

Socio-Economic Conditions and Challenges of Women Garment Workers in Chittagong Area–An Empirical Study

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Abstract

There are more than 4500 garment companies in Bangladesh. At present, more than four million workers are working in this sector from different areas of Bangladesh in which about 90% are women. This research paper is an attempt to delineate the present condition of the female workers from social and economic perspective. The analysis depends on the survey of 192 female workers working in more than 32 garment industrial units situated in Chittagong area. This research reveals that the standard of living of the women garment workers is still in miserable condition and they are facing extreme challenges in obtaining fundamental necessities of survival. This paper suggests some measures for improving present social and economic conditions, to a great extent, to achieve women workers' satisfaction at the maximum level and their life style.

Keywords: Women Garments Workers, Social Factors, Economic Factors, Workers Satisfaction.

1. Introduction

The economy of Bangladesh largely depends on agriculture. However, the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector has become the largest earner and contributor of foreign currency and income of Bangladesh. It also provides employment to more than four million Bangladeshis, mainly women from low income generated families and rural areas of the country. (Khondhker, Razzaque & Ahmed , 2005).

In 1980s, there were only 50 factories with only a few thousand employees. But now a day, there are 4296 manufacturing units. Knitwear Industry is adding up to 75% value, which opens up great potential for international and local investors to invest in different areas of accessories manufacturing. The average

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contribution of knitwear for the last successive five years to the national GDP of Bangladesh is 7.2 % which proves RMG as a strategically and economically important sector. To compete and cope with the changing and challenging global RMG market this sector of Bangladesh has to face and overcome many hurdles (Wikipedia, 2017).

This sector is contributing approximately 13% to the GDP, which was only around 3% in 1991. However, female workers face problems. Most of them come from families whose earnings are low. They are paid far less than men mainly due to their low rate of education. Women are not interested to unionize because factory owners threaten to fire them. Though the number of garment factories and the employment is concerned, till the end of 1982, there were only 47 garment manufacturing companies in Bangladesh. The breakthrough occurred when the total number of garment factories increased to 384 and it became 4296 in 2014, 4328 in 2015. In the year 1997 the total number of workers working in this sector was 1.3 million and in the year 2016 this number increased to 4 million in which about 3 million workers were female (Wikipedia, 2017).

Bangladesh garment industry has generated \$28.67bn exports in the calendar year 2016 which is 7.76% higher than the previous calendar year. The export in the last fiscal year 2015-16 was \$28.09bn with a 10.21% growth from the previous fiscal year. Bangladesh RMG has been securing a consistent growth through the decade. From 2007 to 2016 average yearly growth was 12.84% which shows a strong potential of the sector. As Bangladesh RMG is moving towards achieving a target of reaching USD 50 billion by 2021 the country requires more growth than it has been getting for last three years in particular. 2017 is to be a very crucial year in that path. It may proceed toward achieving the goal if the country can secure a growth around of 15% in this year. (BGMEA, 2015).

From the statistics of 2002 to 2014 it has been found that the total export of RMG industry has been increased substantially in Bangladesh. The reasons might be attributed by the quality of the products and the goodwill of the companies to the international buyers for making best quality products.

1.1 Objectives of The Study

The major objective is to delineate the present socio-economic conditions and challenges of the women workers working in different garments situated in

Chittagong area. To achieve the major objective, this research also sets some other objectives:

- a. To visualize the present conditions and challenges of the women garment workers.
- b. To explore the social and economic conditions of the female workers of garments in Chittagong area.
- c. To suggest some ways (measures) for improving the social and economic conditions and positions of the female garment workers.

1.2 Methods of The Study

The study has been done by following the steps:

- a) At first, an intensive literature review has been made. The literature collected from different books, periodicals, journals and newspapers related to the research topic. Female workers were selected as respondents, because their participation rate is high in RMG sectors.
- b) Simple random sampling technique was used in this study where the total number of respondent was 192, collected from more than 32 garments establishment situated in different locations of Chittagong.
- c) To collect primary data considering the objectives of the study a self constructed questionnaire was administrated. The questionnaire includes close-ended and a little bit open ended questions, which was distributed among the respondents.
- d) Simple statistical techniques like frequency distribution, percentage of frequency, descriptive analysis were used for the analysis of collected data.

