

Policy Brief on

READYMADE GARMENT (RMG) WORKERS BEYOND THEIR WORKPLACES: STATE OF LIVING CONDITION SECURITY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Author: Mostafiz Ahmed, Shajib Dey; Co-ordination: Nazma Yesmin

Readymade Garment (RMG) industry is the lifeline of Bangladesh economy which employs 3.1 million people (BBS, 2018) of whom the majority is women. The industry regularly attracts the attention of the national and international community mainly due to its worker-rights condition at the workplace/factory. Excessive working hour is an inseparable feature of the RMG industry. Violation of the national and international norms concerning the daily and weekly working hours is rampant. Despite an increase in the minimum wage, the latest amount still far behind to ensure a decent living condition for the workers. Trade Union (TU) rights is another serious concern. Although the number of plant-level unions has increased since the Rana Plaza Tragedy in 2013, the overall condition is not favorable for unions to become functional fully. As a whole, the rights conditions at the workplaces have remained as an issue of great concern.

On the other hand, beyond their workplaces, RMG workers have another part of their life and living which is still a less explored area. Millions of RMG workers represent a large cohort of a deprived and disadvantaged group. Various factors are influencing the condition of living, security, and social protection of RMG workers and making them vulnerable at their living and community places. However, the lack of information in this regard is remarkable and the marked information gap ultimately hinders the adoption of appropriate measures and policies to address their issues.

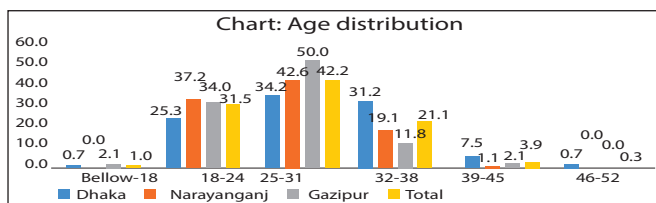
This policy brief has presented the state of the RMG workers in terms of living standards, work-life-balance, and safety and social protection situation. The paper has further outlined a set of recommendations to bring improvements in these areas.

About the study

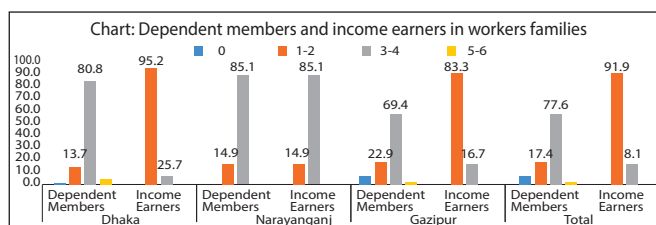
3 Locations (Dhaka, Narayanjang, and Gazipur)
384 Respondents
60.4 % women; **39.6 %** men
4 FGDs; **16** interviews

About respondents

75% below 32 years.
60.4% are women.
66.9%, the largest contingent, are married.
41.4% and **41.7%** respectively have primary and junior-secondary level education.



83.6% workers live with family members.
4.13 members in every family, larger than the national average.
97% have dependent members (2.32 members).
1.8 income earners per family.



Living place condition

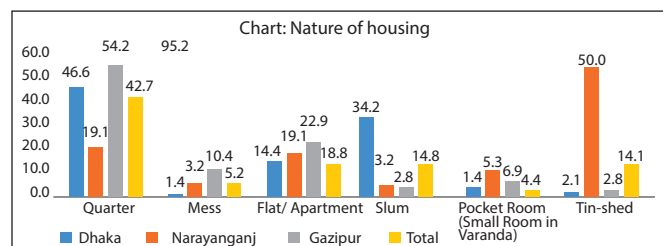
Rented, semi-pucca and quarter-type housing is predominant for garment workers.

73% living in semi-pucca houses.
34.25% in Dhaka live in slum.
98% live in rented houses.
42.7% live in quarter-type housing.

