

Socio-Economic Changes of Women Garment Workers in Bangladesh

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Abstract:- Garments industry is the prime economic sector in Bangladesh. Most of the GDP (Gross Development Product) carried on Garments Industry. In this industry most of the worker is women. So, women garment worker are main human resources in Bangladesh. But one problem is that, they have no standard social status in our society on the other hand they have owned social status after joining the garments industry. Basically, before joining the garments industry women have lower social status or have no status in her family, relatives, and societies. Women are deprived from control over resources, have no decision making power, no invitation in social functions, poor health service etc. But this scenario changes after joining the garments industry. In that perspective researcher applied quantitative social research methods to find out how to change social status of women garments worker. In the quantitative method researcher followed sample survey into the garments industry where women are working. Researcher found some recommendations from the women garments worker. At first they have an occupational identity which is helpful to consume social status in her family as well as in her relatives. So it is a great change for women with help of garments industry. This process is not easy because various problems hamper this changes system. Sometimes women garments worker harassed/discriminated by her family members, relatives as well as her colleagues, staffs, owner of the garments etc. In this situation a women is helpless in her life and they need to support from her family members, friends, colleagues, staffs and owner. In this context, researcher found that women have to solve this problem without other help; it is a great social status change of women garments worker in Bangladesh. Women garments worker think that if they have regular work in garments factory as well as they get social, economic, and legal support from stakeholder (Garments Industry, Government, Media etc.) their social status changes well radically.

Keywords: Social Status, Change, Women Garments Worker, Bangladesh.

I. INTRODUCTION

The garment sectors are essential in our national life for economic growth. People want to decorate themselves with cloths at reasonable prices which will uphold their dignity. As a result, the garments sectors are established for serving our demand as well as boosting our country for the recognition of being a developing country. Bangladesh is a proper place to achieve goal through promoting ready-made garment factories because of its low labor cost and abundance of raw materials. Now the numbers of garment factories are 4328 and the numbers of workers employed in these factories

are 4 million in 2015-2016 year (BGMEA). The readymade garments industry acts as a catalyst for the development of Bangladesh. Readymade garments industry is the main sector for women in labour market. The Bangladeshi women garment workers raise their voices against the traditional cultural and religious norms when they make the decisions to join the garment sector. Of the approximately 4.2 million workers in the RMG industry around 85% are women workers (Shanjida Shahab Uddin, March 25, 2015 South Asian Journal). On the other hand, the garment sectors remarkably developed due to the globalization. (Majumder 2003:295). But the women are deprived from initial period. They did not get their legal benefits from there sections (Majumder and Jahir 1994). Most of the women are deprived because of there are thousands of labours working in the same situation in the garment sector of Bangladesh, making it difficult for them to ask for more facilities and salaries then the present condition. Above all, the gender discrimination is still very high in our country and women workers are defrauded. Another important remarkable matter is that most of the garment workers have come from the poor family, so they spend their salary to educate their children and buying daily materials. Since, they get small amount of money to deal with gigantic family needs they fall various consequences. They have to live in the slum house. It is very difficult to bear the family expenses by their salary. For instance, they suffer from many diseases and can't afford to get proper medication. Many of their husbands are drug addicted and ill tempered. They take all of the salary and torture the women physically, mentally, verbally etc. Besides, they maintain their family by doing the household works by themselves although they have to attend their work at day regularly. Above all, they don't get their proper facilities from the society, garments industry, family after working all day. Moreover, they are always neglected by the society. This is the circumstances of the garments workers in our country. The problems are increasing day by day economically and socially because of longtime duty, ill-treated by authorities, less salary, irregular salary, and lack of social safety. The women workers are facing various hazardous conditions in the working place. Thus, they cannot contribute themselves for the socio-economic problems. It is the duty of the authorities to ensure their salaries with health facilities by ILO convention. There are no more than two or three bathrooms for two thousand labours. Above all they are always faced physical, mental, economic, verbal harassment and ill-treated by the authorities.

