

M.Phil. Dissertation

A Study on Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of Bangladesh

*This Dissertation is Presented to the Institute of Social Welfare and
Research, University of Dhaka as Fulfillment of the Requirement for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil)*



Institute of Social Welfare and Research

University of Dhaka

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A Study on Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of Bangladesh

M.Phil. Dissertation

Researcher

Naimul Razzaque

Registration No: 080

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Institute of Social Welfare and Research

University of Dhaka

Dhaka-1205

Supervisor

Dr. Md. Tawohidul Haque

Associate Professor

Institute of Social Welfare and Research

University of Dhaka

Dhaka-1205



**Institute of Social Welfare and Research
University of Dhaka
Dhaka-1205**

November, 2025

Dedication

*I dedicate this dissertation to my father Md. Abdur
Razzaque and my only son Ahnaf Abdullah*

Declaration of Ownership

I hereby declare that this M.Phil. dissertation entitled “**A Study on Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of Bangladesh**” is prepared for the degree of Master of Philosophy under the guidance and supervision of Associate Professor Dr. Md. Tawohidul Haque, Institute of Social Welfare and Research, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. I have done this research with my own effort and incorporate relevant information. I have used lots of literatures in my study and also provided accurate references. For completing the procedure of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.) in Social Welfare, I am submitting this dissertation to, the Institute of Social Welfare and Research, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. I have not submitted any part of this dissertation to anywhere for any assessment.

Naimul Razzaque

M.Phil. Researcher Registration No: 080

Session: 2023-2024

Institute of Social Welfare and Research

University of Dhaka

Dhaka-1205

ড. মোঃ তৌহিদুল হক

পিএইচডি (ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়)

সহযোগী অধ্যাপক

সমাজকল্যাণ ও গবেষণা ইনিস্টিটিউট

ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়

ঢাকা-১২০৫, বাংলাদেশ

ফোন: +৮৮০১৫২১২৫৬৪৬১

ইমেইল: tawohid@gmail.com



Dr. Md. Tawohidul Haque

University of Dhaka, Ph.D

Associate Professor

Institute of Social Welfare and
Research

University of Dhaka

Dhaka-1205, Bangladesh

Phone: +88 01521256461

E-mail: tawohid@gmail.com

Certificate of Approval

This is to certify that Naimul Razzaque, an M. Phil researcher of the Institute of Social Welfare and Research University of Dhaka, has effectively completed her dissertation entitled “**A Study on Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of Bangladesh**” under my direct supervision. To the best of my knowledge, it is a unique and original work. I am recommending and forwarding this dissertation to the University of Dhaka, through the Institute of Social Welfare and Research for further official formalities to accept under the requirements for the degree of Masters of Philosophy.

(Associate Prof. Dr. Md. Tawohidul Haque)

Research Supervisor

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With Regards

Naimul Razzaque

M.Phil. Researcher

Registration No: 080

Session: 2023-2024

Institute of Social Welfare and Research

University of Dhaka

Dhaka-1205

Executive Summary

The RMG sector in Bangladesh is a critical contributor to the national economy; it represents about 11% of the country's GDP and encompasses about 84% of the revenues from exports. This industry employs approximately four million workers, out of which 60-65% are women. Though these women drive this success story, they are burdened with innumerable challenges regarding labour rights, including wage disparity, unsafe working conditions, and GBV. This research assesses the labour rights of women workers in Bangladesh's RMG sector, specifically their working conditions, wages, safety, and access to legal protection. In this study, the labour rights problems faced by women in the RMG sector were investigated using mixed-methods research, in which both quantitative and qualitative techniques were combined to give a comprehensive view. Conducted between November 2024 and February 2025, data from a total of 375 female workers were collected using structured questionnaires, which gathered information on working conditions, wages, safety, and job satisfaction across five RMG factories in Savar and Gazipur, two major industrial hubs in Bangladesh. Qualitative insights complemented the quantitative data obtained from 20 in-depth interviews and 4 FGDs with key stakeholders such as female workers, factory managers, union representatives, and labour rights activists. The integration of these methods allowed the study to capture not only the statistical trends but also the personal experiences of the workers, better understanding the challenges they face. The study is intended to unravel the nexus between economic empowerment and labour rights, as well as identify the impediments facing women workers in realizing their full labour rights in the workplace. One of the key findings from this study reveals that there is still a persistent gender pay gap issue in the RMG sector. While women comprise the majority of the workforce, 78% of female workers receive wages below a living wage. Further, there is a 20% gender pay gap at the managerial level of employment, where men have higher-paying jobs in management, while women hold lower-paid manual labour positions like sewing machine operator and helper. The existing wage gaps prove there is discrimination against women, who get paid less for the same work than men. Another urgent issue is workplace safety. In spite of the regulations concerning fire drills and the implementation of other safety measures, 65% of the probed factories did not hold fire drills as legally demanded, leaving workers

particularly vulnerable in case of an emergency. Secondly, 85% of women workers reported feeling unsafe in their workplace due to poor safety features such as bad fire exits, poor ventilation, and an absence of protection gear. These conditions have continued to raise great concern, especially following the devastating fall of Rana Plaza in 2013, exposing failures in the safety legislation in this industry. Union representation is weak, with only 5% of workers unionized, and fewer than 10% of the leadership positions are held by women. The consequence of such underrepresentation greatly reduces the extent to which female workers are able to assert their rights for better wages, improved safety conditions, and freedom from discrimination. The study found that significant cultural and institutional barriers exist for women joining unions, with many fearing retaliations by factory management or dismissal from their jobs. The RMG sector is filled with various cases of gender-based violence. In the study, it was reported that 90% of the female workers had faced some kind of harassment, which included verbal, physical, or sexual harassment. However, the same percentage, 82%, never received a solution because of the weak grievance mechanisms and fear of retaliation. The inefficiency in policies and mechanisms for addressing harassment issues in workplaces has led to the persistence of such violations, making the environment inappropriate and insecure for females. Although the Bangladesh Labour Act guarantees maternity benefits, many of the women workers are not receiving any such benefits despite legal protections granted within the amended version of 2006, revised in 2018. The study revealed large numbers of women either being refused maternity leave or forced into resignation during pregnancy, which leaves many workers bereft of income and job security during this very critical period. On top of this, the absence of childcare facilities at the workplace exacerbates women's challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. It also investigated the awareness of labour rights among women workers. Most women had very little knowledge of their rights as stated in the national laws on labour and international conventions. Some workers had general information about their rights, though a significant proportion did not have substantial details about certain provisions, such as about wages, hours of work, and even maternity leave. Indeed, this lack of awareness is what further exacerbates their inability to claim these rights and access legal remedies when violations occur. The study has put forward a number of recommendations to enhance the labour rights for women workers in Bangladesh's RMG sector: The government should develop more

comprehensive strategies for enforcement of existing labour legislation, including wages, workplace safety, and gender-based violence. Implementation of the Bangladesh Labour Act should go hand in hand with accountability for non-compliance at factories. Effective implementation needs to be matched with strengthening regular inspections through the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, in order to ensure that not only are safety standards upheld, but workers' rights are better protected as well. The study advocates for gender-sensitive workplace policies regarding paid menstrual leaves, maternity benefits, and increasing childcare support. It would make work more accommodating and help women balance work and family responsibilities. Affordable childcare and paid menstrual leaves would reduce the stigma associated with reproductive health and enable women to be more active participants in the workforce. Improvement in labor rights therefore requires increased women's participation in unions and their leadership. The study suggests that the unions actively involve women, conduct labor rights training, and union leadership training. This would equip the female workers with the capacity to advance their rights. The research study requires safety measures to be put in place, including compulsory fire drills and adequate emergency exits. Training workers on safety procedures and enforcing minimum standards of safety in factories will reduce the frequency of accidents and promote a more favorable working environment. The government should allocate adequate resources to increase factory inspections and prosecute non-complying industries. There is an urgent need to spread awareness on labour rights among the women workers. The NGOs, trade unions, and civil society organizations should actively inform the workers about their rights under the Bangladesh Labour Act and international conventions and enable them to seek justice when necessary. The international buyers must take increasing responsibility for ensuring that their suppliers in Bangladesh maintain ethical standards in labor practices. Imposing strict codes of conduct can be useful for global brands in making factories follow labor laws regarding gender equality, safety, and fair wages. This needs cooperation with local stakeholders for long-term improvement in the industry. This research evidences the critical role that women workers play in Bangladesh's RMG sector and points out a range of barriers to securing their labour rights. While the sector has opened economic opportunities for women, these gains are being eroded by systemic exploitation, poor working conditions, and weak enforcement of labour laws. For truly sustainable and inclusive growth, strong labour regulations with

strict enforcement, better safety standards, union leadership by women, and gender equity at workplaces will have to be ensured in the Bangladesh RMG sector. By taking on these challenges, the industry will engender a more just and equitable environment for the millions of women who contribute to its success.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BCWS	Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity
BDT	Bangladeshi Taka
BGMEA	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association
BILS	Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies
BJA	Bangladesh Knitwear Association
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DIFE	Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments
FGA	Female Garment Workers' Association
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HR	Human Resource
ILO	International Labour Organization
MOL	Ministry of Labour
MoLE	Ministry of Labour and Employment
MIA	Migrant Integration Act
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
RMG	Ready-Made Garment
RPA	Regional Policy Agreement
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
USD	United States Dollar
WEPs	UN Women's Empowerment Principles

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Introduction**
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1.1 Introduction

The ready-made garment (RMG) sector is one of the most robust cornerstones of Bangladesh's economy and society. The industry has grown from a relatively minor export-based business from the late 1970s to a major worldwide arena, and it has converted Bangladesh into the second-biggest exporter of clothing globally behind China (World Bank, 2019). The sector currently contributes for approximately 84% of the nation's total export revenue and contributes approximately 11% of its GDP (BGMEA, 2023). Beyond its macroeconomic contribution, the RMG sector has also become a site of transformation of women's involvement in the workforce with near four million workers, of whom an estimated 60–65 percent comprise women (ILO, 2022).

The integration of women into industrial labour has had important social effects. For many women, especially those with rural backgrounds, working in garments is the first paid wage in a formal sector labour environment. The gains from the jobs have enabled women to contribute directly to household upkeep, finance the education of children, and improve their social status (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). Work in RMG factories has thus been celebrated as a force of empowerment of women, poverty reduction, and gender norm change within a deeply entrenched patriarchal society (Heath & Mobarak, 2015).

And yet, alongside these achievements is a paradox. The very sector celebrated as a driver of women's empowerment owes its origins to widespread breaches of labour rights, hazardous working conditions, and systemic gender-based discrimination (Hossain, 2012; Siddiqi, 2009). Global concern for workers' safety following the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in 2013 brought to the fore systematic failures of labour rights enforcement in the RMG sector of Bangladesh (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). Despite adhering reforms and global pressure, there persist reports indicating wage exploitation, denial of maternity benefits, sexual harassment, and intimidation of workers' union work, particularly for women workers (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Such resistance of economic empowerment by deprivation of rights forms the basis for this study.

It has more than four million workers in the present day, and women comprise the overwhelming majority of them. The majority of these women are from impoverished, rural, and marginalized communities where economic options are few and social restrictions strong (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004; Siddiqi, 2009). For the majority of them, working in the industry was their introduction to the formal labour market - a field that for so long had been off-limits for women of their class. By doing this job, not only have they earned themselves an income, but also a sense of independence and self-respect. Their wages, meagre as they are, become the mainstay of keeping their families going, paying for children's education, and scraping through day-to-day existence.

Employment in this sector has also begun to revolutionize traditional gender roles in subtle yet powerful ways. Women once confined to the household now going to factories, manage their own earnings, and make decisions within their families. The opportunity to work has delayed early marriages for some adolescent girls, provided them with a voice in families, and allowed them to participate more visibly in the urban economy (Heath & Mobarak, 2015). These are quiet but significant steps toward gender equality.

The majority continue to work long hours in unsafe and poorly regulated factories for low wages, insecurity of work, and routine disregard for labour rights. The lowest position in the labour hierarchy remains inhabited by women despite being the backbone of the industry's global success. They receive less pay compared to males for the same work and are not given decision-making roles or opportunities for betterment (Ahmed, 2013; Mahmud & Kabeer, 2018).

Although the reforms that were implemented after the Rana Plaza incident of 2013 and constant international force from buyers and labour rights organizations have not had much of an effect on labour standards, it is still very weak. According to research, a lot of the rights of female employees are not well understood specified in the Bangladeshi labour law while the few who are informed do not have the power or the safe ways to assert their rights. On top of this, the gendered aspect of factory hierarchies makes the situation worse as women are the ones being paid the lowest and getting the least secure positions while men hold the supervisory and managerial roles. Knowing about the rights of women workers in the RMG sector is very

important not only because of the large number of women in the industry but also the sector is a major factor in Bangladesh's reputation in the global economy. Ensuring the rights of women at the workplace, the business world creates an immediate link with SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) are the primary Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In order to identify the gaps, difficulties, and areas for reform that currently exist, it is imperative that a comprehensive study on women's labour rights in this sector be carried out.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although Bangladesh's the RMG sector has produced significant job possibilities for women, the industry continues to be plagued by structural exploitation and gendered inequality. Women workers are often victims of wage discrimination, denial of maternity leave, non-payment of overtime, lack of provisions for workplace safety and health, and sexual harassment in the workplace specially in the RMG factories. Although their rights are legally guaranteed under national labour legislation and international conventions, their enforcement and monitoring are uneven. Moreover, cultural heritage, employment insecurity, and the absence of powerful female representation in trade unions limit women from exercising their rights in an effective manner.

The problem is additionally compounded by the strong relationship dynamic in international supply chains in that foreign purchasers demand low cost of production, thereby indirectly compelling factory owners to make concessions on workers' rights. While numerous studies have been done on industrial safety and labour rights after major accidents in industries, there is comparatively limited focused study of women workers' lives and how they can exercise labour rights in daily life in factories.

This study, therefore, tries to know how Bangladeshi women workforce in the RMG sector think about, feel, and bargain their labour rights. The study tries to spot on both the material realities of the industries and the subjective narratives of women workers and therefore provide a multi-dimensional understanding of the barrier and advantages for guaranteeing gender-sensitive labour rights in one of the most significant industries in the Global South.

Women workers in the RMG factories are exposed to a range of labour right problems. Forcing overtime, excessive working hours, delayed or non-payment, and unsafe working conditions remain prevalent (ILO, 2019). Gender discrimination further fuels these problems. Research has also documented men's and women's pay differentials for doing the same job, where women mainly occupy the lowest-paid and lowest-status jobs like sewing machine operators and helper but jobs such as supervisory and managerial positions are mainly occupied by men (Akhter, 2019).

A critical issue relates to maternity rights. Although the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006, amended 2018) mandates paid leave for maternity, many women workers either do not receive these benefits or are forced to resign during pregnancy (Nazneen & Sultan, 2014). Similarly, sexual harassment and verbal abuse are frequently reported but seldom addressed due to weak grievance mechanisms and fear of retaliation (Chowdhury, 2017). The hierarchical factory structure and patriarchal cultural norms discourage women from joining trade unions, resulting in their exclusion from collective bargaining and decision-making spaces (Siddiqi, 2009; Zaman, 2021).

The problem is exacerbated by the world supply chain dynamics of the RMG industry. International brands and retailers exert downward pressure on production costs, which factory owners often absorb by compromising workers' wages and rights (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). The dependence of Bangladesh's economy on this sector creates political resistance to labour activism, as both government and factory owners are reluctant to risk foreign buyers relocating orders to competing countries (Anner, 2020). Thus, female garment workers find themselves caught in a web of exploitation shaped by both local structural inequalities and global economic forces.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

Despite significant scholarly work on the RMG sector, there remains a relative lack of focused inquiry into the labour rights of women from a holistic perspective that combines structural analysis with lived experiences. Much research has focused on industrial safety, trade unions, or economic impacts, but fewer studies have critically examined how women garment workers themselves perceive, access, and negotiate their rights in everyday life (Kabeer, 2014).

Moreover, most existing interventions—whether by the state, industry organizations like the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), or foreign buyers - tend to adopt a compliance-based approach, focusing on physical safety and productivity. This often neglects issues of gendered violence, reproductive rights, and women's agency. Understanding women's experiences of labour rights, therefore, offers valuable insights into the enduring gender inequalities embedded in the specific area.

The rationale for this study is threefold. **First**, although the Ready-Made Garment sector has been the subject of extensive research, much of the scholarship focuses on workplace safety and economic contributions, often overlooking the gendered dynamics of labour rights (Siddiqi, 2009). **Second**, while global supply chain governance has drawn attention to compliance issues, the voices of women workers themselves are frequently marginalised in both academic literature and policy debates (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019). **Third**, the intersection of gender, labour rights, and industrial relations remains underexplored in the Bangladeshi context, particularly with regard to how women understand, claim, or are denied their rights.

Through these dimensions, this study intends to make a contribution both to scholarly debates on gender issues and labour in the Global South and to practical policy discussions on how to ensure decent work and gender justice in worldwide supply networks and highlight the Institutional and sociocultural barriers that undermine women's labour rights.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Comprehending women's labour rights in this sector is essential for a number of reasons. First of all, it draws attention to the gendered aspect of industrial labour, where women's contributions are frequently underappreciated and disregarded while playing a crucial part in production. The study offers a greater understanding of how exploitation and precarity interact with economic empowerment by recording women lived experiences. It also highlights the structural injustices and obstacles that hinder women's career advancement, including salary discrimination, inadequate maternity benefits, hazardous working conditions, and restricted access to positions involving decision-making.

Second, the study has significant policy implications. Governmental organizations, factory owners, and global brands can use its results to tighten labour regulations and provide equitable treatment and protection for female workers. It might also aid in the creation of gender-sensitive workplace regulations that uphold dignity, safety, and equity.

Lastly, this study adds to the accumulation of knowledge regarding human rights and the empowerment of women in global supply chains. It seeks to stimulate discussion and action toward more inclusive, moral, and sustainable industrial practices by bringing attention to the daily hardships and tenacity of female employees. In summary, this study highlights the critical role that women play in economic growth as well as the pressing need to protect their rights, voices, and general well-being within the RMG sector.

This study holds significance at multiple levels.

1. *Empowerment through Work:*

The readymade garment (RMG) industries has created one of the largest sources of entry for women into the formal labour market, especially in developing nations such as Bangladesh. This study is significant in that it looks at how such employment opportunities empower women both economically and socially. It shows how earning an income allows women to gain confidence, negotiate decisions within the home,

and challenge customary gender norms that had once confined them to the domestic sphere.

2. Exposure of Labour Rights Abuses:

Despite being the backbone of the industry, women workers are exposed to abuses of their fundamental labour rights. This study reveals facts pertaining to wage discrimination, dangerous factory conditions, long working hours, physical and verbal abuse, and non-payment of maternity benefits. By putting these facts on record, this study brings to light the long-standing need for change and accountability in the sector.

3. Gender Inequality in the Workplace:

The study emphasizes the persisting gender inequality that pervades even a women-dominated sector. Men are likely to be given supervisory or managerial positions, while women are relegated to unskilled, low-ranking jobs. These trends need to be explained in order to establish mechanisms to break down the gender hierarchy and promote women's leadership in the workplace.

4. Policy Development and Reform:

Research outputs from this study can provide evidence-based data to policymakers, labour ministries, and advocacy groups to improve existing labour laws. Through the identification of implementation gaps, the research can feed into the formulation of new legislation that more effectively protects women workers' rights, such as decent wages, job security, and access to social protection mechanisms.

5. Advocacy for the Sustainable Development Goals:

The study contributes directly to the international development agendas, especially SDGs 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 5 (Gender Equality). Its connection between women's labour rights and the more general development aims, the research brings gravity to the argument that gender equality and good labour standards are essential to sustainable national development.

6. *Improving Workplace Conditions:*

Another key implication is in calling upon industry stakeholders—buyers, trade associations, and factory owners—to create safer and more equitable working conditions. Findings from research can be utilized to promote the adoption of codes of conduct in the workplace, improved safety measures, and better welfare facilities for women workers.

7. *Awareness and Advocacy:*

The study may be employed as a means of enlightening the general public and working class on the importance of labour rights. The study may empower women to understand their rights under international and domestic labour laws and motivate NGOs, trade unions, and rights-based organizations to advocate more effectively for them.

8. *Bridging Academic Gaps:*

While many works cover economic aspects of the clothing industry, fewer consider interactions between gender, labour rights, and social justice. This study fills the gap by bringing together social, economic, and gendered perspectives in presenting a holistic account of women's factory work experiences.

9. *Economic and Social Implications:*

Protecting the women rights is not just ethical behavior or legal necessity but also an economic one. This study explains how achieving decent wages, occupational health, and employment security can increase productivity, reduce labour turnover, and ensure the overall sustainability of the industry. It further demonstrates how women's earnings are invested in family welfare, education, and poverty reduction.

10. *Global Supply Chain Accountability:*

RMG industry is interconnected with global supply chains, and there are worldwide the study's implications. In documenting the truths of female workers, it calls for multinational buyers and brands to practice ethical sourcing and hold their suppliers responsible for human rights. This adds further pressure on multinational companies to take responsibility for decent labour conditions.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of the study is to investigate the labour rights of women workers in the Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry, focusing on their awareness, lived experiences, and the obstacles they encounter in exercising these rights.

Objectives:

The specific objectives are:

1. To identify the key labour rights issues affecting women workforce in the RMG sector;
2. To evaluate the state of women's labour rights in Bangladesh's RMG sector, with an emphasis on important topics like pay, working conditions, safety and health safety measures, extra hours, legal safeguards, and the larger socioeconomic background;
3. To investigate the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers to exercising labour rights;
4. To analyse the aspect of NGOs, and global buyers in promoting and limiting women's labour rights;
5. To examine women workers' awareness of their labour rights under national law and international conventions;
6. To investigate the everyday experiences of women in relation to wages, working conditions, maternity protection, workplace safety, and harassment; and
7. To propose policy recommendations for strengthening gender-sensitive labour rights protection in the RMG industry in Bangladesh.

1.6 Research Questions:

This thesis explores the diversified dimensions of women's labour rights in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector, with regard to the rights of workers in their everyday lives, reveal the complex dynamics of empowerment and utilization, highlight the broader implications for workplace justice, gradual development in the apparel industry in Bangladesh. To achieve these goals, the following investigations have been formulated:

1. What labour rights are most important to Bangladeshi women employees in the RMG sector?
2. How do female workers thought of, understand, and experience these rights?
3. What barriers limit their ability to claim or exercise labour rights?
4. What role do state institutions, factory management, and global supply chains play in shaping women's labour rights?
5. What are the key labour rights concerns that Bangladeshi women in the RMG sector face?
6. What barriers - structural, cultural, and institutional - limit women's access to labour rights?

1.7 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is demarcated by its geographical reach, thematic boundaries, and population concern. It deals primarily with selected industrial zones of Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narayanganj, which are known to be the prime production hubs of Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector. Their selection was based on their representation of the dominant characteristics of the garment sector in Bangladesh as far as labour composition, factory location, and labour right concerns are concerned. The study is focused on women workers employed in medium and large-scale factories and directly engaged in production processes such as sewing, cutting, and finishing. They are chosen since women constitute the lion's share of the RMG workforce and are disproportionately affected by working conditions at workplaces, discrimination in wages, and gender-based labour rights violations.

