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Problems of Migrant Workers of Bangladesh: An investigation on defrauded migrant workers in Dhaka

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Moonmoon Binta Aziz²

Abstract

Bangladesh is a huge labour surplus country. Hence it belongs to the supply side of the global labour market. Flow of migrant workers is associated with growing flow of remittance to Bangladesh. In this paper it is tried to unearth the problems of migrant workers of Bangladesh. Every year a large number of people migrate from Bangladesh as workers but they have to face various types of problems. This study was conducted in Chief Metropolitan Magistrate court (CMM) from the defrauded migrant workers those who came to the court for appearance or initial hearing. Other important information degrading migrant workers was collected from Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) and Labour court. For selecting the sample non-probability sampling were used. Sample size was fifty. The main reasons of the workers for going abroad are- earning money, better livelihood or better employment. But their dreams come into an end when they face several problems like Deception of the recruiting agencies embezzlement by the brokers, issuing fake passport, lengthy process in achieving visa etc are the main problems for the migrating workers of Bangladesh. Besides, it's very easy for such brokers to cheat the half-literature, unskilled and novice village people. The simple minded people of the villages of Bangladesh collect money by selling their properties and giving the money to the brokers in the hope of getting a better life. But when their desired migration is disrupted or stopped for fake passport, work permit problem these people do have no way but street baggers. In this paper these problems are tried to be unearth from the defrauded migrant workers.

Keywords: Migration, embezzlement, manpower, unemployment.

Introduction and Background of the Study

Bangladesh is a densely populated country of south Asia. A huge

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number of people are migrating to different countries of the world to get jobs because of the tremendous pressure of huge population and consequent acute unemployment problem. The young people living in the remote corners of the Bangladesh are mainly migrating to the middle east, Europe and United states to avail the opportunity of better living. Many women from Bangladesh have also been engaged in various jobs from some years back. Though the spheres of work are different from male and female workers, both of the groups to face almost same types of problems regarding workplace and living in a foreign country. The unique problem that the female workers have to face are sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

Deception of the recruiting agencies embezzlement by the brokers, issuing fake passport, lengthy process in achieving visa etc are the main problems for the migrating workers of Bangladesh. The problem has reached an acute level in Bangladesh since the manpower exporting business has been monopolized a group of monitory greedy, cheat syndicate. Besides, it's very easy for such brokers to cheat the half-literature, unskilled and novice village people. The simple minded people of the villages of Bangladesh collect money by selling their properties and giving the money to the brokers in the hope of getting a better life. But when their desired migration is disrupted or stopped for fake passport, work permit problem these people do have no way but street baggers. These empty hands, cheated People then go to the village chief's influential people and politicians. Then begin a new chapter of deception.

After liberation a large number of young people from Bangladesh started going to the Middle East countries which are rich in oil resources. Siddiqui mention that 10 percent, 8 percent, 9.33 percent, and 9.94 percent migrant workers have gone to Kuwait in 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1996 and also 27.79 percent, 25 percent, 18 percent, 31 percent migrant workers gone to Malaysia in 1994, 1995 and 1996 (Siddiqui 2004; Prepared from BMET data 2003). Mainly they managed the job made passports, acquire visa and did such other tasks by their own endeavor and with the help of non-government recruiting agency and local agents. The whole process of manpower exporting business went into the grip of a wicked syndicate as there were no powerful government organization to supervise the process and bribery. It has been easy

for them to deceive the effective measures against, these activities they have been doing their immoral activities. Since the problem has reached an unbearable level at present government has taken initiative to solve the problem. But it is not possible to solve the problem overnight which has existing for a long time. Transaction of money without documents, incomplete medical checkup, issuing fake visa etc are the main problems faced by our workers willing to go abroad. The solutions to these problems are not easy too. Those who are cheated regarding their migration, initiatives have to file suits in the existing courts as there is no special tribunal/court. There are also complexities regarding filling a suit. As there is no special law one has to file suits under the conventional and criminal penal code. The victims file suits in accordance with the penal code 406, 407, 419 and 420. The aggrieved person/victim does not get any compensation for his loss. The court declares penalty against the accused if the complaints prove true. It takes too long time for a aggrieved person to have justice because of case load. Consequently general people feel apathetic towards the court.

Most migrant workers are engaged in notorious “3D”—dangerous, dirty and demeaning—jobs. An ICDDR study on migrant workers’ health found that an astonishing 60% of workers experienced an injury on the job while abroad. Thirty four percent reported having a physical disability as a result. Only 10% received financial assistance from their employer for treatment. According to data collected by the Daily Ittefaq, 267 Bangladeshis working in Malaysia died from unnatural causes such as torture and suicide between January and June 2008. Between January and May 2009, 904 migrant workers’ bodies were returned to Zia International Airport (Dhaka) from abroad. 44 % (391) alone died of cardiac arrest, which commentators attribute to the sheer stress and unhealthiest of working abroad. 30 % (268) died from workplace accidents, 7 % (62) from road accidents, and 13 % (115) from illness.

When a prospective migrant worker (hereafter “the passenger”) arrives at the airport, the immigration authority checks the passport and visa of that passenger. A good number of proposed migrant workers get arrested by the immigration police for holding forged passports, counterfeit visas or both. Next, they are taken to the Airport Police Station. A First Information Report

(FIR) is filed at the Airport Police Station against the passenger. In most cases, the original passport holders (if the passenger is not the passport holder) and the brokers/middlemen are also made accused. Generally the passenger, passport holder and the middleman are made accused under Sections 406, 419, 420, 467, 468, 471, 109 of The Penal Code of 1860 and Section 11/ (1)/ (a), (b), (d) and (e) of The Bangladesh Passport Order 1973. A police officer is assigned to investigate the case. Passengers are detained by the police until they are produced in front of a Magistrate. Passengers' luggage, cell phones and other valuables are seized by the police. A seizure list is made for each arrested passenger with the names of the articles seized. Passengers are produced before the Magistrate within 24 hours of their arrest. Whether, the victim gets bail or not, he/she has to appear before the court once in a month for the hearing of the case. In the meantime, the charge sheet is made and produced in the court. If the advocate of the accused is able to convince the judge that the passenger was unaware that his or her documents were false, the Court will inflict a lesser punishment. Usually, in a case of a bona fide passenger, a sentence consists of 7-15 days imprisonment with or without a fine of tk. 500 to tk. 2000.

In most cases, a person tries to go abroad when he has no opportunities left in the country. Some of them cover the expenses selling the last of their land. When a prospective migrant worker of this sort is arrested and detained in jail, he has no resources left to defend himself. Sometimes family members will help him get a lawyer, but the opposite is not rare. After leaving on bail or finishing the sentence, the still aggrieved migrant rarely knows what to do next. Returning to one's village means facing the shame of having failed to go abroad. But without education and experience, getting a job in the city is not easy. Consequently, many aggrieved migrants find their already precarious situations have worsened considerably.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to summarize recent trends regarding migration of the people from native country to abroad of Bangladesh. In Our country people are migrating in different countries and facing various problems. This study addresses the following specific objectives:

A comprehensive survey based study was conducted on the Legal Framework for labour Migration and Human Rights. The objectives of the study were to:

- ▶ Explore the socio-demographic characteristic of the migrant's workers.
- ▶ To detect the causation for migration
- ▶ To identify the problems of migration
- ▶ To identify the present condition of the defrauded migrant workers.

Research Methodology

Area selection

Basically migrant worker who defrauded by brokers' or any other people are caught in the air port by immigration police. In our country most of the international flights are run by The Shahjalal International airport. When any person having fake passport or visa entered in to the airport and caught by the immigration police then they send them airport police station and a case lodge against the accused. After lodging a case the accused are appeared to the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate and initial hearing of the accused are done before a magistrate. It is very easy to get huge number of respondents in the court for fulfilling the purpose of the study. So the CMM court was selected for initial data collection.

Sources of Data

The validity of a research is fully dependent on the source of data. Both primary and secondary data are collected in this study.

Primary Data: Primary data was collected from the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate court (CMM) from the defrauded migrant workers those who came to the court for appearance or initial hearing. Other important information regarding migrant workers was collected from Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) and Labour court.

Secondary Data: Secondary data was collected from various books, newspapers, journals and literature on the global and Bangladesh perspective related to labour migration, and various relevant papers, articles and documents etc.

Population

This research was conducted in the CMM court in defrauded migrant worker. The data collection process work for one and half months. In that tenure of data collection all number of people those who came in court for preliminary hearing and for monthly hearing are the population size of this research and it is unknown.

Sampling

In this research population size is unknown so a reasonable sample was determined for an excellent result. The sample size was fifty and those were selected by non probability sampling with purposive way of sampling.

Method of Data Collection

Survey Method

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods (survey, case studies etc.) were used in data collection; there are two primary modes of doing a survey; using questionnaires and taking interviews. Both methods are based on a set of questionnaire. This study has been completed by sample survey and personal interviewing by the use of questionnaire in which primary data was collected from the migrant workers. The questionnaire was open ended, close ended and contingency. For reliable information firstly rapport was built up with respondent for avoiding unnecessary fear about the researcher. Hence the technique of data collection was questionnaire survey.

Data processing and analysis

Data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitative after necessary editing and coding the. In accordance with the objectives of the study; the emphasis was given on qualitative analysis. The collected data are processed in computer with the help of SPSS program. First data are analyzed with univariate statistical tools such as mean, mode, and median. Graphs are used for visual understanding.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics used for analyzing the findings result. The results presented in percentage and graphics. Graphical representation (pie chart, Bar chart) are used in this study. Bar chart and pie chart are used in categorical data (i.e. nominal, ordinal data) to interpret the findings of results in this

study. Tools of data analysis: univariate analysis i.e. frequency distributions, measures of central tendency and dispersion are used in this study for interpretation of the findings that was found in the field.

Findings of the Study

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Study

From the study it was found (Table 1) that 50 percent people were unable to go abroad and their age belongs to 21 to 30. Because this time of a human being is the perfect time to work hard and earn for their family for a better life. 48 percent followed by age limit 31 years to 40 years. Only 2 percent belongs under the age limit 20 years because in that time people become very tender and they show no more interest about work. From the study it revealed that 90 percent of the respondent those who unable to attain their dreams comes true are from Islam and only 10 percent of the respondents are from Hinduism. From the study it indicate that huge numbers of married people show their interest to work in abroad because when a person got married the monthly expenditure increase day by day. It shows that 67 percent of the respondents are married there only 33 percent of the respondents are unmarried those who show interest to migration and become defrauded any way. That means married persons representation is more than two times than unmarried (Table1). Education is the backbone of a nation. So, educated person become less defrauded than the illiterate person. The study shows that 34 percent people cannot attend manage to go abroad because of their lack of knowledge. Followed by 32 percent those who belongs to only primary education followed by 14 percent by the respondents those who belongs to class nine to ten and only 2 percents were cheated in case of educated person who completed their graduation (Table 1). From the study it revealed that 36 percent of the respondents were unemployed those who didn't manage any job for survive, followed by 22 percent respondents those were farmer, followed by 20 percent were businessman and only 12 percent were government or privet service holder those who showed interest in migration for their better life. Unemployment is the main and vital factor for migration in our country (Table1). From the study it revealed that 36 percent of the respondents were unemployed those who didn't manage any job for survive, followed by 22 percent respondents those were

farmer, followed by 20 percent were businessman and only 12 percent were government or private service holder those who showed interest in migration for their better life. Unemployment is the main and vital factor for migration in our country.(Table1). It was found from the study that 46 percent migrant workers are unemployed followed by 28 percent migrant workers are businessman followed by 26 percent are farmer, (Table 1). It is important to notice that those migrant workers are came back to country most of them are unemployed. Because they are getting frustrated after pull back to the country and their mind condition getting terrible day by day and they are not managing themselves fit for any work. It was found from the study that 38 percent respondents' monthly income was 25,01taka to 5000 taka followed by 34 percent respondents' monthly income was 5,001taka to 10,000taka followed by 24 percent below 2500 taka per month. Only 4 percent respondents' monthly income was above 10,000 taka (Table 1). From the study we can see after pull back to the country most of the migrant worker earn bit than before. It shows 46 percent of the respondents earn monthly below 2500 taka that is very harder to go on followed by 40 percent between taka 2501 to 5,000. Only 14 percent can earn some money to live and the amount belongs to 5001 taka to 10,000 taka per month. (Table 1).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the migrant workers

