

An Analysis of Safety and Security Management in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) Sectors in Bangladesh

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.814MG0048>

Received: 03 December 2024; Accepted: 11 December 2024; Published: 11 January 2025

ABSTRACT

The ready-made garments (RMG) sector significantly contributes to Bangladesh's developed foreign currency reserve. However, ensuring the safety and security of the large number of RMG workers in this sector remains a critical concern. Currently, there are numerous obstacles standing in the way of enhancing safety and security management in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry. To enhance safety and security management, it is necessary to examine workers' beliefs and habits, the level of management's involvement, and any gaps in the regulatory framework to establish a solid foundation in the workplace. Numerous examples demonstrate how the lack of an appropriate safety and security management system contributes to accidents, resulting in a significant number of worker fatalities. The safety and security conditions of the ready-made garment (RMG) industries in Bangladesh have been the subject of global concern as a result of these incidents. This article focused on the role of regulatory reform in fostering a safe management work environment, examining the perspectives of workers, employers, and government regulatory bodies. The main objectives of this study are to conduct an analysis of the safety and security management of the ready-made garment (RMG) sectors in Bangladesh, with a particular emphasis on management engagement and government authorization. The study employed qualitative methods to gather primary and secondary data, and then analysed this data to derive recommendations for enhancing safety and security management in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector. Through the implementation of workers' self-efficacy and the improvement of collaboration between workers, employers, and the government in the RMG sectors of Bangladesh, the findings of the study have the potential to contribute to managerial change that is both successful and efficient.

Keywords: Safety and Security, Management, Ready-made garments, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

The ready-made garment (RMG) sectors stand out as a crucial and promising area in terms of labour supply, productivity, and the financial and social growth of our nation during this era of industrialization. The workforce is the primary power of any sector, and the safety and secure work environment for the workforce is an essential component of the RMG sectors in Bangladesh (Uddin, M. N., 2023). The ready-made garment sector is the leading contributor to Bangladesh's overall export trade. In 2012, the garment sectors in the country generated approximately 80% of their total income from exports, primarily to the US and Europe (Adnan, A. T. M., Rakib, A., & Rahman, M., 2015). By 2014, the RMG industries accounted for 81.13% of Bangladesh's total exports (Rahman, M. K., Nessa, M. T., & Rahman, M. T., 2019). The presence of affordable labour is responsible for the significant expansion and its impact on the growing economy. The workforce serves as the driving force behind these sectors. The safe and secure working environment and conditions of factories, which have faced scrutiny in recent years due to issues surrounding worker safety and security management, closely link to worker satisfaction (Friend, M. A., Friend, M., Kohn, J. P., & Kohn, J., 2023). Furthermore, in this era of globalization, there has been a failure to provide opportunities for workers (Jalil, M. A., Islam, M. Z., & Islam, M. A., 2020).

This article focuses on safety and security management in relation to the needs, demands, expectations, and rights of workers in the RMG sectors in Bangladesh. In recent years, it has encountered several unfortunate disasters, such as Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashion House (Ullah, A. A., 2022). The unfortunate incidents highlight that the implementation of sustainable safety and security management for workers, particularly in the globally competitive RMG sectors of Bangladesh, falls significantly short of the necessary safety and security standards (Munir, S. T., 2022). The findings of this article are anticipated to assist various sectors within the ready-made garments industry in implementing corrective actions to enhance worker safety and security and prevent undesirable incidents by implementing proper management systems, thereby positively prompting overall production in the RMG sectors in Bangladesh.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The government of Bangladesh has been attempting to implement privatization and liberalized trade policies to adapt to the global economy since the country's independence. Due to its manpower abundance, Bangladesh's garment industry has received significant attention and has become the largest export sector in the country (Chowdhury, M. A., 2023). The RMG business has predominantly relied on low-skilled labourers since the outset. Consequently, workers were the primary labour force in the garment sector from that point on. In developing countries, numerous opportunities arise for marginalized individuals, such as low-skilled garment workers who have the chance to engage in the RMG industry and earn income to support their families. This also heightens their safety and security risks within Bangladesh's RMG sector (Arman, S. S., Bari, M. A., & Khan, M. M., 2021).

