

Factors Influencing Women's Leadership in Bangladesh's Ready Made Garment Industry: A Study of Dhaka and Gazipur Districts

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10100531>

Received: 28 January 2026; Accepted: 02 February 2026; Published: 16 February 2026

ABSTRACT

Women's participation in the workforce of Bangladesh has significantly increased, particularly in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, a cornerstone of the national economy. However, their representation in leadership roles remains disproportionately low. This study explores the current state of women's leadership in Bangladesh's RMG industry and identifies key factors that influence their advancement into such positions. Drawing on data collected from 250 female employees, the research employs a quantitative approach to evaluate the impact of training, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, prior experience, and socio-cultural practices on women's leadership development. Findings indicate that over 90% of respondents recognize these four factors as influential to varying degrees. The study is pioneering in its focus on these specific antecedents within the Bangladeshi context, where a lack of prior research exists.

Key Words: Women's leadership, ready-made garment (RMG) industry, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, socio-cultural practices, workforce participation, female empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh's RMG sector, the country's second-largest global exporter, has driven foreign earnings for the past three decades, leveraging competitive advantages in price, quality, product variety, and on-time delivery (Das, 2022; Das & Aman, 2021). Women constitute a major portion of the workforce—approximately 80–90%—yet remain underrepresented in leadership roles, with only 7% of enterprises run by women (Islam, 2017; Hossain, 2020). Challenges include societal attitudes, limited career growth, and organizational barriers such as succession planning and communication gaps. Despite these constraints, women leaders contribute significantly through participative, instructive, and motivational behaviors, and their growing involvement is critical for organizational performance, gender equity, and Bangladesh's economic development (Swazan, 2022; Hilal, 2015; BGMEA, 2021). This study provides both theoretical and practical insights into women's leadership, highlighting its role in empowering women, promoting gender equity, and fostering national development. Women in leadership contribute diverse skills, perspectives, and decision-making abilities that enhance organizational collaboration and culture. While societal, governmental, and organizational support is essential, ambitious women themselves must take initiative to advance into leadership roles. The findings offer valuable guidance for funding institutions, stakeholders, and policymakers to improve leadership programs. The study also serves as a foundation for future empirical research on women's leadership in the Bangladeshi context, particularly regarding program effectiveness and leadership perceptions (Alfaraidy, 2021; G.T., 2015).

Objectives of the Study

The study's main goal is to identify the factors influencing women's leadership in Bangladesh's RMG sector. Also, to understand the present state of women's involvement in leadership roles within Bangladesh's RMG, to become familiar with the status of women progress on leadership or gender equality, to know how training and experiences impact of women leadership, to know how socio- cultural practices facilitate women leadership.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's leadership capacity in entrepreneurship must be strengthened to increase their participation in management and business in Bangladesh, particularly within the RMG sector. Existing research suggests that women's leadership perceptions are shaped by program quality, competencies, challenges, support systems, and strategic vision, and that motivated, entrepreneurial women leaders with strong managerial skills are more likely to achieve organizational success (Hoque & Islam, 2022).

An entrepreneurial mindset characterized by creativity, risk tolerance, persistence, and strong interpersonal and managerial skills is critical to women's entrepreneurial success. However, women's leadership advancement is shaped by social, organizational, and personal factors, with discriminatory organizational cultures and gendered societal expectations continuing to constrain women's progression into leadership roles despite demonstrated leadership capability (Hoyt, 2017; Fagenson, 1990; Davidson & Burke, 2002).

In Bangladesh, senior management remains predominantly male, with women occupying only 5.4% of leadership positions, although participation in leadership programs has recently increased (ILO, 2015). Persistent barriers such as limited confidence, weak organizational support, and restrictive social norms continue to hinder women's advancement into executive roles, particularly in the RMG sector, where women constitute the majority of the workforce. Greater inclusion of women in leadership is associated with improved organizational performance, employee satisfaction, and enhanced opportunities for economically vulnerable women.

Team performance is strongly influenced by leaders' experience and leadership behavior, while family support plays a critical enabling role for women entrepreneurs, particularly where institutional support is limited. In Bangladesh's RMG sector contributing 13% to GDP and employing nearly 4 million workers, most of whom are women female representation in even lower-level management remains minimal. Based on prior literature, this study develops a conceptual framework linking education and training, entrepreneurial mindset, and leadership intention to women's leadership behavior and outcomes.