Furthermore, the supervision on forced the women labor physically and mentally. If they protest against the authority they have to loss the job (Alam, 2006). Eventually, most of the Garments authority is neither follows the rules nor maintains the legal rights of workers. There is no child care facility in garments factories in Bangladesh and it is an inhuman heartless system for children and its mother. In spite of feeling this problem they are bound to be silent about their job (Reza, 2005: 28).

Rationale of the Study

Bangladesh is a male dominated society in which women are treated unequally. It starts from the family and rise up in different aspects (economic, political, health, education & cultural) of the outside family like the garment sector. At the family level, where women's voice is not heard, and thus, it shows the disempowerment of women in the family. To shed light on women workers' absence of voice at home, this research aims to show that garments industry is responsible to change their social status. Exploitation of women garments workers starts from the very beginning of their recruitment process in the garment sector. They are harassed by owners, employees, colleagues, and staffs as well as they feel insecure in workplace. During the recruitment process, most of the women workers are not given formal job contract papers (Absar, 2002:3012). They face discrimination in terms of wages and access to higher ranking positions (Absar, 2001: 5). Sometimes they are victims of sexual and verbal abuse by their male managers, colleagues and supervisors (Hossain and Al-Amin: 2012). There is no sufficient toilet for women workers in most of the garment factories. Furthermore, garment workers believe that their social status has decreased because of working environment of the garment industry (Paul Majumder and Begum, 2000).

The study observes the problems of women garments workers through four aspects like economic, political, health, education & cultural. The study also find out the pre-condition of social status of women garments worker and after joining the garments industry what are the changes of their social status. Above all, this paper will be helpful for women to know their social status. This paper is also helpful for women garments worker to create awareness about their social status and social rights as well as it is useful resource for NGOs, researcher, BGMEA, government and private organizations to know how to change social status of women garments worker in Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to know the social status changes of women garment workers in Bangladesh. However, the specific objectives of the study are follows:

- (1) To know the social status of women garment workers.
- (2) To assess the social status of women garment worker after joining the garments industry.

- (3) To identify the changes of social status of women garments worker in Bangladesh.
- (4) To determine the role of stakeholder to improve the social status of women garments worker.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study assumed both quantitative and qualitative approach because prior studies regarding public administration aims to find out solutions in public problems and feeds the various supportive statements from existing research outcomes. To prove conceptual framework the research applied quantitative and qualitative methods. This is a cross-sectional study carried out in five garments of Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Gazipur. Respondents are the women workers of these five garments and some case studies have also been interviewed. The sampling design was simple random sampling (SRS) for this study where each and every item in the population has an equal chance of inclusion in the sample and according to Cochran's formula for determination of sample size 400 respondents were interviewed. In this study, data were collected in direct interview method for quantitative purpose and case study was undertaken for qualitative purpose. For interview a well-designed questionnaire was prepared. A pilot survey was undertaken to improve the questionnaire and other survey instruments. The collected data was compiled and analyzed using SPSS. Data analysis has been done in three phases. In univariate analysis portion bar chart, pie diagram and frequency table were used to describe different variables. Bivariate analysis encompassed association between pair of variables using Cross-tab, clustered bar chart and Chi-square test. Finally, logistic regression analysis was used to identify factors affecting social status of women garments worker and to improve policy suggestions.

