March 2022) focused on the problems faced by pregnant garments workers in different readymade garments (RMG) in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The findings of this study that; awareness regarding care during pregnancy should be increased among the garment workers. Report titled “Impacts of Covid-19 (2020-2022) on cotton and garments market of Bangladesh: A small country case” was prepared by Sheikh Jafor Emran, et. al (December 5, 2022). They focused on the production of textiles in Bangladesh depends on the price of raw materials, global supply chain. This paper showed that how the decline in the demand for garments, coupled with an increase in cost, and shrinks the producer welfare of textile manufacturing and garment exports of the small producing country, Bangladesh. Areeba Ahmed, et. al (February 2021) discussed about the stakeholder theory, intersectional feminism, women RMG workers and sustainable initiatives. Report titled ‘Socio- Economic Changes of Women

Garment Workers in Bangladesh' prepared by Nahar Kamrun, et. al (October-2019) focused on the social status of women garment workers, determines of the role of stakeholder to improve the social status of women and discussed about some specific aspects- economic aspects, education and cultural aspects, health aspects and political aspects. Report titled 'Determinants of Women Garments Workers' Housing Choices in Bangladesh' prepared by Sharmin Shaila, et. al (2020) discussed about the conjoint analysis, this method observes how people's preferences influence choosing a product or service and conditional logit model was applied to calculate the part-worth utilities and marginal willingness to pay of each level of all the attributes and also used by conditional logistic regression analysis and findings of the analysis are survival package. The findings of this paper which feature discouraged women workers from choosing facilities provided in the government dormitory. An analysis of the results found that housing environments such as the number of people sharing a room, the number of people sharing a toilet and having a common kitchen with gas connection, had a higher impact on housing choices than affordability in the mean price or rent of houses. Report titled 'Assessment of the current working condition of the garment workers and determining the importance of labor union for the improvement of working condition in the RMG industry of Bangladesh' prepared by Mohsin Uddin, et. al (March-2021) he focused on this study significantly improved the workplace condition in terms of gender discrimination and health and safety of the workers. The findings of the study labor laws are still violated in the small size factories, although the overall working condition of the country's RMG industry has been tremendous amelioration. Report titled 'Discrimination of Women at RMG Sector in Bangladesh' prepared by Faizul Haque, et. al (February 2020) This study focused on some remarkable findings such as, a) women employee do not get proper respect at workplace from their male colleagues. b) Women are often harassed verbally by their male coworkers. c) Owners, managers and supervisors have the bad intention to fulfill their sexual desire with women workers. d) Male supervisors often force their women subordinates to do overtime till the late night. e) Though women workers are doing the same job, but they do not get proper justice in terms of getting desired job posting, salary on time and promotions based on their skills and competencies. Finally, this study findings on resolved the issues of gender discrimination at the workplace and contributes towards the equity and empowerment of women in RMG sector in Bangladesh.

The researcher reviews some relevant international and national literature related to the garment workers working environment, their wages, gender discrimination, etc. It is true that the working environment and economic policy are not so good in Bangladesh but the women have to be bound to do their job because of their poor socioeconomic condition. The readymade garment industry has provided jobs to millions of rural and urban women but they do not maintain international standards of the working environment.

In the present study an attempt has been made to discuss about the compliance issues, effects of employment of women workers which is conspicuously absent in the earlier studies. Apart from compliance issues, it also portrays the consequences of compliance issues as well as understanding the socio-economic conditions of women workers in the garment industry of the country as a whole.

METHODOLOGY

This paper discusses the present socio-economic condition and compliance practices of the garment workers of Bangladesh. To achieve the research objectives, we have adopted and developed questionnaires from the past literature review. Primary data have been used in this study drawn from the survey. 150 women garment workers have taken a convenience random sampling basis from the 8 garments factory located at Mirpur, Dhaka. The study area was selected based on researcher accessibility. Since we just aim to exhibit the socio economic and compliance conditions of women garment workers. Simple frequency distribution and statistics are used to portrait the actual scenario concerned.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

By collecting the data, the study tried to analyze the key issues that address the socio-economic conditions as well as the compliance practices for women garment workers. The findings are summarized as below:

Analysis composed with the details of respondent's demographic background, compliances & facilities issues of the factory for the respondents, changes before & after joining the job of the respondents, knowledge, satisfaction & suggestions of the respondents sequentially.

