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Academic

- Assessment of the implementation status of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy and way forward
- COVID-19 and Impact on Employment: Assessing the Situation of Chattogram based Industrial Sectors
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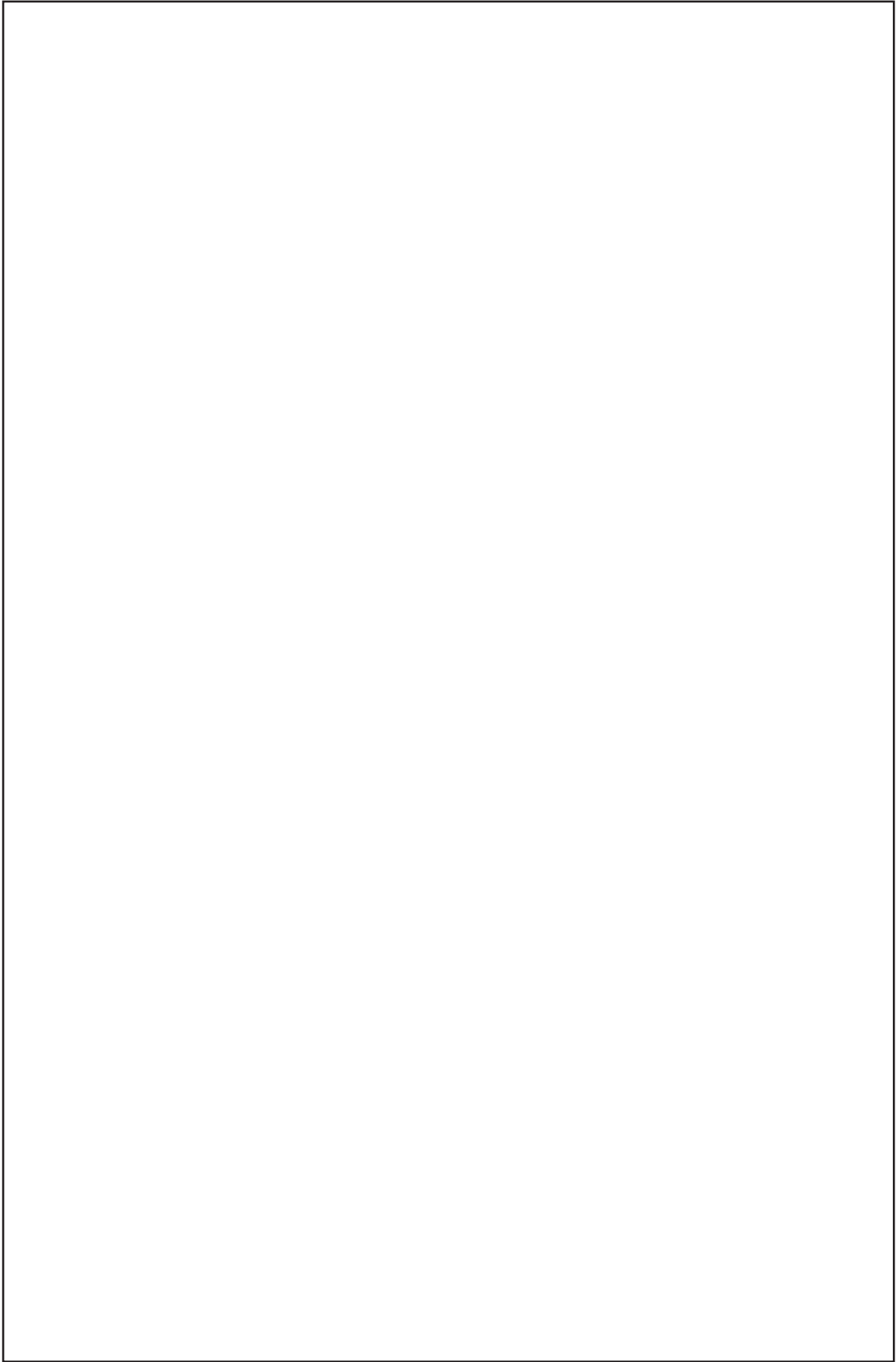
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Editorial

Public life has become obsolete in Bangladesh due to second wave of Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown situation. The government has taken a number of initiatives but struggling to tackle the situation. Working people are facing new challenges every day. We need to mitigate the challenges as per our lesson learning and best practice with a view to build better tomorrow.

We have incorporated five articles in academic section and one article in civil Society section. The first article based on the study on assessment of the implementation status of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy aims to measure decent work deficits and implementation status of the Policy. The study attempted to draw insights from a feminist research that situates women's social conditions in a patriarchal society to investigate decent work deficits in domestic work. It contends that women's labour-market positions are characterized by their over-representation in low-wage jobs in economic sectors or occupations where women are concentrated.

Another research based article on COVID-19 and Impact on Employment in Chattogram based Industrial Sectors focused on highly affected six sectors-such as RMG, Construction, Restaurant, Health & Diagnosis, Transport and Port. The study influenced those sectors in terms of short-term and long-term employment, the influence on the economy from macro and micro perspectives. It also searched the avenues for workers who have been affected by the COVID-19 and lost their works from the psychology of working theory and related social-justice oriented perspectives. This study focused on how governmental and nonprofit interventions can reduce vulnerability.

The article on COVID-19 impact on RMG Sector in Bangladesh has analyzed the global clothing supply chain based on different indicators like targeted termination, layoff, wage deprivation, denial of benefits etc. The article has considered that collective and inclusive actions are must for sustaining the RMG industries as well as improving the life and livelihood of the RMG workers.

The article based on study on victimization of indigenous women workers in Tangail district has discussed multiple forms of victimization in different sectors such as beauty parlor, garments, agricultural, and health service. The study's findings indicate that indigenous women had become victims of multiple types of victimization such as physical victimization, wage discrimination, face discrimination, psychological victimization. The study finds that low mentality of males, lack of ethical education, disrespect to indigenous women are the leading causes of victimization.

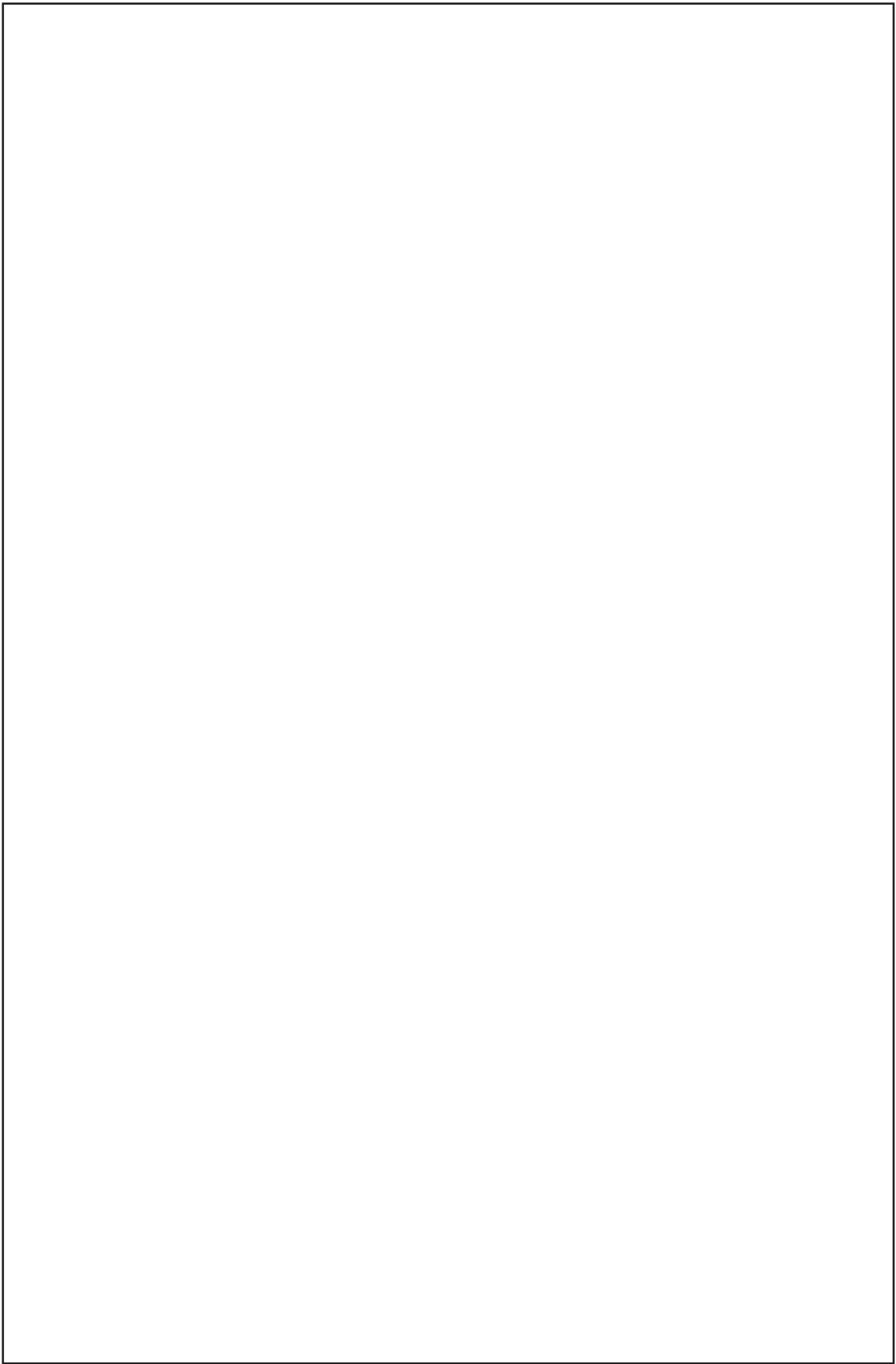
The article on violation of labour rights in Plastic Sector in Bogura district mainly analyzes the nature, patterns and cause of labour rights violation of plastic factory workers. The findings of the article shows that, plastic factory workers faced low wage, long working hour, low overtime payment, gender discrimination, inhuman behavior, unhealthy and unhygienic condition of workplace, lack of safety and security etc. It suggests that, the proper enforcement of existing labour act can reduce the violation of labour rights in this sector.

We hope these articles will be helpful for our readers. We thank our partners for their support and cooperation regarding publication of this journal.

Md. Mojibur Rahman Bhuiyan
Editor

The views expressed by the experts and the writers who wrote and gave interviews in this publication are reflections of their opinions; BILS Editorial Board has no liability in this regard

Academic Part



Assessment of the implementation status of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy and way forward

M. Zakir Hossain Khan¹

Sifat E Rabbi

Sadman Khalili

Romana Ali

Kabir Ahmed

Mohaymenul Islam

Abstract

This study aims to measure decent work deficits and implementation status of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy-2015. There are significant gaps in DWPWP implementation, including key issues such as the right to a minimum wage, allowances, fixed working hours, leave time, bonuses, a weekly day of rest, maternity leave, benefits, and protection from workplace violence and harassment. In developing economies, women in all regions continue to face higher unemployment, vulnerability, working poverty and often more informality of employment than men (ILO, 2016). This study attempted to draw insights from a feminist research that situates women's social conditions in a sexist, "malestream," and patriarchal society to investigate decent work deficits in domestic work. It contends that women's labour-market positions are characterized by their over-representation in low-wage jobs in economic sectors or occupations where women are concentrated. Domestic work is one of the lowest-paying industries in the labour market (Oelz and Rani 2015). This lower status of domestic workers is characterized by a lack of formal skills and educational levels, a high incidence of informality, a lack of collective representation, a lack of individual bargaining power, a lack of income generation opportunities, and vulnerable social status.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic workers (DWs) play an important role in daily life management, DW is predominantly contributed by women and children who are contributing to the specifically reproductive labour of society and

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the care economy. Their efforts and assistance make life easier for certain segments of society. The growing number of domestic workers over time coincides with the growing demand for domestic assistance. Recently, local and international stakeholders, developing partners, donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the international community, and regional influential organizations have been focusing on the recognition of workers' rights and facilities, benefits, and welfare in the domestic workplace, as well as the recognition of necessary housing equipment, including providing the suitable financial and non-financial rewards. Bearing this in mind, the Cabinet of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh approved the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy (DWPWP) in December 2015, which includes key provisions for worker registration and legal aid. The DWPWP-2015 contains 16 provisions that define the responsibilities of employers, employees, and the government. It caters to the needs of over 2 million people, the majority of whom are women and children. Because of poverty, the majority of those employed as domestic workers in Bangladesh have chosen this profession as a means of subsistence. Even though Bangladesh is a source country for international migrant domestic workers, the DWPWP-2015 excludes them entirely. Domestic workers' earnings are not included in our country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

With the advancement of society, it is necessary to update Policy, Law, or Act. Policy updates are determined by the government's objectives and goals. The amendment of any existing law or act, or the enactment of new legislation, is a policy decision made by the government. An existing Law or Act can be amended by inserting, removing, or substituting provisions. Because there is no law or act governing domestic workers, it is up to the government to decide whether to enact new legislation on the subject. If the government decides to enact new domestic worker legislation, the existing Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy 2015, may serve as a guiding force in the legislation's enactment.

OBJECTIVES

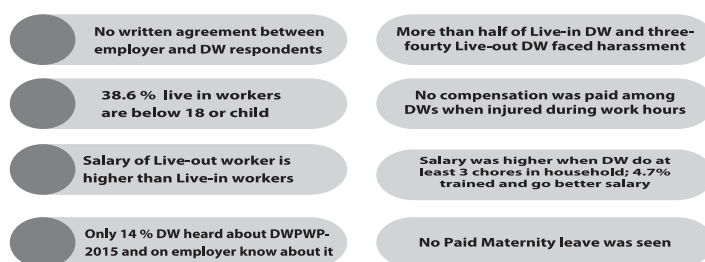
Major objectives of the study was to examine the progress, challenges in enforcement, and areas for improvement/reform of the Domestic

Workers Protection and Welfare Policy 2015 recognizing the gendered inequalities and norms; identifying effectiveness of the institutional redress mechanisms, communicating the status to the relevant stakeholders, which include employers, domestic workers, gender inequalities, gender norms, job placement agencies, and other relevant organizations (e.g. trade unions, right groups, CSOs & local domestic worker provider groups); and assess household employers' awareness of the DWPWP. The study applies both qualitative (In-depth interviews, key informant interviews, FGSs, case stories) and quantitative technique (survey of both live-out and live-in DWs) to gather data.

FINDINGS

According to the findings of the study, there is no authority to monitor the situation of domestic workers in the protection system. Because the nature of their work requires them to work in the private sphere, away from their families and communities, they remain hidden from public view. Furthermore, because the vast majority of DWs are women, they are always vulnerable to various forms of sexual abuse, which they are reluctant to report due to social stigma. Furthermore, workers in various formal sectors are covered by welfare funds, but there is no such fund specifically for domestic workers. The absence of a trade union is also a significant impediment to ensuring the welfare of the DWs.

The availability of standard wages for DWs is an important indicator of decent working conditions. Every one of the 287 DWs reported a different monthly wage. The overall minimum monthly salary of a DW worker being BDT 500 and the maximum salary being BDT 20,000.



However, 70% of live-out workers earned 7000-9000 BDT per month,

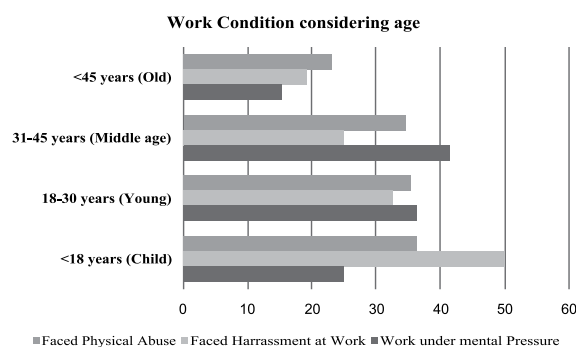
while only 30% of live-in workers earned the same. Moreover, 55% of live-in workers earned less than 1000 BDT per month, the lowest wage.

However, educational qualification and training have a significant impact on the salary distribution of DWs. More than half of the DWs with low income have no educational background, in reverse DWs who have participated in any training tend to have a higher salary range than those who have not received any training for work purposes. DWs earned more than 9,000 BDT (US\$105) who have received training on various electric equipment or household related stuff. However, according to a 2015 BILS study on domestic workers supported by Oxfam, only 15% earned more than Tk. 5,000 per month (approximately \$59).

