

Human Security and Employment Relations in the Ready-Made Garments Industries of Bangladesh: Perspective of Women Workers

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ABSTRACT

Ready-Made Garment (RMG) is the largest export earning sector of Bangladesh and the second largest provider of RMG products in the world. The RMG industries generate more than eighty percent of the country's total export by creating employment for nearly 4.4 million people out of which more than eighty percent are women. The health, safety and working condition of workers in the RMG industry do not comply with global standards and in many of these factories, insecurity of women workers, faulty infrastructural standards, violation of labour law, labour exploitation by low wage and over work; remain matters of serious concern. Obviously, employment in the RMG industry has reduced the social exclusion of women in Bangladesh, but more analysis is required to know how the RMG industry enables the women worker to re-negotiate their roles in society. Therefore, the present article is an attempt to examine how the human security system in the RMG sector has influenced the women workers' job satisfaction and employment relations in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Employment relations, Human security, Job satisfaction, Ready-Made Garment.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Since the 1970's, the most notable feature of economic development in many Asian countries has been the employment of young women in the industrial sectors (Dannecker, 2002). Women play significant roles in international, national, local and household economics. But they still have a disadvantageous economic position than men as they experience discrimination and inequality in different sphere of their family, religious, social and economic life. Bangladeshi women have only recently been linked to the global economy with large numbers of women working in the formal economic sector including the ready-made garments industries. In Bangladesh, the export oriented Ready-made Garment (RMG) industries expanded in the 1980s and from the very beginning the sector has created substantial number of female employments. This is considered as is a classic case of female led industrialization (Begum, 2002) and currently RMG is the largest export earning sector of Bangladesh and the second largest provider of RMG products in the world (Rahman, 2019). The RMG sector generates more than eighty percent of the country's export by creating employment for 3.6 million women (Bangladesh Garments and Manufacturing Exporting Association, 2014).

Actually, the women RMG workers are found to be challenging the traditional social norms, codes and customs as with their employment they can defer early marriage, have got decision making capability and also work with men in the workplace in ways that were thought impossible earlier. Both push and

pull factors are responsible for this large number of women and girls becoming garment workers. Push factors are poverty, financial crises, unemployment, illness and death of the household head, and pull factors include the desire to improve their standard of living through social and economic advancement, and saving for their dowry (Kibria, 1998). The status of women in Bangladeshi society is determined by the social construction of gender. Due to patriarchal rules and norms, women are subordinate to men in society, resulting in a lifelong dependency. The livelihood of women often declines in both social position and material conditions and they fear their own selves deprived of male security (Kabeer et al., 2011). Since most of these women have mainly come from rural areas and have little or no education at all, their employment in any formal sector would have been impossible, without the RMG industry in Bangladesh. This financial capacity has earned them economic emancipation, made them self-reliant and given a dignified life (Bangladesh Garments and Manufacturing Exporting Association, 2014).

Obviously, employment in the RMG industry has reduced the social exclusion of women in Bangladesh (Khosla, 2009), but more analysis is required to know how the RMG industry enables the women worker to re-negotiate their roles in society. This is because often they are suppressed of their rights and are forced to work in most risky, unsafe conditions. After the massive tragedies of the Tazreen Fashions fire incidence in 2012 and Rana Plaza building collapse in 2013, the most important question remains that whether the RMG sector has emancipated and empowered the underprivileged women workers of rural Bangladesh who make up most of the workforce in the same the way the sector has contributed to economic growth, industrialisation, and foreign exports of the country. Tazreen Fashions factory's fire incidence took life of 117 workers and Rana Plaza building collapse killed 1135 and injured more than 2500 workers of the five garments factories housed in the building. In Rana Plaza the structural defect was identified before the collapse but the building owner as well as the owners of the garment factories located in the building forced the workers to carry on with production to provide for the 31 Western multinational corporations (MNCs). It is regarded as "the deadliest structural failure in modern history" that took the life of more than thousand RMG workers (Chowdhury, 2017).