Age group of respondents	Frequency	Percent
Below 20 Years	1	2.0
21-30 Years	25	50.0
31-40 Years	24	48.0
Total	50	100.0
Religion of the respondents		
Islam	45	90.0
Hinduism	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0
Marital Status of the respondents		
Married	16	33.0
Unmarried	34	67.0
Total	50	100.0

Age group of respondents	Frequency	Percent
Education of the respondents		
Illiterate	17	34.0
Below 5	16	32.0
VI-X	10	20.0
SSC	5	10.0
HSC	1	2.0
Honors'	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0
Previous Occupation		
Unemployed	18	36.0
Farmer	11	22.0
Govt. Service/Private Service	6	12.0
Business	10	20.0
Others	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0
Present occupation		
Unemployed	23	46.0
Farmer	13	26.0
Business	14	28.0
Total	50	100.0
Previous income		
Below 2500TK	12	24.0
2501-5000TK	19	38.0
5001-10000TK	17	34.0
Above 10000 TK	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0
Present income		
Below 2500TK	23	46.0
2501-5000TK	20	40.0
5001-10000TK	7	14.0
Total	50	100.0

Causation of Migration

Bangladesh is one of the highly populated countries in the world inspite of having a large geographical area. So it is not so easy to get a job in this country. And most of the people lived under the poverty level. So for a better survive and meet up the basic needs people of this country become more interested to migrate in the developed countries. And globalization generates intense competition for labour that has had a profound effect in both developed and developing countries. In developed countries' economies, there tend to be more jobs available at the high and low ends of the labour market than in the middle. Migrant workers and irregular migrants from poorer countries have stepped in to fill the demand.

Factors for going abroad

From the table bellow it found that most of the respondents show their interest to go to abroad because of earning more money that they can support their family without any hazard. About 64 percent respondents said as followed by 20 percent of the respondents for more facility or more status followed by 10 percent for better employment. (Table 2)

Table-2 Why selected go abroad

Factors for going abroad	Frequency	Percent
Earn more money	32	64.0
More facility/more status	10	20.0
for being employed	5	10.0
Others	3	6.0
Total	50	100.0

Destination of Migrant Workers

From the study it revealed that 36 percent of the respondents were interested to go to Dubai because Dubai is one of the richest in sense of having petroleum reserve of Middle East countries and they are in race of making world largest buildings and attracting tourist by developing their tourism sectors. So they need huge number of workers in every year, followed by 28 percent in Malaysia, followed by 18 percent in Saudi-Arabia, followed by 10 percent in other countries of the world. (Table 3)

Table- 3: Destination of Migrant Workers

Name of country	Frequency	Percent
Saudi –Arab	9	18.0
Dubai	18	36.0
Malaysia	14	28.0
Iraq	4	8.0
Others	5	10.0
Total	50	100.0

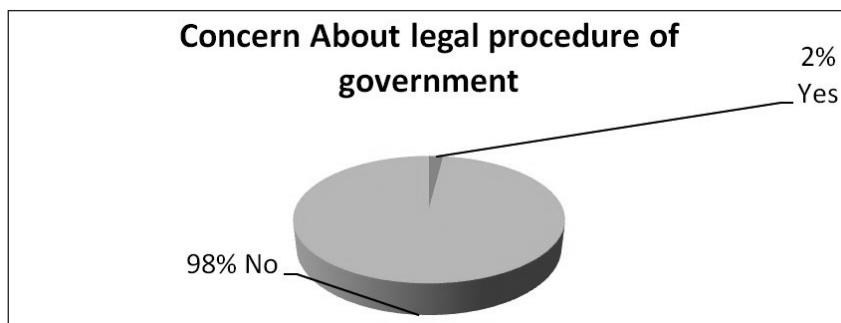
Problems/ barriers of Migrant Workers to going abroad

Deception of the recruiting agencies embezzlement by the brokers, issuing fake passport, lengthy process in achieving visa etc are the main problems for the migrating workers of Bangladesh. Besides, it's very easy for such brokers to cheat the half-literature, unskilled and novice village people. The simple minded people of the villages of Bangladesh collect money by selling their properties and giving the money to the brokers in the hope of getting a better life. But when their desired migration is disrupted or stopped for fake passport, work permit problem these people do have no way but street baggers. These empty hands, cheated People then go to the village chief's influential people and politicians. Then begin a new chapter of deception.

Recruiting agency

It was found that from the study that only 2 percent migrant workers know about the procedure of migration or BMET (The Bureau of Migration Employment and Training) but they didn't applied those procedure and 98 percent migrant workers don't know about the legal procedure of migration. (Figure 1)

Figure 1- Concern about legal procedure of Government



Communication for going abroad

Maximum migrant workers don't communicate with Govt. recruiting agency and private recruiting agency. From the study it found that about 66 percent of the respondents communicate with middleman or broker followed by 18 percent respondents communicate with their relative for migration followed by 16 percent of the respondents communicate with others for migration. (Table-4)

Table 4- Communication for going abroad

Information from the procedure of migration	Frequency	Percent
From middleman/broker	33	66.0
From recruiting agencies	0	0.0
From relatives	9	18.0
Others	8	16.0
Total	50	100.0

Characteristics of Brokers

From the study it revealed that 64 percent of the respondents communicated with familiar broker for migration that means brokers were known before, followed by 32 percent of the respondents communicate with unfamiliar broker with the help of known people and only 2 percent respondents communicate with their relatives for migration. (Table 5)

Table 5: Relationship with Brokers

Characteristics of Brokers	Frequency	Percent
Familiar	32	64.0
Unfamiliar	16	32.0
Relatives	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

Amount of money spending for going abroad

It was found from study (Table-6) that 24 percent, 48 percent and 28 percent migrant workers had given money 100000-200000TK, 200000-300000TK and above 300000TK for going abroad. It is specially mention that those who had paid money for going

abroad within 100000-200000TK, they were paid money for Saudi Arab to brokers or agency, those who had paid money for going to Dubai, Malaysia, Singapore, Abu Dhabi, their money range were 200000-300000TK and also those who had paid money for going to Iran, Iraq, South Africa and England; their money range were above 300000TK. (Table 6)

Table 6: Amount of money spending for going abroad

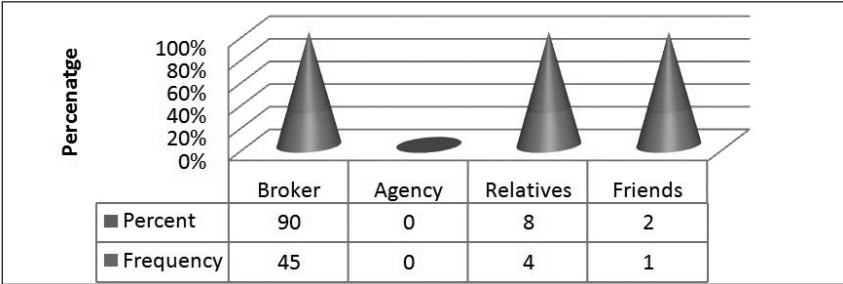
Amount of money	Frequency	Percent
100000-200000TK	12	24.0
200000-300000TK	24	48.0
Above 300000TK	14	28.0
Total	50	100.0

To whom Money was given

It was found from the study that 90 percent migrant workers had given money to brokers and 10 percent migrant workers given money to relatives, friends and other way (Figure 2).

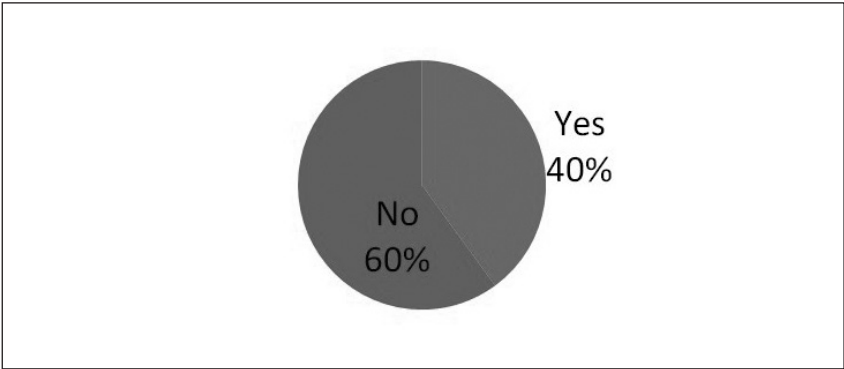
And also found of this study that hundred percent migrant workers did not take any received documents from brokers or middle man. As a result the have been cheated very easily and they have no way to trace those brokers because lack of any documents. And it also found from the study cent percent of the migrant worker those who were defrauded collected visa and passport from the brokers’ half an hour before their flight and most of them were arrested by immigration police inside the air port because of fake visa and passport and send back to air port police station and lodge a case against them of having fake visa and passport.

Figure-2: Dealings of Money



From the study it revealed that the ration of going to abroad is not so smart. About 60 percent of the respondents was unable to go to abroad and only 40 percent of the respondents able to going abroad but they came back to the country because of having false visa or passport. (Figure 3)

Figure 3: Ratio of Success in going abroad



Causes of failing to go abroad

From the study it found that among total respondents 30 person were unable to go to abroad. Among them about 87 percent of the respondents was unable to go to abroad because of fake visa and about 13 percent of the respondents was unable to go to abroad because of pc passport or cheated by brokers’. (Table 7)

Table 7: Causation for failing to going abroad

Causation	Frequency	Percent
Fake visa	26	86.66
PC Passport/Cheated	4	13.33
Total	30	100

Causes of return of migrant workers

From the table below it found that among the total respondents those who were able to go to abroad send back to the country again because of various problems. About 80 percent of the respondents were send back to the country because of identification of fake visa and rest 20 percent were came back to the country because they don’t get money from the agent where they work.(Table 8)

Table-8: Causation for Returning from Abroad

Causation for Returning	Frequency	Percent
Fake Visa	16	80
No payment	4	20
Total	20	100

Duration to stay in Police Station

From the study it was found that 58 percent of the respondents stay at police station for one day, followed by 30 percent of the respondents stay two days, followed by 10 percent of the respondents stay three days and only 2 percent stay four days at police station. (Table 9)

Table- 9: Time of stay in police station

Time of stay in police station	Frequency	Percent
1 days	29	58.0
2 days	15	30.0
3 days	5	10.0
4 days	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Communication with family

It was found from study that 48 percent of the respondents communicate with their family by police during detention, 22 percent of the respondents communicate with their family by friends, 20 percent of the respondents communicate with their family by neighbors and 10 percent of the respondents communication with family by relatives.(Table 10)

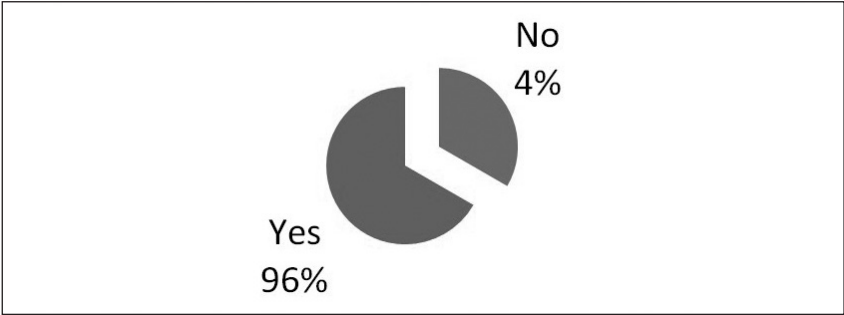
Table-10 Way of communication with family

Way of communication with family	Frequency	Percent
By Police	24	48.0
friends	11	22.0
By Relatives	5	10.0
By neighbors	10	20.0
Total	50	100.0

Legal aid for defrauded migrant Workers

It was found from study that 96 percent migrant workers taken help from lawyer and 4 percent did not help from lawyer. It is expressly mentioned that 96 percent migrant workers admit that they have paid money to lawyer for seeking bail within short time and left migrant workers not paid money to lawyer but they have recommendation others political leaders. (Figure 4)

Figure 4: Paid any money to lawyer



Amount of money paid to lawyer

It also shown from the study that 38 percent migrant workers have paid money to lawyer 2501-50000TK, 36 percent, and 26 percent migrant workers those who are arrested as an accused/ victim have given money to lawyer 5001-10000Tk, and above 10000TK. (Table 11)

Table 11-Amount of money pay to lawyer

Amount of money	Frequency	Percent
2501-5000Tk	19	38.0
5001-10000TK	18	36.0
Above 10000TK	13	26.0
Total	50	100.0

Conclusion

Migrants are grievously ill-informed about their rights, the legal regime in the receiving country, administrative processes related to immigration, and common problems. As a result, they are extremely vulnerable to exploitation in the receiving country. Migrants are frequently victim to “contract substitution,” where employers force them to sign a different contract, often one in

a language they do not understand. Needless to say, these contracts drastically cut salaries and benefits. Other migrants find themselves assigned to different, more degrading work than what they were told. Consequently, many find that they must extend their time abroad to earn enough. There is great potential for win-win migration schemes allowing migrants to expand their economic horizons, and receiving countries to access cheap labour. But in the absence of suitable oversight, these relationships are unquestionably exploitative. There is a considerable need to better inform migrants of their rights, and provide them with the legal and organizational resources to assert them. Second, the issue must be made a priority for the Bangladeshi government, driving it to ratify the appropriate international conventions, negotiate fair deals with recipient countries, and clamp down on supply-side corruption.