Understanding the recruitment pattern is useful in mapping work insufficiencies for domestic workers. Though the Policy recommends that “both sides shall be obliged to abide by the conditions set forth in the appointment letter or contract or understanding or agreement, but it is to be ensured that the conditions set forth are not contrary to laws and policies of the country,” these options are rarely practiced by the employers due to the Policy's non-obligation. According to the study findings, the majority of live-in DWs are recruited by relatives, while the majority of live-out DWs are recruited by other domestic workers. None of them have a written agreement from their employers, and the DWPWP has also left room for an informal recruitment process by recognizing verbal discussions as a recruitment option.

The Policy also proposed establishing the type of employment, the date of employment, the wages, the time of leisure and rest, the type of work, the lodging facility and food availability of the domestic worker, the domestic worker's apparel and physical cleanliness, and the domestic worker's obligations. However, when asked about their vacations at work, slightly more than half of all respondents said they enjoy vacation from their employers, but very few claimed to enjoy yearly 90 days of leave. When asked why they chose this profession, one-fourth of the respondents stated that it is their only source of income because they lack the necessary education to obtain a formal job. When asked why they wanted to change professions, the majority of DWs (30.7%) said it was because of the low pay.

DWPWP-2015 Mentions that on no account the domestic worker shall be subjected to unbecoming behavior or physical torture or mental oppression; if any domestic worker is subjected to any type of physical or mental oppression by the employer, necessary step is to be taken under the existing law of the country. However, 31.58% live-in DWs and 36.42% live-out DWs were forced to work under extra health/mental pressure 41.23% Live-in workers reported they were verbally abused. In contrast, nearly 24.86 % of the live-out DWs reported experiencing verbal abuses DWs earned more than 7,000BDT/month faced less harassment at workplace. About 52%of live-in DWs reported that they were slapped for any fault in a regular manner, 75% live-out DWs reported that they were kicked and buffeting for any of their fault. Victims of sexual harassment rarely speak about their experiences. This is reason for which only 6.14% live-in DWs and 0.58% live-out DWs reported being sexually harassed.



Through our research, particularly through qualitative data, we discovered the following policy gaps that should be addressed in any future amendments. The research findings and analysis presented in this paper reveal significant gaps in the implementation of the DWPWP-2015 policy for both live-in and live-out domestic workers in Bangladesh. In terms of gender, because the vast majority of DWs are women and children, there is a need to address the practical and strategic gender needs of women working in this sector. Major gaps are as follows:

- Failure to recognize contributions of Domestic Work in both labour related laws and estimates of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
- No declaration of minimum wages

- Absence of systematic statistics of the domestic workers
- Lack of provision of forming Trade Union or Association
- No clear instruction on basic education and socialization
- Lack of direction about the welfare and rights related issues of Migrant Workers
- Lack of workers' awareness on policy due to poor media coverage and illiteracy
- Lack of immediate response from authority for harassment, torture, and forced labour
- Lack of registration or information in Law Enforcement agencies
- No monitoring cell in action
- Lack of social rights

DWs recommended the following steps to formalize their work during FGDs and IDIs: decent living standards and welfare, proper safety and security. Employers emphasized that legal action, use of a helpline by DWs, and skill development opportunities can improve DWs' situation.

Government officials, NGO representatives, law enforcement agency representatives, donor organization representatives, DW representatives, Domestic Worker Association representatives, and Bangladesh Labour Foundation all made specific recommendations, which are listed below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

a) Enactment of the DWPWP Act and Recognize Contributions of Domestic Works

Non-enforceability of the DWPW Policy, in contrast to Law or Act, lacks sanction for violation or omission. If the existing policy does not become law the violence and mistreatment against women (VAW) cannot be stopped. Since the policy is not legally binding a new law should be formulated so that the rights of DWs can be protected legally. In that case, Domestic Work should be formally recognized immediately as a profession the government must take immediate action to enact a comprehensive and enforceable law that recognizes domestic work as a formal sector, protects labour rights, ensures minimum wages, safety, security, and welfare of domestic workers, and

provides exemplary punishments.; and a dedicated cell/organization under the Ministry of Labour is required to enact the Act.

The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 and the National Child Labour Elimination Policy of 2010 classified domestic works as part of the informal sector, which is exempt from all government regulations and monitoring mechanisms. The Domestic Servant Registration Ordinance 1961 is ineffective to labour rights protection. Contributions of Domestic Work in both labour related laws and estimates of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) are absent. Apart from awareness building among employers, there should be a good management system to protect the rights of DWs at the local government level.

b) E-database or Statistics of DWs and Registration/Information to Law Enforcement Agencies

The number of domestic workers in the informal sector continues to fall short of accurate data. The ILO, BBS, or Ministry of Labour, as well as other studies, use different parameters and show vastly different numbers of DW in Bangladesh. The policy should specify how relevant organizations (for example, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and relevant NGOs) will be responsible for creating a centralized data set of DWs with the assistance of local administration/law enforcement agencies. An E-database on DWs should be created where all information about their status and employers' details can be found.

This causes issues for both employers and the government. It has been observed that domestic workers sometimes leave their houses without notice, causing a complication for the employer. The government should create a proper E-database, introduce a record register, and issue identification numbers in favor of the person who intends to be a domestic worker.

Data on DWs should be gathered at the union/thana level. This will provide the government with detailed statistics on DWs, their internal and international migration, and their status. To ensure the integrity and accuracy of the data the government should have an effective monitoring and follow-up mechanism in place so that it has the most up-to-date information about DWs. In this case, the government/service provider can learn about the DWs' situation from their friends and neighbors. In the long term, the government should take initiative to collect information regularly about the situation of the DWs in the national survey. The observation committee and monitoring cell can receive assistance from both the national and local governments.

c) Declaration of Minimum Wages and Benefits for DWs and their poor families

There is no minimum wage for the domestic workers. Typically, they are paid less by their employer. There is variation in pay due to the lack of a minimum wage for experienced and inexperienced workers. The government should set the minimum hourly wages for DWs based on the type and nature of the work and both for urban or rural setting. To ensure domestic worker-friendly policies, health insurance policies, minimum wage rights, and digitized money transactions must be implemented.

The government should provide allowances or other benefits to senior and elderly DWs. Moreover, DWs' salaries should be increased, and festival bonuses should be provided. Two to three times a year, DWs should be given a bonus equal to 50% of their salary. DWs should be treated humanely when they are sick. A pregnant woman should be given at least 3-4 months of leave and half of her salary to be paid during and after her pregnancy; some employers recommend paying the full salary. Employers should allow DWs to breastfeed their children during work hours if possible. In this case, a commercial service provider, such as HelloTask or Sheba.xyz, can be used for negotiating in favor of DW. There should be a provision in place that allows them to receive one-time assistance after working as DWs for at least five years, as they typically do not receive financial assistance after losing their jobs. Additional benefits or penalties from law enforcement may encourage the signing of a written contract.

DWs should be provided with not only formal, educational, and social security benefits, but also area-specific dormitory, ambulance, and hospital services. Domestic workers who do not have the assistance of DWRN-affiliated organizations, NGO and CSOs, or other self-help groups are more vulnerable. The vulnerability of taking any job must be addressed and mitigated through local offices of the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and social safety net allowances, which can do a lot of good in terms of social protection for DWs and their families. Needy families/people should be chosen as recipients of the government's safety net program.

Even though the government has made primary education mandatory for all citizens, it is not implemented in the case of children from extremely low-income families. The ultra-poor family should have a safety net provided by the local government. During a disaster or crisis period, such as Covid 19, to ensure their financial security/protection, DWs should be paid at least half of their salary by employers so the workers can sustain themselves.

d) Ensuring Basic Education, Socialization and Benefits for Migrant Workers

The policy should clearly state how live-in and child DWs can obtain education and other forms of socialization while under the employer's supervision 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Draw policy lessons from other countries that have not only enacted domestic worker legislation but have also ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention 2011. A written contract is required between DW and employers. Moreover, due to lack of instruction of Migrant Workers in the DWPWP 2015 leaving the victims of abuse abroad more vulnerable. That's, why, before a domestic worker or other migrant worker moves to overseas, the existing DWPWP 2015 or proposed Act must include a provision for a legitimate contract.

e) Provision of Forming Union or Association

The government must ensure that DWs do not lose their educational rights, and opportunities for proper education must be created in terms of inequality and standards. Domestic workers do not have a union or an association, despite the fact that garment workers, transportation workers, and other professional bodies do. Formal recognition by labour-related acts or instruction in DWPW policy to form or establish a location-based formal trade union to act as a leverage for domestic workers to settle their rights rather than relying on other rights or activist groups. DWs must be aware of the informal work environment, as well as labour and human rights. They can easily track their earnings and extent if they are involved with any organization.

As long terms steps, DW trade unions should be allowed and supported by the legal regime so that DWs can work for their rights and articulate their demands and interests to act against violence. Local leaders' interests dominate the trade union. As a result, it should be effective if steps to ensure the rights of DWs can be taken at the Upazila level. Trade unions and recruitment agencies can reach an agreement in which the DW's rights, such as fair wages, decent working conditions, and other benefits, are outlined.

f) Response to Victims of Tortured and Forced Labour and Strong Monitoring

Domestic work is confined within the private sphere that is not accessible to the public, the concerns and sufferings of domestic workers go unnoticed. If the victim is located outside of Dhaka, immediate assistance from legal aid, NGOs, and labour unions are not possible. Moreover, DWs regularly face problems such as low wages, monthly wages received by parents, relatives, and recruiters; long intervals (more than 30 days) in the monthly payment of wage; longer working hours; non-payment of Overtime benefits; lack of daily rest period, etc. The helpline is not operational regularly, and there is no place to file a complaint. Even the worker cannot call a helpline due to illiteracy and employer restrictions.

In that case, proactive monitoring and surprising visits are required by either mobile court Magistrate or relevant government official in the houses/flats, dormitories, and other places to assess the living standards of DW. To make mandatory submission of worker's data, mode of employment by the employers to nearest police stations. Effective collaboration between different right groups and trade bodies with Bangladesh Labour Court is required to regulate employment issues e.g. regular wages and leaves; accountability in time-bound grievance redress mechanism.

There should be a complaint center for DWs so that they can take immediate steps against any incidents of harassment or violations. Female police should be recruited to work directly with DW victims. Special care should be taken to ensure the safety of female DWs aged 12 to 14. NGOs must work more closely with the government to protect the rights of DWs. Employers who torture their employees should face legal consequences. That's why, Dhaka North and South City Corporations should establish an effective Monitoring Cell, with the participation of trade unions and NGOs working to protect the rights of domestic workers.

As long-term measures, to reduce the incidence of DW harassment, a one-stop center should be established at each ward/union level. Different organizations must come forward and collaborate under the same roof, sharing available data to help build trust and ensure that activities run smoothly. Strict policies must be implemented, and

domestic workers must be treated with dignity. In this case, organizations such as Sheba XYZ can serve as role models. Sheba XYZ makes certain that its employees receive their pay on time.

g) Awareness of Both Domestic Workers and Employers

According to the ILO's 189, indicators for decent work in Bangladesh include a lack of a decent work environment, gender discrimination, and a lack of social security. Furthermore, no one is aware of the indicators. There must be provisions for DWs' freedom of expression and attainment of the minimum wage. Moreover, maximum domestic workers and employers were unaware of the DWPWP-2015 policy, indicating a clear lack of promotion for this policy. The extensive effort to disseminate the provisions and role of stakeholders (government, NGO, association) must be undertaken by the Ministry of Labour; extensive mass communication can include publicity through social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, BiP, etc., TVC, RDC, and positive word of mouth communication both in rural and urban areas. Both DWs and employers should be made aware of the situation through various awareness and courtyard meetings. DWs should be trained and made aware of how to use helpline numbers. Motivation should be provided to DWs to use the helpline numbers, as many of them do not know them. Even if they do, they are afraid to call this number for assistance. Attention should be paid to preventing the helpline from being abused.

h) Training and Skills Development

DWs need formal training to increase their skill and bargaining power in their workplace. For example, if they would be trained to operate electronic machines available in the market as well as in their employers' houses their work would have been much easier and faster, and efficient. It would also help them not be misbehaved with as much. Moreover, they could get more respect and values in their workplace if they had the skill of this type. Furthermore, participants emphasized the need of receiving training on mental skills and behavior since they lack any formal education in most cases. Participants demanded that they need training on all aspects of the household chores.

As long-term measures, the Government has the most vital role to play in enhancing the skill of DWs. Different NGOs can also help.

Employers, along with Govt. and NGOs, can work as well in this regard. The government should open domestic workers development institutions like the Department of Youth Development, which can play a vital role to develop domestic workers as qualified human resources. Impact-oriented organizations can come forward to facilitate training. They should be given training or opportunities to build their capacity in areas such as personal hygiene, equipment use, and soft skills.

Future Scope of Evidence-based Advocacy

Additional research should be conducted on) Need assessment of DW in the post-COVID-19 situation; b) Overall contributions of domestic works to GDP; and c) status of all DWs across the country in accordance with national and international labour policy and laws.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRADE UNION

Domestic workers can benefit greatly from the support of trade unions. DWs need to get aware of informal workplace and labour and human rights. If they can involve with any organization, then they can easily track their earnings and their extent. Trade unions in Bangladesh are represented in the National Tripartite Consultative Council, which they could use to advocate for increased social protection spending. Global trade union federations can play an important role in putting pressure on the Government of Bangladesh to ratify key international legal instruments, such as Conventions 189 and 102, by collaborating with international institutions such as the ILO.

The trade union of DWs should be allowed and supported by the legal regime, thus DWs themselves can work their rights and articulate their demands and interest to act against violence. The trade union is dominated by the interest of local leaders. Therefore, it should be effective if steps can be taken at the Upazila level to ensure the rights of DWs. There can be an agreement between trade unions and recruitment agencies, where the DW's rights like fair wages, decent work conditions, and other benefits should be mentioned.

When the Domestic Worker Protection and Welfare Policy 2015 went into effect, it was praised for its clear direction in recognizing domestic work as formal labour and ensuring DWs' rights. It requires, among

other things, salary payment within the first seven days of the month, one-month advance notice before redundancy, resting time, registration of DWs, days off, other leaves, and assistance with healthcare costs. However, the concept of having contracts between employers and DWs is far from reality, and serious issues remain unaddressed. The research findings and analysis presented in this paper reveal significant gaps in the implementation of the DWPWP-2015 policy for both live-in and live-out DWs workers in Bangladesh that should be addressed by the Ministry of Labour and Employment in any of the future amendments. In terms of gender, because the vast majority of DWs are women and children, there is a need to address the practical and strategic gender needs of women working in this sector.

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COVID-19 and Impact on Employment: Assessing the Situation of Chattogram based Industrial Sectors

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Abstract

This research focused on highly affected six sectors of COVID-19 in Chattogram - such as RMG, Construction, Restaurant, Health & Diagnosis, Transport and Port. The researchers have concentrated on how COVID-19 influenced those sectors in terms of short-term and long-term employment, the influence on the economy from macro and micro perspectives. This study will also locate the current and upcoming challenges in those sectors due to COVID-19. We have also searched the avenues for workers who have been affected by the COVID-19 and lost their works from the psychology of working theory and related social-justice oriented perspectives. Besides, the concentration has been placed to evaluate what major roles different stakeholders can play to uphold the health of those sectors as well as the national economy. We have also focused on how governmental and nonprofit interventions can reduce vulnerability.

OBJECTIVE

The basic objective of the study was to assess the impact of COVID-19 on employment in the Chattogram based industrial

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sectors. Six sectors, as per the terms of reference, were selected for the purpose of the study. They are RMG, construction, hospital, restaurants, port and transport sectors. To achieve this objective, we conducted a survey comprised of two groups of samples – workers and firms, covering all the six sectors. Some 300 workers and some 50 firms were mostly selected randomly from the lists. In addition to collecting quantitative and qualitative data, three FGDs (two FGDs involving workers and one FGD for firms and stakeholders) were conducted.

As in previous studies, several unforeseen contingencies including identifying the samples always adversely affect targeted primary data collection in this study. Consequently, we could not complete collection of data within the stipulated time; we lagged from the beginning of the study including coordination with the Chattogram office. Despite the constraints, we have been able to complete the data collection successfully.