2. Analysis of The Findings

The social and economic conditions of the female RMG workers in Chittagong are portrayed in the following sections.

2.1 Social Condition

Table 1. Age and Marital Status of Women Garments Workers

Age of women garments workers				Marital status of women garments workers			
Class interval	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Class interval	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0-20	23	12	12	Unmarried	34	17.7	17.7
21-30	114	59.4	71.4	Married	144	75	92.7
31-40	46	24	95.3	Widow	14	7.3	100
Above-40	9	4.7	100	Total	192	100	
Total	192	100					

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

The study finds that 59.40 percent (Table 1) of the female workers are aged from 21 to 30, while only 4.7 percent of the workers are aged above 41 years. This shows that different types of occupational hazards and workplace stress work as prior reasons behind not working a long time and because of this the employers don't prefer aged women workers in garments to decrease cost by appointing young workers at low compensation (Majumder & Begum, 2000). Among the workers surveyed, 75 percent are married and 17.7 percent are unmarried.

Table 2. Family and Earning Member of Women RMG Workers

Family member of Women RMG Workers				Earning member of Women RMG Workers			
Number	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Number	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	2	1.0	1.0	1	18	9.4	9.4
2	10	5.2	6.2	2	129	67.2	67.2
3	46	24.0	30.2	3	40	20.8	20.8
4	82	42.7	72.9	4	4	2.1	2.1
5	40	20.8	93.8	above 4	1	.5	.5
6	12	6.2	100.0	Total	192	100.0	100.0
Total	192	100.0					

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

Living cost is very much high now. It is also affected by the number of family members, that is, the higher the number of family members, the higher would be the cost of living for the family.

This study finds that 42.7 percent (Table2) of the female workers have 4 family

members and 1.0 percent has 1 family member; while the percentage of workers' has two earning members are 67.20 and only 0.5 percent has more than 4 earning member.

Table 3. Education Level and Nature of Job of Women RMG Workers

Education level of women RMG workers				Nature of job of women RMG workers			
Education level	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Number	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Illiterate	30	15.6	15.6	unemployed	127	66.1	66.1
can sign only	31	16.1	31.8	agro-based job	22	11.5	77.6
class 1-5	60	31.2	63.0	handicraft	3	1.6	79.2
class 6-10	61	31.8	94.8	garment job	40	20.8	100.0
above secondary	10	5.2	100.0	Total	192	100.0	
Total	192	100.0					

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

Education and knowledge is the backbone and foundation of getting a job and better performance in the job. Increase in the level of workers' education plays role in reducing male-female wage differences and sexual harassments faced by the female workers in the work place. This survey indicates that among the workers only 15.6 percent (Table 3) are illiterate and 16.1 percent can sign only. On the other side, 31.2 percent of the workers have education up to class V. Because workers educational level is low, their work understanding and working capacity is expected to be poor. For this, they get poor compensation and facilities from organizations.

Nature of job is an important factor for getting a job and getting higher amount of compensation in any organization. The survey finds that 66.10 percent (Table 3) of the workers were unemployed or have no previous work experience in garment industries. About 20.8 percent of the workers surveyed have work experience in garment factories.

This study reveals that about 39.1 percent have less than 2 years of job experience, while only 5.2 percent have job experience of more than 7 years. According to the section 100 of Bangladesh Labor Act (BLA), 2006 the regular working hours of an adult worker must not exceed 08 hours per day. In this research it is found that 40.10 percent women workers has to work 8-9 hours in a day, while 8.9 percent (Table 4) women worker has to work 11-12 hours a day.

