

# **Occupational Health Hazards on Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh: A Case Study on Dhaka EPZ**

## **M.Phil Dissertation**



**Department of Political Science  
University of Dhaka**

### **Guided by**

Dr. Nasima Khatun  
Professor  
Department of Political Science  
University of Dhaka

### **Submitted By**

Israth-Un-Nisa  
Registration No: 271  
Session: 2013-14  
Department of Political Science  
University of Dhaka

**Date of Submission: 02 December, 2019**

## **Statement of the Researcher**

I do hereby declare that this research work is the outcome of my own exploration and I am the sole composer of this thesis. I also declare that this thesis paper has not been previously submitted or published anywhere for a degree in any University or Institution. I want to confirm that a great number of documents borrowed from different sources were used to complete this paper with due references.

I want to empower the University of Dhaka to lend this work to individuals or any institution fully or partially by photocopying or by any other means for the motive of any academic investigation or scholarly research.

.....

(Israth-Un-Nisa)

Registration No: 271

Session: 2013-14

Department of Political Science

University of Dhaka

## **Certificate of Approval**

It is my pleasure to certify that the research paper titled “**Occupational Health Hazards on Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh: A Case Study on Dhaka EPZ**” submitted by Ms. Israth-Un-Nisa (Reg. No:271 /Session : 2013-14), Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka is the genuine investigation which is finished under my direct guidance and supervision from beginning to end. The whole script was scrutinized by me and found it satisfactory for submission for the degree of Master of Philosophy. It is a work on the field of health hazards of DEPZ female garment workers in their professional arena. As far as I know the entire thesis is the individual performance of the researcher’s own labour and has not been submitted previously in any other university or institution for any degree or diploma or anything else.

.....

Dr. Nasima Khatun  
Professor  
Department of Political Science  
University of Dhaka

## Acknowledgement

First of all, I want to express my whole-hearted gratitude to the almighty Allah who gave me the scope to finish this research and it would be an incomplete one without his grace.

Then I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Nasima Khatun, Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka. The research would be a failed project without her direct support, cooperation and guidance. She provided me the freedom of choice and never created pressure on me. She helped me a lot in many ways such as making questionnaire, preparing literature review, selecting methodology, how to take interview etc. which proved much beneficial for my research work.

I would like to thank Ms. Nusrat Sharmin and Mr. Jahid Ansari (Dhaka Bank Ltd.); Mr. Shahjahan, Mr. Syful Islam Bablu and Mr. Muzahidul Islam (Eastern Bank Ltd.); Mr. Shadat Hossain (FAVP, Prime Bank Ltd.) and Mr. Imtiaz Uddin (Mercantile Bank Ltd.). Mr. Jahid Ansari and Mr. Muzahidul Islam are the managers of the DEPZ branch of their own banks. They helped me a lot to take the interviews of DEPZ and Non-EPZ Female garment workers.

My cordial thanks also go to my parents and only brother whose immense love and unconditional support always inspire me to study.

Special thanks to Nasrin Akter Jahan Nupur-my soul mate; Hasnat Jahan Shikha- my hall roommate & a university senior and Ayesha Khatun-my helpful classmate friend. All of them were also the students of the Dept. of Political Science, University of Dhaka. They taught me that never give up.

At last, I want to declare that I personally will be accountable for all the errors and inconsistencies of this paper. Thanks again to all.

.....  
(Israth-Un-Nisa)  
Registration No: 271  
Session: 2013-14  
Department of Political Science  
University of Dhaka

## Abstract

As the performance graph of the RMG sector in Bangladesh has been going upward for previous few decades, we-the people of Bangladesh are happy to say that the most powerful and potential sector of Bangladesh in earning foreign currency is RMG. Although working sphere of most garments factories is below standard. However, there is no way to deny the contribution of RMG sector in Bangladesh economy. Now-a-days, the term “**Made in Bangladesh**” is very familiar in garments world. The garments that are made in Bangladesh are available everywhere in the world including Europe and America. Bangladesh is a very well-known name in the outer world for RMG sector. We all know this story. But what we do not know is the behind story. Those brave and fearless girls for whose sacrifice a new story in Bangladesh economy was written remain behind the screen. Nobody knows their story. No matter how they are who make the economic wheel dynamic through their inhumane hard working from dawn to dusk. They are giving much but taking less. Simultaneously they are losing their physical strength and becoming the victims of different occupational health hazards. Malnutrition, Day long continuous labour and unfriendly working environment suck their efficiency and vitality. This paper has focused on this forgotten chapter.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AIDS</b>	:	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
<b>BEPZA</b>	:	Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority
<b>BGMEA</b>	:	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association
<b>BKMEA</b>	:	Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association
<b>BLA</b>	:	Bangladesh Labour Act
<b>BMI</b>	:	Body Mass Index
<b>CEDAW</b>	:	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CIRDAP</b>	:	Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific
<b>CNG</b>	:	Compressed Natural Gas
<b>DEPZ</b>	:	Dhaka Export Processing Zone
<b>EPZ</b>	:	Export Processing Zone
<b>EU</b>	:	European Union
<b>FDI</b>	:	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FY</b>	:	Fiscal Year
<b>GoB</b>	:	Government of Bangladesh
<b>HIV</b>	:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>IBC</b>	:	IndustriALL Bangladesh Council

<b>ILO</b>	:	International Labour Organization
<b>MoLE</b>	:	Ministry of Labour and Employment
<b>NoWW</b>	:	Nutrition of Working Women
<b>OSHE</b>	:	Occupational Safety Health and Environment Foundation
<b>RH</b>	:	Reproductive Health
<b>RMG</b>	:	Readymade garment
<b>RR</b>	:	Reproductive Rights
<b>STD</b>	:	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
<b>TU</b>	:	Trade Union
<b>TV</b>	:	Television.
<b>UNFPA</b>	:	The United Nations Population Fund, formerly the United Nations Fund for Population Activities
<b>UNICEF</b>	:	The United Nations Children's Fund, originally known as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>USA</b>	:	The United States of America
<b>WHO</b>	:	World Health Organization
<b>WWA</b>	:	Worker's Welfare Association (Shramik Kalyan Sanghstha)

## Glossary of Bangla Terms

<b>Beton</b>	:	Salary
<b>Bostee</b>	:	Slum
<b>Chanachur</b>	:	A snack mix which consists of a variable mixture of spicy dried Ingredients such as fried lentils, peanuts, vegetable oil, Chickpeas, flaked rice, fried onion and curry leaves.
<b>Eid</b>	:	Religious Festival of the Muslim Community
<b>Izzat</b>	:	Honour
<b>Jhalmuri</b>	:	A street snack made of puffed rice and an assortment of spices, oil, vegetables and chanachur.
<b>Kalyan</b>	:	Welfare
<b>Mastan</b>	:	Local Tout, Rascal, Hooligan, Rowdy etc.
<b>Monga</b>	:	Yearly cyclical phenomenon of poverty and hunger widely occurred in Northern Bangladesh.
<b>Rickshaw</b>	:	A light three-wheeled passenger vehicle.
<b>Sanghstha</b>	:	Association
<b>Shishu Park</b>	:	Children's amusement park in Shahbag, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
<b>Shramik</b>	:	Worker/Labour
<b>Tempu</b>	:	Three wheeled engine driven vehicle.



## Table of Contents

Serial No.	Title	Page No.
	Statement of the Researcher	i
	Certificate of Approval	ii
	Acknowledgement	iii
	Abstract	iv
	Abbreviations	v
	Glossary of Bangla Terms	vii
	Table of Contents	viii
	List of Figures	xi
	List of Tables	xi
	List of Graphs	xii
<b>CHAPTER-01 INTRODUCTION</b>		<b>(1 - 11)</b>
1.1	EPZs of Bangladesh and Dhaka EPZ	3
1.2	Definition of Health, Garments Workers and their health related Hazards	5
1.3	Statement of the Problem	7
1.4	Rationale of the Study	8
1.5	Importance of the Study	9
1.6	Aim of the Study	9
1.7	Objectives of the Study	9
1.8	Research Questions	10
1.9	Limitations of the Study	10
<b>CHAPTER-02 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</b>		<b>(12 - 29)</b>
<b>CHAPTER-03 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>		<b>(30 - 32)</b>
3.1	Sample Size and Sampling Technique	31
3.2	Research Area	31
3.3	Data Sources	31
3.4	Data Collection Technique and Time-Frame	31
3.5	Case Study	31
3.6	Data Analysis	32

<b>CHAPTER-04 PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS</b>		(33 - 73)
4.1	Medical Facility, Maternity Leave, Sickness & Others	34
4.2	Duration of Maternity Leave	37
4.3	Condition of Working Environment	39
4.4	Hygienic Condition of Working Environment	41
4.5	Food and Sleeping	43
4.6	Sleep Duration	45
4.7	Starting Time for Working Hours	48
4.8	Working Period	50
4.9	Closing Time	53
4.10	Weekly Holidays, Overtime, Workload & Others	54
4.11	Occupational Health Hazards	58
4.12	Body Parts where Physical Problems are occurred	59
4.13	House Facility& Saving	61
4.14	Patterns of Occupational Health Hazards before and after joining RMG Sector	64
4.15	How they spend their Leisure Periods Returning from Garment Factory	66
4.16	Case Study	68
 <b>CHAPTER-05 HEALTH RELATED RIGHTS OF THE FEMALE GARMENT WORKERS AND INITIATIVES</b>		 (74 - 80)
5.1	<b>Rights</b>	75
	5.1.1 National Level	75
	5.1.1(a) Constitutional Rights	75
	5.1.1(b) Rights on Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006	76
	5.1.2 International Level	77
	5.1.2(a) ILO	77
	5.1.2(b) CEDAW	78
5.2	<b>Initiatives</b>	79
	5.2 (a) BKMEA	79
	5.2 (b) BGMEA	80

	<b>CHAPTER-06 MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS</b>	(81 - 85)
	<b>CHAPTER-07 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION</b>	(86 - 94)
7.1	<b>Distinguished Suggestions and Key Recommendations</b>	87
	7.1 (a) Recommendations to the GoB, to the Policy Makers and to the MoLE	87
	7.1 (b) Recommendations to BGMEA and BKMEA	89
	7.1 (c) Recommendations to the Factory Owners	91
	7.1 (d) Recommendations to the Female RMG Workers	92
7.2	<b>Conclusion</b>	93
	<b>References</b>	(95 - 97)
	<b>Bibliography</b>	(98 - 99)
	<b>Questionnaire</b>	(100 - 104)

## List of Figures

<b>Serial No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
1	Location of the EPZs in Bangladesh	4
2	Dhaka EPZ in Savar near Dhaka city	5
3	Garment workers are busy in their workplace	6
4	These innumerable girls have become the backbone of Bangladeshi RMG Sector	48

## List of Tables

<b>Serial No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
1	Average Amount of Sleep by Age	46
2	Incidence of Health Problems before and after joining (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	64
3	Incidence of Health Problems before and after joining (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	65
4	How they spend their Leisure Periods (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	66
5	How they spend their Leisure Periods (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	67
6	ILO Health Related Rights of Female Workers ratified by Bangladesh	78
7	Unit Labour Cost, 1994	87

## List of Graphs

<b>Serial No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
1	Medical Facility (and others) among the DEPZ Female Garment Workers	35
2	Medical Facility (and others) among the Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers	36
3	Duration of Maternity Leave (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	38
4	Duration of Maternity Leave (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	39
5	Condition of Working Environment (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	40
6	Condition of Working Environment (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	41
7	Hygienic Condition of Working Environment (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	42
8	Hygienic Condition of Working Environment (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	43
9	Food and Sleeping (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	44
10	Food and Sleeping (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	45
11	Sleep Duration (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	46
12	Sleep Duration (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	47
13	Starting Time for Working Hours (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	49
14	Starting Time for Working Hours (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	50
15	Working Period (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	51
16	Working Period (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	52
17	Closing Time (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).	53
18	Closing Time (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	54
19	Weekly Holidays, Overtime, Workload & Others (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	56
20	Weekly Holidays, Overtime, Workload & Others (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	57
21	Health Hazards for being engaged in this job (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	58
22	Health Hazards for being engaged in this job (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	59
23	Limbs where they feel problems. (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	60
24	Limbs where they feel problems. (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	61
25	House Facility& Saving. (DEPZ Female Garment Workers)	62
26	House Facility& Saving. (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers)	63

**CHAPTER-01**  
**INTRODUCTION**

Bangladesh is a very potential developing country whose economic development depends firstly on agriculture and secondly on industry. The RMG sector has given the opportunity of employment to millions of unemployed especially innumerable uneducated/less educated women of the country which is a breakthrough in women employment. Thus women are playing a vital role in the Bangladesh garment sector. This sector has been one of the driving forces behind Bangladesh's economic development over the past few decades. Since its rapid expansion in the late 1970s, Bangladesh has become the second largest exporter of garments in the world after China which has created a breakthrough regarding women's employment in the industrial sector. A supply of cheap and readily available female labor has contributed to the rapid expansion of the apparel industry in Bangladesh. The hard labor of the millions of female workers has also contributed in making the garments as the highest export earner of the country. Today, the industry's estimated 4,500 export oriented factories are believed to either directly or indirectly support the livelihoods of more than 25 million people, particularly women and children.<sup>(1)</sup>

The majority of garment workers are women who are a powerful economic force, many of whom have migrated from rural to urban areas in search of employment. The RMG industry can provide them with a first opportunity to enter the formal workforce, offering an important source of income, economic independence and greater decision-making power. For a country's growth, they make important contributions as entrepreneurs and employees. And they support development more broadly, through the care and attention they bring to the welfare of their families. Currently, garment sector employs approximately 2.2 million workers, of whom almost 80% are women.<sup>(2)</sup>

Employment in the garment industry has increased the average age of marriage and improved women's financial situation but many difficulties remain including significant challenges to women's health. Women workers in garment factories receive low wages and suffer from a series of health and safety concerns. However, the work environment of the garment industries is not safe for the workers, especially for the female workers. Some of the problems of women workers are related to the human environment of the workplace. Many of the female workers suffer from various health problems like severe skin diseases, Malnutrition, Headache, Air ache, Eye pain, Chest pain, Back pain, Asthma, Physical weakness, Fainting, Less appetite, Gastritis,

gynecological problems, Urine Infection and other communicable diseases due to lack of health-friendly environment in their working places. The temperature of most of the garment factories remains abnormally high due to lack of proper ventilations. Moreover, they are always in want of proper rest, sleep and hygienic diet. Although the condition of the workers of Dhaka EPZ is little better than those of outside industries, they are also deprived of health-related rights. The study deals with different factors that are responsible for the health problems of women garment workers in Dhaka EPZ. This paper focuses on brief the problems of health issue of female workforce of garment industries based upon the industry environment, working condition, problem of health and their medical facilities. Industrial Laws should strictly be implemented through the government to overcome these problems.

### **1.1 EPZs of Bangladesh and Dhaka EPZ**

The People's Republic of Bangladesh presents fantastic opportunities for improvement of policies and programs targeting female workers to help boost competitiveness and promote zone investment growth, because of the significant participation of women in the RMG industry in the EPZs in the country. In order to boost up economic development of the country, a number of steps have been taken to attract FDI and facilitate industrialization process of the country.

One of such efforts was the promulgation of BEPZA Act 1980 which eventually instituted the formation of BEPZA, the government organ responsible for creation, operation and development of Export Processing Zones in the country. At present there are eight EPZs in Bangladesh.





**Figure 01 :** Location of the EPZs in Bangladesh (Source: Internet)

In 1993, Dhaka EPZ started its journey at Savar as the second EPZ of the country. There are 105 enterprises in DEPZ where more than 70 of the enterprises are directly or indirectly involved with RMG sector. <sup>(3)</sup> Cumulative investment of DEPZ was 1,360.81 Million US \$, Cumulative export was 24,778.59 Million US \$ and total employment was 92,979 in the FY 2017-2018 . <sup>(4)</sup> Most of the garment workers here are estimated as women.



**Figure 02** : Dhaka EPZ in Savar near Dhaka city (Source: Internet)

## **1.2 Definition of Health, Garments Workers and their health related Hazards**

**Health:** According to WHO (1948), “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity”.

Health is “the condition of a person’s body or mind.”<sup>(5)</sup> Another definition is “the state of being free from illness and injury.”<sup>(6)</sup>

So, it can be said that “that condition of human body and mind which is free from troubles is called Health.”

**Garments Workers:** The persons who work for a garment industry and make garment products to maintain their livelihood are called Garment workers. They are involved with Clothing, Stitching and needlework.

Someone says that the persons who makes or mends dresses in the factory or garment industry is called garments workers. In another sense, someone who does work as sewing or embroidery with a needle someone who sells men's clothes a garment maker who performs the finishing steps persons whose occupation is making and altering garments someone who does work as sewing or embroidery with a needle. <sup>(7)</sup>



**Figure 03 :** Garment workers are busy in their workplace (Source: Internet)

According to the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, “a woman is prohibited to work in any factory for six weeks after the birth of a child.” However, in most of these factories there is no provision for maternity leave. Not only that, they are even denied of their basic health rights. In addition, the living victims of Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashion- most of them are women are still suffering from different health problems. However, the scenario is trying to be changed day by day, nevertheless female are constantly being ignored from many basic facilities which are essential for their day to day living.

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Can we save the women right in workplace or sing their requiem? No generation before us would have asked the question posed in this title. The Garment industry is the most important source of foreign currency. Millions of people are dependent on it directly or indirectly and about 80 percent garment workers are woman. The garment sector has become an important institution for reduction of poverty. But the workers face many health problems during working time and outside. The main problems faced by garments worker are:-

**Unhygienic and uncongenial environment**- Most of the garment factories are very congested with machinery and employees. There are no or very few ventilators and sanitations. The existed sanitations are mostly unhealthy. The factories of Dhaka EPZ is also not exceptional of that. Although the Dhaka EPZ authority claims their working environment is health friendly. But the reality may differ.

**Lower wage** - Although they work extremely hard but their salary structure is not attractive at all. Their salary is very poor. Only 69\$ (69\$ has become effective from 1 December, 2013 which is the lowest in the whole world) <sup>(8)</sup> is not sufficient to support a standard life. Sometimes salary is not paid in due time. On 24 December 2013 Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) announced the Minimum Wage for Garment Workers within Export Promotion Zones (EPZs) in Bangladesh. The salary of the Dhaka EPZ garment workers is more than the salary of other RMG industries. But garment industries are exploiting them as cheap source of labor <sup>(9)</sup>. So they are not able to get adequate health facilities as they spend almost all their wages in food, housing and clothing.

**Wage Discrimination** -Moreover, they receive less money than that of their male counterparts in many cases.

**Pressure to increase productivity** - The garment workers are always in pressure from the factory owners to increase their productivity which affect their health.

**Hurry to meet the production target** - Every garment factory has a target of production within a specific time. Maximum garments Industries feel a rush to fulfill their target within the time period. As a result, the poor garment workers become bound to do more work.

**Hard work and no leisure period-** They start for their workplace in very early in the morning and return home after 8 or 9p.m. at night. It takes more time when they engage with overtime work to earn some more money. There are more pressure in the EPZ areas because these industries have to maintain foreign orders. As a result, after this inhuman labor, they possess poor health.

**Late-night overtime work** - To get some more money and to meet the pressure of the factory the workers do late-night overtime works which make their poor health poorer.

**Absence of Leave Facilities-** If they become absent even for illness, the owners of the factories cut money of the days when she/they were absent. So they try to be regular even in unwell health.

**Torture (physically and mentally)-** Women are harassed in the factory, in the street, or in the house <sup>(10)</sup>. In factory, they are harassed physically and mentally by their male upper grade masters or male co-workers which affects both their mental and physical health.

**Ineffective Trade Union-** There is a “Workers Welfare Association” (WWA-Shramik Kalyan Sanghstha) in Dhaka EPZ which is nothing but a toothless tiger. Furthermore, most of the garment workers are female, but their union leaders are not.

#### **1.4 Rationale of the Study**

The export-oriented apparel industry of Bangladesh, popularly known as RMG or simply as the garment industry- a highly globalize industry, occupies a unique position in the economy of Bangladesh which is playing a vital role for the socio-economic development of the country. It is mentionable that about 76% of foreign exchange is earned by this sector. <sup>(11)</sup>

Garments sector is the life blood of Bangladesh as the agricultural land has there been turned to a country of garments industries. Employment in the Ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh provides workers with economic benefits and some empowerment. At present, more than 3.2 million people are working in this sector (80% are female) and more than about 4,000 garment factories are scattered across the country. In the garment industries, women workers are cheap and can be easily exploited. More than three-fourth of our foreign earnings come from this

sector. So it is very urgent to regain the GSP in US market. It will not be an overstatement to say that, we earn our bread from garment industries. At present Garment industry is the main industry of Bangladesh. But in reality, the condition of garment workers especially the female workers in Bangladesh is very bad. This scenario is almost the same in DEPZ. There is much pressure in the industries of this area. So, if the health of the brave fighters who make our economic wheel active are not be secured, I will say the total health of our rising economy will not be secured.

I tried to focus the real scenario of the RMG industries of Dhaka EPZ because if they start changing their situation, the other industries will follow them by doing betterment of the labours.

### **1.5 Importance of the Study**

This research will clarify the rights of the garment workers of Dhaka EPZ area and other RMG factories in Bangladesh and will provide the legal remedies for violation for their rights. I believe that, this research will be very helpful for the readers and the garment workers. They will be able to know about their rights, remedies and process of enforcement of their rights. The defines of this study will be helpful for the legislative to repave the legislating to garment workers.

### **1.6 Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to identify occupational health hazards among female workers in the readymade garment factories of Dhaka EPZ as well as other industries of Bangladesh and to improve the overall production of garment industries, developing female workers health and safety issues are the main factors.

### **1.7 Objectives of the Study**

This research has been directed with having some specific objectives which are as follows:

1. To clarify the concepts of health rights of the garment workers of Dhaka EPZ and other garment workers of Bangladesh.
2. To identify the health status of female worker's in the industry.

3. To estimate the relationship of occupational factors such as length of service, working hours and nature of job with physical problem.
4. To examine the legal reasons for the protection of health rights of the garment workers.
5. To evaluate the measure for enforcement of health rights of the garment workers.
6. Ensure the equal health rights for the women workers.
7. Improve the working condition and environment in working places.

### **1.8 Research Questions**

Some questions have raised when examining and arranging the research work. The questions related to my study are:

1. Why they become interested to work in Dhaka EPZ?
2. Do they get more facilities in this area?
3. How working conditions and environments are affecting?
4. Do they get any rest for some time?
5. Is the sanitation system of these RMG industries in Dhaka EPZ good or so-so?
6. Do they get medical and health facilities from the industry owners?
7. Are female garments workers aware about their medical facilities?
8. Do garments have any role to make them aware of their health issues?
9. What kind of helps is needed for them?
10. Which steps are taken by the factory owners and the government to solve their problems?
11. Is WWA trying to protect labour rights?
12. What are the socio-economic conditions of the female garment workers?
13. For which reason they leave their villages?
14. Why are they interested to work in spite of huge difficulties?
15. Are they involved with other jobs?

### **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

Research is a vast project. It takes much time, much proper use of time and careful observation. The help of related population is necessary to complete a good research work. The availability of

primary and secondary data helps the work to be a better research project. But I had to face some problems during my work time which are as follows:

1. Unavailability of secondary data such as books and writings on it which are strongly related with health problems of female garment workers of Dhaka EPZ.
2. The DEPZ authority was mostly unhelpful as worker/labour is a very sensitive issue.
3. Due to short time the sample size of the research was limited.
4. As I am a student the financial resource was also limited.
5. Time killing traffic jam and strike also hampered my regular tasks.
6. Many female garment workers were unwilling or afraid of to say something due to fear.
7. To them, the other name of time is money. So, they were not agreed to waste any time.
8. Many of them were advised by their masters to hide the reality.

In spite of the presence of these problems, I tried my best to make a good and effective research work. My work would be a better one if I didn't have to compromise with these obstacles.



**CHAPTER-02**  
**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

There are a huge number of literature and research on female garment workers of Bangladesh. Most of the writers and researchers are involved in the rights of female garment workers, their problems and harassments in the working places. They highlighted those problems which are related to their reproductive health. They also discussed their daily routines, working style of the workers and the condition of the environments where they works. As a result, there is not any dearth of literature on this topic. News of some daily newspapers also helps me to finish this work by providing important information. My research will be an incomplete one without the help of the following literatures:

### **2.1 Health and Nutritional Status of Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis by Md. Riaduzzaman.**

In this article, Md. Riaduzzaman has mentioned that the garment industry is growing at an exponential speed in Bangladesh contributing a positive impact on the economic growth. Because of cheap labour, this sector has developed here rapidly. The garment factories involve about 13 lack 20 thousand female (more than 80%) and only 2 lack 80 thousand male workers. Women in low income male headed households and women heads of household have been particularly engaging in these jobs where 50% of them are adolescent girls. Almost all of the women are migrated from rural areas and living in urban slums and squatters.