FINDINGS FROM THE WORKERS SURVEY

The critical findings are quite well known or well perceived. The key findings of quantitative survey are as follows:

First, some seventy percent of the workers at the aggregate level were affected by Covid-19. However, intensity varied by sector. The workers in three sectors, as presented in Table I, restaurant, construction, and transport – were worst affected by COVID-19 induced lockdown⁶. Port users' workers were moderately affected. Relatively least affected sectors were the RMG and health sectors. The respondents were 33 years old on an average, and most of them were male (81%) (Table-5 in main report). About 42% of the respondents went to high school and studied between grade-VI and secondary school. More than half (68%) of the participants were married. On average, there were 5 members in a family, while the mean earning member in the family other than the

⁶ In this report, we consider the general holiday and the restrictions announced by the government of Bangladesh from March 24 to May 30 for preventing the spread of COVID-19 and protecting the people from it as “lockdown”, which was extended up to July 2020 in case of transport, housing, and restaurant sectors.

respondent was around one. On average, the workers had 12.3 years of work experience. About 43% of the respondents were fully unemployed during the lockdown period, with the unemployment rate being quite high for the affected group compared with the unaffected counterpart (55% vs. 17%). The participants, on an average, worked for 23.5 hours and earned Tk. 6,468 per month during lockdown. Those in the affected group earned an income that was substantially lower than the unaffected group (Tk. 3,772 vs. Tk. 12,809). The affected group maintained an average savings amount of Tk.5,902 as opposed to Tk. 30,608 for the unaffected group.

Table-I: Percentage of workers affected by COVID-19 by sector			
	Total (N)	Affected	Unaffected
Garment	52	56%	44%
Port	49	59%	41%
Construction	49	90%	10%
Restaurant	45	98%	2%
Health	51	31%	69%
Transportation	50	90%	10%
Total	296	70%	30%

Second, around 98 percent of the workers, as noted in Table-I, were affected in restaurant sector, followed by 90 percent in both construction and transport sectors during the lockdown period; three other sectors-port, garment, and health were less affected with 59 percent, 56 percent and 31 percent of the workers respectively during the same period due to COVID-19 induced lockdown.

Third, at the aggregate level, amid the lockdown period, intensity of unemployment increased by some 40 percent, and intensity of full employment decreased by around 54-percentage point (Table-II). As a result, average working hours per week declined to 24 hours during the lockdown period from the pre-lockdown average working hour of 58 hours a week as a consequent of 47-day closure of firms on an average. Around 49 percent (48.99% exactly) employees did not receive their salary (Table II). Intensity of Covid-19 on employment varies by sector.

Table II Aggregate Level Impact of COVID-19 (Lockdown)		
	March 2020	Lockdown Period
Work type		
Fulltime, N (%)	285 (96.3)	126 (42.7)
Part-time, N (%)	1 (0.3)	41 (13.9)
Unemployed, N (%)	1(3.4)	128 (43.4)
Secondary work, N (%)	41 (13.8)	45 (15.2)
Hours worked per week, Mean (Std Dev)	58.0 (20.33)	23.5 (27.11)
Mean days factory remained closed, Mean (Std Dev)	0.27 (0.90)	46.9 (47.57)
Salary received, N (%)	296 (100)	151 (51.01)

On the other, we find that unemployment rate varies by sector (Table-III). It was 80 percent (highest rate) in restaurant sector, followed by 64 percent and 56 percent, respectively for construction and transport sectors. By duality, it is positively related with the number of days of closure of firms. On an average, restaurants were closed for 90.13 days, construction works were closed for 75.59 days, and transport sectors were closed for 61.14 days. Consequently, we found that 82 percent of the restaurant employees did not receive their salary in the time of lockdown. It was 80 percent for construction and 74 percent for transport sector. More than 50 percent of employee in all other sectors received salary during lockdown.

Table III Work-related information over time								
Area		Work type			Secondary work N (%)	Hours worked per week, mean	Mean days of factory remained closed, mean	Salary received N (%)
		Fulltime N (%)	Part-time N (%)	Unemployed N (%)				
<i>Restaurant</i> (N=45)	Mar-2020	44 (98)	0	1 (2)	2 (4)	64.93	0.06	45 (100)
	Lockdown Period	3 (7)	6 (13)	36 (80)	11 (24)	3.33	90.13	8 (18)
<i>Construction</i> (N=49)	Mar-2020	47 (96)	1 (2)	1 (2)	11 (22)	56.55	0	49 (100)
	Lockdown Period	8 (17)	9 (19)	31 (64)	9 (18)	11.98	75.59	10 (20)
<i>Transport</i> (N=50)	Mar-2020	49 (98)	1 (2)	0	5 (10)	67.16	0	50 (100)
	Lockdown Period	13 (26)	9 (18)	28 (56)	9 (18)	14.6	61.14	13 (26)
<i>Port</i> (N=49)	Mar-2020	49 (100)	0	0	7 (14)	58.18	0	49 (100)
	Lockdown Period	26 (53)	8 (16)	15 (31)	3 (6)	34.96	24.33	28 (57)
<i>Garment</i> (N = 52)	Mar-2020	49 (94)	0	3 (6)	4 (8)	51.65	1.16	52 (100)
	Lockdown Period	32 (62)	8 (15)	12 (23)	4 (8)	27.63	31.19	46 (88)
<i>Health</i> (N = 51)	Mar-2020	47 (92)	0	4 (8)	12 (24)	50.55	0	51 (100)
	Lockdown Period	44 (86)	1 (2)	6 (12)	9 (18)	45.88	4.71	46 (90)

Fourth, because of the narration in the above second, economically workers became worse-off. Total income declined at the aggregate level by some 50 percent. But the intensity of decline was higher for the workers in the restaurant and transport sectors. There was a decline in income by around 86 percent. Income fell by some 13 percent for the health and around one-third for the RMG workers. Modest fall was noted for construction and port users' workers. Quite a significant percentage of workers had secondary income. Not only total income decline, but secondary income also declined.

Fifth, how did the workers maintain their livelihood? Households maintained their livelihoods using three means – use of savings, consumption rationing, sale of assets. Around 70 percent of the affected workers used savings in meeting consumption expenditures (Table IV). Generally, most of the affected workers regardless used savings to cope with the adverse shock of COVID-19 induced lockdown.

Sixth, not all the affected workers used borrowing as another means of coping. Around 50 percent of the affected workers borrowed to some extent (Table IV). This happened when savings was not sufficient to meet the consumption demand. Only one-third of the affected workers in the RMG and health sectors borrowed for consumption purpose. In other sectors, more than 60 percent of the affected borrowers had borrowed to meet consumption need.

Seventh, not all of them were lucky to use savings and borrowing to meet their full consumption needs. Some of them were forced to sale property. Some 10 percent of the workers did sell whatever limited properties they had to cope with the situation.

Table-IV: Erosive and Non-erosive Coping Strategies of the affected workers by sector							
	RMG	Port	Construction	Restaurant	Health	Transport	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Dissaving	66	83	67	73	50	73	70
Borrowing	31	72	45	59	38	62	53
Selling property	12	7	5	8	0	4	7
Consumption rationing:							
Half meal	31	34	27	34	6	31	29
Occasional meal skipping	10	10	16	9	0	7	10
Temporary employment	14	7	7	5	0	2	6
Total (N)	29	29	44	44	16	45	207

Eighth, under some extreme circumstances, some affected workers had to ration consumption. Some 29 percent of the affected workers rationed consumption by food rationing. Under some more extreme situation, some 10 percent of the workers had to skip meal occasionally. All these extreme situations or circumstances were experienced relatively more by the affected workers in transport, restaurant, and construction sectors.

Ninth, the affected workers have recovered from the shock by the end of August 2020, almost two months after the lockdown was withdrawn in the beginning of July. Not all could recover. Some 78 percent of the affected workers had their pre-level income restored by the end of August (Table V). Some 12 percent of the workers could recovery partly (below 50 percent). The intensity of partial recovery was more pronounced for the workers in the transport sector, followed by the restaurant and construction sectors. The workers with long experience

recovered quickly than the young workers. This was also supported by our econometric analysis.

Table-V: Income recovery of workers by sectorS							
Percent	Garment	Port	Construction	Restaurant	Health	Transport	Total
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<25	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25 - 50	0	0	0	0	0	10.20	1.79
50 - 75	4.44	6.12	10.42	4.65	2.17	20.41	8.21
75 - 100	8.89	14.29	18.75	4.65	8.70	16.33	12.14
100	86.67	79.59	70.83	90.70	89.13	53.06	77.86
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100.00
N	45	49	48	43	46	49	280
Mean wage (taka)	12,887	13,632	15,804	11,958	13,559	13,946	13,657

Tenth, insurance mechanism like savings has played a key role in smoothing consumption and recovering from early shock of COVID-19.

Eleventh, the role of trade unions in unorganized sectors was very limited. They were quite active in the health sector. The same initiative was visible in RMG sector with the significant timely initiative taken by the government. In the port sector, the port authority with the help of port users' workers association provided with financial support from the 'welfare fund' to the extent of BDT 11,000 including loan of BDT 5,000 to the workers of the port users, namely berth, terminal and ship handling operators.

Twelfth, Covid-19 has created a long-term impact on the lives of many workers. Although the economy has opened, employment and income recovery have taken place at the pre-lockdown level. Some 22 percent of the workers has remained as net-borrowers. That means, they are trapped in long-term indebtedness.

COMPLIMENTARY EVIDENCE FROM FGD

The quantitative findings are corroborated with the qualitative findings. The FGDs of the workers provide a similar gloomy picture of life. Based on the FGDs, we could easily classify the workers into two groups – most affected and moderately affected. It became clear that workers from restaurants, transport and construction sectors were most affected by COVID-19; the least or moderately affected in other three sectors. In this case, we explored many sad but remarkable stories from

the samples of each sector. Of which a few cases have been cited below:

“...before the lockdown, I used to earn 11,000 to 12,000 taka per month, actually my salary was 5,500, and the rest of the amount was from tips. Now the income is like half of my previous income since there aren't customers like before.... I have house rent due, I borrowed 40,000 from my brothers....we had 25,000 in hand....we spent our livelihood on this amount during lockdown...we bought 1 kg instead of 3 Kg.... We lived on mashed potato and dry fish.... my boss did not receive my phone calls...” A Restaurant Worker stated.

“...one of my daughters is in class 5 and another one is in class 4...my son is in class 1...I used to spend 1,500/- for their coaching... I am compelled to stop this now...school is off...no study...”- transport worker

“...contractors were fine...., but daily labors like me....our distress is indescribable...I earned around 14,000/- per month before Corona...I was at home for 15 days, I did not have anything to eat....I got out to look for work... I went to Halishohor for work...I worked for 550/, even for 300/- which was usually 700/- before Corona...but it was for few days...finally I was compelled to sell my wife's gold....At that time all shops were closed...I called one of my known jewelers, then I mortgaged the gold to him and got 10,000/-....now I don't work under the contractor from then since I did not get any help from them during my distress....I go to labor market at Chawk Super Market...” a Construction worker stated.

“.....I worked in a garment factory.... I was in maternity leave before the general holiday due to Corona, it was leave for 112 days, when I came back for joining after lockdown, my company gave the salary of 56 days, took signature from me on a white paper and told me that my service is no longer required....later on I came to know that as the company fired many employees....I even did not get the due salaries....”, distressed situation of a Garment worker.

What is the intensity of impact on the life of the workers? The story became clear that workers in construction, restaurants and transport sectors had to take major blow from the COVID-19. Although initially these workers could survive on their savings, they could not carry for long time. As reported by the workers, food insecurity became a critical issue in their lives. Many of them had to ration their food forcing them to move from three full meals to two meals, and in some cases even to one meal a day. The workers in hospital, port and RMG sectors were little better-off because of the government initiatives and/or the nature of business. Despite lockdown, port operated at some capacity; RMG workers could receive their salary under the stimulus package of the government. Despite potential risk, hospitals had to remain open to meet-up with overwhelming number of COVID-19 patients.

The FGD of firms and stakeholders provided some analysis of the state of workers in lockdown period and afterwards (Table VI). Given the nature of RMG business, the operating and financial sustainability was hinged upon international order; in many cases RMG-capacity reduced significantly. This was also relevant for port operations. Because of the reduced export and import related activities, port has also operated at a reduced capacity.

Table-VI: Themes Identified and the Findings

Themes/Topic	Issues Raised
1. Employment Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Job loss - Reduced salary - Employer's role - Labor Federation's role - No formal appointment letters - Firing from job without prior notice
2. Value Chain Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interrupted supply of raw materials - Shipment delay & limited distribution - Limited workforce/reduced number of workers
3. Operation and Profitability Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stopped operation - Reduced operation - Costly operation - Reduced demand - Cancellation of previous order - Reduced buying power - Business contraction - Stopped loan/lease rental repayment & rent payment - Less Profit/high Loss
4. Sustainability Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management and commitment - New opportunities for business - Integration of political commitment and research - Governmental Policy support

It became clear from the FGDs and the quantitative analysis that workers were affected; it was matter of degrees in different sectors.

The reality that workers had to ration their food consumptions; many of them have become more indebted. This is particularly true in construction, transport and restaurants. The workers have recovered within two months of the opening of the economy. Around 78 percent recovered their pre-lockdown income. Some 12 percent of the workers could recover only less than 50 percent of the pre-lockdown income level. They are more likely to be trapped into the vicious cycle of poverty.

In addition to the FGDs and the quantitative analysis for assessing the impacts of COVID-19 on employment, workers' lives, and livelihoods, we have investigated employers' value chain system, workers' safety measures at workplace and the impacts of the same on their overall operations of business and how they responded to the challenges.

FINDINGS FROM THE FIRM SURVEY

Intensity of impacts on the lives and employment of workers was an outcome of the intensity of impacts on the firms. We derived the following findings from the analysis of the impacts on the firms:

First, all firms surveyed were affected by Covid-19. Because of the closure, they had to keep their firms also closed. Degree of closure was longer for the restaurant, construction and transport sectors.

Second, because of scaling down of operations and cancellation of work-order forced some RMGs to default in wages or salary payment. However, with the Bangladesh Bank stimulus packages the situation improved in the RMG sector.

Third, firms in the restaurant, construction and transport severely suffered from liquidity because of the closure during the lockdown. As a result, they could not extend financial supports to their workers in most cases.

Fourth, firms have recovered mostly when the lockdown was withdrawn. But the losses incurred by the firms during the lockdown period have brought new challenges for some of the firms. However, with subsidized credit facilities, the challenges may ease for the firms who can avail.

Could the state of firms affected by COVID be avoided? It could be but initial incomplete information about COVID and its extent of impact led to lockdown, perhaps following the footprint of international community. The responses of the government were relatively more

focused on the RMG sector. However, Bangladesh Bank, as per designs of the government, came out with different stimulus packages for different size of firms and other beneficiaries including workers of some sectors. The important question from the perspective of workers was the employability and coping with the shock. No doubt that firm workers were affected, but even with the limited government responses, benefits could not be distributed for the workers for some limitations. What was missing in the most vulnerable three sectors (construction, restaurants and transport) in COVID-19 was formal list of workers employed in these sectors and sector-specific financial package. It also became apparent in the discussion that many firms lacked financial capability to cope with shocks and stand by the affected workers.

Despite the fact that firms were also affected during the lockdown period, it emerged during our discussion with the stakeholders that some of the firms resorted to the bad practices like termination and taking the signature of the workers on white paper during the lockdown period. Such behavior has deprived many workers of their rights. Workers are rarely seen as partners in the good and bad times of a business. Absence of humane approach was reported in the meeting of the stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings, we have drawn the following policy recommendations to cope with shocks like COVID-19:

First, since savings have played a critical role in consumption smoothing, we recommend that in all enterprises, employers in collaboration with employees should create worker ‘welfare fund’ with contribution from both employees and employers. This should be managed by the association or by the employer jointly with worker leadership. In addition, special savings instruments may be developed to increase marginal propensity to save of the workers.

Second, workers need to be organized. Government should ensure that employees are organized in all sectors so that concerned association can work jointly with the employers. It is always better taking positive steps in the interest of the workers in situation like COVID-19 if workers are organized.

Third, there will be some long run impacts of COVID-19 and the lockdown period. Some 12 percent of the workers have partially recovered (less than 50 percent). In other words, these workers are more likely to fall below poverty line on perpetual basis. In order to assist them to smooth consumption, the government needs to bring these workers under the social safety net programs.