Table 4. Duration of Job Experiences And Working Hour of Women RMG Workers

Duration of job experiences of women RMG workers				Working hour of women RMG workers			
Duration	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Working hours	Frequency	Percentage percentage	Cumulative
less than 2 years	75	39.1	39.1	less than 8 hours	44	22.9	22.9
2-3 years	58	30.2	69.3	8-9 hours	77	40.1	63.0
3-5 years	42	21.9	91.1	9-10 hours	54	28.1	91.1
5-7 years	7	3.6	94.8	11-12 hours	17	8.9	100.0
above 7 years	10	5.2	100.0	Total	192	100.0	
Total	192	100.0					

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

Table 5. Overtime Working Hour and Duration of Casual Leave of Women RMG Workers

Overtime working hour(monthly) of women RMG workers				Duration of casual leave(yearly) of women RMG workers			
Hour	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Duration	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0-30	111	57.8	57.8	no leave	27	14.1	14.1
31-60	72	37.5	95.3	0-5	68	35.4	49.5
61-90	9	4.7	100.0	6-10	86	44.8	94.3
Total	192	100.0		11-15	6	3.1	97.4
				16-20	5	2.6	100.0
				Total	192	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

About 37.5 percent of the women workers regularly work more than 2 hours as overtime per day, while 4.7 percent (Table 5) has to work more than 3 hours of overtime a day. Even in many establishment workers do overtime in the weekend. As their salary is very low, they always try to earn some extra amount from overtime. For this, they cannot spend much time for their family and children. (Majumder & Begum, 2000).

According to BLA of 2006, every worker shall be entitled to enjoy casual leave with full wages for ten days in a calendar year. This study reveals that 14.1 percent of the workers do not enjoy any casual leave with pay and 44.8 percent

(Table 5) of the workers get 6-10 days of casual leave per year. In many cases women workers are bound to work even when they are sick. Absence of proper leave facilities is another reason that makes the working environment of garments very difficult.

Table 6. Accommodation expenses of women RMG workers Workers turnover of women RMG workers

Overtime working hour(monthly) of women RMG workers				Duration of casual leave(yearly) of women RMG workers			
Expenses (Tk)	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Workers turnover	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0-500	39	20.3	20.3	0	95	49.5	49.5
501- 1000	45	23.4	43.8	1	43	22.4	71.9
1001-1500	46	24.0	67.7	2	28	14.6	86.5
1501-2000	18	9.4	77.1	3	25	13.0	99.5
above 2000	44	22.9	100.0	4	1	.5	100.0
Total	192	100.0		Total	192	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

A major problem faced by working women (migrants), particularly in urban areas, is the lack of proper accommodation. It is also difficult to find a landlord who would let out his place to a single woman. The study finds that 24 percent (Table 6) female workers have to pay Tk 1000-1500.

During the field survey it is observed that workers face many hurdles to meet the living cost with rental costs. 60 percent or more of the monthly income of a worker consumed for house rent purposes. Zohir and Paul-Majumder (1996) in their study have found that accommodation in the city is not enough for workers. This study reveals that turnover rate among the female garment workers is low i.e. about 50 percent (Table 6) of the workers have not changed their jobs at all. Skilled and experienced workers changed their jobs frequently. Only 0.5 percent of the workers worked in 4 garment factories.

Only about 10.4 percent (Table 7) of the female workers are satisfied with their job environment as they said good, while 51.6 percent workers treat the job environment as bad. Harassment by other employees (male colleagues) or by management in the workplace has become day to day issue in the garment industries. As per the survey result, 55.2 percent of the female workers are not

Table 7. Job Environment and Nature of Harassment of Women RMG Workers

Job environment of women RMG workers				Nature of harassment of women RMG workers			
Level	Frequency	percentage	Cumulative percentage	Nature	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
very bad	8	4.2	4.2	no harassment	106	55.2	55.2
bad	99	51.6	55.7	physical	24	12.5	67.7
neutral	63	32.8	88.5	mental	59	30.7	98.4
good	20	10.4	99.0	sexual	2	1.0	99.5
very good	2	1.0	100.0	other	1	.5	100.0
Total	192	100.0		Total	192	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

harassed/tortured physically, mentally, sexually or other ways. In opposite, 30.7 percent of the female workers say about the mental harassment at their organization. Harassment of the female workers can be decreased by increasing the level of education and awareness about labor rights (Mahmud, 2010).