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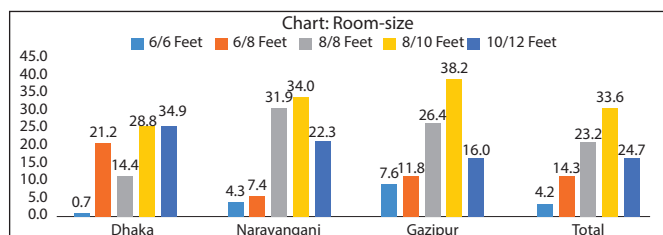
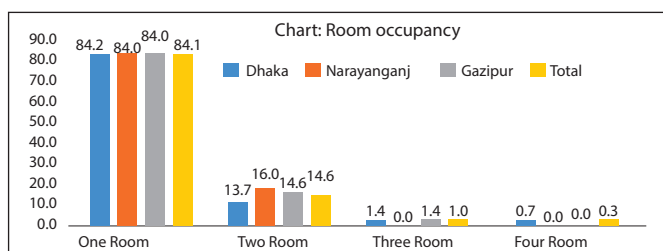
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Single and small rooms are under most workers' occupancy.

84.1% live in a single room.
60-80 sq.ft. room size of **56.8%** workers.
<50 sq.ft. room size of **18.5%** workers.
3.16 members live in a single room.

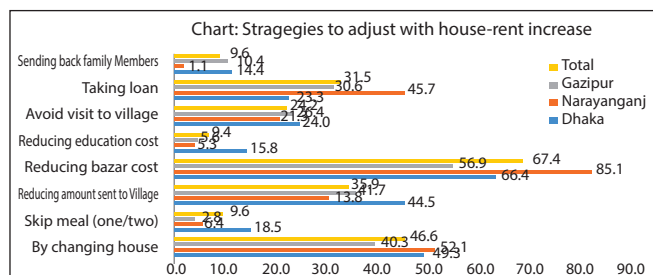


House-rent amount, its increase, and workers' counter measures.

BDT 3574.64 average house rent.
68.1% house rent is increased once a year.
However, house owners always do not follow a specific time-gap to increase the rent.

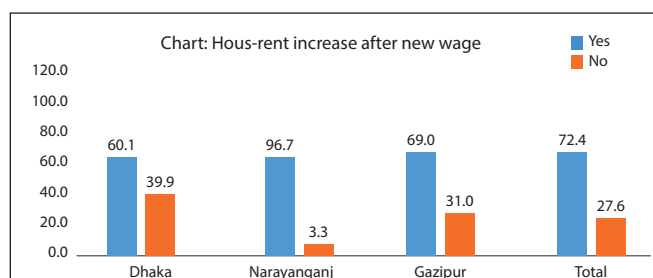
Workers adopt various strategies/ means—simple to harsher—to adjust with house-rent increase.

67.4% reduce monthly bazar cost.
31.5% borrow money.
 Smaller proportion, often adopt harsher strategies (e.g. sends back children to village, skips meals).

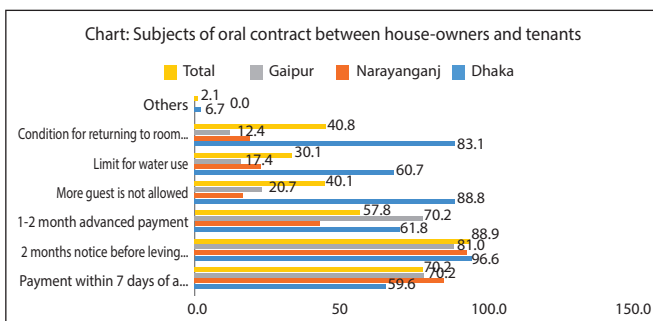


House-rent increase after declaration of minimum wage in RMG is a harsh reality.

72.4% workers' house-rent has been increased.
41.9% faced the increase within 1-2 months after the new wage, and **26%** after 5-6 months.
BDT 233.70 was average rent increase.



No written contract for house-rent.
One-sided oral contract.

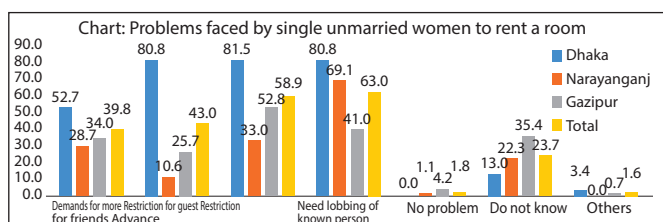


Renting a house is not easy always, single/unmarried women face stricter condition.
75% women (single or married) who do not live with families face different difficulties.