Mr. Zaman has followed mainly the analytical approach as well as socio-legal approach. Primary data were collected from interviews with women garment workers, case study and structured questionnaire. Garment factories, legislations, books, research papers, journals, reports and news were the sources of secondary data.

The nutritional situation of garment worker in the country are very scares. Although in course of time, the BMI has been increased, the overall nutritional situation is very poor. Mr. Zaman has related Poverty and nutrition in his article in the context of Bangladeshi women. Then he explained the conditions of the female Bangladeshi garment workers that is not so good. Most of the garment factories do not follow the labor law and ILO conventions. In most cases the workers cannot enjoy the weekly holidays are forced to work 14-16 hours per day, sometimes the whole night. Sometimes it is compulsory and forceful. There is no housing facilities, no maternity leave, no doctors or first aid, no sufficient light and ventilation, no pure drinking water

and toilets for the workers. In many cases, monthly wage and overtime payments are not paid in due time. Sometimes their payments remain outstanding for two or three months. Women workers are deprived from equal wage, equal dignity, equal rights and equal promotions. Most alarming news is that many of the female garment workers run the risk of rape and sexually harassment or engaged in sex at the workplace and STD (*Sexually Transmitted Diseases*). Even women are threatened with dismissal if they speak out.

However, these characteristics differ between female workers employed in the garment factories located in the DEEPZ and those located outside the DEEPZ. Mr. Zaman has categorized the female garment workers as seven categories which are- Age, Marital status, Level of Education, Migration, Poverty, Health -Nutrition and Living Condition. Then he analyzed Five Case studies- almost all the Case studies showed that they poor migrants from village, low wage-earners (tk. 1200-2200 per month), young (age 20-32, except one), less educated (except one), unmarried, widow, divorced or abandoned by the husband. Most of them are saving money to meet the dowry demand of marriage or to buy some lands. As they are earners, they can buy egg, milk or fish. They are not so aware of their health.

At last, Mr. Zaman suggested some recommendations relating to proper implementations of National Women Policy and International Labour Organization rules, working hour, free mid-day meal, providing medical facilities, air condition or ventilation system, fire alarm, easy exits, wage rate, insurance benefits, nutritional knowledge and future diseases. As the women are weaker than men they are neglected in every sphere of life, nutrition is very much essential for better health and for better economy of the country.

## **2.2 Health Impact of Women's Wage Employment: A Case Study of the Garment Industry of Bangladesh by Pratima Paul-Majumder.**

The garment industry alone has opened-up a big opportunity for women in Bangladesh for gainful employment with up to 69 percent of the women working in the formal industrial sector. Ms. Majumder has shown in her paper that the female workers employed in the garment industry of Bangladesh had to pay a high price in terms of ill health to acquire a socio-economic status in the society with their wage employment. But better productivity can be expected from a better health condition. Mostly uneducated Bangladeshi female garment workers have nothing but their

cheap labour in the context of the widespread poverty prevailing in the country. Compared to men, they suffer more illness when they entered the job market. They also have to bear the double burden of work for wages and household work.

The data of this article were collected using a structured questionnaire. 426 female workers and 245 male garment workers of 32 selected garment factories were selected where the majority of the workers said that they enjoyed healthier life before entering the garment industry but it deteriorated after joining this job. Much common diseases are cough, cold and fever. After that the most prevalent illness was physical weakness and dizziness. All the employers agreed that workers, especially female workers were weak and suffered from malnutrition. Even they fainted during the work. Table II showed the physical problems like eye trouble, cough, cold and fever, Headache, Weakness, Jaundice, Stomach upset/Diarrhoea, Urinary infection etc. are severe after joining. The workers did not enjoy a weekly holiday and have to work even in illness. They usually are not granted a paid leave but the high rank holders can enjoy it. In our social system, women are the last to eat, and as such, in most cases they have the least to eat which is also true to the female garment workers.

Gender discrimination is very common in this sector. They earn less than their male counterparts. It has a bad affect on their daily food- the source of nutrition. Even the female garment workers want to save more. The married female workers spent their earnings more on their children's well-being rather than on their own food and medical Care. They enjoy less time for sleeping, rest and recreation. Moreover, some diseases related to menstrual problems, contraceptive use, pregnancies, sexual harassment and sexually transmitted diseases (STD) are acute among them. These are likely to lead to high maternal mortality and morbidity. About 30 per cent of the sick garment workers did not get any treatment for their sicknesses. Although their living conditions developed, they had very limited access to doctors. A worker may suffer from headache or pain in the eye because garment workers need the intensive use of eyes and also requires a great deal of patience.

In the article, Ms. Majumder mentioned that It has been found that, on an average, provides about 12 hours of labour, whereas the standard work hour advised by the Labour Law of 1965 is 8 hours. They get a lunch break of only 30 to 45 minutes. In most cases, there are absence of Leave Facilities, Transport Facilities, Health Insurance Facilities and Medical Facilities. Many of

the female garment workers found cannot continue her work in the garment industry for a long time due to disability and fatigue arising from occupational hazards and workplace stress.

Most of the garment factory buildings are not designed with fire-escape where fire is one of the greatest dangers for workers and fire occurs in one or two factories each year. Still today no effective measures have been taken to control fire in the factories. Moreover, various incidents of mishappenings that may affect their mental health. Many of them are treated badly by the management and male co-workers. They are also harassed by the local mastans and polices in the streets while commuting. They are also insecure in their residing slums.

A large number of the garment workers, particularly the female garment workers, suffered from various illnesses after starting work in the garment industries which is the result of overwork, uncongenial working conditions and above all because of wide- ranging labour law violations. Ms. Majumder suggested of a two- shift working system, the implementation of labour laws regarding employing a qualified medical practitioner and installing firefighting equipments and the introduction of health insurance and health education program would ease the health problems of the female garment work.

### **2.3 Health and Occupational Safety for Female Workforce of Garment Industries in Bangladesh by S Akhter, AFM Salahuddin , M. Iqbal , ABMA Malek and N Jahan.**

This article has presented the health problems and safety issues of female workforce of garment industries in Bangladesh based upon the industry environment, their residential environment, working condition, age, problem of health, causes of diseases, causes of fire accident and their medical facilities. At present, the readymade garment industry (RMG) is a highly globalized industry. The overwhelming success of the RMG sector of Bangladesh has moved its status in the global context in terms of economic and social development indicators which has opened up a new door of economic emancipation for Bangladesh. It emerged as value chain member of EU, USA cloth merchants and retails.

This study was conducted on 20 selected garment industries of different categories located mainly in Dhaka city based on questionnaire. 300 female workers of different sections were asked questions where they found the physical problems like Asthma, Back pain, Eye problem,

Headache, Allergy and other diseases are existing among the female workers. Most of the low paid female workers suffer from acute shortage of medicine that is costly for them. Female force engaged in the garment industries are also suffering from malnutrition, anemia, gastric, dysentery, diarrhea, respiratory problem, gynecological problems, tuberculosis and urine infection etc. They do not get maternity leave with pay for more than 30 to 60 days that is the clear breaking of government rules. The pregnant female workers suffer from malnutrition, anemia, along with other complications. But they do not have access to proper health care for this kind of ailments. Moreover, gender equity status and existing disparity depriving female workers from the public health care system. As a result, they are bound to go to half trained midwife or village quack. Sometimes, female workers having different health problems are compelled to go to the village home.

Garment workers working in the urban center live around the very unhygienic slums of urban and semi urban areas where they face many problems like proper sanitation facilities, safe drinking water and uninterrupted electricity etc. The survey found that those who live in both slum and semi slum residence mostly suffer from community diseases also. On the other hand, garment industries and fire are closely related to each other in Bangladesh. Most of the deaths and injuries are caused by locked and/or inadequate means of escape in such factories. The survey found that most of garment industries has no designated first aid sections that can be dealt with immediately. However, garment industries in some particular industrial area in Dhaka found that industry owners are now much more concerned about fire safety.

Good working environment can protect many small and big injuries. Very few garment industries in Bangladesh take necessary steps to ensure the worker's health security. Garment industry in Bangladesh can be successful for a very short time by developing work environment of female workforce but if they have not planned and implemented some very essential health and safety rules that industry will suffer and eventually close. At last, the authors suggested that legal requirement of industry act has to be ensued properly like cleanliness, disposal of wastes and effluents, ventilation and temperature, artificial humidification, fire safety management system, lighting, pure and safe drinking water supply, more toilets, latrines and urinals, fulltime medical care and first aid treatment with female doctor and highly trained nurses for female workers, Maternity leave & weekly holiday with pay, equal wages, trade union etc. to meet the basic standards.

## **2.4 Health Hazards and Labour Laws in Bangladesh: A Narrative-based Study on Women Garment Workers by Syeda Sharmin Absar.**

Good health is the pre-condition of the worker's good performance. Because of many diseases like Headache , Musculoskeletal pain , Weakness / anemia , Fever, Fainting, Chest pain/heart disease, Cold/cough, Eye pain, Ear pain, Stomach pain/vomiting tendency, Diarrhoea/stomach upset/dysentery, Less appetite, Jaundice, Urinary infection, Skin disease, Pox and other illness, many of the garment workers become often absent from work. Women workers not only suffer from these illnesses but also suffer from genito-urinary infections and sexually transmitted diseases (STD) like urinary infections, HIV AIDS, STD and skin diseases. Most of the garment factory buildings are overcrowded, congested, poorly ventilated and workers are exposed to toxic substances and dust. Very few workers use protective masks. Women workers suffer from female-related illnesses because of unhygienic conditions of the factory latrines. Young women avoid drinking water to avoid going to smelly and dirty toilets. However, it is reported that, women workers were in better health before they started working for the RMG sector.

In spite of better conditions and wages in EPZ (Export Processing Zone) factories than in non-EPZ factories, health problems among women workers in both kinds of factories are not much different. By working in the garment factories, most of the female workers have become able to contribute in the family income, got the right of decision making and have treated as an honoured person. But in exchange they have to pay a lot for their health. Sometimes, they have to engage in extra-social relationships for some extra income which is the reason of many health risks. Another health hazard is abortion where one-fourth of the abortions take place among unmarried workers and most women seek the help of quacks.

Most shocking news is that, the female workers want to avoid compulsory medical expenditures than male workers due to save money or time and absence of leave facilities. Many female garment workers reported that medical facilities were not provided by the factory.

Although the presence of many effective labour laws, the poor, helpless but hard working workers are deprived of their essential and fundamental rights. Because of lack of education, resource and awareness violation of the laws are happening. On the same side, because of the lack of enforcement of the laws, workers often suffer from health problems both at work and home.

**2.5 Study on Change in Attitudes and Behavior of Garment Owners, Managers and Workers towards Gender and Reproductive Health Issues by Abul Barkat, Murtaza Majid, Rowshan Ara, Golam Mahiyuddin, Matiur Rahman, Avijit Poddar, Asmar Osman, Md. Shahnewaz Khan, Md. Badiuzzaman and Abdullah-Al-Hussain.**

Bringing in about 76 percent of the country's total merchandize export earnings, the readymade garment (RMG) industry has become a key sector of Bangladesh economy. But the garment workers are not much aware about the existing health care system. Since 2006, UNFPA has been supporting BGMEA under project "*Promotion of Reproductive Health, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the garment Sector*" (2006-2010) including 450-garment factory with 450,000 garment workers under the area of Malibagh, Mirpur, Chittagong and Narayangong. This study was directed to unveil the RH status and comparison in the RH/RR status of the garment workers between UNFPA/BGMEA intervention and non-intervention garments where both quantitative and qualitative techniques were followed. Total number of sample factories was 24, intervention (12) and non-intervention factories (12).

At first, the authors described some Socio-economic Characteristics of Garment Workers. Then it was described about Awareness and Practice on Health Issues. Intervention factories hold better positions compare to non-intervention factories in both fields. The garment workers of intervention factories are more cautious in socio-economic, demographic and reproductive health issues. Most of the intervention garment workers go to the clinic when necessary. There is an employment of qualified medical officer on part time basis and a trained nurse on full time basis to provide health care services inside the factory in addition to BGMEA-UNFPA project supported service. Even the intervention garment workers have much knowledge on family planning, reproductive health, RR, gender equality and STD. Health education was imparted to the garment workers. On the whole, the workers from the intervention factories were more aware about both RH and RR issues, Antenatal Care, Child Delivery and Postnatal Care as compared to those from the non-intervention factories.

At last, the authors put some Suggestions and Recommendations for Garment Owners/Managers, Garment Workers, Garment Factories, Providers/Clinics, BGMEA/ UNFPA and Project to ensure a healthy working environment for the garment workers.



## **2.6 Working Conditions and Reproductive Health Status of Female Garments Workers of Bangladesh by Shakila Matin Mridula and Ms.Khoshnur Afrin Khan.**

The RMG sector has created a great economic opportunity for the women of Bangladesh. Almost 80% are women among 2.2 million workers of this sector. Despite the great effort which these brave women working hard day and night are showing, are not getting the due recognition from their employers which they very rightly deserve. Not only that, they are even denied of their basic rights. When it comes to their reproductive health and other related issues, very less importance are given. Workers have to work for day and night, sometimes 12 hours a day. Even the situation is so worse that the rate of miscarriage among garments workers is very high and most of them experience abortions more than once.

This research has been conducted with both quantitative and qualitative method. Interview Method and Sampling Method (100 female garments workers from Narayanganj and Dhaka) are widely used. This female garment workers were mostly uneducated or little educated and young. This age is proper time for education but they are deprived of that. Most of the garment workers lead very poor lives. Most of them live in slum areas with inhuman living conditions. Some of them are the only wage-earners of their family. Some of them have to live with their children and mothers. Their salary is only tk.2500-3200. Sometimes this small amount of money cut for absence of work on a particular day. Sometimes they do not get the payment on time. For this reason, to earn some more money they have to work overtime and sometimes they feel pressure from the authority to work overtime. So when they even fail to survive with this amount, how could they pay attention on their reproductive health issue? Every day they work with different hazards and risks. The respondent informed that they are not aware about occupational safety, health and other fundamental rights and factory management do not organize any education or training program for them at workplace. They are not aware even about early and unwanted childbearing, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy-related illness etc. Moreover, long working hours, in-adequate weekly holidays and rest are the prime factors contributing to the hazardous health of RMG workers. There is no job security, social security, gratuity for them.

The common physical problem the workers face is Headache. Moreover the study shows that a good number of workers face eye problems, respiratory problems, nausea, vomiting, back pain, anemia, Stomach ache/Ulcers, Fainting, backache, Skin irritation, Pain in joints etc. Many of

them have to face menstrual problems. The toilets they use are not hygienic. None of them receive any rest and facility of taking safe drinking water. Most of the cases, there is no doctor, first aid, sufficient light and ventilation. And maternity leaves are absence. Harassment at workplaces is a common phenomenon and they didn't want to talk about this issue because shame and fear.

RMG sector in Bangladesh has come a long way in last two decades but working conditions and environment are not so friendly and secured enough for the female garments worker's reproductive health issues and rights. Most of the garment factories do not follow the labour law and ILO conventions. Most of the cases the workers cannot enjoy the weekly holiday. There is other form of sex discrimination. Women workers are deprived from Equal wage, Equal dignity, Equal rights and Equal promotions. At last, this study suggests a tripartite (Government-Employer-Workers) consensus on how to improve the working environment and occupational safety of RMG workers, while striving for excellence in a competitive world market.

## **2.7 Harassment of women garment workers in Bangladesh by F. Begum, R. N. Ali, M.A. Hossain and Sonia B. Shahid.**

Women workers account for the lion's share of the total labour force employed in the RMG sector. But women were exploited easily as cheap source of labour due to lack of technical knowledge and training.

Three garment factories from Mirpur area under Dhaka district were selected for this research work and 90 women workers were taking from each of the three garment factories as the sample. In this study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used.

In the garment industry, women are mostly employed at the lower category of jobs where she has to work at a stretch for more than 6 hours without any break. Sometimes they are not even allowed to go to the toilets or to drink water. Sometimes they lose interest in work and become depressed. Their wages are very low and irregular. Most of the jobs in the garment industry are temporary and not secured. On the other side, this very young women are harassed by colleagues, by police, by mastans etc, even they harassed sexually. Most of the women workers lived in unhygienic conditions of the slum areas. The condition of the toilet was very unhygienic. Urinary infection results from the use of these unhygienic toilets. Not only that but also they

suffer from illnesses and diseases like headache, eye trouble, ear ache, gastritis problem musculoskeletal pain etc. which are the results of long working hours.

Working in the garment factory severely affects women's health, as they are confined in a small factory. Moreover, the hot and humid climate of Bangladesh makes the environment of these small factory buildings unhygienic and this condition is largely responsible for widespread prevalence of some illness and diseases among the garment workers. Low back pain, sore feet, varicose veins, swelling in the legs, general muscular fatigue and other health problems have been associated with prolonged standing. Workers also suffer from some kind of weakness. This occurred due to long hours of work and low quality of food that they took for lunch. During the peak season, the workers are required to work overtime after working 9 hours a day. Female workers also encountered various mishaps while returning home late at night after finishing overtime work. The employers do not pay any heed to this exploitation. So, the govt. should take initiatives to ensure the health security of the female garment workers as well as the workers must be aware about labour rights and occupational safety.

## **2.8 Present Status of Garment workers in Bangladesh: An analysis by Md Zafar Alam Bhuiyan.**

Rising of RMG industry in Bangladesh occurred during a time when the economy's health was poor shaped and it was plagued by various problems. Md Zafar Alam Bhuiyan has mentioned in this article that our bread is earned from garments industries as 78 per cent of our foreign earnings come from this sector. Bangladesh has been turned to a country of garments industries from a country of the agricultural land. The study is based mainly on economic and social status of 100 garments workers (selected by random sampling) from Rampura and Badda areas of Dhaka City. A detailed questionnaire was made for collection of primary data and only primary was used in this study. The ratio of the workers Male: Female was 9:11.

Because of the remarkable growth of RMG export from Bangladesh, the sector has become the life blood of Bangladesh. Before the innovation of Garments industry of late 1970s the unemployed were the burden to the Agro based economy of Bangladesh. Then the following social problems were found in the rural areas of Bangladesh which used lead the country as a country of poor, poorly developed infra structures, lack of education, Social unrest, Malnutrition, Marriage in underage, Polygamy, Dirty village politics.

Then this sector emerged as a new hope for the young women of Bangladesh who are doing restless work from dawn to dusk even up to late night. But their wages are not in the satisfactory level. Not only that, any time, without any reason they may be suspended, demotion, transferred even sacked from the company. Very few companies abide by the rules of Govt., BGMEA. All of the garments workers are ill fed and ill clad. Hardly can they spend for their accommodation after purchasing their food stuffs. Most of the garments workers are live in the rented slums with inhumane and miserable life. They suffer from malnutrition and unhygienic complexities. They have limited access in Savings and bank deposits. Very little time for recreation and amusement as they have to work day-night even in the holidays. They suffer from various diseases including malnutrition. Still they are ill paid. They cannot afford their foods, cloths, housing, medicines and educations. On the contrary, their children are deprived from their care.

At the end of the study, some recommendations were placed to improve the present conditions of the garments workers as well as garments sector of the country.

## **2.9 Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh by Syeda Sharmin Absar.**

As a hundred per cent export- oriented industry the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh employs women form over 90 per cent of the production workers whose income is in very much lower level. The multimillion dollar garment industry is a major draw for these uneducated or little educated women who migrate to urban areas due to floods, cyclones and abject poverty. Thus, they are easily hired and fired. To conduct this research work, the author interviewed 35 women workers of different occupations, age, education level and wage in Gulshan and Badda areas using narrative-based in-depth conversations without any set questionnaire.

The workers of this multi-billion dollar industry face problems in getting decent accommodation, transport, and commute security and suffer from many diseases. Low wages and lack of access to basic needs compel workers to compromise with the problems of living in urban centers. Accommodation in the city at present is not adequate for 1.5 million workers. A 'bostee' is equivalent to a squatter settlement. Those living in bosteess are subject to unhealthy conditions. It is also an insecure existence in the sense that sometimes bosteess are uprooted by the law enforcing agencies because they are built on others' land without permission and proper papers. On the other hand, living in the mess is quite insecure for women as these are owned by

'mastans', or local touts. Another major problem in the city is transport. Harassment by police and harassment by men on the streets are reported by female workers. Young or not-so-young, married or unmarried, pretty or not-so-pretty, smart or not-so-smart, all women of reproductive age told the same thing: that when they get off from work at night they fear men will stop them on dark roads and take away their 'izzat' (honour).

All 35 workers began developing health problems. They suffer from eye strain, headaches, backaches, flu, fever, cough, gastric problems, and general weakness. They identified long working hours, poor working conditions, working on their feet and lack of adequate rest due to the double burden of work at home and factory as reasons for their health problems. The overall situation of the workers of EPZ Factories is much better than the workers of non-EPZ factories. However, in spite of all these problems they are reluctant to unionize. Instead, they asked the author to convey their messages to the proper authority so that they can have better living conditions in Dhaka.

## **2.10 Problems surrounding wages: the readymade garments sector in Bangladesh by Syeda Sharmin Absar.**

Bangladesh today is considered an economic competitor in terms of international garment manufacturing by other countries of the region where a rapid increase in the number of women has been occurred. But their wages are fixed far below the minimum wage rate. 35 women workers of 2 garment industries from Gulshan and Badda were interviewed to conduct this research work.

Bangladesh has the cheapest unit labour cost in South Asia. Though the wages are low, the working hours are very long. They are asked to work whole months at a time without a single day off. Moreover, the women workers face wage differentials, insecurity and discrimination at various levels and places. Sometimes they eat potatoes for days. Boiled potatoes and water. Most of the time some of them go to work without having breakfast. It has a bad effect on their reproductive health. They are continuing to struggle for food, wages, overtime payment and daily expenses. The law enforcing agencies are not strict in enforcing factory laws, it appears that many of the problems are due to institutional failure. The male-oriented trade unions are also not so helpful for the workers.

However, the female garment workers identified six major needs those were job security, physical security, higher wages, regular and timely payment of wages, subsidized accommodation arrangements and better working conditions.

### **2.11 Upward Occupational Mobility Among Female Workers in the Garment Industry of Bangladesh, a Research Report by Pratima Paul-Majumder & Sharifa Begum.**

As well-known women constitute 85% of the workers of RMG Sector but hardly a few could be found holding higher level jobs in managerial, administrative or supervising capacity. Why this is so, what are the bottlenecks for upward occupational mobility of women in this sector, how this can be overcome and what needs to be done for this; questions and concerns like these have led to this study.

This study is based on data collected through five structured questionnaires in five different organizations. However, the authors used some indicators to find the answers of the related questions where some indicators are directly related to my topic. The indicators are-

(a) working condition, (b) working hours, (c) monthly earning, (d) gender differential in wage rate, (e) transport facilities and (f) housing.

In many cases, working conditions in the garment industry do not allow the female workers to continue their work. It was found in a study more than 51% of the female workers (who changed jobs at least once) changed their job due to adverse working condition. Night work and overtime work are very common in these factories due to seasonality in production. As the labour requirement increases during the peak season, workers are required to work overtime which must affect their health. Their take-home monthly income are not so high gender differential in wage rate is also very common. That is why they cannot afford spend more money for nutrition and medical purpose. It was found that the female workers had to commute daily on an average more than 2 kilometres. Many of them commute on foot which also affects their health. Their housing systems are also not much better. Not only had that frequently faced harassment by the local touts while commuting. Other facilities like meal/Tiffin allowance, paid leave, maternity leave, Eid and other bonuses are also rare among the female workers compared to their male counterparts.

## **2.12 Export Processing Zones in five countries: The Economic and Human Consequences** by **Dennis Shoemith.**

EPZs are the most characteristic tactic used in the export-oriented industrialization. This study is the result of research under taken in Ireland, The Philippines, Malaysia, Sri-Lanka and Taiwan is concerned with the impact on workers and their communities of an industrialization strategy. The five country reports are concerned with the life situation of the workers who are employed in the EPZs, and with the ways in which the zones affect local people in the area and the home communities of their workers.

The surveys of the zones in the countries begin and end with a basic question: Do the zones and the EOI (Export-oriented Industrialization) strategy they serve enables workers and the urban and the rural poor of the less developed countries to achieve a more just and human place in the societies? The author has categorized the EPZs in the following category that are:

1. The Characteristics of the Labour force
2. Wages and Conditions
3. Labour Regulations
4. TU Membership
5. Housing
6. Job Security and
7. Working Condition

All of the five countries have long colonial history.

**Ireland:** The Irish Exports with EOI and with EPZs has been presented as a success story. Most of their workers are young. Wage levels are slightly higher inside the zone. The labour health, safety, anti-pollution regulations and laws apply within the zone. Housing facilities are available for the far-comers. Only 4% replied negatively about the job security. Majority of the workers like their jobs.