Table 8. Application of Labor Law and Facilities of Labor Union of Women RMG Workers

Application of labor law of women RMG worker				Facilities of labor union of women RMG worker			
Class	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Class	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
do not know	69	35.9	35.9	no union	52	27.1	27.1
no application	41	21.4	57.3	prohibited by owners	30	15.6	42.7
few application	41	21.4	78.6	manage top leaders	63	32.8	75.5
good application	41	21.4	100.0	others	47	24.5	100.0
Total	192	100.0	100.0	Total	192	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

Of the surveyed female workers, 35.9 percent (Table 8) reported that they don't know about the implementation of labor laws in their garments, while 21.4 percent opined that there is no or very little application of labor law. It is found under this survey that 27.1 percent respondents answered that there exists no trade union in their establishment because the employers are in against of labor union practices of women workers. 32.8

percent (Table 8) of the workers reported that though trade union existed in their industries, the leaders of the union are managed and controlled by the authority; they don't work for the workers but only serve for the concern of the owners of the factory.

Table 9. Causes of Labor Unrest in Chittagong Area, 2017

Class	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
do not know	71	37.0	37.0
reduce exploitation	46	24.0	60.9
influence by leader	9	4.7	65.6
increase salaries	63	32.8	98.4
Other	3	1.6	100.0
Total	192	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

At present labor unrest is an unavoidable problem for the garment industries and for the country as well. About 37 percentage (Table 9) of the female workers said that they have no knowledge about the causes of unrest, while 32.8 said that the reason is to increase salaries and 4.7 percent said it is caused and influenced by leaders.

2.2 Economic Condition

Table 10. Mode of Salary Structure and Basic Salary of Women RMG Workers

Mode of salary structure of women RMG workers				Basic salary of women RMG workers			
Salary Structure	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Amount of salary (Tk.)	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
weakly	1	.5	.5	below 500	3	1.6	1.6
monthly	138	71.9	72.4	500-1000	3	1.6	3.1
hours worked	31	16.1	88.5	1001-1500	86	44.8	47.9
units of	13	6.8	95.3	1501-2000	11	5.7	53.6
others	9	4.7	100.0	above 2000	89	46.4	100.0
Total	192	100.0		Total	192	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

Salaries and facilities are the major factors that determine the economic position and living standard of garment workers. This survey finding reveals that 71.9 percent (Table 10) workers get salary in monthly basis, while 0.5 percent gets weakly. In this study 46.4 percent of workers get basic salary above Tk. 2000, while 1.6 percent gets below Tk. 500.

Table 11. Total Salary Structure and Modes of Salary Payment of Women RMG Worker

Total salary structure of women RMG worker				Modes of salary payment of women RMG worker			
Amount of Salary (Tk.)	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Payment dates	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
1000-2000	1	.5	.5	25- last days	7	3.6	3.6
2001-3000	4	2.1	2.6	1st-10th day	155	80.7	84.4
3001-4000	81	42.2	44.8	10th-15th day	28	14.6	99.0
4001-5000	18	9.4	54.2	after 15+	1	.5	99.5
above 5000	88	45.8	100.0	Others	1	.5	100.0
Total	192	100.0		Total	192	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

In this study 45.8 percentages of the female workers get Tk. 5000 and above (Table 11) as total pay per month, which is really insufficient to lead their life with 3-4 dependent members in the family, while 0.5 percent workers get Tk. 1000-2000. In Bangladesh, women workers are very cheap but they are easily exploited in many cases like the cheap price of their labor, low bargaining power, and their docility (Majumder & Begum, 2000). Women are getting low compensation as they are employed in lower level and unskilled and semiskilled jobs.