The health, safety and working condition of workers in the RMG industry do not comply with global standards including minimum standards of building and construction law, large number of poor women are employed in the RMG industry with very low wages with miserable working environment, and they are often victims of abuse and harassment by the factory owners (Ansary and Barua, 2015). In many of these factories, insecurity of women workers, faulty infrastructural standards, violation of labour law, labour exploitation by low wage and over work; as well as health and safety provisions remain matters of serious concern. Government of Bangladesh is concerned about workplace safety and is committed to ensure workers' welfare. Labor unrest is also very common in the RMG sector of Bangladesh and in most cases, the employers do not pay heed to the workers' rights and often they disregard labor standards and fair labor practices. Formation of a trade union is not allowed in the RMG sector and often thwarted by severe repression, dismissal, arrest, assault by hooligans hired by employers and other practices which are the violation of the international labor standards and Codes of Conduct (ILO Conventions: 87, 98, 135 and 154; and R. 94, 129, 130) (Leary, 2013).

Unsafe working conditions and poor compliance facilities for women have continuously been the concern for the government, foreign buyers, human rights organisations, donor agencies as well as for other stakeholders of this sector (Rahman, 2018). Bangladeshi exporters also face continuous pressure to comply with the international labor standards. Therefore, ensuring labor-management relations is very important in the garments industries both to maintain the quality of products as well as meeting the expectations of the export market.

Rationale of the Study

Workers usually want to continue working in those organisations where the working environment is congenial, and the behavior of the management is kind. The working environment of an organisation is reflected through its employees' sense of job satisfaction. However, the RMG industries' existing

working conditions do not comply with the international labour standards, and Codes of Conduct (Dasgupta, 2002). The recruitment processes and terms of recruitment are highly informal, most insecure and often deplorable (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2006). Therefore, the women workers in this sector work in the most vulnerable condition of losing their jobs at any time. Besides, lack of alternative job opportunities compel these low skilled, women RMG workers to remain in the unsatisfactory employment relations (Bansari, 2010).

Human security analysis explores using both empowerment and protection to tackle specific threats to people's lives and empowerment especially links closely with human development. Human development and human security are interlinked but are by no means identical. Human development is a broad concept, aiming at enlarging people's choices and freedom. Human security is about assuring priority freedom so that 'people can exercise choices safely and freely' and can be confident that the opportunities they have are protected (Gómez and Gasper, 2013). Without ensuring human security of women workers and employment relations in the RMG sectors at workplace, we won't be able to create a safe and sustainable industry. This is one of the issues that has attracted much attention. The study, therefore, aimed to fill up the gap of our knowledge regarding to the human security of women workers and their employment relationships in the RMG sectors in Bangladesh.

The study findings may be useful at least four possible ways : a) in understanding the situation of human security systems of women workers in the RMG sectors of Bangladesh; b) formulating instrumental public policy to provide essential services to meet the needs of developing the human security in garments sector of Bangladesh and other developing countries as well; c) in formulating development programs for the improvement of the human security, job satisfaction, and labour-management relations; and d) in adding some new information and knowledge about the overall human security systems and employment relations of women workers in the RMG sectors of Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study

The major aim of this study is to investigate and analyse the relationship between human security systems and employment relations in the RMG sectors of Bangladesh from the women workers perspective. With this end in view, the following specific objectives of the study are:

- To examine their human security status at workplace, while commuting to work, and at the place or residence.
- to explore the legal framework and situation of employment relations in the RMG industry; and
- To provide appropriate suggestions for developing policies, laws, legislation, and programs at macro and micro levels for ensuring human security and employment relations for the women workers.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The methodology of the study was a combination of document analysis and review of literature. For the purpose of the study both qualitative and quantitative literature had been reviewed. The secondary source included census reports, gazettes, relevant studies on RMG sector, BGMEA and BKMEA reports, trade union activities, international organizations like ILO's annual reports as well as documents of GOs and NGOs involved in human and socio-economic security support services. Further, due to the ongoing pandemic and Covid-19 situation, literature review and document analysis had to be limited only to those resources which were available online. The data collected through the literature review, and document analysis from the secondary sources was explained and analysed so as to find significant implications for different stakeholders of the RMG industries of Bangladesh.