Access to female trainers and targeted skill-development programs enhances women's competencies and leadership capacity, benefiting organizational performance. Leadership training bridges gaps between existing and desired organizational cultures, strengthens women's awareness of workplace rights, and fosters creative, innovative, and accountable leadership behavior (Islam, 2022; Preuss, 2017; Cardella, 2020).

Women entrepreneurs transform opportunities into marketable products by managing resources, production, and marketing, requiring an entrepreneurial mindset, risk-taking, creativity, and managerial skills. High motivation, self-confidence, and entrepreneurial orientation are strongly linked to business success, while support from NGOs and other organizations further enhances women's leadership capabilities and decision-making (Hisrich, 2016; Balogun, 2017).

Women's leadership programs strengthen skills and social capital, helping women advance and mentor others. Despite their positive impact, women in corporate leadership often face high-risk roles with limited authority, leading to shorter tenures than men (Perceptions towards Female Leadership, 2015; Christy, 2016).

In contexts with limited external support, family plays a crucial role in enabling women's leadership by providing financial assistance and helping balance work and domestic responsibilities. Societal and cultural norms, particularly in Islamic countries, remain significant barriers, influencing women's leadership development in sectors such as Bangladesh's RMG industry (Cardella, 2020; Bhattacharjee, 2020).

Research framework

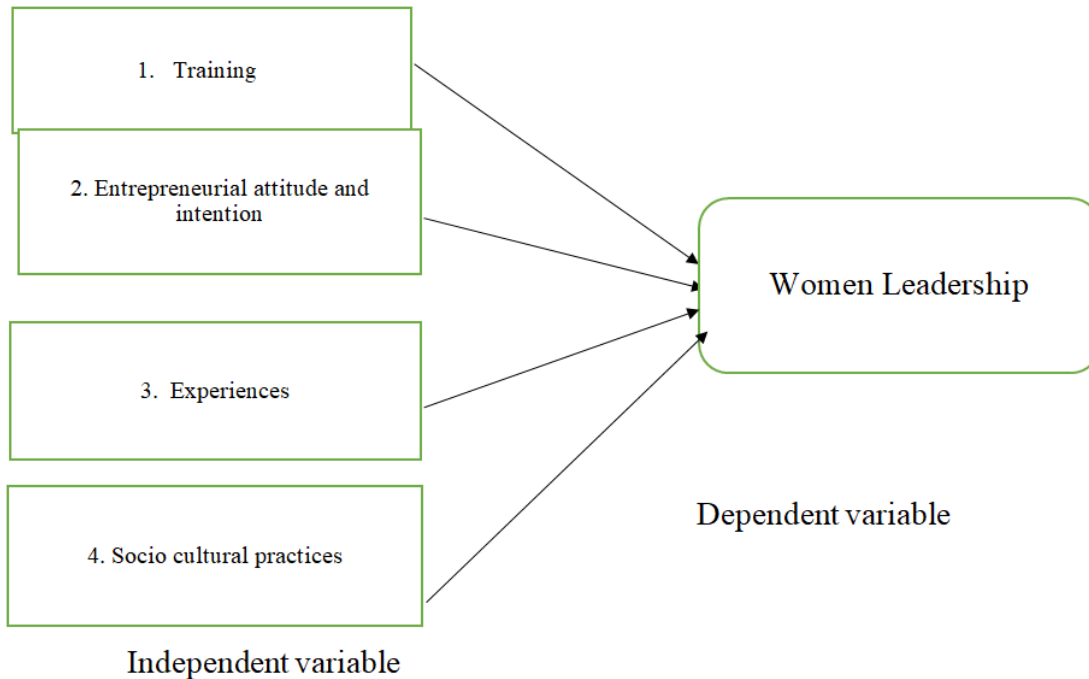


Figure 1: Research framework

In view of the above, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H₀: Training, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, experiences, sociocultural practices do not affect women leadership in Bangladesh

H₁: Training, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, experiences, socio-cultural practices affect women leadership in Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative, descriptive research design to examine the effects of training, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, experiences, and socio-cultural practices on women's leadership in Bangladesh's RMG sector. The population includes all female employees in RMG organizations, with a sample of 250 women drawn from 13 firms in Dhaka and Gazipur using convenience sampling.

Data collection relied on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were gathered via a structured questionnaire of 30 items, designed on a five-point Likert scale and covering demographics, women's leadership, training, entrepreneurial mindset, experiences, and socio-cultural factors. Pre-testing and pilot surveys ensured clarity and reliability. Secondary data were obtained from scholarly articles, reports, and online databases.