**Taiwan:** EPZ was established as a central tactic to promote exported industrialization which reached in its goal. Workers are young and energetic. Satisfactory level of wages but the male workers receive some more. More than a third of the workers interviewed reported that their working environment had a negative effect on their health.

**The Philippines:** The Philippines established EPZs to come to light from the economic crisis. Workers of the zone were relatively well-educated but job satisfaction level is not so high. Wages of the zones were also not standardized. They have to work long.

**Malaysia:** The main reason of the establishment of EPZs was to shift towards an open, export-led industrial country from an import-oriented country. A large proportion of the workers surveyed were Malay women in the 18-29 years age group. Many of the workers migrated from rural areas. The working pattern was highly regulated. So, the work-related stress has led to a cases of mass hysteria and panic. 93% of the wages are daily rated. Overall wages in the zone were low and inadequate by local standards. Very few of the workers interviews (24.4%) stated that their working condition to be satisfactory while 58.5% stated that they were neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory.

**Sri Lanka:** Sri Lanka set EPZs for economic betterment. The Lankan employment pattern by industry was unlike that typical of the Taiwanese, Philippine and Malaysian zones. They were young, unmarried and came from rural areas. Their education level is high. The practice of political patronage in allocating state sector jobs is common in Sri Lanka. The overall factory discipline is so bad. Wages paid to production workers are fairly uniform and stipulated by the authority. Workers earnings were generally considered to be higher.

### **2.13 Between Conformity and Resistance: Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh by Petra Dannecker.**

Since the 70s the most noticeable feature of economic development in many Asian countries has been the employment of young women in industry. The increase of women workers in export-oriented factories became a long-state phenomenon in some countries. In Bangladesh, virtually overnight, women entered a highly visible form of employment in factory production, namely in garments. To conduct this study, 10 garment factories were selected.

However, the working conditions in the factories the women worked at were not uniform. Certain work-related problems were mentioned by the majority of the workers. Their salary is very low, working hours are long where overtime is a general feature. Their physical conditions as well as the safety measures in the factories are far from satisfactory. For example, the toilet



facilities are generally inadequate, that canteens are often missing and the medical care is not guaranteed.

Today's global economy offers new perspectives and new chances for the women of Bangladesh which has recently entered the global market. In a relatively short time they have been able to exploit the new opportunities but have also experienced new insecurities of control. In today's global economy many of the fashionable cloths we wear are made by these underpaid women workers and many pockets are filled by the low wages paid. Many women suffer from medical problems as a result of the long hours factory work. Now it is the high time that all have to contribute to strategies and opportunities to influence the restructuring process in a way that Many people benefit from it.

#### **2.14. Garment Workers in Bangladesh, a Research Monograph by Salma Chaudhury Zohir & Pratima Paul-Majumder.**

Garment industry in Bangladesh is not only accounts for the lion share of the export earnings of the country, but also accounts for a large part of the employment. The growth of export-oriented industries in Bangladesh in the last decade has created opportunities for factory jobs for women. In spite of the great contributions made to the national economy, the RMG sector in Bangladesh is beset with innumerable complains, such as wide scale labour lawlessness, exploitation of labour by low wage and overwork, large-scale social insecurity of female workers and occupational health hazards etc. A total of 673 workers from 32 garment factories were interviewed; of them 245 were male and 428 female. The workers were selected randomly.

As more and more women are coming out to work, they are likely to come in contact with occupational health hazards in increasing numbers. Almost all the workers asked said that they had healthy life before entering the garment industry. Eye trouble, headache, Cough & fever, weakness, jaundice, stomach upset, urine infection etc. are very common health problems among them. May be due to fatigue they cannot continue to work for a longer period of time. The two common accidents which often happen in the garment industry are- pricking of fingers by needle in the sewing section and hurting finger tips while buttoning in the finishing section. The relative medical expenditure by gender also confirms that the incidence of illness was higher in case of the females than the male workers. Even after coming out to work, the female workers don't

want to spend money on food. Taking leave due to sickness was more common among the lower income groups. They cannot receive sufficient maternity leave.

The female workers lacked training on basic cleanliness and sanitation. Although there were separate toilets for male and women, the workers had to seek, permission from the management to go to toilet.

Although the workers were willing to have health insurance, there was practically no positive response from the management. But as there is now location based concentration of factories, medical centre at each location would be beneficial for the garment workers as well as their employers.

**CHAPTER-03**  
**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were followed in order to obtain the actual story. The Research Methodology which is followed to conduct this study is stated below.

### **3.1 Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

In 1983, there were about 50 garment factories in the country. In 2004, this number had jumped to 4,000. In early 2009, there were about 4,500 garment factories in Bangladesh. On the other hand, there are more than 70 garment factories in Dhaka EPZ.

65 female garment workers were selected from 7 DEPZ garment factories and 17 from 2 Non-EPZ garment industries. I used random sampling to complete the research.

### **3.2 Research Area**

The Dhaka EPZ situated in Savar was chosen and 7 garment factories were selected randomly to conduct this research. Another 2 factories from Ashulia area were also chosen to understand the situation of Non-EPZ female garment workers.

### **3.3 Data Sources**

The data and information was collected from primary and secondary sources.

(1) **Primary sources** :- Interview of the female workers of the regarding field.

(2) **Secondary sources** :- books, journals, articles, newspapers, internet, web sources and so on.

### **3.4 Data Collection Technique and Time-Frame**

A structured questionnaire consists of closed-ended questions was provided to the respondents for the collection of data. I also used phone interview to collect data.

The garment workers were questioned directly and the questionnaires were filled in based on their response.

The data were gathered during the period of September to December, 2018.

### **3.5 Case Study**

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Case study is "a detailed account of the development of a person, a group of people or a situation over a period of time". It is a very useful method to explore the truth which is very much helpful to illustrate the depth and to

investigate their past, present and other things such as the reason behind why they came to this profession, the problems they face inside or outside the workplace etc. That is why I included several case studies to get some more information regarding their health, type of health hazards, workload, overtime, pressure, Leisure time and others.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed through Microsoft XL, Percentage, Arithmetic Mean and Graphical Representation (Column, Bar Diagram, Line Diagram, Pie Chart, doughnut chart and so on). I also used Tables for analyzing data.

**CHAPTER-04**  
**PRESENTATION OF DATA AND ANALYSIS**

This chapter is going to present gradually the information of the research based on the data collected from the respondents. The data collected from DEPZ industries will be presented and analyzed first, and then the data collected from Non-EPZ industries will be presented with researcher's own analysis.

#### **4.1 Medical Facility, Maternity Leave, Sickness & Others**

Medical/Health facility is one of the important basic needs of a human being. The Constitution of Bangladesh also ensures the provision of basic necessities. "It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to attain, through planned economic growth, a constant increase of productive forces and a steady improvement in the material and cultural standard of living of the people, with a view to securing to its citizens- the provision of the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care."<sup>(12)</sup>

"The State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the improvement of public health as moving its primary duties ..."<sup>(13)</sup>

##### **a. DEPZ Workers**

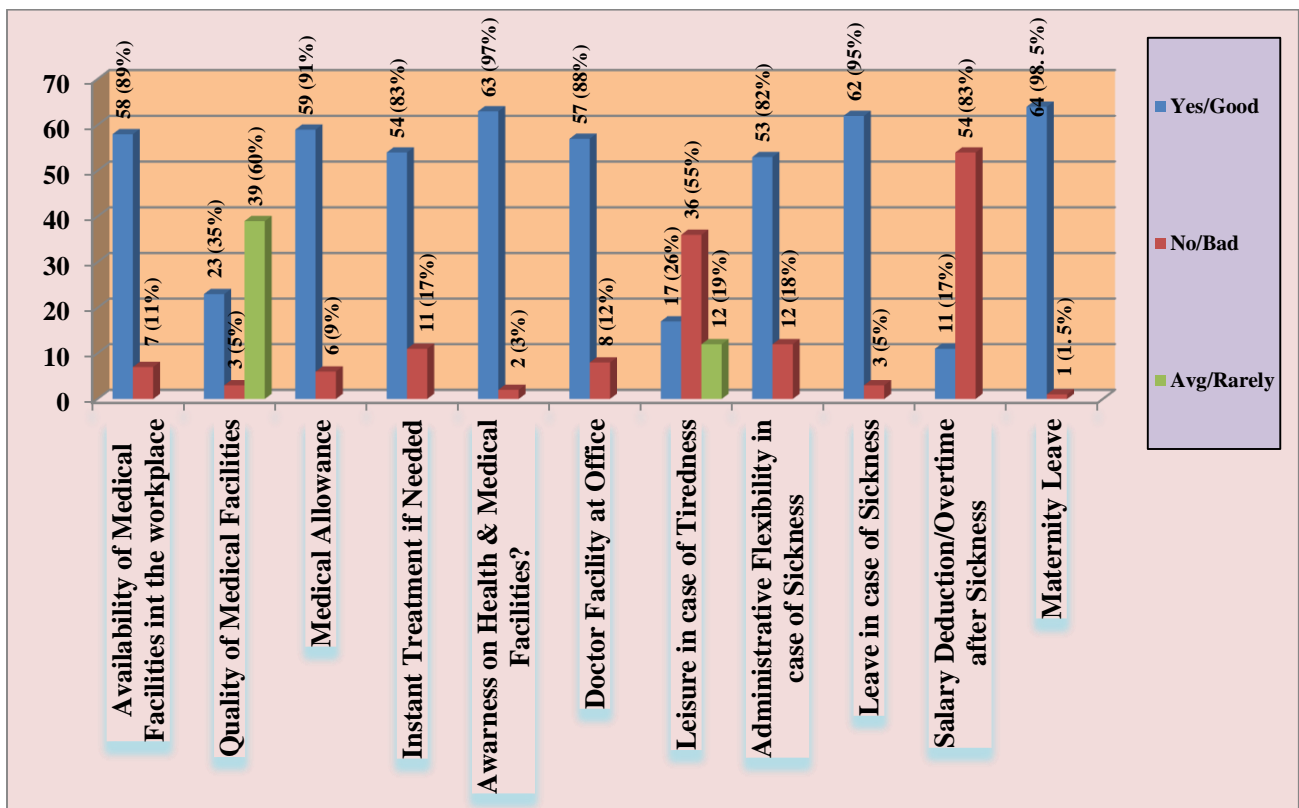
Every citizen has the basic right to adequate health care. The State and the government are constitutionally obliged to ensure health care for its citizens. The garment workers are also not the exception of that. Now let's see the situation of the health rights among the DEPZ Apparel industry first.

89% (58 out of 65) of the DEPZ female garment workers said that medical facility in their workplace is quite available where only 11% (7 out of 65) said that it is not available. The ratio is not dissatisfactory at all. 35% of the respondents said that the medical facilities they received is good while 5% said that it is not good. 60% said the quality is in average standard. Only 9% of the respondents said they do not get medical allowances while the lion's share (91%) receives the allowance facility.

Working in a garment factory is somewhat risky as they have to work with needles and operate sewing machines and others Hazardous tools. 83% of the workers obtain instant treatment if the needles pierced but 17% don't have instant access to this facility. 63 of the 65 participants are much aware on getting health and medical facilities, 2 of them are not. 88% of them said that there are doctors at their working sphere and 12% do not have doctors.

Leisure is also a part of labour. It is something like free time when one is free from doing something. If you do not get any time for leisure, your labour will be boring very soon. You will get no interest on it. So, leisure period is very important for them who work hard. Garment workers are such type of persons who deserve leisure whether it's for a short time. The Picture we get from the research is very frustrating. Only 26% of the workers get the opportunity to spend some time without working if they become tired. It is very rare for 19% of the participants to get leisure period. 55% of them never get any time to spend in leisure.

**Medical Facility & Others (Sample Size-65)**



**Graph 1:** Medical Facility (and others) among the DEPZ Female Garment Workers.

The factory authorities become flexible in case of sickness in 82% case where the authorities are not flexible in 18% case. 5% of the female employees do not get leave even they become sick. The comfort issue is that in 95% case they avail leave if they become sick but there is a big “BUT” that is their salary is deducted or has to do overtime work in 17% case after returning

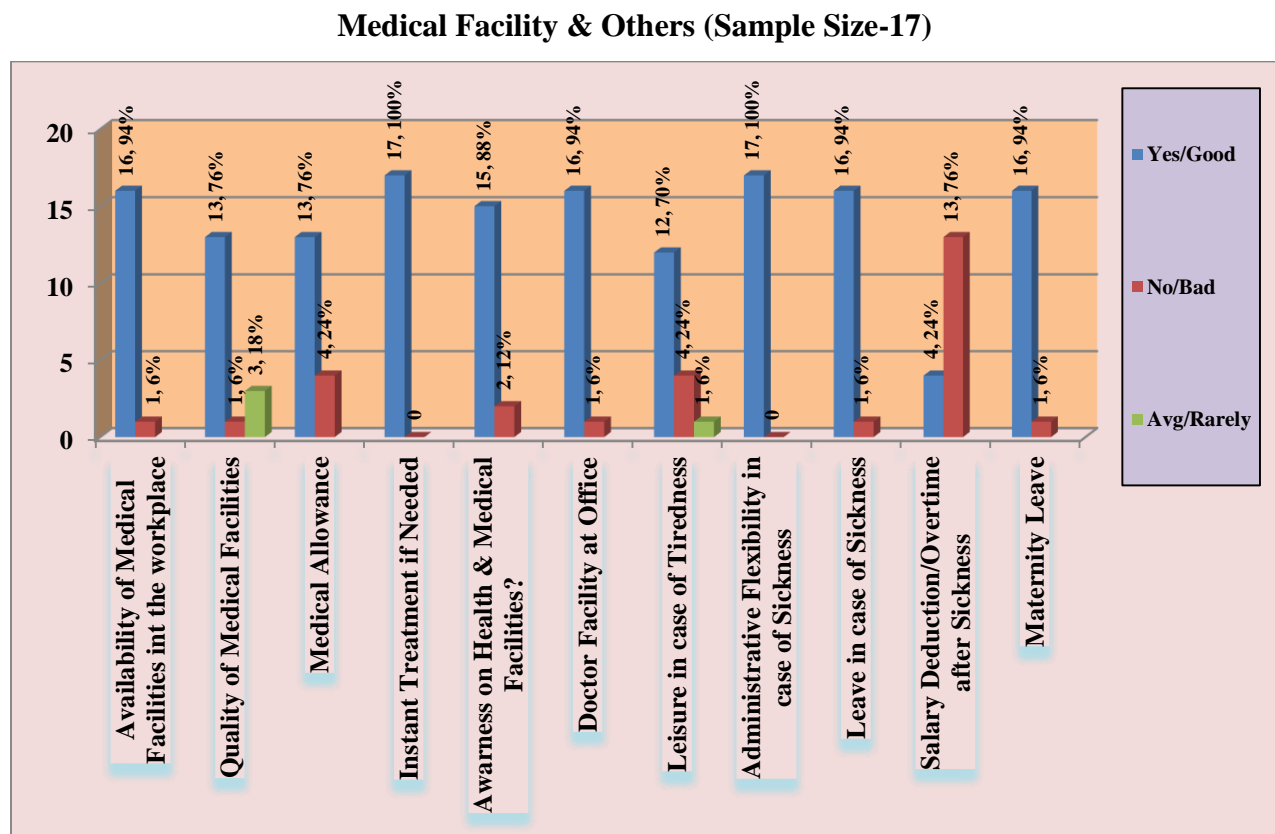


from leave. 83% of the authorities are quite malleable as they do not deduct salary or do not force them for overtime.

The Government of Bangladesh has declared that maternity leave should be increased to six months with full payment. <sup>(14)</sup> But the cruel truth is that 1.5% of the EPZ respondents are not getting this benefit which must be much painful for them to work leaving their new born baby at home. It is also detrimental to their reproductive health. 98.5% of the respondents said that the factories where they work try to follow the provision of maternity leave.

**b. Non-EPZ Workers**

Now, let see the situation of Non-EPZ garment factories.



**Graph 2:** Medical Facility (and others) among the Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers.

94% of the non-EPZ garment workers said that they avail medical facility in their working arena while only 6% are deprived of that facility. This availability was 89% among the DEPZ factory workers. 35% of the DEPZ workers said that the quality of the medical facility they get is good enough while 76% of the non-EPZ workers said that the quality is good. Only 6% said it is bad and the quality is average standard said by 18% non-EPZ garment workers. 76% of them received medical allowances and 24% are not received. Instant medical treatment is received by the 100% non-EPZ workers, if need. 88% of them are quite aware about their medical and health related rights when 12% are not. 94% of the non-EPZ workers have the doctor facility.

70% said that they get leisure in case of tiredness, 24% said never and 6% have said that it is very rare to get leisure. 100% of the non-EPZ workers said that their authority is flexible in their sickness. 94% said they can avail leave in case of sickness while 6% said that they cannot avail. 24% of them said their salary is deducted or have to do overtime work after returning from sickness leave but 6% said that it is not negative for them.

94% said that they get maternity leave.

#### **4. 2 Duration of Maternity Leave**

Maternity Leave a period of absence from work granted to a mother before and after the birth of her child. It is a period of time when a woman temporarily leaves her job to have a baby. <sup>(15)</sup>

Every working mother has the right to obtain maternity leave for six months which is ensured by the government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Maternity protection is a fundamental human and labour right and an indispensable element of comprehensive work-family policies. It is crucial to promoting maternal and child health and preventing discrimination against women in the workplace. The goal of maternity protection legislation is to enable women to combine their reproductive and productive roles successfully and to promote equal opportunities and treatment in employment and occupation, without prejudice to health or economic security. <sup>(16)</sup>

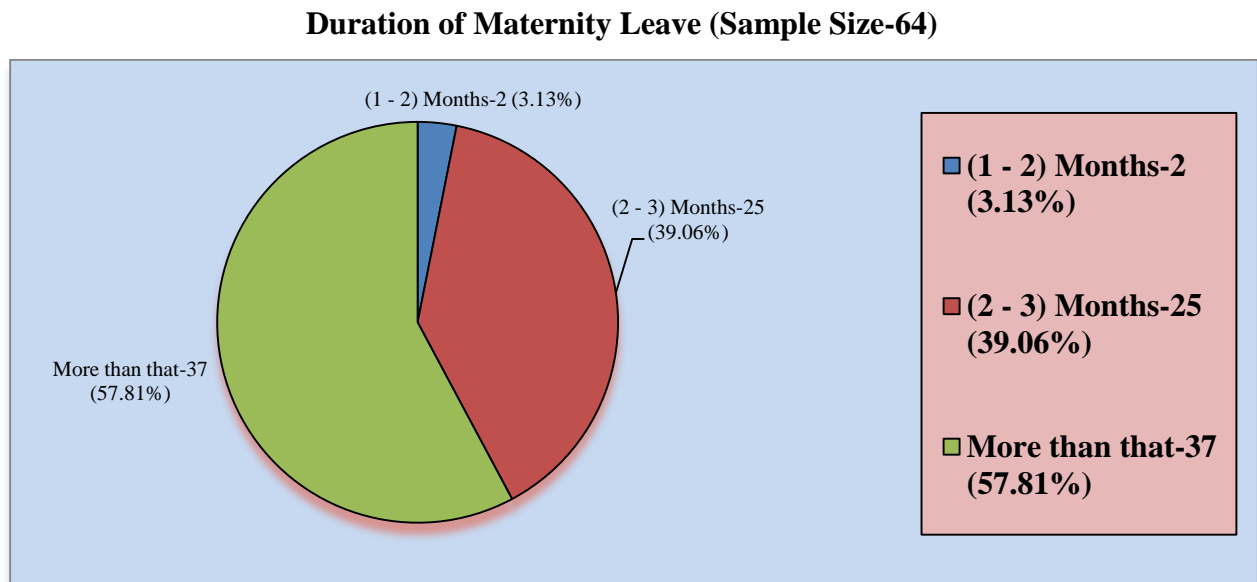
It is an employee benefit available in almost all countries. Parental leave has been available as a legal right and/or governmental program for many years, in one form or another. In 2014, the International Labour Organization reviewed parental leave policies in 185 countries and territories, and found that all countries except Papua New Guinea have laws mandating some form of parental leave. <sup>(17)</sup>

But it is a matter of great regret that maximum authorities except some govt. organizations are violating the provision of maternity leave. Let explain the real picture of our high profile RMG sector.

**a. DEPZ Workers**

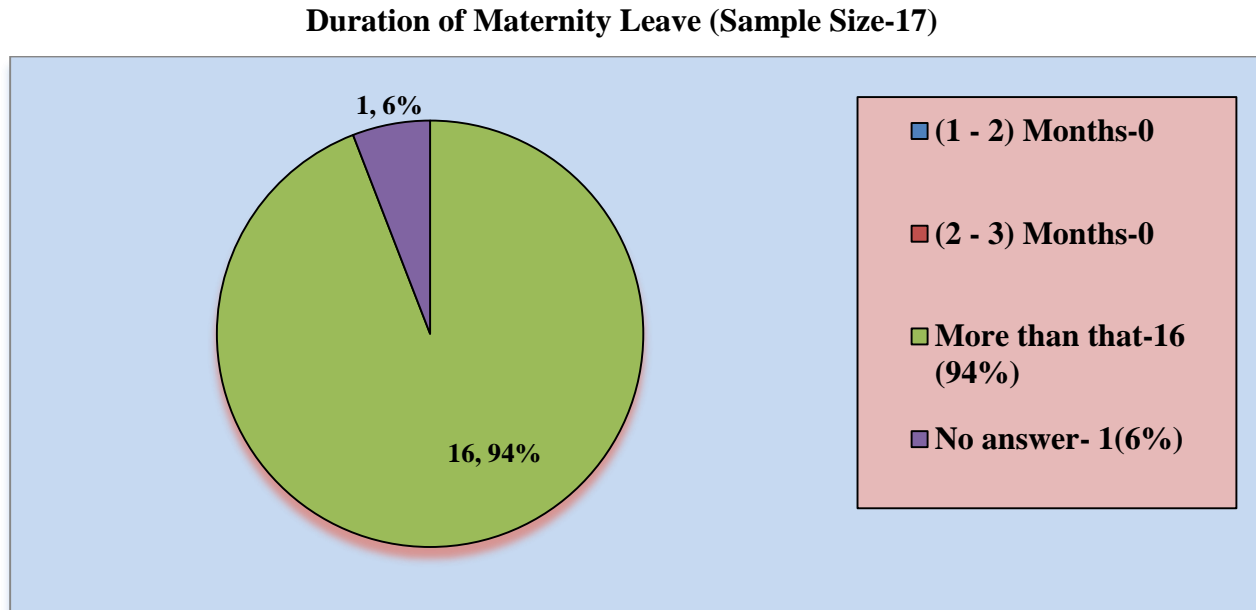
64 of the 65 DEPZ garment respondents said that they avail maternity leave. But the picture showed that many of the factory owners are not interested to let them enjoy the full duration of maternity leave.

3.13% of the respondents enjoy only 1 to 2 months of maternity leave. 39.06% enjoy maternity leave of 2 to 3 months while 57.81% enjoy more than that. But the ratio should be 100%. Even the EPZ factories are breaking the rules.



**Graph 3:** Duration of Maternity Leave (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

## b. Non-EPZ Workers



**Graph 4:** Duration of Maternity Leave (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

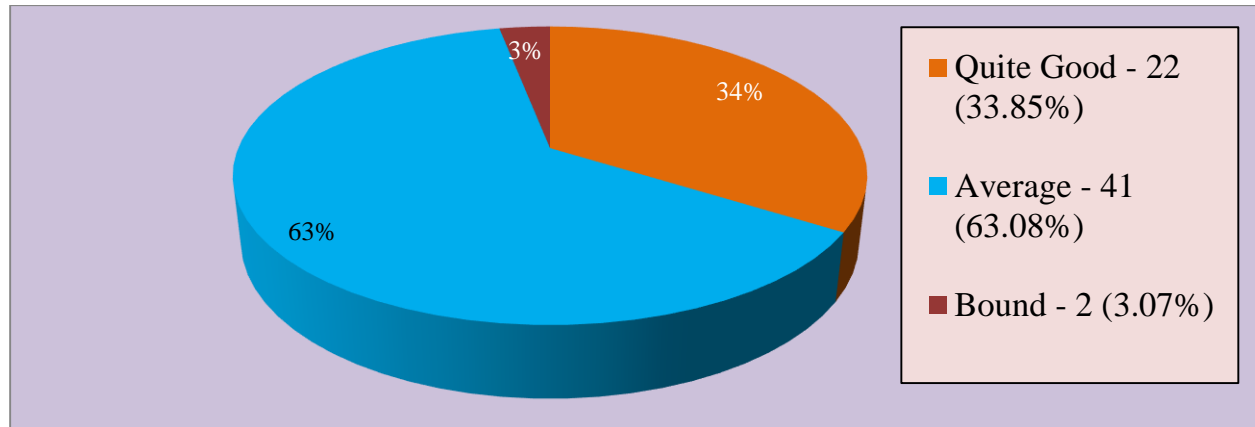
The story we found from Non-EPZ participants is encouraging. 16 of the respondents (94%) enjoy maternity leave for more than 2 to 3 months. 1 of the participant remain silent.