Operational Definitions and Concepts of the Study

Women Garment Workers

At present, at least 4.4 million workers work in the garments sector of Bangladesh and majority of them are women. The people working in the garments sector are increasing day by day. A person who works in a garment industry is called a garment worker. Someone whose occupation is to make, or repair garments products is called garment workers. However, it is generally by garment worker we consider the people work in the ready-made garment factories and the garment workers are the main driving force of RMG sector of our country.

Human Security

The human security approach was introduced in the global Human Development Report (HDR) in 1994. Afterwards, the approach was flourished through a range of literature and initiatives building on the idea, and to a series of discussions in the United Nations (UNDP, 1994). Later, a common definition of the concept was adopted in 2012 by the United Nations General Assembly (GA). The 1994 HDR was more specific as it listed seven essential dimensions of human security namely, economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political of an individual. As such the human security not only recognizes the inter-linkages between peace, development and human rights but also equally considers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;- thus human security forms part of the family of human concepts (including human rights, human needs, human development) (Gómez and Gasper, 2013).

Human development is a broad concept, aiming at enlarging people's choices and freedom. Human security is about assuring priority freedom so that 'people can exercise choices safely and freely' and can be confident that the opportunities they have are protected. Some of the elements of the 2012 GA resolution show the link between human security and human development and thus help with the conception of a human security report: " Human security calls for people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses..." (Gómez and Gasper, 2013). The first three elements are shared with human development, although human security analysis is focused on threats; the last element implies understanding the threats in order to implement preventive measures; "... that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities" (Gómez and Gasper, 2013). The human security analysis considers multiple providers of security, including citizens themselves. Human security analysis explores using both empowerment and protection to tackle specific threats to people's lives and empowerment especially links closely with human development. "Human security recognizes the inter-linkages between peace, development and human rights, and equally considers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights;"- thus human security forms part of the family of human concepts (including human rights, human needs, human development)(Gómez and Gasper, 2013).

The word security is not separately defined in the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. However, the security of the workers has been discussed in the Act very extensively which includes conditions of service ranging from the stage of appointment to the stage of termination of service and even beyond and relates to matters pertaining to disciplinary action. Truly, the insecurity of female workers is comparatively higher than male workers. However, there are a good number of provisions under some chapters collectively dealing with the purposes of security of workers.

For the purpose of the present study, human security of women RMG workers means the protection and empowerment of workers rights, enlarging worker's choices and freedom, recognizes/considers the civil, political, economic, health, environmental, personal, social and cultural rights in the working place, society and the greater community.

Employment Relations

Employment relations means the organization and practice of multi-pronged relationships between workers and management, unions and workers, and the unions and managements in an industry. According to Prof. John T. Dunlop (1993), an industrial relations or labour-management relations system at any one time in its development is regarded as comprised of certain actors, certain contexts, an ideology, which binds the industrial relations system together, and a body of rules created to govern the actors at the workplace and work community. Therefore, it is in the interest of all to create and maintain good relations between employees (labor) and employers (management)(Dunlop, 1993).According to the Bangladesh Labour Law-2006, the provisions related to employment management relations are given below(Bakht and Hossain, 2017):