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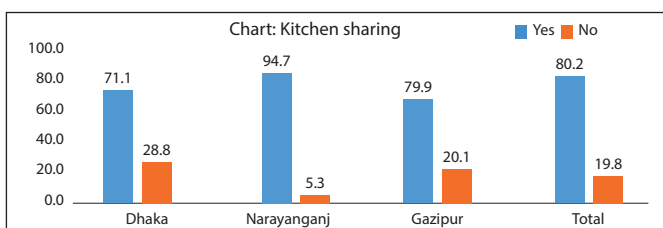
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Utility charges are included mostly in house-rent, subject to increase when guests come.

- Water, gas, and electricity cost are included in the rent of **92%**, **81.5%**, and **64.1%** workers respectively.
- 1** in every **2** workers inform that when guests come to visit and stay, house-owners charge extra money.

Sharing is an inseparable feature of workers' life



On an average:

27 persons and **9.34** families (range is 2-70 families) share a single water source.

6.30 families (the range is 2-30) share single kitchen;

3 families share single burner.

4.41 families share single toilet.

Serial/queue is the ultimate consequence of sharing, queuing eats up **1.5 hours** every day.

2 of every **3** workers stand in queue to collect water.

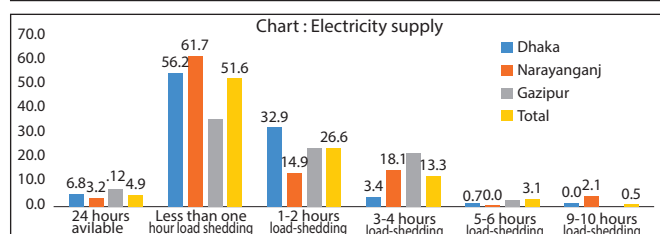
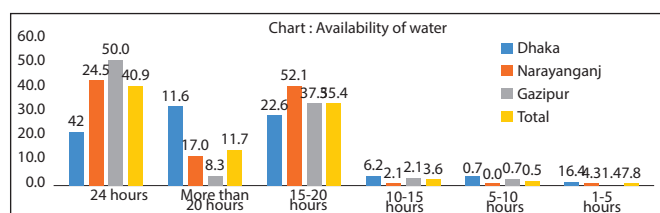
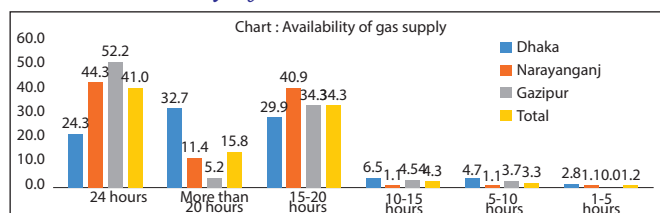
3 of every **4** (**74.7%**) families maintain serial for cooking.

80.7% workers queue for toilet using; and

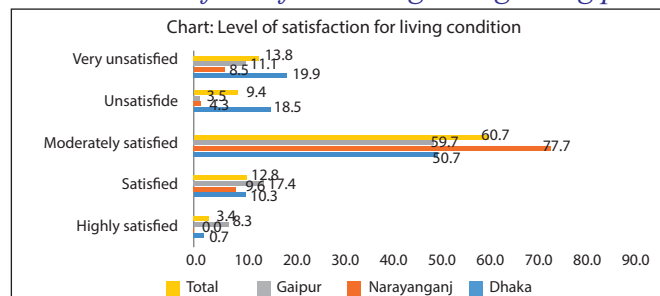
70.8% workers queue for bathing.

Altogether total time spent in queue for different purposes is **90.44** minutes.

Utility services (water, gas, electricity) are not available always for 24 hours.



Diverse level of satisfaction regarding living place



Income, expenditure, savings, and assets

Main income earner, income source other than RMG, and total personal income.

76.8% the principal income earner of family.

For **89.1%** RMG is the only source of income.