The migrant workers are the lifeblood soul of the economy of Bangladesh. We have to take proper initiative to solve their problems. The High Commission officers and missions of Bangladesh in foreign countries should be more pro-active. All the financial transactions related to migration must be done through bank. The safe transaction of the money earned by the emigrant workers through great hardship must be ensured. Bangladesh must take proper measures to send skilled workers to the employment giving countries as per their demand. Safe migration and safe employment for all should be our pledge.

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Violation of Labor Rights: A Study on Female Workers in RMG sectors of Bangladesh

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Abstract

The ready-made garment (RMG) industry of Bangladesh was started in the late 1970s and it has contributed to export earnings, foreign exchange earnings, employment creation, poverty alleviation and the empowerment of women. But from its beginning in Readymade garments area women face a lot of violation. Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006 not practically utilized this sector to insure the rights of the worker. In the recent study mainly tries to find out the sector where labor rights are violated for the female garments worker. The non-probability purposive sampling method is used to conduct the survey and primarily a sample of 151 is interviewed with structured questionnaire is used to collect the data. In most cases, it has been observed that, most of the female worker's education level is very low, most of them comes from the rural area and they living in the under poverty line. Many of them continue their job without getting appointment letter. So the owner can easily discharge the worker without any lawful reason. In case of their wage distribution the labor law not practically used. Most of them do not get their wage in due time. They face different kinds of torture from their senior officers in working time. Besides, most of the administrator do not ensure the minimum working environment and not properly provide the basic facility such as maternity leave with payment, death compensation, child room facility, causal leave, medical allowance for the female worker in the workplace. Female worker play a major role in garments sector of Bangladesh. So, for controlling the violation of labor rights in the garments sector, Government should take necessary step and the labor law must be strictly applied in that sector.

Key Words: Female Worker, Ready-made Garment (RMG), Violation, Labor Right, Labor Act

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Introduction and Background

The Ready Made Garments (RMG) sector plays an important role in enhancing Bangladesh economy. The sector draws global attention for its quality production and huge employment women workers. In early 2009, there are about 4500 garment factories in Bangladesh. (Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh, 2008 edition). This industry alone contributes about 75% of the total exports. In the last financial year the total export volume of the RMG sector was more than \$9.5 billion. In terms of GDP, RMG's contribution is highly remarkable; it has become 13% of GDP which was only about 3% in 1991(Khan, 2011). The RMG firms are located mainly in three main cities: the capital city Dhaka, the port city Chittagong and the industrial city Narayanganj. Bangladesh's garment industry provides employment to about than 3.6 million workers which 2.8 million are women (Mahmud R.B., 2012).

The table rebels the value of garment exports, share of garments export to total exports and contribution to GDP have been increased significantly during the period from 1984-85 to 2005-06. The total garments export in 2005-06 is more than 68 times compared to garments exports in 1984-85 whereas total country's export for the same period has increased by 11 times. In terms of GDP, contribution of garments export is significant; it reaches 12.64 percent of GDP in 2005-06 which was only 5.87 percent in 1989-90. It is a clear indication of the contribution tom the overall economy. It also plays a pivotal role to promote the development of linkage small scale industries. We earn maximum foreign currency by the garment's sector of Bangladesh.

Table-1: The up growing exporting and GDP in garments sector from 1984-2006

Year Garment	Garment Export (Min USD)	Total Export (Min USD)	Share to total Export in %	Share to GDP in %
1984-85	116	934	12.42	-
1989-90	624	1924	32.43	-
1994-95	2228	3473	64.15	5.87
1999-2000	4349	5752	75.61	9.23
2004-05	6418	8655	74.15	10.63
2005-06	7901	10526	75.06	12.64

Source: *Economic Review of Bangladesh, BGMEA and Computation made by author. Figures in parentheses indicate compound growth rates (CGR) for the respective periods.*

It is fair to say that this sector has created enormous economic opportunities for the country's women, who until the late 1970's were almost nonexistent in the labor force. Despite the great effort which these brave women working hard day and night are showing, are not getting the due recognition from their employers which they very rightly deserve. Not only that, they are even denied of their basic rights. When it comes to their reproductive health and other related issues, very less importance are given (Mahtab, 2003). The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to women and men, and national laws are in place to safeguard women's rights. One example is the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, which protects the fundamental rights of women workers, including the right to maternity leave. The reality is that, despite such legislation, women workers' rights are ignored. Women workers perform poorly paid jobs, face severe labour rights violations and do not enjoy their legal entitlements. Statutory maternity rights are rarely provided, overtime is compulsory and excessively long working days add to the burden of domestic responsibilities, denying women any rest periods or time with their children.

RMG is now one of the main export items of the country. Besides, enriching the country's economy it has been playing a vital role in alleviating unemployment. In the financial year 1998-99, export-oriented garment sector earned US\$4,020, which accounted for 75.7 percent of the country's total export earnings. Employment in the RMG sector provides female workers with economic benefits and some empowerment. Over 90 percent of the production workers employed in RMG factories are women. Moreover, the industry accounts for about 70 percent of the total female are employed in the country's manufacturing sector (Bhattacharya and Rahman 2000). For poverty a number of women join to as a worker of RMG sector. But they face a lot of problem in their working sector. Labor Act, 2006 is not properly utilized in RMG sector. Labor law is violated by different way. For that area the working area become more vulnerable for the worker mostly for women. The study gives emphasis only on the female worker in Ready-made garment sector and attempts to analyze their rights violation in workplace underlying the Bangladesh labor Act, 2006.

Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature; quantitative method has

been used as research method. The study purposively selected 5 garments from Gazipur & Savar as study area. This area is chosen consideration that, it is a garments worker living zone area. It is very easy to find out the garments worker and collect the answer of the questionnaire. The main population for research includes female garments workers. Female workers were selected as sample because of their high percentage of participation as production workers in RMG factories and they are more vulnerable and faces a lot of violence in their working sector than the women. The non-probability purposive sampling method is used to conduct the survey and primarily a sample of 151 is interviewed with structured questionnaire is used to collect the data. This helped to ensure that the study adheres to the required standards of accuracy and validity. Primary and secondary both types of data were used to analysis the study. Primary data collected from respondents. Secondary data collected from various books, newspapers and journals. In this study collected data from female garments worker, taken their opinion, collected data through interview and observing their condition. The study being a descriptive one, it had focused on in labor rights violation sector on female garments worker. The collected data are process in computer with the help of SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Service) program.

Findings

Socio-demographic characteristics of the worker

The explanation of socio- demographic and socio- economic characteristics is very important to understand the societal position of female garments worker in our society. In the study socio- demographic characteristics discussed according to the reported information from the respondent. The information related to age, residence & basic familial information of female garment worker are given below:

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of female garment worker

Age	F (%)	Marital status	F (%)	Father's occupation	F (%)
16-20	33(21.9%)	Unmarried	55(36.4%)	Business	17(11.3%)
21-25	36(23.9%)	Married	80(53%)	Day labor	35(23.2%)

Age	F (%)	Marital status	F (%)	Father's occupation	F (%)
26-30	47(31.1%)	Divorced	10(6.6%)	Farmer	42(27.8%)
31-35	17 (11.3%)	Widowed	6(4%)	Physically decade	38(25.2%)
36-40	12(7.8%)	Others	0(0%)	Others	19(12.6%)
40 above	6(4%)				
Total	151 (100%)	Total	151 (100%)	Total	151(100%)

Family size	F (%)	Living Area	F (%)	Educational level	F (%)	Earning Member	F (%)
1-3	27 (17.9%)	Urban	30 (19.9%)	Illiterate	4 (2.7%)	1	25 (16.6%)
4-6	35 (23.2%)	Suburban	18 (11.8%)	Can Sign Only	37 (24.5%)	2	82 (54.3%)
7-8	42 (27.8%)	Rural	56 (37.1%)	Class I-V	58 (38.4%)	3	34 (22.5%)
8-10	41 (27.1%)	Close to Thana	15 (9.9%)	Class VI-X	43 (28.5%)	4	8 (5.3%)
More	6 (4%)	Far from District	32 (21.1%)	Above X	9 (6%)	Above 4	2 (1.3%)
Total	151 (100%)	Total	151 (100%)	Total			
	151 (100%)	Total	151 (100%)				

In the new addition of child act it is banned child labor whose age are below 18. But in research it is found that respondents 21.9% is in 15-20 years. The study showed that majority of the women garments workers belongs to 31.1% followed by 26-30 year age group; next majority belongs in 21-25 years (23.9%), then 11.3% are belongs in 31-35 years, 7.8% are in 36-40 years and finally 4% are in above 40 years. Most of the female workers are belong to young. The study finds that 75.9 percent of the female workers are aged less than 30, while only 4.1percent of the workers are aged above 41 years. This implies that female workers cannot work in the garment fully for long time because of occupational hazards

and workplace stress and the employers do not prefer aged-experienced workers in the factories to reduce cost by employing fresh workers at low remuneration (Majumder & Begum 2000). Among the female workers surveyed, 53 percent are married and 36.4 percent are unmarried garment workers are the main earners of their family. Garments worker are mainly comes from the poor family. To maintain the family the married and unmarried women join as a garments worker.

Table replicates that most of the respondent father's occupation is farming (27.8%), and another one is physically decade (25.2%), 23.2% father's occupation is day labor. Most represents that their family earns only 3000-4000 taka in a month. These family members easily engaged in garments sector very early age. It is found that all the people who work in garments sectors are live in poverty line.

These studies represent that in the garments sector most of the female worker came from joint (35%) family and extended (31%) family. They mostly have 7-8 family members (27.8%), 8-10 members (27.1%). They joined in the work earlier to support their family financially. About 37.1% worker came from the rural area. In our country a number of people live under the poverty line. They cannot maintain their live properly. Education is the backbone and foundation of getting a job and performing better in the job. Increase in the level of workers' education contributes to a reduction in male-female wage differences and to the visible decline in the sexual harassments faced by the female workers in the work place (Mahmud and Ahmed 2005). The survey indicates that of the total workers served only 2.7 percent are illiterate and 24.5 percent can sign only, 38.4% are in class. Cost of living is very much high now. It is also affected by the number of family members, that is, the higher the number of family members, the higher would be the cost of living for the family. The survey reveals that 55.6 percent of the female workers have 5 or more than 5 family members, while 70.8 percent workers' have one or two earning members. Therefore, it is found that maximum families have 3-4 dependent members whose expenses are borne by only 1-2 earning members. Without female workers' earning,

80 percent of their families would slide below the poverty level (Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1995).