The study uses SPSS v29 for descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and hypothesis testing. PLS software is applied to assess reliability and discriminant validity. The framework includes four independent variables (training, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, experiences, socio-cultural practices) and one dependent variable (women's leadership).

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Measurement Model Assessment

In this study, reliability and validity were calculated using Smart PLS version 4 to evaluate the measurement scales of the constructs.

Construct Reliability

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho-a)	Composite reliability (rho-c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Training	.813	.823	.858	.503
Entrepreneurial attitude and intention	.808	.821	.866	.565
Socio cultural practices	.846	.917	.889	.669
Women Leadership	.803	.814	.858	.502
Experiences	.805	.748	.846	.533

Using four different variables, the internal consistency and convergent validity of the measurement model's 26 items were examined. The internal consistency of reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability. If Alpha (α) is greater than .70, a construct is considered dependable (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013). According to the findings, the Training (TA) scale, which had six items and a reliability of .813, and the Entrepreneurial Attitude and Intention (EAI), which had five items and a reliability of .808? The Socio Cultural Practices (SCP) scale had four items with a reliability score of .846, the Experiences (E) scale had five items with a reliability score of .805, and the Women Leadership (WL) scale had six items with a reliability score of .803. At least 0.5 should be the Average variance extracted (AVE) threshold value (Fornell C. &., 1981). The aforementioned table shows that the average extracted variance value for each construct is more than 0.5. These findings demonstrate the constructs' convergence validity.

Discriminant validity

	Training	Entrepreneurial attitude and intention	Socio cultural practices	Women Leadership	Women Leadership
Training	0.709				
Entrepreneurial attitude and intention	0.074	0.752			
Socio cultural practices	0.04	0.275	0.818		
Women Leadership	0.194	0.248	0.202	0.709	
Experiences	0.157	0.199	0.157	.0227	0.73

The Fornell & Larcker (1981) Criterion was used to assess discriminant validity. According to Table, all square root of AVE values is higher than other correlation values between the variables, proving that the various constructions utilized are all part of separate entities. As a result, the measuring model for this investigation is deemed adequate.

Correlations

Correlations		WL	TN	EIA	EP	SCP
WL	Pearson Correlation	1	.056	.167**	.034	.162*

	Sig.(2- tailed)		.378	.008	.595	.010
	N	250	250	250	250	250
TN	Pearson Correlation	.056	1	.032	.063	-.029
	Sig.(2- tailed)	.378		.610	.320	.643
	N	250	250	250	250	250
EIA	Pearson Correlation	.167**	.032	1	.131	.242**
	Sig.(2- tailed)	.008	.610		.039	.000
	N	250	250	250	250	250
EP	Pearson Correlation	.034	.063	.131	1	.075
	Sig.(2- tailed)	.595	.320	.039		.238
	N	250	250	250	250	250
SCP	Pearson Correlation	.162*	-.029	.242**	.075	1
	Sig.(2- tailed)	.010	.643	.000	.238	
	N	250	250	250	250	250

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Women's leadership (WL), training (TA), entrepreneurial attitude and intention (EIA), experiences (EP), and sociocultural practices (SCP) are all included. It displayed the findings of the examination of the Pearson correlation coefficient. The results indicate that there are significant correlations between the variables. Social cultural practices and entrepreneurial attitude and intention are independent variables that have a significant link, as indicated by the greatest r value of the Pearson correlation, which is 0.242. The dependent variable "Women leadership" and the independent variable "training" have a low correlation, as indicated by the lowest r value of -0.29. Every connection shows a positive trend, indicating that all of the evaluated constructs have positive associations with one another.

Regression Analysis

ANOVAa					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	3.949	4	.987	2.988	.020b
Residual	80.951	245	.330		
Total	84.900	249			

a. Dependent Variable: Women Leadership

- b. Predictors: (Constant), Socio cultural practices, Training, Entrepreneurial attitude and intention, Experiences.

The results of regression analysis used to examine the association between training, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, experiences, and the application of sociocultural practices with women leadership. Table 12 presents the calculated results. With 4 and 245 degrees of freedom, the f-statistics produced ($f = 2.988$) are significant at the 1 percent level ($\text{sig. } f < 0.01$), indicating that the model is fit.