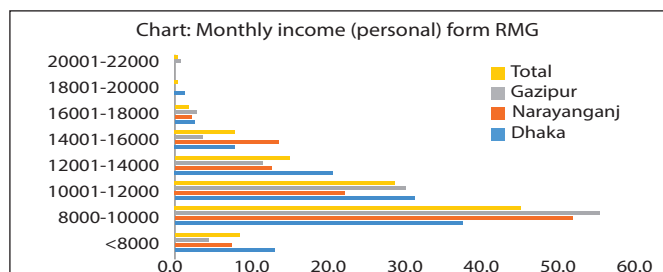
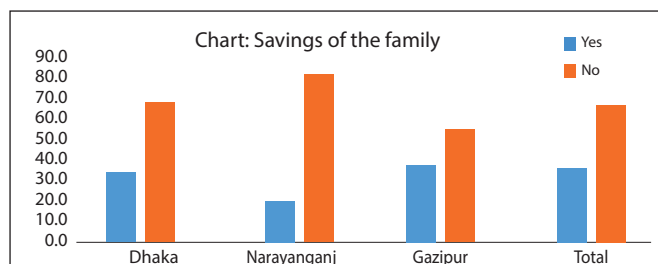
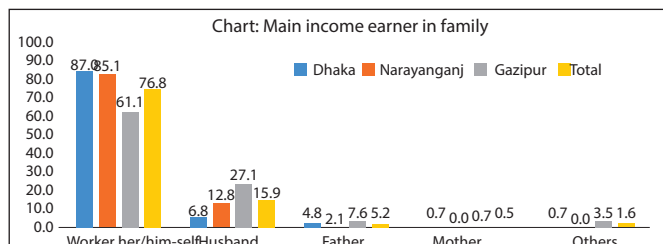
BDT 10773.35 the average personal income.

7.3% was receiving below the legal minimum wage.

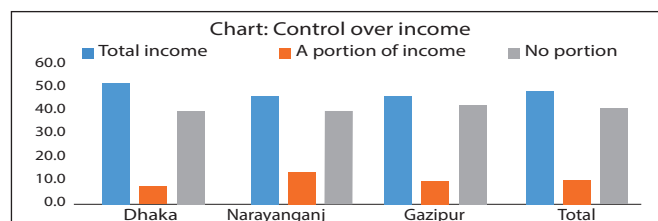
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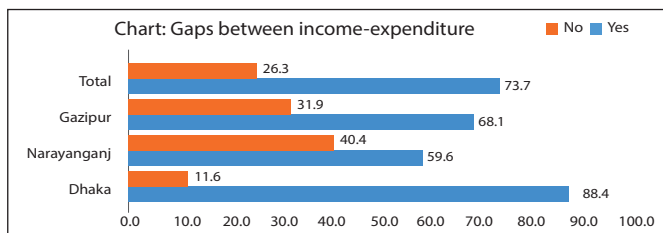


- Remarkable gender variation in control over income.
- 51.29% women workers have no control over their income.

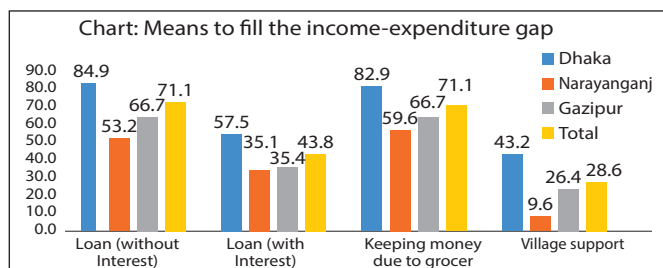


Gaps in household income-expenditure:

BDT 17,591.34 average monthly family income;
BDT 17917 average monthly family expenditure.
73.7% suffer from income-expenditure gap



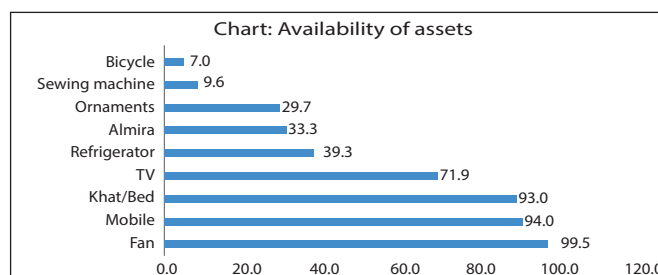
55.5% face the gap round the year.
71% take 'loan without interest' and 'keep money due to grocery shop' in both cases.
82% are exploited when products are purchase in credit.
28.6% often take support from village .