Fourth, not only the employers need supports to run their business, but workers also need supports from the government. As has been evident in this study, quite a significant percentage of workers are engaged to complement their low primary income. Loan facilities may be extended to the workers to finance their self-employment activities.

Fifth, entrepreneurs in construction, restaurant and transport are different from the RMG; they generate revenue when their businesses are open. The RMG sector could function in many cases because of the international work orders. Financial stimulus package should be drawn separately for these sectors.

Sixth, it is probably high time that government in collaboration with insurance companies introduce ‘social insurance scheme’ for the workers and employees.

CONCLUSION

Like all other studies, this study has some limitations. First, the study has been conducted over a small sample of 300 workers with a sub-sample of 50 workers from each of the six sectors. Certainly, larger sample would have always been better. Resource constraint of the sponsoring organization put us in a constraint. However, we might add here that we are confident of the robustness of the findings on two grounds –300 samples for aggregate analysis were sufficiently large, and findings from each of the six sectors truly represent the aggregate level findings as there was no large variance. Second, the study is limited to Chattogram. Therefore, it may not represent the national level.

The world has already witnessed the grievous effect of COVID-19 on public health as well as socio-economic condition. While workers from all sectors got adversely affected by the on-going pandemic, the experiences of construction, transportation, and restaurant workers were bitter than that of the RMG, health, and port laborers. COVID-19 type shock will have long run effects; but this is a shock. Shock of different types, particularly covariate shocks, will emerge. Adverse impacts of all these shocks will adversely affect the workers in future

as well if we are not prepared.

Moreover, when we finalized the report at the end of December 2020, the situation of COVID-19, in terms of new cases and the death rate, was getting better (WHO, 2020e). However, the situation is getting worse again and the Government of Bangladesh has enforced a weeklong lockdown again from April 5, 2021 and a week of strict lockdown from April 14, 2021. Given the recurrence of lockdown, workers will be worst sufferers again. Whatever the workers have recovered will be lost again. More workers are likely to be trapped in long-term debt. The worsening situations can be avoided with a set of constructive and collaborative policies, as recommended above, with the participation of all stakeholders. Further research is highly recommended after this second wave for getting the trend on this aspect.

COVID-19 is a deadly shock with both short- and long-term impacts. Shocks will always be there. Covariate shocks will always have devastating effects. The worst affected groups in the labor market will be the workers in unorganized labor markets. To cope with long term shocks of COVID-19, multi-party initiatives will be required.

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COVID-19 and Impact on RMG Sector in Bangladesh: A Study on Current Context

Shajib Dey¹

Abstract

COVID-19 creates a devastating mess on the RMG industry of Bangladesh. The country's dependency on imported raw materials in the apparel business is mostly contingent on global clothing brands/buyers' attitude and buying practice. Due to pandemic the global clothing supply chain is largely disrupted. Fashion brands were compelled to shut down most of their outlets and stores. The shipments were locked. The business of many giant apparel brands was shrunk. Consequently, Bangladesh's RMG sector was entombed as a victim of USD 3.16 billion worth of orders cancellation. Asking discount, late payment, denied receiving of already made items was reportedly common. No way, the closure of several small and medium factories permanently, caused millions of jobs cut. Denial of wage and benefits, workers backed home with empty hands. The country was trapped into lockdown and imposed movement restriction. No work, no money, no food was a common scenario of RMG workers.

Currently, the COVID-19 situation is improving. The global economy is starting to bounce back on its track. Orders are coming with a new attitude comprising with short lead time, discount offers, reducing the amount than the previous time. The factory is getting backed into operation. But workers' woes are continued. Targeted termination, layoff, wage deprivation, denial of benefits is reported most. TU rights are neglected as same as previous. Labour protest, unrest for a due wage is continued. Several hundreds of workers are tested COVID-19 positive. RMG workers' livelihood still now at stake. Different relevant actors act to mitigate the emerging crisis in RMG regarding COVID-19. However, due to lack of collectiveness and inclusiveness, all these efforts didn't find the way of its definite means. The crisis is continued. Experts reveal that there is a high possibility of a second wave. Considering all these crises, collective and inclusive actions is a must for sustaining the RMG industries as well as improving the life and livelihood of the RMG workers.

Key Words: COVID-19, Ready-Made Garments-RMG, BGMEA, Brands-buyers, Live and Livelihoods, Trade Union.

1. The Settings

Bangladesh economy is highly reliant on the ready-made garments

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industry for creating jobs, foreign reserve, and women empowerment. The industry contributes 11.2 per cent to the gross domestic product of the country². This sector shares 6.8 per cent of global RMG trading in apparel exports³. The recent shock of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the global economy. Consequently, the RMG sector in Bangladesh victim of the worst hit. Export is sharply dropped. Around \$3.16 billion worth of orders were cancelled (BGMEA, 2020). About 85.25 per cent of export fallen in April 2020⁴ and 62 per cent in May 2020 compared to the same period of last year⁵. It is projected that GDP is to drop by 3 per cent due to the COVID-19 pandemic⁶. Brands/Buyers response is largely missing. Ask for a discount and an additional day for due payment is largely reported. Workers are the ever most victim. Several hundred factories have shut down. There is already anecdotal reporting of millions of job cuts. About 47 per cent of workers have become income less⁷. The situation is changing now. The global economy is started to bounce back after relaxing lockdown. New orders are coming. Most of the factory is backed in operation. Thus, rampant retrenchment is reported most. Denial of wage, EID bonus and benefits is common. Workers disputes for wage and termination is a daily headline in the national/international dailies. The live and livelihood of workers has become uncertain. However, factory close/open dilemma, lack of transportation facilities for workers and improper implication of health guideline at factory level make the situation more vulnerable for workers. Social distancing is in negligible settings. Mismanagement caused several hundred workers tested positive. Treatment facilities and isolation arrangement for workers is not reasonable means. Nevertheless, the government already initiated several stimulus packages to RMG for ensuring workers wage. But several reports suggested that thousands of workers did not get wage and benefits properly. The functions of the Crisis Management Committee is not in

- 2 Textile Focus. 2020. Review and Outlook, 2020 Bangladesh Garments and Textile Industry. <http://textilefocus.com/review-outlook-2020-bangladesh-garments-textile-industry/>
- 3 <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2020/08/05/rmg-global-market-share-bangladesh-still-lags-behind-vietnam>
- 4 <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/economy/2020/05/07/exports-shrink-83-last-month>
- 5 <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/rmg-exports-drop-62pc-to-106b-in-may-1590982449>
- 6 <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/reviews/the-toll-of-coronavirus-on-our-exports-1588607346>
- 7 <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2020/04/18/survey-47-rmg-workers-lose-jobs-amid-covid-19>

a visible remark. Participation of the trade union in the decision-making process is not welcomed. Tripartite mechanism including Trade Union is broadly missing.

COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the RMG sector in Bangladesh. It created a total uncertainty for 4.1 million employed workers in this sector. More than millions of workers become completely income less in both backward and forward linkage which are directly connected with RMG sector. Without income, most of the RMG workers fall into the poverty line. Collaboration with the government, employers, trade union as well as workers is a missing part. It is prime time to act inclusively to mitigate the emerging challenges of the RMG sector due to COVID-19.

2. Research Objective

Broad/General Objective

The general objective of this research is to assess the situation of the RMG sector due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Specific Objectives

- To assess the situation of the RMG sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- To assess the RMG workers vulnerabilities due to COVID-19;
- To assess the role of different actors regarding the COVID-19 crisis;
- To recommend a way forwards.

Research Questions

- ✓ What is the situation of the RMG sector in Bangladesh due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- ✓ How RMG workers become the victim of the emerging COVID-19 crisis?
- ✓ What is the role of different actors of the RMG sector regarding Crisis?
- ✓ What is the way forwards?

3. Methodology

This study is mainly premised on the qualitative approach of research.

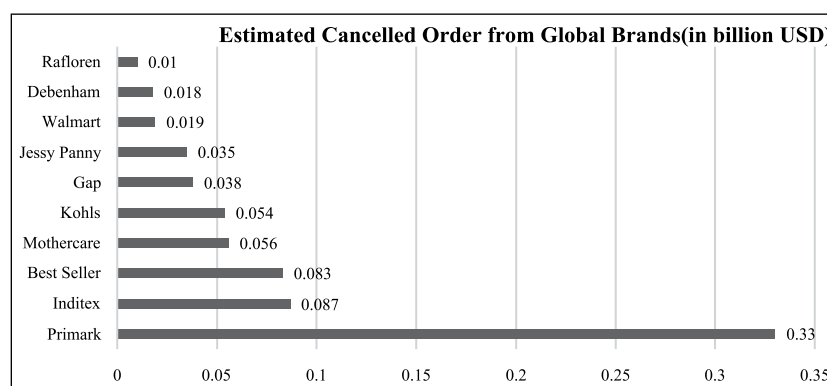
Information is collected both from primary and secondary sources. Survey reports from authentic government and private sources, published and non-published research documents, seminar/conference papers and proceedings, webinar, articles, presentations, digital documents available in social media, blogs and daily newspapers are mainly sourced for the collection of secondary information. Primary information is collected from three main RMG industrial hubs of Bangladesh (Dhaka, Gazipur and Savar). The methodology of this study broadly included In-depth Interview, Consultation, Newspaper Screening and Literature Review. A set of pre-developed checklists are used for collecting data from primary and secondary sources.

4. COVID-19 Impacted Bangladesh RMG Market

The Ready-Made Garments-RMG industry of Bangladesh accelerates the country's economy. RMG export contributes a lion share of the national GDP. This industry now the victim of the worst hit of COVID-19. Exporters reveal that the readymade garment industry faced postponed payment worth USD 3.0 billion because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Local clothing exporters met USD 3.18 billion work order cancellations or suspension during the pandemic.

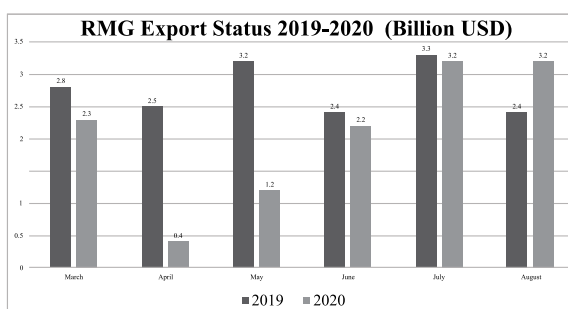
Source: BGMEA and Prothom Alo, 2020

Of the total, about 50 per cent worth USD 1.93 billion work orders



were cancelled or held by the buyers from European Union, followed by USD 574 million by the US, and USD 52 million by Canadian buyers. Apart from this, USD 620 million were cancelled or held by buyers from non-traditional markets⁸. BGMEA reported that only

European fashion brand Primark cancelled worth USD 0.33 billion at this time⁹. Along with downsizing the previously placed order, many of the buyers have been frequently asking for discounts up to 20 per cent to 5 per cent as well. Besides, fresh work orders from the global apparel brands and retailers to Bangladesh clothing products suppliers have seen a sharp decline by 62 per cent in the last three months due to slower demands in export destinations and supply chain disruption.



Bangladesh has faced disruption in the export market. The figure shows that in April this year, the country experienced an export downfall of 85 per cent compared to the same month of last year in the RMG sector. It is 62 per cent in May as the pandemic disrupted the global supply chain. According to BGMEA, the RMG export in June this year declined by 11.43 per cent to USD 2.2 billion from USD 2.4 billion in the same month of 2019. The country's readymade garment exports in the just concluded the financial year 2019-20 declined by 18.45 per cent, or USD 6.3 billion, to USD 27.83 billion from USD 34.13 billion in FY 2018-19 as the global outbreak of coronavirus disrupted business across the world. There is a projection that Bangladesh RMG exports dip by USD 6.3 billion in FY20 on the pandemic¹⁰. Although the export earnings witnessed negative growth in June, the last month of FY20, the export performance in the month was slightly better compared with that in the previous three months.

8 <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/30b-rmg-payment-uncertain-1595129935>

9 <https://www.prothomalo.com/business/industry/সাত-মাস-পর-রপ্তানিতে-ঘুরে-দাঁড়ানোর-সম্ভাবনা>, August 25, 2020

10 <https://www.newagebd.net/article/109968/rmg-exports-dip-by-63b-in-fy20-on-pandemic>

Many international clothing brands and retailers are coming up with assurances to help garment suppliers by taking the shipment of goods that have already been manufactured or ordered, in a relief to the exporters revolving from the COVID-19 fallout. A few brands, including *PVH*, *Inditex*, *Marks & Spencer*, *KIABI* and *Target* have come forward and confirmed their decision to take the ready goods along with the goods in production¹¹.

However, there is hope that orders are coming back. International retailers are assured to reinstate the cancelled orders. In July, most garment manufacturers in Bangladesh were booked for about 75-80 per cent of their capacity. For August and September, known as the lean period, they have orders for about 50-60 per cent of their production capacity. From September onwards, factories seem to have orders for about 50 per cent of their capacity. RMG export increases more than 2.7 billion USD in 25 days of August¹². Bangladesh's readymade garment exports recorded a 44.63 per cent year-on-year growth in August after seven months of a negative trend. The country's export earnings from RMG stood at \$3.24 billion from \$2.24 billion in the same period of August 2019¹³. Yet, the order is increasing but offering the lowest price. It is 5 to 15 per cent lower than the price offered in normal times¹⁴. Inter competition between local manufacturers leads to the agreement to work at a low cost. Lead time is shrinking up to 1 -1.5 month caused more workload for workers. The volume of orders is decreasing. International brands/retailers are moved into basic garment items with low price.

5.COVID-19 caused Factory Closure

COVID-19 pandemic creates a devastating mess in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Rampant order suspension/cancellation caused factory closure. Small, medium and sub-contracting factories are suffering the most. About 300 small and medium garment factories were closed

11 <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/now-more-buyers-assure-garment-suppliers-taking-goods-1888342>

12 <http://epaper.ittefaq.com.bd/?date=2020-08-29>

13 <https://www.fashionatingworld.com/new1-2/bangladesh-rmg-exports-grow-44-63-per-cent-in-august-bgmea>

14 <https://rmgbd.net/2020/08/despite-available-orders-lower-prices-pressure-rmg-factories/>

down due to the COVID-19 fallouts, causing a USD 1 billion loss in the sector's annual export value while 50,000 workers lost their jobs (BGMEA, 2020). Business insiders reveal that it is tough to resume these factories operations following the prolonged pandemic period persuaded layoff even though work orders from international buyers are gradually making a comeback. Poor compliance standard in this pandemic period triggered these factories are not able to get direct order from international buyers. Poor transaction records or reputation, loan payment and non-compliant attitude or inability to fulfil the contractual obligations caused they are out of stimulus package benefits. Thus, 9 per cent of factories are closed permanently. Wage deprivation and denial of workers benefits is a common cause in these factories. Above and beyond, large factories are running in full swing now. In some case, a few big factories stopped their one/two production unit due to order shortage or reduce production cost by denying wage and benefits to the workers.

6. COVID-19 and RMG Workers Vulnerability

COVID-19 hammering the life and livelihood of RMG workers. Losing a job, layoff without payment, termination is reportedly common. A notable number of workers pushed back to their village with empty hands. The vulnerabilities of RMG workers can be portrayed with two separate magnitudes. The first one reveals the situation of workers when the first wave of COVID-19 hit Bangladesh from early March to April. The whole country was trapped by the lockdown. Most of the RMG factories were announced shut down. RMG workers were faced bound to back home without payment. Millions of workers temporarily lost their job. Live and livelihood become uncertain. However, the second phase divulges the situation of workers in late April to at present intellectually termed it as new normal. The factory announced reopen with assurance to maintain proper safety guidelines. But the scenario is changed. Improper safety guideline in the factory level is reported highly caused several hundred are affected. Wage deprivation, termination without prior notice, layoff and more workload is common. Demonstration for a wage is continued.

Live and Livelihood Uncertainty: RMG workers are in Peril

The COVID-19 triggered a wreaking mess in the ready-made garments (RMG) sector of Bangladesh. The factory workers are suffering the most. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 rampant cancellation of orders from thousands of factories in the mid-March to April, distressing approximately 2.28 million workers, leading to many workers being sent home without pay¹⁵. Due to the daily increase in the number of COVID-19 infections in Bangladesh, the Government of Bangladesh was declared lockdown in the country from 26 March 2020, which continued until 30 May 2020. BGMEA closed their factories in line with the government's lockdown instructions. Therefore, millions of RMG workers returned to their home from Dhaka as they would be unable to support themselves in Dhaka without work. They faced a total uncertainty condition. Consequently, around 82 per cent of garment workers' livelihoods have been affected by the COVID-19 crisis (SANEM & MFO, 2020). It was reported that about 47 per cent of the garment workers had suffered from no income at that time¹⁶. The sole household earners RMG workers are vulnerable to shocks such as the pandemic that caused completely wipe out their livelihoods and render them poor overnight. It below the poverty line¹⁷. Even several workers are forced to stop their child education due to the scarcity of money.