Table-01: The Employment Relations Provisions in Bangladesh Labor Law 2006

Key Indicators	Comprehensive Indicators	Exact Legal Provisions
Employment Standards	Employment and Contract	Appointment letter, employment status, retrenchment, dismissal, retirement
	Working hour and Work time	Working hours, overtime, night work
	Wage and Benefits	Procedures of wage fixing, regularity and timelines of wage and benefit payments, deduction, overtime rate, bonuses
	Leave and Rest	Weekly rest day, casual leave, festival leave, sick leave, vacation leave, maternity leave
	Elimination of Child Labor	Minimum wage
	Protection Against Forced Labor and Protection Against Discrimination	
Occupational Safety and Health	Occupational Accidents, Hazards and Diseases	Accident prevention regulations, prevention from workplace hazards, safeguards against work related diseases
	Safety Equipment/Tools and Facilities	Fire extinguisher and emergency fire exit, protective kits, helmets as well as safety measures
	Social Security Provisions	Pension, provident fund, gratuity, welfare fund, insurance (accident, life etc.), compensation (injuries, disabilities), etc.
Labor Relations and Social Dialogue	Freedom of Association	Right to form and join trade unions, formation rules, freedom to elect union representatives, protection vs. anti-union acts
	Collective Bargaining and	Rights, procedures and scope of bargaining, rights to strike, conciliation, arbitration, protection vs. interference, grievance

	Industrial Relations	procedures, protection vs. lock outs and layoffs during strikes etc.
	Tripartite Consultation	Tripartite process (formation, composition and scope), participation in dialogue and consultation in policy formation
Enforcement	Administrative Capacity	Personnel and budget for inspection and inspection process
	Inspection and Punishment	Scope of inspection, penalties for violations of laws (payment of wage, failure to give notice of the accidents, unfair labor practice, illegal strike or lockout)
	Access to Judiciary	

Source: Bangladesh Labor Law, 2006

For the purpose of the present study, employment relations in the export oriented RMG industry includes right to form and join trade unions, formation rules, freedom to elect union representatives, and overall women workers relations with the management and workers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The UN suggests that job security, income security, security of health and working environment along with security from criminal activity are the emerging global concerns of human security (UNDP, 1994). The aim of the present study is to assess the human security and employment relations of the female RMG workers in Bangladesh. Therefore, while continuing this academic study based on review of literature, a deliberate attempt has been made to know and examine the factors affecting human security and employment relations of women workers in the RMG sector of the country.

Key Information of the Women RMG Workers

The individual characteristics like age, educational qualification and marital status of the women RMG workers' have been studied to understand the socio-economic and demographic information of the women workers in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. RMG is the single largest source of export earnings (USD 24 billion a year), employing 4.4 million workers and more than 80 percent of them are women (Bangladesh Garments and Manufacturing Exporting Association, 2014). The reasons for this large positive contribution to the economy, are the competitive price and capacity of the RMG industries in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2019). Labour cost in Bangladesh is relatively cheap and the price of women's labour is even cheaper. Paul Majumdar and Begum (2006), show that along with providing cheap labour, some specific roles like women are patient, more controllable than men, less mobile and less likely to join trade union all these encourage the employers to hire more women workers. Regarding age, the female garment workers tend to be younger which is another important reason that employers can recruit younger women workers at a very low price (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2006).

As the level of education of the RMG workers increases, male-female wage disparity as well as sexual harassments faced by the women workers in the work place reduces significantly (Mahmud and Ahmed, 2005). Level of education is generally low among the women garment workers and is reflected in their level of efficiency, skill, consciousness and confidence. In the RMG industry, men are generally doing the skilled jobs that require more education whereas women are employed mostly in unskilled jobs as they have less or no education (Berg et al., 2011).

As stated by Paul Majumder and Begum (2006), garment employers are more likely to employ young and unmarried, widow, separated, abandoned women workers who have less or no care responsibilities. Married women tend to remain absent from their job due to family and childcare responsibilities and cannot do over time. Therefore, garment employers are likely to prefer unmarried women. However, maternity leave and maternity allowances, which the garment employers are reluctant to provide, is another good reason behind the preference of unmarried women (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2006).

Human Security of Women Workers in the RMG Industry

The 1994 HDR identified seven essential dimensions of human security: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political (UNDP, 1994). Based on the UNDP Human Security approach, the following sub-sections address the women RMG workers' a) human security at the workplace b) human security while commuting to work, and c) human security at the place of residence.