#### 4.3 Condition of Working Environment

A good Working Environment is the precondition of fruitful working. If the working territory is not adjustable the working result would be non profitable. A good working environment is one of the most important elements in making you feel good and for our activities to function and develop. The workers have the right to a safe and healthy workplace which is suitable for all who work in or visit them.

Working environment is affected by factors including health and safety, security and working hours. A poor working environment can damage one's health and put one safety at risk. The employer is legally responsible for ensuring good working conditions; they also have a responsibility to make them work safely. Healthy workplaces tend to exhibit a common set of traits that foster excellence, productivity and camaraderie.

## a. DEPZ Workers

**Condition of Working Environment (Sample Size-65)****Graph 5:** Condition of Working Environment (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

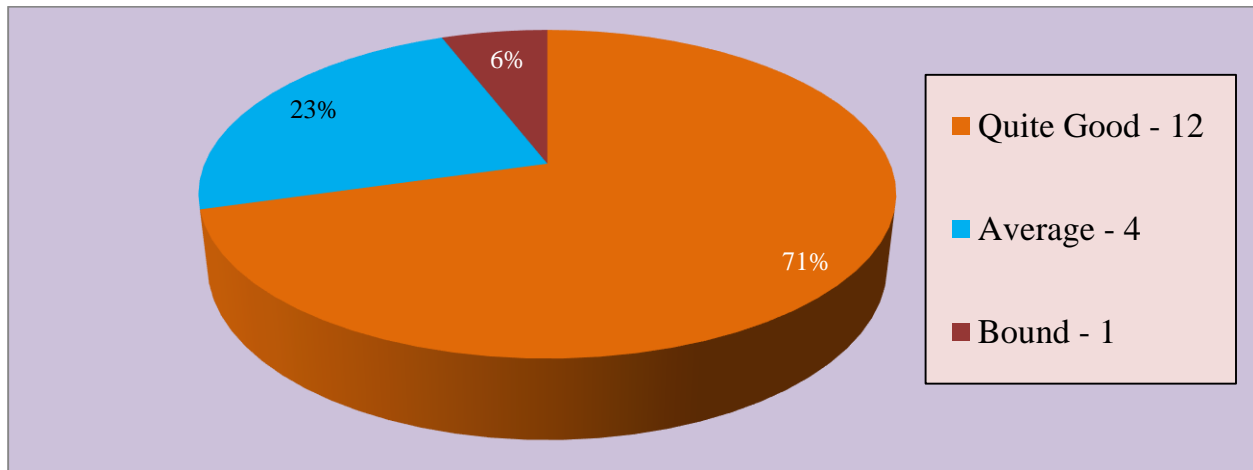
According to the above Pie Chart, we have found that, only 22 participants (33.85%) said that their working arena is quite good. Maximum female workers (41 respondents, 63.08% ) termed that the working condition is nothing but tolerable and average standard. 3% said as they have no other option they are bound to do this job in this condition.

It is very much unexpected from an industry of a field like Dhaka EPZ. The situation should be developed for our own sake. These brave women deserve a healthy, hygienic, sound and positive working environment.

## b. Non-EPZ Workers

In this case, we have invented something different from EPZ to Non-EPZ. It is 71%, who said that their working condition is quite good. This percentage was only 34 in EPZ that is less than half.

### Condition of Working Environment (Sample Size-17)



**Graph 6:** Condition of Working Environment (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

23% of the Non-EPZ respondents said that their working condition is ordinary- somehow meet the need. 6% expressed that they are bound to do this task.

It is very urgent to reform both the EPZ and Non-EPZ garment factories to ensure a better working environment as we earn our livelihood from this ground in broad sense. A sound and healthy working environment can ensure sound and healthy production.

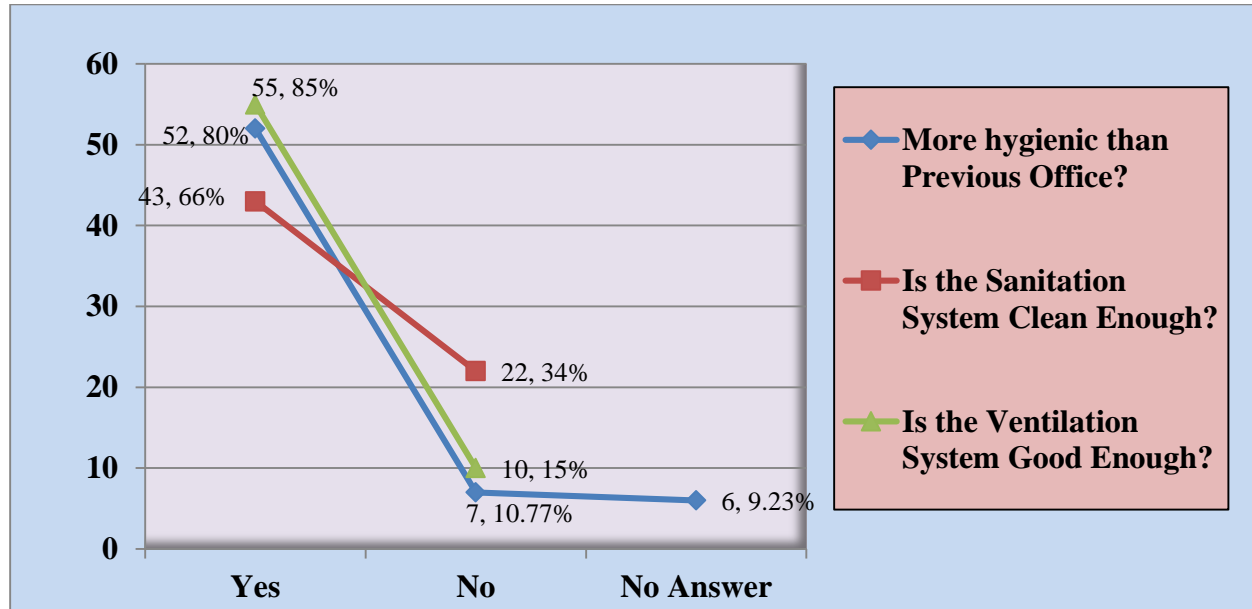
#### 4. 4 Hygienic Condition of Working Environment

We can call an office hygiene when we find it very neat and clean which protects the employees from hazards at work that may result in injury, illness or affect the well being of workers. This means hygienic working environment is related to the issues such as space, cleanliness, lighting and ventilation and adequate toilet, washing and changing facilities. A strong health and safety program of any industrial establishment can assure safety and sound health of its employees.<sup>(18)</sup> As the highest export earning sector, the garment factories of Bangladesh should be hygiene, neat and clean.

Each and every garment industry desires improved productivity but do they about think the safeties of their workers?

## a. DEPZ Workers

## Hygienic Condition of Working Environment (Sample Size-65)

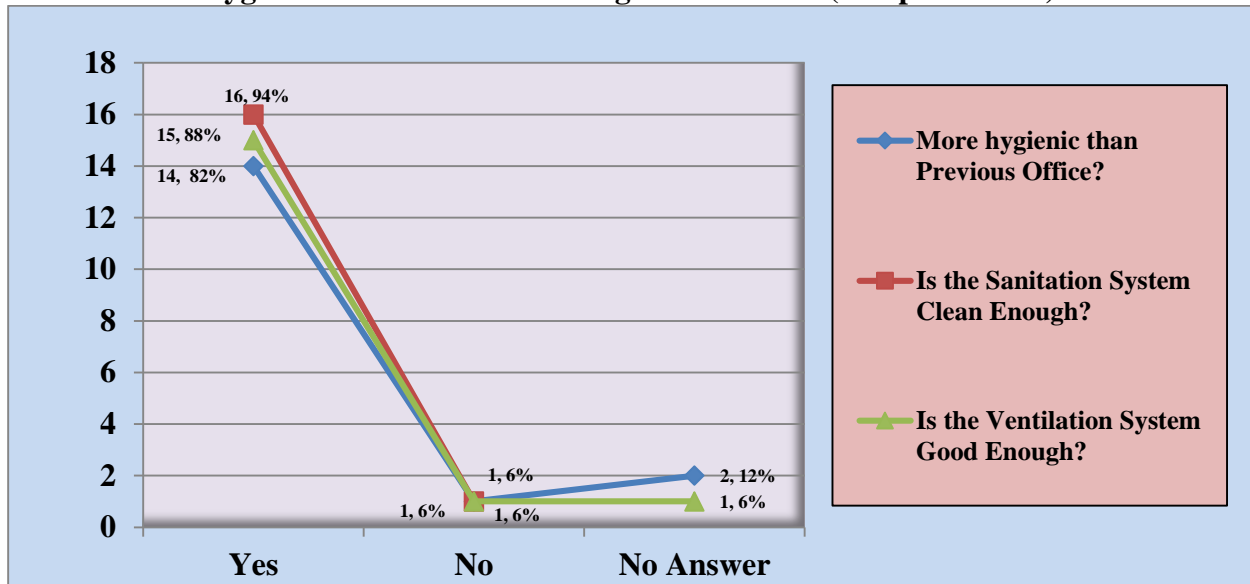


**Graph 7:** Hygienic Condition of Working Environment (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

From the above Line diagram, we find that 80% of the DEPZ Female garment workers replied “YES” when they were asked whether your present workplace is more hygienic than the previous. The answer “NO” was of 10.77% respondents. 9.23% of the Answerers did not answer against this question. 66% respondents defined their sanitation system clean enough while 34% described that the system is not clean enough. 85% said their ventilation system is good enough and 15% of the participants disagreed with the other.

## b. Non-EPZ Workers

Now, we can discuss about the hygienic situation of the Non-EPZ Garment workers working environment. It will be easier to describe by the following graphical representation:

**Hygienic Condition of Working Environment (Sample Size-17)****Graph 8:** Hygienic Condition of Working Environment (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

It is found from the above graph that 82% of the Non-EPZ female garment workers said their current office is more hygienic than their previous office, 6% denied it and 12% did not answer. 94% said their sanitation system is good enough and 6% disagreed. And finally 88% agreed that their ventilation system is good but 6% said it is not good and 6% were abstained from answering this question.

#### 4.5 Food and Sleeping

Food is an essential part of everyone's lives. It gives us the energy and nutrients to grow and develop, be healthy and active, to move, work, play, think and learn. The body needs a variety of the following 5 nutrients - protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins and minerals - from the food we eat to stay healthy and productive. The consequences of not having a balanced diet are numerous. It's very important for the hard working people that they keep their energy high for the day, not only to be able to complete the work, but also to keep their brains alert to avoid mistakes or accidents. So, a balanced diet and proper food is much needed for the ladies who are working wholeheartedly to make our garments sector prosperous.

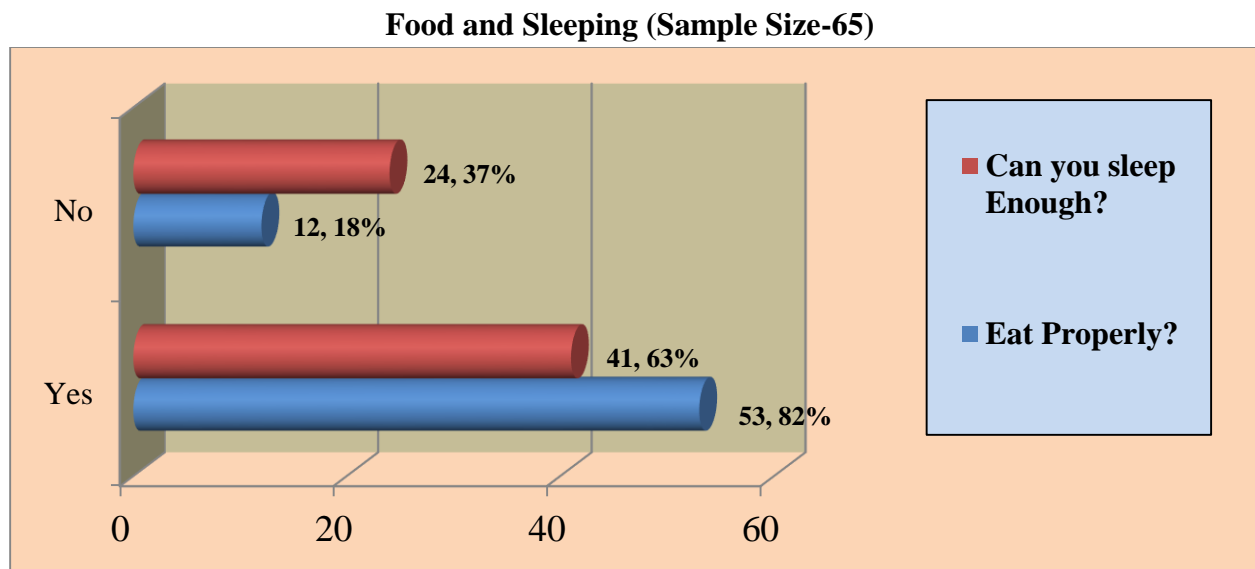
Sleeping is another significant state of mind and body. Like food it is also very important for health. As human body cannot afford without food and meal, likewise he/she cannot afford without sleep.



The garment workers need a balanced diet and proper sleep. Otherwise, they become very weaker and fragile and their vitality will be reduced.

We want not only to make our economy stronger but also want to see our glorified and majestic women active, capable, happy, jolly and alive.

a. **DEPZ Workers**

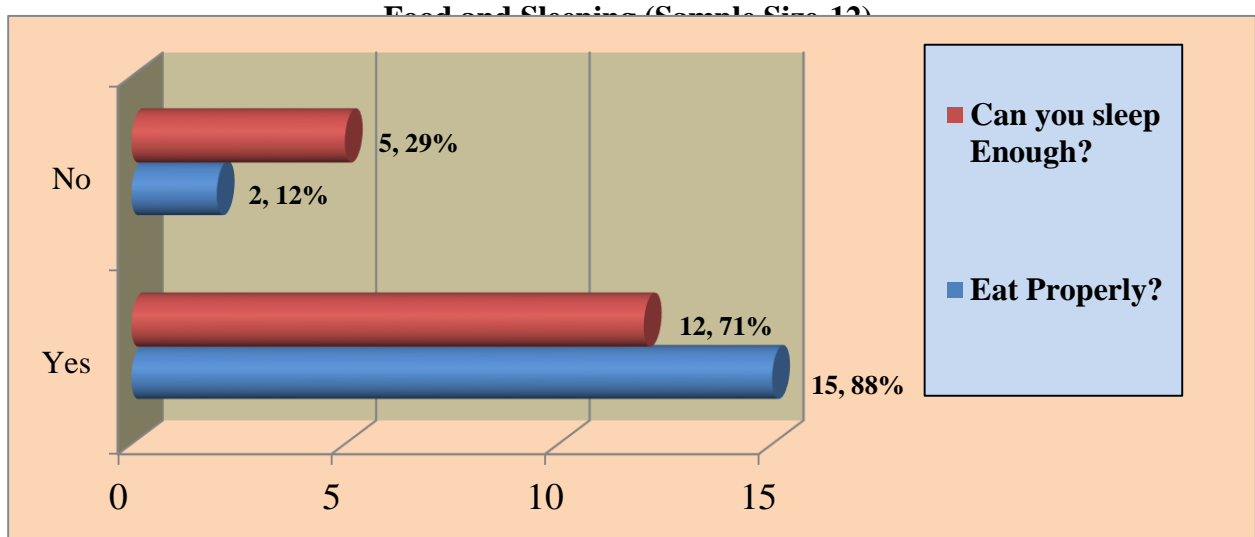


**Graph 9:** Food and Sleeping (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

When the DEPZ Female garment workers were asked whether she can sleep enough, 63% of them answered yes while 37% answered no. When they were asked that can you eat properly, 82% answered that yes, they can eat properly. And 18% answered no, they cannot eat properly.

b. **Non-EPZ Workers**

When the Non-EPZ respondents were asked about sleeping, 71% of them answered yes and 29% answered no. In the case of eating, 88% said yes and 12% said no.



**Graph 10:** Food and Sleeping (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

One can't survive for long without food and sleep. Food and Sleep are huge factors in a person's health. Lack of Proper Diet and sleep can affect the risk of many diseases like heart disease, fainting, fatigue, physical weakness, obesity and much more. Balanced Diet and proper sleep are those important elements of a strategy to improve workers' welfare. It is our duty to take necessary actions for the physical improvement of them who keep our economic wheel active.

#### 4. 6 Sleep Duration

Sleep is a vital indicator of overall health and well-being. We spend up to one-third of our lives asleep, and the overall state of our "sleep health" remains an essential question throughout our lifespan. <sup>(19)</sup> The quality of sleep directly affects mental and physical health and the quality of waking life, including productivity, emotional balance, brain and heart health, immune system, creativity, vitality and even weight. How Much Sleep Does a Person Need a day?

The short answer: adults need 6 to 9 hours per night. Around 7 to 7.5 hours of actual sleep (not counting time falling asleep and getting out bed) appears to be optimal for most people.

The long answer: it depends. The amount of sleep each person needs depends on many factors, including age, health, recent physical exertion, and mental activity. There is genetic influence, too. Some people just need more sleep than others. <sup>(20)</sup>

The amount and type of sleep needed changes from childhood to adulthood.

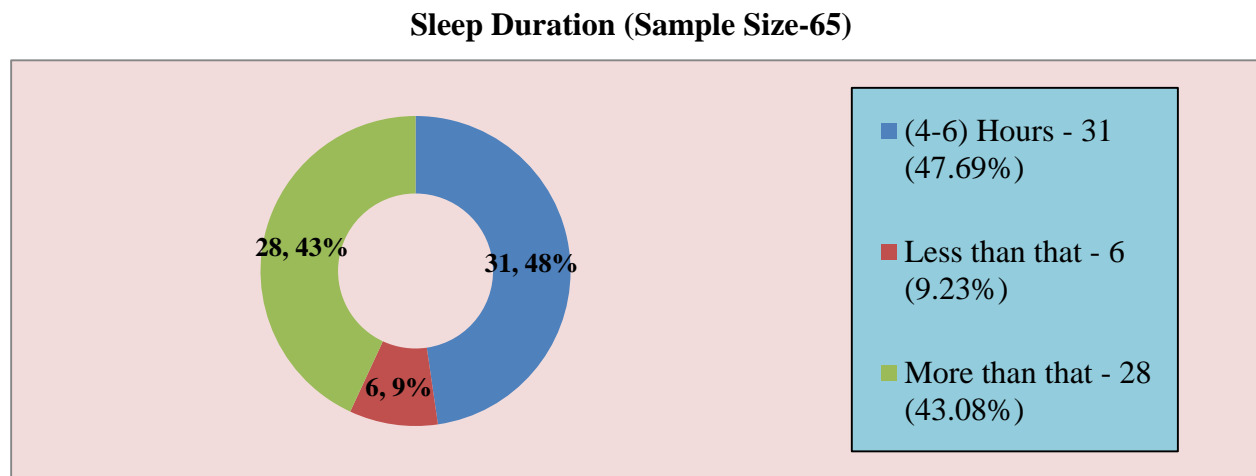
Age	Recommended amount of sleep
Infants under 1 year	16 to 20 hours
1-2 years old	14 hours
3-4 years old	12 hours
5-12 years old	10 hours
13-19 years old	9 hours
Adults & seniors	7 to 8 hours

**Table 1:** Average Amount of Sleep by Age. <sup>(21)</sup>

Now, it is time to see the sleep duration of the female garment workers. How much time do they spend for sleeping?

#### a. DEPZ Workers

Like other garment factories, DEPZ garment factories also run with a specific time-table. The workers also have to maintain this time table. Sometimes they do some extra which is known as overtime work. After finishing these hard tasks, do they sleep enough? Let see with the following doughnut chart.



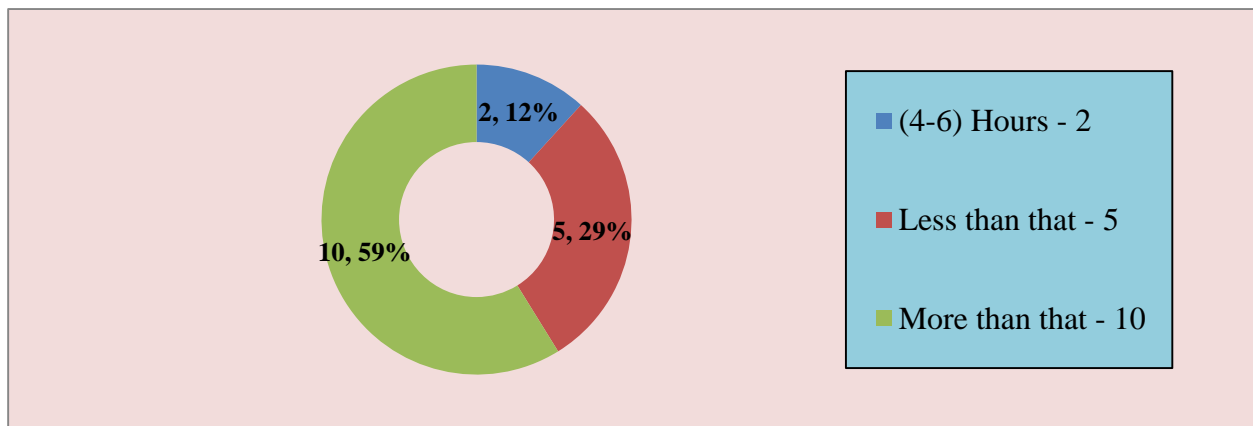
**Graph 11:** Sleep Duration (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

From the above chart, we find that 47.69% of the DEPZ Female Garment Workers can sleep 4 to 6 hours. 9.23% are so poor to sleep 4 to 6 hours. 43.08% said that they can sleep more than that duration. This picture is also frustrating for their productive health because 56.92% of the respondents are in scarcity of enough sleep.

### b. Non-EPZ Workers

Most of the garment factories start their activities on early in the morning which ends on night after evening. It becomes tough for those who do overtime works. Its aftermath is doing household chores and preparation for next day. As a result, their sleep duration reduced. After these hardworking they need a deep sleep but hardly have they got the time for sound sleep.

**Sleep Duration (Sample Size-17)**



**Graph 12:** Sleep Duration (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

12% of the Non-EPZ respondents said that they can sleep for 4 to 6 hours. 29% replied that their sleep duration is less than that. 59% said they can sleep more than that duration. It means 41% of the Non-EPZ respondents remain in scarcity of enough sleep.

DEPZ and other EPZs have very little number of garment industries. Most of the industries are from Non-EPZ background. Although we can't judge all the Non-EPZ industries from the above mentioned data but we can get an idea from it. As 41% of the Non-EPZ respondents are in want of proper sleep, may this percentage can increase or can decrease to other places. But from previous research works, we came to know that they are leading very inhuman lives where they can't take proper rest, can't take balanced diet and their salary structure is very low through which they become incapable of to maintain a standard life. As a result, they become the owner of poor health structure.

#### 4.7 Starting Time for Working Hours

The government organizations normally start on 9a.m., Banks and other financial institutions start on 10 a.m. But the garment factories in Bangladesh starts very early in the morning. It may starts 8 a.m. or before than that time.



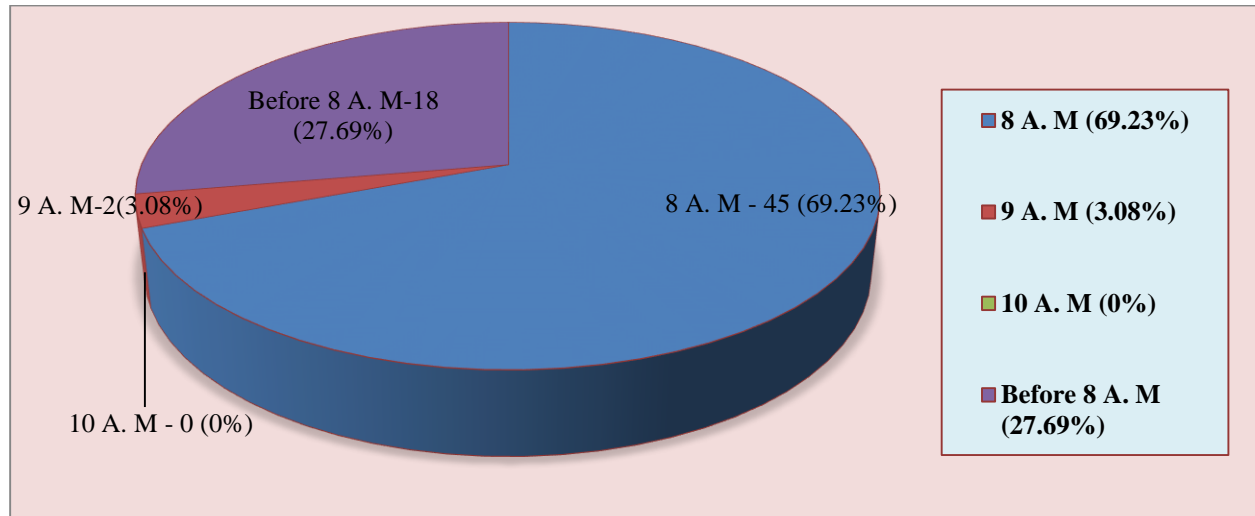
**Figure 04:** These innumerable girls have become the backbone of Bangladeshi RMG Sector. (Source: Internet)

The female garment workers start for their workplace at the dawn after cooking for the family members and other household tasks. As a woman she has to do the inside works as well as the outside works also. Even she herself does not know what a great responsibility she performs not only for her own family but also for the homeland.