- 68.2% do not have any family savings

Family assets:

- The most common (available in 80% families) asset:
 - 99.5% have electric fan;
 - 94% have mobile phone;
 - 93% have *khat*/bed;
- The least available (available in less than 20% families)
 - 7% have bicycle;
 - 9.6% have shewing machine;



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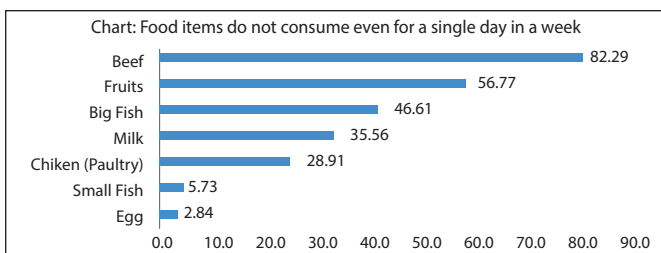
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Food habit, health, nutrition and hygiene

Food taking habit among workers is diverse, despite some commonness.

- Large/big fish, beef, fruits and milk is generally not in daily food-list of largest section of the workers.
- **85%** eat small fish for 1-2 days in a week.
- **86%** eat egg 1-3 days weekly.

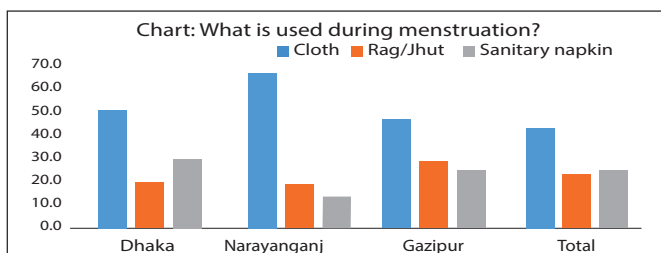


Chronic diseases are common, and geographical variation in prevalence rate is marked.

- **65.1%** workers face health problems.
- Complaints of chronic diseases is very high among the workers of Dhaka (**83.56%**), and lowest in Gazipur (**50%**).

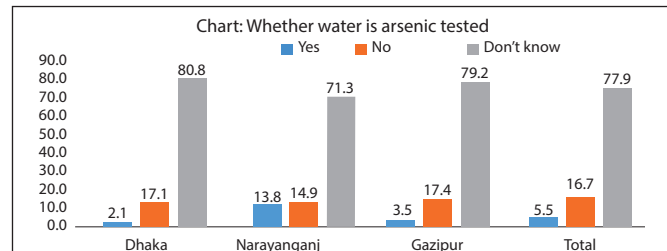
Use of sanitary napkin is not frequent.

24.1% women workers use of sanitary napkin



Water purification

- **7** of every **10** workers do not use any method to purify their drinking water.
- **37%** report that since they collect water from tube-well, they need not to purify it.
- **77.9 %** lack awareness on arsenic test of water.

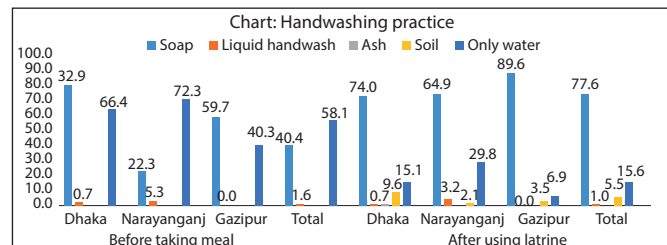


Hand washing habit is characterized by geographical variation.

58.1% wash hands with water only before taking meals.

77.6% workers use soap after using toilet (higher in Gazipur, 89.6%).

15.6% use nothing but water only after using toilet (29.8% in Narayanganj)



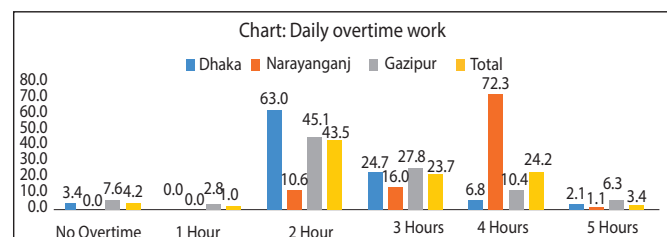
Work-life balance

47% time of 24-hours is spent at workplace:

11.15 hours daily— (8.30 hours as normal working + 2.85 hours overtime).

13% work more than 8 hours but not counted as overtime.