In Bangladesh, workers in the RMG sector face significant risks due to working in unsafe and insecure environments in garment factories, as well as being subjected to unrealistic factory regulations such as management systems, which heighten their vulnerability to security threats (Kabir, H., Maple, M., Islam, M. S., & Usher, K., 2022). This article has examined the extent to which the rapidly expanding garment industry is leading to violations of the safety and security rights of the workers in the RMG sector in Bangladesh.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study enhances the current understanding within academic, international, and commercial sectors about the influence of safety and security beliefs on practices and safety protocols in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. Safety and security management within an organization plays a crucial role in promoting safety performance, as both culture and subculture shape safe practices and the fundamental beliefs that guide them (Asamani, L., 2020). Additionally, to cultivate safety and security management, it is crucial to: (a) document and report injuries and accidents without concern for retaliation from organizational leaders; (b) create safety regulations and follow them diligently; and (c) educate leaders to monitor and promote safety practices (Asamani, L., 2020). To accomplish these tasks efficiently, and because remedies and plans of action begin with reporting and examining basic information, it is essential to understand the present management practices in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

Furthermore, organizations must reduce risk by implementing a risk assessment program and establishing control mechanisms through safety and security management. This can be achieved by implementing management controls, administrative or work practice controls, and utilizing personal protective equipment. Faysal, N. M. (2021) argued that the ultimate responsibility lies with managers, emphasizing the critical importance of managerial skills in labour-intensive industries.

This article has significant implications for rethinking safety and security management. It clarifies how safety cultural beliefs shape behaviour, and this insight can drive the creation of a safety and security work environment conducive to positive social change. The study effectively addressed the gap between assumption and practice regarding the practical application of policy, highlighting the distinctions between concepts and the actual implementation of policies for workers' safety and security management, employers, and government officials within Bangladesh's RMG industry.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study examines workers safety and security management in the RMG industry who are employed in non-Accord or Alliance factories, deliberately excluding those affected by the Rana Plaza collapse. This event continues to affect the families and friends of the victims and Rana Plaza survivors. Interviewing the mentioned victims would not align with the objectives of this study, as it could potentially distort the findings.

Furthermore, the study adopted a methodology that ensured the confidentiality of interviewees, taking into account the politically sensitive context surrounding RMG safety and security management issues, the unwarranted situation of the workers, and the dynamics among them, to mitigate any concerns regarding potential reprisals. Ensuring the confidentiality of participants was essential, particularly since there were cases where employers terminated employees who expressed concerns about factory safety and security management (R. Wayss in a personal communication on December 8, 2014). Possible validity concerns in this qualitative research study encompassed bias from the investigator, misinterpretation of gathered data, loss of meaning in translated terms, issues with generalisability, and the potential for participants to withdraw from the study. In qualitative studies, the investigator's bias can jeopardize the process of data gathering and analysis (Lim, W. M., 2024). In light of this, the investigator has set aside personal biases and remained open to new perspectives. Furthermore, it was ready to address any potential misinterpretations of the data supplied by participants. During the interview process, it has been employed a certified translator to ensure precise interpretation of the interviewees' responses, along with their verbal and nonverbal cues. The limited sample size relative to the target population led to expected challenges in achieving generalisability, which constituted a limitation of the study. Additionally, as anticipated, certain participants opted to withdraw from the study, leading to a reduction in data availability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Safety and security in the RMG sectors in Bangladesh encompass a set of legal entitlements and asserted workers' rights that pertain to the dynamics of labour relations between employees and their employers and are typically established through labour and employment legislation. Several experts and publishers provided insights regarding existing labour laws relating to safety and security management. However, these explanations are inadequate for several sections of the law. Furthermore, neither BGMEA nor BKMEA have provided adequate guidelines for managing safety and security in the workplace (Moazzem, K. G., & Khan, A. M., 2023). The garment owners are not adhering to or implementing the rules and regulations set forth by BGMEA and BKMEA. Moreover, company owners face no penalties for violating the existing rules and regulations pertaining to worker safety and security.