Table 12. Bonus Structure and Medical Allowances of Women RMG Workers

Bonus structure of women RMG workers				Medical allowances of women RMG workers			
Bonus structure	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Medical allowance	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
on time attendance	5	2.6	2.6	no payment	38	19.8	19.8
regular attendance	4	2.1	4.7	paid as per medical documents	64	33.3	53.1
festival	178	92.7	97.4	onetime payment	80	41.7	94.8
production efficiency	5	2.6	100.0	Others	10	5.2	100
Total	192	100.0		Total	192	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

According to the section 123 of the BLA, 2006, the wage period fixed for the payment of wages shall not exceed thirty days and the wages of every worker shall be paid within one week after the expiry of the wage period. This survey result shows that 80.7 percent of the workers get their salary of the last month before 10th day of the next month, 14.6 percent get their salaries of the last month before 15th day of the next month.

Basically, different bonuses are given to the workers for motivating them for higher work performance and sincerity in the work. In this study above 92.7 percentage of the female garment workers reported that they get only festival bonus from their employers, 2.6 percent (Table 12) get bonus for production efficiency and 2.1 percent of the workers get bonus for regular attendance in the work. One of the fundamental needs of the human being is medical allowances from the employer but it is very frustrating that 19.8 percent of the surveyed female workers say's that they get nothing from their organizations and 41.7 percent workers get onetime payment as medical allowance.

Table 13. Duration of Maternity Leave and Payment Structure of Maternity Leave of Women RMG Workers

Duration of maternity leave of women RMG worker				Payment Structure of maternity leave of women RMG worker			
Leave structure	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Payment structure	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
no leave	2	1.0	1.0	no-payment	17	8.9	8.9
1- month	16	8.3	9.4	regular salary	110	57.3	66.1
1- month	16	8.3	9.4	regular salary	110	57.3	66.1
2-months	84	43.8	53.1	paid as per medical document	63	32.8	99.0
3-months	83	43.2	96.4	Other	2	1.0	100.0
4-months	7	3.6	100.0	Total	192	100.0	
Total	192	100.0					

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

According to Maternity Benefit Act 1950, the maternity leave was of 12 weeks. The new BLA, 2006 increases the maternity leave from three months to four months and the benefit of maternity is payable according to section 48 of the act,

at the rate of daily, weekly or monthly average wages and such payment shall be made wholly in cash. This survey revealed that 43.8 percent (Table 13) of the workers are granted 8 weeks leave and 3.6 percent granted 16 weeks and only 1.00 percent granted no leave. While 8.9 percent of the female workers are paid nothing during their maternity leave and 57.3 percent of the workers get regular salaries.

Table 14. Amount of Savings and Transport Facility of Women RMG Workers

Amount of savings of women RMG workers				Transport facility of women RMG workers			
Savings per month (Tk.)	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Facility	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0-500	67	34.9	34.9	no facility	61	31.8	31.8
501-1000	88	45.8	80.7	one way	9	4.7	36.5
1001-1500	28	14.6	95.3	both way	102	53.1	89.6
1501-2000	8	4.2	99.5	transport allowance	20	10.4	100.0
above 2000	1	.5	100.0	Total	192	100.0	
Total	192						

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

Saving is a prominent factor that affects the social and economic condition as well as position of the garment workers. The survey result indicates that about 45.8 percent (Table 14) of the workers can save Tk. 500-Tk. 1000 per month and very small percentage 0.5 of the workers can save more than Tk. 2,000 per

Table 15. Satisfaction Towards Earning and Satisfaction Towards Job of Women RMG Workers

Satisfaction towards earning of women RMG workers				Satisfaction towards job of women RMG workers			
Level of satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Level of satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
very bad	9	4.7	4.7	very bad	12	6.2	6.2
Bad	76	39.6	44.3	bad	57	29.7	35.9
neutral	78	40.6	84.9	neutral	85	44.3	80.2
good	27	14.1	99.0	good	37	19.3	99.5
very good	2	1.0	100.0	very good	1	.5	100.0
Total	192	100.0		Total	192	100.0	

Source: Own Survey, November 2016-January 2017.

month. In this paper it reveals that 31.8 percent of the female workers do not avail any kind of transportation facility, while 53.1 percent are provided with two way transportation facility; only 10.4 percent are provided with transport allowance.