Working Condition and Labor Rights Violation

Table 2: Total Salary Structure per month of the respondent

Amount of salary (TK.)	Frequency	Percentage
1000-2000	8	5.3
2001-3000	37	24.5
3001-4000	63	41.7
4001-5000	16	10.6
Above 5000	27	17.9
Total	151	100.0

Salaries are the main factors that determine the economic position and life standard of garment workers. The survey reveals that 71.5 percent of the female workers get Tk. 4,000 or less as total pay per month, which is really insufficient to lead their life with 3-4 dependent members in the family. These amounts of salary are not adequate to maintain a family. In the present context daily expenditure are raising day by day whereas the allowance opportunity is not sufficient. As a result naturally the respondents are satisfied about their salary. Only 18 percent of the female workers get more than Tk. 5,000 as total monthly salary. Women labors are very cheap in Bangladesh but they are employed in this industry to exploit the comparative advantages of their disadvantages like the low price of their labor, their low bargaining power, and their docility (Majumder & Begum 2000). Women are getting low salaries as they are employed in lower level and unskilled jobs. A study indicates that the female workers earn only about 60 percent of the earnings of the male workers (Majumder & Begum, 2000). In the time of getting salary women are always discriminated from male worker whenever their work is same. This is the other sector of violation for women garments worker.

According to section 123(1) of Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006, the wages of every worker shall be paid before the expiry of the seventh day after the last day of the wage period in respect of which the wages are payable and sec. 122 (2) says that no wage

period shall exceed one month. But reality is different from the law. Workers do not get their salary at the due time. The study find out that about 39% (59) worker said that there salary are given by due time, in another hand about 61% (92) female worker said that they do not get salary in due time. It is a kind of harassment for the worker. Because of the dealing payment the workers face a number of problems. About 92 female worker 39.1% said that there payment delayed for one month, 16.3% said for two month, and 30.5% say that there authority show excuse to wait till export for giving salary.

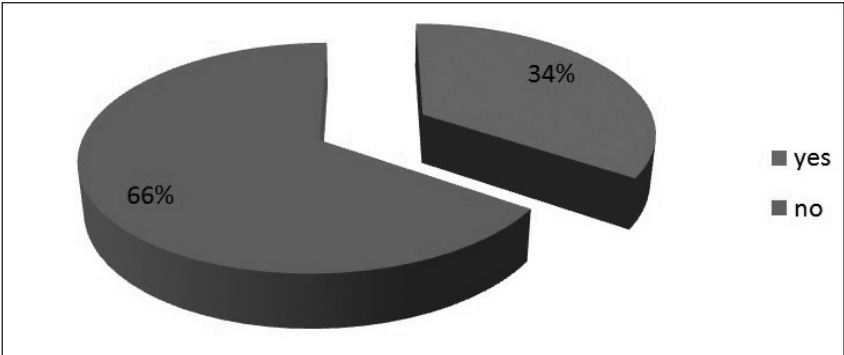
Table 3: Working and Overtime work hours of the respondent

Work hours	Frequency	Percentage	Overtime-work hours	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 8 hours	7	4.6	0-30	34	22.5
8-9 hours	93	61.5	31-60	58	38.4
9-10 hours	37	24.5	61-90	35	23.2
11-12 hours	7	4.7	91-120	21	13.9
Above 12 hours	7	4.7	Above 120	3	2
Total	151	100.0	Total	151	100.0

The most tedious condition of work in the garment factories is the long working hours. According to section 100 of the Bangladesh Labour 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, 33.8 percent work more than 9 hours a day, while 95.3 percent work more than 8 hours a day. Overtime work is an advantage and an extra earning source for the female 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. About 40 percent of the workers work more than 2 of hours overtime a day, while 15.9 percent work more than 3 hours of overtime a day. In some cases, workers do overtime in the week end. 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, female workers

are obliged to shorten their time for pleasure and sleep due to long working hours and all domestic chores (Majumder & Begum 2000). There are about 38% workers who are moderately satisfied for their overtime duration, 46% are low satisfied and 16% are highly satisfied about their overtime duration. Garments worker generally do not get high amount of salary. It is very difficult for them to maintain their family with this low salary. For that, they want more overtime to get money. But they do not get it properly. During the time of overtime bill payment, workers face a lot of harassment.

Fig 1: Providing the appointment letter to the worker



From the beginning it is known that about 66% of the respondents have no appointment letter. According to sec 5 of BLA, No employer shall employ any worker without giving such worker a letter of appointment and every such employed worker shall be provided with an identity card with photograph. But most of the garments authorities not follow the rules. The study finds out that about 49.7% do not know appointment rules properly. According to BLA of 2006, every worker shall be entitled to enjoy casual leave with full wages for ten days in a calendar year. The study reveals that about 8 percent of the workers do not enjoy any casual leave with pay and more than 50 percent of the workers get less than 10 days of casual leave per year. In some cases the workers are bound to work even they are sick. The absence of leave facilities is another factor that makes the terms and conditions of garment employment very stringent. Maternity leave is a basic and humanitarian right of the female 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. The survey revealed that 7 percent of the workers are granted 8 weeks or less maternity leave, 33.1 percent get 12 weeks, 54.3 percent granted 16 weeks and only 6.6 percent granted no leave. While 3.2 percent of the female workers are paid nothing during their maternity leave, remaining 86.7 percent of the workers get either regular salaries or an amount based on the medical documents. Most of the factory gives festival leave for 3-6 days. About 60% worker says that festival leave give with pay, 9.9% says that festival leave give without pay. Sec 118(1) of BLA, 2006 describe that every worker shall be allowed in a calendar year eleven days of paid festival holiday. But every factory not provide these duration of leave.

Table 4: Attitudes of administration to the worker

Attitudes of administration	Frequency	Percentage
Bad	39	25.8
create pressure to over product	26	17.2
good	3	2
moderately	38	25.2
physical/verbal torture by supervisor	45	29.8
Total	151	100.0

This table describes that about 29.8% respondents command that in their factory face physical/verbal torture by supervisor, 25.8% says that the attitudes of administration to the worker is bad, 25.2% says that the owner behave are moderately with them, 17.2% says that owner create pressure to over product. In garments sector female worker are always discriminated than the male. They not get their rights and they are more vulnerable. Job environment is a vital factor for the garment workers, specifically for female garment workers. The survey finds that job or work environment is quite good in the surveyed garment factories.

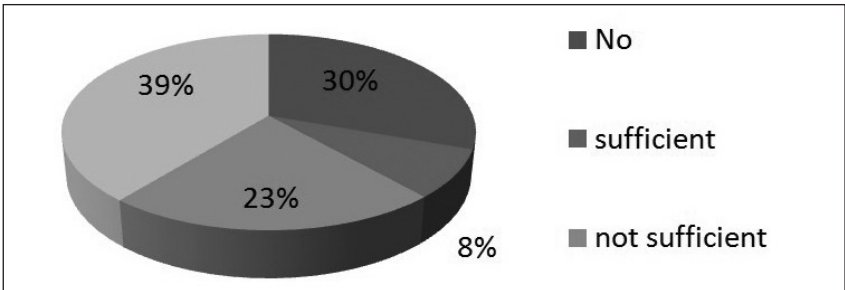
Only about 14 percent of the female workers are dissatisfied with their job environment, while 65 percent are happy with their job environment and remaining 21 percent are neutral in this regard. The better job environment was possible to achieve due to imposition of terms and conditions by foreign buyers and strict monitoring of the government regulatory authorities.

Table 5: Payment of maternity benefit in case of a women’s death

Payment system	Frequency	Percentage
not given	45	29.8
according to the salary	54	35.8
according to the profit	20	13.2
intention to the authority		
	32	21.2
Total	151	100.0

This table show that about 29.8% worker says that the authority not give any facility for the Payment of maternity benefit in case of a women’s death, 35.8% says that authority given payment according to the salary, 13.2% says that authority given payment according to the profit, 21.2% says that authority given according to the intention to the authority. According to sec 49 (2) of BLA 2006 says that, If a woman dies during the period for which she is entitled to maternity benefit but before giving birth to a child, the employer shall be liable only for the period up to and including the day of her death, provided that any sum already paid to her in excess of such liability shall not be recoverable from her legal representative. But the payments not properly give to the worker according to the law.

Fig 3: Providing separate child room facility



This figure shows that about 70% of the worker feel that they have child room facility, but among of them 39% says that it is not properly practically used, 23% says that not sufficient and 8% says that it is sufficient. In the other hand 30% worker says that there have no any child room facility for women worker in their factory. According to the sec 94(1) of BLA 2006, in every establishment, wherein forty or more workers are ordinarily employed, thee shall be provided and maintained a suitable room or rooms for the use of children under the age of six years of such women. So, women are deprived from those rights in their working area. When a factory provide child room facility a she put her baby on it then the worker given proper attention in her work. For that reason it is very important for the female worker to having child room facility in their work place.

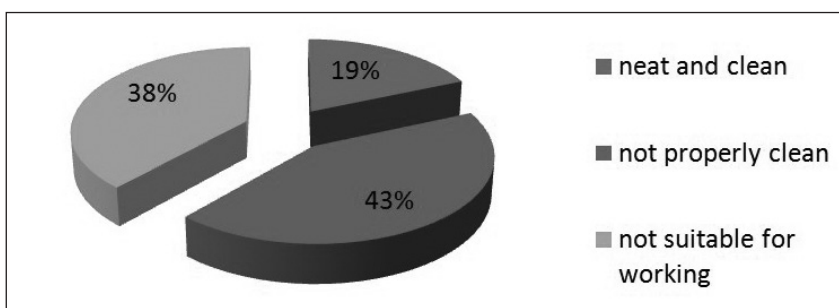
Table 6: Providing Transport Facility for the worker

Facility structure	Frequency	Percentage
no facility	67	44.4
one way	10	6.6
both way	57	37.8
Transport allowance	12	7.9
others	5	3.3
Total	151	100.0

Workers come to the industries from different locations due to non-availability of the dwelling houses near to their factories. The study reveals that 44.4 percent of the female workers not avail any transport facility, while 37.75 percent are provided with two way transport facility; only 6.6 are provided with one way transport facility. Majumder and Khatun (1997) found that 70 percent of the female garments workers traveled by bus experienced bad behavior by conductors and drivers; hence, the workers are willing to pay more for safe and secure transport facilities. One of the basic needs of the human being is medical allowances from the employer but it is very unfortunate that 26.5 percent of the surveyed female workers get nothing from their employers for medications if they make any accident or become sick. According to the BLA 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. But the reality is very crucial for the worker. Most of the worker says that their factory not properly medical allowance to the worker. Some of them say that when they need that they face a lot of harassment by their senior officer.

Fig 4: The environment of the factory



This figure show that about 43% worker says that the factory environments are not properly clean, 38% says that the environment are not suitable for working, just only 19% among of them says hat factory environments are neat and clean. According to the BLA, 2006 sec 51 Every establishment shall be kept clean and free from effluvia arising from any drain, privy or other nuisance, and the floor of every work-room shall be cleaned at least once in every week by washing, using disinfectant where necessary or by some other effective method. But most of the factories not follow the rules. For better work neat and clean working place is very important. When the working place e is not properly clean and not suitable for working then the worker not give their proper effort in workplace. The study describe that about 22.5% of the worker says that there have no adequate ventilation system in their factory, 47.7% says that the ventilation system not properly used in their factory. Sec 52(1) of BLA, 2006 describe that, Effective and suitable provisions shall be made in every establishment for securing and maintaining in every work-room have adequate ventilation by the circulation of fresh air. It is the basic rights for the worker to have a suitable environment for working which is legalized by labor law. But most of the garments authority not provides the facility. About 44.4% workers says that the fire precaution system of their factory not properly used.