Human Security Related to Employment, Working Conditions and Working Environment

Workers usually seek employment to earn a living, and an important indicator of their economic security is the monthly wage earned by them. According to the 1994 HDR, economic security is the most important component of human security and it comprises of having a stable income from productive and remunerative work. But it has been found that only about a quarter of the world's people are considered economically secure in this sense, and even those with jobs may feel insecure if the terms of employment is only temporary (UNDP, 1994). Therefore, to understand the condition of economic security as well as employment and working conditions of the women RMG workers, details regarding the reasons to get employed in the RMG, recruitment process and terms of recruitment, current job category and occupational status, wage and working hours, monthly wage and savings, staff amenities enjoyed, leave category and leave enjoyed by women garment workers etc. have been studied in this section.

It has been generally understood that employers of the garment industry choose to hire women workers for the obvious reasons that women are patient, more controllable than men, less mobile and less likely to join trade union and most importantly, they accept lower wages than men. In fact, employment in the garment industry has given them the first opportunity to earn wages as the RMG has provided women with access to wage which has created a new group of industrial workers in the country (Sobhan and Khundker, 2001). An analysis of women's entry into wage earning employment clearly indicates the causes of extreme poverty and male unemployment in Bangladesh which forced the women to get employed in this sector (Mahtab, 2003).

Although the export oriented RMG industries belong to the formal sector of the economy, the recruitment process and terms of recruitment in the RMG industries are highly informal, most insecure and often deplorable (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2006). In fact, job insecurity is much higher in the RMG sector than other sectors of employment in Bangladesh. As most of the women workers do not get any formal appointment, they must endure job insecurity and risk of unemployment which causes felling of anxiety and stress (UNDP, 1994). Except a few upper category employees, no garment worker is provided with written appointment letter and the terms employment are unknown to them (Begum, 2002). Therefore, they cannot seek any legal assistance even if they are deprived of their rights. Furthermore, gender discrimination is very common in the RMG industries and therefore, the lack of any formal appointment causes the women workers to experience more suffering due to continuous job insecurity, irregular wage payment, deprivation of minimum wage and lack of promotion exposure. Since most of the RMG workers are low skilled, young women (Bangladesh Garments and Manufacturing Exporting Association, 2014), they are not considered for any higher paid upper positions like cutting masters, production managers or supervisors who draw salaries varying from 2-10 times higher than that of the average operator (Absar, 2001).

Women workers in the RMG industries often work for excessively long hours but receive unusually low payment. Although, the labour legislation of the country insists on maintaining both overtime pay and minimum standard wage, the wage level in the RMG industries is one of the lowest in the world. It is lower even by the South Asian Standards as it remains very low that the average hourly wage in Bangladesh being 42%, 50% and 33% of those in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka (Ferdous, 2011). The unit labour cost in the RMG sector is also the lowest (\$0.22 per hour) which is the lowest in Asia, leaving behind Cambodia (\$0.33), India (\$0.51) and China (\$0.55) (Bell and Newitt, 2010).

Workplace environment is another vital factor for the female garment workers, and the Bangladesh Labour Law, 2006 has also set standards for health and occupational safety for the workers but it is found to be rarely enforced due to resources limitation and mal-practices (Doshi, 2009). The working environment in Bangladesh RMG factories do not meet the standards (Ansary and Barua, 2015) as the health and safety regulations are often violated and ignored by the factory owners. Most factories do not have adequate ventilation system and the garments workers remain exposed to toxic substances, dust and fiber particles that hang in the factory air. Therefore, the women workers frequently suffer from constant fatigue, headaches, anemia along with other severe health problems like urinary tract infection and reproductive health problems due to overwork and uncongenial working conditions. Moreover, many of the factories do not meet the minimum standards of building and construction codes. As a result, fire is common in the RMG factories and buildings collapse with faulty building design causing numerous death of workers (Anu, 2006). The violations of the occupational safety and health codes are evident in tragic and preventable accidents that occur in Bangladesh factories (Paul-Majumdar, 2002). The fire accidents in the garments industry not only result in serious burn or death of the workers, but often cause serious damage to the eyes and respiratory systems of those who escaped from the fire. Fire accidents also affect workers mental health adversely since fire accidents can give rise to psychological insecurity (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2006) .