It is observed that the satisfaction level of the female garment workers towards earnings and overall jobs is in, rated average. As per the survey, 39.6 percent (Table 15) of the female workers are dissatisfied with their earnings, while 40.6 percent are neutral about their decision and only 1.0 percent are very satisfied with their earnings. More satisfaction of the female workers may be aroused from their realization that they could be unemployed and have no earnings so what they are getting is good for them, or from their awareness of their education, job experience, and socio-economic conditions of the country. In this study it is found that 44.3 percent of the female workers have neutral opinion toward satisfaction about their job and 29.7 percent of the female workers are not satisfied towards their job as they said bad about their satisfaction level. Only 0.5 percentages are satisfied with their job.

3. Some Incidents and Prospects of Garment Industries in Chittagong

Though RMG sector is contributing a lot to our economy, this sector is not out of its limitations.

Every year this sector faces many hurdles, incidents, and accidents. The following chart shows several incidents of recent time with causes and outcomes of those incidents occurred in Chittagong.

Table 16. List of Incidents at RMG's in Chittagong

No.	Factory Name	Location	Incident date	Causes and outcomes	Injuries	Deaths
1.	Haves Garments	Shah Amanat Bridge Area Chittagong	3/29/2016	Fire damaged valuables worth Tk 2.5 lakh of a RMG factory in Shah Amanat Bridge area of Chittagong city early yesterday. Fire Service officials said the fire originated at the store room of Haves Garments around 2:50am and damaged the valuables. Fire fighters doused the blaze after one and half-an-hour's effort.	2	0

2.	Ciho Fiber Ltd	Kalurghat, Chittagong	10/25/2015	Around 1 a.m. fire originated from the spinning room of the factory due to a machinery trouble and soon engulfed the adjacent rooms. Fire fighters doused the blaze after an hour and estimated the damage at Tk 5 lakh.	0	0
3.	Precious Apparels Limited	Chittagong	9/30/2014	At 7 a.m. fire originated on the fourth floor of the knitting factory. Three firefighting units brought the blaze under control by 8:30 a.m. Neither the cause of the fire nor the amount of damage was evident at the time. No casualties had been reported as of 8:33 a.m.	0	0
4.	Sagar Garments limited	Shah Amanat Bridge Area Chittagong	9/29/2014	At around 7:35 a.m. fire originated on the fifth and sixth floors of Precious Apparels Limited in the area. The extent of loss in the incident was worth Tk 1.20 crore. The cause of the incident could not be known immediately.	0	0
5.	Karnaphuli Knitting, Siddique Knitting Fashion Park International Ltd	Shitaljharna Chittagong	5/11/2014	At least two workers were burned to death as a fire engulfed two sock factories located in Shitaljharna residential area at BaizidBostami in the port city early Friday. The fire was started by an electrical short-circuit at about 4 a.m., police and fire service said. Chittagong Fire Service and Civil Defense Deputy Assistant Director said that the blaze had started at the factory and spread to adjacent Siddique Knitting. Both the factories manufacture socks.	0	0

Source: (Hasan, Mahmud, & Islam, 2017)

Several incidents occurred from 2014-2016 in different garment establishment of Chittagong. Among the incidents major problems were regarding fire origination in establishments where immediate action has been taken. Beside some unexpected incident occurred in past, there are some good news too for the women workers of Chittagong. According to one report published in The Daily Sun, (03-09-2016) the first-ever dormitories developed under public-private partnership for female garment workers in the port city are expected to be opened in November.