There is a necessity to create a basis for safety management within the workplaces of Bangladesh's RMG industry. A collaborative effort among employees, employers, and regulatory bodies will transform safety management into a tangible reality. Creating a safety culture is essential, as its presence contributes to the prevention of workplace accidents (Zara, J., Nordin, S. M., & Isha, A. S. N., 2023). There is a dearth of information regarding the implementation of safety and security management in the RMG industry in Bangladesh, which highlights the disconnect between prevailing worker attitudes, culture, and behaviours in fostering a safe workplace environment (Zaman, S., & Jenkins, J., 2024). The existing literature reveals a need to explore how workers and employers conceptualize safety and security management. This study's findings could enhance working conditions, reveal policy deficiencies, or assist in identifying vulnerabilities in the safety infrastructure of the RMG sector in Bangladesh.

The distinction between the concepts of safety management and safety environment has been examined, along with the roles that organisational leaders and workers play in ensuring a safe working environment. Additionally, Beus et al., 2010 and Bosak et al., 2013 have highlighted the significance of beliefs and behaviours regarding the prioritization of safety and security management by both workers and employers

(Mutegi, T. M., Joshua, P. M., & Maina, J. K., 2023). The existing literature lays the groundwork for a deeper exploration of the connections among essential stakeholders concerning safety and security management. However, there is a dearth of literature that specifically addresses the relationship between workers, employers, and government authorities in the context of implementing safety and security management. When employees genuinely engage and employers commit to prioritizing worker safety, strong safety management can safeguard them. It is essential for both workers and employers to adopt and enforce safety measures. Finn, K. (2023) characterizes safety management as an unspoken collective of shared beliefs, attitudes, or convictions that contribute to reducing the risk of danger or injury for employees and managers.

Therefore, to foster intrinsically motivated employees, organizations must alter their mindsets and actions to pursue innovation while adhering to rules and established safety management. This expands theory of reciprocal determinism, which posits a direct correlation between the achievement of goals and levels of confidence (Yuan, J., Yao, J., & Zheng, R., 2024). Enhancing confidence levels to attain objectives necessitates that individuals have faith in their success and adjust their behaviours to align with this conviction. Kemper, J. A., Benson-Rea, M., Young, J., & Seifert, M. (2023) identified a difference between beliefs and behaviours. Nonetheless, the presence or absence of confidence influences the gap between beliefs and actions. In an effort to discover a solution to the problem of inadequate safety and security management in the workplace, the objective of this study was to acquire knowledge of the viewpoints held by the participating parties.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is fundamentally a descriptive analysis. This approach serves as an essential tool for uncovering current events, exploring fresh perspectives, posing enquiries, and evaluating occurrences from a different viewpoint. The investigation has examined various factories within multiple textile industries. This study relies on a survey, primarily selecting respondents from the factory and management sectors.

The qualitative case study process included conducting interviews with various employees from chosen factories, representatives from employers, and important government officials. Interviewing techniques have served as the primary method for data collection. The process of gathering data included in-person, open-ended interviews, along with meticulous note-taking and observations. The methodology included documented interviews, enabling analysis of nonverbal signals (Heiselberg, L., & Stępińska, A., 2023). One challenge encountered in the study involved obtaining access and establishing trust with employer representatives and workers. Engaging a trustworthy source who had established a solid connection with the target population contributed to reducing any feelings of mistrust. This study provided insights into how workers, employers, and government officials perceive the current state of safety and security management in the RMG industry. Moreover, each interviewee provided their perspectives on the necessary elements to foster lasting safety and security management within the workplace.

The objective of this article was to gather data using questionnaires and analyse the results to clarify the circumstances. This plan also presents several recommendations concerning the investigation, the approval of which could assist in addressing the current circumstances. Data was gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was the survey with workers and employers, while the secondary data sources included various sites, journals, published papers, and reports.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This qualitative case study aimed to explore the viewpoints of workers, employers, and government regulators concerning safety and security management within the RMG industry of Bangladesh. It has been conducted face-to-face interviews, utilising a translator when necessary. The interviews included RMG workers and management who were outside the scope of the Accord or the Alliance initiatives. The Accord includes several garment brands from Europe, while the Alliance encompasses numerous North American

brands (Accord, 2016; Alliance, 2016). Nearby 3.1 million workers are included under the scope of Accord and Alliance (Accord, 2016; Alliance, 2016). The factories that continue to export actively fall under the purview of the National Initiative, which accounts for around 900,000 workers.