Pre economic dependency

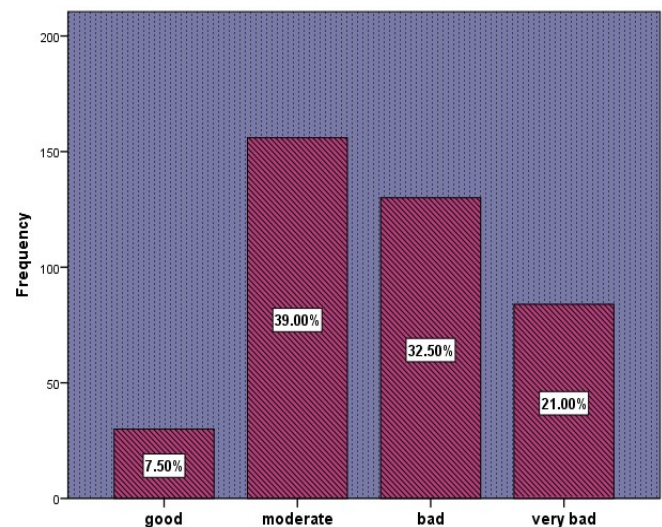


Figure 1 Pre economic dependency

Usually women garment workers are dependent on their family, husband, parents etc. This dependency is high before joining the garments industry.

In this perspective researcher found that 39% respondents said they had moderate dependency and 32.5% women garments worker said they were badly dependent and 21% said to have very bad dependency. So in this scenario economic dependency of women was in very bad, bad and moderate situation before joining the garments industry.

Post economic dependency

After joining the garments industry economic dependency of women was found to get reduced because they got some money from garments industry.

Table 1 Post economic dependency

Variable name	Categories	Frequency	Percent
	Very good	9	2.3
	Good	207	53.6
	Moderate	170	44
	Total	386	100.0

Researcher found that 53.6% respondent said good, 44% women garments worker said moderate and 2.3% said very good condition after joining the garments industry. So this scenario is positive for women because garments job reduce economic dependency of women from others.

Pre decision making power in family

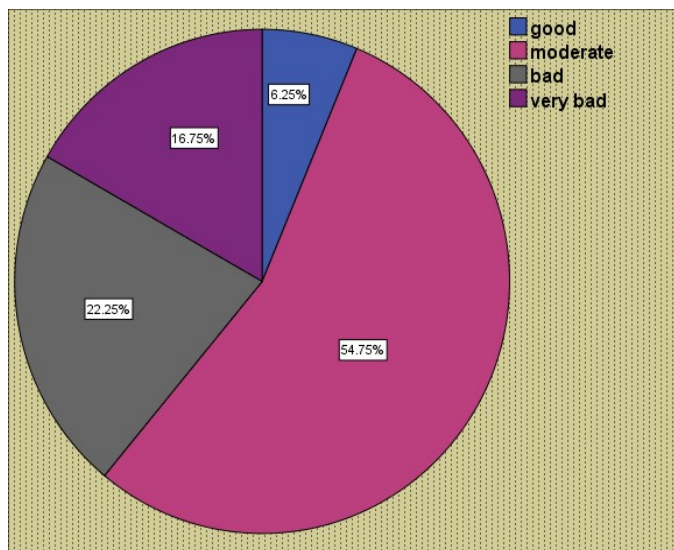


Figure 2 Pre decision making power in family

Decision making in society & family is less important for women because most of the decision making is done by her parents or big brother or husband. Researcher finds out the scenario of decision making power in society before joining the garments industry. Diagram shows that 54.8% respondents

said moderate, 22.3% women garments worker said bad and 16.8% said very bad as well as only 6.3% respondents said good.

Post decision making power in family

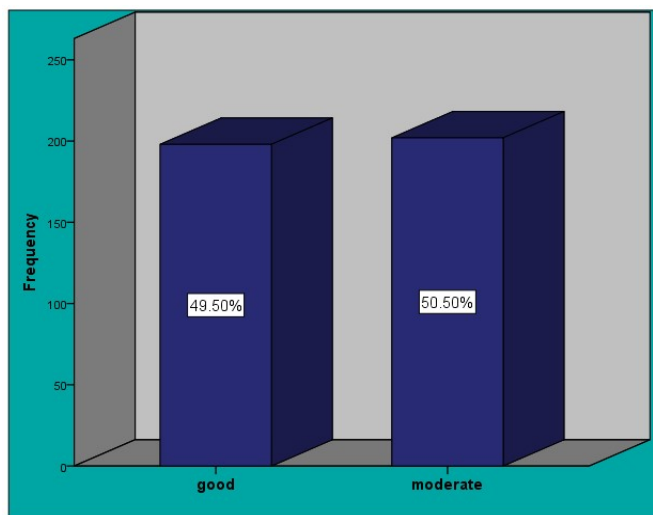


Figure 3 Post decision making power in family

After joining the garments industry decision making power of a woman is changed. Bar chart shows that 50.5% said moderate and 49.5% said good condition in her family. Now they can take decision in any important issues.