No payment or partial payment impelled the suffering of workers. Workers lost an estimated USD 501 million or 29.5 per cent of their total monthly wages during three months amid the COVID-19 pandemic (CCC, 2020). A sudden factory closure announcement is like a bolt from the blue. Workers were tried to reduce their food cost. Without potential savings or somewhere in nominal amount forced them to reduce their food cost. Zero income and no savings of RMG workers leads to starvation. The situation is going to be more worsen that income uncertainty caused a notable number of workers to even skip their/one times meal for a day.

15 <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2020/05/09/how-is-covid-19-affecting-the-rmg-industry-the-trade-unions-perspective>

16 According to an assessment carried out jointly by Brac James P Grant School of Public Health (JPGSPH), Brac University and Bangladesh Health Watch (BHW) between 3 April and 15 April over phone

17 <https://www.dhakatribune.com/opinion/op-ed/2020/08/18/op-ed-not-a-good-time-for-the-rmg-sector>

Several reports suggested that about 80 per cent of workers had no savings left in the time of no work. This scenario is going to be a common feature for RMG workers even after rejoining when factories are resumed in operation. Irregular wage payment is reportedly common caused around 27 per cent of workers had reduced their food expenses¹⁸. No wages but the high price of daily goods is another caused of sufferings. Apart from this, most of the workers kept their house rent dues for two or three months because of financial scarcity.

Transmission of COVID-19 Woes RMG Workers

A garment worker, who returned home from Ashulia in Savar, underwent a coronavirus test after showing symptoms and started for his workplace without getting the report. When the test result reached his house, two days after he joined the work, he was found infected with the coronavirus¹⁹.

It was a report of a renowned online national daily that revealed the maximum scenario of how RMG workers getting infected by COVID-19 at factory level after lockdown. Bangladesh is currently at the highest peak in terms of infections and death rates. Although the national COVID-19 detection daily briefing is stopped by August 2020²⁰. Expert predicts that there is a high possibility of the second wave. During the ongoing infection (while COVID-19 related infections and death rates are increasing), the BGMEA abruptly declared that garment factories would be reopening from 26 April 2020 with the permission of the government so that shipments of previously ordered clothing items could be completed. Besides, the factory/close dilemma in early April created a puzzling state for the workers. Thus, RMG workers were reportedly contacted by the management of the factories. Workers were forced to come back soon. There was a continuous threat from factory management that if they do not return to work they would lose their jobs as well as any salary due. Immediate return to work directions was made more difficult as public transport was not available and no alternative transportation was provided to bring them to the factory during the lockdown. Consequently, workers had to arrange their means of travel to return to work. Using

18 <https://cleanclothes.org/news/2020/august-2020-covid19-blog>

19 <https://unb.com.bd/category/Bangladesh/rmg-worker-joins-job-only-to-know-hes-corona-positive/50747>

20 <https://be.bangla.report/post/56204-c9Bd9cHsS>

overcrowded transportation even walking with a group was making them more vulnerable to infection transmission.

Returning workers were not informed whether they would be able to maintain social distance at the workplace or if they would have access to healthcare facilities in the case of becoming infected with COVID-19. While BGMEA is already directed strongly to maintain proper health guideline at the factory level. Nonetheless, it has already been reported that social distancing is in a negligible setting inside of the factories and effective protective measures are not taken properly to protect workers²¹. Unable to maintain social distancing, inability to access appropriate healthcare facilities increases the risk of COVID-19 infections for millions of lives as well as the entire population (Kabir et. al, 2020).

The number of infections and deaths of RMG workers have already been reported after the reopening. It was mostly figured out at small and medium factories around 52 per cent of workers were affected after 26 April 2020²². Data from Industrial Police shows that 293 RMG workers have been infected with COVID-19 till 16 June, but labour leaders claimed that the real number was higher than the reported figure. They also alleged that workers are not getting the required support from their factories²³. Side by side, the deaths of several RMG workers with undiagnosed fever and respiratory symptoms have also been reported most.

Wage Deprivation

Wage and benefits Deprivation of workers is a common portrait of the RMG sector. COVID-19 is adding fuel to the fire. Wage payment dilemma during this pandemic is reported in several factories. Many factories waged less than the full sum of March and deducted their wages for the lockdown period. Some factories which had overdue wages closed their factories without making any payment to workers. Although, small factory workers are in the most vulnerable state. Evidence reveals that most of the small RMG factory is largely shut down without giving workers payment. There is an ambiguity to

21 <https://www.prothomalo.com/economy/article/1655466/>.

22 *ibid*

23 <https://www.newagebd.net/article/107530/251-factory-workers-infected-with-coronavirus>

assurance of further payment from the owners. However, the government initiated the Tk 5, 000 crore stimulus package for export-oriented industries to pay workers' wages for three months (April-June) with only 2% as service fees. After a tripartite meeting, it was an announcement to pay 65 per cent wages to the workers. It was also a declaration from the government that absentee RMG workers will receive only 60 per cent of the wage for the lockdown period in April and those who resumed work from 26 April would get a full wage for the last five working days. Those who have worked in April would receive full wages²⁴. Another 5 per cent will provide in May. On the contrary, TU demands at least 80 or a maximum of 100 per cent. It is reported that up to May about 169 factories were yet to pay the wages of March, with an estimated 200,000 workers were not received their salary. While BGMEA revealed that only 48,200 workers from 92 factories are yet to receive their wage of March²⁵. On the other hands, a portion of employers cut the wages for the last five days of March 2020 with the argument of government announced holidays (CPD, 2020). But the country witnessed a matter of good practice that most of the workers got there at least 60 percent wages for two months March and April²⁶. In May 80 per cent workers received their bonus though not in full but on average roughly 80 per cent of the bonus²⁷.

Targeted Termination and Unlawful Layoff Denied Benefits

Targeted termination from the RMG factory is mostly noticed in the pandemic period. Rampant termination and denied wage and benefits are largely reported. A large number of garment workers have been terminated and they are deprived of the benefits as mentioned in the labour law. According to DIFE, 67 factories, including seven non-RMG factories, have terminated a total of 17,579 workers until May. This number is figured increased to 24,860 in June due to the cost-cutting measures adopted by the factory owners on the excuse of

24 <https://tbsnews.net/economy/rmg/rmg-workers-get-60-salary-april-74995>

25 <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/97-rmg-workers-infected-with-coronavirus-1588864557>

26 This finding have collected from the cases stories of ten RMG workers in different zone as Dhaka, Ashulia, Gazipur.

27 <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/rmg-workers-lose-500m-in-wages-in-three-months-1597115935>

28 <https://www.newagebd.net/article/109175/24860-rmg-workers-fired-after-eid>

the COVID-19²⁸. Besides, the data of the Industrial Police (IP) shows that 10,493 workers lost their jobs in five industrial zones, except Dhaka metro area, under its jurisdiction during this viral outbreak. Some 47 workers from factories under Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority and 1,436 workers from ten non-RMG units were terminated during this pandemic period²⁹. This figure is increasing frequently. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the estimated figure is more than 0.1 million (more than one lakh) after the period of lockdown³⁰.

By and large unlawful layoff is common. Although according to labour law workers are entitled to get as compensation half of their basic salary plus applicable allowance like house rent. But the reality is perceived as a different scenario. Most of the workers did not get enough compensation sometimes this amount is zero.

Forced resignation and taking signatures on blank papers are reported most. Workers who have been working for 5-10 years are the ultimate target. Although, workers who have been working for more than one year in a factory is worthy to get service benefits. Thus, employers take this pandemic period as a scope to kick out the permanent workers without any benefits. Factory authorities denied paying the provident fund, earned leave and other benefits. The factory management laid off the permanent workers without paying any lawful benefits and are now running production in the same building with temporary workers under a different identity by changing the name of the factory³¹.

However, women especially pregnant women workers are another target of termination. It was a common practice in the RMG factories but in the pandemic period, these numbers are increasing dramatically. Evidence suggests that some factories had taken pregnant women

29 <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/thousands-of-garment-workers-lose-jobs-1591328801>

30 This is an estimation by following calculation: About 300 small and medium garment factories were closed down due to the COVID-19 fallouts caused 50,000 workers lost their job after lockdown. According to DIFE another 24,860 workers lost their job in June due to the cost-cutting measures adopted by the factory owners. This tendency is frequently increasing. If we consider this condition is going at 50% increasing rate in between July and August. So, the estimated figure will be $[(50,000 + 24,860 \times 50\%) = 37,430]$, so the total amount is $50,000 + 37,430 = 87,430$ approx..]

31 <https://www.newagebd.net/article/114871/dragon-groups-terminated-workers-to-beseize-shrama-bhaban>

workers' ID cards and forced them to resign, while others merely refused to pay their maternity benefits. Union organisers are also being targeted. Workers who are trying to raise their voice about their basic rights are become to be an easy target for termination. In this pandemic period is the chance for manufacturers to handpick the workers they want to kick out of the industry the ones with a voice, the ones who are trying to organise³². Blacklisting and hanging the list of worker's names on the factory gate is continued.

COVID-19 & TU Rights Status in RMG

Trade Union is virtually restricted at the factory level in RMG (Manirul, 2017). TU practice at the factory level is in negligible settings. Although this trend is not new in this sector. Thus, trade union rights for workers at the factory level is legally protected by Labour law. But the reality is unexpected. COVID-19 pandemic period witnessed union members are targeted to fire. Employers taking this situation as an opportunity to terminate workers especially union members or those who are connected to the union. It is reported that 3,000 garment workers were dismissed in this pandemic period up to June from Dhaka and Gazipur area (BHRRC, 2020). Employers cited reduced orders and the economic impacts of COVID-19 as the reason for dismissals. Whereas workers claimed that they have been disproportionately targeted due to union membership and organising. Unfair targeting of labour activists, dismissals, filing criminal cases and blacklisting are most common for the workers who are protesting the violation of their rights in the factory. Employers always used these tactics to retard union organising and collective action of the workers. On the other hand, membership collection from the factory level (existing workers in the RMG factory) is slowed down. But dismissed workers are willing to get involved in local trade union federation to resolve their woes of deprivation.

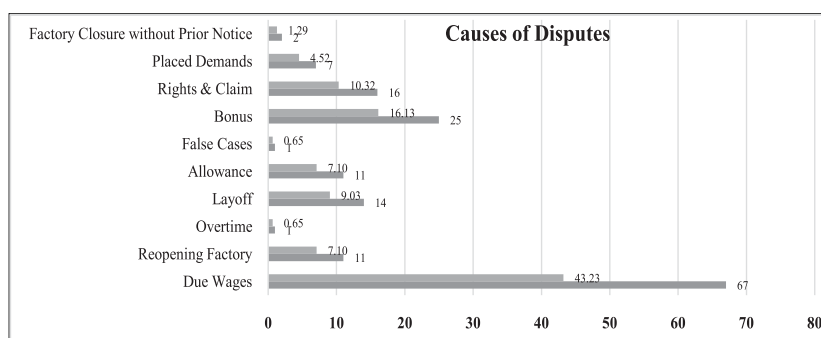
COVID-19 Hasten Labour Unrest in RMG

Protests also continued in other parts of the country including Savar, Narayanganj, and Chittagong, where workers demanded reopening of closed factories, payment of their arrears, and provision of adequate safety measures at reopened factories³³...

32 <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jul/09/we-are-on-our-own-bangladeshs-pregnant-garment-workers-face-the-sack>

33 <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2020/04/27/rmg-workers-protests-turn-violent-in-gazipur-8-injured>

This picture reveals the actual circumstances of labour unrest of the country in its pandemic period. Even though labour unrest is a very reiterative circumstance in the garments sector of Bangladesh. Protest and mass demonstrations by workers have become a common countenance in this industry. COVID-19 pandemic caused this situation worse. Sudden factory closure and denied wage and benefits of workers creating an inescapable milieu that forced them to come on the street and cry for their demands. A notable number of RMG workers getting the victim fired without payment, terminated without prior notice, unlawful layoff. Due wage/wage deprivation is the prime cause of these dispute in this sector. BILS newspaper survey reveals that about 43 per cent of labour unrest in RMG caused due wages (up to July 2020). Non-payment of dues and festival allowance and workload are among other reasons that might fuel unrest³⁴.

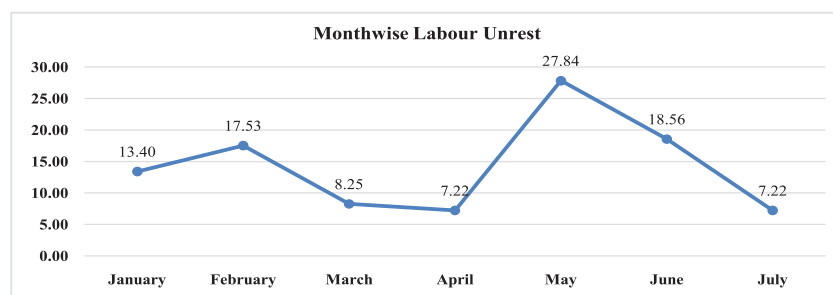


Source: BILS Newspaper based survey, July 2020

These cases are mostly found in RMG when the factory was announced to reopen after a sudden shutdown due to COVID-19. BILS survey indicates that most of the labour unrest incidents (about 28 per cent in May and 18 per cent in June 2020) in RMG had occurred between May and June 2020. The country's six industrial zones witnessed more than 100 incidents of labour unrests in June mainly over non-payment of wages. Besides, workers of some 1,004 factories are yet to get the wages for May until the first half of July³⁵.

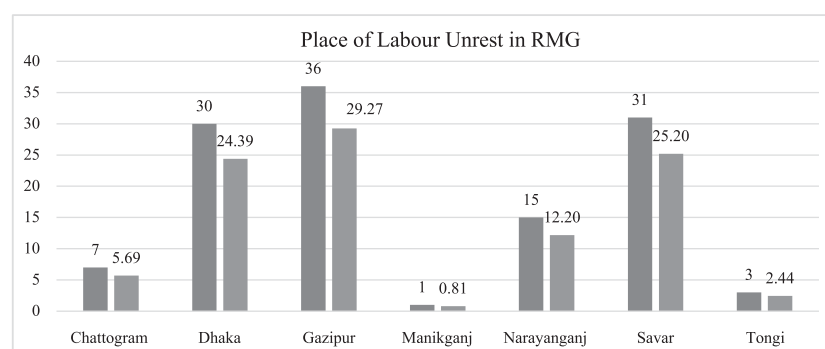
34 <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/industrial-sector-vulnerable-to-labour-unrest-1595432611>

35 See supra note 38



Source: BILS Newspaper based survey, July 2020

This labour unrest unforeseen observed in all RMG industrial belt of the country. BILS survey report identifies that most of the unrest had ensued at Gazipur (29 per cent). About 25 per cent of unrest occurred at Savar and 24 per cent happened at Dhaka.



Source: BILS Newspaper based survey, July 2020

Fairly any initiatives to resolve these labour disputes is not perceived. The success story is out the lens. Rather workers are the victim of police attack, false cases filed against them. Employers are not willing to solve these crises. Consequently, mass demonstration, human chain, placed memorandum, roadblock, besieged factory is continued.

7. COVID-19 Impacted RMG: Role of Stakeholders

A stakeholder's effective role is a vital mechanism to lever up any crisis of a country. Bangladesh has already witnessed inflicting mess in the most influential sector RMG due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Different stakeholders are tried their level best to mitigate the

catastrophe. The rapid government response, employers' actions, brands/buyer's role, global stakeholder roles are vastly observed in this pandemic period. Thus, the role of pertinent stakeholders regarding the crisis of the RMG sector wherever it is effective or somewhere is question marked. Mismanagement, bureaucratic complexity, reluctance, non-responsive attitudes, 'profit fast' mentality is noticed broadly. Cooperation, an inclusive effort among relevant stakeholders is largely missing. All initiatives from different stakeholders are found as a disjointed approach. This chapter discusses the role of different stakeholders, their functions/operations/actions regarding the crisis of RMG due to COVID-19 and analyses ambiguities in such actions.