Thematically, the study explores women's knowledge, understanding, and experiences of labour rights in their everyday work lives. The study explores such key dimensions as reasonableness of wages, hours worked, security and health at work, maternity leave, and workplace harassment concerns. A socio-legal and gender-sensitive analytical strategy, the study aims to uncover both the structural constraints and the subjective perceptions that affect women's capacity to understand and assert their labour rights. Although its geographically and thematically limited focus, this study is generalizable to other Global South labour-intensive economies where women's factory labour is central to export-led production and development policy discourses. In addition, it contributes to current policy discussions regarding gender equality, decent work, and social justice in international supply chains.

But the study acknowledges some caveats. First, access to factory sites and workers was often constrained due to confidentiality concerns, which limited the researcher's ability to conduct extensive in-situ observations.

Secondly, owing to sensitivities related to matters such as harassment, salary exploitation, and workplace abuse, some of the respondents were reluctant to open up and discuss their experiences, which is likely to have led to underreporting of major concerns.

Third, the study was conducted under limited financial and time restrictions, which contained the scale of data collection to a manageable number of respondents.

Fourth, the findings are site-specific and possibly not universally applicable across other industrial sectors, informal garment production units, or rural areas.

Lastly, the research study is largely based on self-reported data collected through interviews and interactions. While these kinds of qualitative results provide rich context, they are also rife with personal interpretation and recall biases that jeopardize the total objectivity of the information.

Despite such constraints, the study offers a grounded and meaningful understanding of women's everyday lives in the RMG industries of Bangladesh.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks on Labour, Gender, and Rights

2.3 Women in Global Garment Industries

2.4 Women in Bangladesh's RMG Sector

2.5 Labour Rights Matters in Bangladesh's RMG Sector

2.6 Governance, Policy, and International Interventions

2.7 Conclusion

2.1 Introduction

A review of the literature is indispensable building block of academic research that systematically integrates and critically appraises the body of available scholarship on a given subject. It provides not only an overview of the main studies and conclusions within the field, but an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of these works as well. Reviewing the literature, researchers are able to determine patterns, trends, and theory that have been developed over time and also where knowledge is established or lacking. The review of the literature serves as a foundation for knowing how much of the topic exists, whereby research stays grounded in the current body of knowledge. Additionally, it assists scholars in identifying holes in previous research and providing directions for further research to be conducted. Through synthesizing different sources, the literature review may also identify contradictions or varying opinions in the field, enabling one to have a more developed understanding of the subject matter (Hart, 1998). In so doing, the literature review is not a summary but a critical evaluation that informs the path of future research through highlighting areas of outstanding questions or points of refinement (Cooper, 2017).

Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector has received considerable academic and policy attention for its economic significance and the gendered nature of its workforce. In the Global South, the RMG industry has come to represent both the promise and paradox of globalization as the second-largest exporter of apparel worldwide (World Bank 2019). On the one hand, the sector has received praise for creating jobs for millions of women, aiding in the reduction of poverty and gender empowerment (Kabeer and Mahmud 2004). On the other hand, it has been severely admonished for providing workplaces rife with exploitation, crushing labour rights, and reproducing gender inequalities (Siddiqi 2009; Hossain 2012).

This review of the literature's desired outcome is to synthesize major debates and findings which are relevant to women's labour rights in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. The literature review will cover theoretical frameworks, a review of global scholarship about women and garment work, Bangladesh-specific studies, the thematic dimensions of labour rights (e.g. wages, (or forms of remuneration), working conditions, maternity rights, harassment, and unions), and the role of both domestic and foreign regulatory frameworks. The literature review ends by identifying research gaps which motivate the current study.

2.2 Theoretical Frameworks on Labour, Gender, and Rights

The study of women's rights to labour is founded on the ready-made garment (RMG) sector various theoretical frameworks, with each offering particular perspectives on the nexus of labour, gender, and women rights within the industry. One such prominent framework is labour rights theory, which situates labour as a fundamental human right rather than an exchange within the market. In this perspective, employees are entitled to equal pay, secure employment, and collective bargaining as prerequisites of human reverence, equality, and Justice for all (International Labour Organization [ILO], 1998). The theory argues that the commitment to workers' rights cannot simply be framed an economic issue, it is also a a moral and social question with ramifications for human development and social justice. It contradicts the perception among workers as commodities intended to be exchange on the market, instead viewing workers in their inalienable right to decent work environment.

The field of feminist political economy is also considered a critical perspective, one that critiques how capitalist production regimes and patriarchal structures come together to influence women's work. Scholars like Elson and Pearson (1981) argue that women's work in industries like the RMG industry is undervalued and underpaid due to Gender-based labour division. The theoretical framework highlights the habitual marginalization of women into low-wage, insecure work due to long-standing gender norms and stereotypes. Furthermore, standing (1989) supports the idea that the global demand for cheap, flexible labour tends to create labour opportunities for women which, in turn, delivers gender subordination in capitalist modes of economy. In this hypothesis in the context of Bangladesh's RMG industry furthers identifies the ways in which women's work is being exploited, alongside wage discrimination and precarious employment conditions, to distinguish women's labour power based on an economic gender underpinning. The global value chain framework addresses another perspective, which places the RMG industry in Bangladesh into transnational supply chains where Global North consumers want the lowest prices possible, in turn exerting significant pressure downward on price structures.

Gereffi (1999) presents the argument that such a global supply chain environment yields a competitive environment where local producers are compelled to compromise workers' rights in order to reduce expenses, if necessary. In such a framework, female

labour rights abuse is not considered a micro-local phenomenon but an offshoot of broader global economic configurations. The imbalances of power in these transnational networks compel the local producers to skim on workers' protections as a way of meeting international buyers' cost-reduction agendas, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation.

Finally, intersectionality serves as an important perspective for analyzing the different and intersecting ways in which women labourers in RMG are oppressed. Coined by Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality reflects how multiple and intersecting social identities like gender, class, and migration status intersect with one another resulting in different kinds of experiences of marginalization and discrimination. This is especially true among women RMG workers in Bangladesh, rural migrants who often have lower educational levels with greater vulnerabilities in urban factory environments. Female RMG workers account for a significant portion of the labour force and experience a unique form of exploitation as doubly marginalized women and migrants who face prejudice based on gender, and specific discriminatory barriers based on their demographic or migration status. The lives of these women can only be revealed by understanding how their identities intersect and engender specific situations of vulnerability in the working conditions.

Together, these frameworks highlight that the labour rights of Bangladesh's RMG women workers must not be disaggregated. Instead, they must be comprehended in an ensemble of global economic forces, domestic labour regimes, and deeply entrenched gendered power relations. The cross-cutting dynamics create a web of inequality and exploitation, necessitating an integrated approach in addressing women garment workers' issues in Bangladesh.

2.3 Women in Global Garment Industries

In the global arena one of the biggest industries that employ women is the garment sector, particularly in the developing world, where females constitute a large proportion of workers. As reported by “feminization of labour” has been widely discussed in the literature, with authors referring to both the economic advantages and also the dilemmas faced by women in this sector. According to Elson and Pearson (1981), the presumed demand for female workers in labour-intensive sectors is

prompted by the attributes that they are seen to possess in terms of dexterity, docility and flexibility in suitability to work in garment production. The International Labour Organization (ILO) highlights in submissions over many years, that women usually occupied low-paying precarious work without social protections and labour rights in the garment industry (ILO, 2016). As stated in a World Bank report in 2017 on textiles and apparel's role in developing countries, although the industry provided millions of women with their first paid job, while it reinforced gender inequalities in pay and unsafe working conditions. Women in the garment sector face long working hours, unsafe environments, and gender discrimination, which typically result in low employment security. Yet the industry is also a route to women's economic power, particularly in countries such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Cambodia, where garment manufacturing accounts for a significant proportion of GDP and employment (World Bank, 2016).

Amsden (2001) suggests that women's workforce in the garment factories have been a driving force for industrialization in countries like Bangladesh, where the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector is a mainstay of the country's economy. The ILO's 2018 research on women's labour rights in the RMG industries finds that women's increased participation in wage labour has helped to increase their accessibility to education, health, and financial independence in the social and family life. However, these gains are eroded by the exploitation of women workers who face a myriad of problems, such as limited access to collective bargaining, poor maternity entitlements, and gender-based violence in the workplace (ILO, 2016).

Feminist political economy theory provides further elaboration of these issues, arguing that while garment work has enabled women to access formal labour force participation, it also entrenches gendered power relations. Studies conducted by Basu (2007) and Barrientos (2008) highlight how in the RMG sector, women employees are concentrated in the most insecure, poorly paid work, particularly in export-oriented factories.

According to the *Better Work Global Gender Strategy (2018-2022)*, gender inequality remains a significant barrier to progress in the global apparel market, where the majority of workers are women, but must confront embedded discrimination, unequal wages, restricted chances for leadership, and unsafe working conditions.

The report asserts that promoting gender equality is a human rights imperative and is also a contributor to productivity, performance improvement, and development overall. Also demonstrate that when factories apply gender-sensitive regulations, such those that deal with sexual harassment, supporting maternity protection and addressing maternity discrimination, and improving women's leadership - there are meaningful improvements in worker satisfaction, less absenteeism, and increased efficiency. It also highlights the importance of engaging men as allies and changing workplace norms to foster gender equity (Better Work, 2018).

2.4 Women in Bangladesh's RMG Sector

The contribution of women in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh—about 60–65% of the labour force (ILO, 2022) - is empowerment and exploitation simultaneously. The sector has provided millions of women with a job opportunity at gainful employment, a considerable shift from unpaid household work to wage work. *In Rags, Riches and Women Workers: Export-Oriented Garment Manufacturing in Bangladesh*, Naila Kabeer and Simeen Mahmud (2004) make an argument that the shift has relegated traditional patriarchal norms, augmenting women's agency within domestic and local spheres. Nazneen Ahmed and Sayema Haque Bidisha (2018) in *Women in Ready-Made Garments: A Pathway to Empowerment?* note that waged employment has raised economic independence and mobility among women. Yet embedded gender hierarchies and workplace gender discrimination undo such advances. *Problems Surrounding Wages: The Ready-Made Garment Sector in Bangladesh* by Parvin Sultana Absar (2001) reveals that women are disproportionately confined to unskilled finishing or sewing work, with men given supervisory and managerial roles - reporting ingrained gender bias and curtailing women's career progress. Additionally, Niaz Asadullah and Zaki Wahhaj (2016) in *Missing Women in Bangladesh's Manufacturing Miracle* note that wage discrimination is still present with women earning on average 15–20% less than men for the same work. Amin, Diamond, Naved, and Newby's (1998) *Research on Transition to Adulthood of Female Garment-Factory Workers in Bangladesh* shows additional vulnerabilities: insecure contract of employment, absence of maternity leave, and excessive domestic workload limiting women's access to education.

2.5 Labour Rights Matters in Bangladesh's RMG Sector

Despite being essential to Bangladesh's economic growth, the ready-made garment (RMG) supply chain nonetheless has a record of egregious labour rights abuses pertaining to wages, productivity, safety, freedom of group work, and career stability.

2.5.1 Working Conditions and Wages

Despite there being minimum wage legislation on the statute books in Bangladesh, it remains weakly enforced. *In Improving Social Compliance in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment Industry*, Ahamed (2013) argues some workers - particularly women - are below the legal minimum rate due to unlawful deductions, non-payment of overtime, and late wages. Production intensification results from the high-speed world demand for “fast fashion,” with employees entering 10–14-hour workdays without adequate rest or compensation (Hossain, 2012). The added work results in fatigue, reduced productivity, and long-term health issues, especially for the women workers who have household chores to attend to as well.

2.5.2 Occupational Safety and Health (OHS)

The collapse of the Rana Plaza in 2013, which killed more than 1,100 people, revealed systemic complacency towards workplace safety. Following the disaster, international collaborations like *Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety and the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh* initiated mass-scale assessments and fixes activities (Donaghey & Reinecke, 2018). But in *Occupational Safety in Bangladesh's Apparel Sector: Post-Accord Realities*, a research paper by Ahmed, Islam, and Hossain (2020) discovers that some of the small and subcontracted plants still remain beyond regulatory reach, with workers still facing poor ventilation, fire hazards, and exposure to chemicals.

2.5.3 Arbitration and freedom of association

Even though ILO Conventions 87 and 98, which guarantee the freedom of association and collective bargaining, are ratified by Bangladesh are often violated. Rahman and Langford (2012) in *Compliance and Beyond: Labour Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry* document cases of intimidation, dismissal, and violence against union organizers. Moreover, Naila Siddiqi (2009) in *Do Bangladeshi Women Workers Have*

a Voice? indicates that patriarchal norms and the dominance of males in union hierarchies exclude women from being fully involved, reinforcing gender hierarchies in workplace representation.

2.5.4 Precarious Employment

Contractual insecurity still persists. Alamgir and Banerjee (2019) in *Postcolonial Industrial Relations: Precarity, Work, and Competition in the Garment Industry of Bangladesh* indicate that workers are being hired informally or on temporary terms, which denies them benefits such as maternity leave, termination pay, and medical insurance. Such precarity and skimpy legal recourse aggravates women workers' economic vulnerability and dependency.

2.6 Governance, Policy, and International Interventions

The governance of labour rights in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector functions at multiple levels, encompassing national law, international regulatory regimes, and society activism. The legislative requirements for safeguarding workers' rights, including as minimum wage levels, workplace conditions, hazards at work, syndication representation, and maternity leave, are outlined in the *Bangladesh Labour Act 2006* (as revised in 2018). Organizations like the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) and the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) are responsible for enforcing and implementing these requirements. Haque and Bari (2021), in *Labour Governance and Workers' Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Sector*, observe that such institutions are habitually under-resourced, with minimal personnel and susceptible to political interference, which greatly undermines their capacity to enforce. The International Labour Organization (2022) reports that there are less than 400 factory inspectors in Bangladesh to oversee more than 4,500 export-oriented garment factories, creating substantial loopholes in monitoring and compliance.

At the global level, international buyers and multistakeholder initiatives play a significant governance role through codes of conduct, compliance audits, and collective safety programs. In the article *Multinational corporations, global value chains, and the Rana Plaza disaster*, Donaghey, J., & Reinecke, J. (2018) demonstrate that *The Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh* (2013–2018) and the

Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety (2013–2018) were innovative initiatives launched following the fall of Rana Plaza, jointly inspecting more than 2,000 factories and carrying out structural remediation. While such efforts led to tangible gains in the sites of building security and preventing fires, they have been criticized for their failure to emphasize workers' empowerment and gender-specific concerns such as sexual harassment, maternity protection, and equal involvement in workplace decision-making. The focus on compliance-driven interventions has meant that broader labour rights and social protections have continued to remain inadequately addressed.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have attempted to fill these lacunae through the creation of awareness, provision of legal support. Organizations like the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) and the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) were instrumental in advocating workers' labour rights. However, Alamgir and Banerjee (2019), in *Postcolonial Industrial Relations: Precarity, Work, and Resistance in Bangladesh's Garment Industry*, state that their influence is hampered by restricted factory access, dependence on donor funding, and hostility from employers. These limitations reduce their potential for gaining durable structural transformation or empowering workers, particularly women, who remain underrepresented within union leadership and collective bargaining.

2.7 Conclusion

The chapter uncovers the literature review that critically examines the existing body of knowledge about women's rights within Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. The review demonstrates that the RMG sector has given women an entry to wage employment and socio-economic mobility, although these advances tend to be constrained by structural gender disparities, exploitative work practices, and weak enforcement of labour standards. Underpinning its argument with theoretical perspectives such as feminist political economy, theory of labour rights, and intersectionality, the chapter illustrates how patriarchal conventions, neoliberal economic dynamics, and global production arrangements as a whole shape women's work, exposure, and resistance processes. Whereas national legislation and international compliance policies were implemented following the Rana Plaza

disaster, the literature identifies existing policy implementation gaps and absence of women labour rights representation in collective bargaining and decision-making position. Gender issues - wage gap, maternity protection, and workplace harassment - remain under-addressed. The chapter chooses both the peaks and valleys of past studies, emphasizing that what is required is a more complex, intersectional understanding of women workers' daily lives. The current research attempts to fill these lacunae by exploring how women workers perceive, experience, and analyze their labour rights within the wider legal and demographic framework of Bangladesh's RMG sector.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACHES

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Research Design

3.3 Study Area

3.4 Sampling Technique

3.5 Quantitative Data Collection Technique

3.6 Data Collection Methods

3.7 Data Analysis

3.8 Ethical Considerations

3.9 Clarification of the Study

3.10 Conclusion

3.1 Introduction

Analyzing interview findings and interactions with participants in different contexts usually presents challenges that demand for sensitivity and careful consideration. Having the highest ethical concerns and integrity standards, firsthand data was collected from the field. Confidentiality and privacy of participants were ensured stringently, and consent was obtained prior to involvement. Data were collected in two locations - Savar and Gazipur RMG factories - and from the local citizens who were working in the RMG sector. The study was interested in language differences specifically, observing regional patterns and employment of various regions of Bangladesh, as the women workers of the RMG sector moved from across the country. The differences in language were seen and reported through interviews. Provided a clearer vision of language use in constructing cultural identity, local culture, and social relations of RMG workers. With the incorporation of verbal and non-verbal codes, the research provided an enriched understanding of the perceptions of the participants, characterized by respect, deference, and cultural sensitivity.

3.2 Research Design

The study attempts to give a comprehensive picture of women's labour rights in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector by using a mixed-method research design that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques. The design enables triangulation that's a particular approach of interpreting the findings in a way that ensures statistical validity and contextual depth.

Quantitative Approach:

Quantitative analysis of the research includes a structured questionnaire survey of the female workforce employed in several sectors of RMG. in Savar and Gazipur. The intended use of the survey is to obtain quantifiable data in the most important areas of their working lives, such as employment conditions, wages, working hours, healthcare and safety procedures in the workplace, availability of benefits, and job satisfaction. Demographic factors like age, educational background, and duration of employment are also asked so as to be able to determine possible patterns and gaps. By statistical analysis, the information will be analyzed and broader trends affecting the women workers in the industry will be highlighted.

Qualitative Approach:

The qualitative aspect of the research complements the quantitative data by examining first-hand experiences and feelings of the primary stakeholders through the medium of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews. The actors covered in the research will be women workers, factory owners, trade unionists, and NGO staff who practice labour rights activism. The interviews will reveal the social, cultural, and institutional powers influencing workplace relations, gender roles, and awareness of rights.

The research offers a more comprehensive understanding of the situations by utilizing both approaches of labour rights, ethnic and numerical patterns being conjoined with human experiences to expose the real patterns underlying women's engagement and struggles in the RMG sector.

3.3 Study Area

The study took place at some of the chosen RMG factories in Gazipur, and Narayanganj districts of Bangladesh. The districts are major centers of the RMG sector with a significant apparel factory employing large numbers of female workers. The study's target demographic consists of all female employees of the identified RMG locations. The industrial corridor around Gazipur and Savar (covering Ashulia) has become one of Bangladesh's largest centers for ready-made garments (RMG). The region's easy accessibility from Dhaka, the excellent transport linkages, and pool of skilled and semi-skilled workforce have all contributed to making it a prime destination for export-oriented garment production. It has grown from semi-rural villages to flourishing industrial zones during the past three decades, symbolizing the growth of the export-oriented economy of Bangladesh (BGMEA, 2025). The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) estimates that 4.2 million people are employed by more than 4,000 firms in the country that are registered with the RMG factories (BGMEA, 2025). The Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) maintain a list of approximately 2,540 knitwear mills as an independent count, indicating the level of production from woven to knitted garments (BKMEA, 2023). BRAC University-initiated MiB project mapped 3,630 RMG factories focused on exports as of 2022 (The Business Standard,

2022). The MiB study also found that these factories employ an estimated total number of workers of nearly 2.7 million with women constituting approximately 58% and men accounting for 42% of the total workers (CPA News BD, 2022). Parliamentary confirmation of these trends in June 2024 further added that Bangladesh's garment sector employs about 5.017 million employees, of which 55.57% are female (Daily Country Today, 2024). World Bank report that Bangladesh's RMG factories is not only the biggest in the world but also a key source of women's employment and empowerment, as about 80% of the garment industry's workers is female (World Bank, 2017).

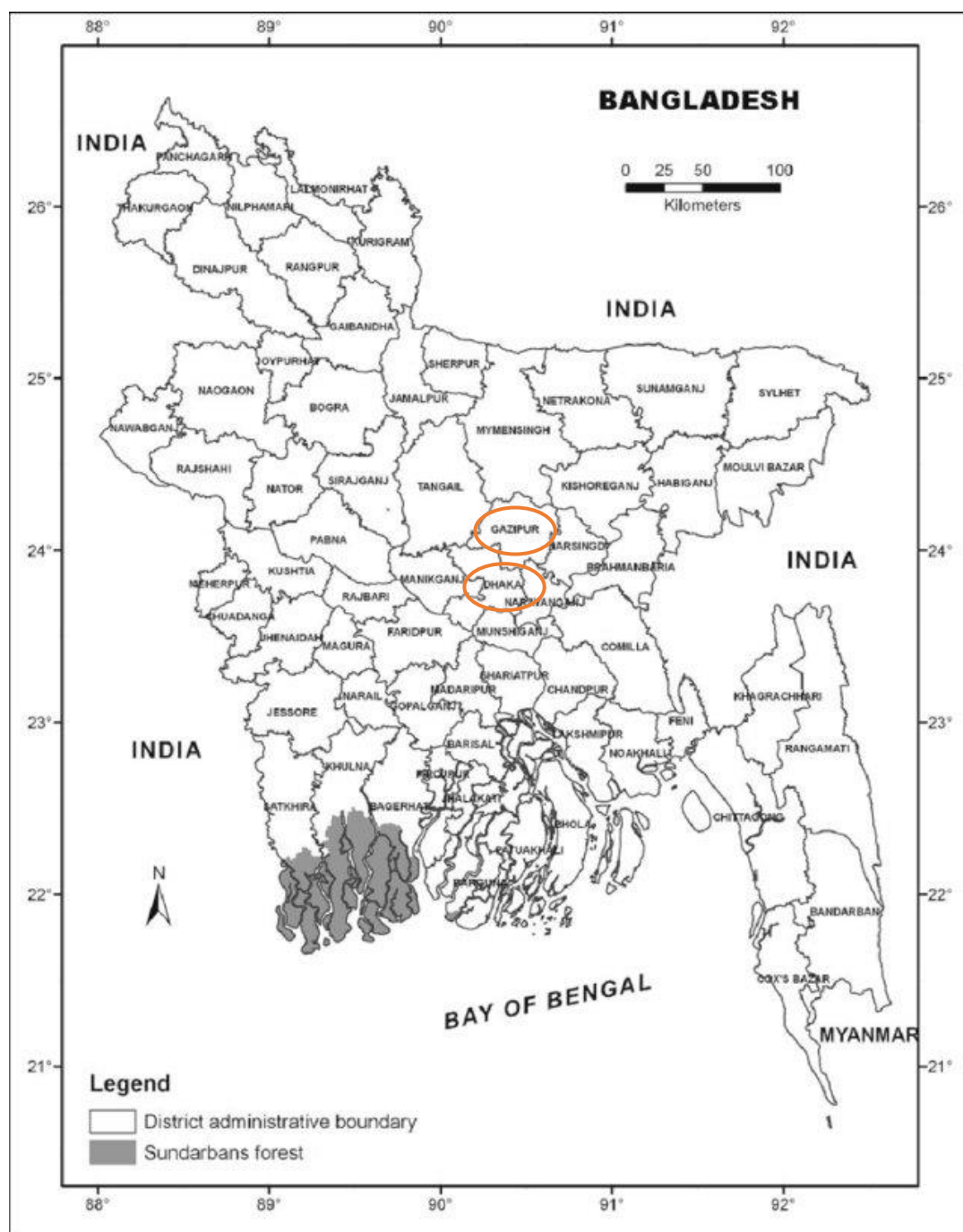


Figure 3.1: Bangladesh Map showing RMG Industrial area (Savar and Gazipur),

Source:

LGED,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23637571_Recommendation_domains_for_pond_aquaculture_country_case_study_development_and_status_of_freshwater_aquaculture_in_Bangladesh/figures?lo=1

In this national perspective, Savar and Gazipur hold particular importance. They are host to hundreds of factories making up a continuous industrial belt from the

periphery of Dhaka. Press and industry reports note that during times of unrest or inspection drives, Savar–Ashulia–Gazipur have a tendency to be affected en masse at one time, citing the region’s concentration of production units (The Business Standard, 2022). The region also has a significant number of subcontracting workshops and medium-scale factories catering to the bigger export houses registered with BGMEA and BKMEA. Bangladesh’s RMG sector as the “backbone of export growth,” and it emphasizes that competitiveness must be maintained through productivity enhancement, enhanced compliance, and social protection. In the case of Gazipur and Savar, these issues are particularly pertinent because the country’s local workers - comprised mainly of young migrant women - are often exposed to wage insecurity, housing shortage, and workplace safety issues (World Bank, 2017). Despite the sector’s significance, quality data are difficult to establish. Most of the cases in small factories found that it’s the informal or unregistered sector, and double membership in BGMEA and BKMEA lead to duplication of numbers. Self-mapping efforts such as MiB attempt to overcome these data limitations by surveying factories and their locations. However, repeated factory openings, closures, and mergers make real-time tracking challenging.