It is only possible due to her job as well as her economic contribution in her family so most of women join garments industry.

Decision taker before joining garments

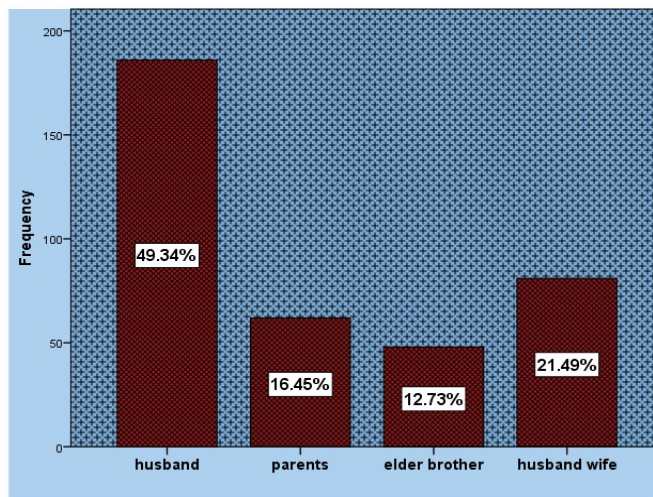


Figure 4 Decision takers before joining garments

In our society most of the decision in a family is taken by elder brother, husband, and parents. There is no contribution of women in taking decision before joining garments industry.

Researcher shows that 49.34% respondents said husband took decision, 21.49% said husband-wife jointly and 16.45% women garments worker said parents took decision before joining the garments industry.

Decision taker after joining garments industry

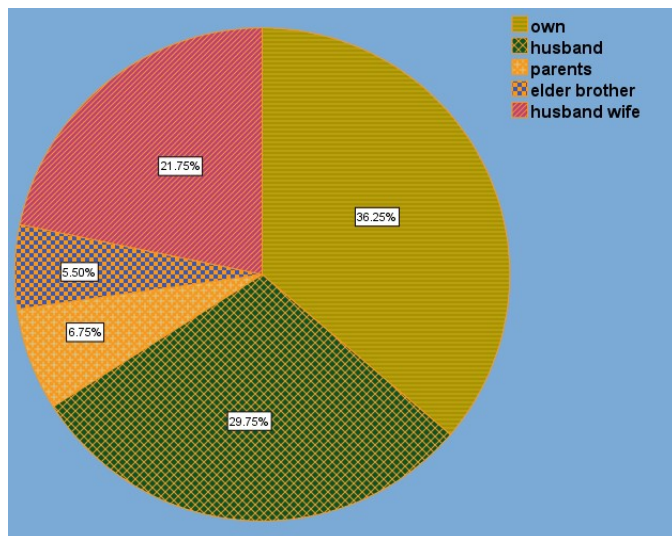


Figure 5 Decision taker after joining garments industry

But the scenario prevailing before joining the garments industry changes after joining the garments industry. Researcher shows that 36.25% women garments worker said they take decision without permission of others. As well as others participation in decision taking is getting reduced due to the fact that women are contributing economically and so they take decision in any family matters. So it is a great empowerment of women in this context and garments industry is playing active role to empower women to take decision on their own.

