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## **WOMEN WORKER IN RMG SECTOR OF BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY OF CEPZ**

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### **Abstract:**

Readymade garment (RMG) industry is the key sector of the Bangladesh's economy in terms of Employment, production and foreign exchange earnings (World Bank, 1990). There are at present more than 4500 garment factories contributing about 80 percent of the country's export earnings. This tremendous success is greatly attributable to women workers, who account for the lion's share of the total labour force employed in the sector. But women were exploited easily due to lack of technical knowledge and training. Globalization as manifested in the RMG sector, failed to offer opportunities to the female labour force. Garment industries were exploited them as cheap source of labour (Halim and Kabir, 2005). In the garment factory, most of the female workers age is between 18 to 30 years. Qualitative methods were used in order to get a reasonably true picture of the entire population. The data were collected during the period from February to April, 2019. This study find out what are the main reasons to becoming a women garments worker, what the problems they facing during her garments life and to recommend some measures to improving the problems of RMG sectors female worker by this study.

**Keyword: Readymade garment (RMG), Women, BEPZA, CEPZ, Bangladesh**

### **1. Introduction**

The ready-made garments (RMG) sector of Bangladesh has got a greater fact than any other sector in terms of growth and foreign exchange earnings. It makes a significant contribution to the national economy by creating generous employment opportunities and reducing poverty through socioeconomic development. Despite unquestionable success story, this sector has got a number of formidable challenges for the future growth. The present study has made a search on the women worker RMG industry in Bangladesh. To accomplish the task, a descriptive research based on study of available records is conducted. The study reveals that since its inception, especially during the last three decades, the RMG industry contributed significantly through creation of physical infrastructure which is demonstrated

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by BGMEA listed about 4500 RMG<sup>2</sup> units along with the development of human capital as around 4 million workforce are directly involved in this industry. It has also contributed tremendously through empowering women as almost 90 percent of its labour force is female which ranked the highest in Southeast Asia. The apparel industry, employer of 40 million workers, mostly rural women, contributed 83.49% to Bangladesh's total exports of \$36.66 billion to date. According to Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) data Bangladesh's export earnings from the RMG sector stood at \$30.61billion, posting 8.76% growth in the last fiscal year.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to assess the scenario of the female garment workers employed in the garment industries located in Chittagong EPZ. To achieve the main objective, the study also sets the following specific objectives:

- a. To identify the reasons becoming women garments worker.
- b. To find out the socio economic status of women garments worker

## 3. Methodology of the Study

At the very beginning of the study an intensive literature review has been made. The literature included books, periodicals and journals related to female garment workers. Female workers were selected as sample because of their high percentage of participation as production workers in RMG factories. Garments and workers are selected following the random sampling method. The total number of sample for this study was 100, which were drawn from 15 garment factories situated in different locations of Chittagong Export Processing Zone. Region was selected as research area because researchers' working place is Chittagong EPZ and it was convenient for the researchers to collect data by self-financing. Data were collected during February to April 2019. The female workers irrespective of marital and religious status and ranks have been taken into consideration.

A self-constructed questionnaire was administrated to collect primary data considering the objectives of the study. The questionnaire consists of maximum close-ended and a little bit open ended questions, which was distributed among the female garment workers. The respondents were personally questioned and the questionnaires were filled in by the interviewer based on the response of the respondents. Out of the number of factors that influence socio-economic conditions, the following factors have been selected from each conditions respectively for the study purpose: age and marital status, family members and earning members, level of education, previous jobs and service length, working hours and overtime hours, workers turnover, casual leave, job environment, harassment, application of labour law, facilities of labour union, labour unrest; salary and its payment mode, payment dates, type of bonus

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/about>

<sup>3</sup> 'RMG exports saw 8.76% growth last fiscal year' Reported by Dhaka tribune on 5th July 2018