51.3% do overtime-work for more than two-hours (yet in Narayanganj, about 90%)



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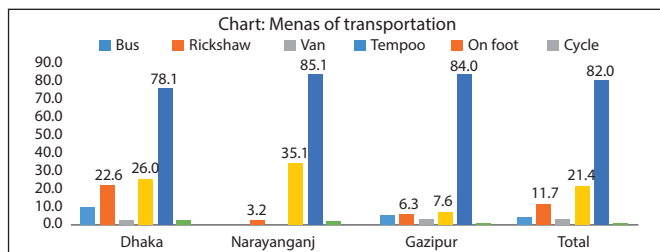
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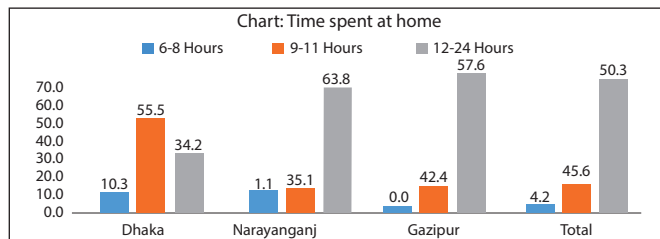
1-3 kilometer distance between living place and factory for majority workers.

82% go to factory/commute factory on foot (similar pattern in all three locations).

50 minutes average time spent for transportation.



11.12 hours workers stay at home on average
50.3% spend 12-14 hours; and **45.6%** 9-11 hours.

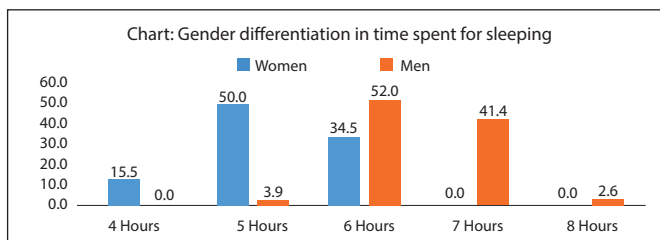


Workers' sleeping period is usually **short**.

5.68 hours average time spent for sleeping.

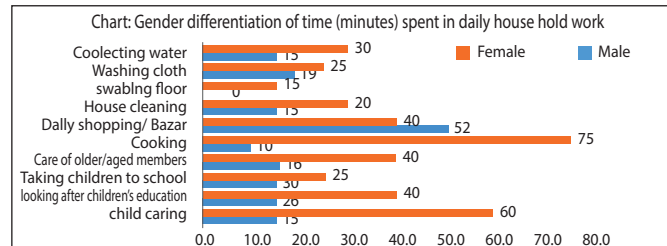
Sleep span is **shorter for women**.

None of women workers sleeps more than six hours; **44%** men workers get the chance.



Time spent by women workers in household chores is almost double than men workers.

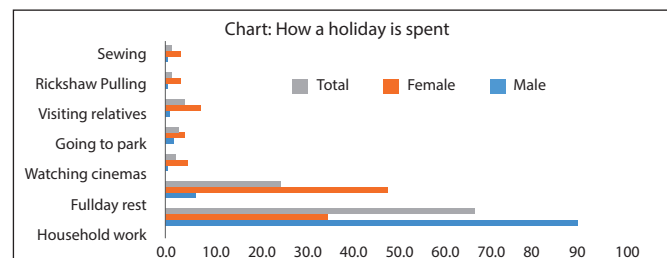
6.16 hours women spend for household chores.
3.3 hours men spend for household chores.



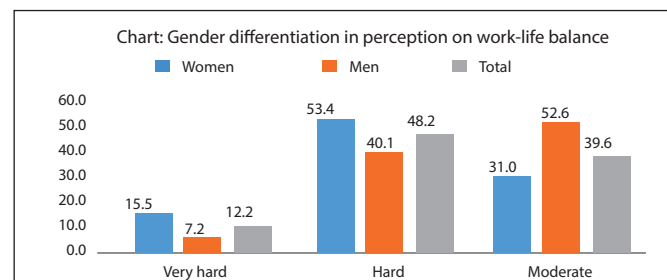
Time spent by men workers for leisure/rest is **four times** more than women workers:

- **50 minutes** is the average rest time;
- **31.3 minutes** rest time for women;
- **122.48 minutes** rest time for men;

Weekly holiday is day to finish pending household tasks.