Savar

Savar Upazila, situated approximately 24 km northwest of Dhaka city, is among the most industrialized regions of Bangladesh, in addition to the primary location for the ready-made garment (RMG) industry. With an area of 280.11 square kilometers, Savar is composed of one municipality and 13 union parishads, bordered: Kaliakair and Gazipur Sadar to the north, and Dhamrai to the west (Banglapedia, 2024). As stated in the 2011 Bangladesh Population Census, it had a population of about 1.39 million, though the census data will likely underestimate its population, given the number of migrant garment workers (Banglapedia, 2024; Dhaka Tribune, 2019). It is an economically export-oriented landscape, dominated by the export-oriented garment industry. There are reported to be 1700+ factories in the Savar-Ashulia-Dhamrai industrial belt, which are under the Industrial Police-1 jurisdiction (The Daily Star, 2024). The vast majority of the millions of workers employed by these industries are young women who migrated from rural areas in search of work.

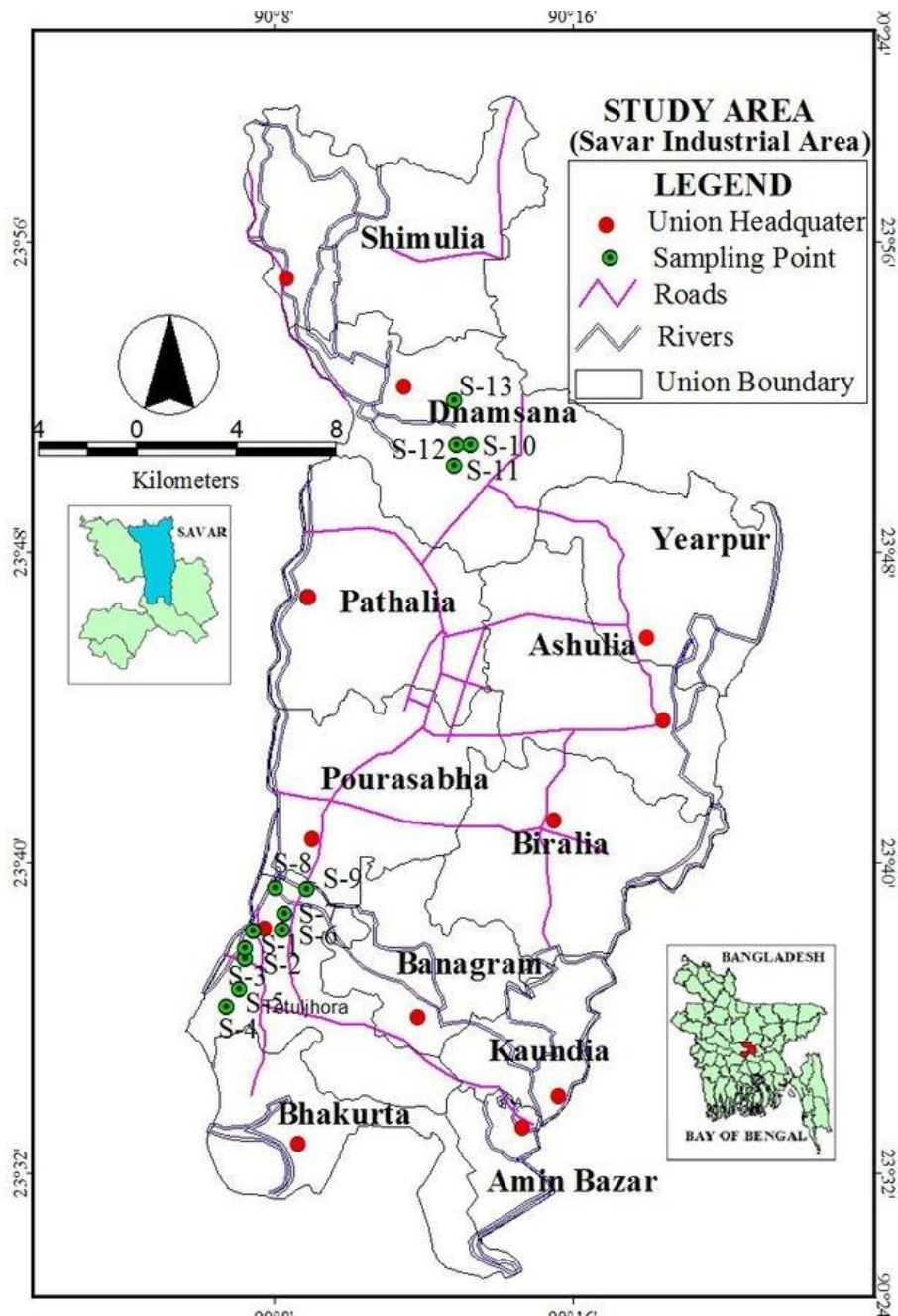


Figure 3.2: Map of Savar Industrial area Dhaka District. Map, Source: LEGEND

Savar is an important network point for Bangladesh's RMG production systems for its number of factories, its proximity to Dhaka, and because it has a large pool of local labour. Nonetheless, the region's rapid industrialization has exacerbated processes of labour unrest, pollution, and urban overcrowding (The Daily Star, 2024; Dhaka Tribune, 2019).

Gazipur

Gazipur, located north of Dhaka, is a hub industrial area in Bangladesh widely known for its ready-made garment (RMG) sector. Spanning approximately 1,753.75 square kilometers with a population of roughly 4 million, the district has become a leading figure in the country's garment manufacturing and textile sector. Gazipur has over 400 RMG factories, which are significant sources of export revenue of the country, and more than 1.5 million people work in this industry, with women constituting up the majority (World Bank, 2020).

The factories in Gazipur produce different kinds of goods, ranging from garments for international brands like H&M and Zara, and the area is also known as the “garment capital” of Bangladesh due to the large-scale production and export capacity (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association [BGMEA], 2021). Industrial complexes like Sreepur, Tongi, and Kaliakair are the main locations for textile production, with numerous advanced complexes handling garments, knitwear, and home textiles. Gazipur's RMG industry has been facilitated by improved infrastructure, including advanced transport and power supply facilities, and investment in modern machinery and factory complexes (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2022).

The proximity of the district to Dhaka and the Chittagong port enhances the logistics effectiveness of the area, and therefore it is a strategic location for garment export (BGMEA, 2021). The sector has challenges, particularly with working conditions, where labour rights and safety measures are under consideration despite efforts by local as well as international buyers to enhance the working environment (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020). In addition to its industrial dominance, Gazipur is itself also fast urbanizing, with mounting housing, educational, and healthcare demands driven by a huge influx of migrant workers.



Figure 3.3: Map of Gazipur Sadar Upazila Industrial area, Dhaka. Map, Source: Banglapedia, [https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Gazipur_Sadar_Upazila#:~:text=It%20is%20bounded%20by%20sreepur%20\(gazipur\)%20upazila,kaliakair%20and%20Savar%20upazilas%20on%20the%20west](https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Gazipur_Sadar_Upazila#:~:text=It%20is%20bounded%20by%20sreepur%20(gazipur)%20upazila,kaliakair%20and%20Savar%20upazilas%20on%20the%20west)

The city is changing with new residential and commercial infrastructure, even as issues such as traffic jams and industrial pollution continue to remain serious concerns (Gazipur City Corporation, 2024). Gazipur's RMG industry, while earning insanely for the economy of Bangladesh, is also at the center of the region's urban and social development, hence both an industrial and economic giant in the country. This chapter lays the contextual and conceptual background for the study by considering on the emergence, relevance, and challenges of women's labour rights in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. It emphasizes how the industry is a key contributor to economic progress and women's work, continues to be characterized by gendered inequalities, insecure working conditions, and sporadic enforcement of labour rights. Through exposition of the problem, rationale, goals, and research questions of the study, the chapter positions the research within wider debates on globalization, gender, and workers' rights. It seeks to justify why there is a pressing need for a gender-sensitive exploration of women workers lived realities, and what local as well as global forces shape their vulnerabilities and agency. The discussion on the scope and limitations delves into the geographical, thematic, and methodological limits of the research.

The chapter offers an extensive overview of why and how this research tries to investigate women's understanding, perception, and negotiation of their labour rights in the RMG industry. From women's everyday experiences to national labour laws and global value chains, the study attempts to make a contribution to scholarly, policy, and advocacy efforts promoting gender justice, workplace equity, and sustainable development in Bangladesh's garment value chain.

3.4 Sampling Technique

The study used a multi-stage sampling technique to get a representative and diverse sample of women who work in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry. The method allows systematic selection of respondents between various categories of factories and locations, making the research results more reliable and generalizable.

Initially, purposive sampling will be used to utilized in the selection of Savar and Gazipur, two major industrial zones of Bangladesh, RMG factories. Selection has been made on a specific criterion such as factory size (small, medium, and large), and degree of compliance with national and international labour law. This purposive strategy guarantees the representation of factories with varied working backgrounds, permitting an accurate grasp of labour conditions and workers' rights across various classes of establishments.

For the second stage, a method of simple random sampling employed for choosing female factory workers from every selected factory. This method ensures that the right workers have an equal probability of being selected, thereby minimizing selection bias and maximizing the representativeness of the sample. The research study's quantitative section includes a total of 375 employees, whose sample was determined through proper statistical formulas for ensuring enough representation.

Twenty in-depth interviews and four focus group discussions (FGDs) constitute the qualitative data with key stakeholders, including female garment workers, factory managers, trade union representatives, and NGO personnel involved in labour rights advocacy, among others. An in-depth, contextually rooted understanding of the socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors influencing women's labour experiences in the RMG industry is the essence of the qualitative encounters are intended to elicit.

3.5 Quantitative Data Collection Technique

Two categories of respondents were identified. The first category was termed as case group that is were already have orientation about the laws, and the second one was termed as a control group, which includes respondents from other factories where there was no intervention.

Initial methodology

A rigorous questionnaire was developed in order for collecting data using numbers. Initially face to face interview technique was decided to apply.

Sampling design and Calculating the sample size Total sample size for survey was determined by using cochran's sampling techniques:

Initial Sample Size:

$$n_0 = \left(\frac{Z_{\alpha/2}}{e} \right)^2 pq = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

Final Adjusted Sample Size:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}} = \frac{Nn_0}{N + n_0 - 1} = \frac{10508 \times 384}{10508 + 384 - 1} = 371$$

Where,

N	=	Total number of workers	10508
	=	Initial sample size	384
	=	Z value for 95% confidence interval	1.96
	=	The degree of precision (Margin of error 5%)	0.05
	=	Estimated prevalence of indicator	0.50
	=	Adjusted sample size (Final sample size)	371

As per calculation, The size of the sample was 371. 60% of the size of sample as case and 40% as control was chosen. So, there were 223 case respondents and 148 control respondents. As there were 5 factories where the project intervened their activities, we distributed the case respondents equally among the project intervening factories which was 44.6 (223/5) in round figure 45. So, the study covered 225 (45*5) respondents from the case group. For collecting control data, Initial plan was to consider 3 surrounding factories near intervening factories to compare. So, we distributed the control number among those factories equally which is 49.33 (148/3) in round figure

50. So, in total it was decided to cover 150 (50*3) respondents as the control sample. To sum up, the sample size was 375 (Case 225, control 150).

3.6 Data Collection Methods

To allow methodological triangulation and reinforce the findings' reliability, the study utilizes a combination of the data collection techniques to get in-depth and reliable data from primary and secondary sources. A standardized questionnaire survey was conducted on a randomly chosen sample of female workers in order to collect quantitative data on working environment, compensation, occupational health and safety, job satisfaction, and availability of compensation and rights at workplace. To complement the survey, qualitative information on their perceptions, experiences, and views about labour rights and workplace realities was gathered by conducting in-depth interviews with important parties, including as factory managers, trade union officials, NGO employees, and female garment workers. A total 6 of focus group discussions (FGDs) was also organized with small groups of female workers to enable participatory discussion and explore collective opinions on gendered issues of labour, workplace issues, and empowerment. Apart from primary data, documentary analyses of secondary sources such as factory records, labour laws, government reports, and NGOs reports were undertaken to establish contextual understanding and enrich the study's analytical structure. Supplementing one another, these methods are focused on in-depth and holistic study of rights of women workers in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry.

3.7 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data in the present study followed an inclusive direction by embracing both qualitative and quantitative approaches in comprehending the evolution of female workforce labour rights at RMG factories in Savar and Gazipur, Bangladesh. Convergent parallel design is the basic strategy in this mixed methods research, in which simultaneous collection and independent analysis of both kinds of data are implicated. This approach exploits the strengths of both methods for comprehending the research phenomenon more comprehensively.

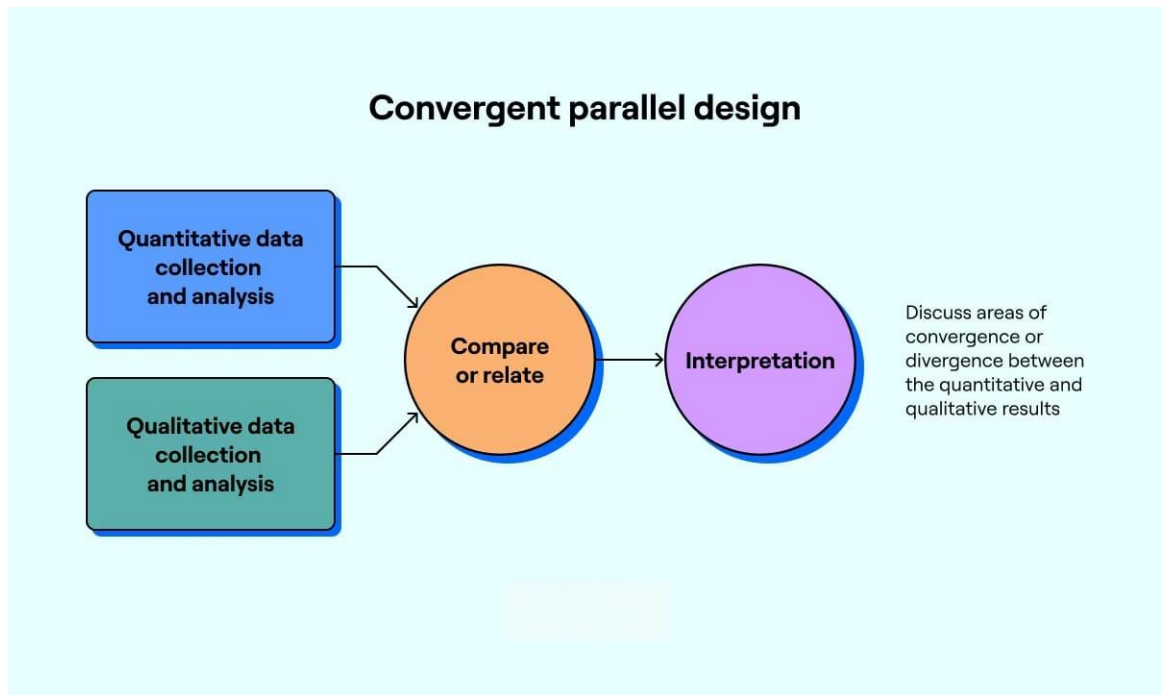


Figure 3.1: *Convergent parallel design is a mixed methods research approach,*
 Source: maze, <https://maze.co/blog/mixed-methods-research/>

Quantitative data obtained primarily from structured surveys, leading to measurable and generalizable trends related to socio-demographic profiles, income sources, labour rights and vulnerability levels. These data subjected to rigorous statistical analysis to uncover trends and relationships. Meanwhile, qualitative data gathered through observation and in-depth interviews to have the ability to access the complicated experiences of women who worked in the factories owned by RMG factories. These data undergo thematic analysis, which included looking for repeated patterns, emerging themes, and rich descriptions that explain the social-economic lives of the respondents.

After independent analysis of the two datasets, results merged at the interpretation phase, where the strengths of the two datasets utilized in identifying convergence, divergence, and complementarity areas. Integration will yield a multidimensional picture of the research issue, enabling corroboration and enrichment of results through method triangulation. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) note, the convergent parallel design is particularly useful when the goal is to compare and cross-validate findings from different sources of data, or to complement quantitative findings with qualitative ones.

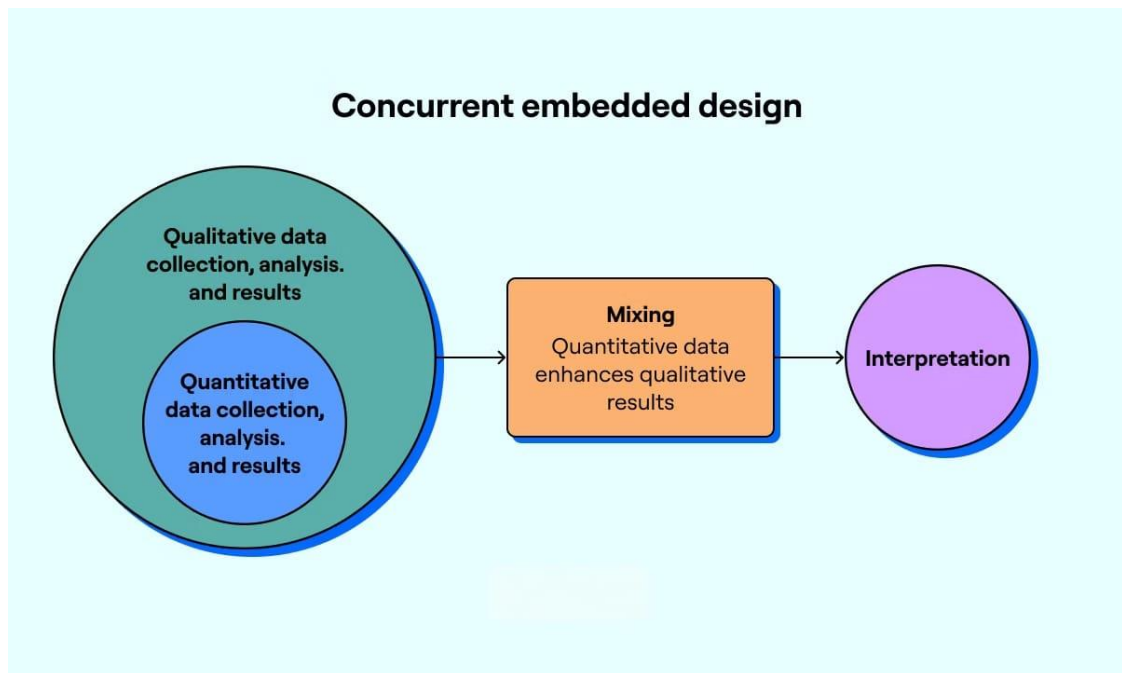


Figure 3.2: *Concurrent Embedded design is a mixed methods research approach,*
Source: maze, <https://maze.co/blog/mixed-methods-research/>

Also, the concurrent design that has been incorporated to provide additional depth to the study. This design allows the primary data type (quantitative or qualitative) to take center stage, while the secondary approach is used to provide added context or explanations. It is feasible, for example, to nest qualitative interviews within an otherwise quantitative design to provide contextual meaning to numeric data, or, alternatively, to utilize quantitative data to supplement qualitative findings with a broader statistical perspective. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) point out that this embedded method is helpful when researchers are interested in gaining a more complex, multi-faceted understanding of a phenomenon without extending the data collection process.

While both designs achieve methodological scope, they also require extremely careful attention during the integration process. The various purposes and weights of the different data types can render data integration and comparison more complicated. When correctly utilized, however, this design is an efficient method of gathering diverse insights without compromising resource and time efficiency. This mix of convergent parallel and concurrent embedded mixed methods designs facilitated the extensive examination of the labour rights challenges and prospects of Bangladeshi

women employed in the RMG industry. Through synthesizing quantitative numbers and qualitative narratives, the study offered a dense and vivid image of the dynamics involved.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ensuring the integrity, credibility, and social responsibility of every research project involves ethical concerns. This research adhered to established ethical guidelines at each phase of the study, from preparation to gathering data to analysis and distribution. The following ethical standards were maintained:

1. Informed Consent:

Prior to starting the study, each participant gave their informed consent. The respondents were clearly explained the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study, as well as any risks or benefits of participating by each participant. Participants were also made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any moment, for any reason, and without consequence. Written or verbal consent was documented as appropriate.

2. Confidentiality:

Strong protocols were implemented to maintain participants' privacy and confidentiality. Personal identifying information was erased from the dataset, and pseudonyms were utilized in all transcripts, notes, and analyses to ensure anonymity. Sensitive data was treated ethically, so that no data could be traced back to single participants or particular artisan groups.

3. Voluntary Participation:

Research participation was entirely voluntary. No individual was enforced into participating, coerced, or persuaded to join in the interviews, discussions, or questionnaires. This guaranteed that the participants' participation was accordance to their desire to support with the studies and voluntarily.