Sec 62(1) of BLA, 2006 describe that every establishment shall be provided with at least one alternative connection stairway with each floor and such means of escape in case of fire and firefighting apparatus. For not properly utilized the rules create a number of accident, destroy the factory. So, it is the basic need of the worker that having a safety environment. In other hand about 36.4% female worker of the study says that the rest room facility of their factory is not enough to take rest. For that result female worker face a lot of problem. They have not take proper rest when they feel seek or other pain.

Table 7: Nature of Harassment/Torture of the female worker

Structure	Frequency	Percentage
No harassment	75	49.7
physical	13	8.6
mental	38	25.2
sexual	13	8.6
others	12	7.9
Total	151	100.0

Harassment by male colleagues or by management in the workplace is very common for the female workers in the garment industries. There are more than 50 percent of the female workers are harassed/tortured physically, mentally, sexually or other ways. On the other hand, 49.7 percent of the female workers opined that there is no harassment at their workplace. Increased level of education and awareness about labor rights keep harassment of the female workers at the minimum level (Mahmud 2009). The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, Factories Act of 1965 and the Factories Rules of 1979 all provide protection to labor force. Of the surveyed female workers, 51 percent reported that they do not know about the application of labor laws in their garments, while 25.8 percent of the workers reported that there is no or little application of the laws in their garment industries. Since existing labour legislation assumes a predominantly male workforce, it is often at a loss to deal with the specific needs and concerns of an overwhelmingly female and unskilled workforce employed in garment manufacturing industries (Mahmud 2009).

Evaluation of the findings

The garment sector in Bangladesh contributes more than 70 percent of the national income and 80 percent of the garment workers are female. Due to participation in this income generating sector their life and status in the society got upgraded. However, largely, the condition of female garment workers is very frustrating. Women workers face various crises in the RMG sector. The print media had written many reports and the TV channels had aired many pathetic stories on their low wages, unfriendly working environment, health issues, nutrition, insurance, etc. but feeble measures have been taken so far to address these problems. In maximum garments industries cannot give salary at due time. They not get proper amount for their salary. In few garments they have no govt. holidays & festival leaves even in Friday for garments workers in any serious case and even they do work seven days in a week.

The study shows that about 66% having no appointment conditions or ruled are signed between owner and worker. The worker not have appointment card mostly. So owner can easily release her from their job. 47.7% says that the ventilation system not properly used in their factory, 29.8% respondents command that in their factory face physical/verbal torture by supervisor, 25.8% says that the attitudes of administration to the worker is bad, 25.2% says that the owner behave are moderately with them, 17.2% says that owner create pressure to over product. One of the basic needs of the human being is medical allowances from the employer but it is very unfortunate that 26.5 percent of the surveyed female workers get nothing from their employers for medications if they make any accident or become sick. The study reveals that about 8 percent of the workers do not enjoy any casual leave with pay and more than 50 percent of the workers get less than 10 days of casual leave per year. In some cases the workers are bound to work even they are sick. The female workers are discriminated by the senior officer in garments factory. Harassment by male colleagues or by management in the workplace is very common for the female workers in the garment industries. There are more than 50 percent of the female workers are harassed/tortured physically, mentally, sexually or other ways. On the other hand, 49.7 percent of the female workers opined that there is no harassment at their workplace. Increased level of education

and awareness about labor rights keep harassment of the female workers at the minimum level.

The labor law provides a number of provisions for the safety of the worker. But practically the study concluded that they not fully get there rights. They have not proper hygiene, health, and safety related problem. They not get proper leave facilities which ensure the Labor Law. Of the surveyed female workers, 51 percent reported that they do not know about the application of labor laws in their garments, while 25.8 percent of the workers reported that there is no or little application of the laws in their garment industries. Overall, these problems are hampering the production and environment of the RMG sector and if these obstacles are not removed, the sector may be affected more and more in the coming days. Last but not the least, the poor female garment workers, who are the major workforce behind this sector, must be recognized properly and concrete ideas and their implementation should come to lessen the plight of them. Unless and until the basic rights of the poor female garment workers are ensured, it may not be expected that this sector will achieve its desired goal.

Conclusion

Ready-made garments are one of the most important foreign currency incoming sectors. Most of the foreign currencies are earned by exporting cloths. A number of female workers found in garment sector. They not properly get their job facility, and other rights. Labor rights and law are not properly utilized in garment sector. So the female garment worker face a number of violation in their working place. Continuous work schedule, wage penalties, physical and verbal abuse are common. Women workers face physical abuse and sexual harassment inside as well as outside the factories, but management does not ensure the security of women workers. So, the regulatory measures and its strict implementation and monitoring by the government agency could overcome work place in security problem of garments workers in Bangladesh. Work areas are often overcrowded with limited workspaces, causing occupational hazards such as musculoskeletal disorders and contagious diseases. Injuries, fatalities, disablement and death from fire and building collapses are frequent in the RMG sector. The absence of labour standards monitoring system and ineffective building codes, poor enforcement and outdated labour laws, and a lack of awareness of

labour rights among workers are the main reason of such kind's violation. If we ensure our economical development we must remove the labor rights violation from the factory. It is possible when the worker feel safety in their workplace and labor law properly utilized in garment sector.

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In Quest of Minimum Wage Amount of the RMG Workers in Bangladesh

A BILS Research

Abstract

This paper evaluates the current living expenditure and expected cost of living for a decent living status of the RMG workers in Bangladesh; analyzes the wage of RMG workers in the perspective of current economic condition of Bangladesh, particularly in terms of inflation, GDP, and per capita income. At the same time, reliably scrutinizes the comparative wage scenario of the RMG workers both at national and international level. This study has applied different techniques of data collection and information was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data collection applied survey, FGD, and interview. The research findings show that the garments workers' wage of the country is not only less in comparison to the wage amount of other/competing country's RMG workers but also they received least even among the workers of other sectors within the country. Garments workers' wage is about two to more than three times less than the wage of the workers of other sectors in Bangladesh. Garments workers' minimum wage is less than three times than the wage amount of the tannery sector workers, and construction and wood sectors. The paper concludes with recommend a wage amount for RMG workers to ensure their decent life.

Key words: RMG Minimum Wages, Living standards, Expected wages amount, Decent living.

1. Introduction

Bangladeshi RMG workers' wage is the lowest not only in international context but also in national context they are earning the least wage amount. Because of these poor/meager wage workers of this sector have been labeled as "salve labour" by Pope Francis which precisely depicts the condition of RMG workers in Bangladesh (Daily Star, 2013). While some other countries revise their minimum wages on regular basis, Bangladesh has adjusted the RMG minimum wage only three times since it was first set in 1985 – with the last revision dating back to 2010. However, during the previous initiatives to fix minimum wage expectations of the workers were not addressed. Wages fixed during those periods were not sufficient at all to meet the all basic needs completely. Thus workers always remained under a poor standard of living

which they are still bearing. On the other hand, the government of Bangladesh is committed to alleviate the poverty nationally and internationally. The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh guarantees the basic needs of the citizens. Besides, according to "Vision 2021" declared by the present Government of Bangladesh, poverty rate will be decreased by 15% within the year 2021. Bangladesh has also international commitment to eradicate poverty under Millennium Development Goals of United Nations. In this situation, the wage of the 4.0 million workers must be fixed in such a way so that it can be effective enough to lift the workers and their families from poverty line. RMG industry of Bangladesh has attracted attention of world community both for its successes, potentials, and contribution to national economy; and numerous problems among which 'wage' is the most important one. This industry has rapidly attained high importance in terms of employment, foreign exchange earnings, and its contribution to GDP. In addition to its economic contribution, the expansion of the RMG industry has caused noticeable social changes by bringing more than 3.20 million (80 percent of total RMG employment) women into labor force. The garment sector is the largest employer of women in Bangladesh. This sector has provided employment opportunities to women from the rural areas that previously did not have any opportunity to be part of the formal workforce (Bhuiyan & Ismail, 2013).

In spite of contributing significantly to the economic as well as social development of the country RMG industry is highly criticized because of its poor working condition and various deprivations of the workers. Workers of this industry are highly vulnerable in the perspective of safety condition. Because of recurrent fire accidents and recent incidences of building collapse the sector is very often portrayed as 'death trap'. Implementation of the labour standards is also not satisfactory for RMG workers. Workers are bound to work for longer hours, do not get weekly holidays, deprived of maternity leave, not allowed to enjoy trade union rights etc. are commonly known complaints against this sector. Nevertheless, the most significant issue of RMG workers is wage. Although due to the hard and untiring labour of the workers Bangladesh has become the 2nd largest RMG exporting country in the world, wage of the RMG workers of Bangladesh is the lowest compared to other RMG exporting countries (like India,

Sri-Lanka, Pakistan, Cambodia, China, Philippine, Indonesia, Thailand etc.) (ILO, 2013).

2. Minimum Wage of RMG Workers: Basis, Considerations, and Comparative Wage Scenario

Workers' minimum wage in any society is guaranteed through both national and international instruments. In Bangladesh constitution and labour law provide the national basis of minimum wage of all workers, including RMG workers. International basis of minimum wage includes Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and ILO convention and recommendation.

2.1 Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

The main foundation of fixing minimum wage for the RMG workers in Bangladesh is rooted in the constitution of the country. In the 'Fundamental Principles of State Policy' section "work" has been declared as right of every citizen for which s/he is entitled to get wage. Wage, in this regard, is to be paid according to the ability and work of the citizen. Constitution of Bangladesh has also ensured the arrangement of fulfilling basic necessities of the people (GoB, Constitution of the People's republic of Bangladesh, Article- 20 (1)). The State is committed to improve and develop the productive force and also aims at improving the standard of living. In this regard State commits to ensure food, cloth, shelter, education, and treatment for all. State endeavors to attain, along with these necessities, 'work' and a reasonable wage for the work for all people. Leisure, recreation, and social security are some other priorities that State wants to ensure, as basic necessities, for all the people (GoB, Constitution of the People's republic of Bangladesh, Article- 15).

2.2 Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006

Bangladesh Labour Law 2006 is a very comprehensive law which also provides the foundation of ensuring and declaring minimum wage for the workers of the country. A special Chapter of the law describes the procedure of minimum wage fixation. Based on the provision of the law different minimum wage boards for various sectors were formed and wage for those sectors have already been decided. This BLA 2006 is the foundation of minimum wage fixation and declaration for the RMG workers in the country also.

2.3 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

UDHR provides a strong base of minimum wage for the workers (UDHR, Article- 23). As per UDHR, getting a wage suitable for protection of human dignity of an individual is considered as human rights. Noteworthy wage of a worker not only is to be sufficient for protection of dignity of individual worker but also for the family members of the workers.

2.4 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 1966

The issue of ensuring a fair and reasonable wage of the workers has also been incorporated in the ICESCR 1966 (OHCHR, ICESCR Article, 7). This covenant aims at ensuring a decent life of the workers and their family members. In order achieve that decent life workers must be provided with sufficient/adequate income opportunity.

2.5 ILO Convention 131 (Minimum Wage Fixing Convention)

ILO convention 131, though not ratified by Bangladesh, is one of the most important instruments for declaration and implementation of minimum wage for workers. According to this convention country should have system and mechanisms to fix minimum wage of workers. Not only that, this convention also declares that a competent authority of the countries that ratify this convention would determine the groups of workers who would be covered under the coverage of minimum wage (ILO Convention 131, Article -1).

2.6 ILO Recommendation 135 (Minimum Wage Fixing Recommendation, 1970)

According to ILO recommendation 135 poverty alleviation policy of the country should have component relating to minimum wage fixing. This policy will also try to ensure the need satisfaction of all the workers. In this regard minimum wage must be able to provide necessary social protection of the workers (ILO Convention 131, Article -1).

2.7 Minimum Wage Fixation: Considering Issues

There are two basic mechanisms for setting the minimum wage – first, a statutory minimum wage is set by government, possibly involving consultations with trade unions and employers; and second, minimum wages are determined through collective (tripartite or bipartite) negotiations (Rutkowski,2003).

Collective Agreements can set national or sectoral (industry, occupational) minimum wages. Irrespective of minimum wage setting mechanisms, some factors/issues are always taken into consideration while fixing the amount.