Coefficients

Coefficients							
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		standardized Coefficients			
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Impact
1	(Constant)	3.173	.334		9.497	.000	
	Training	.047	.053	.055	.884	.377	Not Supported
	Entrepreneurial attitude and intention	.096	.047	.133	2.047	.042	Supported
	Experiences	.003	.051	.003	.050	.960	Not Supported
	Socio cultural practices	.085	.042	.131	2.036	.043	Supported
a. Dependent Variable : Women Leadership							

I. It is not significant enough in positive correlation between Training And women leadership. $\beta = .055$, $t = .884$, $p = .377 > 0.05$, it shows that training has little positive effect on women leadership.

II. It is significant enough in positive correlation between Entrepreneurial attitude and intention and women leadership. $\beta = .133$, $t = 2.047$, $p = .042 > 0.05$, it shows that Entrepreneurial attitude and intention has large positive effect on women leadership.

III. It is not significant enough in positive correlation between Experiences and women leadership. $\beta = .003$, $t = .50$, $p = .960 > 0.05$, it shows that Experiences has little positive effect on women leadership.

IV. It is significant enough in positive correlation between Socio cultural practices and women leadership. $\beta = .042$, $t = 2.036$, $p = .043 > 0.05$, it shows that Socio cultural practices and has large positive effect on women leadership.

In summing up, Entrepreneurial attitude and intention, social cultural practices are verified. On the other hand training and experiences are not verified.

Findings

A total of 250 valid responses were analyzed for this study, collected from employees across various departments in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of respondents (36.4%) belonged to the 31–40 years age group, indicating that the sample comprised relatively young to mid-career professionals. In terms of educational qualifications, more than half of the respondents (52.4%) were graduates, reflecting a moderately educated workforce capable of engaging with organizational leadership programs. Regarding income, the largest group (30%) earned between 36,000–45,000 Taka per month, suggesting a standard remuneration range for mid-level employees in the sector. These demographics provide a representative

overview of the female workforce in the Bangladeshi RMG industry, supporting the validity of the study's findings.

The study focused on four key dimensions affecting women's leadership: Training, Entrepreneurial Attitude and Intention, Experiences, and Socio-Cultural Practices. A conceptual research model was developed to examine the relationships between these dimensions and women's leadership outcomes. Analytical results indicate that socio-cultural practices and entrepreneurial attitude and intention significantly influence employees' perceptions of women leadership, highlighting the role of both individual mindset and external cultural factors in shaping leadership opportunities. Training and practical experiences further enhance leadership capabilities, suggesting that structured capacity-building initiatives are critical for empowering women in managerial and executive roles.

These findings emphasize the importance of creating an enabling environment in which socio-cultural barriers are addressed, entrepreneurial attitudes are nurtured, and continuous training is provided. For the RMG industry, which employs a large proportion of women, such interventions can enhance organizational performance, increase employee satisfaction, and promote more equitable gender representation in leadership roles. Overall, the study underscores that women's leadership is shaped by a combination of personal competencies, organizational support, and socio-cultural contexts, aligning with existing literature on female leadership development in emerging economies.

Mean, Std. deviation

Independent Variable	Valid	Mean	Std. deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Training	250	4.3240	.69060	2.00	5.00
Entrepreneurial attitude and intention	250	3.4880	.80277	1.00	5.00
Experiences	250	3.9040	.71613	2.00	5.00
Socio cultural practices	250	3.0440	.90184	5.00	5.00

The study examined four dimensions influencing women's leadership: Training, Entrepreneurial Attitude and Intention, Experiences, and Socio-Cultural Practices. In the Training dimension, six statements were used to assess respondents' perceptions. The results indicate a high overall mean score of 4.32 (SD = 0.69), with values ranging from 2.00 to 5.00, suggesting that training is perceived as a strong contributor to enhancing women's leadership capabilities. This highlights the critical role of structured capacity-building initiatives in developing managerial competencies and leadership skills.

For the Entrepreneurial Attitude and Intention dimension, five statements were included, producing a mean of 3.49 (SD = 0.80), with a range of 1.00 to 5.00. This reflects a moderate level of entrepreneurial mindset and intention among the respondents, indicating potential for improvement in fostering risk-taking, creativity, and initiative among female employees.

The Experiences dimension, also measured through five statements, yielded a mean of 3.90 (SD = 0.72), with scores ranging from 2.00 to 5.00. These results suggest that practical work experience significantly contributes to leadership development, allowing women to gain confidence and competence in managerial roles.