According to the 1994 HDR, health security is also important for human security (UNDP, 1994). Health is critical to the well-being of a person, and it is a basic human right. Employees with sound physical and mental health can live long and they are more productive, and thus they can make important contribution to economy. However, within the RMG industry, 87 percent of women employees suffer from ailments and diseases (World Health Organization, 2012) including malnutrition and anaemia, poor hygiene, inadequate pre- and post-natal care, and exposure to infections and illness (Akhter et al., 2010). In fact, the RMG industry in Bangladesh has grown rapidly within a context of limited social or physical infrastructure to support it. Therefore, in the RMG sector the occupational health and safety (OHS) measures are insufficient, and most often the OHS's are poorly protected and managed. The factory fires in Gazipur in October and November 2013 as well as the building collapse of Rana Plaza in Savar, Dhaka in April 2013 that killed almost 1,135 lives of the garments workers, obviously show the deficiency of OHS measures in the RMG sector (Chowdhury, 2017). Within this context, access to the best attainable healthcare services and products, particularly for women, is a critical gap in the RMG industry of Bangladesh.

Human Security while Commuting

To understand the human security of the women RMG workers, it is also important to know the circumstances under which the garments workers commute to and from the workplace. The women garment workers get neither any transport allowance nor other transport facilities from their employer. Sometimes due to the absence of transport facility, the garment workers need to walk a long distance (Begum, 2002). In the garment industry, it is very common for a worker to work overtime during the peak season. On an average, a woman RMG worker work 2-4 hours of overtime a day. Hence, it is very important to know how the women RMG worker commute to work, how far from the workplace they live, with whom they usually commute and finally to look into the nature of social insecurity faced by the female garment workers while commuting to the work place from residence; all these will help to understand the human security of the women workers while commuting.

It has been found that the female garment workers usually travel to the workplace on foot. On an average, a female RMG worker who travel on foot, spend about 2 hours a day in commuting which drastically cuts the female worker's personal time. Moreover, traveling long distance on foot in adverse weather causes frequent cough, cold and fever to the workers (Paul-Majumder, 2001). Moreover, they also become victims of public sexual harassment while returning from work at night. Workers come to the RMG industries from distant locations as they cannot get affordable dwellings near the factories. Zohir and Paul-Majumder (1996) have shown that living in a factory accommodation is the most secure housing system for the women RMG workers (Zohir and Paul-Majumder, 1996).

Human Security at the Place of Residence

In the social context of Bangladesh, it is difficult for a woman or a group of women workers to find a secure accommodation independently without their male guardians. Most women RMG workers live in the urban slums of the industrial areas (Bangladesh Garments and Manufacturing Exporting Association, 2010). Those slums are usually over-crowded, unhygienic and crime prone as they are controlled by the local gangs. However, the workers need to spend about one-third of their income on paying rents. Since the slums are dominated by local gangs, the women workers are most vulnerable to verbal and sexual assaults (Begum, 1997). It is expected that these women might continue to be victims of the situation arising out of their accommodation problem (Begum, 1997).

Employment Relations of Women Workers in the RMG Industries

Since the two notorious factory disasters of Tazreen Fashion's fire incidence and Rana Plaza building collapse in Dhaka, workers' welfare and workplace safety have become the most compelling components of employment relations in the RMG industries of Bangladesh. Tazreen Fashion's fire incidence in 2012 in Ashulia, Dhaka caused death of 117 garment workers whereas the building collapse of Rana Plaza in Savar, Dhaka in April 2013 killed almost 1,135 lives of the garment workers. Both the incidences have created significant awareness among the different stakeholders of the RMG sector including the government, employers and owners, western retailers, civil society, NGO, development partners etc. It is understood that employers need to adopt welfare measures to motivate employees, to encourage workers to become efficient, to develop healthy relation and to receive loyal services through adding to their earnings (Srinivas, 2013). Besides providing a consistent 6 percent GDP growth annually, the RMG industry of Bangladesh has created considerable employment mostly for women contributing to their economic and social empowerment. In return the industries have started to move to the way of sustainability (Hassan, 2014). However, most of the women RMG workers are dissatisfied with their work and they are unhappy with the security and safety measures in the workplace. The two factory disasters mentioned earlier have not only created international sensation, but also have drawn attention to the fact that the country is earning billions of dollars at the cost of abandoning safety of the poor RMG women workers.