Table-1.1:Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents (Table – 1)

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	(%)
Age	15-25years	88	55.00
	26-35years	50	31.25
	36-45years	22	13.75
	Total	160	100.00
Education level	Can sign only	33	20.62
	Class I-V	74	46.25
	Class VI-X	39	24.38
	Above Class X	14	8.75
	Total	160	100.00
Marital status	Unmarried	43	26.87
	Married	95	59.38
	Divorced	6	3.75
	Others	16	10.00
	Total	160	100.00
Family members	4	12	7.50
	5	40	25.00
	6	75	46.88
	>6	33	20.62
	Total	160	100.00
Earning Family Members	1	45	28.12
	2	80	50.00
	3	25	15.63
	>3	10	6.25
	Total	160	100.00
Migration status	Rural to Dhaka City	110	68.75
	Within Dhaka City	50	31.25
	Total	160	100.00
Job experiences	0-2	74	46.25
	3-5	56	35.00
	5-7	22	13.75
	>7	8	5.00
	Total	160	100.00
Monthly salary	Tk. 5000-9000	60	37.50
	Tk. 9001-13000	85	53.13
	Tk. 13001-17000	15	9.37
	Total	160	100.00

Source: Self Field Survey, November,2024

The above table (Table – 1) shows the demographic profile of the randomly selected women garment workers in terms of their age, educational

qualifications, marital status, family members, migration status, earning members, job experiences and salary structures.

Most of the women garment workers are very young. The study found that 55 percent of the women workers were aged 15-25 years, while only 13.75 percent of the workers were aged above 36-45 years (Table 1.1). This means that women garment workers do not work in the factory for long time due to working hazards and the employers do not prefer aged experienced garments workers in the factories may be reduce cost by employing fresh garment workers at low remuneration. Most of the aged women garment workers complained that the management intentionally behaves roughly and torchers mentally so that they quit the job.

The survey indicates that 46.25 percent of the women workers were Class I-V, 24.38 percent of the workers were Class VI-X, and 20.62percent could sign only, while only 8.75 percent were Class X (Table 1.1). As their level of education is low, their working efficiency and working capacity is also low. For this, they have less bargaining power; they get poor remuneration and facilities from employers. Even they cannot explain what kind of jobs facilities they have in their present working place. Both married and unmarried women garment workers are working in the garment's factory. Among the total number of women garment workers surveyed, 26.87 percent were unmarried and 59.38 percent were married (Table 1.1). It can be said that more than half of the women workers were married due to increasing economic power, avoiding harass by their male employees and want cooperation from their husband.

Most of the women garment workers (68.75 percent) were migrate from rural area to Dhaka city, while 31.25 percent of the women garment workers were within Dhaka city (Table 1.1). There is a greater demands of the labor in the RMG sector and lacking of employment opportunities in rural area. So many people especially the women migrate from rural to urban area because of their poverty, employment opportunity and better livelihood and soon. Bangladesh has a very cheap labor market in the world. The survey has justified the truth. Maximum 53.13 percent women garment workers were getting 9001 to 13000 taka as monthly salary and 37.50 percent workers were getting 5000 to 9000 taka as monthly salary (Table 1.1). This shows 90.63 percent workers were getting 5000 to 13000 taka as monthly salary that is very low amount now a days for livelihood.

Table-1.2: Compliances & Facilities Issues of the Factory for the Respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	(%)
Average working hours of the respondents	8-9	55	34.37
	9-10	68	42.50
	11-12	25	15.63
	>12	12	7.50
	Total	160	100.00
The Overtime Working Hours (monthly) of the respondents	30-50	55	34.37
	51-60	65	40.62
	61-70	25	15.63
	>71	15	9.38
	Total	160	100.00
Duration (in days) of Casual Leave of the respondents	0-5	28	17.50
	6-10	85	53.12
	11-15	35	21.88
	>15	12	7.50
	Total	160	100.00
Harassments faced in the workplace	No Harassments	92	57.50
	Financial	5	3.13
	Physical	6	3.75
	Mental	56	35.00
	Others	1	0.62
	Total	160	100.00
Facilities of doing labor union in the factory	No union	95	71.87
	Prohibited by owner	18	3.13
	Manage top leaders	35	7.50
	Others	12	17.50
	Total	160	100.00
Payment date of salary in the factory (according to the next month)	1st – 10th day	55	34.37
	10th -15th day	80	50.00
	After -15th day	25	15.63
	Total	160	100.00
Medical allowance system of the factory	No Payment	75	46.87
	Paid on medical document	62	38.75
	Onetime Payment	21	13.13
	Others	2	1.25
	Total	160	100.00
Duration of Maternity Leave	No Leave	25	15.62
	2 months	12	7.50
	3 months	80	50.00
	> 4 months	43	26.88
	Total	160	100.00

Source: Self Field Survey, November,2024

The above table (Table – 1.2) shows the compliances & facilities issues of the factory for women garment workers in terms of average working hours, the overtime working hours, duration (in days) of casual leave, harassments faced in the workplace, facilities of doing labor union, payment date of salary, medical allowance system and duration of maternity leave.