##### a. DEPZ Workers

Maximum DEPZ workers live nearby the EPZ in Savar. After talking with some EPZ workers, I was informed that Because of being close to the workplace, they can save time and the transport cost which become convenient for them.

### Starting Time for Working Hours (Sample Size-65)



**Graph 13:** Starting Time for Working Hours (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

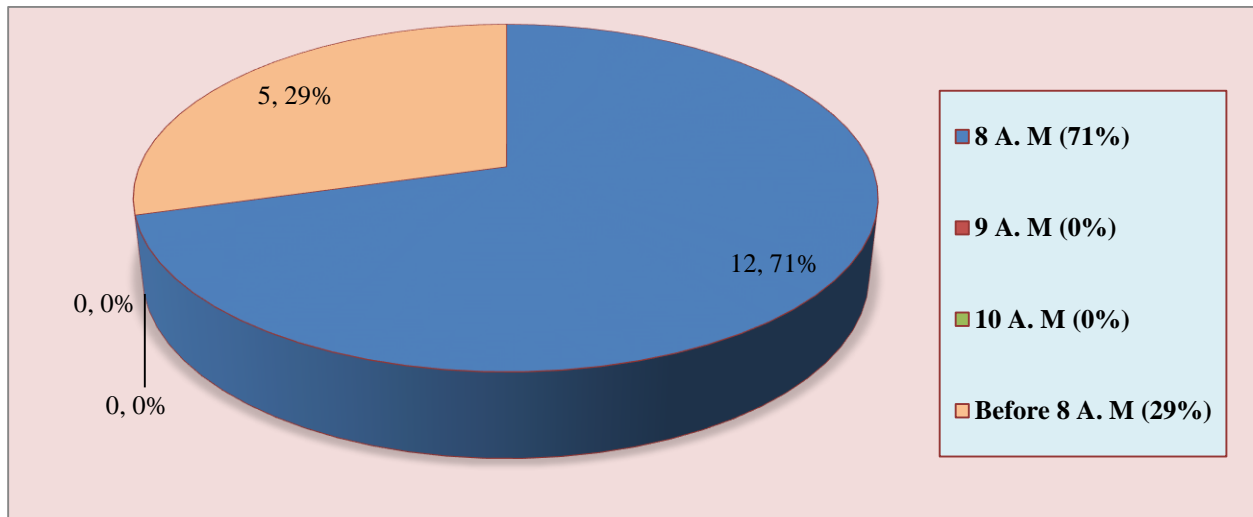
It is already mentioned that the garment workers start for very early in the morning. Now, let discuss the working time of the female garment workers.

I have found no respondent who come on 10 a.m. 27.69% (18 in number) said they come before 8 a.m. 69.23% said they come on 8 a.m. and 3.08% come to workplace on 9 a.m. Most of the respondents come on 8 a.m. There are some persons who come before 8 a.m. It means they have to start for very early in the morning to reach in time.

#### b. Non-EPZ Workers

Generally, Non-EPZ garments are scattered all over the country. The garment workers are also scattered here and there. In Dhaka city it is very normal that the garment factory is situated one place but its employees live in a remote place from the industry location. In these cases, money and time are consumed for distance. 2 Non-EPZ garment factories I have chosen for was from Ashulia area. Most of the workers also live nearby the factories.

### Starting Time for Working Hours (Sample Size-17)



**Graph 14:** Starting Time for Working Hours (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

The female garment workers here come to their workplace on 8 a. m. or before 8 a.m. No one was found to come on 9 or 10 a. m. 29% of them come before 8 a.m. So, they have to start many times before that. 71% said they come on 8 a.m. So they have to start before 8 a.m.

So, it is very obvious that the garment workers work hard from dawn to dusk. But they do not get the real dignity of their labour.

#### 4. 8 Working Period

The regulation of working time is one of the oldest concerns of labour legislation. Already in the early 19th century it was recognized that working excessive hours posed a danger to worker's health and to their families. The very first ILO Convention adopted in 1919, limited hours of work and provided for adequate rest periods for workers. Today, ILO standards on working time provide the framework for regulated hours of work, daily and weekly rest periods, and annual holidays. These instruments ensure high productivity while safeguarding worker's physical and mental health. Standards on part-time work have become increasingly important instruments for addressing such issues as job creation and promoting equality between men and women. However, the normal working hours are 08 hours a day and 48 hours a week. "No adult worker shall ordinarily work or be required to work in an establishment for more than 8 (eight) hours in a day: Provided that subject to the provisions of section 108, any such worker may work in an

establishment up to 10 (Ten) hours also in a day.”<sup>(22)</sup> Now it can be shown what is written in section 108 of The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006.

“**Extra-allowance for overtime :** (1) Where a worker works in an establishment on any day or week for more than the hours fixed under this Act, he shall, in respect of overtime work, be entitled to allowance at the rate of twice his ordinary rate of basic wage and dearness allowance and ad-hoc or interim pay, if any.

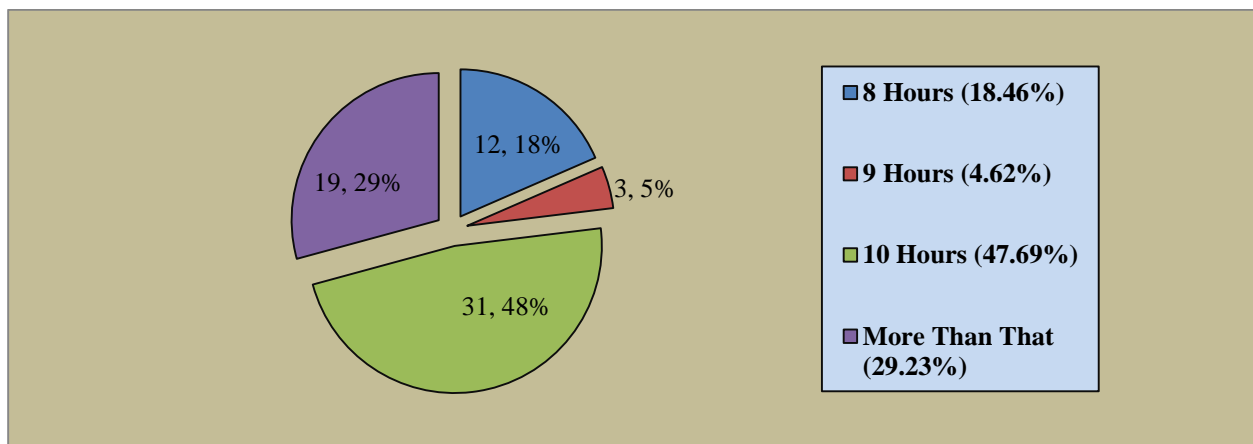
(2) Where any worker in an establishment are paid on a piece rate basis the employer, in consultation with the representatives of the workers, may, for the purposes of this section, fix time rates as early as possible equivalent to the average rates of earnings of those workers, and the rates so fixed shall be deemed to be the ordinary rates of wages of those workers.

(3) The government may prescribe registers to be maintained in an establishment for the purpose of securing compliance with the provisions of this section.”<sup>(23)</sup>

It seems that in the Bangladesh garment industry today, the only way to make a profit or a decent livelihood is to work more and more hours. Average work hours in apparel factories currently stand at 66-70 hours per week. However, during peak production periods, times when buyers increase their purchase orders due to seasonal demands in their countries, working hours can increase to 80-90 hours weekly.<sup>(24)</sup>

a. **DEPZ Workers**

**Working Period (Sample Size-65)**



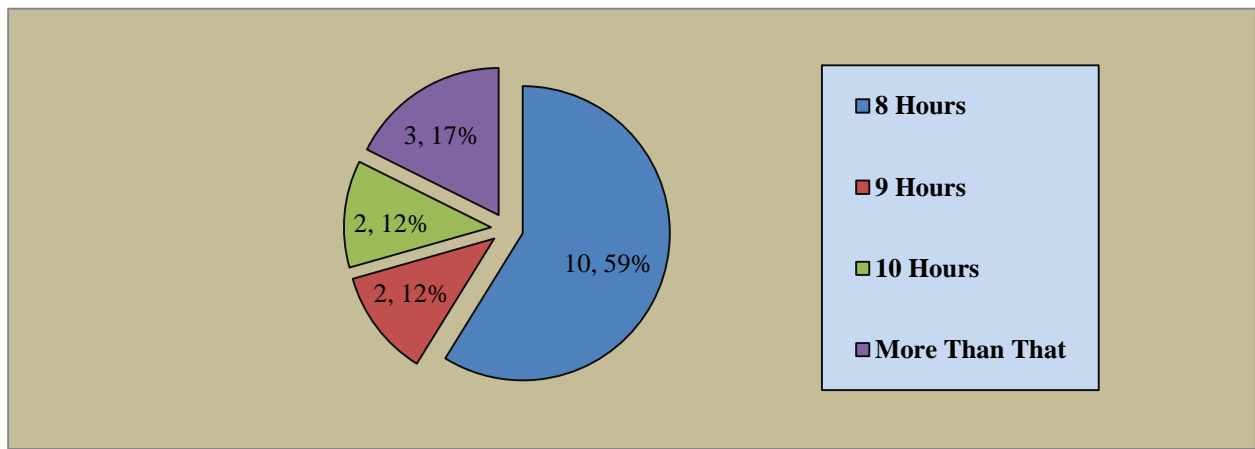
**Graph 15:** Working Period (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).



From the above graph, it is seen that 18.46% work 8 hour, 4.42% work 9 hours, 47.69% work 10 hours and 29.23% work more than Ten hours. It is the clear violation of labour act to make them work more than 10 hours in a single day which is much unexpected from a DEPZ garment industry.

b. Non-EPZ Workers

**Working Period (Sample Size-17)**



**Graph 16:** Working Period (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

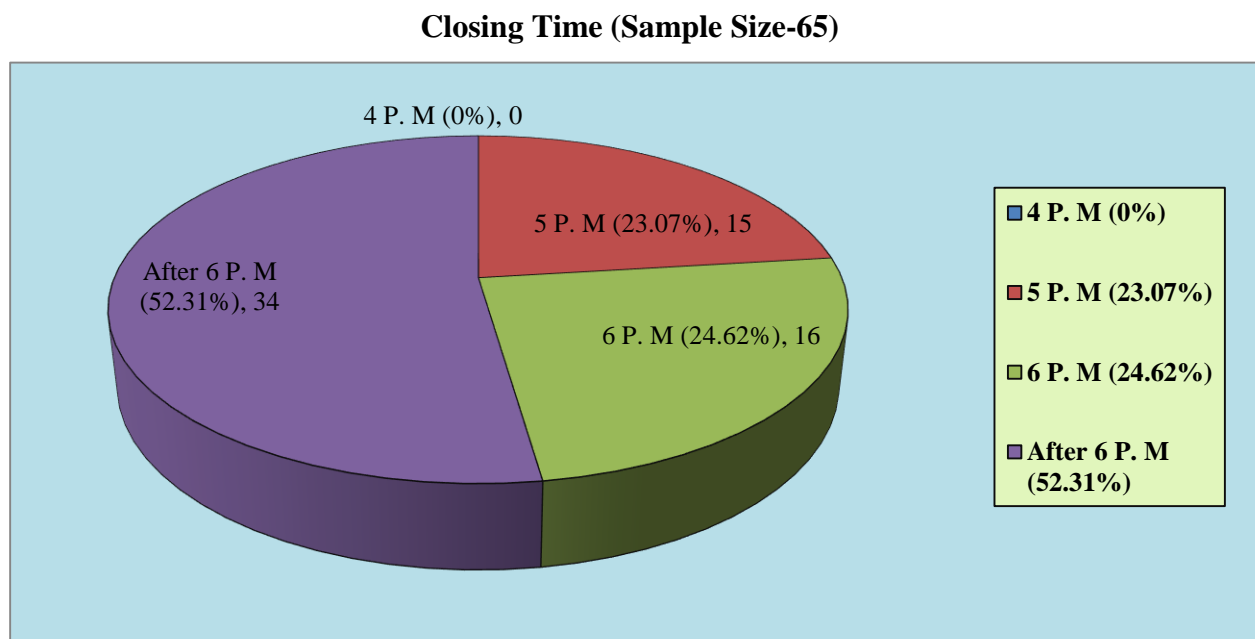
From above chart, we see that most of the Non-EPZ Female garment workers (59%) work 8 hours. 12% work 9 hours, another 12% work 10 hours and remaining 17% work more than 10 hours.

Bangladeshi readymade garment workers earn poverty-level wages and they continue to work excessively long hours for little money while both the government and the industry fail to protect their interests, according to a study of Fair Labor Association, a US-based workers' rights organisation. <sup>(25)</sup> Overtime is usually compulsory. Workers are mostly informed at the last minute that they are expected to work extra hours. In many instances, workers report being threatened with dismissal and subjected to penalties as well as verbal abuse if they cannot work the additional hours.

#### 4.9 Closing Time

The garment sector's main challenge now is the long work hours that result from weak supply chain, poor infrastructure, insufficient utility services and high migration rates, a study finds. Though the usual work duration for a day is eight hours, workers press on for 12 hours on an average to earn some extra pay through overtime. <sup>(26)</sup>

##### a. DEPZ Workers

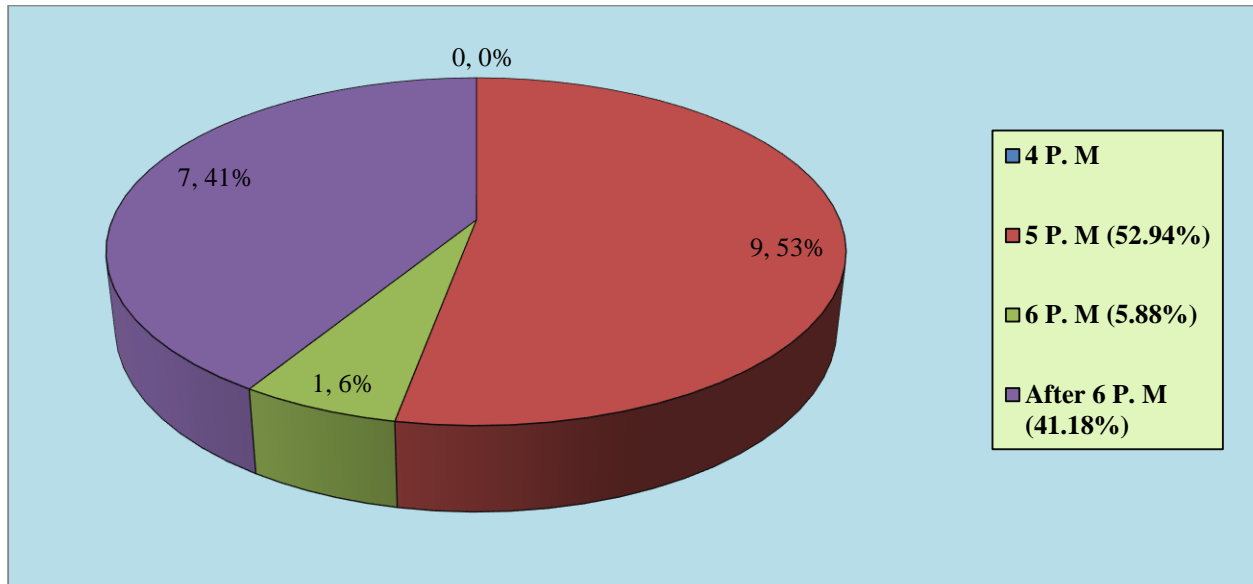


**Graph 17:** Closing Time (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

52.31% DEPZ garment workers work even after 6 p.m. 24.62% workers work till 6 p.m. 23.07% work till 5 p.m. There found none who work till 4 p.m. everyone work till 5 p.m. or more.

## b. Non-EPZ Workers

Closing Time (Sample Size-17)

**Graph 18:** Closing Time (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

52.94% of the Non-EPZ workers work till 5 p.m., 5.88% work till 6 p.m. and 41.18% work even after 6 p.m. Like EPZ workers there also found none who work till 4 p.m. but work till 5 p.m. or more.

Long working hours is a major challenge in our RMG sector. Usually, workers are supposed to work for eight hours a day. But due to overtime, they continue to work for 12 hours a day. Definitely these long working hours damage their energy level and make them weaker. Due to lack of rest and balanced diet, their body lose the immunity power. We cannot expect good results from a person who is physically ill. Sometimes a tragic question peeps in mind - are we acting like the colonial emperor with this female garment workers who knows what is profit but do not know what is humanity?

**4.10 Weekly Holidays, Overtime, Workload & Others**

Bangladeshi Garment workers used to work six days a week. Although the govt. employees enjoy the weekly holidays of Friday and Saturday, (Generally) Friday is the only weekly holiday for the garment workers. Sometimes, many of them can't enjoy the weekly holiday. The

government of Bangladesh has recommended the weekly holidays for the workers in Bangladesh Labour Act which are as follows:

**Weekly holiday:** An adult worker employed in an establishment-

(a) which is a shop or commercial establishment, or industrial establishment, shall be allowed in each week one and half days holiday and in factory and establishment one day in a week;

(b) which is a road transport service, shall be allowed in each week one day's holiday of twenty four consecutive hours; and no deduction on account of such holidays shall be made from the wages of any such worker. <sup>(27)</sup>

**Compensatory weekly holiday:** Where, as a result of the passing of an order or the making of a rule under the provisions of this act exempting an establishment or the workers therein from the provisions of section 103, a worker is deprived of any of the weekly holidays provided for in that section, he shall be allowed, as soon as circumstances permit, compensatory holidays, of equal number to the holidays so deprived of. <sup>(28)</sup> They are allowed for festival holidays. <sup>(29)</sup>

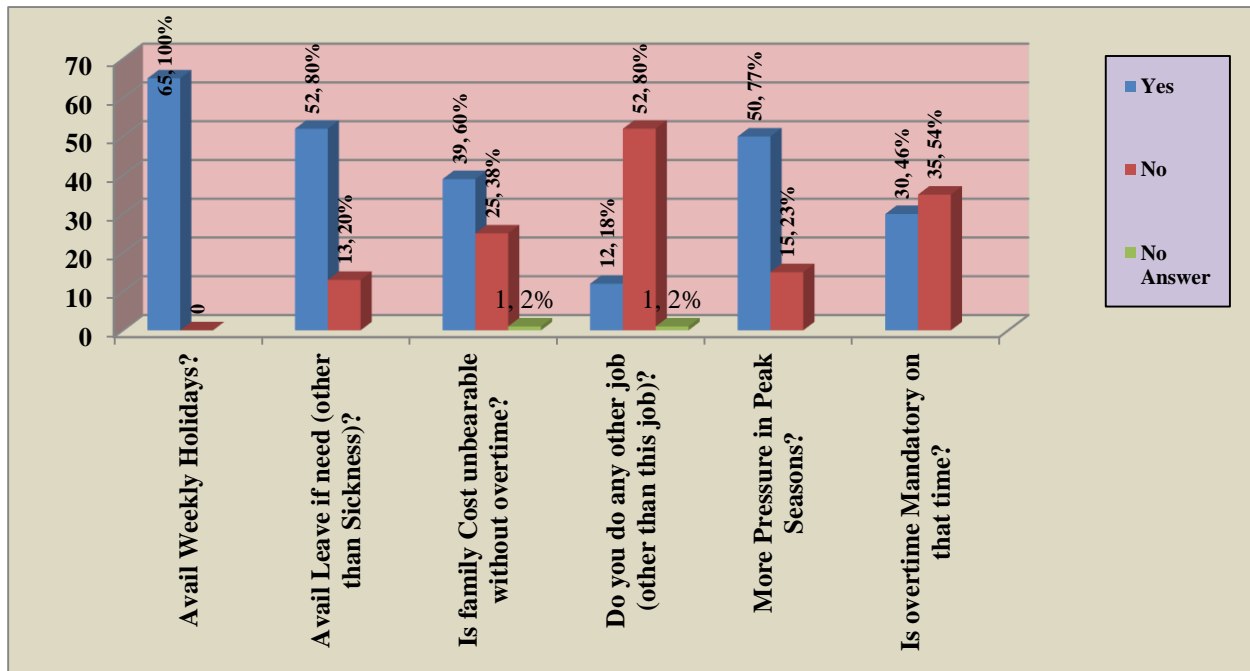
There are also overtime policies for the workers that he or she can work “up to 10 (Ten) hours also in a day” <sup>(22)</sup> where 10 hour means he/she can work total ten hours in a day including overtime .

Let's turn around the reality.

#### a. **DEPZ Workers**

All of the DEPZ garment workers receive the weekly holidays that is definitely a good sign. 80% of the workers said they also get leave other than sickness but 20% do not get leave other than sickness. 60% of the workers said that family cost become unbearable without overtime work and 38% said they can bear their family expenses without overtime but 2% remained silent when they were asked about this question. Apart from this work, 18% of the DEPZ workers do another job. 80% do only this job. 2% did not answer this question.

## Weekly Holidays, Overtime, Workload &amp; Others (Sample Size-65)



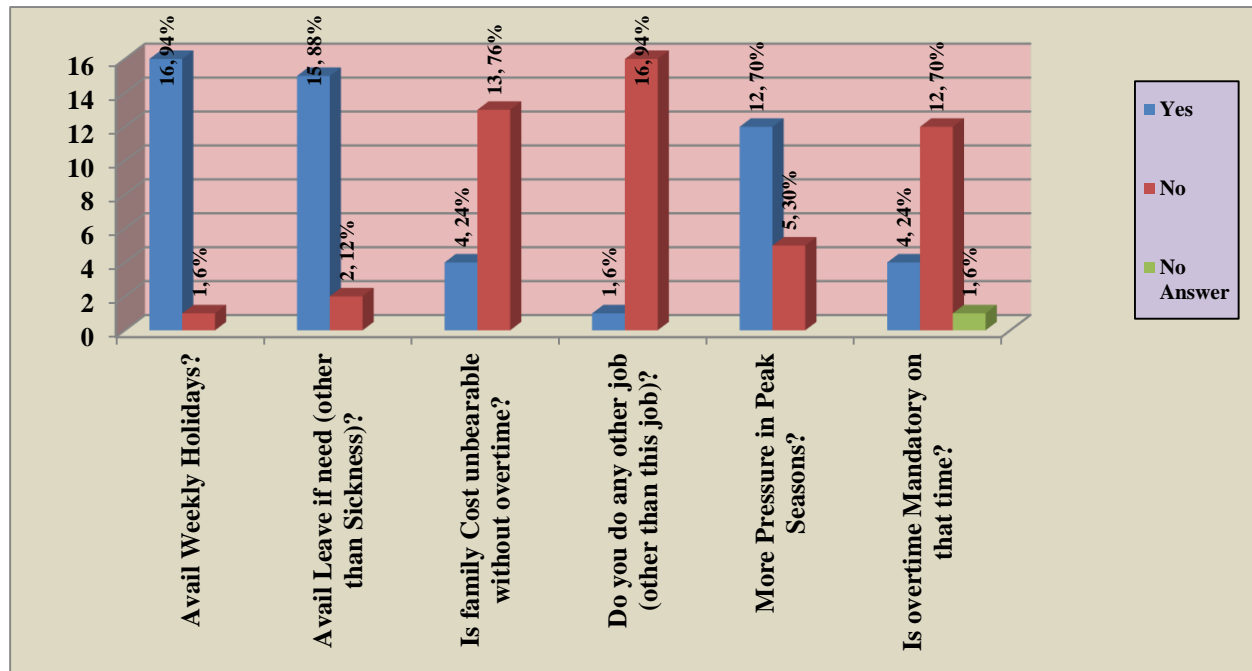
**Graph 19:** Weekly Holidays, Overtime, Workload & Others (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

77% said they have to face much workload in peak seasons while 23% do not have to face much pressure in that time. Overtime is mandatory during the peak season for 46% workers while it is not mandatory for the rest of the workers.