Chittagong Development Authority and Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association jointly started to build dormitories some four and a half years back. On June 2017, the dormitories were handed over to the garment owners but, these are still to be furnished inside.

Under the contract five six-storey dormitory buildings have been developed on a 36.5-katha of land of the CDA in the city's Saltgola Crossing area. Construction of the dormitories with modern facilities and amenities cost around Tk 30 crore, said the sources.

There are 244 rooms in the five dormitory buildings containing rest room, facilities for watching television and waiting room. And it is estimated that 4000 garments workers will be accommodated in these dormitories. A management committee consisting representatives from the industries will run the dormitories. Though accommodation for approximately 4,000 workers is very poor compared to 500,000 garment workers in Chittagong, it will motivate other garment owners to take such step in future.

4. Challenges of Women Workers

Women garments worker are facing many challenges in their work life as well as in daily life. In this study the following challenges are traced.

- a) Though, the minimum wage for garment workers was raised earlier, now it fall far short of the level which is considered to be a living wage-that is enough to allow a worker to provide her family with fundamental human need like food, shelter, clothing, water, health, education and transport.
- b) Women garment workers are forced to put in extra hours on a daily basis in order to meet unrealistic production targets set by factory owner. Yet, extra hours worked to meet this production targets are not considered overtime. Female workers are exploited more often than men as they are not ready and want to protest.

- c) Women workers also experienced overtime deduction for several reasons (lack of punctuality, failure to meet production targets, conversation with co-workers, absence without leave, making mistake at work, protesting management decisions).
- d) Working at night is a big challenge for women workers. It causes several problems in their family lives (separation from the children, problem with babies who are breastfeeding, domestic violence). In many organization women have to work at night shift who have already worked a day shift and they were threatened with losing their job if they refused to work a night shift.
- e) Women workers face many forms of mistreatment in the workplace (spoken obscene to with language, beaten, hit in the face, sexual and mental harassment, and mental torture with the threat of punishment).
- f) According to Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 no women are entitled to get maternity leave if she already has two or more survival children. But most of the women garments workers of our country have more than two children. Most women workers don't know about the full legal application about maternity leave and facilities. Those who are aware have to struggle to understand the complex calculation necessary to determine what they are entitled to. Many factories do pay maternity benefits less than statutory entitlement.
- g) In many garment factories women have to work in unhealthy, congested, noisy environment and they always have a fear of fire-out for some previous incident. Factory owners were seen reckless in this case.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1. Recommendations

The study suggests the following measures to protect the concern of the female workers and to save them from harassment:

- a) The amount of Wages/salaries paid to the women workers and the payment date of salaries affects the standard of living of the female workers. Therefore, the Government, BGMEA and owners of the garment industries should take some immediate steps to provide reasonable and standard amount of salaries as per their position and services at the end of the month or within the 5th day of the next month.
- b) Relationship of worker with owners in our RMG sector is generally very awkward and restricted. In some cases, owners underestimate workers and deprive them for their low status of life. This attitude and mentality

has to change. RMG factory owners should listen to demands of workers and either agree with them or assure workers to look into prompt steps to reach a solution.

- c) Job environment is to be made more healthy and safe for the female workers and compliance report may be sought for sustainable development of the industries. The factory owners or the management may arrange day care center, school, etc. for the children of the female workers at the factory premises.
- d) Through training program, education and different awareness programs and materials, workers and organizations will be benefited from improved safety practices.
- e) Torture and different kinds of harassment are very common issues in the garment industries. Female officers may be engaged or the male officers may be given proper training to reduce torture and harassment towards female workers.
- f) Activation or introduction of labor union in each garment industry communicates the claims of the workers to the higher authority and the information from the higher authority to the workers. Women representative should be ensured in the administration and leadership of the union.
- g) Though Bangladesh has enacted Labor Law (Act) to ensure the rights and regulations of the female workers in the garment industries but the provisions of the labor law are far from implementation. Therefore, government, different NGO's and BGMEA should monitor violation of the law against the poor and suffered female garment workers and steps should be taken as remedial.