4. Respect for Culture and Community:

Local traditions, beliefs, and cultural practices were taken into consideration when conducting the research. The researcher adapted means of data gathering and

communication to the cultural setup of the community, thereby earning their trust and respect.

5. Beneficence:

The study was guided by the principle of beneficence, seeking to present research results that would be of benefit to the participants and their societies. Research results were disseminated to the artisans and stakeholders concerned, as well as suggesting improvements in livelihood, protection of traditional crafts, and policy-supportive interventions.

6. Researcher Bias and Reflexivity:

The researcher was also cognizant of the possibility of personal bias influencing data collection or interpretation. Reflexivity was maintained constantly by examination and critical reflection in order to minimize subjective influence and present a true representation of participants' opinion.

7. Ethical Approval:

Prior to undertaking fieldwork, official clearance was obtained from the Bell Metal Artisans' Association and the relevant local authorities. This clearance confirmed that the research aligned with ethical standards, especially in relation to the utilization of human subjects and handling of community-based information.

8. Feedback and Accountability:

A feedback mechanism was offered to allow participants to see and provide comments on the preliminary findings. This was a participatory action that guaranteed the artisans' voices were properly and respectfully recorded in the final report, improving accountability and transparency in the study.

3.9 Clarification of the Study

The thesis examines the labour rights of women employed in the ready-made garment (RMG) factories of Bangladesh, the problems of women workers, workplace conditions, and enforcement of internationally accepted standards and labour laws. The research aims to explain how gender influences workplace relations, opportunities, and treatment, and assess the level of effectiveness of the policies and

interventions that have been implemented to save and protect the rights of women. In order to encourage equity and the empowerment of female employees in the RMG industry, gender discrimination in the workplace must be addressed. Examining legislation, factory compliance, and the perceptions of women workers, the research seeks to inform an picture of the complexities of labour rights in the RMG sector and areas requiring improvement, with practical recommendations on how to proceed with ensuring gender equality, empowering women, and providing better working conditions.

The RMG is a significant sector in Bangladesh's economic situation and produces a substantial section of the country's exports and employment, particularly for women (Bhattacharya et al., 2002; Rahman & Siddiqui, 2015). Women now have access to previously unheard-of employment options because to the growth of the RMG industry, empowering them both financially and socially. Despite all this, however, there are still immense challenges and inequalities in the workplace. Poor working conditions, low pay, long hours, and job insecurity are commonplace for female employees in the RMG sector (Hossain & Shirazi, 2018). These problems are further compounded by deeply rooted gender stereotypes, cultural attitudes, and power relations that make women more susceptible to abuse and exploitation. Furthermore, enforcing labour regulations and compliance with international standards remains weak, compromising the enforcement of women's rights at work (Chowdhury, 2017). Taking into account the intersection between economic development and social justice is necessary in order to comprehend the future implications for women garment workers and their families. Identification, protection, and respect for the women's contributions in the RMG sector is central to a more inclusive and sustainable industry.

To continue the momentum, it is important to remove the long-standing obstacles to women workers and give them safe working conditions and fair treatment. Political stability, security in the workplace, and access to raw materials are essential for the industry to continue its growth. Approximately 90% of the 4.2 million RMG workers are female, the majority of whom hail from rural areas, making it even more imperative to provide special care to their well-being (SAIDUR, 2022). For Bangladesh's RMG manufacturer to grow sustainably, it is crucial to look into the

labour rights of female employees in the sector and promote laws that support gender equality and women's empowerment.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter delineates the study methods used in identifying socio-economic status, cultural practices, livelihood patterns, and working environment for working women in the factories. In order to acquire an extensive understanding of the study area, a mixed-methods strategy was implemented, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Two locations - Savar and Gazipur - were targeted, where data were gathered by employing a systematic sampling technique. Surveys, in-depth interviews, participant observations, and review of documents were employed in the gathering of diverse perceptions. A convergent parallel design, augmented with a concurrent embedded design, allowed simultaneous data collection and independent analysis of each set of data, which increased the holistic depth of the study. The findings were confirmed and made credible through triangulation from different data sources. Strict commitment to values such as consent with knowledge, privacy, voluntary engagement, and cultural sensitivity satisfied the ethical requirements. Worldwide, this methodological process ensured data collection and analysis validity, providing a good platform to interpret women lived experiences, problems, and coping mechanisms in the clothing business. The chapter concludes with data discussion and analysis of this good methodological design.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN LABOUR RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Policy Review

4.2.1 The Constitution of Bangladesh

4.2.2 Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006

4.2.3 International Conventions and Commitments

4.3 Women Workers' Rights in RMG Sector

4.3.1 Equal Pay and Non-Discrimination

4.3.2 Maternity Benefits

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4.3.4 Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

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4.6 Labour Law and Rule Amendment

4.7 Implementation and Enforcement

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4.9 Power and Function

4.10 Procedures

4.11 Constitutional Provision

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4.13 Relevant Case Laws

4.14 Geneva Conventions

4.15 Conclusion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter emphasis on the Legal Regime of Labour Rights and constitutional provisions that guarantee women's labour rights and protection with an emphasis on the ready-made garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh. The chapter examines how these constitutional rights are safeguarded under law and assesses their effective application within the industry. Central constitutional provisions such as Articles 28, 15, and 20 addressing issues of equality, right to work, and protection from forced labour are critically analyzed to understand how they affect working women in the RMG industry. In addition, the chapter offers a comparative analysis of enforcement of labour rights between locally owned and foreign-owned factories, namely maternity leave and other significant labour protections. Through examination of the loophole between policy promises and actual intervention, the chapter places ongoing challenges to protecting women's labour rights in the limelight. The discourse highlights the persistent problems of gender-based discrimination, poor enforcement, and the struggle to achieve fair wages, safe working environment, and improved labour protection in this sector. Through this analysis, the chapter aims to push the knowledge of the constitutional protection of women workers and the explanations for which they are not totally actualized in reality. The law of labour rights in local (Bangladesh) is a complex crossroads of constitutional principles, legal enactments, and international agreements. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees fundamental rights for instance the freedom of association, equality in the legal system, and protection against discrimination.

4.2 Policy Review

For ensuring sustainability, further measures need to be adopted. Social sustainability development benefits poor workers, helps suppliers in building longer-term connections with multinationals, and supports economic growth. Supply chain transparency can help ensure consumer confidence.

4.2.1 The Constitution of Bangladesh

Bangladesh's Constitution, which upholds the protection and advancement of fundamental rights, particularly those pertaining to labour, is the ultimate law of the land.

Article 27 of the Constitution provides equal treatment before the law and equal protection under the law for all people, regardless of gender, religion, color, or social origin.

This provision outlawed discrimination in employment and ensured that women workers are given equal rights and opportunities with their male peers.

Article 28 of the Constitution empowers the State alone to make specific arrangements for women and children.

This provision enables the government to bring in legislation and policies concerning the special needs and issues of women workers, i.e., maternity leave, child-care facilities, and protection against sexual harassment. Article 31 of the Constitution provides the right to a hygienic and safe working environment, which ensures all workers, including women workers, are protected from hazardous environments and occupational diseases.

Article 34 prohibits forced labour and promotes fair wages and reasonable working hours.

These constitutional provisions provide a basic framework for the rights protection of the labour in Bangladesh, protecting the right principles of equality, non-discrimination, and decent work.

Beyond these fundamental rights, the Constitution also directs the State to ensure social justice and economic prosperity for all citizens. This includes promoting equal opportunities in work, providing social security benefits, and improving working conditions according to international norms (Omar, 1996). Article 11 of the constitution enshrines basic human rights and freedom (Faruque & Islam, 2023). Bangladesh became an independent country as a nation in 1971, and its law

encompasses common law principles inherited through British colonialism and customary laws and practices (Alam & Mashraf, 2023). Bangladesh's Constitution, enacted in 1972, outlines essential citizen rights such as equality, freedom of association, and protection from discrimination. The judiciary plays an important role in the interpretation and application of labour laws, as well as ensuring that workers' rights are respected.

Under the Constitution, the government is responsible for safeguarding and ensuring freedom, as well as providing all citizens with a dignified level of living (Das & Saibabu, 2014).

4.2.2 Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006

The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 is the principal national legislation that governs labour rights in the country, consolidating many other labour laws and updating them to provide an overarching code for the regulation of employment relationships. The Act covers formal and informal sectors, to a wide range of industries and establishments, for example, take the ready-made garment sector. The Act defines the employers' and employees' rights and responsibilities, including issues such as wages, working hours, leave, holidays, termination of employment, and workplace safety and healthcare.

It should be identified that the Labour Act does not cover all workers' categories, particularly informal sector, including household workers and labourers in agriculture. (Fahim, 2020). The Labour Act, 2006, is the codified basis of labour laws of Bangladesh that consolidated and amended previous laws to address new challenges at the workplace. It spells out the obligations and rights of employers and employees, including significant issues such as conditions of work, pay, and safety at work. The Act also establishes methods of resolution of labour disputes, including conciliation, arbitration, and adjudication. Also, the Act makes it mandatory for employers to provide written employment contracts, maintain accurate records of workers' employment, and establish grievance procedures to resolve workers' grievances. The Act broaches essential issues regarding working hours, right to leave, and overtime pay, making sure that workers are treated equitably and given adequate rest. The Act specifies the duration of working hours per day and per week, as well as the minimum

number of festival holidays, sick leave, and annual leave. The Labour Act prohibits discrimination based on gender, religion, color, and social origin in employment to avoid female workers being discriminated against or biased (Saha, 2023). The Act also forbids SGBV in the workplace and mandates employers to enact measures for avoiding and reacting to such acts. Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 only applies to the formal private sector of Bangladesh. Occupational hygiene, safety practices, industrial accidents, work conditions, trade union, working hours, welfare facilities etc. are provided for.

4.2.3 International Conventions and Commitments

Bangladesh has ratified several international treaties and conventions that augment and advance workers' labour rights of women, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, as well as the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. These accords establish a burden on the state to ensure that female workers have equal opportunities and rights in the workplace. Bangladesh has also signed significant International Labour Organization conventions, including those regulating the right to assembly and negotiations, along with the elimination of forced labour and discrimination. These conventions form the foundation for national labour laws and policy and guide the government in its actions in striving to enhance working environment and protect workers' rights. Bangladesh has ratified several International Labour Organization conventions addressing various problem related to labour rights, including collective negotiation, and the elimination of forced labour. By ratifying these conventions, Bangladesh has undertaken to align national policies and legislation with international standards. Seeing the importance of labour rights, the government included them in its national policy, particularly in sectors like the ready-made garment sector, in an effort to conform with international standards.

4.3 Women's Rights in the RMG Sector

Women workers in the RMG sector enjoy a variety of rights under national legislation and international conventions, including the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to leave during pregnancy, and the right to a safe and healthy place of work.

They have the right to create and join trade unions, in addition to participate in labour negotiations, in order to better their wages and working conditions.

4.3.1 Equal Pay and Non-Discrimination

Women workers must be rewarded equally as men for doing the same duties and have equal opportunity for advancement and training. Both the Constitution and the Labour Act clearly require equal compensation for equal work, thus rendering it illegal to discriminate against women workers in the workplace based on their gender. Employers are not allowed to discriminate against women workers when recruiting, hiring, promoting, or firing. Equal remuneration for equal work is covered under the Constitution and Labour Act, which excludes discrimination against workers on the base of gender with regard to wages.

4.3.2 Maternity Benefits

The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 contains many excellent provisions for protecting the rights of women workers. For example, Section 46 to 50 of the Act discussed maternity benefit to the women workers. Women workers are granted maternity leave with pay and other benefits such as nursing breaks and childcare facilities. The Act mandates employers to provide maternity leave on full pay to female employees for some time before and after delivery. The Act also criminalizes employers for terminating the employment of expecting women or discriminating against them because of pregnancy. Effective enforcement of existing regulations on maternity leave is not found in all factories.

4.3.3 Workplace Safety and Health

A safe and healthy workplace free from hazards to their physical and mental well-being is a right for female employees. Accident and injury prevention schemes in the workplace must be ensured by employers and adequate safety equipment and training provided to workers. One of the key sectors that makes an important contribution to Bangladesh's economy in terms of employment and exports is the apparel sector. Despite being economically important, the sector has been plagued with numerous issues relating to the security and welfare of its workers. The garment factories of Bangladesh need occupational safety above all, as it is the most prosperous and job-

providing sector. However, the industry is underdeveloped, and the level of safety is not satisfactory compared to industrialized countries. Non-pleasant working conditions in which workers are exposed to a healthy and safe dangerous environment, one is never going to attain a healthy economy, quality of goods or services, and productivity in the long term from that working group. Recent incidents around the world have highlighted the potential dangers of numerous industrial operations. Rana Plaza tragedy has worked as a hard-learned lesson of the dangerous workplace prevailing in the garment industry and the necessity of timely changes to ensure labour safety. Recent incidents of labour unrest and collapse of Savar garment buildings became a red-hot issue within Bangladesh and the entire world with the deaths of thousands of labours.

Following the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in April 2013, two international union federations and over 190 worldwide clothing manufacturers and retailers signed a "Accord on Fire and Building Safety" (Brown, 2015). To increase factory safety, a five-year legally binding agreement has been signed. The International Labour Organization created a code of practice on the health and safety of the textile, clothing, leather, and footwear industries to protect workers and, consequently, limit any harm or intimidation in order to enforce strict adherence to safety requirements by manufacturers in the textile and fashion industries (Seidu et al., 2024). After the Savar disaster, The Bangladesh Labour Act has been amended by the government of Bangladesh. The amendments demonstrate a dedication to raising labour standards and providing better protection for workers by addressing important topics including workers' compensation, trade union rights, and workplace safety.

4.3.4 Associational Sovereignty and Collective Agreements

In order to improve the working environment and wages, both male and female employees are entitled to organize, join, and engage in collective bargaining with their employers. The Constitution protects freedom of association, and the Labour Act guarantees trade union registration and recognition. Through collective bargaining and pressure group tactics, trade unions are essential to the defense of workers' rights and advancement of their interests.

The foundation of Bangladesh's economy is the country's garment sector, has been at the center of a storm regarding labour rights, particularly women workers who constitute the largest portion of its workforce. Since the Rana Plaza garment complex collapse, the Bangladesh trade unions have led international efforts to enhance factory safety worldwide. These outside linkages will defend union federations and their leaders but may also bring agendas that can be different from those of the workers themselves. The change in industrial relations was significant following the Rana Plaza disaster, there has been a marked improvement in terms of compliance regarding safety inspections and technical standards of labour; however, it remains a problem to ensure basic labour rights are protected. Negotiating collectively and the formation of unions for workers are imperative to ensure fair labour practices and healthy workplace conditions. Garment sector trade unions in Bangladesh face various issues, such as limited resources, weak bargaining positions, and resistance from employers. Despite legislative provisions, the majority of employers resist the establishment of trade unions within their factories and practice anti-union activities, which include intimidation and harassment of union officials. Moreover, intrinsic resistance to change in trade unions, driven by external pressures, further prevent their ability to serve workers' interests and cause extensive change in the sector (Kumar et al., 2012).

4.3.5 Equal Remuneration and Non-Discrimination

Women workers are entitled to protection from gender discrimination in the workplace and equal compensation for work of equal worth (Ahmed & Peerlings, 2008). Gender discrimination in wages, promotions, and other aspects of employment is prohibited under the Labour Act and the Constitution, which also establish the idea of equal remuneration for comparable work.

In the ready-made garments sector, gender discrimination and salary inequality still exist, with women being paid less than males for comparable labour, despite legal provisions. In order to promote wage equality and higher gender equality, policymakers and stakeholders must intensify and implement existing law and regulations and take measures to provide equal pay for similar work. In addition, efforts should be made to challenge and deconstruct discriminatory practices and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality in the workplace. Even though

Bangladesh's garment sector is one of the main drivers of the national economy, is confronted with intricate problems concerning its predominantly female workers' labour rights. These range from freedom of association and work safety to equal pay & resistance against abuse and harassment based on gender. The industry's competitiveness is increasingly challenged by other garment-producing countries, necessitating improvements in productivity, worker standards, product design, and overall management skills. Lean implementation, a strategy focused on minimizing waste and maximizing efficiency, is seen as a promising approach to enhance the industry's performance. Despite the industry's economic importance, issues such as political instability, supply chain management, and workplace safety persist, impacting its global competitiveness. These issues, along with the need for better labour practices, go to highlight the urgency of the need for comprehensive changes towards ensuring the sustainability and ethical integrity of Bangladesh's apparel industry.

The Bangladeshi garment industry has transformed the socio-economic landscape of Bangladesh, primarily through the utilization of a mostly female workforce (Mahmud, 2017). Not only did this industry facilitate economic growth, but it also turned out to be an important driver for women empowerment, entrepreneurship, and enhancing livelihoods in the nation. The massive export revenues of the sector, which account for a significant percentage of the nation's total export revenue, confirm its central role in driving economic growth. The women's participation of society, which was previously restricted to the home, has grown thanks to the ready-made clothing industry (Sharma, 2020). In addition, the sector has encouraged skill upgradation, technology transfer, and infrastructure development, resulting in overall Bangladesh's economic modernization. The industry has also promoted allied industry investment in the form of textiles, accessories, and logistics, creating a multiplier impact in the overall economy. In Bangladesh, the ready-made clothing industry has reduced poverty and narrowed inequality in addition to creating jobs. Empowering the local workforce through the development of action is necessary to overcome current challenges and achieve business expansion. The industry's expansion has enhanced levels of living, easy access to healthcare, and levels of education, especially among women worker and their families.

Enabling these labour rights issues calls for a multi-pronged strategy that involves cooperation among government, employers, trade unions, and international organizations. Bolder regulation, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and greater social dialogue are essential to achieve better working conditions and protect women workers' rights.

Promoting equal opportunities and empowering women in the ready-made garment industry requires ensuring fair pay, secure working conditions, and access to social protection and health care (Chowdhury et al., 2019; Mahmud et al., 2017). To create a more equitable and welcoming workplace, it is also critical to advance gender equality and stop harassment and violence against women. Women tend to be discriminated against, particularly in compensation, advancement, safety, and overall work environment. Educating, training, and enhancing the women workers' leadership capabilities can further maximize their participation and decision-making in the industry. The industry's dependence on 'shy' women to acquire administrative control perpetuates exploitation of employees through the device of low and infrequent wages. The study emphasizes the realization of decent labour practices, good working conditions, and gender equality to allow for sustainable and equitable development in Bangladesh. One of Bangladesh's main sources of export revenue is ready-made clothing. Maintaining health and safety standards among women garment workers is critical towards formulating sustainable development in Bangladesh. Most female employees frequently experience physical health issues such as migraines, eye disorders, hand discomfort, and breathing difficulties. These figures highlight the necessity of enacting laws that protect the health of female employees in the apparel sector. One important factor is that the ready-made clothing sector prioritizes gendering women's rights.

4.4 International law

Bangladesh has signed several global conventions related to workers' rights such as those released by the ILO. The conventions set standards for improving respectable work, protecting workers' rights, and promoting social justice. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and the ILO core conventions on

freedom of association, collective bargaining, forced labour, child labour, and discrimination are suitable international legal instruments. The primary legislation governing labour relations in the country is the Bangladesh Labour Act, which sets minimum requirements for pay, working hours, working conditions, and occupational safety and health. Additionally, the Act offers procedures for resolving labour disputes and upholding workers' rights. The application and enforcement of labour regulations are nevertheless beset by flaws and gaps, especially in the RMG sector. Studying Bangladesh's ready-made clothing market necessitates a careful examination of labour laws and regulations. It will also help solve wage disparities, as well as health and safety concerns. There is a pledge by Bangladesh to implement international labour legislation and conventions to protect garment workers' rights. It involves factory inspection legislation, rules, and labour. Efforts have been made towards environmental sustainability (Hemphill & White, 2018). The Rana Plaza tragedy prompted significant policy reactions like Bangladeshi labour law reforms, international buyer-initiated building inspections, tariff penalties, and efforts to improve international buyer-union government social dialogue (Islam et al., 2022). Following the Rana Plaza tragedy, several global programs were established to improve factory safety, offering unions' chance to affect labour standard regulation when factory unionization rates are low. Nevertheless, resistance still emerges in terms of protecting simple labour rights.

4.5 The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006

The main piece of legislation controlling labour relations, terms of employment, and workers' rights in Bangladesh is the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. The Act consolidates and amends some of the current labour laws, with a perspective to ensure a comprehensive legal framework for regulating employment relationship and promoting harmonious labour relations. The Act contains provisions on various aspects of employment, including working hours, wages, leave, healthcare and safety-security, and settlement of disputes. It also refers to some issues relating to women workers, i.e., maternity leaves and sexual harassment protection. Informal workers are not protected by the Labour Act, although they make up a majority of the workforce. In regard to workers' conflict resolution in the informal sector, there are no legal policies or systematic policies. Further reformulation of crucial labour laws is needed

to ensure workers' labour rights and protect their social security in the modern society (Rapatsa, 2014).

4.6 Labour Law and Rule Amendment

To address the growing demand for compliance with international labour standards, the government has introduced several amendments in the Labour Act and related rules. They cover provisions for the strengthening of the protection of labour rights, enhancing enforcement mechanisms, and promoting social dialogue. For example, registration provisions for trade unions, collective bargaining, and occupational safety and health have been altered. There exists a Labour Relations Act that provides labour peace and harmonious workplace relations (Ntimba et al., 2020). There is equal opportunity to every citizen provided by National Employment Policy and generating new avenues for employment.

4.7 Implementation and Enforcement

Despite the existence of a strong legal system, implementation and enforcement of labour laws remain a serious problem in Bangladesh. Weaknesses in labour inspection systems, inadequate resources, and inadequate worker and employer awareness render enforcement difficult. Political interference, corruption, and lack of accountability also dilute the rule of law and pose obstacles to the realization of labour rights. For proper implementation and enforcement, a need for augmenting mechanisms of labour inspection, enhancing the resources allocated to agencies of labour law enforcement, and augmenting employers' and workers' awareness-raising programs is called for. Bangladesh's ready-made clothing industry is a vital sector that significantly boosts the country's economy through exports and jobs.

The sector, however, has been associated with instances of the abuse of labour rights, most notably of the workers, particularly women workers (Akhter et al., 2019). Therefore, a careful examination is needed in order to understand the intricate problems that face women in this sector and propose sound recommendations for change. This research has strong practical relevance. It will provide valuable insights into their lived realities and perspectives concerning labour rights issues. The ultimate objective is to advance social justice and gender equity in the RMG sector in order to

create a more fair and sustainable future for all parties involved. A thesis concerning the rights of women workers in Bangladesh's ready-made clothing factories must thoroughly analyze the legal, social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to their existence. The study begins by placing the position of the RMG industry in the economy of Bangladesh, observing its position as a major female employer and exporter. It is significant to observe that there should be safe and healthy work environments because this directly impacts the health and productivity of workers. Further, the thesis should analyze the effectiveness of the existing labour law and policy in protecting women's rights, and highlight loopholes and gaps that need to be addressed.