Garments job increase your social status

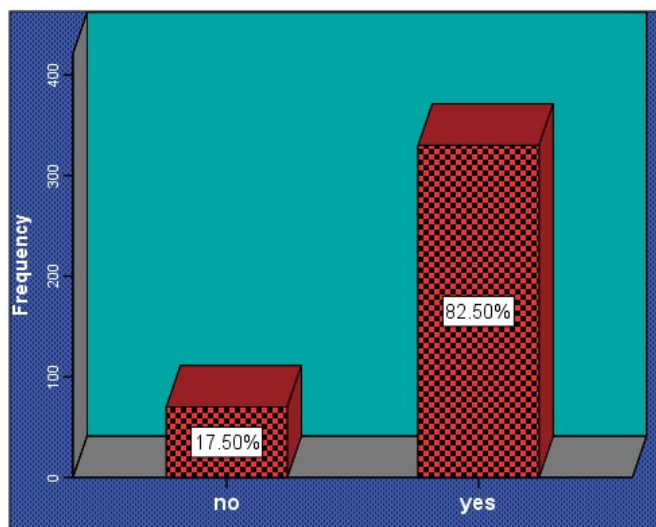


Figure 6 Garments job increase your social status

Researcher thinks that garments job has people's recognition in our country. Especially women are more popular as garments worker in Bangladesh. Figure shows that 82.5% respondents said yes and 17.5% women garments worker said no to the question regarding whether joining garments has improved their social status or not. So this scenario is positive that garments job increase social status.

III. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study conducted to find out the changes social status of women garments worker in Bangladesh. Women are highly deprived group in our society especially they have no contribution in the family. Women have lower social status before joining the garments job. But this scenario is changes after joining the garments industry. In this context researcher find out the social status of women garments worker, to know the previous social status of women before joining the garments and after joining the garments industry, to identify the problems of women garments worker. At last, role of stakeholders in changing social status of women garments worker.

In this study, researcher found that garments industries get more priority for the young age women 27.25% respondents age is 25-29 years old on the other hand only 4.75% respondent age is 45-49 years old.

Economic Aspect

- (1) Researcher found that control over resources of women is not good in their family, which is controlled by their male family members. In our society most of the decision taker in family is elder brother, husband, and parents. There is no contribution of women in taking decision before joining garments industry. But above these scenario changes after joining the garments industry. So it is a great empowerment of women. In this context garments industry playing a vital role to change the scenario of women. In the perspective of economic dependency researcher found that 39% respondents said they had moderate dependency, 32.5% women garments worker said they were badly dependent and 21% said to have very bad dependency.
- (2) In the question of Control over resources 50.8% respondents said moderate contribution and 41% women said badly. After joining the garments industry economic dependency of women was found to get reduced. Researcher found that 53.6% women said good economic conditions, 44% women garments worker said moderate, and 2.3% said very good.
- (3) Researcher found that most of the women garments worker came from moderate and bad social status background. They have no standard social status they have only survived hand to mouth. In Bangladesh perspective, social status of a woman garments

worker is not good before joining the garments industry. Garments job gives their amount of money which spends for livelihood. Most of the women garments worker familial status is not good due to poverty.

- (4) Researcher found that in our country perspective most of the women garments worker came from moderate and bad social status. They have no standard life style they only survive hand to mouth. If a women joining the garments industry they change their social status. In Bangladesh perspective social status of a woman garments worker is not good before joining the garments industry. Garments job gives her a quantity of money which is spent for livelihood. Most of the garments worker family is not good due to poverty.
- (5) After joining the garments industry economic dependency of women is reduces because they got some money from garments industry. So this scenario is positive for women because garments job reduce economic dependency of women from others.
- (6) It is important findings that Garments job influence the women to take control over resources. They think that it is their own right as well as they are contributing economically in family matters so why they don't take control over resources. Men always control over resources in our society it is a traditional view in our country.

It is only possible when a woman was not involved in any income generating activities.

Political Aspect

- (1) Researcher found that after joining the garments industry decision making power in family of women is changes 50.5% respondents said moderate and 49.5% said good respectively. They have been taking decision in family expenditure, children education, family planning etc. In before joining the garments job family planning depends on her husband which is totally opposite of her mind.
- (2) In the age of 20-24 years and 35-39 years aged workers are more likely to achieve good post decision making power in family. In the income women garments workers having either 5000-10000 or 10000-15000 salary are more likely to achieve good post decision making power in family.