The Constitution of Bangladesh has provided legal framework for both workers and employers to maintain employment relations. Besides, the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 recognizes workers to join in trade unions and the employers to join in associations rightfully. However, the existence of trade unions in the export-oriented sectors such as in RMG sector, Export Processing Zones (EPZs), shrimp exporting firms, finished leather and in leather goods industries is very limited. Unfortunately, garment workers are being dismissed from their jobs because of their effort to form trade unions. Moreover, 20% workers' representation is required to form trade unions in an organisation and currently only 3.88% of all workers are under the umbrella of trade unions. As a result, we find gradual decrease of Trade Union membership which are responsible for the weak bargaining power of the workers. Employers become powerful to dictate terms and conditions unilaterally (Khan, 2001). But it is also true that the garment workers, especially women are still reluctant to join trade and labor unions (Mahmud, 2010).

On the other hand, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) has taken various measures for

women workers' development and training. These measures include ooperation of 30 Labor Welfare Centers and 4 Industrial Relations Institutes for imparting training, providing primary health care, social welfare and recreational facilities to working women; revising discriminatory laws against women, ensuring work place safety for women, creating women friendly environment and facilities in work place. Further, the Government has amended existing Bangladesh Labour Law 2006 in 2013 and 2018.

Women Workers Job Satisfaction in the RMG Sectors

The women worker of the RMG industries of Bangladesh are not satisfied with their jobs. The wage they earn is below standard level and it is the primary source of dissatisfaction for workers in the RMG industry. Other than not improving the existing wage condition of the RMG workers, the sector lack any kind of human resources practices. Therefore, employee benefits like timely full payment, prospect of promotion and incentive for employees are absent in this highest export earning sector. As a result, the workers are continuously unhappy with their jobs and are always anxious about the future. Obviously, this has impact on the level of productivity (International Labour Organization, 2005, Morshed, 2007). The satisfied workers are likely to be more engaged, creative, flexible, innovative and loyal to their work, whereas unhappy employees remain actively disengaged in their work being negatively motivated by the fear of job loss and irregular payment. Modern human resource practices as well as employee's development mechanisms like benefit sharing, bonus payment system, provision to increase salaries, employee benefit plans or incentives are totally absent in the context of workers welfare in the RMG industries. In addition to this, for the female workers lack of maternity leave benefits and childcare are facilities cause significant job dissatisfaction(Rao, 1998).

Job satisfaction of an employee plays a vital role in his or her productivity, health and wellbeing. The women workers remain satisfied with their jobs in the sense that they are employed at least. As there are little job options for unskilled and illiterate women, getting a job is of great relief for them as well as for their families. But they also have complaints as to the nature of their employment. Overtime, duration of work, work environment, absence of leave or other benefits, ill treatment of supervisors, lack of medical and health care facilities are some of their point of dissatisfaction. Due to these dissatisfactions, the out-migration of garment worker is considerably high. As they are not satisfied with their present employment, they are eager to find another garment industry where the employment conditions and work environment are better. This sort of dissatisfaction affects adversely on the commitment of workers to their work (Begum, 2002).

Boateng et al. (2015) have found that providing employees with responsibility improves employee's work satisfaction. Besides, if the leadership in an organisation is task oriented and committed to relational behaviours, it would improve employee job satisfaction. This is because employees work satisfaction is directly connected with their human needs and conditions. Therefore, as labour standards and workers' rights are commonly ignored in the RMG industries, poor practices including absence of trade unions, informal recruitment, and irregular payment, sudden termination, wage discrimination, excessive work are pervading the sector as a disease (Boateng et al., 2015). Bansari, (2010) finds that informal recruitment policies and absence of written formal contracts and appointment letters keep the women worker in the RMG industries vulnerable to losing their jobs at any time. But, as the workers do not have alternative job opportunities and they lack both skill and education, the workers feel compelled to continue in unsatisfactory employment relations (Bansari, 2010).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is based on only secondary document and searched academic articles published from 2015 to 2020 searchedfrom Google Scholar advanced database search using specific concepts of research question such as human security, employment relations, job security, RMG women worker and Bangladesh. Afterwards, the researcher carried out a new field of knowledge. Therefore, the limitations remain that it could have been an empirical study with the first-hand data collected from the significant