Given the possibility of occupational illnesses and injuries in the sector, the health and safety of garment workers are of utmost importance. The health, productivity, and general well-being of employees can be jeopardized by unsafe working conditions, such as exposure to hazardous situations. Secondly, the thesis should analyze the contribution of worker organizations and labour unions in advocating women's rights, whether they have succeeded in collective bargaining and grievance handling or not. The conclusions drawn in this research will be valuable for diverse stakeholders: Policymakers, Industry Stakeholders, and Civil Society. Through the identification of the systemic issues and suggestions for implementable actions, the research can assist in the design of policies and programs that promote gender equality, decent work, and social justice in this sector. Assessing the attainment and shortcomings of the wage movement, our research observes women increased effective involvement in the attainment of broader labour rights in this booming economic sector. Furthermore, staff turnover in the RMG industry is greatly influenced by adherence to the established standards. In order to increase the competitiveness of the ready-made garment industry, this study must examine the external stakeholders' variables to the supply-side and demand-side drivers and constraints (Nuruzzaman, 2015). Satisfaction with clients and competitiveness can both rise with effective supply chain management (Chowdhury et al., 2019). Bangladesh's ready-made garment sector is crucial since it generates the most foreign exchange in the country.

Despite the identification of limitations by different researchers in the past and the establishment of different models with beneficial recommendations to ensure

workplace security and safety for employees, the causes behind the lack of corresponding measures to avoid insecure workplaces in garment industries are still an enigma. The primary objective of this study is to explore worker safety in Bangladesh's garment industry, which is the nation's main source of employment and revenue. Topics of concern are workplace safety, building construction and design, fire safety, electrical safety, and employee conduct. The garment industry grew immensely since 1980, and it represents about 75% of Bangladesh's total exports. This sector employs 45% of the country's industrial employment (Mahmud et al., 2017). The sector is plagued by inadequate infrastructure, political instability, and ineffective law enforcement. The RMG industry is essential to Bangladesh's economic expansion, but in the recent past, it has been plagued by unforeseen issues. Fire incidents have already claimed hundreds of workers employed in garments, and fires have become a routine occurrence in the situation.

4.8 Labour Law Reform

The RMG sector is a sector of greatest significance for Bangladesh (Ruba et al., 2021).²⁴ However, in the recent past, certain tragic accidents took place in this sector. The fire at Tazreen Fashions, the collapse of Rana Plaza, etc. caused some deaths and injuries. National and international organizations have since these accidents pressed for improvement in labour standards and occupational safety in Bangladesh. After the tragedies of this sector, many attempts have been utilized to improve the state of affairs. Overall examination of labour laws, factory inspection reports, company policies, collective bargaining agreements, and NGO and international organization reports informs us regarding the legal framework, prevailing policies, and documented examples of the violations of labour rights. Statistical data on wages, work conditions, job safety, and availability of health care in government reports, industry associations, and research institutions can point out the gaps between the law provisions and practice. Primary data from questionnaires, interviews, and FGD of women workers in the RMG industry can provide information on their actual experience and perspective on issues of labour rights.

4.9 Power and Function

In order to advance and defend labour rights, it is necessary to look at the roles and duties of employers, governmental bodies, trade unions, and civil society organizations. The performance of the existing mechanisms of monitoring and enforcement, such as labour inspections, mechanisms for dispute, and judicial remedies needs to be assessed. Implementation of sustainable practices because the RMG industry necessitates a cooperative effort by stakeholders along the value chain, incorporating environmental, social, and economic considerations into business operations. The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh is a key economic driver, contributing substantially to the country's export earnings and providing a large workforce, which is largely female. Yet the sector has been confronted with significant challenges, including things related to workplace safety, labour rights, and environmental sustainability. Despite its economic importance, the sector has been surrounded by reports of hazardous working conditions, poor pay, long hours, and infractions of freedom of association. The issues have attracted international condemnation and have led to increased scrutiny by consumers, brands, and regulatory bodies. The law covering labour rights in the country is based on constitutional provisions, statutory law, and international conventions.

The Bangladeshi Constitution guarantees basic rights, that's the right to equality, right to association, and protection from exploitation. Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 is the primary law regulating labour relations, defining provisions related to working conditions, remuneration, industrial relations, and professional safety and health. Bangladesh is also a signatory to several International Labour Organization conventions in committing itself to upholding international labour standards. Despite these statutory safeguards, challenges continue in meeting international requirements and effectively enforcing labour legislation (Fahim, 2020). Bangladesh's readymade garment sector, a support for the economy of the country, is of critical significance in powering export revenue and creating employment, primarily for women (Ahmed et al., 2021). The sector, though, is plagued by critical concerns over workplace safety, labour rights, and environmental care. There is utmost importance of the Readymade

Bangladesh apparel industry as it generates the highest foreign exchange earnings for the country.

4.10 Procedures

Despite its economic importance, the industry has had repeated cases of rights of labourers, occupational safety, and sustainability (Asif, 2017). The concerns include unsafe working conditions, wage poverty, exploitation of wage labour, restrictions on freedom of association, and gender discrimination, which have raised international concern and questions of well-being for garment workers. Confronting such challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of the legal and regulatory context that surrounds labour rights in Bangladesh and the political, social, and economic factors that shape the lives of women employed in the RMG sector. The legal context of labour rights in the country is intricate, comprising constitutional assurances, statutory legislation, and international pacts. All citizens of Bangladesh are guaranteed fundamental rights by the Constitution, including freedom from discrimination, equality, and freedom of association. However, to what extent such rights are actually applied and upheld in the RMG sector is doubtful. The most significant law that regulates labour relations in the nation is the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, which lays down provisions concerning conditions of work, wages, and Health and protection at work.

The primary legislation governing labour relations is the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006, that establishes provisions regarding working conditions, remuneration, health, safety, and welfare benefits for labour in the entire economy, including the RMG industry. Besides national laws, Bangladesh is also a signatory to several international conventions which related to labour rights, namely those from the International Labour Organization, thereby committing to uphold international labour principles and standards (Chowdhury et al., 2019). However, the effective application of labour legislation and global standards within the RMG sector remains a critical issue, and instances of non-compliance, weak monitoring, and weak enforcement procedures undermine workers' rights protection. In addition to controlling the country's economy, Bangladesh's ready-made clothing sector employs a sizable number of people and provides a living for millions of people, mostly women (Mahmud et al., 2017). Major labour rights issues, including hazardous working conditions, low pay, long hours, limitations on freedom of association, and discrimination based on gender, have also been linked to the industry. In the RMG sector, adherence to the established

standards is essential for improving the working environment for employees and reversing the intention to leave (Uddin et al., 2021).

Different factors can impede the implementation of labour regulations and standards in the RMG sector, including scarce funds for labour inspections, corruption, worker lack of knowledge about their rights, and pressure from factory owners to meet production targets. Rana Plaza building collapse in 2013, where over 1,100 factory workers lost their lives, served as a grim reminder of the cost that accompanied prioritizing profit at the price of employee security and highlighted the need for industry-wide systemic changes (Islam et al., 2022). RMG women workers are likely to face some problems of gender inequality, including discriminatory pay, sexual harassment, and limited access to maternity leaves and healthcare (Saha, 2023). The RMG sector's economic significance cannot be overemphasized as it serves to contribute significantly to the export of Bangladesh, foreign exchange earnings, and overall economic growth. However, this success came with a price, as proof of exploitation, worse working environment, and violations of labour rights has tainted the image of the sector. The RMG sector is directly accountable for generating the export earnings of the country, and therefore it provides a substantial amount of foreign exchange as well as a key driver of economic progress.

4.11 Constitutional Provision

The Constitution of Bangladesh contains certain clauses that protect the rights of female workers. An analysis of how maternity leave rules are enforced in factories that are owned locally versus those that are owned abroad. The comparison indicates the extent of abuse of labour rights and why the abuses take place. This study dwells on understanding the agency of women as well as how they struggled for wage parity in the sector.

The Constitution of Bangladesh comprises different articles that guarantee basic rights and protection to all the citizens, including women working in the RMG industries (Haque et al., 2020):

Article 28: This article prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth and guarantees equality. Women will enjoy the same rights as males in all areas of the state and public life, according to Article 28.

Article 15: The provision of basic essentials is covered in this article. It assigns the State the duty of guaranteeing the right to work, including paying a fair salary, taking into account the quantity and caliber of labour, and providing adequate time for rest, leisure, and amusement.

Article 20 states that all citizens who are able to work have the right, obligation, and source of dignity to work, and that they must all be fairly compensated for their labour.

Article 34: All forms of forced labour are forbidden and will be prosecuted as crimes.

Article 38: This guarantees the freedom of unionization and organization.

These constitutional protections serve as the cornerstone of workers' rights and are intended to shield female employees from prejudice and exploitation. The Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 provisions cover occupational hygiene, safety provisions, industrial accidents, working conditions, trade union rights, working conditions, and welfare facilities.

4.12 ILO Convention

Over the past 20 years, Bangladesh's RMG industry has grown at an astounding rate, becoming a major employer and contributor to the country's economy. However, the growth has brought with it long-standing issues with workplace safety, working conditions, and labour rights, especially for female employees. The factors that affect the health and safety of women employed in Bangladesh's garment factories include the workplace, living conditions, age, health difficulties, disease-causing factors, fire incident causes, and medical care. The industry has about 3 million women workers, and although it is helping the economy, it faces issues of low payments, employment insecurity, and disrespect towards rights of female workers (Mollah et al, 2024; Saha, 2021).

Such challenges are likely to lead to noncompliance with labour laws, hampering productivity and overall viability. The Bangladeshi garment industry, which is predominantly founded on female labourers, experiences frequent violation of the rights of women workers, thereby raising issues regarding wages, mobility, and workplace safety (Basirulla et al., 2024). Accordingly, providing a work environment

conducive to productivity for women is a central means of empowering them economically, because Bangladesh earns a majority of its foreign exchange from the RMG, in which over 90% of the 4.2 million employees are rural women. The ready-made garment (RMG) industry has been Bangladesh's highest performing sector in terms of earnings foreign currency and profitability since independence (Islam, 2021). It has significantly impacted the country's economy through different employment opportunities and poverty elimination by ensuring social development. The industry has grown to be the world's second-largest clothing exporter, only behind China, and it recorded \$32 billion in exports over the previous fiscal year (Hossain & Khan, 2020). The industry is, however, subsidized on cheap labour since Bangladeshi employees earn approximately \$68 USD per month (Adnan, 2018). The RMG sector provides significant yearly income, underscoring its crucial role in Bangladesh's economy even though it only employs a small portion of the country's workforce (Carlson & Bitsch, 2018).

It contributes immensely to women empowerment by employing millions of female workers and offering new avenues of employment never before seen to women in rural areas where domestic service was the initial choice (Zohra et al., 2025; Mahmud, 2017). In spite of its economic advantages, the RMG industry has been under intense criticism for its labour practices, especially regarding the rights and conditions of work of women (Chowdhury, 2017). Such practices include gender discrimination, poor health and safety conditions, and limitation of unions. These practices denigrate the dignity and welfare of women workers and hinder their full exploitation of their potential (Sharma, 2020). These issues persist even though the industry plays a important role in Bangladesh's economy and female employment. Furthermore, the sustainability of the RMG sector is under threat on the basis of the violation of workers' rights. Addressing these issues requires inclusive action that promotes gender equity, assures fair wages, and improves workplace safety. These policies must also focus towards enhancing the overall socio-economic as well as socio- culture development of the country and sustainable industry development of the RMG sector. The focus must also incorporate the introduction of green programs so that sustainable growth and moral production are guaranteed within the sector. Sustainable competitive advantage would only be achieved if human resource practices are taken seriously, considering the reality that human resources are one of the prime drivers of

industrial growth and quality performance improvement in Bangladesh's RMG sector. Through the inclusion of qualitative and quantitative data, a comprehensive understanding of women's labour rights in the Bangladeshi RMG sector can be derived. It is so critical in making factories more resilient by way of addressing structural issues (Ansary & Barua, 2015). A special United Nations organization, the International Labour Organization establishes global labour rules and encourages fair working practices (Canton, 2021). Since joining the ILO in 1972, Bangladesh has ratified a number of treaties, including eight of the ten fundamental conventions. The agreements encompass a wide range of labour rights, including the eradication of employment discrimination, the right to collective bargaining, and the prohibition of forced labour.

Below are some of the most relevant ILO conventions for women RMG workers in Bangladesh:

Convention No. 100: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951: This treaty mandates that nations pay men and women equally for equal labour.

Convention No. 111: Discrimination Convention, 1958: This treaty mandates that states forbid discrimination in employment and occupation on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social background.

Convention No. 190: The 2019 Convention on Violence and Harassment: This is the world's first international agreement that upholds everyone's right to a workplace free from harassment and violence, including harassment and violence based on gender.

These conventions serve as a foundation for preserving gender equality in the workplace and the rights of female employees in the RMG industry. They address issues of equal pay, discrimination, and violence and harassment, all issues that are core to women in the sector. Bangladesh is legally bound by these standards as an ILO member.

4.13 Relevant Case Laws

A major concern for a safer working environment for employees in Bangladesh's ready-made clothing industry is adherence to legal criteria and regulations set by

international certification agencies and/or foreign purchasers. A report claims that non-compliance is a major issue in Bangladesh's RMG industry. The labour laws and their application are not being followed.

A number of regulations are included in the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 to protect of women workers' rights, but these tend to be the most widely disregarded, notably concerning workplace safety. This gap suggests that more enforcement mechanisms and improved labour rights awareness among employers and employees are needed. In order to identify areas for development and the effective protection of women's labour rights, it is necessary to examine the current legislative framework and its implementation in the real meaning (The Bangladesh Labour Act 2006). The research will ascertain obstacles towards the access by women to legal redress and in enforcing existing labour laws. Furthermore, Bangladesh's Constitution guarantees its citizens essential rights, comprising women, to the extent of equality and against gender discrimination.

4.14 Geneva Conventions

Such rights are further reinforced by international conventions and laws signed and ratified by Bangladesh and also by the Bangladesh Labour Act. The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, contains provisions for welfare facilities, safety procedures, and occupational hygiene, which are generally applicable but are still less than international standards (Saha, 2023).

Following the collapse in Savar, several international agencies came together so as to spur safety inspections and enhancements in RMG factories. It also provides suggestions regarding how labour standards can be enforced in a meaningful way in order to attain workers' rights and promote social justice, thereby safeguarding the nation's economy against loss. Although they are not suitable for guaranteeing entire corporate responsibility, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety are two significant organizations spearheading efforts to enhance fire and building safety (Hemphill & White, 2018). These schemes emerged because of the necessity for enhanced safety measures and structural solidity in the sector (Barua et al., 2020). The sector does not have adequately trained personnel and resources for monitoring workplace health and safety, hindering data collection to

make well-informed decisions. These limitations are threats to the healthcare and safety-security of the predominately female workforce. These problems highlight the need for a comprehensive approach that includes tougher sanctions for nonconformity and the use of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety as a floor-level corporate responsibility requirement. Additionally, it seeks to determine the underlying reasons for Bangladesh's labour laws' poor enforcement and failure. With 85% of workers in over 5000 factories, the ready-made clothing sector is Bangladesh's largest employer of women. Therefore, ensuring workplace safety becomes a necessity for business profitability and competitiveness globally (Parveen et al., 2019). The RMG industry's success relies on improving social, building long-term relationships with suppliers, and promoting economic development, especially of vulnerable workers. All these are essential for the economic prosperity of the industry and upholding ethical labour practices and the welfare of workers. Even if it is found that present safety and health standards are not sufficient, and the workers are constant victims of numerous health problems.

4.15 Conclusion

This chapter critically examined the constitutional provisions for the support of Bangladeshi women's labour rights, especially in the ready-made garment (RMG) industry. Even while the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights including equality, fair compensation, and the abolition of forced labour, there are significant challenges in putting these rights into practice. The report emphasized the gap between protective legislation and effective enforcement, especially with regard to discrimination based on gender and the working conditions of women in the RMG industry. Despite the sector's significance to the economy and women's employment, issues such as failure to provide adequate safety, low wages, and limited freedom of association continue to erode workers' rights. The chapter underlines the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and better awareness about labour rights among employers as well as workers. For long-term sustainability and fair labour practices, it is critical that these loopholes in legal protection are plugged and the general women's working conditions in the RMG industry are improved.

CHAPTER FIVE

STUDY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

5.2 Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Women Workers in Bangladesh's Garment Industry

5.3 Bangladesh's Garment Wages: The Lowest in Eurasia

5.4 Gender Distribution in Garment Production Processes

5.5 Factors Contributing to Low Complaint Rates: Insights from Case and Control Groups

5.6 Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the issues of justice, labour rights, and gender in Bangladesh's garment industry, with a focus on women workers. Although women make up a significant portion of the ready-made garment (RMG) business, they frequently face systemic vulnerabilities such as unequal pay, unfavorable working conditions, and lax implementation of laws protecting against gender-based violence (GBV). The socioeconomic circumstances of female employees, including their coping mechanisms, means of subsistence, and workplace hazards, are examined at the beginning of the chapter. It examines the legal framework, labour law enforcement loopholes, and inefficient wage policies that lead to economic inequality. The chapter also importantly examines vulnerability assessments to identify the risks workers face, and the many localized strategies workers use to reduce their vulnerabilities. Through case studies, this chapter highlights the continuous challenges to justice for women workers giving way to conclusions about what advocacy, policy reform, and collective action could help make the garment industry in Bangladesh, a safer, equitable workplace for women workers.

This chapter seeks to uncover their broader implications for women's empowerment and the socio-economic and financial development of Bangladesh, while also focusing the need for stronger labour laws and policies to bring about a more equitable and inclusive RMG industry. This exploration thus advocates for systemic changes which let women workers break barriers and gain their proper place in the workforce.

5.2 Breaking Barriers: Women's Rights in Bangladesh's Garment Industry

5.2.1 Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Women Workers in Bangladesh's Garment Industry

Table 5.1: The Demographic and Socio-economic condition

Age group	Case		Control	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
19-23	6	11.1	8	34.8
24-28	28	51.9	4	17.4
29-33	10	18.5	8	34.8
34-38	8	14.8	3	13.0
39-43	1	1.9		
More than 43	1	1.9		
Total	54	100.0	23	

	<i>Case</i>		<i>Control</i>	
	n	%	n	%
0 - 4.9	17	31.5	16	69.6
5 - 9.9	27	50.0	5	21.7
10 - 14.9	10	18.5	2	8.7
Total	54	100.0	23	100.0

<i>Education level</i>	<i>Case</i>		<i>Control</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
Sewing	29	53.7	12	52.2
Cutting	1	1.9		
Knitting				

Dyeing			1	4.3
Finishing	7	13.0	6	26.1
Others	17	31.5	4	17.4
Total	54		23	
	<i>Case</i>		<i>Control</i>	
	n	%	n	%
Less than 4 hours	1	1.9		
Less than 8 hours	9	16.7	1	4.3
Less than 10 hours	40	74.1	17	73.9
Less than 12 hours	4	7.4	4	17.4
More than 12 hours			1	4.3
Total	54	100.0	23	100.0

The demographic and socio-economic data for the “Case” and “Control” groups show some important differences in the age distribution, education levels, and working hours, indicating the diverse workforce in the garment sector of Bangladesh. Regarding their age, the “Case” group consists of 51.9% between 24-28 years, followed by the 29-33 years category with 18.5%, while the “Control” group has a greater number of workers in the 19-23 age group (34.8%), showing relatively older employees in the “Case” group than in the “Control”. This may indicate a difference in experience or seniority between the two groups. In the case of education, the major portion in both groups is involved in sewing, as 53.7% of the “Case” group have expertise in sewing, compared to 52.2% in the “Control” group. Other categories like cutting, knitting, and dyeing have lower representation in both groups, but overall, there is a trend that the “Case” group has concentrated more on sewing. These educational differences may point to specific competencies relevant to different occupations within the garment sector and, therefore, imply that workers in the “Case” group have more technical skills or greater experience in a particular field. Work-wise, both the groups roughly follow a similar trend where the majority of workers in the “Case” (74.1%) and “Control” (73.9%) groups reported 8 to 10 hours

of work every day. On the other hand, the “Case” group also includes a small proportion of 1.9% workers who work for over 12 hours, which could indicate cases of overtime or extended periods of work, while in the “Control” group, relatively fewer workers report such cases. Besides this, a significant portion in both groups’ reports working less than 8 hours a day, reflecting the variability of work schedules that may depend upon factory regulations or individual workload. The data further presents the “Case” group with a greater number of workers aged above 43 years (1.9%), indicating a wide range of age groups represented in this category, whereas the “Control” group is less diverse in terms of age, having few workers in the relatively older age brackets. The data put together create a picture of a workforce that is predominantly composed of young workers, mainly with sewing skills, but at the same time, there is variation in working hours and education levels, especially between the “Case” and “Control” groups. Such differences might indicate the socio-economic conditions and work dynamics which may impact experiences and issues faced by women workers within Bangladesh’s garment industry.

Table 5.2: Educational Qualification

Education level	Case		Control	
	<i>Frequenc y</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Frequenc y</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
Can’t read and write	2	3.7	1	4.3
Pre primary	5	9.3	3	13.0
Primary	16	29.6	7	30.4
Secondary or equivalent	17	31.5	6	26.1
Higher Secondary or equivalent	9	16.7	4	17.4
Others	1	1.9	2	8.7
Total	54		23	

Table 5.2 compares the educational qualifications between Case and Control in detail. Starting with formal education, the Case group had a higher percentage of secondary

or equivalent (31.5%) than the Control group (26.1%). In addition, the representation of primary education for both groups was high: 29.6% for the Case group and 30.4% for the Control group. This further indicates that the majority of the individuals in both groups had at least completed primary schooling. In the case of the pre-primary category, the Control group had a higher percentage (13.0%) than that of the Case group (9.3%), which could reflect a younger or less formally educated population. Surprisingly, the percentage of those who cannot read or write is lower in the Case group than in the Control group, at 3.7% versus 4.3%, indicating possibly worse conditions regarding education in the Control group. In the higher secondary or equivalent category, both groups exhibited very similar percentages: 16.7% for the Case group and 17.4% for the Control group. While the educational background of both groups is primarily up to the primary or secondary level, the Case group demonstrates a higher proportion of secondary education, while the Control group consists of more pre-primary educated people and a slightly higher rate of higher secondary schooling.