#### 4. History of RMG Sector in Bangladesh:

Garment Industry started developing in Bangladesh in the late 1970s when the high-cost producers, for example, US, EU, etc. moved to low cost countries for outsourcing their merchandises. It was the foreign buyers who initially motivated the Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to manufacture apparels under special terms and conditions to export.<sup>4</sup> The readymade garments industry acts as a catalyst for the development of Bangladesh. The "Made in Bangladesh" tag has also brought glory for the country, making it a prestigious brand across the globe. Bangladesh, which was once, termed by cynics a "bottomless basket", has now become a "basket full of wonders." The country with its limited resources has been maintaining 6% annual average GDP growth rate and has brought about remarkable social and human development. After the independence in 1971, Bangladesh was one of poorest countries in the world. No major industries were developed in Bangladesh, when it was known as East Pakistan, due to discriminatory attitude and policies of the government of the then West Pakistan. So, rebuilding the war-ravaged country with limited resources appeared to be the biggest challenge. The industry that has been making crucial contribution to rebuilding the country and its economy is none other than the readymade garment (RMG) industry which is now the single biggest export earner for Bangladesh. The sector accounts for 83% of total export earnings of the country.

The late Nurool Quader Khan was the pioneer of the readymade garment industry in Bangladesh. He had a vision of how to transform the country. In 1978, he sent 130 trainees to South Korea where they learned how to produce readymade garments. With those trainees, he set up the first factory "Desh Garments" to produce garments for export. At the same time, the late Akhter Mohammad Musa of Bond Garments, the late Mohammad Reazuddin of Reaz Garments, Md Humayun of Paris Garments, Engineer Mohammad FazlulAzim of Azim Group, Major (Retd) Abdul Mannan of Sunman Group, M Shamsur Rahman of Stylecraft Limited, the first President of BGMEA, AM Subid Ali of Aristocrat Limited also came forward and established some of the first garment factories in Bangladesh. Following their footsteps, other prudent and hardworking entrepreneurs started RMG factories in the country. Since then, Bangladeshi garment industry did not need to look behind. Despite many difficulties faced by the sector over the past years, it has carved a niche in world market and kept continuing to show robust performance. Since the early days, different sources of impetus have contributed to the development and maturity of the industry at various stages. We learned about child-labour in 1994, and successfully made the industry free from child labour in 1995. The MFA-quota was a blessing to our industry to take root, gradually develop and mature. While the quota was approaching to an end in 2004, it was predicted by many that the phase-out would incur a massive upset in our export. However, the post-MFA era is another story of success. Proving all the predictions wrong, we conquered the post-MFA challenges. Now the apparel industry is Bangladeshis biggest export earner with value of over \$30.61 billion of exports in 2017-18 financial year.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Banglapedia

<sup>5</sup>Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and exporters association (BGMEA), <http://www.bgmea.com.bd>

#### 4.1 Scenario of Bangladesh Ready-Made Garments Industry at a Glance

Bangladesh is the second largest exporter of ready-made garment products in the world for last three decades which exported over 132 Countries around the world. It's estimated to double from 2010 to 2015 and nearly triple by 2022.<sup>6</sup> The total export of Bangladesh has crossed the USD 30.18 billion mark for the first time in the history which is 13.83% growth during the last fiscal year.<sup>7</sup> The growth of this industry has been dramatic, increasing from 30 factories in 1980, to over 6000 in 2014.<sup>8</sup> The RMG sector provides direct employment to around 4.4 million people, 80% of whom are women.<sup>9</sup> Around 20 million people are directly and indirectly depending on this sector. Bangladesh offers not only a low competitive cost but also ensures best quality products for the high-end garment products to famous global brands such as Adidas, Benetton, Calvin Klein, Diesel, DKNY, G-Star, Hugo Boss, Nike, Puma, Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger. Bangladesh RMG Sector has duty-free market access to most of the developed countries including EU, Norway, Switzerland, Canada, Japan, and Australia. Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer and Exporters Association (BGMEA) is working to build a safe and sustainable garment industry. The ministry of labour and employment commission, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies found that about 80.8 percent factories buildings are approved structural designs, 85.9 percent factories are approved layouts, 92 percent factories have valid fire safety licenses and 55 percent factories electric generator is located outside of the factory. Under "TREES" (Toward Resource Efficiency and Environmental Sustainability) many of garments industry practices in the area of waste management, waste heat recovery, cogeneration, energy efficient technology, environmental management system and encourage them to adopt eco-friendly technologies. Some garments recently taken a greater step of going towards carbon-free production.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.2 Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA)

The Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) is an agency of the Government of Bangladesh and is administered out of the Prime Minister's Office. Its objective is to manage the various export processing zones in Bangladesh. BEPZA currently oversees the operations of eight export processing zones (EPZ). A ninth zone is scheduled to open in the future. Recently government has announced that in 15 years 100 new EPZ and SEZ will be established.<sup>11</sup> The Government provides numerous incentives for investors for opening factories in EPZs. For example, new factories enjoy tax holidays for 5 years. Also, labour unions and other activities that are often viewed detrimental to productivity are banned inside the EPZs.

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<sup>6</sup>[http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/McKinseyReportof2011\\_#.U9xxkUDG2qc](http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/McKinseyReportof2011_#.U9xxkUDG2qc)

<sup>7</sup><http://www.epb.gov.bd/index.php>

<sup>8</sup><http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2014/03/28/25672>

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.theindependentbd.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=222937:the-apparel-story&catid=169:op-ed&Itemid=201](http://www.theindependentbd.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=222937:the-apparel-story&catid=169:op-ed&Itemid=201)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/media/newsletters/june2014/june2014.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Meghna Group to build two economic zones". The Daily Star. 12 May 2015. Retrieved 1 October 2016.

### 4.3 Chittagong Export Processing Zone- CEPZ:

Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ), also known as Chittagong EPZ, is the first and one of the eight export processing zones in Bangladesh located at South Haliashahar in Chittagong.<sup>12</sup> It was established in 1983 following an Act of Parliament approved in 1980 by the Government of Bangladesh.<sup>13</sup> In 2010, CEPZ was ranked third in the best cost-competitiveness category and fourth as the best economic potential in the global ranking in a survey among the world's 700 economic zones carried out by FDI magazine.<sup>14</sup>

## 5. Findings and Analysis:

Earlier of this report mentioned that, the study basically finds out the reasons becoming women garments worker and the socio economic status of women garments worker. That's why we generated the data in bellow according of the objectives of the study. Data presented here in table which information gathered the survey time:

### 5.1 Age Status of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ

Age Type	Upto-20	21-25	25-30	30-40	Total
Person	40	30	20	01	100

Most of the female workers are belong to young. The study finds that above 99 percent of the female workers are aged less than 30, while only 1 percent of the workers are aged above 30 years. This implies that female workers cannot work in the garment fully for long time because of occupational hazards and workplace stress and the employers do not prefer aged-experienced workers in the factories to reduce cost by employing fresh workers at low remuneration (Majumder & Begum 2000).

### 5.2 Marital Status of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone

Marital Status	Unmarried	Married	Divorced	Widow	Others	Total
Frequency	41	36	13	10	0	100

The study finds that among the female workers surveyed, 41 percent are married and 36 percent are unmarried.

### 5.3 Family Members of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ

Family Members	1	2	3	4	5	Above 5	Total
Frequency	03	15	30	25	20	07	100

<sup>12</sup> "Chittagong Export Processing Zone". BEPZA. Archived from the original on 29 December 2012. Retrieved 10 January 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Rahman, S M Mahfuzur (2012). "Export Processing Zone". In Islam, Sirajul; Jamal, Ahmed A. (eds.). *Banglapedia: National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh* (Second ed.). Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

<sup>14</sup>"Ctg EPZ ranks 4th in global ranking". The Daily Star (Bangladesh). Retrieved 10 January 2013.