Women having best pre social status in family are 47% less likely to achieve post decision making power in family relative those who have good pre social status in family. Women having bad pre economic dependency are 38% less likely to achieve good post decision making power in family relative to those who have pre economic dependency.

Women having bad social security before joining the garments are 35.25% more likely to get good post decision making power in family. Women having bad pre decision making power in family are 87.6% less likely to gain post decision making power in family with respect.

- (3) Decision taker in family before joining the garments is less important for women because most of the decision taking by her parents (16.45%), elder brother (12.73%), husband (49.34%). So it is important for women garments worker because without decision taking power there is no empowerment.
- (4) Legal protection for women is not good before joining the garments industry weather this condition changes good moderately. Women garments worker (50.25%) said they got good legal protection from the country. Legal protection increases after joining the garments industry 74% responded by women garments worker.
- (5) Researcher found that (82.50%) respondents said garments job increase their social status "yes" and (17.5%) women garments worker said "no". so this scenario is positive that garments job increase social status.

Education and Cultural Aspect

- (1) In this study Researcher found that most of the garments workers are involving garments industry in their early age which is hampering their education as well as maximum women garments worker are married in an early age. Educational status changes after joining the garments industry as though changes her children educational condition support by her. In this study found that 28.7% respondents are literate as well as 21.8% respondents are class five.
- (2) Women garments worker is not educated due to their poverty. Although 88.8% garments worker are married on the other hand 11.3% respondents are unmarried, Most of the garments worker are married as well as some garments worker are divorced, separated, and widow which influence to involve in garments industry.

Most of the garments workers are involving in garments industry in their early age which is hampering their education as well as maximum women garments worker are married in an early age.

- (3) It shown that women garments worker harassed economically (39.58%), mentally (31.25%), and physically (29.17%) in their family as well as working place. Marital status and harassment of women garments worker interrelated because unmarried women harassed by her family members

in economically and mentally. On the contrary married women harassed by her husband and member of the father in law.

- (4) In this study researcher found that most of the women garments worker age is 25-29 years old in that age they are harassed by her family members as well as by her officials where ever it is economic, physical, mental respectively.
- (5) During this job women garments worker are harassed by her colleagues (4.5%), staffs (19.8%), owners, and supervisors. As a result researcher found that harassment of women garments worker depends on her nature of job. So social status changes through a lot of harassment consumed by the women garments worker. Working environment influences the male employee to harass against women economic, physical, and mental.
- (6) Before joining the garments industry only 70% women garments workers got invitations in social functions like marriage, religious festivals, local festivals etc. After joining the garments industry invitation in social function is increased (73.75%) rather than before joining the garments industry.
- (7) Before joining the garments industry 48.5% women garments worker are discriminated in various ways like economic (11.28%), familial (17.44%), mental (7.18%), physical (32.31%), and social (31.79%). After joining the garments industry, only 37.25% women were discriminated by various persons like owners, staffs, colleagues, and officers. In this context researcher find out that women garments worker get support in times of persecution. Some of them got support from the NGOs which are working with rights of women garments worker.

Health Aspect

- (1) Researcher shown that garments job is playing a vital role to get the quality of health care service. Women are more deprived group from quality health care service before joining the garments industry even their family members deprived these services. It is possible positive changes due to her contribution of health care service because joining the garments industry.
- (2) Quality of health care services took in before joining the garments industry; 51% women took bad quality due to take from general hospitals, local doctors. Situation changes after joining the garments industry 59.3% women take good health care services from specialized hospitals.
- (3) Quality of health care services took in before joining the garments industry; 51% women said quality of health care service is bad but situation changes after

joining the garments industry 61.56% women said good health care services, 34.03% respondents said moderate and only 1.04% said bad health care services.