Table 5.3: Difference between case and control regarding ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly Agree’ and negative difference regarding “Disagree” or “Strongly disagree”

Situation consider it as violence against women / torture/ sexual harassment		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Physical Punishment (Beat/slap etc) if there is any mistake at work						
Case	P	66.7	16.7	1.9	7.4	7.4
Control	P	43.5	30.4	4.3	17.4	4.3
Difference		23.2	-13.7	-2.4	-10	3.1
Verbal abuse if seen talking with other in Garments						
Case	P	44.4	31.5	7.4	11.1	5.6
Control	P	21.7	21.7	8.7	43.5	4.3
Difference		22.7	9.8	-1.3	-32.4	1.3
Less salary than the male colleague						

Case	P	40.7	31.5	7.4	11.1	9.3
Control	P	21.7	17.4	13	47.8	
Difference		19	14.1	-5.6	-36.7	9.3
Inappropriate touch to female workers on the pretext of work						
Case	P	70.4	16.7		5.6	7.4
Control	P	60.9	21.7	8.7	4.3	4.3
Difference		9.5	-5	-8.7	1.3	3.1
Harassment at workplace or on the way to/from workplace						
Case	P	68.5	18.5		7.4	5.6
Control	P	39.1	43.5	4.3	8.7	4.3
Difference		29.4	-25	-4.3	-1.3	1.3
Attempted rape or rape						
Case	P	79.6	7.4		1.9	11.1
Control	P	73.9	8.7		17.4	
Difference		5.7	-1.3	0	-15.5	11.1
Take picture/video by mobile camera and publish them on internet						
Case	P	74.1	13		3.7	9.3
Control	P	47.8	30.4	8.7	8.7	4.3
Difference		26.3	-17.4	-8.7	-5	5
Bothering by texting or calling, proposal of unexpected romantic affair or engagement, use slang						
Case	P	68.5	18.5		5.6	7.4
Control	P	39.1	34.8	4.3	17.4	4.3
Difference		29.4	-16.3	-4.3	-11.8	3.1
Indecent gesture						
Case	P	63	24.1		1.9	11.1
Control	P	26.1	47.8	4.3	13	8.7

Difference		36.9	-23.7	-4.3	-11.1	2.4
Showing pornography by tricking or by force						
Case	P	64.8	22.2		3.7	9.3
Control	P	52.2	30.4	4.3		13
Difference		12.6	-8.2	-4.3	3.7	-3.7
Touching the body's unwanted / sensitive place during the exit or entering the factory						
Case	P	75.9	11.1		3.7	9.3
Control	P	69.6	17.4	8.7		4.3
Difference		6.3	-6.3	-8.7	3.7	5
Intimidating for establishing physical relationships						
Case	P	70.4	16.7		1.9	11.1
Control	P	60.9	13	8.7	4.3	13
Difference		9.5	3.7	-8.7	-2.4	-1.9

The Table 5.3 comparison of the Case and Control samples across different types of workplace harassment, violence, and gender issues indicate that the Case observed or experienced higher levels of harassment overall. In the case of indecent gestures, 63% of respondents in the Case group reported indecent gestures had occurred to their knowledge, a difference of 36.9% to the Control group (26.1%). A similar report is observed in attempted rape or rape incidences, which 79.6% of the Case group reported experiencing or observing to some degree in their work experience, compared to the Control group (73.9%) where 5.7% of the Control group reported attempted rape or rape ever occurred.

Further, the Case group reported incidence of physical punishment (66.7%) to the Control sample (43.5%) as 23.2% difference. Also, Case females reported inappropriate and unwanted touch when it was deemed as “work-related” (70.4%) to the Control (60.9%). Likewise, when it came to salary, the Case individuals reported greater disparity in gender, with 40.7% of females earning less than men, while the Control reported 21.7%, so a 19% difference. These findings are suggestive in that the Case group appears to be more exposed to workplace violence and harassment. This

could be attributable to industry environment, or gender and victim awareness of these issues, while the Control group indicated less exposure or identification of workplace violence and harassment.

Table 5.4: If a female worker becomes victim of violence in the factory, what step is taken?

	Case		Control		Difference
	#	%	#	%	%
Complaint to the officials (manager, welfare officer, human resource officer etc.) of the garment factory.	51	94.4	16	69.6	24.8
Complain to the committee for preventing sexual harassment (if any)	32	59.3	1	4.3	55
Seek assistance from own family	1	1.9			1.9
By direct protest against the lawbreaker/offender					0
By taking violent action against the culprit/offender	3	5.6			5.6
File a case/GD at police station/appropriate authority					0
By seeking assistance from Govt. legal aid service	1	1.9			1.9
By taking assistance of NGO					0
By taking assistance from community policing forum	1	1.9			1.9
DLAC (District Legal aid committee)			1	4.3	-4.3
Trade Union	17	31.5			31.5
Complain box at factory			7	30.4	-30.4
Don't go anywhere			2	8.7	-8.7
Other	2	3.7	3	13	-9.3

Table 5.4 illustrates the differences between the Case group and Control group female workers when faced with violence in the factory. The initiation of a complaint to officials demonstrates a clear distinction, as 94.4% of the Case group reported taking this course of action versus 69.6% of the Control. The Case workers also have a much higher percentage of individuals who complained to the sexual harassment committee (59.3% versus 4.3% of the Control group). In contrast, the Control group has a higher percentage of individuals reporting that they used the complaint box at the factory (30.4%). This positive discrepancy suggests that the Case group engages more than the Control group in formalized, internal levels of complaint. Furthermore, while the community-level support networks (NGO assistance or community policing forum meeting) are infrequently used by both groups, it would appear that the Case group is more likely to engage formal mechanisms within the hierarchy of the factory. Overall, the Case group seems to have a higher level of assurance with formal mechanisms of reporting violence and was more likely to initiate complaints, while the Control group was employing informal avenues.

5.2.2 Bangladesh's Garment Wages: The Lowest in Eurasia

The figure 5.1 illustration is a comparative analysis of minimum wage trajectories, in Bangladeshi Taka (BDT), over thirty years across seven countries - Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, China, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Bangladesh. It suggests the minimum conformity in trends of wage progression, reflective of regional economic trends, and shifts in labour policy indicators or measures. Poland and Romania stand out with strong upward trajectories finishing at 89,065 BDT and 70,157 BDT, in 2023, respectively. Both countries are still catching up with their rapid rises following post-socialist economic transformation, membership in the European Union, and oversight to international labour standards which all converged to raise wage arrangements and lift living standards. Bulgaria, China, and Thailand have a modest positive trajectory suggesting ongoing intercession of policy frameworks, small but upward shifts to workplace conditions, and reduced requirements to respond to pressures of inflation.

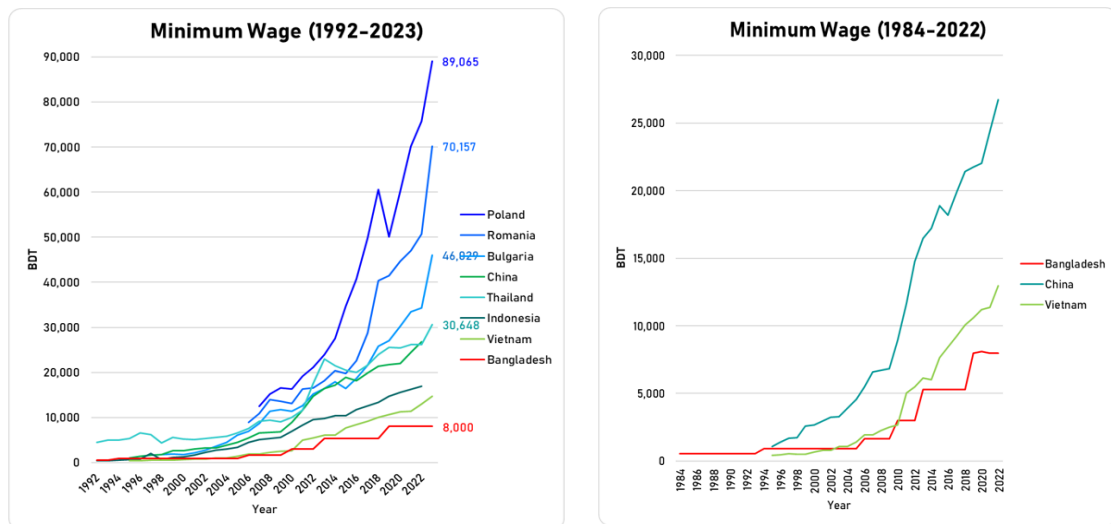


Figure 5.1: *Comparative Trends in Minimum Wage Growth Across Selected Countries (1992–2023, in BDT).* Source: Gutzy Asia, <https://gutzy.asia/2023/09/07/bangladeshs-minimum-wage-needs-to-grow-faster-for-its-economy-catch-up-with-other-countries/>

Yet, Bangladesh shows modest growth, with the minimum wage being kept constant at 8,000 BDT, demonstrating ineffective wage management in the case of Bangladesh’s even more dominant role in the global garment value chain. The huge gap suggests that the Bangladesh labour market still suffers from inadequate wage responsiveness, weak collective bargaining practices, and limited state engagement for the promotion of decent work conditions. The information points out systemic inequalities in global labour regimes where the emerging economies like Bangladesh give more priority to export competitiveness over living wages, hence bringing to light social justice, economic sustainability, and conformity of national wage policies with the principles of inclusive development. China’s minimum wage was enacted in 1994, and two new regulations were developed in 2004 that increased the cost of living at year two and included a wider spectrum of workers, including self-employed and contractual or part-time workers. In both occasions the minimum wage expanded, and therefore did household consumption expenditure and GDP, and those amounts eventually exceeded Bangladesh’s.

More significantly, the figure reflects the broader issue of labour inequality in global capitalism where countries such as Bangladesh adopt a “race to the bottom” wage strategy for the purpose of ensuring competitiveness in global value chains. This

inaction perpetuates worker exploitation and undermines inclusive and sustainable development goals. The contrast with countries that have successfully achieved industrial development and wage growth indicates that the labour policy of Bangladesh is still falling behind socioeconomic realities. The evidence is consistent with the need for a combination of improvements in wage policy, institution building, and policy coherence that will ensure just compensation, dignity, and equitable economic justice for workers. While China and Vietnam have achieved significant growth in their minimum wage levels, surpassing 25,000 BDT and 10,000 BDT, respectively, Bangladesh has barely progressed to reach only 8,000 BDT approximately. The continued increases in minimum wage levels in China and Vietnam demonstrate proactive labour reforms, labour market growth, and a government that is responsive to continuous economic changes. In addition, the minimum wage in Bangladesh has not changed, which illustrates the lack of labour law, and policies lagging behind inflation or productivity improvements. Giving rising attention to fair wages, particularly, exemplifies the continued dependence on the low-wage labour model.

“The government says they’ll protect us, but we don’t see real action. There are rules about maternity leave and working hours, but they’re not enforced in our factory. No one is holding the factory owners accountable.”

(Respondent “A”, Swing Operator, Kunabari, Gazipur)

The contrasting trajectories of minimum wage in selected countries from 1992 to 2023 (Figure 5.1) and 1992 to 2027 (Figure 5.2) reveal differences in growth between Bangladesh and that of countries in Eastern Europe, like Poland, Romania and Estonia. The countries mentioned witnessed extreme increases comparing wages to those benchmarked in the other parts of the world, with Poland reaching nearly 89,065 BDT in 2023 (Figure 5.1) and an estimated 106,645 BDT in 2027 (Figure 5.2). The minimum wage growth in Poland, Romania and Estonia can be linked to general economic changes and extensive labour policies, as well as integration into the EU economies. In contrast, the Bangladesh minimum wage continues to remain only 8,000 BDT in 2023, rising to merely 23,000 BDT possibly by 2027.

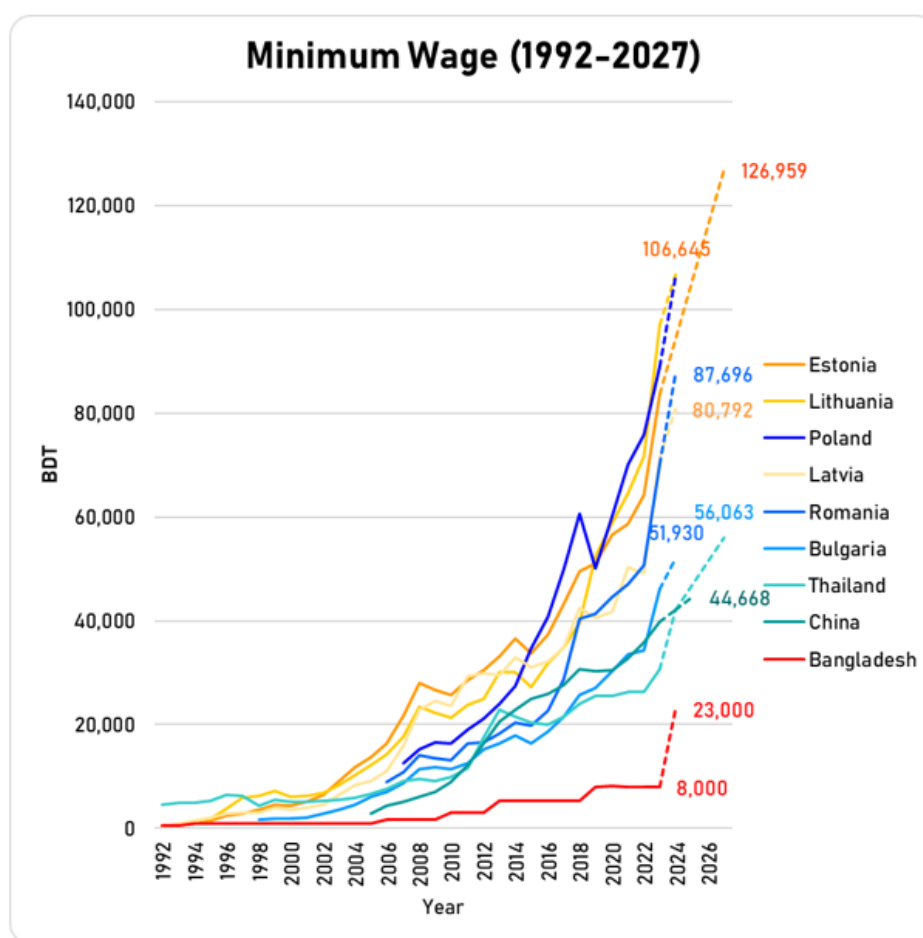


Figure 5.2: *Cross-Country Comparison of Minimum Wage Increases (1992–2027),*

Source: Gutzy Asia, <https://gutzy.asia/2023/09/07/bangladeshs-minimum-wage-needs-to-grow-faster-for-its-economy-catch-up-with-other-countries/>

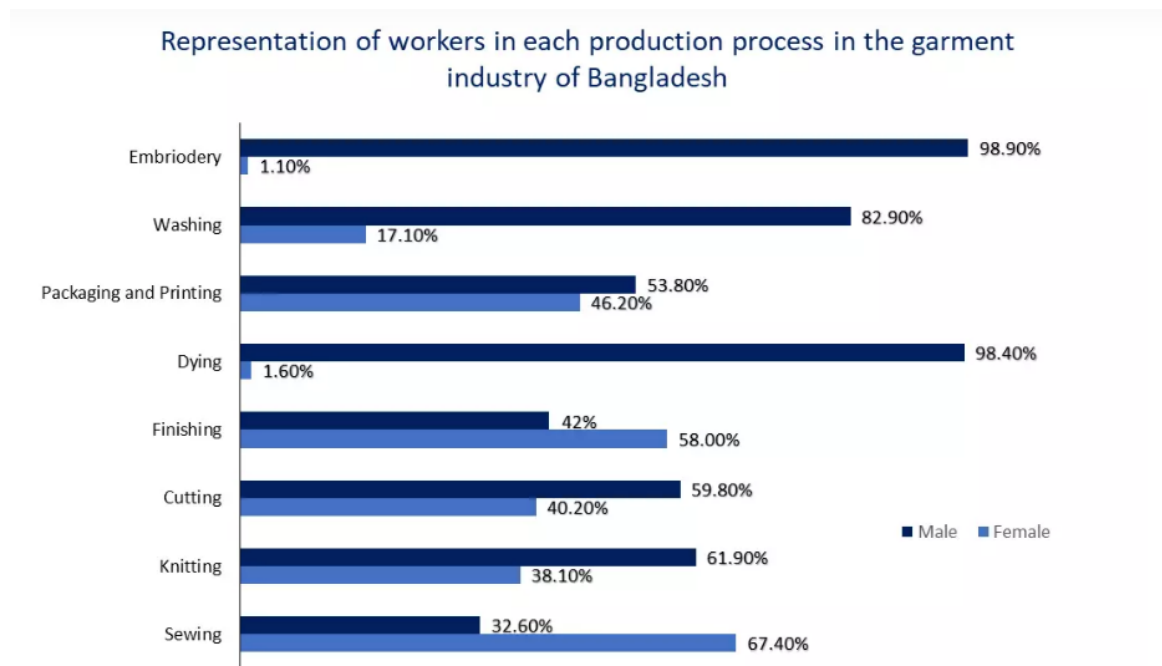
The low wage increases as projected in Bangladesh points to a more general wage constraint which is due to not only slower economic growth, but also potentially slower development, inflation, and lack of policies. The overall disparity shows not only the different wage changes in context referring to differing economic conditions in that country and that of countries in the EU, but also in relation to issues of labour market reforms and policy. While the economies in Eastern Europe have been successful in increasing wages alongside their economic growth, Bangladesh can only illustrate the difficulty in increasing a wage that reflects the economy's growth across all relevant sectors in society.

5.2.3 Gender Distribution in Garment Production Processes

The figure 5.3 shows the gender breakdown of the workforce along the different production processes in Bangladesh's clothing sector using data from the ILO report. It reveals the obvious division of labour that exists by gender: women are engaged primarily in some production processes whereas men dominate others. Women are prevalent in sewing (67.4%) and finishing (58%), which are labour-intensive processes that require precision and repetitiveness by hand.

Often these jobs are associated with low pay and little opportunities for advancement, revealing a wider gender inequality in the garment industry. Female representation is also high in knitting (61.9%), and packaging and printing (53.8%), suggesting again that women are involved in lower skilled jobs in processes deemed less labour intensive, yet requiring attention to detail.

In contrast, men dominate embroidery (98.9%), dyeing (98.4%), and washing (82.9%). These processes typically require machine operation, use of chemicals, or



are physically demanding, all traditionally male tasks.

Figure 5.3: *Gender Distribution of Workers in Different Production Processes of the Garment Industry in Bangladesh*, Source: ILO Report

The data demonstrates how entrenched the gender segregation is in Bangladesh's garment industry. Although women provide the industry's backbone, being concentrated into lower objectively paid and un-mechanized jobs shows more structural inequalities for women in terms of availability to skill development and training, and structural hierarchy in the workplace. All of these discriminatory practices can only serve to limit women and the effort of women has to be strategically disentangled and rewarded in order for any advancement in gender equity to happen in industrial work.

The figure 5.4 depicts a small decline in the share of Bangladeshi Ready-Made Garment (RMG) workers that are women, wherein this proportion had its fall from 54.22%-from five years ago to 53.65%-two years ago. The decrease, however small, does indicate that there has been some kind of trend of the workforce gender composition over the six years.

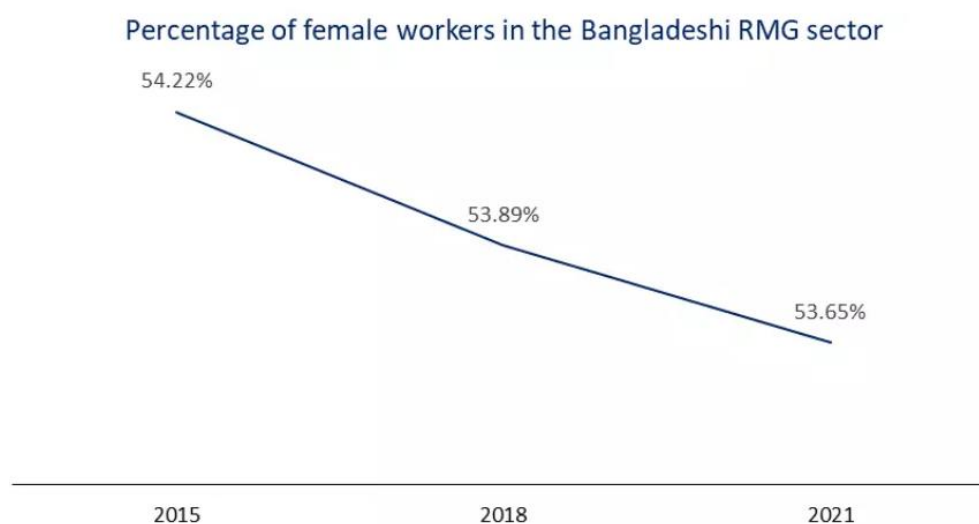


Figure 5.4: *The Changing Face of the RMG Industry: A Decline in Female Labour,*
Source: ETI_GIZ Study on Women Workers.

Possible explanations of it shall include that with increased automation and mechanization in garment production, the demand for low-skilled labour-intensive jobs, which were predominantly filled by women, might have diminished. Therefore,

changes in the labour market, including changing global demand for certain types of garments, which is also play a role in this decline. Other social and economic factors, such as women’s access to education and availability of alternative option of employment opportunities, may also, in a non-linear way, add another measure of other reasons to explain the decline. Although women still make up more than half the RMG workforce, this decline poses significant concerns for gender equality and women’s marginalization in the sector. Women are confined to lower-paying, less-skilled positions; a decrease in the number of women might also suggest deeper systemic obstacles in their access to better-paid and higher-skilled posts. This trend highlights the importance of policies aimed at enhancing women’s participation in the industry, ensuring gender equity in employment opportunities, and providing pathways for women to move into leadership and higher-skilled roles. The decline in female workers should serve as a prompt for stakeholders to consider how to better support women in the RMG industry to ensure that their contributions are recognized and their rights upheld.

5.2.4 Factors Contributing to Low Complaint Rates: Insights from Case and Control Groups

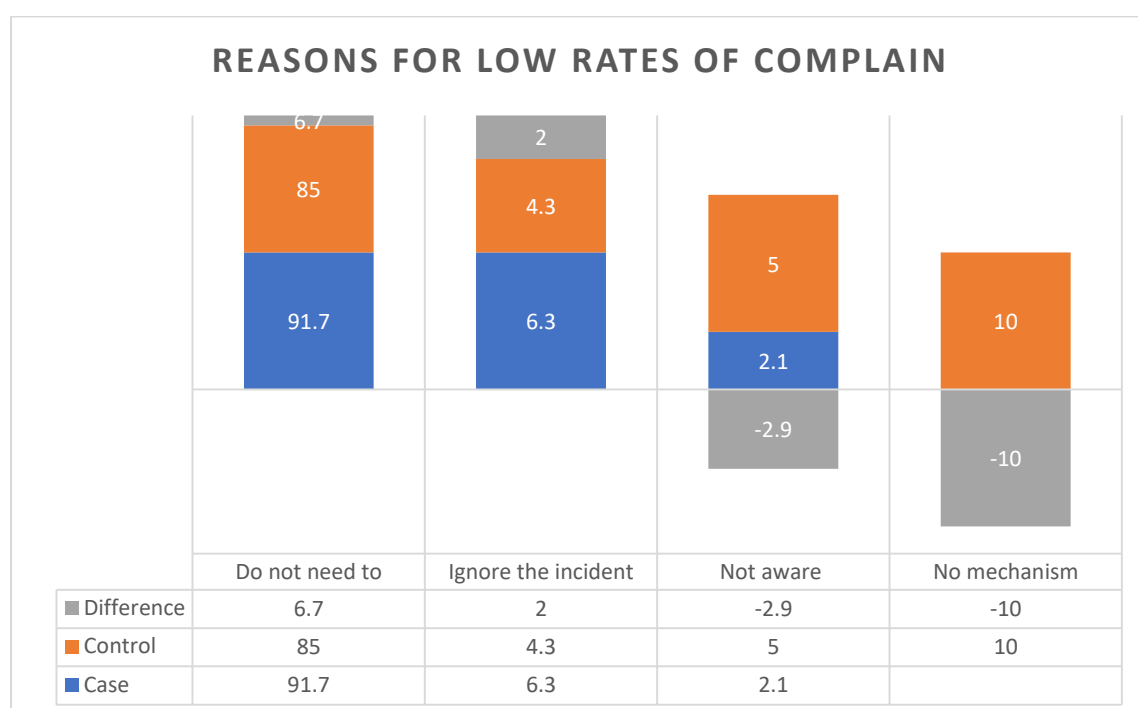


Figure 5.5: *Factors Contributing to Low Complaint Rates: A Comparative Analysis of Case and Control Groups*, Source: Author

The study found that, while the committees were indeed organized and the workers were oriented on their roles, their responsibilities, and how to file complaints, not much was done by way of actual filing of complaints or reporting of incidents. While awareness among workers increased during the short span of the project, no cases were filed, nor were there any incidents reported. It was seen, however, that 100% of the complainants who filed complaints had received remedies for their grievances. Out of these, 66.7% recorded high satisfaction, and 33.3% reflected general satisfaction in regard to the procedure for redressal. However, the evaluation found out that the rate of judgment on the perpetrators of GBV still lay at a relatively high level, standing at 38.5%. This is probably explained by the fact that under the law, GBV is a non-bailable offense, and is therefore difficult to handle at the level of arbitration.