The BGMEA estimates 4 million workers in the RMG sector, incorporating data from the Accord and Alliance (Accord, 2016; Alliance, 2016; BGMEA, 2016). This area served as the main emphasis of the investigation. The interview process encompassed not only workers and management but also representatives from employers and officials from the government. It has been utilised as a primary research question, accompanied by interview questions for gathering data.

The ages of the interview participants varied between 21 and 49, with a total of 15 females and 26 males consenting to take part. Their tenures varied from 9 months to 25 years, with educational backgrounds spanning from no formal education to a master's degree. This is an analysis categorised by workers, employers, and government regulators relating to security management. The initial target audience consisted of 35 interviews, distributed as follows: The initial target audience included 10 workers, 15 employers, and 10 regulators, with 5 from BFSCD and 5 from DIFE. Of the 35 participants aimed to engage, they consented to participate in the interviews. On the days of the interviews, three participants chose to withdraw voluntarily. Consequently, a total of 32 interviews were carried out. The group consisted of 10 workers, 12 employers, and 13 government regulators. A significant number of participants addressed the necessary safety and security management and highlighted several fundamental considerations. FB-Employer-1 emphasized that the worker must uphold safety and secure management in the factory, regardless of the necessary training provided by the employer. The employer emphasized the crucial responsibility that established management systems hold for the workers in upholding safety and security within the factories.

Furthermore, employers emphasized the significance of effectively overseeing training and its use. When discussing safety and a secure environment, FB-Employer-2 emphasized the prevalence of hazards and the importance of maintaining a proper management system. They stated, "The primary safety and secure environment in the workplace is achieved by establishing an appropriate management system." Employers must ensure that they have a sufficient number of employees to effectively maintain the management system. The findings showed that employers prioritised the lack of a proper management system as their primary safety and security concern. Both FB-Employers 1 and 2 underscored the importance of safety and a secure management system in enhancing worker performance and promoting economic sustainability. FB-Employer 1 elaborated, stating, "Firstly, there is a management team, and all necessary steps are prepared and available here to confirm their safety and security in the workplace."

The employer has provided a detailed description of the safety management system. "The employer must maintain a proper management system to ensure workers' safety and security in the workplace during their work," declared FB-Employer 1. Furthermore, FB-Employer-1 emphasized the significance of preparedness, stating, "In every factory, all management staff, including junior executives, must be in a state of readiness." FB-Employer-2 also discussed equipment relating to the safety, stating, "We have everything necessary to be compliant." We possess a hose pipe reel, constant access to water, CO2 gas and powder extinguishers, and multiple staircases, among other safety features that management needs to provide us with the proper safety and security. Employers have come to understand the significance of upholding safety and security and the critical role that management fills in making this happen. The management has prioritised safety and security above other safety concerns. The employer should develop a specific system to address safety and security concerns, as some have discussed.

The key topics addressed included safeguarding life and property, ensuring security, addressing management systems, promoting proper training, and emphasising the necessity for inspectors to receive education in Occupational Safety and Security (OSS). Labour Inspector-1 remarked, "The concept of safety management is relatively new in our country, yet it holds significant importance." The inspector must possess relevant academic qualifications in occupational safety and security to effectively cultivate safety management in the organization. An academic degree and proper training in this subject are currently lacking in this country.

Labour Inspector-2 agreed, emphasizing that OSS is a significant subject. BFSCD-1 underscored the significance of safety and security management within the organisation, stating, "For me, safety culture revolves around ensuring the safety and security management within the organisation is highly significant." BFSCD-2 recognizes the critical importance of safeguarding and implementing management systems. The participant provided a definition of safe and secure management in the workplace, stating: "For me, a safe and secure management in the workplace means one where I do not face life risks, feel secure, the machinery is safe to operate, and management always helps me." The workplace is secure from any misbehaviour, misleading behaviour, and various risks.

The primary themes identified by employers included training, health and safety, safety equipment, and the necessity for collaboration to train their management staff. The primary coded reference that emerged across three of the four main themes was training to establish a management system. During the training theme, participants shared insights on the necessity of training and offered suggestions regarding its content. Participants highlighted the necessity of safety and security management for ensuring safety, stressing the importance of receiving adequate training on its use. Participants recognized the importance of conducting training in partnership with fellow workers, employers, and government representatives. Additional aspects that held significance, yet did not encompass various themes, included workplace and life safety, along with its relationship to recognising the importance of life, the working place, proper training, and safety in relation to production and profit in the RMG sectors in Bangladesh.