Stimulus Package

To fight the COVID pandemic recounting fallouts, the government announced a stimulus package of BDT 50 billion (on 25 March 2020, the prime minister of Bangladesh announced this stimulus package) for RMG and other export-oriented industries. There was a clear-cut direction that the stimulus could only be used for paying salaries and allowances to the workers and employees. This immediate initiative from the government hoarded RMG workers from getting the victim to the worst situation during the period of crisis. Expert reveals that timely stimulus package staved off the disaster in RMG sector³⁶. Although evidence suggests that employers did not pay the full wages to the workers for March and April 2020 and did not pay due to wages on time, which levied thousands of workers to demonstrate on the street demanding their wages in full³⁷. It is reported that in some cases employers are intended to usage this stimulus benefits for personal interest. Thus, RMG workers are the main game-changer of this industry that brings billions of dollars every year, yet the employers are not seen to stand beside them during this critical crisis period. Some workers alleged that they had not been paid for a couple of months (Kabir et. al, 2020). Most of these cases are spotted in small and subcontracting factories. Small and subcontracting factories are out of government stimulus coverage. However, in the structure of the workforce in the

36 <https://tbsnews.net/economy/rmg/timely-stimulus-package-staved-disaster-rmg-sector-economists-140896?fbclid=IwAR1N4NfpKrej2w6xP9Pp2eGL48SNZILIRJoVgLDml9ca5DqAfROP465PFCs>

37 The Daily Star. RMG Workers Agitate for Full April Salary. 10 May 2020. <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/rmgworkers-demonstrate-demanding-full-wages-1901209>

RMG sector, full-time formal workers constitute only part of the workforce. Contractual or probationary workers were identified as a key group that was left out (Brac-BIGD, 2020). Factories are largely shut down. Workers lost their job forced them to go back with empty hands.

Tripartite Consultative Council-TCC

The Tripartite Consultative Council (TCC) is an established structure by the government for the RMG sector to address labour and workplace-related issues and to resolve disputes in the RMG sector through dialogue. The TCC consists of representatives from the government, employers, and workers. The ILO is an observer and facilitator of the TCC. But, the formal code of conduct of TCC is not well defined. However, TCC's responsive attitude and effective functioning are observed is not up to the mark regarding this crisis of COVID-19. Government and employers driven decision-making process creating a diminutive space to reflect TU demands. This setting is only limited to some 'meeting -seating' modalities. In this COVID-19 pandemic period, Bangladeshi's RMG industry going on an unhinged condition. But, TCC's definite role is not observed broadly. In the tenure of March-August 2020, only one meeting was held last 19 July 2020 and urged the owners of garment factories to pay Eid bonus to their workers³⁸.

Crisis Management Committee- CMC

Crisis Management Committee has formed to maintain the overall labour situation and to ensure workplace safety for workers and employees during COVID-19 headed by the MoLE. A total of 23 region-based committees have been formed across the country. The Committee is structured with the officials from DIFE and DoL, factory owners and TU representatives. Formed CMC is a prodigious initiative of the government. This structure is aimed to deal with the crisis of COVID-19 for all sector workers including RMG. It could be a potential platform to work together with relevant stakeholders for ensuring the safety, security and coherence of the RMG sector in this crisis moment. But in this pandemic period country witnessed a slothful role of CMC. This committee was limited with some nominal meeting in the beginning³⁹.

38 <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2020/07/20/pay-rmg-workers-eid-bonus-by-july-27-state-minister>

39 Naimul Ahsan Juwel, Joint conveners, SKOP stated over a telephonic interview was scheduled on 24 July 2020

Limited scope for the TU role is largely reported. Even in some cases, TU leaders were not informed about the operation of CMC.

Hygiene and safety guideline for RMG factories

Ministry of Family welfare published a hygiene and safety guideline that has been given to ensure the hygiene of the garment factories after reopening. Social distancing, washing hand, using the face mask, sanitizing was given the most priority. But this practice is severely maintained inside of the factories in most. Several numbers of the factory use the thermal detector, sanitising spray before entering the factory. Most of the factories have a mandatory obligation to wear a face mask. In some cases, factories do not provide any face mask. Workers made their own. Social distancing is in a negligible setting that caused several hundreds of workers to be infected.

Workers Layoff prohibition and Payment Direction

Ministry of Labour and Employment-MoLE has prohibited garments and other factories from laying off workers in this pandemic period. Nonetheless, rampant layoff, termination without prior notice is continued. Furthermore, such factories are mandated to pay a full month's salary to workers who have worked full or part of the month in April. Workers who have not been able to work at all during April shall be entitled to receive 65% of the month's pay. Despite this fact, wage deprivation is mostly reported. RMG sector is perceiving the situation of termination without payment, even no payment of due wages for two/three months, targeted termination during this crisis moments.

Considering the economic fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic the government have decided to continue a 1 per cent additional cash incentive for the country's garment export in the 2020-21 fiscal year. The incentive means the garment exporters have been enjoying a 5 per cent cash incentive for all non-traditional export markets. Bangladesh considers all the markets as nontraditional markets except the EU, the US and Canada. Apart from this, the government assured the continuation of reduced corporate tax for non-green garment factories at 12 per cent and green factories at 10 per cent for the next two years. There is also a proposition to reduce the value-added tax (VAT) on sales of synthetic yarn and polyester. On the other hands, global negotiation

for RMG is continued. All these initiatives have taken to revive the RMG sector which is only focused on a 'business-export-profit' concentrated attitude. Workers issues are ignored.

Guideline for RMG factories

BGMEA provided a comprehensive guideline for the factories on April 22 after announcing reopen of factories. On 26 April factories are advised to start operations with 30 per cent of their workforce. In the second phase May 2-21 it was advised to add 20 per cent of their workforce. The comprehensive guideline comprising with entrance protocol, social distancing measures, advised creating the COVID-19 task force, considering paid leave for pregnant women and workers over age 50⁴⁰. However, BGMEA's factory close-open dilemma creating a vagueness towards workers which forced them to rush back into the factory caused awful sufferings. By and large social distancing was not maintained in a satisfactory manner inside of the factory. The functioning of the COVID-19 task force is not invisible settings. Empirical findings reveal that senior workers and pregnant women are targeted to termination in this COVID-19 pandemic even they did not get any service benefits and due wage.

COVID-19 testing Lab and Hospital for Workers

BGMEA has set up a COVID-19 testing lab through coordination with the Ministry of Health under the overall direction of the Prime Minister for workers at Chandra, Gazipur. The facility can test up to 180 samples per day. The authority has a plan to scale up the figure at a later date. Side by side a 50-bed dedicated Covid-19 field hospital in the Saltgola area of Chattogram to provide medical treatment to RMG workers and needy local people has been inaugurated on 2 July. Partnering with Maya Digital Health to offer workers access to an anonymous platform through which RMG workers can ask questions relating to health and well-being. Interestingly, RMG workers are not aware of these facilities. However, access to service and costing is not well defined. Special incentives, compensations for workers during infection and treatment is not considered.

Statement on Responsible Purchasing Practices

BGMEA along with nine textile and garment business associations of STAR Network (Sustainable Textile of Asian Region) from six

producing and export countries has initiated a joint statement by highlighting responsible purchasing practices of brand companies, retailers and traders of the global textile and apparel supply chains. These initiatives giving most emphasis on the impacts on the fundamental rights of millions of workers and the livelihood of their families in the supplier end. This joint statement is an urge for global businesses to uphold and honour their commitment to labour rights, social responsibility and sustainable supply chains. The call on global brand companies, retailers and traders are pointed as it is⁴¹. Furthermore, urged from BGMEA to hold order cancellation and negotiation with brands/ buyers is beheld. But implications level is not up to the mark. While frequent demands for discount, shrinking lead time even dropping order is continued.

Brands/Buyers Roles

Rampant cancellation of orders, reluctance to take responsibilities of workers during the pandemic, asking discount, squeezing the amount of order, dwindling lead time is a common attitude from clothing brands/buyers in this pandemic crisis caused ultimate sufferings for RMG workers. Although, some positive approaches from global clothing brands/buyers are also being observed.

Role of Trade Union

The role of TU is largely impeded in communicating, mobilising, and carrying out protests during the general lockdown. Imposing restrictions to physical movements and meetings overwhelming, but others were able to find their way around by using the digital platform (e.g. phones, video conferencing calls and social media) both to keep in touch with workers and to reach out to other stakeholders. Many federations and unions have continued releasing press releases, statements, and charters of demands (Brac-BIGD, 2020). Side by side trade union leaders have been trying to play an active role in negotiating with owners, associations, the BGMEA and the government to ensure worker safety, job security and wage payments. The effective role of national trade unions to influence the international unions and fair-trade bodies putting pressure on international buyers in this pandemic is largely observed. All the same, effective negotiations, bargaining, active voice is largely missing in the major

decision-making process concerning crisis during this pandemic. Political influence and sometimes biased/neutral position of TU is observed in some cases. Interest conflict among national trade unions is immensely spotted during the COVID-19 global crisis.

Response from other relevant Global Stakeholders

Global stakeholder's effort to mitigate the emerging crisis in RMG during the COVID-19 pandemic is broadly witnessed. Different concerned global bodies initiated numerous actions to alleviate the rising challenges in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

- EU the largest export destination for the country's apparel goods assured to provide Bangladesh with a €113 million grant to pay three months of wages to one million workers laid off by readymade garment factories amid the Covid-19 pandemic. Under the endowment, a single RMG worker will get Tk3, 000 a month for June, July, and August. Workers who were laid off due to the closure of factories, after the government decided to shut down all businesses in March, and did not join another factory and are still unemployed, will be eligible for the cash support⁴². While without the proper list of workers who lost their job, factories types related concern, improper identifications criteria could be main hindrances in the implications level of these grants.
- The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) was called on its members to ensure workers in its supply chain receive payment for completed work during the Covid-19 pandemic and urged dialogue over ongoing orders as it releases guidelines for brands.
- ILO partnering with BGMEA and BKMEA has launched a COVID-19 safety 'Learning Hub' for RMG workers which aimed at preparing and maintaining safer working conditions for garment workers in the South Asian country both during and post-pandemic⁴³.
- The International Apparel Federation (IAF) was adding to calls for solidarity and collaboration by the apparel supply chain and its stakeholders including governments and consumers to reduce the damage to suppliers.
- The Council of Global Unions (CGU) call for workers protection measures in the COVID-19 era on 16 March 2020.

42 <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2020/06/02/eu-to-provide-97m-for-1m-rmg-workers-wages-for-3-months>

43 https://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Informationresources/Publicinformation/Pressreleases/WCMS_749732/langen/index.htm

8. Conclusion

RMG industry considered as a lifeline of our national economy which contributes a lion share in the export. This garments sector is the main employment generating sector employed millions of workers. The recent global outbreak of COVID-19 creating a total mess in this industry as a whole. The global supply chain is largely disrupted. The rapid spread of the momentum of this pandemic caused to shut down most of the apparel producing and supplying industries of the globe. Fashion brands/buyers are exasperating and cancelled their billions of dollar worth of orders from the supplier countries. Consequently, the Bangladesh RMG sector becomes the victim of worse hit, as the second-largest apparel exporters of the world. Small and medium RMG factory is largely closed. Bangladesh has witnessed millions of jobs cut. Without a job and potential income caused they fall into poverty. RMG workers faced unbearable sufferings. Now, this industry is trying to revive its previous track. The new order is coming. But, asking discount, shrinking order and lead time is common. Thus, workers woes are continued. Targeted termination, denial of wage and benefits are mostly reported. The government of Bangladesh initiated a stimulus package to resuscitate the workers and industry. Employers, international brands/buyers, trade union, global stakeholders played their segregated role to mitigate this crisis. Despite all these efforts are spotted as a disjointed setting caused amenities are not dispersed to the target (both workers & employees) appropriately. To relieve the industry and in the question of sustainability of RMG inclusive, coordinated and joint initiatives among stakeholders is a must.

9. Recommendations

This study is undertaken to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on the RMG sector of Bangladesh. By assessing the impact COVID-19 pandemic on RMG workers, the following potential recommendations are being drawn. The recommendations are:

- *An emergency Crisis Management Fund for RMG needs to establish which can be formulated by the joint contribution of factory owners (a percentage of profit) and the government. This fund shall be used for workers welfare (e.g. paying wage etc.) in such kinds of pandemic /national /global crisis moment.*

- *Development of proper ‘national RMG workers database’ including all regular and probationary workers at all small, medium, and large factories, accessible by associations and government agencies. This kind of database will help to determine the actual estimation of RMG workers in any crisis state of the industry.*
- *Rationing facilities for RMG workers and marginalised groups need to be reintroduced at the community level.*
- *Tripartite Consultative Council (TCC) for the RMG sector needed to be more functional. It can facilitate coordination and decision-making during the present crisis by bringing together the relevant stakeholders;*
- *Employers need to respect the social dialogue and go for a tripartite solution to the emerging crises;*
- *Brands/Buyers ensure responsive and ethical buying practice considering the woes of workers in the supply chain.*
- *Strengthen solidarity and unity with the global trade union, linked up with the regional and global trade unions.*
- *Develop the skills of TU members to use digital platforms to strengthen communications and outreach of TUs with workers and with each other.*

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Victimization of Indigenous Women in Working Sector: A Study on Indigenous Women in Tangail District.

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Abstract

Indigenous women are the backbone of indigenous communities and play a crucial role in working sectors. However, they are victims of multiple forms of victimization while working in different sectors such as beauty parlor, garments, agricultural, and health service. The main objective of this study is to know the victimization of indigenous women in the working sector. In order to fulfill this research objective, an exploratory research design has been used. The study used non-probability purposive sampling and data collected through questionnaire interviews. The study's findings indicate that indigenous women had become victims of multiple types of victimization such as physical victimization, wage discrimination, face discrimination, psychological victimization. The study also finds that low mentality of males, lack of ethical education, disrespect to indigenous women are the leading causes of victimization. Ensuring a safe working place for indigenous women and modern technology is an effective way to reduce such kind of victimization.

Keywords: Indigenous women, Victimization, Working sectors.

1. Introduction and Background of the Study

Indigenous women are involved in different working sectors of Bangladesh. Legal and policy documents of the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) use the term indigenous, aboriginal, *Adivasi*, ethnic minority, Hillman or hill people. Asian South Pacific Bureau for Adult

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Education (ASPBAE) notes that there is no single definition of indigenous. It refers to a collective who has been subject to colonization and has rights to collective ownership of land, desires the maintenance and development of their own identities, language and religions and desires the freedom to determine their relationships with states in a spirit of co-existence, mutual benefit and respect. There are about 370 million indigenous people globally and 185 million indigenous women in the world (Vinding, 2012). According to official statistics, about 2 million indigenous people in Bangladesh, out of which 1.6 million live in the plains. There are 45 different groups in Bangladesh (Ali, 2017). The three largest groups are the Chakma, the Marma, and the Tripura. These are traditionally dependent on swidden or “jum” cultivation. Adivasi groups are found in the plains and hills in the north and northwest near the border with India. They include, among many others, the Garo, the Khasi, the Santal and the Oraon (Vinding, 2012). There are 11 distinct indigenous peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and plains are comprised of 21 Adivashi groups.

In the past, indigenous women worked only on their land and were victims for various reasons. At present, women are being empowered. They are educated and work in different job sectors. Nevertheless, the rate of victimization rate is increasing day by day. According to the 2014 General Social Survey on victimization, the rate of sexual assault of indigenous people was almost triple that of non-indigenous people (GSS, 2017). The violence of indigenous women is three times higher than non-indigenous women (Research and Statistics Division, 2017). Violence against indigenous women and girls is one of the alarming issues. From 2007 to 2015, 434 indigenous women and girls were subjected to physical and sexual violence, and there is no single case where justice prevailed (Roy, 2015). In addition, 38 cases occurred in CHT, and the rest in the plains out of 69 cases in 2015 and the majority of victims were from the CHT. The unique type of sexual violence against indigenous women and girls is rape, which exceeds other physical and sexual violence forms in 2015 (Roy, 2015).