#### b. Non-EPZ Workers

All of the Non-EPZ garment workers except one avail the weekly holiday. 88% of them said that they also avail leave besides sickness but 12% of them are so unlucky that they do not get leave other than sickness. For 24% of the Non-EPZ workers, it becomes very tough to maintain family expenses without overtime. The remaining 76% face no problem to run family expenses without overtime. When they were asked whether they do any other job, only 6% said yes and the rest answered no. 70% said they remain in much pressure in peak season while 30% are not.

### Weekly Holidays, Overtime, Workload & Others (Sample Size-17)



**Graph 20:** Weekly Holidays, Overtime, Workload & Others (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

24% of the Non-EPZ workers replied overtime work is mandatory in peak season, it is not mandatory for 70% and 6% was silent on this question.

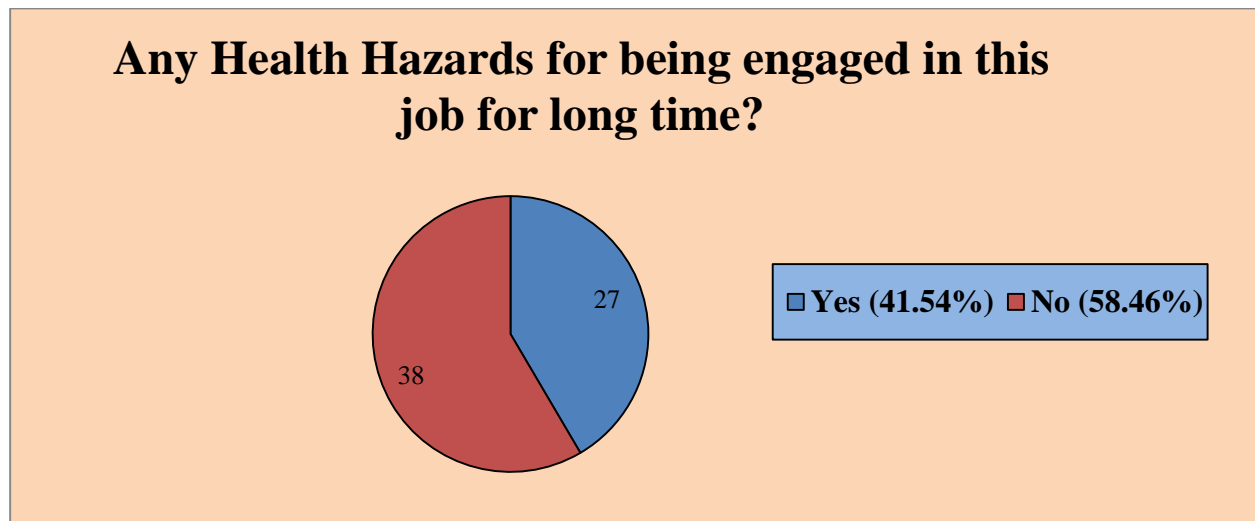
From the above discussion, we can say that the factory owners are breaking the rules of The Bangladesh Labour Act every now and then. The workload the garment workers bear is very painful. It becomes intolerable when it is mandatory to take this pressure.

Excessive working pressure is a great challenge for their health. Since there is no way to meet the expenses, they are compelled to take this challenge. According to section 102 of Bangladesh Labour Law, an adult worker is allowed to work not more than 48 hours in a week. An adult worker may work for more than that limit but it shall not exceed 60 hours in any week and on a yearly average, 56 hours a week. Interestingly, workers want excessive work hours due to low wages.<sup>(30)</sup> Undoubtedly, It will benefit the factory owners in both ways. From one side, they have to pay low wages and they get more outcomes through overtime on the other side.

#### 4.11 Occupational Health Hazards

Hazard means danger or risk. Health hazard is the situation when someone feels problems in health and when this health hazard occurs from occupational reason is called Occupational Health Hazards. The female garment workers of Bangladesh have to work long in the factories. Working for a long period of time without rest at workplace leads to major health-related issues among the workers. Most of the garment workers suffer from a host of chronic health issues. Bangladesh is now the second largest exporter of apparel in the global market only after China.<sup>(31)</sup> However, worker's physical safety issues, their general health, wellbeing and quality of life have remained largely ignored. So, Health issues of RMG workers need attention.

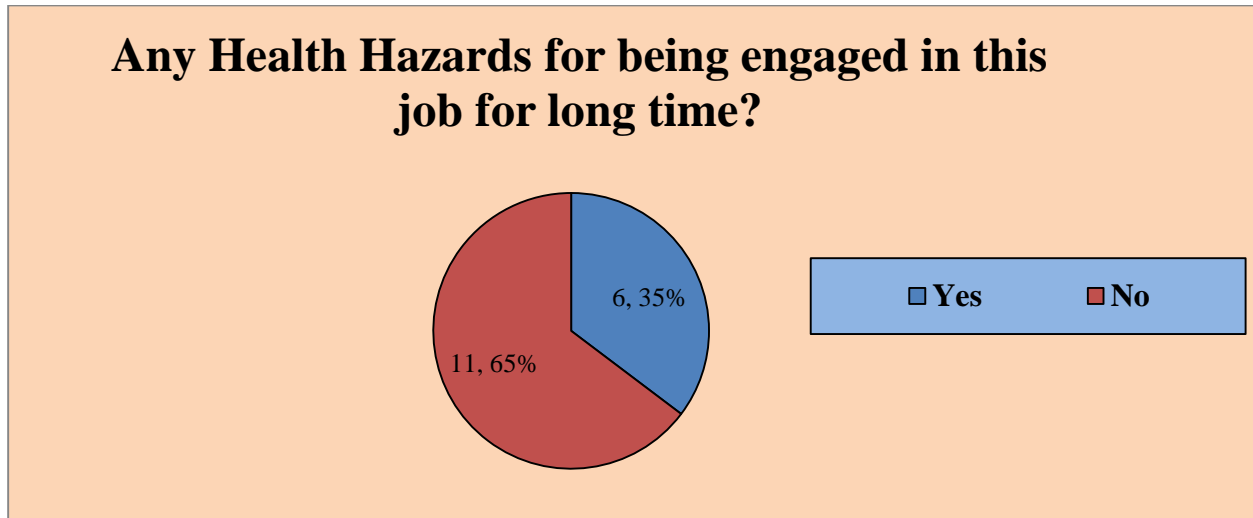
##### a. DEPZ Workers



**Graph 21:** Health Hazards for being engaged in this job (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

Among the 65 DEPZ Respondents, 27 (41.54%) replied that they are facing health problems for being engaged with this occupation while the remaining respondents said they have no problem.

## b. Non-EPZ Workers



**Graph 22:** Health Hazards for being engaged in this job (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

35% (6 out of 17) of the Non-EPZ garment workers said that they are having problems after being engaged with this job but the rest of the respondents said they are facing no problem.

#### 4.12 Body Parts where Physical Problems are occurred

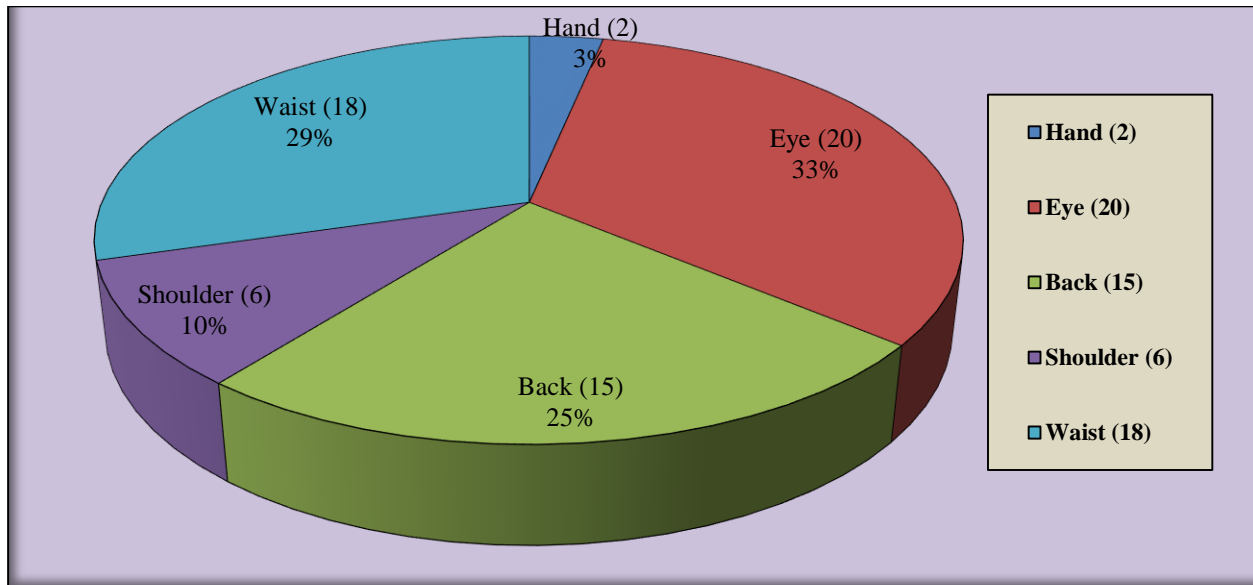
Many unskilled laborers from rural Bangladesh work in this RMG sector. The common jobs handled by them are sewing, ironing, packing and lifting heavy loads which are monotonous, continuous and prolonged. These actions which are done continuously have a great impact in their limbs. Working for a long period of time without rest, absence of personal protective equipment and inadequate provision of ergonomic (Designed to improve people's working conditions and to help them work more efficiently).<sup>(32)</sup> Facilities at workplace lead to major health-related issues among the workers.<sup>(33)</sup> Most of the female garment workers feel problems in Hand, Eye, Back, Shoulder and Waist. These occupational vulnerabilities are related to heavy and ongoing working situation. Dangerous and unhealthy working conditions are also responsible for it.



a. **DEPZ Workers**

27 of 65 DEPZ female garment workers informed that they are having problems in different parts of their body after being involved with garment related works. Many of them suffer from more than one problem.

**Types of Physical Problems (Respondents-27). One may Suffers from more than One Problem.**



**Graph 23:** Limbs where they feel problems. (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

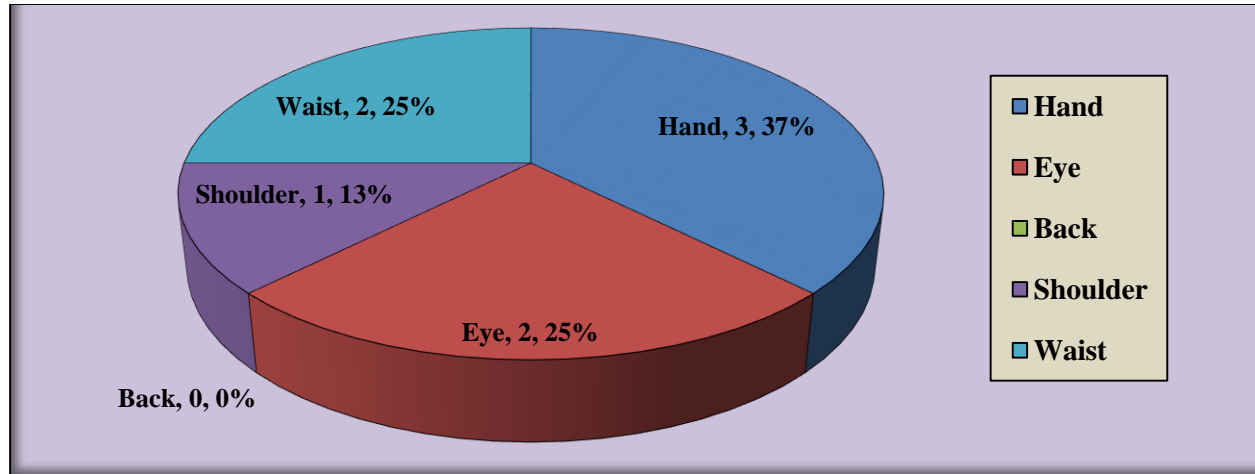
3% said they have problem in Hands, 33% are having problems in their Eyes, 25% have troubles in Back, 10% in shoulders and 29% of them said they are having problems in Waist.

There are some persons who are facing problems in all these 5 body parts.

b. **Non-EPZ Workers**

35% (6 out of 17) of the Non-EPZ female garment workers experienced hazards in their different body parts like hand, Eye, Shoulder and Waist. Some of them are facing problems in all of these parts and some of them are having problems in more than one part.

### Types of Physical Problems (Respondents-6) (One may Suffers from more than One Problem)



**Graph 24:** Limbs where they feel problems. (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

37% of the Non-EPZ respondents are having problems in hand, 25% in Eye, 13% in Shoulder and 25% in waist. There is a noticeable thing here; no one said that they are having problems in Back where back pain is a very common trouble among the working people.

#### 4.13 House Facility & Saving

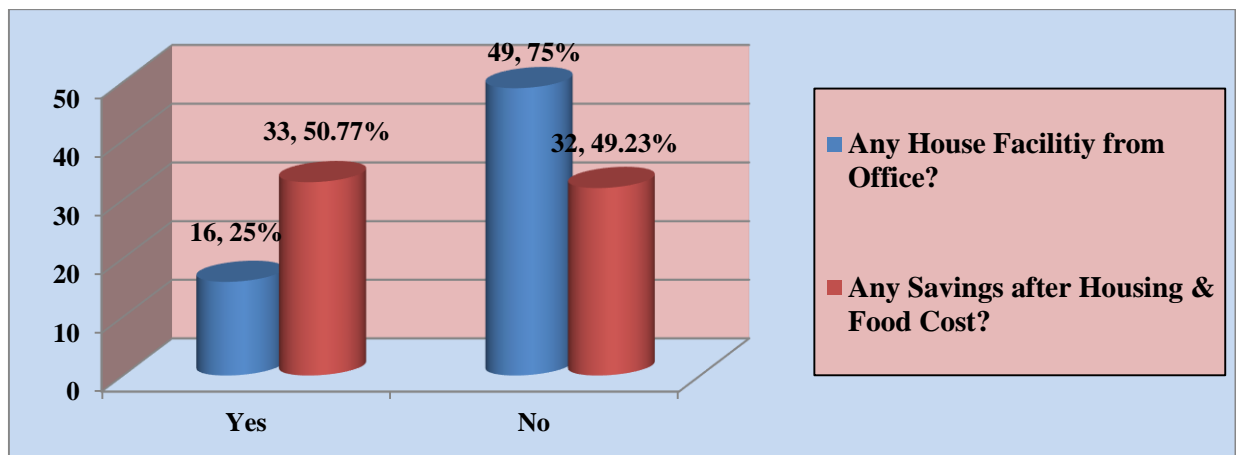
A Daily Star report has shown how helpless our RMG workers are- Leaders of Labour Organisation demanded a decent salary for RMG workers, as they are Major contributors to Bangladesh's economy. They also urged the authorities concerned to increase the basic salary of the workers, so that they could lead a decent life and at the same time save some money for their future. The leaders made the demands "Only 0.40% garment workers can save money while 99.60% have no savings," said Bangladesh Textile and Garment Workers League President ZM Kamal Anam while presenting a survey report conducted by IBC at a round table discussion organized by IBC at Dhaka CIRDAP auditorium. The survey also showed that around 64% of the RMG workers do not earn enough to meet their basic needs, 77.2% work overtime in order to compensate for the insufficient wages. Kamal added that workers in Bangladesh earn lower wages than neighbouring countries like India and Cambodia. "Bangladeshi workers earn \$67 where in India and Cambodia get \$168 and \$170 respectively." He also said the minimum salary for a sweeper on the government pay scale is TK.15,250, while the minimum salary for a garment worker is TK.5,300. In addition, only 13% of garment workers can afford to take

holidays. But each and every worker has the right to a decent life and industry is committed to defending that right-said IndustriALL Global Union’s South Asia Office Regional Secretary<sup>(34)</sup>.

Let see what is the situation of some DEPZ and Non-EPZ garment workers.

a. **DEPZ Workers**

**House Facility & Saving (Sample Size-65)**



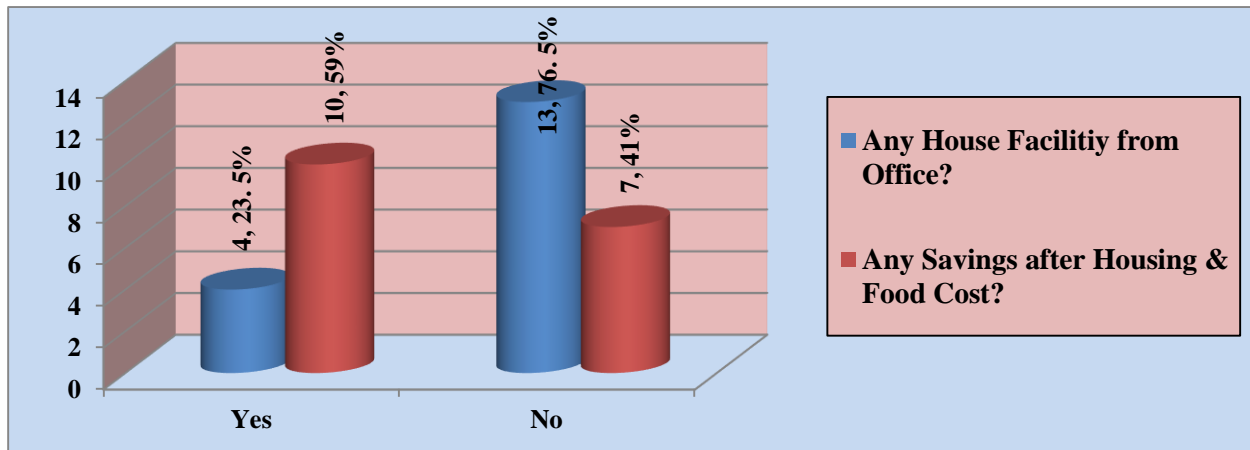
**Graph 25:** House Facility & Saving. (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

25% of the DEPZ garment workers said that they get house facility from office. But the great number (remaining 75%) do not get this facility. When they were asked whether they can save after housing and food cost, 50.77% said yes and 49.23% said no.

b. **Non-EPZ Workers**

Among the Non-EPZ garment workers 4 out of the 17 that is 23.5% said they get house facility from office and the remaining respondents said they get no such facility. 59% of them said yes when they were asked whether they can save any money after housing and food cost. The remaining 41% answered no against the same question.

### House Facility & Saving (Sample Size-17)



**Graph 26:** House Facility & Saving. (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

Bangladesh is the second largest garments exporter worldwide. Because of this success in RMG sector is cheap labor. Bangladeshi labors earn only 67 USD per month. Most of the workers are not satisfied with their earnings. One big reason behind this non satisfaction is they cannot save money at the end of the month. As a result, About half of the workers, especially women take loans from some NGO's with a high interest which helps them to start a new business or savings for their daughters' dowry at the marriage.<sup>(35)</sup>

Garments owners make their production with cheap labours, sold to a third party buyer for a high profit. Third-party buyers do the same while exporting to the brands of US and EU. Therefore, the majority of the profit goes to the owners, the third parties and the brands who basically are a reseller in this system and governments through taxes. The relentless demands for cheap cost products in the west persuades garments owners to increase producing in order to become richer, but the workers are not being benefitted.<sup>(36)</sup>

These female garment workers of Bangladesh dreamt of better wages so that they can save some money for future. Their hard work makes the factory owners richer but hardly had they save a little money.

#### 4.14 Patterns of Occupational Health Hazards before and after joining RMG Sector

I also asked the workers about their health condition before and after joining garment working. Among the 65, most of the respondents said that they had some health problems before joining. Some of them said some of the problems increased after joining. The result found is mentioned below with a table.

##### a. DEPZ Workers (Sample Size-65)

DEPZ	Incidence of Health Problems	Before Joining (number)			After Joining (number)		
		Not at all	Sometimes	Very Much	Not at all	Sometimes	Very Much
	Eye Trouble	43	20		23	37	03
	Ear Problem	57	04		48	10	01
	Headache	24	37		15	38	08
	Hand pain	58	04		36	21	02
	Chest pain	51	11		33	25	01
	Back pain	56	04		28	25	05
	Waist Pain	54	07		28	22	06
	Weakness/Fainting	34	27		28	27	01
	Stomach Upset/ Diarrhoea/Gastritis	24	34		19	36	03
	Cold, Cough & Fever	16	48		9	50	03
	Urinary Infection	48	16		34	21	06
	Jaundice	51	07		40	17	
	Others	43	11		35	18	

**Table 2:** Incidence of Health Problems before and after joining (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

From the above chart, it is clear that the female garment workers are suffering more from different types of diseases after joining in the RMG sector comparing to their previous condition. For example, I have found not a single person to say that they are suffering from any one of the above mentioned diseases in extreme level before starting garment works. But it raised in a great number after joining in RMG sector. In almost all incidences the number in **not at all** decreases but the number both in **sometimes** and **very much** increases after joining.

I have found only 9 persons whose disease condition remained the same in both situations. Some of them remained silent in these matters.

## b. Non-EPZ Workers (Sample Size-17)

NON-EPZ	Incidence of Health Problems	Before Joining (number)			After Joining (number)		
		Not at all	Sometimes	Very Much	Not at all	Sometimes	Very Much
	Eye Trouble	16	01		13	02	01
	Ear Problem	16	01		14	03	
	Headache	12	05		07	08	02
	Hand pain	16	01		14	03	
	Chest pain	16	01		15	01	
	Back pain	16	01		13	04	
	Waist Pain	16	01		10	06	
	Weakness/Fainting	16	01		13	03	
	Stomach Upset/ Diarrhoea/Gastritis	12	04	01	10	06	01
	Cold, Cough & Fever	07	09		07	09	01
	Urinary Infection	16	01		14	03	
	Jaundice	17	01		15	02	
	Others	13			12		

**Table 3:** Incidence of Health Problems before and after joining (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

Like the DEPZ garment workers, there are also some Non-EPZ workers who remained silent in these matters.

I have found only one person remaining the same disease condition in both situations.

The incidence of health problems here are almost the same like health problems of DEPZ garment workers. Before joining this sector most of the workers said that they felt no problem in most incidences. Very little said sometimes they felt problems in some incidences. The exception is Cold, Cough and fever in which incidence most of the respondents (09) said sometimes they faced these problems. There found only one person to feel extreme problem in Cold, Cough and fever before joining.

Like the DEPZ garment workers, there also the number in **not at all** decreases but the number both in **sometimes** and **very much** increases after joining in almost all the incidences.

#### 4.15 How they spend their Leisure Periods Returning from Garment Factory

As human being we must need amusement in our leisure time, to refresh the mind; to work with productivity is the ultimate goal. But, it is very rare for a garments worker who can manage time to have the amusement. Even in the holyday they have to work sometimes. When there is full rush for works, they have to work day-night. <sup>(37)</sup> Leisure is the “time that is spent doing what you enjoy when you are not working or studying.” <sup>(38)</sup> It means Leisure must be a time for recreation and recreation is “the fact of people doing things for enjoyment, when they are not working.” <sup>(39)</sup> Now, it is the time to know what our brave girls do at leisure. Do they really get any leisure time for recreation or amusement? Being a female they have to perform a lot of family duties also after garment working.

##### a. DEPZ Workers (Sample Size-65)

EPZ	Type of Leisure Period	Not at all	Sometimes	Very Much
	Watching TV	10	46	07
	Pastime with Family	01	36	25
	Outing/Travelling	14	39	05
	Going to Watch Movie	50	12	
	Cooking	04	36	20
	Taking Care of Children or other Family Members	02	29	31
	No Leisure	15	40	02

**Table 4:** How they spend their Leisure Periods (DEPZ Female Garment Workers).

We get an idea about their leisure time from the above chart. Watching TV, Family time, Travelling, Going to Watch Movie, Cooking, Taking Care of Children or other Family Members etc. are the common pastimes among them. Taking Care of Children or other Family Members, Pastime with Family and Cooking are the much common activities of the married workers. Those who have babies have to stay home at that period of time. Most of the married women and kids mother hardly had gone for outing or watching movies. Watching TV, Travelling or going for watching movie are the very common pastimes of the unmarried girls and of those girls who still have not taken the responsibilities of their families. 15 of them said they get no leisure time

at all while 40 said sometimes they get leisure. only 2 persons said that they have much time for leisure.

Some respondents were abstained from mentioning how they spend their leisure time.

**b. Non-EPZ Workers (Sample Size-17)**

<b>NON-EPZ</b>	<b>Type of Leisure Period</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Very Much</b>
	Watching TV	01	14	
	Pastime with Family	01	04	10
	Outing/Travelling	02	13	
	Going to Watch Movie	05	10	
	Cooking		08	06
	Taking Care of Children or other Family Members		05	08
	No Leisure	04	11	01

**Table 5:** How they spend their Leisure Periods (Non-EPZ Female Garment Workers).

Like some DEPZ workers, some of the Non-EPZ respondents also were abstained from mentioning how they spend their leisure time.