The four primary themes identified by government regulators focused on worker awareness, management and safety measures, legal references, and the importance of worker training in relation to ensuring safety and security in the workplace. The government categorised awareness within two of the four primary themes. Government regulators have emphasized that awareness programs are crucial for fostering and implementing a safety and security culture in the RMG industry. Government regulators identified collaboration and training as essential components for enhancing workers' awareness in the organizations.

The government regulators also addressed other significant topics, such as workers' awareness of safety-related regulations and guidelines, the enforcement of these regulations, monitoring practices in compliance with current laws, the need for workers to participate in training, safety considerations, and the understanding and acknowledgement of management training, safety, and occupational safety and security. Individuals emphasized the importance of personal protective rules and regulations as a critical factor in ensuring safe and secure work environments. Additionally, employees established a connection between training and personal protective equipment. Employees recognized the importance of adequate training regarding the use and maintenance of safety equipment to guarantee their protection. Additional important topics that were addressed included training, protection, and safety; the need for clear pathways; the organisation of evacuation procedures; effective compliance monitoring; training conditions that facilitate free access for workers; and the assurance of safe commuting to and from work. While employees demonstrated limited awareness of the safety culture, they held numerous beliefs regarding the practical measures necessary to guarantee their safety and security within the organization.

The findings revealed that security and safety, along with training management, ranked among the top four primary themes for employers and government. Collaboration ranked highly among the coding references for both groups. Training and safety management ranked among the top four themes for employers and workers, indicating mutual recognition of the importance of training in relation to safety management. Discussions among government regulators and workers highlighted that training emerged as a central theme for both parties. Additional topics that received less attention yet intersected multiple groups included effective monitoring, safety and security, punitive measures (for workers and government officials), and unrest (involving workers, government officials, and employers).

This study aimed to explore the intricate relationships and viewpoints regarding safety and security management as expressed by workers, employers, and government regulators through a series of individual interviews. It has been aimed to examine and investigate the commonalities and distinctions among each

group. It has been evaluated the safety and security management within Bangladesh's garment industry and explored viewpoints on fostering a sustainable safety culture. The study employed a qualitative case study approach, concentrating on the content analysis design. The aims of the case study were to analyse a specific instance to enhance the overall understanding of various viewpoints. The objective was to achieve a comprehensive understanding and analyse the experiences of RMG workers, employers, and government officials.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to understand the viewpoints of the parties involved, with the goal of triangulating these perspectives to gain insights that could help establish a foundation for developing safety and security management in the RMG sectors in Bangladesh. The study's strength lay in the identification of shared perspectives among the different participant groups concerning the importance of training, safety and security, and management. There were shared aspects regarding the requirements for passive fire protection and the prioritisation of safety standards in the organization. Employers stand to gain from fostering a more assured and efficient workforce, potentially enhancing profitability while setting a precedent for subcontractors and other sectors that continue to face challenges in establishing secure work environments.

By collaborating with employers, we can modify policies to promote safe working conditions. Incentives, such as insurance schemes, may be implemented to encourage compliance. Considering the viewpoints of employees and regulatory bodies, it is essential that policies are formulated to guarantee the execution of enforcement measures and legal actions in cases of noncompliance. Workers urge government regulators to enhance awareness among factory owners about their legal responsibilities. Examining the viewpoints of employees, employers, and regulatory bodies, along with their commonalities, can establish a basis for enhanced cooperation and advantageous partnerships. Workers form the essential basis of any successful safety program; however, it is imperative for employers to fulfil their obligation to provide the necessary tools and training that enable workers to operate within a safe environment.

The results of this research and existing literature support this assumption, indicating that self-efficacy can lead to changes in attitudes and behaviours regarding safety management (Guchait, P., 2023). The development of safety and security management holds the potential to influence society and impact individuals from a young age. It is essential to instil safety awareness starting in elementary school, ensuring that future workers and employers develop a deep-rooted understanding of safety management in the RMG sectors in Bangladesh. Beyond the professional management system, community safety initiatives can be developed and implemented at the grassroots level to guarantee that every segment of society reaps the rewards of these improvements.

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