In Canada, 1181 indigenous women got murdered or missing (RCMP, 2017). Indigenous females are 12 times more likely to die due to homicide than their non-Indigenous counterparts (SCRGSP, 2007). Indigenous victims of homicide are likely to be younger than

non-indigenous victims, with a peak at age 25 to 34 for indigenous victims and age 35 to 49 for non-indigenous victims (Bryant and Wills, 2008). Indigenous separated parents are more likely to be victims of threatened or physical violence than Indigenous non-separated parents (Snowball & Weather burn, 2007). Unemployed Indigenous people are more likely to be victims of violence than those working or not in the labor force (ABS, 2002). Indigenous women suffer from discrimination, victimization, and violence that occur in the home, workplace, education, economic opportunity, labor market, health service, social program, and politics (Human Rights Council, 2017). In Canada, 40% of indigenous women had been physically abused in 2017 (GSS Report, 2017), and 53% of indigenous women had been physically abused in 2018 (Ontario Native Women Association, 2018). Indigenous women suffer from discrimination and violence. They are facing enormous difficulties. Due to unsatisfactory results, it is unknown what types of problems the indigenous women face in Bangladesh. Most of the studies conducted in Bangladesh are in non-indigenous sector.

2. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to find out the status of victimization of indigenous women in working sectors. The specific objectives are,

- i) To know the nature of victimization of indigenous women in working sectors.
- ii) To identify the causes of victimization of indigenous women in working sectors.

3. Methodology

This study followed the quantitative research approach to explore the victimization of indigenous women in the working sector. This study was conducted in the District of Tangail, especially in Madhupur. The reason for choosing Madhupur as the field of study is that many indigenous people live here. This study has been completed following face-to-face interviews through a survey questionnaire. The data have been collected mainly from indigenous women who have been victimized in working sectors.

As the number of working indigenous women was unknown, the study used non-probability purposive sampling. The number of sample was 81. The study was conducted on Garo indigenous community. The indigenous women belong to the age group (10-20) years, (21-30) years, (31-40) years and (41-50) years. Most of the data (46.9%) has been collected from indigenous women belonging to the age group (21-30) years. Secondary data have been collected from books, journal research papers, JSTOR, Google Scholar etc. Data processing and data analysis include listing and numbering the questionnaires, coding data verification, and data punching then processed for data input to computer software statistical package for social service (SPSS) and Microsoft excel. Finally, data has been analyzed to determine the nature and causes of indigenous women's victimization in the working sector, and some recommendations have been proposed to overcome those problem.

4. Literature Review

Victimization of Indigenous Women in Working Sector

Victimization is the process of being victimized or becoming a victim. Women victimization has been a serious problem in the world. Being victimized not only includes physical, it can be both mental and physical. Many indigenous women face serious problem such as killing, torture and rape (IWGIA, 2000). In Bangladesh the indigenous women are suffer more. Indigenous women fall into victims of different forms such as *physically*, *sexually* and *verbally* victimized. Physical abuse is using physical force that injures you or puts you in danger. Women are at risk of sexual harassment and others forms of sexual violence including *extortion*, *inappropriate touching*, *unexpected physical touch*, *staring badly*. Indigenous women suffer all the abuses of women everywhere; gender based and *sexual violence*, *rape*, *forced prostitution*, *trafficking female genital mutilation* and *HIV AIDS* (UNECLAC, 2009). Verbal abuse consists of behaviors that are non-physical but which can still be rather damaging such as being threatening, insulting or humiliating (Roy, 2012). Indigenous women suffer from discrimination or victimization and violence that occur in Domestic worker sector, Beauty parlor, Garments sector, Health service, Agricultural sector, politics etc. (Human Rights Council, 2017)

Victimization of Indigenous Women in Domestic Sector

Many indigenous women are working in different sector. Such as Domestic sector, garment sector, beauty parlors etc. (Vinding, 2012). Indigenous women work is often undervalued and under reported. Indigenous women face serious problem in their workplace. In Guatemala, an estimated 65% of domestic workers are indigenous girls. They work an average 14 hours per day and are often at risk of *physical and psychological abuse* and *sexual harassment* by employers. In Namibia, Domestic workers are indigenous girl risk of sexual abuse by employers and trafficking to other parts of the country (USSD report, 2016). Krishnan(2007), mentioned in his study that, indigenous women of Bangladesh also being victim of *physical* and *psychological* victimization (Krishnan, 2007).

Victimization of Indigenous Women in Beauty Parlor

Indigenous women are the poorest, most violated, most oppressed, most scorned and most exploited in different sectors of society (IWGIA, 2000). Working Indigenous women are increased day by day especially readymade garment sector and beauty parlor (Halim, 2007). In beauty parlors indigenous women face *physical violence* by their employers, co-workers at workplace (Chakma, 2014). In beauty parlor sector, majority of women (72%) belonging to the age group (18-26) years. *Wage discrimination* are seen in this sector (Ali, 2017). In Bangladesh (2007-2015) a total number of 434 indigenous women and girls were subjected to physical violence. Adibashi women face severe human rights violation, *wage discrimination* and lack of security (Kapaeing Foundation report, 2013).

Victimization of Indigenous Women in Garment Sector

A large number of indigenous women migrating from the CHT and plain regions to the city areas with little or no education are mostly engaging in garment (Roy, 2008). In the garment sector indigenous women *face discrimination* mostly from Co-workers and immediate Supervisors and sometimes face *physical violence* and *sexual violence* in their workplace (Ali, 2017). In the United States, indicate that one out of every ten women are raped or sexually assaulted. In Canada UCR report, the five most common violent offences committed against indigenous women such as: *common assault* (49%), *uttering threats*

(13%), *serious assault* (10%), *sexual assault level* (7%), and *criminal harassment* (7%) (Sinha, 2013). The lower wage garment sector has traditionally offered employment opportunities for women. There are wage discrimination between men and women, men and non-indigenous women (USSD, 2016). Many indigenous women work in the garment factories of Bangladesh. They are victimized in this sector. But it should be reduced by their proper steps.

Victimization of Indigenous Women in Health Sector

Few in women engaged in health sector, especially nursing sector. They are victimized in this sector. In Canada, only 0.7% of the Canadian undergraduate nursing students were aboriginal and less than 1% of Canadian nurses were aboriginal (Human Rights Council, 2017). At present, in Bangladesh, the number of indigenous women is increased day by day. In the workplace, indigenous women *face discrimination* mostly from co-workers and immediate supervisors. *Wage discrimination* and *verbally* victimized in this sector. Outside the workplace, they *face discrimination* and *sexual harassments* (Ali & Khisa, 2016).

Victimization of Indigenous Women in Politics

At the local level politics, the representation of women is very low and there is no indigenous female representation at the national level parliament although there are provision of reserve seats for women. Few indigenous women are visible at the local level union parishad as members where they are under represent. Despite the fact, indigenous women play significant role through the establishment of several indigenous women organization in order to protest and raise voice against violence perpetrated against indigenous women and girls and human rights of indigenous peoples both in the plains and the CHT. They are victimized in this sector. Lack of leadership and motivation bars indigenous women spontaneous and active political participation (Roy, 2015). In Kenya, Hon Margaret JepkoechKamar described the *physical, psychological* and *sexual violence* experienced by indigenous women throughout the electoral cycle and Andrew Gilmour expressed that the sexual harassment experienced by indigenous women in politics (Kamar, 2017). Dr. Mona LinaKrook noted that *sexist threats* and *sexual violence* experienced by indigenous women its impact is to

discourage women from being or becoming politically active. In above two study described the *sexual harassment* of indigenous women.. But indigenous women are victimized in different nature in working sector (UNHR, 2018).

Victimization of Indigenous Women in Agricultural Sector

Indigenous women engaged in agricultural work including the cultivation of crops, forestry, hunting or livestock etc. (Pratto, 2015). The indigenous people in the CHT and the plains are generally dependent on shifting cultivation and hunting as these activities are considered as the key traditional livelihood options. According to the indigenous peoples, shifting cultivation or jumis the ideal livelihood options for maintaining food security and indigenous peoples who are dependent on shifting cultivation are known as jummas or jumias. Indigenous women workers in the Northern part of Bangladesh face *wage discrimination* in the agricultural sectors despite contributing equally with their male counterparts (Kapaeeng Foundation, 2011). According to the 2012 Agricultural census, women holders (that is with an Agricultural holding) account for one third of the total (34.27%). Indigenous women workers also face tremendous human rights violation and lack social protection. They sometimes face harassment by their employers, co-workers at workplace, encounter *sexual assault*, *street violence* like *physical* or *sexual harassment*, etc. (Chakma and Chakma, 2014). Hundreds and thousands of indigenous women and girls in the United States today work in fields, packing houses and other agricultural work place where they face a real and significant risk of *sexual violence* and *sexual harassment*. In 2008, only 41% of victims of *rape* or *sexual assault* reported the crimes to the police and they had reported it to their employers (Ramchandani, 2018)

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of the Respondents.

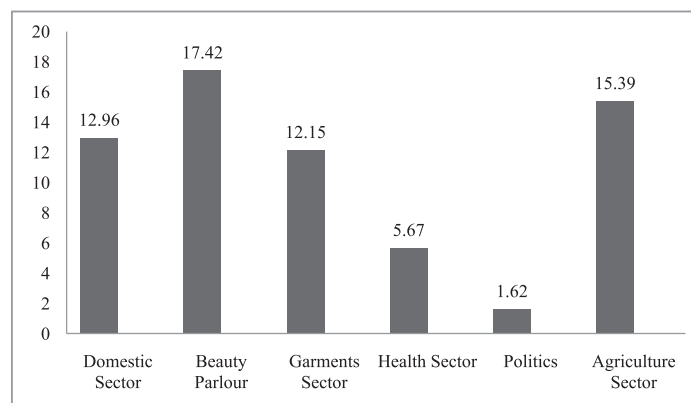
Age Group	Frequency	Percent
10-20	21	25.9
21-30	38	46.9
31-40	17	21
41-50	5	6.2
Total	81	100

Type of Family	Frequency	Percent
Nuclear	23	28.4
Joint	58	71.6
Total	81	100
Indigenous Community	Frequency	Percent
Garo	81	100
Religion	Frequency	Percent
Christian	81	100
Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Unmarried	9	11.1
Married	72	88.9
Total	81	100
Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	5	6.2
Primary	49	60.5
Secondary	17	21
Higher Secondary	7	8.6
Graduate	3	3.7
Total	81	100
Working sectors	Frequency	Percent
Working in Beauty Parlor	47	58
Servant in Shop	12	14.8
Working in Agricultural Field	9	11.2
Service Holder	13	16
Total	81	100
Monthly Income	Frequency	Percent
Less than 5000	19	23.5
5000-10000	50	61.7
More than 10000	12	14.8
Total	81	100

The study has been conducted in Tangail District. The above frequency table demonstrates the socio-demographic information of the respondents. The highest number of the respondents (46.9%) belongs to the age group 21-30 years, while the lowest number (6.2%) belongs to the age group 41-50 years. From the above frequency table, we can see that 25.9% of respondents belong the age of 10-20 years, 46.9% respondents belonging the age of 21-30 years, 21% respondents belonging the age of 31-40 years, and lastly, 6.2% respondents

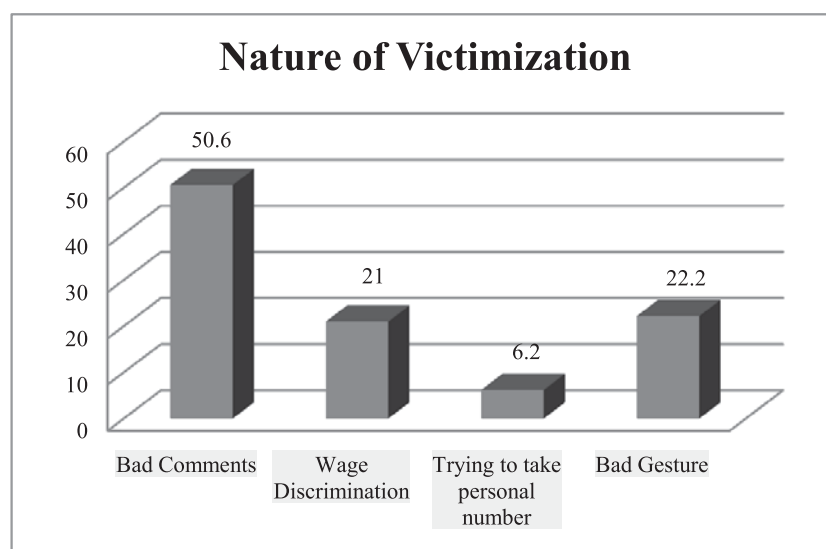
belonging the age of 41-50 years. That means the maximum number of respondents exist in 21-30 years, which identified 46.9% out of 81 respondents, and a minimum of 6.2% of respondents exist in 41-60 years. 71.6% of respondents live in a joint family, and 28.4% live in a single-family. 88% of the respondents are married, and 11.1% are unmarried. That means a maximum number of respondents (88.9%) are married. 60.5% of respondents studied at the primary level, 21% respondents are studied in the secondary level, 8.6% of the respondents studied up to higher secondary level, 3.7% respondents are graduated, and 6.2% were illiterate. Most of the respondents (60.5%) studied at the primary level, and the lowest of 3.7% of the respondents graduated. 58% of the respondents work in a beauty parlor, 16% are service holders, 11.1% are working in the agricultural field, and 14.8% are servants in the shop. That means most of the respondents (58%) work in beauty parlors, and the respondents' lowest (11.1%) work in the agricultural field. There are 23.5% of respondents' monthly income are less than 5000, 61.7% of the respondents' monthly income are in 5000-10000, and 14.8% of the respondent's monthly income are more than 10000. That means most of the respondent's (61.7%) monthly income have 5000-10000, and the lowest (14.8%) of the respondent's monthly income have more than 10000. Many indigenous women work in different sectors such as the domestic sector, garment sector, beauty parlors, etc. (Vinding, 2012). Indigenous women's work is often undervalued and underreported. Indigenous women face a severe problem in their workplace (Halim, 2007).

5.2 Victimization of indigenous women in different Working Sector



This bar graph describes that victimization of women in beauty parlors is the highest (17.42%). On the other hand, The second highest victimization of indigenous women is in the agricultural sector. In this sector, about 16% of women faced different types of victimization. This is because the women do not get an adequate salary with comparing their male counterparts. In the domestic sector, a large number of indigenous women work. In this study, we found that 12.96% of women faced different types of victimization. Indigenous women are also contributing to the economy of Bangladesh by working in the garment sector. Despite this, about 13% of Indigenous women are being victimized in this sector. Especially, they are being sexually abused by the employer when they work in this area. In the Health sector, indigenous women are also being the victim. This study indicates that about 6% women are victimized.

5.3 Nature of Victimization of Indigenous Women in Working Sector



The above graph indicates that out of 81 respondents of the study, 50.6% of the respondents have faced nasty comments, 22.2% of the respondents have faced bad gestures, 21% of the respondents have faced wage discrimination, and only 6.2% of the respondents have faced trying to take a personal number. That means most of the

respondents faced bad comments, and the lowest faced trying to take personal numbers. They face wage discrimination and sometimes face physical violence, sexual violence, psychological abuse, and being verbally victimized in their workplace (Ali & Khisa, 2016).