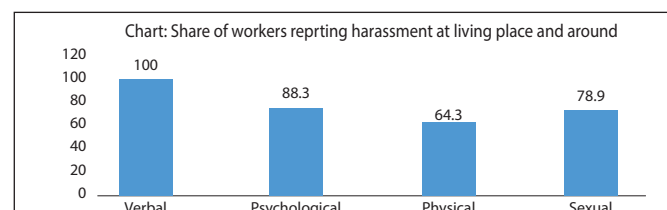


Gender differentiation in perception on work-life balance is remarkable.



Safety situation

Harassments exist at varied level.

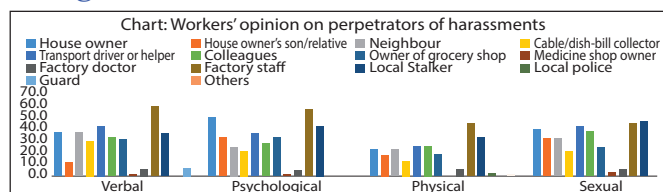


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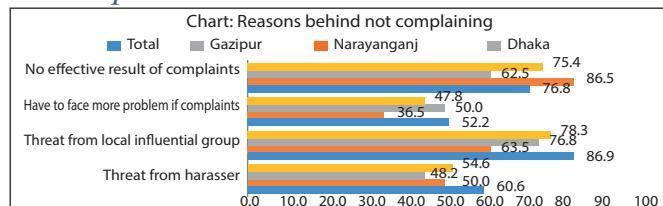
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Perpetrators of harassments are from different backgrounds.



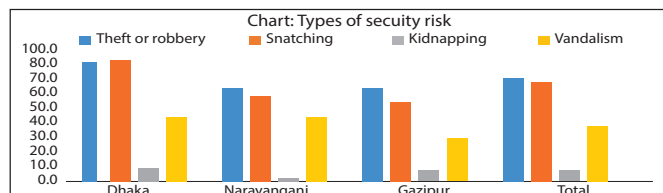
• **53.9%** do not complain against harassment

Reasons of different nature discourage workers to complain.



Security risks of various types are available at living places.

8 of every 10 workers have mentioned several risk.

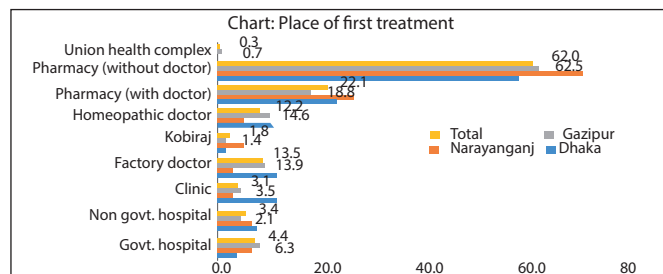


Service and social protection

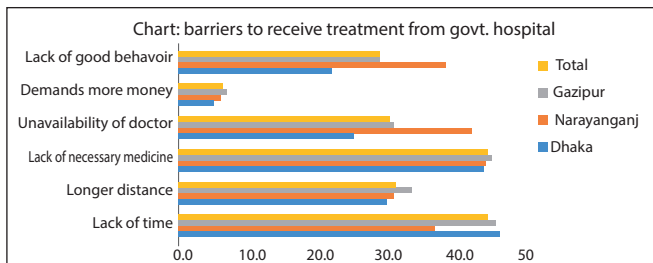
Local pharmacy is the place where most workers go to receive treatment.

More than **8** of every **10** (84.1) workers visit local pharmacy.

- **6** of them take medicine according to advice of medicine-seller(pharmacist),
- **2** consult the doctors of local pharmacies.
- **4.4%** visit the government hospital for treatment.



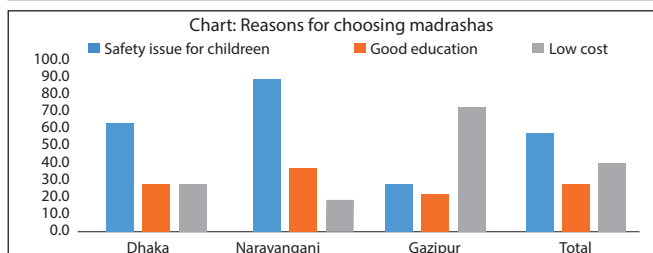
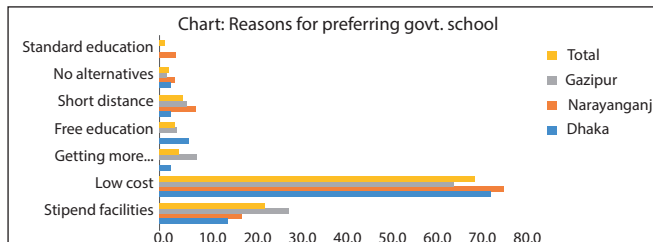
Diverse factors prevent workers to receive treatment from government hospitals are diverse.