Others Aspect

- (1) Working environment is more important in our country especially in garments industry. In that situation most of the 59% women garments worker said good working environment on the other hand only 1% respondents said very good working environment.
- (2) Satisfaction in job is an important criterion for workers happiness and production level. Marital status and satisfaction of job is related with each other which are found from the respondents view.

In this perspective researcher found that among the respondents view final checking, linking, supervisor, quality and refining sector women garments worker are satisfied on the contrary checking, mending, and trimming women garments worker are not satisfied.

- (3) Increase of social status depends on some opportunities like as economic, legal, political, and social. About half of the workers 50.5% think that they need economic support to increase social status. On the contrary 18% needs legal, 13.25% social, and 2.25% workers needs political opportunities and 16% needs to others like social safety net, infrastructure, and social security.
- (4) Researcher found that (45.8%) workers think that “garments industry” is the prime stakeholder to change their social status. Garments industry provides nonstop work support as well as increases their salary. Garments industry gives job security for every employee; other benefits provide on the basis of employee demands. On the other hand, (29%) workers think “state” as the stakeholder, and 12% media plays to change their social status.
- (5) Stakeholders are more powerful for increasing the social status of women garments worker. They take decision and create pressure that make a policy or decision making. During our study, it was found that stake holder’s role is an important ingredient in increasing the social status of the female garments workers. Stakeholders have some positive role to play in increasing the social status of the garments workers in Bangladesh.

Policy Suggestion and Recommendations

In the above discussion about this study we found a lot of problems hamper the women garments worker. They responded physical harassment, psychological assault, socio-economic discrimination and disempowerment are the prime problem to discourage working in garments sector. So, we can

find out some policy suggestion and recommendations to encourage women garments worker, too aware the owner of garments industry, to establish strong relationship between garments worker and owner of the garments industry etc.

Economic Aspect

- (1) In maximum cases, the amount of salaries paid to the female workers is low which creates dissatisfaction among the workers. Therefore, the Government, BGMEA and Owners of the Garments industries should take initiative to provide reasonable and standard amount of salaries as per their position and services just at the end or within the 5th day of the next month.
- (2) Around 84% workers worked more than 8 hours which violates the National Labour Policy 2012. Long working hours due to working at more regular and overtime hours create many problems for the female workers at their families. If salaries and remuneration is increased up to a level of standard then the intention of working more overtime can be reduced and hence ultimately the length of working hours can be minimized resultantly more employment facilities will be created in the garments industries for female workers. In Bangladesh Government should more consensuses regarding this matter according to National Labor Policy 2012.
- (3) From the case studies, we found that basically, they are recruited verbally without appointment letter in this context they have no job security. In anytime, they get suspended by the authority without any cause.
So, they need to a permanent job with appointment letter because it is a power of any job.
- (4) Being a stakeholder for promoting social status of women garments workers to save a portion of their salary in their own bank account. Also garments can motivate women garments worker to determine a target based bonus system as well as other incentives such as leaves, health benefit and so on.

Political Aspect

- (1) To ensure proper working environment and to support women in case of harassment all garments factory need to appoint an Industrial Labour Relation Officer who is helping women garments worker in any problem as well as will coordinate between worker and owner of the garments industry. It is a crying need for appointing an Industrial Labour Relation Officer per 500 or more workers in every garment.
- (2) Stakeholders like garments industry, media, state and others can arrange seminar, symposium, conference, advertisement for creating awareness regarding a standard social status in our country.

- (3) Bangladesh Government as a stakeholder should create pressure to garments industry to ensure the social compliance for the women garments worker by which they would be more benefitted from the garments sector. Social compliance issues are more important for garments industry because it attract the foreign buyers to buy product. Social compliance means working conditions, employment conditions, welfare facilities, forced labor, discrimination, industrial relations etc. that should be ensured for women garments worker.