While the medical support given to victims of GBV has slightly reduced by -6%, this has probably been due to the establishment of government-led One-Stop Crisis Centers, somewhat reducing the need for factory-specific medical intervention. Factories have updated their policies to incorporate zero tolerance for GBV, and all employees - both workers and management - are more aware of the policies and their roles in maintaining a safe workplace. However, while there was no formal monitoring tool to review the implementation of revised policies, some informal consultations and discussions have been carried out to get a sense of awareness and the effectiveness of the revised policies. Yet again, concrete evidence on the implementation aspects of the GBV policy within the factory setting is difficult to obtain when no formal complaints have been filed. It is only when the complaints are officially filed that any proper assessment of the working of the complaint committees and of the factory policies can be made.

A female worker usually did her night duty and came home late. A local guy repeatedly harassed her. As she was divorced and living alone and also her two children live in the village so she felt very scary to go to factory and some point she decided that she will leave her job then came forward and take step with local influential people and solve that problem.

These provide insight into the significant experiences of women workers in Bangladesh's RMG industry, illustrating their struggles, perceptions, and the obstacles they face in exercising their rights. The constitutional guarantees for women workers in Bangladesh mandate equality and non-discrimination across all facets of state and public life, ensuring equal rights with men, alongside the right to employment that is guaranteed at an adequate salary that considers work quality and quantity, plus adequate rest and leisure. These guarantees also encompass the freedom of association and the right to form unions, yet challenges persist in their full realization. The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 incorporates several clauses aimed at safeguarding the rights of women workers, addressing occupational hygiene, safety measures, industrial accidents, working conditions, trade union participation, and working hours.

“Even when we know something's wrong, we don't always have the courage to speak up. We're afraid of being punished, or worse, losing our job. The union is weak here, so there's no one to back us up when we complain.”

(Respondent “B”, Line operator,
Savar)

However, the efficacy of these provisions is undermined by their general nature and, in some instances, substandard implementation, leading to significant violations, especially concerning workplace safety, thereby exposing women workers to considerable vulnerability. Despite the legal requirement for employers to provide appointment letters detailing the terms of employment, a significant number of workers do not receive such letters, hindering their ability to substantiate their employment and pursue legal recourse when necessary. Additionally, the Act does not adequately address gender-based violence and harassment, leaving women workers unprotected against these pervasive issues within the RMG sector. Wage justice is a crucial aspect of labour rights, and women workers are actively striving to secure it, envisioning a more successful role for women in obtaining more comprehensive labour rights in the RMG industry. However, studies reveal instances of gender discrimination in the RMG sector, including verbal harassment by male coworkers, the exploitation of female workers by owners and supervisors, and the imposition of

mandatory overtime for female subordinates. These practices not only undermine the dignity of women workers but also perpetuate inequalities within the industry.

“Some of us know our rights, like the minimum wage and leave policies, but not everyone is fully aware. We’ve heard about labour laws, but it’s hard to understand them when we don’t have anyone to explain things to us clearly.”

(Respondent “C”, Savar)

Moreover, the burden of managing both household responsibilities and workplace demands disproportionately affects women workers, impacting their health and well-being. The existing legal framework in Bangladesh, while providing a foundation for labour rights, requires strengthening to effectively protect women workers in the RMG sector, necessitating comprehensive reforms that address gender-based violence, ensure fair wages, and promote safe working environment. According to the Labour Act of 2006, female employees in Bangladesh's RMG industry are entitled to four months of maternity leave, which suggests that women are receiving compensation for giving birth. The study's objectives are to demonstrate how maternity leave is used in the RMG industry and to evaluate the amount of financial benefits paid for maternity leave. Limitations and inefficiency in the implementation of labour regulations are the root cause of decent work deficits in Bangladesh's shipbreaking and garment industries. The government of Bangladesh has modified the Bangladesh Labour Act to take into account the safety and security of female garment workers. According to the law, if a factory employs forty or more women, a suitable room must be set up for their children. This provision is helpful for female workers to ensure their peace of mind during work.

“We need better wages, safer working conditions, and maternity leave. These are the things that matter most to us. We spend long hours in the factory, and somehow, we don’t feel safe during the way to home, and the wages isn’t enough to cover our basic needs.”

(Respondent “D”,

Gazipur)

With an estimated 2,997,000 workers in 2013—roughly 5% of the country's 58,073,000 employed people—the ready-made clothing industry is Bangladesh's largest single industrial employment. Approximately 60% of workers in the RMG industry are women, making up a sizable component of this workforce. Bangladesh's overall economic progress, poverty alleviation, and women's empowerment are all significantly impacted by this high rate of female labour force participation. The RMG industry has been crucial in promoting economic expansion, making a significant contribution to the GDP and export revenue of the nation. Bangladesh is now the world's second-largest exporter of ready-made clothing after making tremendous progress in this area.

The industry's expansion has not only generated employment opportunities but has also facilitated the entry of female into the formal workforce, challenging gender stereotypes and norms. The apparel industry serves as the economic backbone of Bangladesh, experiencing remarkable growth since its inception in the 1970s. Over 80% of Bangladesh's total exports come from this industry, making it a vital force behind economic growth. For almost ten years, the industry's contribution to the nation's economic growth reached an astounding 6 percent growth rate. Despite the significant strides made by the RMG sector, challenges persist, particularly concerning labour rights, working conditions, and gender equality. The sector is essential to the nation's overall socioeconomic growth since it provides employment possibilities for the underprivileged, illiterate, and half-educated. The RMG industry employs about 4 million people, 80% of whom are women. Bangladesh's labour-intensive, export-focused ready-made clothing industry has revolutionized the country's economy.

The industry's growth has been supported by factors such as low labour costs, preferential trade agreements, and government policies promoting export-oriented industrialization. Yet, alongside these achievements, concerns remain regarding the sustainability and ethical practices within the RMG sector, particularly concerning sustainable environmental practices, safe working conditions, and equitable pay. Just 21.8% of people lived below the federal poverty threshold in 2018. During the fiscal year 2016–2017, the industry's GDP contribution was 11.16%. An essential pillar of Bangladesh's economy, the ready-made garment sector has become a major source of foreign exchange gains.

However, the pursuit of economic progress must not come at the cost of workers' rights and well-being. Over 85% of Bangladesh's total goods exports in 2023 came from apparel products, which make up a large portion of the country's ready-made garment industry (Razzaque et al., 2024).

Within the apparel sector, knitwear and woven garments are the primary product categories, catering to international markets. Although the RMG sector has contributed to economic growth, its labour methods, worker safety, and environmental effects have drawn criticism. Despite the remarkable contributions of the apparel industry, manufacturers encounter numerous challenges in meeting customer demands and expectations.

“The management talks about worker welfare, but it feels like just words. They care more about the factory production and its profits than our safety. We’ve been asking for better safety and security measures for months, but nothing changes. It’s frustrating because they only act when it’s convenient for them, not when real improvements are needed.”

(Respondent “E”,
Savar)

These issues include extended lead times, elevated labour expenses, constrained availability of raw materials, and frequent disruptions in production. About 77% of Bangladesh's foreign exchange profits come from this industry, which also employs 50% of the country's industrial workforce (Shahria, 2019).

Because of this, complete labour rights—which include freedom of association, safe working conditions, and fair wages—are desperately needed. Bangladesh's RMG sector is vital because the nation's economic growth is primarily dependent on agriculture, with industry coming in second (Alom, 2016).

A multifaceted strategy that takes into account ethical corporate practices, environmental sustainability, and labour rights is required to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth in the RMG industry. Improving industrial safety standards and worker safeguards has been made possible in large part by the Bangladesh Accord and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, which were established in the wake of the

Rana Plaza collapse. Bangladesh is expected to encounter fierce competition from other nations that produce clothing, including China, India, and Pakistan (Masud et al., 1970).

“As an NGO worker, I’ve noticed that, although tier 1 factories are usually better and have some kind of monitoring system installed, the same is nowhere near satisfactory in tier 2 and 3. In lower tier factories, safety can be poor, and oversight is often non-existent. Workers may be forced to work in unsafe conditions, overtime hours, and poor facilities. These factories are in violation of basic standards of worker health and safety. Without an effective system of oversight and accountability, workers in tiers 2 and 3 will remain subject to exploitation and unsafe conditions. It is important to advocate for attention on the lower tier factories, and to ensure all workers, whether working in a tier 1 tier factory or a tier 3 factory, are protected and treated decently. Conditions will worsen and workers will be left vulnerable without intervention.”

(Respondent “F”, NGO worker,
Dhaka)

These collaborative initiatives, involving brands, retailers, and civil society, have demonstrated the potential for positive change in the garments industry. The industry needs to adopt modern technology and improve the quality of its products to compete effectively. A thorough investigation of women's labour rights in Bangladesh's ready-made garment industries is crucial given these opportunities and challenges.

Such a study can provide valuable insights into the in hands experiences of female garment workers, the issues they face, and the measures needed to promote their rights and well-being. Furthermore, the sector needs to be more efficient and productive. Additionally, the study can inform policy recommendations and interventions aimed at fostering a more applicable and sustainable RMG sector that benefits both workers/labourers and the broader economy. The implementation of special strategies and approaches to ensure sustainability is crucial, as it benefits

vulnerable workers, promotes long-term relationships between suppliers and transnational companies, and contributes to economic growth.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined a thorough investigation of women's labour rights in Bangladesh's ready-made garment industries is crucial given these opportunities and challenges. Even though women work hard to make the industry successful and profitable, women workers continue to experience systemic inequalities in the workplace, such as low wages, gender violence, and substandard working environment. The chapter shows that labour law enforcement is inconsistent and lacks resources to combat the oppressive working conditions of women workers. Furthermore, gender segregation of production processes places women workers in less skilled roles that pay less and stifle skill development and career advancement. The chapter also discusses the low rates of complaints by women workers, the barriers to litigation, and all of the legal frameworks implemented and/or available to women workers. Even though women workers have litigation rights, they lack access to them. Last, comparing minimum wage growth with other countries, illustrates women workers' persistent and continued stagnation of wages, which are insufficient to meet basic needs. In order to reduce or eliminate these barriers, the chapter argues for systemic policy reform, increased enforcement of labour laws, and greater accountability from employers. The chapter concludes that in addition to these measures, collective action both in the RMG work sector and in the community, are essential for ensuring women's voices are heard and that their rights are recognized. Only through systemic change can the RMG industry become a more equitable and just sector for women workers in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER VI

POLICY ENHANCEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Empowering Women Workers: Strengthening Safety and Advocacy in Bangladesh's RMG Sector

6.2.1 Strengthening Workplace Safety Regulations

6.2.2 Gender-Sensitive Codes of Conduct

6.2.3 Paid Menstrual Leave Policy

6.2.4 Comprehensive Anti-Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policies

6.2.5 Equal Pay for Equal Work

6.2.6 Childcare Support

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6.4 The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Gender Equality and Economic Empowerment

6.5 Institutional Set-Up: Policy Formation and Orientation

6.6 Training Initiatives

6.7 Events and Empowerment

6.8 Awareness-Raising Sessions

6.9 Lobbying and Advocacy

6.7 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The chapter illustrates an enhancement of policies related to the critical issues surrounding labour rights and gender equity for women workers in RMG in Bangladesh. Specifically, this chapter aims to discuss various policies to improve working environments, safety, and the overall rights of women workers. The chapter also discusses various challenges women confront, including unsafe working environments, unequal pay, and harassment in the workplace and offers specific policies to help address these issues. These policies include comprehensive safety measures, menstrual leave policies, and anti-harassment policies. The chapter also mentions the need for gender-sensitivity in codes of conduct, childcare, and equal wages for equal work hours. Drawing on international standards from the ILO, UN's SDGs, and other frameworks, the chapter argues for changes to structural policy attempts to ensure equity and economic risk for women workers in the RMGs. The hope underlying these policy enhancements is the effectiveness in increasing safe, equitable environment and rights for women workers.

6.2 Empowering Women Workers: Strengthening Safety and Advocacy in Bangladesh's RMG Sector

6.2.1 Strengthening Workplace Safety Regulations

A thorough investigation of women's labour rights in Bangladesh's ready-made garment industries is crucial given these opportunities and challenges. The government of Bangladesh should develop stricter provisions for safety enforcement and also require audits of factories to ensure safe environments for women workers. More regular inspections and improvement of the factory buildings should be required once the factories comply with a safety audit and regulations, following standards such as those provided by the ILO. Employers of these factories should be made to provide equipment to ensure safety, appropriate fire exits, well-lit common spaces, and clean respectful restrooms separated for female in the workplace. In addition, ensuring women's safety in the workplace extends from safety around the fire exit and restroom issues and should also be in place for women's handling of chemical materials, machinery, and other hazards. Additionally, women can also be trained on safety measures to avoid hazards and to understand safe practices in an effort to

reduce workplace hazards, accidents, and fatalities. Regular safety audits and monitoring systems for safety can be introduced, which should track the effectiveness of safety policies, as well as identify hazards and whether firms have complied with a full safety audit of standards. Factory management needs to be held responsible for failing to create a secure environment. (ILO, 2020).

6.2.2 Gender-Sensitive Codes of Conduct

Bangladesh has a large number of apparel industries that have a code of conduct, which is often generic and does not sufficiently cover gender-related issues. Therefore, gender-sensitive codes of conduct are urgently needed in RMG (ready-made garments) factories, covering all aspects of the workers' experience (hiring, promotion, work conduct, etc.). The code of conduct should facilitate gender diversity in ordinances, equal pay for equal work, and women's access to leadership opportunities. Moreover, it should establish a harassment-free environment with explicit prohibitions against anti-social conduct such as sexual harassment or gender-based violence. The code of conduct should also include step-by-step instructions for reporting violations that protect whistleblowers and cover workers' anonymity. Moreover, codes of conduct should be made public, ensuring transparency and accountability within factory operations. Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, including internal and external audits, will ensure adherence to these policies (Berg et al., 2019).

6.2.3 Paid Menstrual Leave Policy

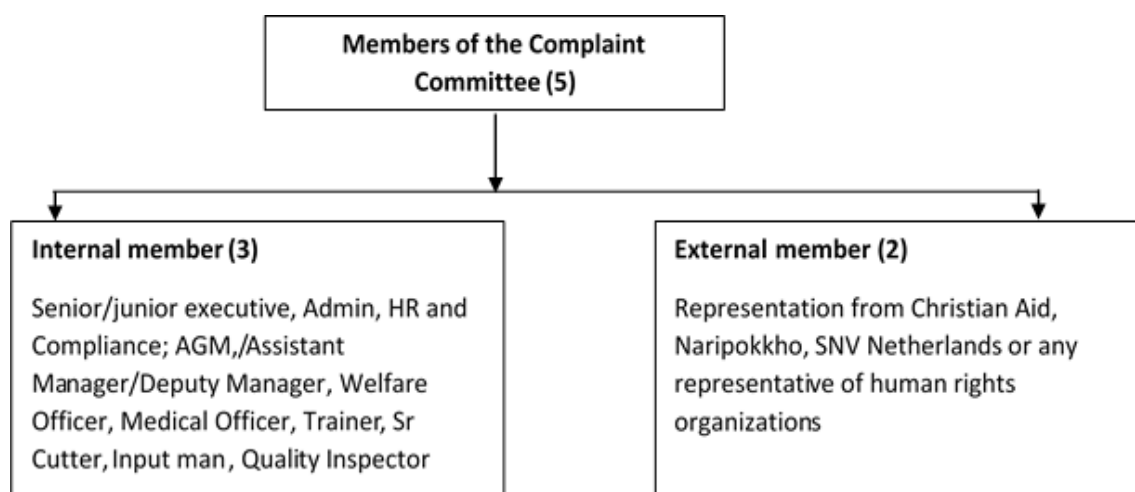
Menstruation is still stigmatized in many countries, and women workers often suffer in silence during their menstrual experiences - absenteeism, reduced productivity, or unhealthy working conditions all occur. We should mandate the implementation of paid menstrual leave. This policy would address physical discomfort and emotional distress often associated with menstruation and provide additional benefits for women's well-being and participation in the workforce. Valid policy exists in other countries and the research shows it likely reduces absenteeism and stress. It would also create a supportive atmosphere for women in the workforce, helping to create a situation where women do not have to lose income or experience discrimination because of their bodies (Sharma, 2017). Likewise, implementing paid menstrual leave

would offer women the chance to verbalize their health concerns with appropriate words, transparency, and comfort, thereby reducing the stigma around discussing health topics in the workplace.

6.2.4 Comprehensive Anti-Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policies

Sexual harassment and gender discrimination continues to be a persistent and pervasive concern in the RMGs in Bangladesh. Women workforce fear retaliation, or losing their job, and don't feel comfortable reporting these incidences. As such, RMG factories should have clear anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies that promote a safe workplace for women.

The Complaint Committee's primary duties include receiving complaints, looking into them, and offering suggestions. Along with that it will prepare an annual report and submit it to the government. In the intervening factories, the committees were formed comprising five members. Among them three are from the inside factory and two are from outside the organization concerned. After a high court verdict, the external members were added from groups addressing sexual abuse and gender issues. The committee has a maximum number of female members. A common organogram of the Sexual Harassment Complaint Committee is as below:



The policy would address what harassment is, such as inappropriate comments, unwelcome touching, and discrimination, and lay out a plan for addressing harassment complaints. The plan would prioritize confidentiality but also allow women access to legal and psychological support services for women reporting harassment. Remedies for any factory found to violate the policy would result in a

fine or loss of their licenses. Finally, the policy should include sensitivity training for management and workers to raise awareness and understanding about sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and the role of respect and safe workplace (ILO, 2021).

6.2.5 Equal Pay for Equal Work

Women in Bangladesh's are frequently paid less than their male counterparts in the apparel sector to perform the same work. We propose to continue workplace policies requiring equal compensation for equal labour, irrespective of gender, in order to promote fairness and provide economic independence for women workers. Factories ought to be required to publicly post their wage structure and be able to prove that they audit pay equality regularly. Any significant pay inequities between similarly situated employees should be remedied and corrected. Also, there should be appropriate procedures in place for reporting wage inequities and demonstrating public accountability. Gender pays inequity can be resolved through these relatively straightforward guidelines and by facing genuine consequences for non-compliance. The introduction of this policy will create women's economic advancement and contribute to a more equitable workplace (Kabeer et al, 2018).

6.2.6 Childcare Support

Mothers attempting to balance work obligations and childcare responsibilities make up the bulk of female employees in the RMG industry. Therefore, it should be provided, at a minimum, that every RMG factory is required to tact on-site childcare services or offer child care subsidies to help unburden working mothers. Providing affordable and reliable childcare services allows women to remain in the labour force and contributes to better health and developmental outcomes for children. Factories could either offer reliable in-house daycare service or partner with childcare service providers in the community around the factory. This would support employee retention and morale and yield long-term productivity gains (Smith, 2019).

6.3 The International Labour Organization (ILO) Standards: Gender Equality and Decent Work

Gender equality alongside equal work for all workers have always been priorities for the International Labour Organization (ILO). Under their system, the ILO Conventions—particularly Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration and Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)—offer guidance to ensure that women are paid equally for equal work and are not subjected to gender discrimination. The development of long-term, respectable, secure, and socially inclusive jobs is encouraged by the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

To advance labour rights for women in the RMG in Bangladesh, the government of Bangladesh and factories must conform to the ILO's conventions. Once they have ratified and implemented these standards, Bangladesh can establish a legal framework that guarantees women will not suffer lower wages than the male worker or unsafe working environment. The ILO's Gender Equality Policy gives recommendations for addressing workplace harassment, maternity leave, and the promotion of women into leadership roles (ILO, 2019). These policies ensure that gender equality is a part of the national labour laws and corporate practices used to govern the RMG sector.

6.4 The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Gender Equality and Economic Empowerment

Gender equality (SDG 5) is a key objective that must be accomplished in all spheres, including the workplace, according to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are the main objectives of SDG 5. It emphasizes equal access to economic resources, leadership responsibilities, and the eradication of violence. Policies in the RMG sector should focus on social protection, worker safety, and women's economic empowerment in order to achieve these objectives. For instance, the objectives of enhancing women's labour rights in Bangladesh's apparel industry are highly similar to SDG 8, which focuses on decent work and economic growth.

It calls for fair wages, job security, and non-discrimination in hiring for both women and men. Similarly, the UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) provides a

framework for organizations for integrating gender equality into their operations, including leadership roles, workplace policies, and supplier practices. Finally, the alignment of national policies with the UN's SDGs and the national uptake and implementation of the frameworks for SDG 5 and SDG 8 would greatly improve women's labour rights, which may include better opportunities for equal wages, working situations, and opportunities for progress in the RMG sector (UN Women, 2020).

6.5 Institutional Set-Up: Policy Formation and Orientation

Significant advancements have been made in the institutional framework of factory operations in an effort to respond to gender-based violence (GBV) and work towards a safer workplace for female in RMGs in Bangladesh. Policies and procedures that emphasize harassment prevention and elimination have been developed and instituted in five partner factories. The goal of the policies and procedures in order to clearly frame the procedures for responding to cases of sexual harassment in the workplace, including the process for reporting harassment, what happens when a complaint is received, and how the investigation personnel will approach the investigations and the subsequent disciplinary process.