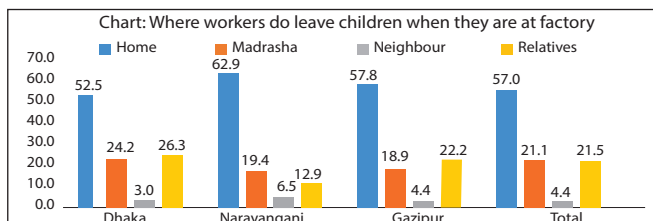
Geographical variation in school preference is remarkable.

44.1% in Gazipur and **43%** in Narayanganj send children to government schools.

36.5% in Dhaka prefer private schools. Tendency to send children to madrasahs is also higher in Dhaka.



• **57%** of the workers leave/keep their children in home when they go to factory.

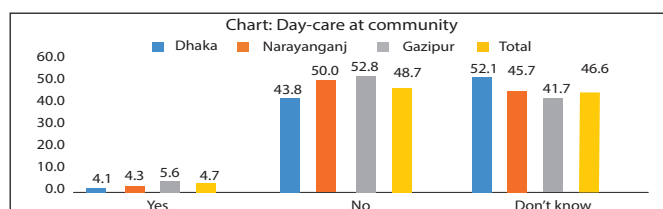


• Day care facilities are generally absent in neighborhood.
• **46.6%** are unaware about the availability.

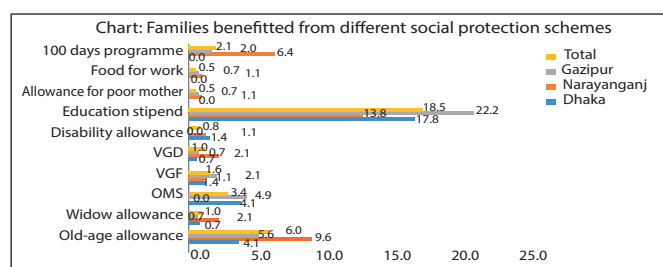
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- **71.4%** inform availability of arrangements of lighting at streets/roads in the locality, but condition is not good always.
- **60.4%** never have seen spraying medicine to kill mosquitos.
- Workers and their families have **very limited access** to different types of safety net schemes.



Recommendations

Decent housing arrangements

The specific requirements in this regard

- Establishing government subsidized housing for workers and their families.
- Developing a mechanism to monitor house-rent condition. Areas-wise house-rent monitoring team could be formed involving the local government representatives, local TU and house owners.
- Ensuring rental contract between house owners and workers specifying the terms and condition that would protect interests of both parties.
- Making the house-rent control act up-to-date and ensure its implementation.

Ensuring 24-hours availability of utility services at houses

Bringing better work-life balance

- Implementation of working hour related provisions of the law at factory level.
- Gender equality at household level; social division of labour at household level should be rationalized/reoriented/reconstructed.

For better health and hygiene

- Campaign/movement for living wage of the workers.
- Awareness raising programs from govt. and NGOs for health and hygiene issues.

Increasing government schools and improve its quality

- Establish more schools in communities/localities of the workers.
- Take initiatives to increase the number of seats in existing schools.
- Improve the standards of education government schools.

Making government health services accessible

- Establish satellite health centers at the community of the workers.
- Introduce 'evening-time' shifts in government hospital located in industrial areas.
- Introduce 'Friday/holiday service' for workers in government hospitals.

Government day-care centers in workers' community/locality

Making streets and community places safer

- Establishing sufficient lighting arrangements at workers living areas and at streets that workers use frequently.
- Transport facility for workers, especially at night.
- Community based committee (including local govt. representatives, local TU, police station) to look after safety and security condition.
- Community based complaints receiving and solving mechanism.

Introduction of social protection schemes for RMG workers.



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