Education & Cultural Aspect

- (1) Competency level of the female garments workers is very low; work at lower position; and productivity is also poor and hence they get poor salaries and they cannot claim for more. If the competency level of the workers can be developed then their productivity will increase and they will be able to perform better and will earn more. For this development, the owners should establish training centers to make them skilled in different rules and regulations and to make them aware of their responsibilities. Every garments industry should establish separate place for working mothers where they can breast feed their children and can safely keep them there.
- (2) Government of Bangladesh enacts Labor Law which may ensure the rights and obligation of the female workers in the garments industries but the provisions of the labor law are far from implementation. Basically the management of the garments industries is frequently violating the law. Therefore, Govt. and BGMEA should be aware of the violation of the Law against the poor female garments workers.
- (3) For enriching status of women garments workers in the society arranging awareness program to increase positive attitude about women garments worker is essential.
- (4) A women garments workers face different types of violence at home, workplace, and also in public spaces.

For reducing harassment/discrimination stakeholders should create awareness among the people about the social norms and legal procedures and the every garment should strictly follow the Violence against Women and Children 2013-2025 so that persecuted women garments worker should also raise their voices to get proper justice.

Health Aspect

- (1) Due to long working hours at the unhygienic job environment the female workers become sick frequently but they get no or very poor support from their industries in this regard. Hence garments

industries should set up medical center or at least appoint minimum number of medical officers or female doctors especially for the female workers. Every Garment Industry owner should follow Health Policy 2011.

- (2) It may be noted that, in the absence of day-care facilities, the mother had to bring her young daughter along with her as there was social risk in leaving her behind at home. Any serious efforts to reduce the extent of child labour in the garment industry should address the latter problem and provide for engaging the children (especially daughters) in secured and meaningful ways. One may also find comfort with the practices of child labor if provisions were made for their education for half day or on alternate days.
- (3) According to National Child Labour Elimination Policy (NCLEP) 2010 & National Children Policy 2011 before 18 years old child cannot involve any work. But some Garments Industry employ child because of cheap labor. Government should strictly prohibit this situation.
- (4) To make a legal framework for women garments worker which is helpful to ensure social justice into garments industry as well as to maintain a standard social status? Legal framework protects her from any harassment, discrimination in garments industry and family. To prevent sound pollution in the working place and need to ensure proper medical facilities increasing maternity leave as well. Maternity leave should be increased six months for ensuring proper health both for mother and infant.

State as a stakeholder makes a policy for women garments worker to ensure their rights and to establish standard social status. This build a bridge between garments industry and other stakeholders like BGMEA so that women garments worker will get all facilities from the garments industry. Media promotes awareness program about garments industry specially highlights the status of women garments worker.

IV. CONCLUSION

Garments industry is a revolutionary development sector in our country. Most of the portion of national income contributes from readymade garments industry and it is highest exporting sector in Bangladesh. Most of the garments workers are women because they are more available in the industrial area. They are come from poor family and rural areas. Before joining the garments industry they are deprived from education, health, social function, decision making in family, legal support etc. Garment industries create a supporting opportunity for poor women to their economic solvency. Women garments worker faces various type of harassment/discrimination in garments industry, home and

public places. They harassed/discriminated in economic, physical, mental, etc. by their colleagues, supervisor, staffs, owners, relatives, family members, friends etc. In the persecuted moment women garments worker are getting support from their family, colleagues, friends, relatives, and others.

Although, they are facing many problems in the garments but they are getting a lot of benefits from the garments industry. Garments job gives economic support, which is helping to change their social status. In before joining the garments industry they have no controlling power over resources. They are also depends on their family members economically. They have no decision making power in their family issues. Now they contribute in family income which will make economic solvency. After joining the garments industry they are taking decision in their family issues and they also take control over resources. Quality of health service improves after joining the garments industry but services were not good in before joining the garments. Stakeholders like garments industry, governments, media helps to ensure benefits for women garments worker which are helpful for changing their social status. They also insist on the garments industry to ensure social compliance, it will more favorable to increase social status of women garments worker.

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