2.7.1 ILO Convention 131

The Minimum Fixing Convention of ILO (ILO C131) has taken into consideration both social and economic factors for fixing wage for the workers (ILO C 131, Article -3). Social considerations are related to workers' needs, needs of their families, living standard of workers, living standards of other social groups, social protection condition etc. On the other hand, economic considerations include wage level, productivity, economic development, employment etc.

2.7.2 Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA) 2006

Article-141 of BLA 2006 has identified some factors to be considered by minimum wage board of the country while fixing the wage (GoB, Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, Article – 141). Factors mentioned in this Act are similar to those of ILO Convention 131.

2.8 Comparative Wage Of RMG Workers

Bangladeshi garments workers are getting least minimum wage in the context of its competing countries like Cambodia, Vietnam, Nepal, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, and even Pakistan. RMG workers of all these countries are getting twice to three times more than the Bangladeshi RMG workers. Following section has described in details the wage level along ingredients and indexes used in fixing wage and advantages available for the workers of these countries.

Table-1: RMG workers minimum wage in different countries

Country	Per hour US dollar	Minimum monthly salary (US dollar)	Minimum monthly wage (BDT)
India	0.51	106.08	8486.40/-
Sri Lanka	0.44	91.52	7321.60/-
Pakistan	0.48	115.2	9216/-
Nepal	0.40	83.2	6656/-
Cambodia	0.38	80.0	6400/-
Indonesia	0.44	91.52	7321.60/-

Country	Per hour US dollar	Minimum monthly salary (US dollar)	Minimum monthly wage (BDT)
Vietnam	0.53	110.24	8819.20/-
Bangladesh	0.18	37.49	3000/-

3. Income-Expenditure, Present Cost of Living, And Expected Wage Amount

3.1 Income and Expenditure of RMG Workers

Age-structure of the: Generally, garments workers are of young age. The largest proportion (38.9 percent) of the workers of this study was in 15-20 years' age group, followed by 20-25 years' group (25.2 percent).

Family Size: Average size of the household of the garments workers is similar to the national scenario. Mean household size of the respondents is 4.13 whereas the average size of the households of Bangladesh is 4.4. However, it is important to note that the number of household members of the respondents of this study ranges from one to nine.

Income earners and dependent members in family: It has been observed that in majority cases respondents have more than one income earning member in their household.

Monthly family income: Average monthly family income of the garments workers is Tk. 10,573.13. It is important to note that the monthly family income of the garments workers ranges from Tk.1200 to Tk.22,000. The total monthly family income range of the largest proportion (29 percent) of the RMG workers is Tk. 8,000-11,000 followed by Tk. 11,000-14,000 (25.2 percent). Tk.5000-8000 and Tk. 14,000-17,000 are earned monthly by about same proportion of workers' families, 15.3 percent and 16 percent respectively. Very tiny proportions of workers' families every month earn Tk. 17,000-20,000 (1.5 percent) and Tk. 20,000-23,000 (0.8 percent) respectively. Noteworthy, there are also families (12.2 percent) earning less than Tk. 5000 every month.

Total monthly income of a single worker: Average total income of the individual worker is Tk. 4420.20. The lowest monthly income of a garment worker is Tk. 2800, whereas the highest monthly income is Tk. 6300. The highest (45 percent) proportion of

the garments workers earns Tk. 4500-5500 every month followed by Tk. 3500-4500 (42.7 percent). Total monthly income of a small proportion (8.4 percent) of the garments workers is Tk. 2500-3500. Only a tiny proportion (3.8 percent) of the workers earns Tk. 5500 and above every month.

Income-expenditure deficit, savings, and family loan: Almost all (90.8 percent) of the garments workers have claimed that there is deficit in their income-expenditure. In contrast, 9.2 percent respondents do not have deficit in this regard.

Monthly Total Expenditure: Among the garments workers living singly a little less than two-thirds (62.1 percent) workers' monthly total expenditure ranges from Tk. 5000 to Tk. 7000 and about one-fourth (24.1 percent) workers' monthly expenditure ranges from Tk. 3000 to Tk. 5000.

3.2 Present Cost of Living Expected Amount for Decent Living

3.2.1 Present Cost of Living of a Single/Individual Worker

Average monthly expenditure of a garment worker (7th Grade), not living with family, is Tk.4966.13. Among the four geographical locations, covered under this study, monthly average expenditure of the workers of Naryanganj area is the highest (Tk. 5113.5), whereas the expenditure is the lowest in Chittagong (Tk. 4829.3). Besides, in Dhaka and Gazipur area a garment worker's monthly living cost is Tk. 5022.93 and Tk. 4898.79 respectively.

Food: Average monthly present food cost amounts more or less same in Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Gazipur, although it is the highest in Narayanganj (Tk. 2075.50), followed by Gazipur (Tk. 2063) and Dhaka (Tk. 2056.44). The food expenditure has been observed the lowest in Chittagong area (Tk.1871.63).

Accommodation: Expenditure of a garment worker on accommodation/ housing is the highest in Chittagong (Tk. 843.75) followed by Dhaka (Tk. 753.33). A garment worker of Gazipur and Narayanganj area currently spends Tk. 500 and Tk. 625 respectively for the purpose of accommodation.

Medical/Treatment Cost: Average monthly medical expenditure of a garment worker is the highest in Narayanganj area (Tk. 450) followed by Gazipur area (Tk. 415). Medical expenditure is the lowest in Chittagong area (Tk. 281.25); and in Dhaka a garment

worker spends Tk. 330.33 monthly for this purpose.

Support to Family: The range of monthly average expenditure supporting the family (sending money to village) of a garments worker in Bangladesh is Tk. 183.33-494.79. A worker of Gazipur area sends the highest average amount (Tk. 494.79) to the family members residing in village, and in contrast a worker of Chittagong area sends the lowest amount (Tk. 183.33). A worker of Dhaka and Narayanganj area respectively sends, on an average, Tk. 282.14 and Tk. 300 every month to the family members.

Festival: Monthly average expenditure of a garment worker living individually/singly on festival purpose is the highest in Chittagong area (Tk. 322.92), and it is the lowest in Gazipur area (Tk. 237.50). The monthly average expenditure for the same purpose of a worker of Dhaka area (Tk.240.74) is also very close to that of a worker of Gazipur area. Besides, a worker of Narayanganj area spends monthly, on an average, Tk. 268.75 for festival purpose.

3.2.2 Expected Cost of decent living of a single/individual worker

A garment worker expects that for a desired/decent life she needs Tk. 10376.47 every month. This expected amount varies based on geographical location. Workers of Dhaka expect that they need in order to live a decent life they need at least Tk. 10,749.78. Noteworthy, the highest expected amount is Tk. 11,232.38 (in Narayanganj), and in contrast the lowest amount is Tk. 9689.98 (in Chittagong). Besides, workers of Gazipur expect Tk.9833.75 monthly for a decent life.

A worker expects the highest amount, in the total expected amount, for food items (Tk. 4912.66) followed by accommodation (Tk. 1450) and cosmetics and toiletries (Tk. 672.6). To live well, expected amounts that a worker desires for treatment/medical and cloths/dress are Tk. 588.75 and Tk. 638.18 respectively. A worker also expects that she needs Tk. 523.75, Tk. 479.88, and Tk. 356.33 every month for the purposes of transport and communication, festival, and guest entertainment respectively. A worker also wants to send Tk. 561 monthly to village to support family members. Noteworthy, a worker's desired expenditure on recreation is the lowest (Tk. 193.33) among all areas of expenditure.

3.3. Present Cost of Living of Four-member Family of a Garment Worker

Average present monthly expenditure of a four-member family of a garment worker is Tk. 12458.32. Monthly expenditure of a four-member family is the highest in Narayanganj area, Tk. 13,481.88 and the lowest in Chittagong, Tk. 11111.33. In Dhaka and Gazipur area it has been observed that a four-member family's current monthly expenditure, on an average, is Tk. 12,000.05 and Tk. 13,240.03 respectively. A four-member family currently spends Tk. 5969.81 on food-items and Tk. 2403.36 on accommodation/housing every month. The amounts a family spends monthly on cloths/dress, and 'cosmetics and toiletries' are almost same, Tk. 688.31 and Tk. 683.7 respectively. Similarly, about same amount, in each case, is spent for education (Tk. 512.50) and festival (Tk. 521.80) purposes. Expenditures on 'transport and communication' and guest entertainment are also very close, Tk. 399.25 and Tk. 389.32 respectively. Besides, a four-member family of a garment worker also spends respectively Tk. 486.54 and Tk. 226.62 for medical/treatment purpose and to send money to village. Noteworthy, a family of a garment worker spends the least amount on recreation, only Tk. 177.08 every month.

3.4 Expected Cost of Decent Living of Four-member Family of a Garment Worker

In order to have a better living a four-member family of a garment worker expects, on an average, Tk. 19,501.60 every month. In this regard the expected amount of a family of Narayanganj area (Tk. 20,034.24) is more than that of families in other geographical locations. The amount of monthly expected expenditure for a four-member family is the lowest in Chittagong (Tk. 18,701.48). A four-member family of garments workers of Dhaka and Gazipur area expects Tk. 19,735.24 and Tk. 19,535.43 respectively for living better. A four-member family currently expects that in order to live better a total spending of Tk. 8130.26, Tk. 4500, Tk. 1146.65, and Tk. 786.37 is needed on food-items, accommodation, cloths/dress, and medical/treatment respectively. Expected expenditures on education and 'cosmetics and toiletries' are almost same, Tk. 904.58 and Tk. 907.28 respectively; and the desired amounts on 'transport and communication' and guest entertainment are also very close, Tk. 684.55 and Tk. 681.77 respectively. For the purpose

of festival and sending money to village a four-member family of garment workers respectively expects Tk. 975 and Tk. 555 every month. Similar to a worker living singly/individually, a four-member family also expects the lowest amount for recreation, only Tk. 230 every month.

4. Proposed Wage Amount for RMG Workers and Arguments in Favour of the Amount

The intended objectives of establishing minimum wages are to prevent the exploitation of the workers by employers, to promote a fair wage structure, to provide a minimum acceptable standard of living for low-paid workers and, eventually, to alleviate poverty, especially among working families. Considering these objectives attempt has been taken in this section to propose an amount as minimum to ensure decent life of the workers. Furthermore, this section has also tried to pin point rationality of the proposed wage amount.

4.1 Proposed Minimum Wage Amount

To fix the proposed amount needs of the workers have been taken into consideration. Needs have been assessed through survey, FGDs and interviews. In this regard at first average need (on food, accommodation, clothing, treatment, education, transport, communication, festival, guest entertainment, recreation, cosmetics and toiletries, and family support etc) of an individual worker and a four-member family has been determined, and then needed wage amount has been calculated based on the current market prices. Accordingly, the required amount is: TK. 9366 (for a worker living singly), and TK. 19,969 (for a four-member family).

4.2 Arguments in Favour of the Proposed Amount

4.2.1 Capacity to fulfill basic needs

Minimum wage amount must have the capacity to fulfill basic necessities of the workers and their family members. In Article-15 of the constitution of the Bangladesh a number of necessities has been declared as basic which not only includes food, cloths, shelter, education, and medical treatment; but also reasonable rest, recreation and leisure and social security are part of basic needs of the people of Bangladesh. However, the RMG workers

with a current minimum wage of TK. 3000/month are mostly unable to meet their basic needs adequately. Several studies have revealed RMG workers spend most of their income just on food and accommodation purposes, although food-habit lacks required protein consumption and accommodation is not decent at all. Workers hardly spend on recreation purposes and they cannot afford for better treatment. In this regard the proposed amount would be able to ensure the arrangement of the basic needs at a desired minimum level.

4.2.2 Income level of poverty line

Minimum wage aims at addressing the poverty condition of workers and their families. In 2000 BBS determined the required income level of poverty line of persons in urban area. BBS set the level at Tk. 724.56 for individual person. In the same year CPI (consumer price index) was 124.31 which has increased to 266.61 in 2011-12, a 142.30-point increase from the year 2000. If this increase of CPI is adjusted with the income level of 2000 (Tk. 724.56 for an individual) the level would stand at Tk. 1755.56. Thus a four-member family would require Tk. 7022.43 to come out from the net of poverty.