I have found a great similarity between EPZ and Non-EPZ female garment workers. But an important matter is also explored that the Non-EPZ workers remain in more pressure than the EPZ workers. I have found no workers here who said they do not cook or Taking Care of Children and other Family Members at all. Taking Care of Children or other Family Members, Pastime with Family and cooking here are also the much common activities of the married workers. The women who said Watching TV, Pastime with Family, Outing/Travelling or going to watch Movie are not happened at all are found either married and performing family duties or have little kids.

It can be said that returning from the workplace; they have to do a lot of household chores too. Sometimes they get time for real amusement. For this reason, they have to be equally skilled at home and abroad. So, I would say they are not only contributing to make a strong economy but also trying to make their home a heaven. These women should be saluted.



#### 4.16 Case Study

Interviews of 03 EPZ and 03 Non-EPZ Female Garment workers were taken over the phone which I have used as the Case studies. Coming to this stage, I had to face some problems. Most of the female workers were reluctant to talk. I had to do a lot of ice breaking tasks to persuade them that there will be no harmful consequences. I had to promise that their identity will be kept secret so that no one can track them in future. In some cases, I had to promise that I must hide their real name. And for that purpose, I have used their Pseudonym.

##### a. DEPZ Workers

###### 1. Maya (Real Name)

A 20/22 years old woman from Nilphamari has been working for 05 years in a DEPZ garment industry. She is married and has two baby girls. Her husband is working in a bank. A few years ago “Monga” pushed them to Dhaka. She works 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and gets a lunch break of one hour. Friday is the weekly holiday. She starts for her workplace before 7 a.m. It takes about half an hour. She does not feel any health problem yet. According to her commentary, she gets the government salary. Without overtime her salary is TK. 9,000 and with overtime it raises to TK. 11,000/12,000. She said that she is happy and her family is also running well. Her Mother-in-law is no more and her Father-in-law lives with them. She has two sisters-in-law who have got married already. She did not work anywhere else before joining here. She informed that she gets all the government holidays. Her salary is deducted when she becomes absent without the prior approval of the authority. But when applied for leave ‘no salary deduction’ is granted. She gets medical facility here. Many of her colleagues have got official quarter but she still has not availed it. She left her babies to her mother who lives nearby her. She comes home normally at 6.30 p.m. After finishing all the household chores, she goes to sleep at 9 or 10 p.m. She wakes up at 5 p.m. and cook and then start for her workplace. Another new day starts this way.

On holiday, she does her housekeeping tasks, occasionally goes out. Her elder daughter likes to go to the zoo. Sometimes she and her husband take them to Shishu Park. Before their baby was born, she and her husband used to go for cinema. Now it is very rare.

When I asked her if she is fine overall or not, first of all she thanked to the almighty Allah. She is afraid of thinking about the time of Monga. But now she is very fine with the grace of Allah.

## 2. Dola (Pseudonym)

A 19 years old girl from Kabirhat Upazilla of Noakhali district. Four years ago, she joined in a DEPZ Garment factory with the help of one of her familiar persons. Before that, she worked in several residential homes in Basabo and Shantinogor area of Dhaka city. Her father is a Farmer. She is the child from a poor house. Her parents were too poor to send her and her other siblings to school. For this reason, she was sent to Dhaka to work at her very young age. When she worked at residential homes she had no freedom. She always kept scared in fear. As a girl, she would have been concerned about security and safety. After 2/3 years, one of her maternal uncles gave her a proposal of working in a garment factory near Mirpur. Then she started to work there. Afterwards she came to know about DEPZ garment factory through one of her village friends. Listening about some of the facilities there she became interested to work in DEPZ. Then she tried heart and soul to join in a DEPZ garment factory and at last she became successful. Comparing to her past life, she is leading a better life here.

She is unmarried and living with her sister in a one room rental house. She goes to factory at 8 a.m. and returns on evening. It is ten minutes walking distance from her residence. The lunch time is 1 to 2 p.m. She gets medical facility if being wounded. She received a fair amount as she said. She is free from the responsibility of cooking as it is done by her sister. In leisure time, she watches TV and movie. She has to send money to her family. She has a love for study but she could not study. Now she wants her younger siblings will be illuminated in the light of education as she herself could not study. But now she is determined to make her siblings educated. By this way she wants to fulfill her own dreams through her siblings.

## 3. Rina (Pseudonym)

Rina is a 21 years old girl. She was reluctant to unveil even her home district's name. She is married and mother of a two years old baby boy. They live in Savar. Her Garment factory is not so far from her residence. Her husband was working in a Courier Service Company but recently he lost his job. He has been looking for a job for last three months. Rina lives with her in-laws such as her Father-in-law, Mother-in-law and Two Brothers -in-law. Her only sister-in-law is married and live in a remote place. One of her Brothers-in-law is also a garment worker. Another Brother-in-law is a kid. Her Father-in-law is a Rickshaw Puller. Her Mother-in-law is a house maker and managed the whole family. She left her baby to her Mother-in-law. She is not

unhappy with the in-laws especially she likes her mother-in-law a lot. Her mother-in-law is not an educated woman but she is not like other typical Bengali mother-in-law. As she goes out, her Mother-in-law cooks and does all the household chores. All of them live in a two room rental house. A big amount of her income spends to meet family cost and house rent. One part of her salary also goes to repay the in-laws loan.

Four years ago, she married at her own choice and since then there is no relation with her own family. After a few days of her marriage, her Father-in-law sold all his properties for debt and come here. For the first few days she was unemployed. Then she entered this factory with the help of one of his husband's friend. She left early in the morning when the kid is asleep. The factory authority is kind enough to provide doctor if need. She tries to come on lunch break but she cannot come when it becomes full of rush. She gets Friday as the weekly holiday. They avail other government holidays also. But she could not remember the last time when she went out with her husband for outing or watching movie. In the free times, she takes care of her child or spends time with other family members. Because of her little child, often she cannot do overtime works even she wants to. Her earning decreases without overtime works. Basically she can save nothing after the end of the month. As she does very little over time works, she does not have much health problems. She said her salary is not unfair but the cost is so high. It is the main reason behind of her no savings. According to her, she can eat nutritious food but she cannot sleep enough as her baby is little. She has a dream that is her son will lead a beautiful life.

## b. Non-EPZ Workers

### 1. Aklima (Real Name)

Aklima has been living in Chittagong for Four years and working in a garment factory named Shagorika for Three years. Aklima is a 25/26 years old woman from Nikli Upazilla of Kishoreganj District. She is married and has a boy who is 08 years old. Her husband is so weak that he is unable to do any job. Her working time starts at 8 a.m. and ends at 7 p.m. When I asked her, "How long does it take to go to your factory?" She answered up-down costs tk.12 in Tempu. Friday is the weekly holiday. She and her other colleagues get a lunch break of one hour. Her office remains closed on all public holidays. Her salary is tk. 8,000. They do not get the salary fixed by the government yet. She lives in a one room rental house with her husband and son. The house rent is tk. 3,000. Even then she tries to save something from this small salary for her son's

future. She sleeps during leisure as she has to awake till 12/1 o'clock almost every night. She gets doctor and medicine facilities at office. Sometimes she suffers from severe Chest pain. The reason behind it is for not getting enough rest-she said. "If you become sick and do not come to work, does the authority curtail your salary?"- she was much astonished to hear such type of stupid question. Then she answered- "O ma! beton katbe na?"(Oh my god! why not?). As if there is no abnormality in curtailing salaries while she remains absent even for sickness. She was saying like that it is very natural and the authority has the right to do it.

## 2. Nargis (Real Name)

A 35 years old woman from Bhola District who has been working in several garment factories for 5 years. According to her language, she works for a better life.

Her office begins at 8 a.m. She starts for office at 7.30 a.m. which ends at 5p.m. The closing time lasts long when they do overtime works. Sometimes the closing time extended till 7/8 p.m. She goes her office by Rickshaw, Tempu or CNG driven vehicle whatever she gets. When she was asked whether she faced any physical problem for doing this work she answered- yes, it happens; head, hands and feet ache. A point to be noted that they get doctor and medical facilities at their workplace. Sometimes tears are dropped from eyes as they have to work remaining their eyes blinked always. Even that she described her present workplace better than the previous one. This proves that how little their demand is! It also proves that there are a lot of female garment workers in Bangladesh who are leading more miserable lives than Nargis.

However, she takes home made lunch on lunch break. Nargis narrated herself lucky as she gets a weekly holiday on Friday which is found unavailable for many like her. She also receives all the government holidays. She is also luckier than many as she has been receiving the salary fixed by the state for last few months. A few months ago, she got the salary of tk. 8,000/9,000. But now she receives tk. 13,000 to 14,000. But it fluctuates as she does not receive equal payment in every month. If she becomes absent her factory curtails the salary but it differs if she applies before for leave. She lives in a two-roomed rental house in a slum like place with her husband and three school-going kids. This two-roomed rental house is shared with another family. She has to pay tk. 5,000 as house rent which is shared by the other family. Her husband has no specific profession as he does all that tasks he gets for example Masonry works, day labouring etc. whichever available for him. At last, Nargis said she is fine enough now with her family.

### 3. Ruby (Pseudonym)

Ruby is an 18 years old unmarried girl from Nandail, Mymensingh (Not the actual address). Four years ago, Ruby came to Chittagong with her parents and started working in a garment factory. She is little educated. Before coming here she completed her primary education. She is the only daughter of her parents but not the only child. She has three more elder brothers who are married and living separately with their own families in Dhaka and Chittagong. Poverty and unemployment forced them to leave their own village. Her mother is a maid-servant of a resident house of Chittagong and her father is a seller of Jhalmuri and Chanachur. Basically, Ruby is the main wage-earner of her family. She starts very early in the morning and returns home in the evening or night. Her mother prepares lunch for Ruby and then she herself move for her workplace. Ruby receives tk. 8,000/9,000 as her monthly salary with overtime works. Overtime works are not mandatory. It starts after 5 p.m. according to the wish of the authority. When I asked about cutting-up of salary, she replied that salary is curtailed due to absence. Friday is the weekly holiday and all the government holidays are also received but the salary fixed by the government is not implemented for them yet. Ruby wants to spend her free times with her parents but her leisure time does not match with their leisure time. It pains her a lot. Anyway, her only pastime is watching TV and watching movie in mobile internet. She informed that she has a facebook account also and spends few times in facebook. She has some factory friends with whom she goes for outing but it is very rare case.

All day long she has to do standing works. As a result, she gets extreme pain in her hands, legs, shoulder and back. She would change this job if she got a better opportunity. She is trying her best to save money but it becomes very tough day by day. Recently a new thought has emerged from her parents that is Ruby's marriage. Ruby herself is also very worried about this case. Although she is now better than her previous time, she can't be tension-free for her near future. Dowry system exists in our society which still is a great burden for the parents of the nubile girls like Ruby.

From the above Case studies, it is obvious that the problems of every woman are almost the same that is low salary, hard working, Lack of proper rest and so on. Even these girls have no idea that they are the lowest paid garment workers in the whole world but their labour and toil are not the

lowest rather they do the utmost work from their own side. They are the lowest paid workers but our economy is flourishing through depending on their shoulders. Thus these women and their hardworking are being underestimated. They are not getting the actual price of their labour. And in this way, they are getting sick gradually. The situation of the DEPZ female garment workers are little better than the Non-EPZ workers. It is little better, not the best. So, it is high time to do something for their betterment.

**CHAPTER-05**  
**HEALTH RELATED RIGHTS OF THE FEMALE GARMENT**  
**WORKERS AND INITIATIVES**

Garment workers have received a fair share of attention over the last few years due to their poor working conditions, low wages and benefits, and inadequate facilities at their factories of employment. After the loss of so many lives in several high-profile disasters, garment factories in Bangladesh have finally taken extensive, substantial measures in the face of mounting national and international pressure.<sup>(40)</sup> The workers here deserve to enjoy their rights for their betterment. So, all employers are expected to carry out the government's labor laws, which specify employment conditions, working hours, wage levels, leave policies, health and sanitary conditions and compensation for injured workers. The constitution of Bangladesh, BLA (2006) and ILO have included a cluster of suitable laws for the protection of female workers. This chapter is going to discuss the national and international health related rights of the female garment workers of Bangladesh as well as what are the initiatives taken for them to protect their health.

## **5.1 Rights**

### **5.1.1 National Level**

#### **5.1.1(a) Constitutional Rights**

The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh is the supreme law of our state which has ensured some rights that are directly or indirectly related with the health of the female garment workers are stated below:

##### **1. Emancipation of peasants and workers**

It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to emancipate the toiling masses the peasants and workers and backward sections of the people from all forms and exploitation (Article 14).

By the above article the state assured that the workers will be free from all types of exploitation. And if it comes true, they will be free from hard work and it will be helpful for their health.

##### **2. Provision of basic necessities**

The state shall ensure the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care (Article 15).

If their food becomes secured, it can be said that their health will also be secured quite a lot.



### **3. Public health and morality**

The State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the improvement of public health as moving its primary duties,..... (Article 18).

The above article is directly related with public health.

### **4. Work as a right and duty**

Everyone shall be paid for work on the basis of the principle from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work {Article 20(1)}. This article recognises work as a right.

### **5. Prohibition of forced labour**

All forms of forced labour are prohibited and it a punishable offence. (Article 34).

According to the above Article a female garment worker has the right to protection of law if she becomes the victim of forced labour.

### **6. Freedom of association**

Article 38 guarantees the right to freedom of association and to form trade unions. If there is the presence of TU, the workers can move against any anarchy.

#### **5.1.1(b) Rights on Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006**

A large number of labour rights for protection of women workers are included in Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. BLA has various positive points relating to labour rights, but due to its various limitations, absence of adequate penalty in statutory law for employers and lack of proper code of conduct by the garment authorities, there is scope of violation of labor rights in some areas. <sup>(41)</sup> These rights are stated below:

1. Provisions of Maternity Benefit (Chapter : IV, Section : 45-50)
2. Health and Hygiene i.e. Cleanliness, Ventilation and temperature, Dust and fume, Disposal of wastes and effluents, Artificial humidification, Overcrowding, Lighting, Potable water, Toilets and washrooms, Dustbin and spittoon (Chapter : V, Section : 51-60)
3. Provisions of Safety of building and machinery, Precaution in case of fire, Protection of eyes and Explosive or inflammable dust, gas, .etc (Chapter : VI, Section : 61-78)
4. Special Provisions Relating to Health, Hygiene and Safety. (Chapter : VII, Section : 79-88)

5. Welfare for example First –aid appliances and others (Chapter : VIII, Section : 89-99)
6. Working Hours and Leave which is related to Daily hours, Interval for rest or meal, Weekly hours, Weekly holiday, Compensatory weekly holiday, Night shift, Extra – allowance for work overtime, Limitation of hours of work for women, Sick leave, Annual leave with wages, Festival holiday, Calculation of wages and payment during leave or holiday period etc. (Chapter : IX, Section : 100-119)
7. Wages and Payment. (Chapter : X, Section : 120-137)
8. Wages Board. (Chapter : XI, Section : 138-149)
9. Workers Compensation for Injury by Accident(Chapter : XII, Section : 150-174)
10. Trade Union and Industrial Relations (Chapter : XIII, Section : 175-208)
11. Disputes, Labour Court, Labour Appellate Tribunal, Legal Proceedings etc. (Chapter : XIV, Section : 209-231)

The above mentioned Laws are very rich but “most of the provisions lack in standard values and are not specific rather general in nature. In terms of occupational safety and health issues, the status of Bangladesh is very poor and women workers are extremely vulnerable in this regard.”<sup>(42)</sup>

## **5.1.2 International Level**

### **5.1.2(a) ILO**

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is a United Nations agency whose mandate is to advance social justice and promote decent work by setting international labour standards. <sup>(43)</sup> Bangladesh has been an active member state of the ILO since 22 June 1972 and has ratified 35 ILO Conventions including 07 fundamental conventions. The rights regarding female workers health of ILO that are ratified by Bangladesh are mentioned below through a Chart:

Convention Type	Convention	No.	Date	Status
Fundamental	Forced Labour Convention, 1930	29	22 June, 1972	In Force
	Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948	87	Do	Do
	Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949	98	Do	Do
	Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951	100	Do	Do
	Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957	105	Do	Do
	Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958	111	Do	Do
Technical	Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919	1	Do	Do
	Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention, 1919	6	Do	Do
	Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention, 1921	14	Do	Do
	Workmen's Compensation (Occupational Diseases) Convention, 1925	18	Do	Do
	Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) Convention, 1925	19	Do	Do
	Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised), 1948	89	Do	Do
	Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention (Revised), 1948	90	Do	Do
	Weekly Rest (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1957	106	Do	Do
	Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention, 1962	118	Do	Do

**Table 6:** ILO Health Related Rights of Female Workers ratified by Bangladesh. <sup>(44)</sup>

### 5.1.2(b) CEDAW

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. It has often been described as an international bill of rights for women. Bangladesh ratified the CEDAW in 1984 however with some reservations. The Convention is structured in six parts with 30 articles

total. Among these articles, Article 11 and 12 are directly related with women health which is also applicable for female garment workers.

**Article 11 (Employment):** Women have the right to work, employment opportunities, equal remuneration, free choice of profession and employment, social security, and protection of health. Discrimination on the grounds of marriage, pregnancy, childbirth and childcare is prohibited. Article 11 outlines the right to work for women as "an unalienable right of all human beings." It requires equal pay for equal work, the right to social security, paid leave and maternity leave "with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances." Dismissal on the grounds of maternity, pregnancy or status of marriage shall be prohibited with sanction. <sup>(45)</sup>

**Article 12 (Healthcare and Family Planning):** Women have equal rights to access health care including sexual health, family planning services and pre and post-natal care. Article 12 creates the obligation of states parties to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of healthcare in order to ensure...access to health care services, including those related to family planning. <sup>(46)</sup>

## 5.2 Initiatives

### 5.2 (a) BKMEA

*“Malnutrition and low access to resource and information prevent a majority of women workers from being fully productive despite gaining skills. As a result this sector loses many skilled workers. I am confident that this initiative will improve the health and nutrition of our workers and thereby contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.”*— Chief Guest Abu Sayeed Al Mahmood Swapon, Whip, Bangladesh Parliament and organizing secretary of Central Executive Committee, Bangladesh Awami League. <sup>(47)</sup>

The Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and Nutrition International jointly launched a new initiative called ‘Nutrition of Working Women (NoWW)’ to improve nutrition of workers of garment factories in Bangladesh.

The launch was held at Hotel Pan Pacific Sonargaon in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on March 31, 2019. Through a joint investment of BKMEA and Nutrition International supported by the Government of Canada, the NoWW initiative aims to benefit a total of 240,000 workers including 180,000 women employed in garment factories in Bangladesh located in Greater Dhaka and Narayanganj over a period of 18 months. <sup>(48)</sup>

## **5.2 (b) BGMEA**

According to BGMEA *“Bangladesh, which was once termed by cynics a “bottomless basket” has now become a “basket full of wonders.” The country with its limited resources has been maintaining 6% annual average GDP growth rate and has brought about remarkable social and human development. After the independence in 1971, Bangladesh was one of poorest countries in the world. No major industries were developed in Bangladesh, when it was known as East Pakistan, due to discriminatory attitude and policies of the government of the then West Pakistan. So, rebuilding the war-ravaged country with limited resources appeared to be the biggest challenge. The industry that has been making crucial contribution to rebuilding the country and its economy is none other than the readymade garment (RMG) industry which is now the single biggest export earner for Bangladesh. The sector accounts for 83% of total export earnings of the country. When our only major export earner “the jute industry” started losing its golden days, it is the RMG sector that replaced it, and then, to overtake it.”* <sup>(49)</sup> This victory must go to them who are contributing most. So, BGMEA should be careful to protect them at every stage.

BGMEA has been operating 12 health centers at different parts of Dhaka and Chittagong with a view to providing basic healthcare facilities to garment workers and their families. The trade organization runs a hospital for apparel workers in Chittagong. Besides, taking into consideration the huge number of RMG workers living and doing jobs in Dhaka and its outskirts and addressing their healthcare need, BGMEA has taken the project of constructing a 100-bed non-profit general hospital in Mirpur, Dhaka. Once completed, the hospital is expected to provide various outdoor and indoor healthcare facilities to our workers. The hospital will help our workers to avoid the hassle of public hospitals and exorbitant charges of private hospitals. <sup>(50)</sup>

**CHAPTER-06**  
**MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Findings are an interpretation of practical analysis. In this chapter, I have tried to present the major findings of this study based on data collected after the presentation of data and analysis of data. At the same time, I also have tried to discuss the results and the information discovered for clarity. The most significant variables which emerged from the analyses are stated below:

**(A). DEPZ is Better:** From this study, we have found that the environment and the working conditions of the RMG factories established in DEPZ area are much better than those of non-EPZ factories. The government policies and rules are followed mostly by the DEPZ industries. Salary structure and other facilities are also better. The female garment workers feel safer here.

**(B). A life of hard work:** They work hard from morning to evening. Even they get little chance to take some rest if they become tired of working. These girls work before going their workplace, they work in their workplace and even they work after coming from their workplace. They are constantly working. And they work at a stretch without any break. Sometimes as a mother, sometimes as a wife, sometimes as a sister or sometimes as a RMG worker they are serving the nation faithfully.

**(C). Scarcity of Sufficient Toilet and Pure Drinking Water:** The RMG Industries especially the Non-EPZ industries where the respondents work are found shortened with sufficient toilet and pure drinking water. Moreover, the existing toilets and washrooms are mostly unhygienic. Pure drinking water system is also poor. Many of them do not carry any water bottles for load. The female workers try not to go to toilets as the toilets are used by both male and female workers. So, by this time, they suppress their urge to urinate and to drink water that is detrimental to their reproductive health.

**(D). Weak Ventilation System:** The Non-EPZ industries are very congested with machinery and workers. A lot of workers work in a room which is very small compared to the number of workers. At the same time, not enough ventilation system is available which is the root cause of many health diseases. The situation of EPZ industries is much better.

**(E). Laws and Rights are not being implemented:** There is a cluster of rights and laws ensured by the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the BLA. There are also a big number of workers friendly international rules and regulations. But the factory authorities and the owners are not as much as cordial to follow these rules and regulations. They have a tendency of Procrastination in implementing their rights in maximum cases.

**(F). The facts of the rights are unknown:** The female garment workers even have no idea that there are a great number of health friendly rights which are guaranteed by the state. They have a common concept that they are living on the kindness of the garment factory they are working for. Most of their thoughts are that what they are getting is not low at all. They give thanks to the almighty thinking that they are fine enough and better than before. They do not think themselves important. After listening to their thoughts it seems that the people of Bangladesh are really very satisfied of getting very low salary. They do not have even a minimal idea that what a great role they are playing for the country!

**(G). No Complaint:** These female garment workers do the same monotonous job at a stretch from Dawn to Dusk. They are working day after day without any complaint rather a fear chases them all the time. Fear - Yes, the fear of losing job. Most of the female garment workers told me that they are not willing to do such things which may threaten their job. A common thought among them has risen that they are not in bad situation. When some of them were informed that you are the lowest paid garment industry workers, then some of them reacted in this way- is there no other profession in Bangladesh where the salary is lower than us? I was speechless for some time to hear it.

**(H). Owner of Poor Health:** Most of the female workers possess poor health as usual. This is the gift of their continuous working. Although they are saying that they are facing very little health problem which is a part of their tasks. If you work, there will be a little bit problem as if it does not matter at all.

**(I). Job Changing Tendency:** There is a very common tendency among the female garment workers that is job changing tendency. Most of them have worked different places and garment



factories before joining their present workplaces and many of them are seeking better opportunities. They count salary structure, work load, overtime policy and working environment as the standard in the field of job changing. Sometimes accommodation and work distance are also counted as the criteria.

**(J). Toilsome and Miserable Life:** The life they are leading is very pathetic and miserable. Very little of the female garment workers get residence facility from their office. So, having no other alternative, they live in slum or slum like places. Sometimes they have to share rooms, kitchen, toilets and washrooms with other families to save money. In maximum case, there is no room to swing a cat in. The garment worker herself, her husband and their offspring live in a single room. In some cases, the room is shared with their parents or in laws.

**(K). Accustomed to less sleep:** Another tragic finding is that, they have become accustomed to less Sleep. A great number of the female RMG workers including DEPZ workers do not get enough time for sleeping. They have to wake up very early in the morning, they have to work all day long and then after doing all the household chores it become late night to go to sleep.

**(L). Suffering from Different Diseases:** Some of the female workers including DEPZ workers are found suffering from different diseases like pains in Head, Eye, Hand, Back, Chest, Waist and Weakness, Stomach upset, Urinary Infection, Cold, Fever & Jaundice. The number has increased since joining work.