5.4 Reasons for not protest of Victimization

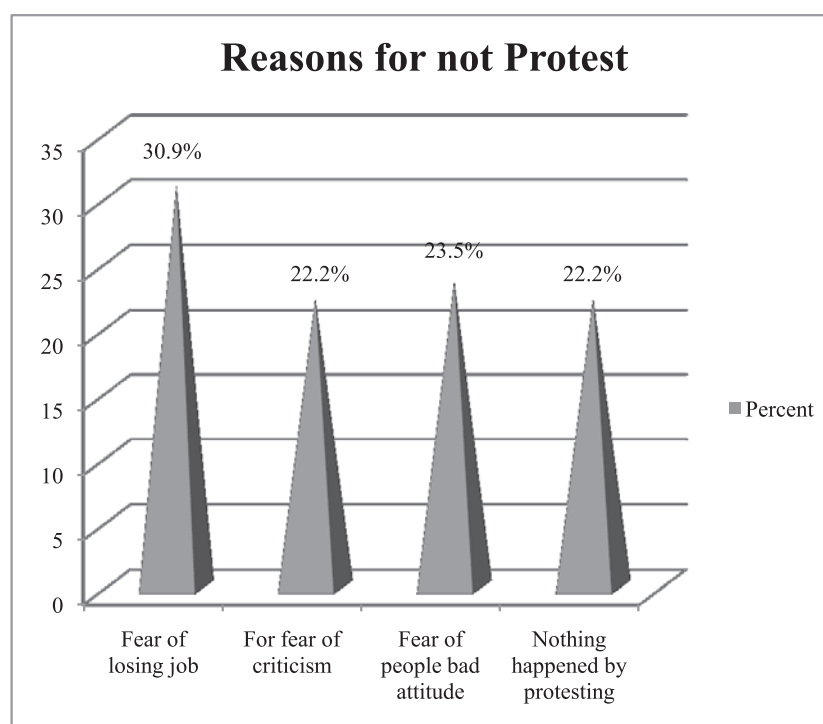
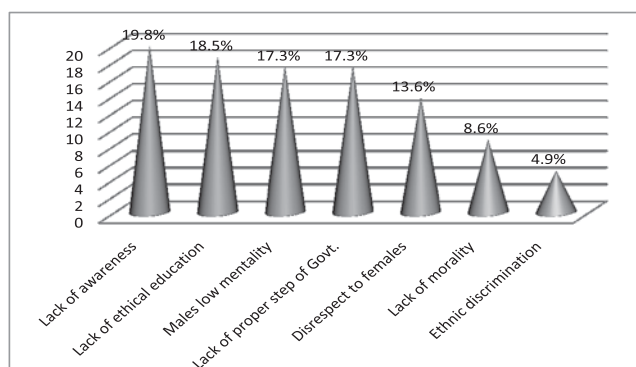


Figure 4.4: Reasons for not protest.

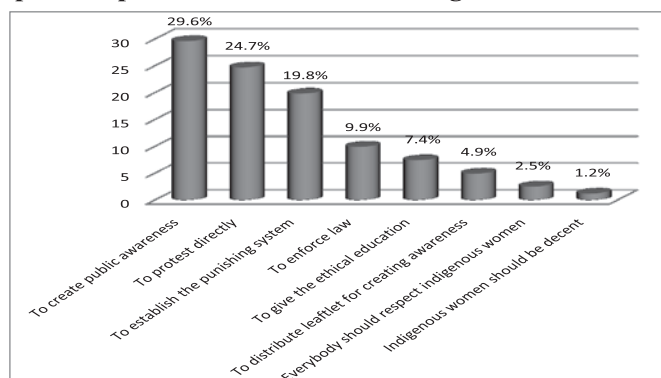
The above figure shows that 30.9% of the respondents did not protest for fear of losing job. 22.20% of the respondents did not protest because of fear of criticism, 23.50% of the respondents have not been protested because of fear of people bad attitude, and 22.2% of the respondents have not been protest because of nothing happened by protesting. That means most of the respondents (30.9%) have not been protested because of fear of losing their job, and the lowest of the respondents (22.2%) have not been protested because they did not get any results.

5.5 Causes of Victimization of Indigenous Women in Different Working Sector



In the above graph, out of 81 respondents of the study, 19.8% respondents own opinion about the reason behind the victimization of indigenous women is “lack of awareness”, 18.5% of respondents own opinion about the victimization of indigenous women is “lack of ethical education”, 17.3% respondents own opinion about the victimization of indigenous women is “low males mentality”, 17.3% respondents own opinion about the victimization of indigenous women is “lack of proper step of Govt.”, 13.6% respondents told about “disrespect of females”, 8.6% respondents indicated “lack of morality,” and 4.9% respondents' opinion about the victimization of indigenous women is “ethnic discrimination”. That means most of the respondent's opinion (19.8%) is “lack of awareness,” and the lowest (4.9%) of the respondent's opinion is “ethnic discrimination”.

5.6 Steps to stop the Victimization of Indigenous Women



In the above graph, out of 81 respondents of the study, 29.6% of respondents recommended that steps be taken to stop the victimization of indigenous women.

24.7% of respondents suggested "to protest directly," 19.8% respondents indicated "to establish the punishing system," 9.9% respondents recommended "to enforce the law," 7.4% respondents opined is "to give the ethical education."

4.9% of respondents hold the opinion "to distribute leaflet for creating awareness," 2.5% respondents own opinion is "everybody should respect indigenous women" and 1.2% respondents' own opinion is "indigenous women should be decent." That means most of the respondent's (29.6%) opinion is "to create public awareness," and the lowest (1.2%) of the respondent's opinion is "indigenous women should be decent". It is related to the victim precipitation theory. Many indigenous women are wearing different clothes than non-indigenous women

5.7 Relationship between Profession and Nature of Victimization

			Nature of victimization				Total
			Bad Comments	Wage Discrimination	Trying to take the personal number	Bad Gesture	
Working area	Working in Beauty Parlor	Count	23	13	5	6	47
		% within Profession	48.9%	27.7%	10.6%	12.8 %	100.0 %
	Servant in shop	Count	3	4	0	5	12
		% within Profession	25.0%	33.3%	0.0%	41.7 %	100.0 %
	Agricultural Field	Count	5	0	0	4	9
		% within Profession	55.6%	0.0%	0.0%	44.4 %	100.0 %
	Service Holder	Count	10	0	0	3	13
		% within Profession	76.9%	0.0%	0.0%	23.1 %	100.0 %
Total		Count	41	17	5	18	81
		% within Profession	50.6%	21.0%	6.2%	22.2 %	100.0 %

The above cross-tabulation demonstrates that out of 81 respondents, 47 respondents are working in a beauty parlor where 23 (48.9%) faced bad comments, 13 (27.7%) faced wage discrimination, 5 (10.6%) faced taking to take a personal number, and 6 (12.8%) faced bad gesture. Twelve respondents are a servant in a shop where 3 (25%) faced bad

comments, 4 (33.3%) faced wage discrimination, and 5 (41.7%) faced bad gestures. Nine respondents that are working in an agricultural field where 5 (55.6%) faced bad comments and 4 (44.4%) faced bad gestures. 13 respondents that are service holders where 10 (76.9%) faced bad comments and 3 (23.1%) faced bad gesture. Again, it is related to the literature review. Physical victimization, verbal victimization, and wage discrimination is expected in all the working area.

Relationship between Nature of Victimization and Victimim'sAge

			Victimizers age			Total
			Young	Middle age	Old	
Nature of victimization	Bad Comments	Count	15	24	2	41
		% within Nature of victimization	36.6%	58.5%	4.9%	100.0%
	Wage Discrimination	Count	3	12	2	17
		% within Nature of victimization	17.6%	70.6%	11.8%	100.0%
	Trying to take personal number	Count	3	2	0	5
		% within Nature of victimization	60.0%	40.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Bad Gesture	Count	6	9	3	18
		% within Nature of victimization	33.3%	50.0%	16.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	27	47	7	81
		% within Nature of victimization	33.3%	58.0%	8.6%	100.0%

The above cross-tabulation demonstrates that, out of 81 respondents, 41 respondents faced bad comments where 15 (36.6%) victimizers are in young aged, 24 (58.8%) victimizers are in middle aged, and 2 (4.9%) victimizers are in old aged. Seventeen respondents faced wage discrimination, where 3 (17.6%) victimizers are in young aged, 12

(70.6%) victimizers are in middle-aged and 2 (11.8%) victimizers are in old aged. 5 respondents who have faced trying to take personal number where 3 (60%) victimizers are young, and 2 (40%) victimizers are middle-aged. Finally, 18 respondents have faced bad gestures where 6 (33.3%) victimizers are young, 9 (50%) victimizers are in the middle age, and 3 (16.7%) victimizers are in old aged.

6. Conclusion

Victimization of indigenous women has been a severe problem in the world. In Bangladesh, indigenous women suffer more. Nowadays, it is a burning issue. Indigenous women in Tangail district faced different types of victimization in the working sector, which has become an everyday problem. Victimization like sexual harassment can happen to women and girls anywhere. The safe working sector is significant for both men and women. In Tangail, the working sector is generally safe and severe sexual assaults are rare. However, research has found that around 50.6% of indigenous women have been subjected to bad comments and 45.7% of the rhesitantlyts felt hesitant after being victimized. In the street, in Bus, in Schools, in College, in the Market place, in job Sector, and in everywhere, indigenous women faced victimization such as sexual or mental. Indigenous women are coping with bad comments, bad gestures, inappropriate touching of work employers.

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Civil Society

Environment for Trade Unionism in Bangladesh: 1971-2020

Md Abu Taher¹

Trade unionism is an attempt by otherwise relatively powerless individual employees (worker) to rectify the power imbalance. It is a substitute for individual action and is an integral part of the relationship between buyers and sellers of labor power. Generally trade union are voluntary association of workers formed to promote and protect their interests by collective endeavor. They are engage in bargaining with the employers to ensure better working conditions, fair wages, job security, safeguard against victimization etc. for their members. It also defends them against any encroachment, injustice and exploitation of workers by their employers. This write up have been focused on environment for trade unionism since independence on the occasion golden jubilee of independence of Bangladesh.

In developed societies management knowshow to deal with trade unions. Trade unionism is accepted as a part and parcel of management of industries. Trade union leaders are allowed to exercise informal power so much and thereby, the worker's movements can be channelized into productive endeavors. A sound meaningful relationship between managers and trade union leaders are continue to reduce tensions within industries which ultimately leads to increase productively and share of benefits both the employerand employees (workers) in the long run. But, in Bangladesh societies, the contending parties are abnormallyunequal in position of strength, as the buyer and seller of labor power. The seller of labor power in treated abjectly as if he is at the mercy of his buyer where the latter dictates almost unconditional terms to the former. In these societies trade unionism acts as a vital organic activity to remove the power imbalance between them as far as possible.

It is evident that political links of trade union have become universal although the extent of relationship between political parties and trade unions differ from country to country. In advanced societies trade unions of the whole country are linked up with a single political party through their single central federation, while, in Bangladesh, trade unions are tried up with too many political parties through multiple federations of trade unions. The deep intimacy ultimately creates a total war of politicization of the country's working class as well as labor movement. Sometimes industrial belts became battlefields of

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political parties. The workers, who had once fought together against their common enemies, started fighting with each other. Trade union leaders became instrumental in making chaos on behalf of their political party.

The statistical data shown that in 1971, there were only 1,160 registered trade unions in the country with a membership of 4,50,606. During the period of 1971-2020, it rose to 8,327 with a total membership of 29,16,989. In spite of them, 99 industrial federations, 44 garments federations and 33 national federation of trade unions are working in Bangladesh. These data reveal that trade union index is 70.50 points higher than trade union membership index. It is also observed that the total membership of trade unions in Bangladesh has been gradually increasing since independence, but the average membership of trade union has been declining. As a result, the majority of the trade unions are small in size which undermines the strength and solidarity of the workers in many ways.

Evidence shows that the multiplicity of trade union in Bangladesh is a by-product of politicization which create a lot of problems in the industrial relations system. These are; (i) increasing intra-union and inter union rivalries; (ii) developing unhealthy competition in CBA election; (iii) developing opportunism in trade union leadership; (iv) increasing political influence among the trade unions; (v) transforming trade union into pocket union through bribing the trade union leaders; (vi) extraction of benefits under threat or physical violence; (vii) developing militant attitudes among the trade union leaders; (viii) worker's negative attitude towards trade union leaders; (ix) deteriorating law and order situation at industry; (x) creation of a sense of big-boss leaders among the workers; and (xi) tendency to avoid collective bargaining process by the employers. It has adversely affected the environment for trade unionism in Bangladesh.

The present government is firmly committed to achieve the SDG, 2030 and Vision, 2041 through facing any challenges in the context of the changed world economic circumstances. Building consensus among the stakeholders on issues of trade unionism and socio-economic development should have been the prime consideration. The environment for trade unionism are political as well as critical in nature and as such the government should take proper steps for addressing the trade unions problems in order to ensure productivity, industrial peace and harmony and also to make the country's economy more vibrant in ensuing days.

Table-1: Trade union growth, membership and average membership per union: 1971-2020

Year	No. of Registered Trade Unions	Indices of Trade Unions (Base 1971)	No. of Members of Trade Union	Indices of Union Membership (Base-1971)	Average Membership Per union
1971	1,160	100.00	4,50,606	100.00	388
1972	2,523	217.50	6,42,923	151.56	271
1973	3,096	266.90	8,59,735	190.80	278
1974	3,320	286.21	9,46,977	210.16	285
1975	3,161	272.50	9,21,152	204.43	291
1976	3,037	261.81	8,95,904	198.82	295
1977	3,005	259.05	8,73,124	193.77	291
1978	3,178	273.87	10,06,516	223.37	317
1979	3,358	289.40	10,41,080	231.04	310
1980	3,613	311.47	10,97,707	243.61	304
1981	3,533	304.57	11,27,508	250.22	319
1982	2,156	185.86	9,46,048	209.95	439
1983	2,216	191.03	9,47,241	210.22	417
1984	2,488	214.48	10,75,496	238.68	432
1985	2,593	223.53	10,90,338	341.97	420
1986	3,132	270.00	11,64,279	258.34	372
1987	3,387	291.98	11,95,704	265.35	353
1988	3,625	312.50	14,21,834	315.54	392
1989	3,908	336.90	15,17,567	336.78	388
1990	3,789	326.64	16,19,008	359.30	427
1991	3,956	341.03	16,42,915	364.60	415
1992	4,065	350.43	16,48,783	365.90	406
1993	4,238	365.34	16,74,949	371.71	395
1994	4,484	386.55	16,81,690	373.21	375
1995	4,796	419.49	17,20,679	381.86	359
1996	5,178	446.38	17,30,927	384.13	334
1997	5,451	469.92	17,93,074	397.93	329
1998	5,694	490.06	18,23,561	404.69	320
1999	5,915	509.91	18,56,694	412.04	314
2000	6,304	543.45	19,05,491	439.78	302
2001	6,528	562.76	19,38,269	330.15	297
2002	6,809	586.98	19,95,307	442.80	293
2003	6,637	572.16	20,42,722	453.33	308
2004	6,835	589.22	19,04,567	422.67	279
2005	6,928	598.24	19,45,969	431.86	281
2006	7,282	627.76	20,44,253	453.67	281
2007	6,951	599.22	22,48,094	498.90	323
2008	6,866	591.90	21,71,713	481.95	316
2009	7,087	610.95	22,88,123	507.79	323
2010	7,188	619.66	22,51,733	499.71	313
2011	7,191	619.91	22,54,155	500.21	313
2012	7,227	623.19	23,08,679	512.34	319
2013	7,000	603.45	23,00,140	510.45	329
2014	7,512	647.59	24,24,854	538.13	323
2015	7,568	652.41	24,98,550	554.49	330
2016	7,792	671.72	22,47,273	498.72	288
2017	8,009	690.43	22,69,519	503.66	283
2018	9,071	781.98	31,01,736	688.35	342
2019	8,052	694.13	28,16,994	625.16	350
2020	8,327	717.84	29,16,989	647.34	350

Publication Policy

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies - BILS has been working on labour issues since its establishment in 1995. BILS endeavors to uphold the causes of working people and Trade Unions of Bangladesh. Twelve major National Trade Union federations are associated with BILS.

Keeping in view to build a just and democratic society, enabling the workers organizations to play proper role as a major force, BILS emphasizes on capacity building of the Trade Unions through trainings, research and information sharing. Protecting workers rights is the main objectives of BILS and it strives to promote fair and worker friendly policies and Laws in Bangladesh. It also plays the role of a catalyst in building relations between trade unions, civil society and the government on labour market issues.

The 'Labour' is a half- yearly journal published by BILS with twin objectives. The first objective is publishing research-based articles on different issues related to the labour, establishment of labour rights, labour welfare, labour laws and the likes. The research articles published are 'double blind' peer reviewed. Secondly, it publishes contributions from the labour activists focusing on the above-mentioned issues with the hope that the practical and empirical realities are properly recorded with an archival value. The journal actually seeks to provide an intellectual platform for the national and international scholars, critics, academicians, researchers and activists of labour rights and human rights issues. It aims to promote interdisciplinary research on labour laws, labour policy, occupational health and safety, job market situation, industrial relations, conflict resolution, wages, employment generation, workers migration and social safety net in Bangladesh.

The guidelines to the contributors for the manuscripts preparation and submission are mentioned below:

1. The submitted manuscript should be original and contributing to some new dimensions in the concerned fields noted and is not published or under consideration for publication elsewhere.
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6. The author should retain a copy of the manuscript for his/her own reference.
7. Three (3) copies of article(s) are to be submitted to the Editor of the Journal in font size 12 (twelve) of Times New Roman on A4 size paper.
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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.