5.2. Implications and Limitations of The Study

An important implication of this study is that factory owners should emphasize on rules and policies practiced in their organization to maintain good working environment for women workers. The policies, procedures and their implementation should be fair and implemented in unbiased manner. Equity in allocation of resources, fair distribution of responsibility and authority, treating workers with dignity and respect should be ensured for better satisfaction that ultimate lead to better organizational success. The current study is pertinent to practitioners as well as union leaders, as the findings may help them to identify the problems and also some recommendations with which the industry owners will be able to facilitate their organizational goals. Despite the positive

implications, the study has suffered from some limitations. Simple Random Sampling method used in this study may cause the problem of getting data from one part beside others which may have an effect on getting accurate results. Beside this, many women worker provide wrong information without understanding the fact as they were illiterate.

5.3. Conclusion

This study has been conducted to represent the social and economic condition of women garments workers in Chittagong. The garment sector has already recognized as the most prominent economic strength of Bangladesh which contributes more than 70 percent of the national income and about 90 percent of the garment workers are female. Due to participation in this income generating sector their living standard and status in the society got upgraded. Women workers face various crises and problems in the Readymade garments (RMG) sector. Different print media had written many reports and the TV channels had telecasts many pathetic stories on their low wages, health issues, nutrition, insurance, etc. but very few measures have been taken so far to solve these problems. The mentioned problems are making many constraints and also hampering the production, manufacturing and working environment of RMG sector. This emerging sector can meet its goal if the recommended measures are implemented.

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Enclosure (Questionnaire):

Name: Name of Establishment:

Designation: Types of Work:

Social Conditions of Worker:

1. Age status of woman RMG Worker--

- a) Upto-20 b) 21-30 c) 31-40 d) Above -41

2. Marital Status--

- a) Unmarried b) Married c) Widow d) Others

3. Family Members--

- a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) 5 f) 6

4. Earning Members.....

- a) 1 b) 2 c) 3 d) 4 e) above 4

5) Education levels

- a) Illiterate b) Can sign only c) Class 1-5 d) class 6-9
e) Higher Secondary

6) Nature of Job Experience --

- a) Unemployed b) agro-based c) Handcraft d) Garments Job

7) Duration of Job Experience --

- a) Less than 2 years b) 2-3 years c) 3-5 years d) 5-7 years
e) Above 7 years

8) Working Hours--

- a) Less than 8 hours b) 8-9 hours c) 9-10 hours d) 11- 12 Hours
e) Above 12 hours

9. Overtime working hours --

- a) 0-30 b) 31 -60 c) 61-90 d) 91-120 e) Above 120

10. Duration (In days) of casual Leave --

- a) No leave b) 0-5 c) 6-10 d) 10-15 e) 16 -20

11. Accommodation Expenses-----

- a) 0-500 taka b) 501-1000 taka c) 1001 – 1500 taka
d) 1501- 2000 taka e) Above 2000 taka

12. Workers turnover (No of factories changed)

- a) 0 b) 1 c) 2 d) 3 e) 4 f) More than five

13. Job environment (Level)

- a) Very Bad b) Bad c) Neutral d) Good e) Very Good

14. Nature of harassment --

- a) No Harassment b) Physical c) Mental d) Sexual
e) other

15. Application of labor Law --

- a) Don't Know b) No application c) Few Application
d) Good Application

16. Facilities of labor union --

- a) No union b) Prohibited by owner c) Manage top leaders
d) Other

17. Cause of labor unrest –

- a) Don't know b) Reduce exploitation c) Influence by Leader
d) Increase Salaries e) Other

Economic Conditions

1. Salary Structure

- a) Weekly b) Monthly c) Hours Worked d) Unit of production
e) Others

2. Basic Salary (per months) ---

- a) Below 500 tk. b) 500 – 1000tk. c) 1001 – 1500tk. d) 1501-2000tk.
e) Above 2000tk.