The most tedious condition of work in the garment factories is the long working hours. According to section 100 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (BLA) of 2006, no adult worker shall ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than 8 hours a day. Of the total women workers surveyed, 42.50 percent work 9-10 hours a day, while 34.37 percent work 8-9 hours a day (Table – 1.2). Overtime work is an advantage and an extra earning source for the women garment workers. According to Section 109 of the BLA, 2006, no women shall, without her consent, be allowed to work in an establishment between the hours of 10.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. Maximum 40.62 percent of the workers work 51-60 hours overtime a month (Table – 1.2). As their salary is very low, they always try to earn some extra amount from overtime. Hence, they cannot provide much time for their family or children. As a result, they become unhappy in their family life. Moreover, women workers are obliged to shorten their time for pleasure and sleep due to long working hours and all domestic chores.

According to section 115 of the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006, every worker shall be entitled to enjoy casual leave with full wages for ten days in a calendar year. Our study reveals that 17.50 percent of the workers enjoy 0-5 days casual leave with pay and maximum 53.12 percent of the workers get 6-10 days of casual leave per year (Table – 1.2). In some cases the workers are bound to work even they are sick.

As per our survey result, it was good that 57.50 percent of the women garment workers opined that there is no harassment at their workplace. But on the other hand, 35 percent of the women garment workers opined that they are harassed/tortured mentally (Table – 1.2).

According to section 176 of the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006, workers, without distinction whatsoever, shall have the right to form trade union primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workers and employers or workers and workers and, subject to the constitution of the union concerned, to join trade union of their own choosing.

The survey reveals that maximum 71.87 percent of the women garment workers said that labor union did not exist in their factories (Table – 1.2) because the owners and management were extremely opposed to any types of labor union of their workforce. One of the basic needs of the human being is medical allowances from the employer but it is very unfortunate that 46.87 percent of the surveyed women workers get nothing from their employers for medical supports if they make any accident or become sick (Table – 1.2). According to section 89 of the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006, in every establishment wherein three hundred or more workers are ordinarily employed, there shall be provided and maintained a sick room with dispensary of the prescribed size, containing the prescribed equipment or similar facilities, in the charge of such medical nursing staff as may be prescribed.

Maternity leave is a basic and humanitarian right of the women garment workers but all the garments factories are not giving maternity leave to their workers with pay. According to Maternity Benefit Act 1950, the maternity leave was of 12 weeks. The new BLA 2006 increases the maternity leaves to 16 weeks from 12 weeks and the maternity benefit which is payable under section 48 of this act shall be payable at the rate of daily, weekly or monthly average wages and such payment shall be made wholly in cash. Our survey revealed that 50 percent of the workers are granted 3 months maternity leave, while 15.62 percent granted no leave (Table – 1.2) that is the violation of laws. According to the gazette of Bangladesh Government states when a government servant applies for maternity leave, authority shall grant the leave for six-months from January 9, 2011 or from her confinement for the purpose of delivery, whichever is earlier that is far away from women garment workers.

Table- 1.3: Changes Before & After Joining the job of the Respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Before joining the job		After joining the job	
		Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
Family Decision	• Take part in all decisions	18	11.25	80	50.00
	• Only take part in important decision	22	13.75	14	8.75
	• Major decision maker	7	4.38	64	40.00
	• Inactive in family decision	113	70.62	2	1.25
	Total	160	100	160	100
Social Changes facing by the respondents	• Getting economic & women empowerment	12	7.50	105	65.62
	• Have strong voice against dowry system	8	5.00	14	8.75
	• Getting importance in family and society	25	15.63	41	25.63
	• Inactive economic & women empowerment	115	71.87	00	00.00
	Total	160	100	160	100

Source: Self Field Survey, November,2024

The above table (Table – 1.3) shows the social and economic empowerment changes of the respondents before and after joining the factory.

Earnings and family decision making are important measures of economic empowerment of women workers that also change social value. In Bangladesh, women's role in household decision making is usually much more limited than men. The survey data shows that 70.62 percent of the women garment workers were inactive in family decision before joining the factory, while 50 percent of the women garment workers could take part in all decisions and 40 percent were major decision maker after joining the factory (Table – 1.3) that means women empowerment has increased after joining the factory of the respondents.

The survey data also shows that 71.87 percent of the women garment workers were inactive economic & women empowerment before joining the factory,

while 65.62 percent of the women garment workers got economic & women empowerment and 25.63 percent were got importance in family and society after joining the factory (Table – 1.3) that creates social value towards the society.