Finally, the Socio-Cultural Practices dimension, measured using four statements, recorded the lowest mean of 3.04 (SD = 0.90). This indicates that social and cultural barriers continue to impact women's leadership opportunities, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address societal norms and organizational culture.

Overall, the findings reveal that while training and experience strongly support women's leadership, entrepreneurial mindset development and socio-cultural support remain areas requiring attention. Addressing these gaps can enhance women's participation and effectiveness in leadership positions within the RMG industry.

DISCUSSION

The study surveyed 250 female employees from 13 RMG organizations across various departments. Respondents were predominantly Sewing Managers (13.2%), aged 31–40 years (36.4%), graduates (52.4%), with monthly incomes of 36,000–45,000 Taka (28%) and 6–15 years of service (36.8%). Most reported that their organizations value women's leadership (88.4%) and provide opportunities to practice it (90.4%), though perceptions of gender differences in leadership were mixed.

Discriminant validity using the Fornell & Larcker criterion confirmed that all constructs were distinct. Regression analysis demonstrated a significant relationship ($F = 2.988$, $p < 0.01$) between training, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, experiences, socio-cultural practices, and women's leadership. Reliability scores for all scales were above 0.80, and AVE values exceeded 0.5, confirming internal consistency and convergent validity. These findings highlight that both individual competencies and socio-cultural factors significantly influence women's leadership in the RMG sector.

The study finds that training strongly influences women's leadership by enhancing communication, product quality, creativity, and innovative thinking (Hoque, 2022; Islam, 2022; Cardella, 2017). Entrepreneurial intention also has a significant impact, with women leaders demonstrating risk-taking ability, creativity, and innovation comparable to men (Bullough, 2015; Esmer, 2017; Swazan, 2022; Rahman, 2020).

Experience positively affects leadership advancement, as women in managerial roles facilitate career progression for other female employees (Perceptions towards Female Leadership in Malaysia, 2015). Socio-cultural practices, including family, spouse, and community support, enable women to balance work and domestic responsibilities, thereby strengthening their leadership capacity (Dunst, 2015; Islam, 2022). Descriptive statistics indicate that respondents generally agree on the positive influence of these factors, though neutrality appears in some statements on entrepreneurial intention and socio-cultural practices.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of training, entrepreneurial attitude and intention, experiences, and socio-cultural factors on women's leadership in Bangladesh's RMG sector. Enhancing women's leadership is crucial for organizational management and performance. Women leaders in the sector exhibit directive behaviors (assigning tasks, guiding teams, and demonstrating self-leadership) and achievement-oriented behaviors (building confidence, motivating employees, and improving team performance). A key limitation is the study's focus on Dhaka and Gazipur districts, suggesting that future research should include other regions to capture a broader perspective of leadership practices across the RMG industry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have several theoretical and practical implications for enhancing women's leadership in Bangladesh's RMG sector. Although training (Mean = 4.32, $t = 0.884$, $p = 0.377$) shows limited statistical significance, it remains essential to strengthen training programs to improve women's performance and leadership capabilities. Similarly, experience (Mean = 3.90, $t = 0.050$, $p = 0.960$) demonstrates low significance, yet experienced women continue to contribute positively to organizational outcomes. Furthermore, developing an entrepreneurial mindset and providing more opportunities are crucial for empowering women leaders in the sector. Expanding designation and promotion opportunities will enable women to assume leadership roles more effectively. Finally, family and spousal support is vital for women to balance work and domestic responsibilities, facilitating their success in leadership positions.

Limitations

This study focused on a limited set of factors influencing women's leadership due to time and resource constraints. Future research could incorporate additional variables and examine the interplay of internal, cultural, and socioeconomic factors affecting women's representation in senior positions within Bangladesh's RMG

sector. Expanding such research may also help identify strategies to enhance market potential and leadership opportunities for women in the industry.

Future implications

Female leadership is particularly relevant to Bangladesh's RMG industry, where equal employment opportunities are essential for enhancing organizational performance. Strengthening societal support through awareness, education, and communication can improve the socioeconomic conditions of women leaders, especially those facing poverty (Uddin, 2021). RMG factories should recognize that investing in a supportive environment for women's advancement is beneficial rather than burdensome. Additionally, government initiatives are needed to encourage and facilitate women's participation in leadership roles within the sector.

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