4.2.3 Comparative wage scenario in Bangladesh

Minimum wage board of Bangladesh has so far declared minimum wage for different sectors. However, the pity is RMG workers rank at the bottom level in terms of the minimum wage amounts fixed.

Sl	Name of Sectors	Minimum announced wage (total)	Date of gazette notification
1	Construction & Wood	9882/-	08-10-2012
2	Oil mills & Vegetable products	7,420/-	01-7-2010
3	Road Transport	6,300/-	08-9-2010
4	Glass & silicates	5300/-	26-04-2011
5	Cold storage	6050/-	11-10-12

Sl	Name of Sectors	Minimum announced wage (total)	Date of gazette notification
6	Rerolling Mills	6,100/-	03-07-2011
7	Tannery	9,300/-	30-06-2011
8	Rice Processing	Inexperienced- 5850/- Semi- experienced (servitor)- 7140/-	2-9-2012
9	Salt	General workers (8) Hours salary per 265 BDT, Area -Dhaka, Chittagong, Narayanganj Chadpur, & coxbazar .	01-06-2011
10	RMG	3,000/-	31-10-2010

Garments workers' wage of the country is not only less in comparison to the wage amount of other/competing country's workers, they got least even among the workers of other sectors within the country. Garments workers' wage is about two to more than three times less than the wage of the workers of other sectors in Bangladesh. Garments workers' minimum wage is less more than three times than the wage amount of the tannery sector workers (3.1), and construction and wood (3.29) sectors. This wage amount of RMG workers is more than two times less than the wages of the workers of road-transport (2.1), cold storage (2.02), and re-rolling (2.03) sectors; and about two times (1.95) less than workers of rice-processing sectors. Salt workers get Tk. 265 daily for 8-hour work. As per this amount the monthly minimum wage of this group of workers stands at Tk. 6890 which is 2.30 times more than that of the RMG workers. Minimum monthly wage of the workers of glass and silicates sector is also 1.77 times more than the amount of RMG workers. Besides, RMG workers' wage in Bangladesh is about two and half (2.47) times less than the minimum wage amount of the workers of oil-mills and vegetable products.

4.2.4 Hazards and Risk of Job

Generally, risks and hazards of a job are taken into consideration while fixing minimum wage for workers of a particular sector. In the context of RMG industry it has been observed that workers

face various occupational hazards. They work in poor work environment and due to nature of job they cannot work for longer period/years, 'work span' in their lives are short. Most of the workers are very young. Among respondents of present study about 80 percent are under 30 years of age. Noteworthy, young workers of this sector cannot continue their job for many years. Now a day fire accidents and building collapse has added new impetus to the workplace safety condition of RMG workers. Taking these risks and hazards of the sector RMG workers wage should higher than other sectors where these issues are less frequent.

4.2.5 Ensuring workers' freedom from exploitation

Minimum wage protects workers from exploitation by employers. Workers of RMG section in Bangladesh are exploited in different ways. Workers in most cases are bound to work for a longer time than workers of other sector. Poor wage amount is one of the basic reasons for which workers often agree to work for longer periods. There are instances that every month workers work 150-180 hours just as overtime. Not only that, workers also agree/even want to work during the weekly holidays and nation holidays just because they desire that they may get addition income for those days. In this way workers are really being exploited just because of the existing poor amount. Proposed wage amount would provide workers with opportunities to enjoy freedom in this regard.

4.2.6 Rise in Per-capita Income and steady GDP of the Country

Per capita income of the country is increasing steadily. Currently Bangladesh's annual per capita income has risen to \$1,044 in 2012-13 (www.bdlinkx.com). Thus, annual per capita income in Bangladesh is BDT 80,652 (1 US\$ = BDT 78) and the monthly income is BDT 6721. Therefore, a four-member family of a garment worker has to have the arrangement of earning BDT 26,884 to keep consistency with the national per capita income level. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Bangladesh expanded 6.01 percent in the fiscal year 2012/2013 from the previous year. GDP Growth Rate in Bangladesh is reported by the Bangladesh Bank. From 1994 until 2013, Bangladesh GDP Growth Rate averaged 5.6 Percent reaching an all-time high of 6.7 Percent in June of 2011 and a record low of 4.1 Percent in June of 1994. In the last decade,

the country has recorded GDP growth rates above 5 percent due to development of microcredit and garment industry. Although three fifths of Bangladeshis are employed in the agriculture sector, three quarters of exports revenues come from producing ready-made garments.

4.2.7 Achieving International and National Development Goals: MDG and Vision-2021

Bangladesh is committed nationally and internationally to achieve some development goals within specified timeframes. In the international arena Bangladesh commits to achieve the targets of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Among the eight goals several (Goal-1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger; Goal-2: Achieve Universal Primary Education; Goal-3: Promote Gender Equality and Empowerment; Goal-4; Reduce Child Mortality; Goal-5: Improve Maternal Health) are directly and indirectly related to level of income of and poverty situation of the people. On the other hand, in national context the country targets to reach its Vision-2021. The year 2021 will mark the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence. For resolution of crisis and a prosperous future, the government envisions a Bangladesh which by 2021, will be a middle income country where poverty will be drastically reduced; citizens will be able to meet every basic need and development will be on fast track with ever-increasing rates of growth (APC, 2014). Achieving targets of both MDGs and Vision-2021 are again linked with income level and purchasing capacity of the people. Proposed wage would be helpful to raise income level and purchasing capacity of RMG workers and thus be instrumental to attain targets of both MDGs and Vision-2021.

5. Conclusion

Readymade Garments (RMG) is the largest formal sector in Bangladesh which currently employs 4.0 million workers, about 59 percent of total formal sector employment of the country (BGMEA, 2011). Over the last three decades this sector has boomed in the country. In 1983-84 export earning of the RMG sector was just US \$ 31.57 million (only 3.89 percent of the total export earning of the country) which stood at US \$ 12,496.72 million (77.12 percent of total export earning) in 2009-10 (BOI, n.d.) Minimum wage is important in addressing the right to

human dignity at the workplace. In this section three issues have been discussed – at first, the basis/instrument of minimum wage; secondly, considerations of fixing minimum wage; and finally a comparative picture of wage that RMG workers are getting in different countries. At present the sector earns 80 percent of the export earning with a volume of US \$ 21.53 billion in 2012-13 (BDNews24, 2013; CPD, 2013). Today in the world of work minimum wage is a very popular demand as well as necessity of the workers. Minimum wage broadly is defined as the minimum amount that must be paid to the majority of workers, and which is fixed in a way as to cover the minimum needs of the worker and his/her family in light of the prevailing national economic and social conditions.

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Workers Security in Garments Sector: Bangladesh Perspective

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Abstract

This paper provides historical background of readymade garment industry and condition of workers in Bangladesh. Workers' safety has been analyzed in this paper. Discussions, here, cover physical safety of workers and safety regulations for the fire and building collapse. Major objective of this paper is to prove how the garments workers are vulnerable in the case of physical security, especially safety regulation of the fire accidents and building collapse. International community's reactions towards the security contents of Bangladesh garments factories is also analyzed.

Key Words: Readymade Garments, Security, Physical Security, Economic Security.

Introduction

In recent times, Bangladesh has showed significant improvement in various business sectors — readymade garments industry being the prime one. The apparel sector is the highest source of earning foreign currency but the workers' security is qualitatively very poor. The authorities concerned always ignore labor rights. Nowadays if we hear the name of garment industry, we are bound to think about the workers' safety.

The collapse of the Rana plaza¹ building, causing the death of more than thousand garment workers is the worst industrial disaster in Bangladesh. Though it is common in the garment sector in the country, it is a surprising incident. In fact, this tragedy is one among the many fire and building accidents that have occurred in the country over the years. More than 100 workers were killed and over 30,000 were injured in as many as 275 factory accidents

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¹ Rana Plaza is Nine Storied Building which collapse in April 24, 2013, caused death of 1138 people and injured more than 3000 people,

between 1990 and 2012. These accidents are, however, not exclusive to Bangladesh. Countries, namely Cambodia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India have had their share of similar accidents in garment sector.

The Ready Made Garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh, is mainly export oriented and most of these accidents have occurred in factories producing garments for leading international brands like H&M, Esprit, Gap, M&S² etc. Rock-bottom prices, the constant need to cut costs, lack of worker representation, poverty wages failure of industry initiatives, apathy of factory owners, and government inaction have led to dangerous working conditions. Frequent accidents which are taking place in the garments industry are not secured at all physically, mentally, economically. International community, International labor organization (ILO)³, international buyers express their concern and GSP⁴ already cancelled by the United States. The Government of Bangladesh has also taken many steps but they are not sufficient. This paper seeks to highlight the significance of the reports of the Accord⁵, and its importance.

This article is divided into three major parts. The first part describes about the historical background of readymade garment industry and working condition in the garments industry in Bangladesh. The second part will elaborate the physical security of workers in the garments industry and the third part is an analysis on the economic security of workers, with some recommendations and conclusion.

Definition of Terms: Textile Industry and Readymade Garments Industry

Textile industry is primarily concerned with the production of yarn and cloth and subsequent design or manufacture of clothing and their distribution. The raw materials may be natural or synthetic using products of the chemical industry. Textile industry is a vast industry composing of various sectors, such as; knitting, weaving

² H&M, Esprit, Gap, M&S are the buyers company garments products from Bangladesh

³ ILO (International labor Organization), is an international organization ensure labor security measures in the world.

⁴ GSP (Generalized System of Preference).

⁵ The Accord is an independent agreement designed to make all garment factories in Bangladesh safe workplaces. It includes independent safety inspections at factories and public reporting of the results of these inspections.

etc. It starts with the plantation of cotton tree and ends when a fabric reaches its final customer.

Readymade garment industry is a sector of the textile industry. However, due to its development nowadays RMG is also considered as an individual industry. While conducting the literature revise for the origin of readymade garments industry, it was discovered that the early literatures referred to 'textile industry' as a whole, rather than describing the readymade garments industry as a separate industry.

Present Trends of Garments Factory in Bangladesh :

Available labor and low price create an opportunity which gears up the garment factory in Bangladesh. Garment factory started its journey through the establishment of Riaz garments in 1977-78, the increasing trends also were going on. Export trends also increased keeping with time with a uprising rate. The following table clarifies the increasing trends of garment industries in Bangladesh.

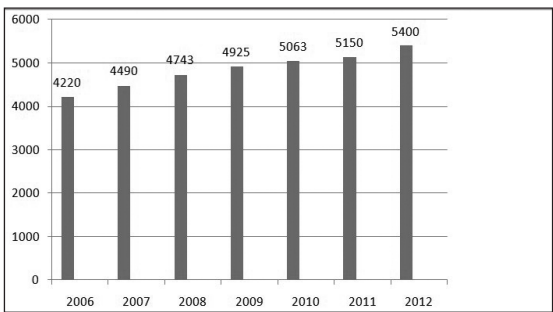


Figure 1: Increasing trends of number of garments factories in Bangladesh.

The following diagram will prove the above-mentioned statement.

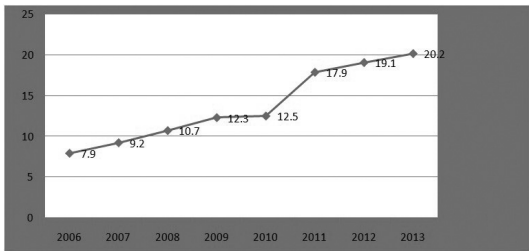


Figure 2: Increasing trends of foreign income (in billion) from garments factories in Bangladesh.