Study finds that 30% of female worker have 3 family member, 20% have 5 person in family and 18% have 1-2 family member while 7% have above 7 member in family.

**5.4 Earning Members of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ**

Earning Members	1	2	3	4	Above 4	Total
Frequency	45	26	15	10	02	100

Cost of living 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. Our survey reveals that 30 percent of the female workers have 3 or more than 5 family members, while 70 percent workers' have one or two earning members.

**5.5 Education Level of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ**

Level of Education	Illiterate	Can Sign Only	Class I-V	Class VI-X	Above Class X	Total
Frequency	04	37	38	20	01	100

Education is the backbone and foundation of getting a job and performing better in the job. Increase in the level of workers' education contributes to a reduction in male-female wage differences and to the visible decline in the sexual harassments faced by the female workers in the work place (Mahmud and Ahmed 2005). Our survey indicates that of the total workers served only 4 percent are illiterate and 37 percent can sign only. On the other hand, 38 percent of the workers have education up to class V, while 20 percent have education above class X. Because workers educational level is low, their work understanding and working capacity is expected to be poor. For this, they get poor remuneration and facilities from employers.

**5.6 Duration of Job Experience of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ**

Job Experience	Less than 2 years	2-3 Years	3-5 years	5-7 years	Above 7 years	Total
Frequency	45	33	10	5	7	100

Experience is an extra advantageous factor for getting a job and getting higher amount of remuneration in any organization. The survey finds that more than 45 percent of the workers were less than 2 years' experience. Therefore, in most cases they are not capable of providing expected performance to the employer and hence being deprived appropriate remuneration. About 33 percent of the female workers have work experience in garment factories and about 10 percent have only 3 years' experience. Job opportunities for women in Bangladesh are limited because of cultural barriers and limited mobility.

### 5.7. Working hours of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ

Work Hours	Less than 8 hours	8-9 hours	9-10 hours	11-12 hours	Above 12 hours	Total
Frequency	07	65	15	10	03	100

The most tedious condition of work in the garment factories is the long working hours. According to section 100 of the Bangladesh Labor Act (BLA) of 2006, no adult worker shall ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than 8 hours a day. Of the total women workers surveyed 15 percent work more than 9 hours a day, while 65 percent work more than 8 hours a day.

### 5.7 Overtime work hours of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ

Overtime Work Hours	0-30	31-60	61-90	91-120	Total
Frequency	25	50	12	13	100

Overtime work is an advantage and an extra earning source for the female garment workers. According to Section 109 of the BLA, 2006, no women shall, without her consent, be allowed to work in an establishment between the hours of 10.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m. About 40 percent of the workers work more than 2 of hours overtime a day, while 15 percent work more than 3 hours of overtime a day. In some cases, workers do overtime in the week end. As their salary is very low, they always try to earn some extra amount from overtime. Hence, they cannot provide much time for their family or children. As a result, they become unhappy in their family life. Moreover, female workers are obliged to shorten their time for pleasure and sleep due to long working hours and all domestic chores (Majumder & Begum 2000).

### 5.8 Job Environment of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ

Level	Very Bad	Bad	Neutral	Good	Very Good	Total
Frequency	5	5	10	65	15	100

Job environment is a vital factor for the garment workers, specifically for female garment workers. Our survey finds that job or work environment is quite good in the surveyed garment factories. Only about 5 percent of the female workers are dissatisfied with their job environment, while 65 percent are happy with their job environment and remaining 30 percent are neutral in this regard.