An internal monitoring system has been established to complement the policies and procedures. Orientation sessions were conducted with the HR, administrative and compliance personnel of the partner factories to ensure they understood their responsibilities for implementation of the policies and procedures to maintain a safe workplace. In addition, the research team conducted individual gender assessments in each of the factories, "Factories Gender Sensitivity: Policy and Practice." These gender assessments outlined strengths and weaknesses of the existing systems and provided eight individual action plans to enhance the mechanisms in place for the factory personnel to report and address incidents of GBV safely and effectively. In compliance with the letter of the High Court, five complaint committees were instituted in the partner factories. These committees have a specific name and are charged with specific duties of responding to sexual harassment complaints. They provide workers with an avenue to report harassment safely and help workers feel that the complaints are taken seriously by management. As one male worker noted,

“Complaint mechanisms should be more confidential, and management should be more positive in receiving complaints from workers.

6.6 Training Initiatives

Training serves as a crucial aspect of building awareness and empowering workers, though there are differences in appearance across factory tiers. For example, large, established Tier 1 factories often have the resources to conduct very regular and good quality training for their staff. This training includes key issues of worker’s rights, complaint mechanisms, and harassment prevention among others. In Tier 2 and 3 factories, small factories were not equipped to arrange this training, leaving the workers in these factories more vulnerable than their counterparts in a Tier 1 factory. A factory welfare officer emphasized that a, “training will be useful for addressing any complaint that makes it to a complaint committee,” suggesting that the training is an important factor of empowering workers to use this training for new formal complaint systems. Similarly, a factory director emphasized, “There is no substitute for training, “giving further weight to its crucial role on an informed workforce to understand and act on their rights when violated.

6.7 Events and Empowerment

Surveys conducted among workers reveal that many now feel their voices are being heard more than ever before. This shift has been attributed to the opportunity for workers to represent themselves in front of management and other key stakeholders. Rubana Haque, a prominent advocate for women’s rights, remarked, “We must stay alert. In all spheres of society, we must remain aware. Women need to be strategic and continue their fight with full confidence.” Her words reflect the growing empowerment among women workers who now see themselves as active participants in shaping their working conditions and advocating for their rights. Additionally, factory mid-level management reported, “We have even organized different kinds of knowledge-sharing and awareness programs,” which have contributed to the increase in worker confidence. These programs have provided workers with the tools to not only voice their concerns but also understand the broader context of workplace safety and gender equality.

6.8 Awareness-Raising Sessions

The awareness-raising sessions have been a cornerstone to the empowerment process. Workers, especially women, who had previously felt disempowered in the face of injustice, now feel capable to take control when they witness an injustice. The sessions have helped bolster their self-confidence so that they speak out for their own rights and create awareness in their families and communities. One of the workers expressed, “I feel empowered now. I am able to talk about issues like sexual harassment not just at work, but at home too. I even try to educate my neighbors.” The awareness-raised programs have had a ripple effect; many workers have become an agent of change in their own communities and spread the message of gender equality and workers’ rights beyond the gate of the factory.

6.9 Lobbying and Advocacy

Long-term change requires lobbying and advocacy efforts. Organizations like BLAST (Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust) have been integral in lobbying meetings with the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) for women’s workplace protections. Legal aid camps have been held with the help of BLAST, BRAC, and other organizations to help workers obtain free legal representation and support to take actions against gender-based violence and/or other injustices they face in the workplace.

Workers started taking actions after attending awareness training and began participating in legal and social forms of advocacy to fight GBV and “speak up.” This endeavor has been very helpful in assisting workers with the legal system and demanding their rights, even in cases where factory management have attempted to get them to remain silent. Organizations have continued their lobbying work with the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) as well, hoping to advocate for better workplace safety, especially for women. They intend to continue to pressure BGMEA to take GBV seriously, and for factory management to assume more responsibility for their female workers.

6.10 Conclusion

The chapter clearly demonstrates the pressing need for policy modifications that will address the institutional challenges that female workers face in the RMGs in Bangladesh. These policies include enhanced workplace safety protocols, gender-sensitive codes of conduct, paid menstrual leave, and comprehensive anti-harassment policies, in order to create a more equitable and safer workplace. Lastly, these policies are designed to achieve international standards established by the UN's SDGs and the ILO, and they intend to empower women by ensuring they receive equal payment for equal working hours and have access to workers' essential services such as childcare. In addition to policies, institutional frameworks, training programming, and legal aid will also solidify change related to gender equality and workers' rights. These policies will change working conditions and cultivate an environment of accountability, transparency, and respect in the workplace. Overall, these changes are important to developing a more holistic, just, and sustainable garment industry in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER SEVEN

INTERPRETATION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Recommendations

7.2 Conclusion

The research underlines substantial problems that women workers face in the Bangladesh RMG industry. Though the sector ensures GDP growth in the country by employing millions of workers, especially women, systemic issues still persist. Female workers often face gender-based wage disparities, poor safety conditions, and inadequate maternity benefits. Not only have they had to bear job role discrimination based on gender, but there is a higher number of males involved in higher-paying jobs, while females are mainly involved in low-paid, manual labor jobs like sewing machine operators and helpers. Workplace safety, along with regulatory frameworks, is yet a serious issue. A large number of factories do not comply with the proper use of safety precautions, which puts workers' lives at risk, especially during emergencies such as fire outbreaks. The study reported that 65% of factories did not carry out the legally required fire drills, and 85% of the female workers felt unsafe in their respective workplaces, indicating poor implementation and functioning of the regulatory mechanisms for workplace safety. Also, GBV predominates; 90% of the female workforce reported at least some kind of harassment, although most did not report for fear of retaliation. Moreover, the grievance mechanisms exist but are mostly ineffectual, thereby demonstrating systemic failure in addressing such matters. This situation is further compounded by the lack of support systems for female workers, such as paid menstrual leave or accessible childcare, which severely hampers their ability to work without facing additional hardships.

7.1 Recommendations for Improving Labour Rights and Working Conditions for Women in Bangladesh's RMG Sector

The RMG sector is a very important contributor to Bangladesh's national economy and employs millions, the majority of whom are women. The sector has remained characteristically mired in issues of gender inequality, poor working conditions, and weak enforcement of labor rights. This study has discussed some of the critical problems regarding wage disparity, unsafe workplace environment, gender-based violence, and lack of effective legal protection among women workers. The following recommendations might help in addressing these issues and improving the general working condition for female workers in the RMG sector.

1. Strengthening Labour Law Enforcement

Although Bangladesh has a comprehensive set of labour laws, the enforcement remains weak, particularly in the RMG sector. In order to bring improvement in working conditions, the following actions are necessary:

- *Increase Inspections and Accountability:* DIFE should be strengthened to conduct surprise and regular inspections. Factories that do not maintain safety standards or violate labor laws should be made accountable through tough penalties like fines, temporary suspension, or permanent closure. These will create a deterrent against non-compliance and guarantee safer workplaces for women.
- *Regulatory Transparency and Worker Participation:* Workers should be involved in safety audits, and management of the factories needs to show more transparency concerning site visits. Setting up an anonymous hotline for employees to report safety infractions could increase accountability by factory owners and minimize retaliation risks.

2. Gender-Sensitive Workplace Policies

Establishing a more supportive environment for female workers requires gender-sensitive workplace policies. The following policies go a long way in improving the conditions for women:

- *Paid Menstrual Leave:* There should be a policy on paid menstrual leave to help women alleviate the discomfort during their menstrual cycle. This would help women take the time off they need without losing income, reducing absenteeism and improving overall job satisfaction. It would also contribute to reducing stigma around women's health at work.
- *Maternity Benefit and Job Security:* Even though the law provides for maternity leave, many women workers are still deprived of the benefits. It is important to ensure that all women workers are provided with paid maternity leave, and their jobs are secured during absence. Additionally, factories should provide childcare facilities to support working mothers and help them balance their family and work responsibilities.
- *Anti-Harassment Policies:* Sexual harassment, as part of gender-based violence, is still one of the major concerns in the RMG sector. Factories should have clear policies

that dictate zero tolerance for harassment, regular training among workers and management, and safe and anonymous reporting mechanisms. Assurance of no retaliation should be communicated to employees against reporting harassment or violence.

3. Enhancing Workplace Safety

Safety in the workplace remains a significant challenge since most of the factories do not follow basic safety rules. The following recommendations need to be put in place:

- *Safety Drills and Equipment:* Regular fire drills must be conducted, and factories are supposed to provide readily available facilities like emergency exits, fire extinguishers, and first-aid kits. Workers are supposed to be trained regularly on safety precautions and ways to evacuate the factory in case of an accident or fire.
- *Improve Infrastructure in Factories:* Most factories lack proper ventilation systems, personal protective equipment, and sanitation facilities. Stricter safety standards need to be put in place by the government, and it also needs to hold factories responsible for implementing proper infrastructure. Small and subcontracted factories will also need support through such plans as subsidies or government-backed programs to improve their safety.

4. Women's Empowerment through Unionization and Leadership

Union participation is very crucial for empowering women workers and, consequently, improving their labor rights. To encourage more participation of women in unions, the following steps should be taken:

- *Promote Female Union Leadership:* Encourage female workers through unions to take on leadership opportunities and to participate in the decision-making process. Only through the provision of appropriate training in leadership and rights education can women increase their full participation within unions and be able to advocate on their behalf for improved working conditions.
- *Increase Female Union Membership:* Design and implement targeted outreach programs in an effort to increase female union membership. This would increase collective bargaining power, giving the unions greater strength to negotiate for higher wages, improved conditions, and more effective policies that protect women workers.

5. Raising Awareness of Labour Rights

The majority of women workers are uninformed about their rights as provided for in national laws and international conventions. In addressing these, the following are suggested:

- *Labour Rights Education:* labour rights education by NGOs, trade unions, and civil society organizations would provide women workers with information on their rights. For instance, this can be done through workshops, distribution of informative materials, or digital platforms where information will be easily accessed by workers on their legal rights regarding fair wages, safe working conditions, and protection from harassment.
- *Access to Legal Support Services:* Legal support services should be available for women workers to claim their rights. Such legal aid facilities help workers in taking legal action, particularly in cases related to wage theft, harassment, and unfair dismissal. The support would surely enable the workers to seek justice and see that their rights are not violated.

6. Holding Global Buyers Accountable

International buyers play a very influential role in shaping labour conditions in Bangladesh's RMG sector. In this regard, accountability of global brands regarding workers' treatment in their supply chains should be ensured through the following actions:

- *Code of Conduct and Its Rigorous Enforcement:* The global buyer should implement a rigid code of conduct to ensure suppliers' adherence to national laws on labour, supplemented by international standards. These codes of conduct should contain statements that deal with gender equality, workplace safety, and fair wages. Suppliers not adhering to such requirements should be penalized or their contracts should be revoked.
- *Collaboration with Local Stakeholders:* Global buyers should work with local stakeholders such as government bodies, unions, and NGOs to identify the long-term structural issues of the sector. In this regard, the focus should be on improving factory conditions, enhancing worker safety, and promoting gender equality in the workplace.

7.2 Conclusion

The Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector is widely acknowledged as the cornerstone of Bangladesh's economic development, accounting for more than 80% of total export revenue and giving almost four million people—mostly women—formal jobs. This thesis is fundamentally driven by the need to critically assess the human cost embedded in this economic success story. Chapter 1 stated that the problem to be addressed was the persistent and systemic violation of fundamental labour rights and safety standards for the female workforce, especially in the major industrial production clusters of Savar and Gazipur. The study sought to go beyond general audits by applying rigorous research questions aimed at quantifying the prevalence of GBV, women's labour rights, the work environment, assessing the efficacy of existing protective legislation, and coming up with concrete, actionable policy recommendations.

It was Chapter 2 that underpinned ideas on global value chains, gendered labour issues, and the gap between Bangladesh's national labour law and international mandates, particularly those of the ILO conventions and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, specifically focusing on Goals 5 (Gender Equality) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Chapter 2 documented a key knowledge gap with regard to the lived experiences of institutional complicity in harassment and the performative nature of grievance mechanisms.

Chapters 4 & 5 disclosed a similar trend of rights erosion, showing how the current institutional and operational environment systematically undermines the well-being of its most important workers. The results can be summarized into three core areas of failure: It was established that women workers at the factories constantly experience wage discrimination compared to their male colleagues performing similar tasks, contributing to gender inequality at a structural level. The practice of mandatory, excessive, and often uncompensated overtime proved very pervasive, with impacts on physical and mental health for the women concerned. The marked absence of gender-sensitive workplace supports—not least of all paid menstrual leave—forces women to work through severe physical discomfort or take unauthorized leave, bringing them deductions in wages and possible disciplinary consequences for inability to fulfill a basic biological need.

The institutional response was covered in detail in Chapter 5, and it has emerged that current protection mechanisms are hardly effective. Performative anti-harassment committees at the factory level and codes of conduct were bereft of independence, transparency, and power to enforce sanctions against higher-ranking abusers. Workers who tried to complain often reported cases of intimidation, retaliation, and pressure from the factory management to keep quiet, indicating a systemic prioritization of the factory's reputation over the victim's safety and justice. This institutional failure demonstrates a fundamental gap into the promise of labour law and its implementation on the ground.

Chapter 6 demonstrates a substantive contribution to policy development, moving from generalized calls for improvement toward a detailed, actionable policy roadmap that is rooted in empirical evidence from Savar and Gazipur. The central argument of Chapter 6 is that for meaningful and sustainable change, there needs to be a legal and structural shifting of accountability. The key recommendations are not incremental fixes but about transformational institutional reforms. These include the following:

Mandatory Independent Grievance Mechanisms: Establish genuinely independent, worker-led Anti-Harassment Committees with external oversight, ring-fenced from influence of internal factory management, and with powers to impose disciplinary action.

Gender-Sensitive Health Policies: Formalize and legally bind paid menstrual leave throughout the sector to reduce health burdens and economic penalties for female workers.

Increased BGMEA and Government Accountability: Apply greater external and governmental pressure on the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) to forcibly implement binding gender-sensitive codes of conduct and to hold individual factory owners and managers accountable for failure to protect their workers.

Legal and Educational Frameworks Strengthened: Provide comprehensive legal aid and rights literacy training for workers, ensuring they know their rights under both domestic and international frameworks. This also encompasses the advocacy of essential workers' services such as accessible childcare facilities to ease the domestic burden on female workers and to support continued employment. Upon implementation, these recommendations, in full accordance with the principles of the ILO and the UN SDGs, would allow the RMG sector to close the critical gap between rhetoric and reality toward an environment of accountability, transparency, and respect.

In Chapter 4, addressed the constitutional and legal provisions aimed at protecting female workers in the RMGs. Although the Constitution of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 articulate protections such as equal pay, maternity benefits, and a right to a safe working environment, carrying out these rights is still a major issue. Furthermore, referenced the UN Conventions, and different resolutions, international standards and conventions suggesting the necessity for gender-sensitive standards in labour. Nevertheless, a gap continues to exist between policy and practice; there are not sufficient mechanisms to enforce laws and regulations, factories are not monitored sufficiently, and many small and/or subcontracted factories simply do not comply with regulations. This chapter emphasizes both the need for stronger legal enforcement and/or accountability at the level of the factory and the level of policy and practice.

Chapter 5 examined the socio-economic and socio-cultural context of women's work, where cultural norms and gendered expectations do empower women to a certain extent, but also restrict women's choices and means of work. The engagement in the RMG sector does provide women with economic independence and mobility, but also exposes them to dangers of gender discrimination, precarious safety measures and wage exploitation. Gender hierarchies, which privilege men, continue in factories which position women into lower rung wage jobs with less status. On a positive note, while women have gained more financial agency, delayed marriage and childbearing, there are still serious concerns about workplace harassment, limited maternity leave, and non-standard contracts which undermine these benefits. The chapter illustrates how better workplace support, as well as community and family support, is needed.

In Chapter 6, focused on the benefits of international organizations for the rights of women. While there are examples of active involvement from sustainability-focused global buyers and international NGOs advocating for better working conditions, the gendered nature of labour organizing means women have often been systematically excluded from decision-making within unions, limiting their ability to sufficiently claim their rights. Women have many barriers to joining unions and taking on leadership roles within unions, as unions are often male-dominated, and are likely to experience backlash for challenging or even wanting to challenge the social construction for working women. The chapter calls for more efforts to better represent women and incorporate more gendered approaches to union work and to encourage

international organizations to apply pressure through their buyer partners to meet the labour standards. The ready-made garment industry presently stands at an inflection point. Its further global growth and competitive advantage depend not just on low production costs but increasingly also on ethical labour practices and demonstrable social responsibility. This thesis demonstrates conclusively that the economic success of this sector is presently subsidized by the systemic subordination and endangering of its women workers. Ensuring equal pay, taking effective safety measures, and implementing a zero-tolerance policy toward gender-based violence is thus more than an imperative of moral obligation: It forms a crucial and indispensable investment into the long-term viability and stability of Bangladesh's most important economic pillar. That may offer the framework necessary to realize the full development potential of such an industry: a model of economic growth truly inclusive, fundamentally just, and globally sustainable.

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Annex - 1**Quantitative Questionnaire**

Questions	Coding categories	
Type of factory	Intervention control	
Name of the factory	Millennium Textile (Southern) Ltd. Comfit Composit Knit Ltd. MG Niche Stitch Ltd. Interstoff Apparels Ltd. Mohammadi Knit Star Ltd. Control Factory name	
Name of the Respondent		
Respondent's mobile number		
Type of respondent	Male	Female

SECTION ONE: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND EMPLOYMENT

First, we want to ask you some questions about your current employment status, conditions at work and living area

1	Age	
2	Educational Qualification	1= Can't read and write 2= Pre primary 3= Primary 4= Secondary or equivalent 5=Higher Secodary or equivalent

		6=Graduate or equivalent 7= Post Graduate or equivalent 8= Others (specify).....
3	Employment Duration in this Garment	Months
4	Section/Department	1= Sewing 2= Cutting 3= Knitting 4= Dyeing 5= Finishing 6= Others.....
5	How many hours per day do you normally work?	Less than 4 hours1 Less than 8 hours2 Less than 10 hours3 Less than 12 hours4 More than 12 hours5

Section Two: INCREASED LEADERSHIP, VOICE, AND CAPACITY OF WOMEN GARMENT WORKERS

6	Do you know about violence against women?	Yes No
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7. Now i will tell you about some situation/ condition. please tell me if you consider it as violence against women / torture/ sexual harrassment or not when you face it while going to home or factory

<u>Perception on Violence against woman</u>						
	Situation/Incident/Condition	Strongly Agree	Agree	Nutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		1	2	3	4	5
a)	Physical Punishment (Beat/slap etc) if there is any mistake at work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b)	Verbal abuse if seen talking with other in Garments	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c)	Less salary than the male colleague	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

d)	Inappropriate touch to female workers on the pretext of work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e)	Harrasement at workplace or on the way to/from workplace	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f)	Attempted rape or rape	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g)	Take picture/video by mobile camera and publish them on internet	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
h)	Bothering by texting or calling, proposal of unexpected romantic affair or engagement, use slang	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
i)	Kidnap/trafficking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
j)	Indecent gesture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
k)	Showing pornography by tricking or by force	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
l)	Deliberately pushing the body	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
m)	Touching the body's unwanted / sensitive place during the exit or entering the factory	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
n)	Intimidating for establishing physical relationships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
o)	Following after leaving the factory	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
p)	Bad comments by surrounding people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
q)	Inappropriate gesture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10	Is there any complain mechanism exist in your factory in case of VAW?	Yes No
16	Do you feel insecure in your factory?	1= yes 2=no
17	Is there any committee to prevent physical harassment against female worker in the garment you work?	1= Yes and effective 2= no 3= yes but not effective 4= don't know
21	Did you receive any support from this committee?	1= yes 2= no 3= do not need to

SECTION THREE: ENHANCING ACTIVISM FOR CHANGE

26	Are you part of any activity/activism to reduce violence against women in the factory?	Yes No
28	Do you know any helpline number where you can report for violence against women and children? (Like National emergency service: 999 and Center for violence against women and children: 109)	Yes No

Section FOUR: INCREASED POLITICAL WILL, CAPACITY AND RESOURCES AMONG GOVERNMENTS AND BUSINESSES

Multi-stakeholder seminars		
29	Had the representatives of senior management participated in any seminar related to GBV/ VAW?	Yes No
30	Is there any change they made after attending the seminar?	Yes No
Development of course contents and materials		
31	Is the any poster/leaflet related to VAW visible in your factory/floor?	Yes No
32	Were the content in those posters/leaflet helpful for you?	Yes No To some extend

Section FIVE: EFFECTIVE MECHANISMS TO SAFE REPORTING

Parameters of existing knowledge, systems, practices			
33	Knowledge	Do you know where to go for reporting if there is any incidence of VAW?	Yes No
Impact of the Project			
39	Did you notice any change after the implementation of the program?		Yes No
40	What are the changes? Kindly explain		Open ended
41	If yes, Do you think those changes are helpful?		Yes No To some extend
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SUPPORT SERVICES			
43	Do you know any female worker who experienced GBV in own work place?		Yes No

Section 6: CHANGES IN VALUES AND ATTITUDES

51	Is the garment factory you work women friendly?	1= yes 2= no
56	Do you think those laws and legal aid services are really helpful?	Yes No Not sure

Annex - 2
Qualitative Questionnaire

• **KII questionnaire for Owners/ Directors /other staff**

Name	:	
Designation	:	
Organization	:	
Address	:	
Mobile Number	:	

Relevant questions
1. What do you understand by Violence against Women? What types of acts do you consider to be violence against women?
2. What are the initiatives have you been taken to create a violence free environment ?
3. Is there any harassment prevention committee in your factory? If yes, what are their roles?
4. Do you think they have been performing well? If yes/no, Why?
5. Are the senior officials responsive against VAW? If yes/no, Why?
6. What are the initiatives your factory took to strengthening the mechanism?
7. Are those initiatives helpful? If yes/no, Why?
8. Where do the women RMG workers complain if they experience any sort of violence? Do they take any step to address violence?
9. What type of actions your factory take if a female RMG worker experience sexual harassment?
10. Do you have any dissatisfaction with the behavior of the RMG workers? What are those? What kind of steps you take to address this?

11. Do you know about the laws and legal aid services available for addressing VAW? Do you think those laws and legal aid services are really helpful?

12. How the harassment prevention committees can be more effective?

13. What sort of initiatives may the senior management take to reduce VAW?

Annex - 3

- **KII questionnaire for BGMEA, DIPE and Govt. stakeholders**

Name	:	
Designation	:	
Organization	:	
Address	:	
Mobile Number	:	

Relevant questions
1. What do you understand by Violence against Women? What types of acts do you consider to be violence against women?
2. till now from factories related to violence against Do you receive any complain women?
3. Did you provide any kind of support to formulate Harassment Prevention Committee in the factories?
4. How do your organization monitor whether the Harassment Prevention Committee performs its responsibilities effectively or not?
5. What are the initiatives have you been taken to create a violence free environment ?
6. Do you have any expert team working on providing support centrally related to harrassment prevention in the factory? f notI, did you contact with any relevant organization working on this issue?
7. Do you know about the laws and legal aid services available for addressing VAW? Do you think those laws and legal aid services are really helpful?

8. How the harassment prevention committees can be more effective?
9. What sort of initiatives may the senior management take to reduce VAW?
10. How BGMEA / DIPE can encourage factories to internalize the harassment committee within the HR system of factories?