Source: *The Daily Star strategic Talk*. (25.12.2013)

Safety Regulations in Bangladesh :

In Bangladesh “Bangladesh National Building Code” (BNBC) serves as the main guideline for ensuring overall safety standard of buildings. Unfortunately BNBC⁶ is considered as a code and is not mandatory to be followed by owners, designers or contractors. However, the government of Bangladesh drafted a law in 2008 and passed it in the parliament in 2009 titled as “Mahanagar Imarat Nirman Bidhimala-2008”. This set of law is mandatory to be followed in Dhaka and Chittagong cities. The law has been implemented and has shown effectiveness. The law has made some mandatory regulations for industrial buildings as well. The Annex I rule - 59, (f) (page-3063 - 3072) the law of Building Code describes the rules and regulations about building safety and fire exits. For construction of factories within the “Export Processing Zones (EPZ)”⁷ a separate set of laws is in practice titled as Bangladesh Export Processing Zone - Requirement for Self Constructed Buildings, (mentioned as EPZ building rules in later parts of the dissertation).

Working Conditions in RMG Sub-Sector of Bangladesh :

In Bangladesh working conditions are after deplorable. Although the garments industry belongs to a formal sector, the recruitment procedure is largely informal compared to western practice. As there is no contract or Appointment letter, millions of garments workers are vulnerable to losing their jobs at a moment’s notice without benefits. The termination of an employment relationship is likely to be a pathetic and miserable experience for a worker, and loss of income badly affects his or her family. In fact compared to other employment sectors in Bangladesh, job insecurity is higher in the RMG sector. (Prio, 2010)

Most of the garments factories do not have standard working hours. Forced labour is common in Bangladesh, especially in RMG sector. Regular two hours overtime⁸ is compulsory, and if any one refuses to work he or she is dismissed, terminated, wage deducted or receives verbal harassment, sometimes escalating

⁶ BNBC (Bangladesh National Building Code)

⁷ Export Processing Zone is an area where the most of the exportable products are made.

⁸ Overtime is that which performed duty by the workers is after fixed eight hour duty.

into physical punishment. (Prio, 2010) Though most working days go after dark, there are no safety measures for them and no residential facilities or transportation facilities are provided. As a result, they frequently feel unsecured, and for good number of reasons many female workers are raped and abused.

Late or irregular wage payments are common in the sector. Usually most of the factories do not provide any pay slip. The factories, which provide pay slips don't have transparency. It is not uncommon for garments workers to be dismissed without payment following several months of devoted work. (Asbar, 2001)

There is also no mechanism for benefit sharing in RMG industry. They do not have a bonus payment system for workers as provisioned in the labor laws nor do they have provision to increase salaries for changing profitability and inflation. Gender discrimination is common. The majority of garments factory workers are young women. In the RMG sector female workers are considered low-skill, low workers. Moreover, women are generally discriminated against inters of access to higher paid white color and management positions. (Ahmed, 2011)

Labor's Physical Security issues and problems in Garments Factory of Bangladesh :

The readymade garment industry has been Bangladesh's key export industry and a main source of foreign exchange for the last three decades. Bangladesh's garment industry provides employment to about more than 4.0 million workers, of which 2.9 million are women. (Ahmed, 2011)

Many researchers have investigated working conditions in the Bangladesh garments industry. In fact working conditions in the RMG sector are below standard and do not meet the ILO standards. Labor standards and rights are commonly ignored in the RMG factories in Bangladesh. Labors always feel unsecured because of poor practices like the absence of trade unions, informal recruitment and irregular payment, sudden termination, wage discrimination, excessive work, and abusing child labor. Moreover workers suffer from various kinds of diseases due to the unhygienic environment and numbers of workers are killed in workplace accidents, fires and panic stampedes. Absence of an appropriate mechanism to ensure the enforceability of the

available laws for protecting workers rights and maintaining workplace safety continues to be a concern in the RMG sector. Working conditions in the RMG sector frequently violate international labour standards, and code of conducts. (Dasgupta, 2002)

Accidents in Garments Industry :

The readymade garments industry has provided source of income for millions of people. It has been playing a vast role in elevating living standard of mass people, especially in the developing country, Bangladesh. On the other hand, the industry also holds record of experiencing some worst industrial accidents as well. The accidents happened were of various types such as building collapse or fire breakout. In 1990 fire breakout in ‘Saraka Garment’ and claimed of 30 lives. Spectrum Sweater factory and Shaharair Fabrics industry collapse in Savar Dhaka on 11 April 2005 that claimed 74 lives. In recent time, the fires at Garib and Garib Sweater factory and Hamim Group in 2010. Fire at Tazreen Fashions in Kashimpur Gazipur in November, 2012. Lastly, Rana Plaza Collapse, which is nine-storied building, claimed 1136 lives and injured at least 3000 permanently or temporarily.

Accidents in Garments Factory and Security Measures for Labor :

In Bangladesh, most of the accidents in readymade garments industry have occurred from fire and its subsequent impact on human mind (panic and stampede etc.) Other incidences like collapse of buildings have also claimed high toll on human lives and property. In an interview a key personal of fire service and civil Defense claimed that if incidences like stampede and panic could be eliminated there might not have been a loss of many human lives in most of the cases of fire in RMG factories.

In massive accidents in RMG factories there the life of labors are not secured at all more little labor face death in these accidents. Now I would like to show some document that will prove how much people killed were in RMG factory.

Table 2: Deaths in fire Accidents in Garments Industries in Bangladesh:

Years	Death
1991	05

Years	Death
1993	12
1995	09
1999	00
2001	18
2007	14
2009	02
2011	22

Source: *Report of fire Service and Civil Defense; 2013.*

The above-mentioned table ensures the security level of life of labours in garments industries. It is sure that there are many accidents, which are not accounted in this report, which occurred slatternly in many parts of the country.

Concern of International Community for Labor Security and GSP Suspension:

All the data fact figures and real situation clearly prove that the labours in Bangladesh especially garments worker are not secured at all physically, economically, mentally and in sense of social honor. Fire accident in Tazreen Fashions⁹ caused death of 112 people in 2012. Another biggest collapses in the history of garments industry in Bangladesh even in the world is Rana Plaza Collapse. A Nine storied building collapsed on 24 April 2014, caused death of 1136 people and injured more than 3000 workers permanently disabled or temporarily. This destruction leads economic crisis and poverty situation in thousands of family more or less.

But we the people of Bangladesh feel sorrow and helpless when we see the victims are not rehabilitated and the accused are awarded in many ways in spite of punishment, because of political connection or anyway connection with the government. By observing major incidents and accidents and its afterward international communities and world power block, foreign buyers, and international humanitarian body and institutions

⁹ Tazreen Fashion is that where fire broke out in November, 2012, and caused death of 112 lives.

sent their warning message and they are concerned about the security of labour Bangladesh garments factory.

United Nations, Human rights watch, European Union, United States and other big powers express their concern for the labour insecurity in garment sector of Bangladesh.

Many foreign buyers' agency and company threaten Bangladesh and cancel their order for Bangladeshi factory. As a result, other countries like Sri-Lanka, India are getting chance to catch and control the international market that will lead the decrease of foreign incomes and will create a disaster in the international market.

In Bangladesh the labour security problem is not new. Bangladesh repeatedly violates international laws and avoids her promise, which kept previously many times to the international community.

National Tripartite plan of Action on Fire Safety and Structural Integrity to ensure labor security in the Ready-made Garments sector in Bangladesh:

A. Legislation and Policy

1. Submission of Labor Law reform Package to parliaments, during its session (by July 15, 2013).
2. Adoption of National Occupational Safety and Health policy (by 30 April 2013).
3. Establishment of a task force on Building and fire safety of the cabinet committee for the Ready-made garments sector (by 30 May 2013).

B. Administration

1. Requirement of staff to fill currently vacant post, as well as 200 additional labour inspectors in the Department of inspection for factories and Establishments by 31 December 2013.
2. Implementation of Ministry of Labour Establishment Project to strengthen capacity for the Department of Inspection for factories and Establishments (by 31 December 2014).
3. Review and, where necessary, adjustment of factory licensing and certification procedures concerning fire safety, including electrical chemical and environmental safety (by 30 June 2013).

4. Development and introduction of united fire safety checklist to be used by all relevant government agencies (by 30 April 2013).

C. Practical Activities

1. Factory level fire safety needs assessment (by 30 April 2013).
2. Assessment of the structural integrity of all active RMG factories (by 31 December 2014).
3. Delivery of fire safety 'crash course' for mid-level, factory management and supervisor (by 30 September 2013).
4. Development and delivery of specific training on fire safety for union leaders (by 31 December 2013).
5. Establishment of a worker fire safety hotline (by 30 June 2013).
6. Development of guidelines for the establishment of labour-management safety and or fire safety (by 30 September 2013).
7. Development of a tripartite protocol for compensation of the families of workers who died and workers who are injured and workers as a result of occupational accidents and diseases (by 31 December 2014).
8. Redeployment of the RMG workers that unemployed as well was rehabilitate disabled workers (by 30 June 2014).

The implementation status of the National Tripartite plan of action is being monitored by the High level National Tripartite committee on fire safety and structural integrity headed by the secretary, Ministry of labour and Establishment, to ensure the labour security in regards to the field of physical, economic, environment of the workplace, and mental security.

So it is expected that if these policy finally implemented, the labors will be sacred in terms of the above mentioned field. (MoLE, 2013)

Future Course of Action :-

The government of Bangladesh needs to address the following factors.

- To improve working conditions of the workers Bangladesh Government needs to conduct a thorough review of labour regulation. The working environment and working conditions need to be brought into line with the country's current realities and should be backed with the resource necessary to ensure labour security in the Readymade Garments industries.

- ▶ Human resource management (HRM) can play a key role in ensuring labour security from all sides in Bangladesh's garment factories. The introduction of modern human resource management will ensure that labor security issues addressed, that workers rights are not violated, and that there is a safe working environment.
- ▶ Labour security in RMG factories is a key role requirement for most of the worldwide reputed garments buyers. Ensuring all labor rights, labors standards; fair labor practices and code of conduct according to the ILO and WTO conventions should be applied effectively.

ILO performs an important role in ensuring that labour is applied equally to all employers and workers, all ILO members.

- ▶ Government should inquire all the garment factories and suggests necessary action to ensure the labour security.
- ▶ All the activities and functions should be done under law regarding the economic, physical and job security.
- ▶ Building code should be followed while the constructions of garment factory buildings are built to ensure labour security.
- ▶ Emergency exit door has to be ensured in all the garment factories.
- ▶ Fire alarm has to be set in all garments factories.
- ▶ Adequate tools and machinery should be available to use in the emergency moment in any accident.
- ▶ Governments should ensure compensation to the affected people in any disaster of garments factory.
- ▶ Neutral inspection in all factories remediation and fire safety training at facilities reprinting should be ensured for labor security.
- ▶ Government should appoint a steering committee (SC) with equal representation chosen by the government, factory owners, and representatives from and chosen by the International labour Organization. (ILO) as a Neutral chair to monitor all the conditions and working environment to ensure labor security.
- ▶ The tripartite action plan, which has been taken, by the Government of Bangladesh should be implemented properly within proposed time.

Conclusion

The recent labour security debate in readymade garments industry of Bangladesh is illustrative of the fact that development, governance and business management do not necessarily follow a traditional linear mode of economic growth and efficiency. Secure working condition, higher production, and economic security of labour will enable workers to do more work with greater degree of satisfaction. Further, the Fair Labour Act, the Factory Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, minimum salary, core labour standards, code of conduct, the ILO and the WTO conventions will all contribute to make a better working environment and higher production and bigger foreign currency income for the country.

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BILS

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies-BILS was established in 1995. The main objectives of BILS are follows :

- To help in strengthening the democratic functioning of the trade unions and to improve their services towards the society.
- To assist the trade unions in Bangladesh for becoming self-reliant through education, training, research, campaign and communication among them and other social partners as well as civil society.
- To provide various support to the trade union movement in Bangladesh and to participate effectively in the development process of the country.
- To assist the increased participation and representation of women and young workers in trade unions.
- To eliminate all kinds of discrimination between male and female workers.
- To improve occupational health and safety situation and worker's welfare as a whole.
- To brighten the image of the trade union movement in Bangladesh and to increase the organised workforce & consolidate the strength of trade union movement.
- To establish greater unity in labour movement of Bangladesh.
- To undertake multifaceted activities for human resource development.
- To introduce programmes for productivity and good industrial relation.