stakeholders through interviews, FGDs and other methods of data collection. This gives way for the upcoming researchers who will carry out similar types of investigation in future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the present study, the following measures are recommended for both the government and concerned authorities to ensure human security and employment relations for women garment workers in Bangladesh's RMG industries.

- a. Although Bangladesh Labour Law, 2006 (amendment-2013), has workers' safety provisions like resolution of conflicts, ensuring safety measures for workers at their workplaces, mandatory election for workers' participation in committees, minimum wage, rights to form and participate in trade unions and introducing compulsory group insurance policies; most often, the owners and employers of the garments are found not following them. Therefore, by implementing these labour laws, many women labourers' problems related to long working hours, low wages, excessive overtime, leave, health, housing, transportation, and other benefits can be addressed. Besides, as Bangladesh has already ratified 33 conventions of ILO, obviously, implementation of the ILO conventions, especially N.100: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951, and ILO Convention on maternity leaves, can improve as well as ensure the socio-economic security conditions of the women workers in the garment industry.
- b. The working environment in Bangladesh RMG factories does not meet the standards, as the factory owners often violate and ignore health and safety regulations. A thorough review of labour regulation is necessary to improve working conditions and the working environment of the garment industries.
- c. The government and employers should take the initiative to develop adequate infrastructural standards and safety measures in Bangladesh's RMG industry to improve safety in garment factories and ensure greater respect for workers' rights and security.
- d. Modern HRM practices will ensure the prevention of workers' rights violations and maintain a safe and congenial working environment. They will also increase employee job satisfaction through training, job security, flexible working times, encouraging new technology, and introducing rewards, benefits, and other fringe payments.
- e. According to Bangladesh Labour Law-2006 (amendment-2013), Article 176, workers can formulate trade unions even without informing the factory owners. Besides, a woman representative would be included in the trade union's executive committee if the factory has a 20 per cent women workforce. In this regard, the government and management should ensure and facilitate the participation of women in trade unions as representatives in the RMG sector.
- f. To ensure complete human security for the female workers in the garment industries, they must be provided with safe residences. In this regard, accommodation arranged by the owners and employers of the garment industries can be most acceptable for their female employees. Besides, transportation facilities for the women RMG workers are also necessary for their safety and security.
- g. Most of the workers work in life-threatening environments, such as factories without proper ventilation systems and in toxic conditions. However, to build a culture of ensuring occupational safety and health for the garment workers, the working environment of the factories needs to be improved. Training and education, along with awareness campaigns, can ensure improved safety practices, from which both workers and employers can benefit.

CONCLUSION

The human security systems of the women RMG workers indeed have a noticeable impact on their employment relations. By using strategies of collective bargaining and freedom of association, appropriate initiatives are to be taken to promote tripartite relations and active social dialogue among government, employer, and trade unions to improve working conditions, occupational safety and health

status and other essential workers' rights at the factory level of RMG sector. The RMG sector in Bangladesh has come a long way in the last two decades. The industry has crossed many hurdles to stay competitive. It has proved many predictions futile and wrong, competing fiercely even after the abolition of the quota. Therefore, the RMG sector must formulate an equitable solution for all the involved parties and ensure a brighter future for the country. The Government, BGMEA, BKMEA, Buyers, Accord, Alliance, and NGO Civil Society Organizations, Collective Bargaining Organizations and other stakeholders can collaborate and work in a coordinated effort to ensure labour-management relations and workers' welfare in the RMG sector of the country.

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