Table-1.4: Knowledge, Satisfaction & Suggestions of the Respondents

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	(%)
Idea about the application of labor law in the factory	Don't know	115	71.87
	No application	5	3.13
	Few application	12	7.50
	Good application	28	17.50
	Total	160	100.00
Idea about factory goal	Known	12	7.50
	No Idea	117	73.12
	Partial Idea	6	3.75
	It's a top-level job	25	15.63
	Total	160	100.00
Satisfaction towards earnings	Bad	43	26.87
	Neutral	52	32.50
	Good	65	40.63
	Total	160	100.00
Satisfaction towards job	Bad	24	15.00
	Neutral	83	51.87
	Good	53	33.13
	Total	160	100.00
Suggestions to improve the working conditions	Proper lighting and enough space	25	15.63
	Ensuring health and sanitation facilities	65	40.62
	Taking action against all kinds of harassments	30	18.75
	Ensuring proper transport facilities	40	25.00
	Total	160	100.00

Source: Self Field Survey, November,2024

The above table (Table – 1.4) shows the knowledge, satisfaction & suggestions of women garment workers in terms of idea about the application

of labor law in the factory, idea about factory goal, satisfaction towards earnings and job and suggestions to improve the working conditions.

The Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006, Factories Act of 1965 and the Factories Rules of 1979 all provide protection to labor force. Of the surveyed women workers, 71.87 percent reported that they do not know about the application of labor laws in their garments, while 3.13 percent of the workers reported that there is no application of the laws in their garment industries (Table – 1.4) so that they can't benefit from Labor Act. Degree of satisfaction of a worker is an important element for job. The level of satisfaction has been measured by scaling as bad, neutral and good. It is observed that the satisfaction level of the maximum women garment workers (40.63 percent) towards earnings was good but and the satisfaction level of jobs was neutral (51.87 percent). The satisfaction of the women workers derives from their realization that they could be unemployed and what they are getting is good for them. It is motivating factor for the survival and stability of garment workers in Bangladesh.

The respondents gave suggestions to improve their working conditions. Maximum 40.62 percent respondents suggested to ensuring health and sanitation facilities, 25 percent suggested to ensuring proper transport facilities, 18.75 percent suggested to taking action against all kinds of harassments and minimum 15.63 percent suggested to ensuring proper lighting and enough space.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and the observation, the study would like to suggest some policy suggestions for improving the socio-economic conditions and compliances practices for women worker in the garments.

- Finding shows that 35% women garment workers have been harassed mentally at the workplace. It is indicating that, it is a big concern for them. So, both government and factory should give prime priority on it to negotiate that particular issues.
- 72% respondents said they have no right or facility to join in labour union. But labour union is a place where they can use to raise their

rights, needs to make their work life easier. And, Labour law 2006 is also give that right. So, regulatory forces should take actions against that violations where necessary.

- Almost half of the respondents are not getting any medical allowances from their workplace. But we all know, women are often facing more health hazards than to men and almost 85 % workers are women. So, without caring the health and safety, how could a sector can get the results in their way? It should be ensured from the factory and regulatory forces. Most of them are also agreed to that issue and want to solve it with priority.
- Almost all the respondents are not getting the maternity leave as per labour law. Some respondents do not get any such leave and rest of them are getting that leave partially (less than 4 moths). Regulatory body should take actions against these violations and ensure the leave as per rule.
- Study shows that majority of the woman workers do not have any idea about the labour law 2006 at all, concern stakeholders should make them aware by arranging training or awareness program so that they can know their rights.

Above are the primary remediation's but not limited to. The stakeholders from every corner should act on the major force of that sector so that the garment sector can lead the country as they did before.

The working condition of this sector is getting worse, compliance issues are neglected most of the cases and socio-economic conditions are in questions specially after the COVID 19 outbreak. If the garments can ensure the compliances that required to the employees, their socio-economic condition may improve. The current study focused only on Dhaka city, particularly in Mirpur. So, it's very difficult to generalize the findings of the study for overall women garment workers. Furthermore, the samples of the study are limited in number, the self-selection of respondents is another weakness of the analysis, which could further bias the findings. Future studies could address these issues.

The upcoming years will be really tough for Bangladesh economically. Remittance and garment industry are two major sectors from where foreign currency are generated. Remittance sector is primarily relying on foreign governments where Bangladesh cannot intervene much, its almost beyond the

Socio-Economic Status

control. But the garment sector is in the control of Bangladesh and that sector is almost rely on women workers. Bangladesh government should intervene where necessary to make the sector alive and effective.

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