**(M). Deprived of Nutritious Food:** There is a general tendency of feeding better foods to their family members among the female garment workers. They like to feed better things to their husband, kids or parents. By doing this, sometimes they have no option to take the test of those food. The nutritious food items which they take home are Fruits, Egg, Fish or Meat. After doing hard work, they also need to take nourishing items. When they were asked on this matter, they said, Yes, of course we take nourishing items but it is the main responsibility to feed my family members first. “Can you yourself take all the items you serve to the family members?” The answer was yes, sometimes I can. But price hike of the daily items play the vital role in these low income families.

**(N). Limited Leisure:** Most of the married respondents spend their leisure time and holidays by doing household chores or taking care of the kids and senior persons or cooking. It means they get no leisure period. Only a few unmarried respondents are capable of enjoying the actual leisure which may be curtailed after their marriage. Some of the unmarried workers said it in jest. However, such wise they are serving the home as well as the nation.

**(O). Better Life Dream:** Most of the female garment workers try to save money for future. I came to know an important thing that is many of the DEPZ garment workers have bank accounts. Non-EPZ garment workers are also familiar with bank accounts. They are saving money to buy a TV, Refrigerator, favorite furniture, gold ornaments or a necessary accessory. But the main target of the married workers for saving money is to ensure a bright future for their kids. They save money to educate them with a good learning. Their own life has elapsed as usual. They lead a traditional life. But they do not want their children to lead the life they have lead. They have a dream that their kids will be well-educated and will do a very good job which will be a much better job. The unmarried workers are saving money for the gifts that will be given at their marriage which is the modern name of dowry.

So, it can be said from above discussion that these low wage earners are being exploited by the factory owners and the authorities, where their contributions are not negligible at all.

**CHAPTER-07**  
**RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

## 7.1 Distinguished Suggestions and Key Recommendations

### 7.1 (a) Recommendations to the GoB, to the Policy Makers and to the MoLE

The Government of Bangladesh has the most important role to ensure the basic health rights of the female garment workers. No other organization except the GoB can contribute most to this field. Only the Bona fide and kindness of the government can solve a lot of problems regarding RMG sector. Here I have made some suggestions in this regard which are as follows:

#### 1. Wage Rate and Salary Standard need to be Raised

The RMG workers working both in EPZ and non-EPZ garment industries are still ill-paid. Bangladesh has the cheapest unit labour cost in S.Asia.<sup>(51)</sup> Basically they are the lowest paid workers in the whole world<sup>(8)</sup>.

Countries	Unit Labour Cost (\$/Shirt)	Wages (\$/year)	Productivity (Shirts/Workers)
Bangladesh	0.11	290	2536
India	0.26	668	2592
Pakistan	0.43	1343	3100
Sri Lanka	0.79	570	719

**Table 7:** Unit Labour Cost, 1994.<sup>(52)</sup>

Although it is the picture from 25 years ago, the situation remains almost the same by this time. A salary structure was fixed by the government which is not followed by most of the non-EPZ garment factories. These irregularities should be brought under law. Their salary structure is the lowest but their hard workings are not the lowest. So, their wage rate should be ensured according to their labour and market price of commodity which will be a fair amount comparing to other neighbouring countries and also as per international labour rules.

## **2. Labour Law and Policy should be Revised**

The existing labour laws and policies should be rectified in line with the ILO and international labor standards, specially the laws and policies directly related to their reproductive health. Otherwise, the factory owners will get more chance to exploit the workers.

## **3. Labour Rights must be Enforced**

The basic labour rights settled by the government and ILO must be established and enforced by the government to get more productivity from the garment workers.

## **4. Training and Education on Labour Rights and Healthcare**

Training and education play the most important role to be aware about their rights, laws and policies. Uneducated /Less-educated and new workers do not know much about labor laws. For example, the survey of 1990 shows that most employers do not give maternity leave because workers do not ask for it. <sup>(53)</sup> This situation remains unchanged in most cases. So, the Training and Education in the area of labour law and labour right, occupational healthcare and safety and reproductive health issue is very urgent for them.

## **5. Stronger Labour Inspectorate**

The factory and labour inspectorate needs a total reshape if it wants to be more effective to ensure safety, health friendly and acceptable working conditions in the RMG sector. Current labour code and betterment of labour inspections at factory level should be properly enforced which can be enforced through an effective and irrespective investigation.

## **6. Ensuring Equal Distribution for non-EPZ Garment Industry**

It is obvious from several studies including this study that, DEPZ garment industries are holding better positions in case of health friendly facilities. So, other garment industries also required this. I think the government, MoLE and the policy makers should pay heed to this case.

## **7. Right to Establish TU and other organisations**

Freedom of establishing Trade Unions and other associations to bargain collectively at RMG level to assure their basic rights should be ensured by the government.

### **8. Ensuring Health Services at Factory Level**

Services relating to Occupational health must be provided by the by the factory management need to be confirmed by the state.

### **9. Promoting the scope of Dialogues among the Parties**

Dialogues among the government, factory owners and Trade unions should be held three or four times in a year on occupational health, safety, working conditions and on basic rights.

### **10. Provision of Punishment**

Provision of law against the lawbreakers must be effective. And the trial should be transparent, neutral, impartial and exemplary. All the allegations of labour right violations should be properly investigated.

#### **7.1 (b) Recommendations to BGMEA and BKMEA**

BGMEA and BKMEA can play the second most important role to improve the occupational health status of the female as well as the male garment workers. The following steps are the way through which they can perform:

#### **1. Encouraging the members to Allow forming independent TUs and Associations**

BGMEA and BKMEA should encourage their members to allow the establishment of Trade Unions and such associations ensuring the safety of TU members and leaders. Not only that they also have to keep in touch regularly with them. They must have listened their demands and needs carefully and would be honest to fulfill their requirements.

#### **2. Helping the government in Policy Formulation and Policy Implementation**

BGMEA and BKMEA can be the most important helping hands of the government in Policy Formulation and Policy Implementation as they are the closest observers of the workers. They can work for the needs and demands of the workers which can help the government to create new worker friendly policy. They also can maintain a liaison between the garment industry and the government.

### **3. Should be Strict in Abiding by the Laws**

BGMEA and BKMEA should confirm that their members would be respectful in abiding by the labour rules. They also have to create provisions for the members who are violating the labour laws.

### **4. Providing Training for the workers**

Most of the female workers have a little or do not have any idea about their health rights and existing labour laws. It should be informed. BGMEA and BKMEA can play the most significant roles to arrange and provide training on healthcare and labour rights. No need to say how important the training and education program is urgent for the RMG workers. So, sufficient workshop and training for them arranged by the BGMEA and BKMEA should be provided in all the RMG industries. Training institutions need to be increased also.

### **5. Should pay heed to Working Hours, Overtime, Salary and Bonus**

The working hours should be shortened as many of the garment factories make them compel to work more hours. Sometimes they become bound to work in the holidays even in the Eid day but they randomly cut salary in the name of late coming, bad performance, bad quality etc. which should there be minimized.<sup>(54)</sup> Sometimes they are forced to do compulsory overtime works. After all that hardworking there are a lot of complaints that the workers do not get their salary and bonus on time. So, as the regulatory bodies BGMEA and BKMEA should pay heed to these grounds.

### **6. Establishment of more Medical Centres & Clinics Outside of Dhaka & Chittagong**

BGMEA has been operating 12 health centers at different parts of Dhaka and Chittagong with a view to providing basic healthcare facilities to garment workers and their families.<sup>(50)</sup> But the number needs to be increased and these facilities should be spread other cities and towns. BKMEA also have to take such initiatives.

### **7. Establishment of Childcare Centres**

Germany-based international garments firm Metro Group and BKMEA have jointly set up a day-care centre for the children of garment workers in Narayanganj BSCIC area.<sup>(55)</sup> It is a good initiative, undoubtedly. Such initiatives should be further expanded.

### **8. Collaboration with National & International Organisations**

They can collaborate with different national & international organisations to improve the working environment of the garment industries and for the arrangement of various training for the garment workers.

#### **7.1 (c) Recommendations to the Factory Owners**

The GoB and the policy makers can formulate workers friendly policies and laws. BGMEA/BKMEA can help the govt. and can create pressures on their members. But the factory owners only can implement the laws and the rights of the garment owners. It is their duty to shape the rules. The followings are some recommendations for them:

- 1.** The salary fixed by the govt. for the workers should be activated at every factory and the culture of overwork with pressure should be closed.
- 2.** The garment workers deserve doctor and medical facilities which should be provided. The arrangement of first aid in case of emergency should be available.
- 3.** The working environment needs to be improved with proper ventilation system and emergency fire exits.
- 4.** Sufficient toilets for the female garment workers.
- 5.** There will be pure drinking water system.
- 6.** Weekly holidays, other government holidays and maternity leave with pay for the female workers should be ensured. Sick leave should be allowed without curtailing salary.
- 7.** Opportunities of taking a little break at work.
- 8.** Child care centres for the new mothers.
- 9.** Transport facilities for those who leave away.
- 10.** Trade Unions and Labour Organisations should be permitted.



*11.* And last but not the least, the factory owners should be sincere in the proper training issue on healthcare and health rights for the female garment workers.

#### **7.1 (d) Recommendations to the Female RMG Workers**

The girls who are working in different garment factories in Bangladesh are mostly less educated or uneducated. They have no idea or very little idea about the existing labour laws. The government, BGMEA/BKMEA and factory owners have duties to inform the female workers about the labour laws and health rights. But the female workers themselves also have some responsibilities to stay good.

1. When the female garment workers become aware about their legal rights, it is to be expected that they will get better health. So, we hope that, they will be much aware about their rights.
2. They have to raise their voices for first aid and fulltime medical facilities.
3. They also have to be loud against forced labour.
5. Weekly holidays, other holidays and maternity leave with pay are their rights. So, they must be aware of getting these facilities.
6. They have to speak loudly for sufficient toilets for women workers, pure drinking water and strong ventilation system.
7. They should claim an arrangement of taking some rest when the female workers feel tired or sick.
8. At last, they will seek their needs and necessities through labour organizations.

## 7.2 Conclusion

It is a very familiar and well-known term in our society that the women are created as physically weaker than the men. According to this common ideology, women need more care than men. They deserve more rest, more nutritious food and less work. But if we concentrate to our RMG sector, we shall find a totally converse picture. RMG sector is the heart of our export earning and the millions of courageous young women have become the driving force of this export-based economy. I have found from my study that, the female workers worked in the DEPZ garment industry lead comparatively better life. They receive many facilities including almost all the government facilities. The Bangladesh branches of the foreign factories of DEPZ are also providing extra ordinary facilities for their workers such as skylight, A/C rooms, medical and day care centres etc. In maximum cases, workers work in health friendly environment and they are not the victims of overwork. But it is not the actual picture of the garment industries of the whole country. The gains and pains here are not running simultaneously where the pains always prevail over the gains.

It is true that after engagement with wage employment these girls have obtained a great socioeconomic status. But they had to sacrifice something more precious to obtain it. Their health was affected very adversely. It was found that a number of illness particularly physical weakness which is the symptom of some serious diseases, like anemia, tuberculosis, etc., are largely prevalent among female workers. <sup>(56)</sup> Continuous hard work without any break, lack of proper nutritious diet and sleep along with unhealthy/unfriendly working conditions jointly have ill affect on the workers reproductive health and their working strength. Thus wage employment is successful in creating socioeconomic status but failed to create any visible effective output to their working capacity rather these overworks spoil their health and strength desperately. Despite all these factors, they lead very inhuman life. Almost all of them live in the slums with miserable living conditions. After working extremely hard, they do not get any attractive salary. They have to maintain their house rent, food, clothing, transport fare, education cost, medical cost and recreational cost within this tiny salary. Moreover, the shocking news is that, these girls are treated as production machine, not human being. Their salary should be paid within the first week or within the 8<sup>th</sup> days of the month which is clearly mentioned in the section of labour law. This law is hardly kept by the factory management. As the poor girls have no other option they

are bound to comply with these irregularities. Basically, these do not get equal wages, equal rights and equal honors.

A tremendous achievement on female wage employment has been occurred through the RMG sector. Available and easy supply of large number of women workers is the main reason behind the swift growth of the RMG sector and it has made RMG as the highest export earner sector of Bangladesh. It is an excellent matter indeed but the tragedy starts when we come to know about its dark side that is exploitation. So, it is very urgent to change the mentality of exploitation towards the female garment workers. Salary structure need to be increased that should be attractive and the working hours need to be shortened as well as forced labour should be banned. It is high time to modify the existing labor laws with the ILO convention and other international labor laws. It is our own interest to implement the labour laws at each and every garment factory to save our main driving force. No doubt, it is indispensable if we want to survive in this competitive global market.

## References

- 1 UNICEF Annual Report 2015. Analysis of the Situation of Children and Women in Bangladesh.
- 2 Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh, 2008 edition.
- 3 [www.bepza.gov.bd](http://www.bepza.gov.bd)
- 4 do
- 5 Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2010.
- 6 do, 2013.
- 7 Chowdhury, Suman. 2018. "Rights of Female Garments Workers in Bangladesh: A Case of Chittagong", *BRAC University: BRAC Institute of Governance and Development*, P-3.
- 8 A report published by ILO on 18 November, 2013 in Geneva.
- 9 Halim, S. and Kabir, A.H. 2005. "Globalization, Gender and Labour Market: Some Evidence from RMG sector". *A Journal of Social Science* 22(1): 29-42.
- 10 Chowdhury, Suman. 2018. P-2.
- 11 BGMEA (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association) Member's Directory, 2008. Annual Report, Dhaka, Bangladesh. pp.4-7.
- 12 Article 15; Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- 13 Article 18(1); *ibid*.
- 14 Chapter IV, Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006.
- 15 Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2010.
- 16 International Labour Organization (2014). *Maternity and Paternity at Work: Law and Practice Across the World*, P-1.
- 17 ILO; *ibid*.
- 18 Rashid, Mohammad Mamun Ur and et al. 2015. "Health and Safety Environment of Readymade Garment Industry in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Zaheen Knitwears Limited", *Manarat International University Studies*, 4(1),.

- 19 National Sleep Foundation (<https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/how-much-sleep-do-we-really-need>).
- 20 <https://www.tuck.com/how-much-sleep-do-i-need/>
- 21 do.
- 22 Section100, Chapter IX (Working Hour and Leave), The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, Act No. XLII of 2006 (11 October, 2006).
- 23 Section 108, *ibid*.
- 24 The Daily Star, November 13, 2016.
- 25 New Age, 30 April, 2018.
- 26 The Daily Star, 08 October, 2018.
- 27 Section103, Chapter IX (Working Hour and Leave), The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, Act No. XLII of 2006 (11 October, 2006).
- 28 Section104, *ibid*.
- 29 Section118, *ibid*.
- 30 Dhaka Tribune, 07 October, 2018.
- 31 The Daily Star, 03 April, 2019. (<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/human-rights/news/health-issues-rmg-workers-need-attention-1724074>).
- 32 Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2010.
- 33 Lillypet S, Jain T and Joseph B. July, 2017. *Health problems among garment factory workers: A narrative literature review, Journal of Occupational Health and Epidemiology*.
- 34 The Daily Star, November 23, 2017 (<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2017/11/23/rmg-workers-basic-needs/>).
- 35 Adnan, Tariq. 2018. "Low Wage Crisis: Impacts on Bangladeshi Garment Sector Workers", *Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism*. Vol 8(1): 357.
- 36 Do.
- 37 Bhuiyan, Md Zafar Alam. (Sep.-Oct. 2012). "Present Status of Garment workers in Bangladesh: An analysis". *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSRJBM)*. ISSN: 2278-487X. Volume 3. Issue 5. PP 38-44.
- 38 Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2010.

- 39 Do.
- 40 The Daily Star, 03 April, 2019. (<https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/human-rights/news/health-issues-rmg-workers-need-attention-1724074>)
- 41 Chowdhury, Suman (2018). P-13.
- 42 Do.
- 43 ILO-Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
- 44 [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11200:8437219810581:::P11200\\_INSTRUMENT\\_SORT:1](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11200:8437219810581:::P11200_INSTRUMENT_SORT:1)
- 45 World Wide Web
- 46 Do.
- 47 <https://www.nutritionintl.org/2019/04/bkmea-and-nutrition-international-launch-initiative-to-improve-nutrition-for-women-workers-of-garment-factories-in-bangladesh/>
- 48 Do.
- 49 <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/about/AboutGarmentsIndustry>
- 50 [www.bgmea.com](http://www.bgmea.com)
- 51 Absar, Syeda Sharmin. 2001. “Problems surrounding wages: the ready made garments sector in Bangladesh”, *Labour and Management in Development Journal*, Asia Pacific Press. Volume 2, Number 7, P-6.
- 52 Do, P-5.
- 53 Paul-Majumder, Pratima and Begum, Anwara. June, 2000. “The Gender Imbalances in the Export Oriented Garment Industry in Bangladesh, Policy Research Report on Gender and Development”, Working Paper Series No. 12, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network, *Development Research Group*, The World Bank, , p-25.
- 54 Bhuiyan, Md Zafar Alam, p-44.
- 55 <http://www.bkmea.com/BKMEA-Day-Care-Centre.html>
- 56 Paul-Majumder, Pratima. (March-June 1996). Health Impact of Women's Wage Employment: A Case Study of the Garment Industry of Bangladesh, *The Bangladesh Development Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1/2, p- 97.

## Bibliography

Riaduzzaman, Md. (March 2017). Health and Nutritional Status of Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh: A Critical Analysis, *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, Volume 4, Issue 3, , PP 19 -29.

Paul-Majumder, Pratima. (March-June 1996). Health Impact of Women's Wage Employment: A Case Study of the Garment Industry of Bangladesh, *The Bangladesh Development Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1/2 pp. 59-102.

S Akhter, AFM Salahuddin , M. Iqbal , ABMA Malek and N Jahan. (June 2010).Health and Occupational Safety for Female Workforce of Garment Industries in Bangladesh, *Journal of Mechanical Engineering*, Vol. ME 41, No. 1,

Absar, Syeda Sharmin. 2003. Health Hazards and Labour Laws in Bangladesh: A Narrative-based Study on Women Garment Workers, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 31, No. 3 pp. 452-477.

Abul Barkat, Murtaza Majid, Rowshan Ara, Golam Mahiyuddin, Matiur Rahman, Avijit Poddar, Asmar Osman, Md. Shahnewaz Khan, Md. Badiuzzaman and Abdullah-Al-Hussain. (December 2008). Study on Change in Attitudes and Behavior of Garment Owners, Managers and Workers towards Gender and Reproductive Health Issues, *Human Development Research Centre*, Prepared for UNFPA Bangladesh, Dhaka.

Shakila Matin Mridula and Ms.Khoshnur Afrin Khan (April 2009). Working Conditions and Reproductive Health Status of Female Garments Workers of Bangladesh, *Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE)*.

F. Begum, R. N. Ali, M.A. Hossain and Sonia B. Shahid. 2010. Harassment of women garment workers in Bangladesh. *Bangladesh Agril. Univ. 8(2): 291–296, 2010 ISSN 1810-3030*.

Bhuiyan, Md Zafar Alam. (Sep.-Oct. 2012). “Present Status of Garment workers in Bangladesh: An analysis”. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSRJBM)*. ISSN: 2278-487X. Volume 3. Issue 5. PP 38-44.

Absar, Syeda Sharmin. (Jul. 20-26, 2002). Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 29 pp. 3012-3016.

Absar, Syeda Sharmin. 2001. “Problems surrounding wages: the ready made garments sector in Bangladesh”, *Labour and Management in Development Journal*, Asia Pacific Press. Volume 2, Number 7.

Paul-Majumder, Pratima & Begum, Sharifa. October, 1997. Upward Occupational Mobility Among Female Workers in the Garment Industry of Bangladesh (Research Report), *Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies*, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Shoesmith, Dennis. August, 1986. *Export Processing Zones in five countries: The Economic and Human Consequences*, Asia Partnership for Human Development, Hong Kong.

Dannecker, P. 2002. *Between Conformity and Resistance: Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh*, The UPL.

Zohir, Salma C., and Majumder, Pratima-Paul. October, 1996. Garment Workers in Bangladesh (Research Monograph), *Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies*, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Lillypet S, Jain T and Joseph B. July, 2017. Health problems among garment factory workers: A narrative literature review, *Journal of Occupational Health and Epidemiology*.

Adnan, Tariq. 2018. Low Wage Crisis: Impacts on Bangladeshi Garment Sector Workers, *Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism*, Vol 8(1): 357.

Internet (World Wide Web) is widely used.



## Questionnaire

### **Occupational Health Hazards on Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh: A Case Study on Dhaka EPZ**

The questionnaire used in the opinion survey for the study of the above title :

<b>Introduction and Permission :</b>	
<p>Assalamu Alaikum. I am Israth-Un-Nisa, a student and an M.Phil researcher of the Department of Political Science, University of Dhaka. To complete my M.Phil dissertation, I am doing this research at the suggestion of my honourable supervisor (Teacher).</p> <p>I will be very happy and benefitted greatly if you participate in this interview. It is entirely up to you to participate in this interview and you may not answer any question or even all the questions you wish. But I hope that you will answer all the questions. Your opinion is very important to me. I want to ensure you that your identity will be kept confidential and the information you provide will not in any way cause harm to you.</p>	
Signature of the Interviewer :	Date :
<b>Participant Introduction</b>	
Name :	Educational Qualification :
Age :	How long have I been working :
Address :	

Now let's start the interview :

1. Do you get any medical facilities here?  
(a). Yes (b). No
2. Quality of the medical facility?  
(a). Good (b). Average (c). Bad
3. Are you aware of getting health and medical facilities?  
(a). Yes (b). No
4. Is there any doctor at your workplace to whom you may get health facilities?  
(a). Yes (b). No
5. Can you take some rest when you're tired of working?  
(a). Yes (b). No (c). Occasionally
6. Does the authority behave flexibly when you become ill?  
(a). Yes (b). No
7. Do you get vacation if you become sick?  
(a). Yes (b). No
8. Do you have to do overtime work or deduct salary while you are on leave due to illness?  
(a). Yes (b). No
9. Do you get maternity leave?  
(a). Yes (b). No
10. How long do you get maternity leave?  
(a). 1-2 month (b). 2-3 months (c). More than that
11. How much compatible is your working environment for work?  
(a). Completely (b). Average (c). Bound to do
12. Is your workplace healthier than other places?  
(a). Yes (b). No

13. Is the sanitation system of the workplace clean enough?  
(a). Yes (b). No
14. Is there enough light and air in the workplace?  
(a). Yes (b). No
15. Do you receive any medical allowance?  
(a). Yes (b). No
16. Can you get enough sleep every day?  
(a). Yes (b). No
17. How long can you sleep?  
(a). 4-6 Hours (b). Less than that (c). More than that
18. When do you come to work?  
(a). 8 a.m. (b). 9 a.m. (c). 10 a.m (d). Before 8 a.m.
19. How long do you work?  
(a). 8 Hours (b). 9 Hours (c). 10 Hours (d). More than that
20. When do you get off from work?  
(a). 4 p.m. (b). 5 p.m. (c). 6 p.m. (d). After 6 p.m.
21. Do you get any weekly holiday?  
(a). Yes (b). No
22. Is family Cost unbearable without overtime?  
(a). Bearable (b). Unbearable
23. Do you do any other job (other than this job)?  
(a). Yes (b). No
24. Any Health Hazards for being engaged in this job for long time?  
(a). Yes (b). No
25. If the answer is yes, then which part of the body do you experience problems with?  
(a). In Hand (b). In Eye (c). In Back (d). In Shoulder (e). In Waist

26. Do you take your food properly?

- (a). Yes (b). No

27. Do you get instant treatment if you become wounded with needle?

- (a). Yes (b). No

28. Do you get leave for any reason other than sickness?

- (a). Yes (b). No

29. Does the workload increase during the peak season?

- (a). Yes (b). No

30. Is it mandatory to overtime during this time?

- (a). Yes (b). No

31. Do you get house facility from office?

- (a). Yes (b). No

32. Can you save enough money for food apart from house rent and other expenses from the salary you get?

- (a). Yes (b). No

**Patterns of Occupational Health Hazards among the Female Garment Workers before and after joining RMG Sector (✓)**

Incidence of Health Problems	Before Joining			After Joining		
	Not at all	Sometimes	Very Much	Not at all	Sometimes	Very Much
Eye Trouble						
Ear Problem						
Headache						
Handpain						
Chestpain						
Backpain						
Waist Pain						
Weakness/Fainting						
Stomach Upset/ Diarrhoea/Gastritis						
Cold, Cough & Fever						
Urinary Infection						
Jaundice						
Others						

**How they Spend their Leisure Periods Returning from Garment Factory (✓)**

Type of Leisure Period	Not at all	Sometimes	Very Much
Watching TV			
Pastime with Family			
Outing/Travelling			
Going to Watch Movie			
Cooking			
Taking Care of Children or other Family Members			
No Leisure			

The interview is over. Thank you so much for taking part in this event.