### 5.9 Periodical Salary Structure and Modes of Salary payment of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ

Salary structure	Weekly	Monthly	Hours worked	Units of work	Others	Total
Frequency	00	100	00	00	00	100

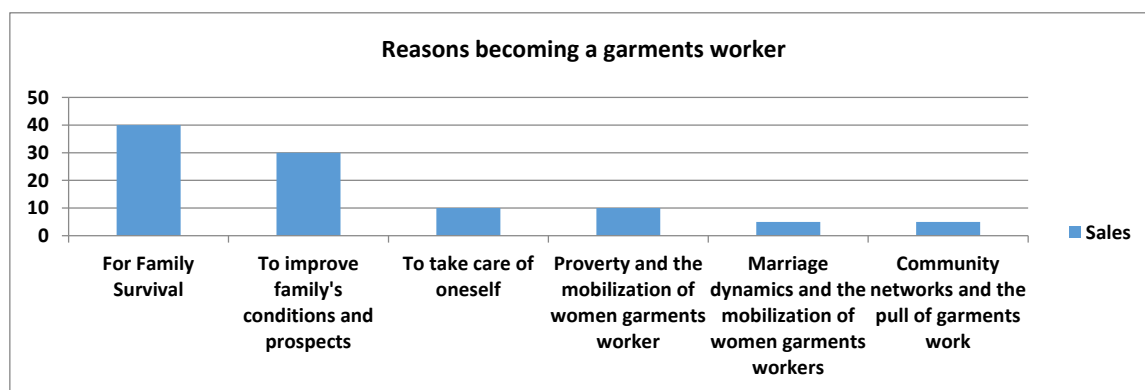
According to the section 123 of the BLA, 2006, the wages of every worker shall be paid within seven days after the expiry of the wage period. Our survey result shows that 100 percent of the workers get their salary of the last month before 10<sup>th</sup> day of the next month.

### 5.10 Bonus Structure of Female RMG Workers in Chittagong Export Processing Zone - CEPZ

Bonus structure	On time attendance	Regular Attendance	Festival	Production Efficiency	Others	Total
Frequency	100					100

### 6. Reason Becoming a garments Worker:

The study found there are six influencing reasons behind a women becoming a garments worker. These are:



In this section I have given an in-depth analysis of these explanations, and the household conditions and processes that underlie their construction. The dynamics of garments entry are thus shaped by the particular conditions, resources and constraints that such membership places on the women workers. In looking at how women experience the garments entry process as members of households, I draw on conceptualizations of the household that recognize the reality of both intra- household co-operation and conflict (Sen, 1990).

#### 6.1 For family's survival:

The study found that most widespread explanation offered by the informants was that they had entered garments in order to ensure their family's survival. While this was an explanation offered by women of varied marital status, it was largely confined to women who were residing with their sending family households. In consonance with the understanding that garments work was a matter of family survival were the particular areas in which the woman's pay was expended: food, rent and the repayment of pressing loans incurred by the household.

However, equally common was the absence of a male wage-earner. Many of the women lived in households in which fathers or husbands were seasonally employed. There were also many cases in which men, due to death, divorce or desertion, were simply not present in the household. What was the process of garments entry like for the women who



identified family survival as a primary motivating factor? Two types of garments work entry histories were recounted. The first related a shift from other types of income-earning activities into garments work. In some cases, the woman herself had moved from a different job into garments, while in others the change had been an intergenerational familial one, with the mother and/or older sister of the worker being involved in another employment sector. But for all of these women, the process of becoming a garments worker was clearly not one that involved negotiating the question of whether or not to have a job.

### **6.2 To improve family's condition and prospects**

For a relatively small number of the women workers, entry into garments work was explained as a move that had been undertaken to enhance the economic situation of their sending family households. In their accounts of how they had come to work in garments, these women emphasized that it had been a matter of choice rather than necessity; they and their families could and in fact did survive quite well without their income. All of these women were residing with their sending family households. The pay of the woman was spent on luxury expenditures or, more frequently, on investments designed to enhance the family's surplus income or financial security. Particularly common was the earmarking of income for the current or future needs of children or younger siblings. Many of the women indicated that their money would be spent to educate family members, or to set them up in business, send them abroad, or get them married. Once again, a variety of household income management practices operated here. In some cases, the woman spent or invested the money herself, while in others; the pay was handled by another household member.

### **6.3 To take care of oneself:**

The third set of explanations offered for the decision to seek garments employment centered on the idea that this path was a way to take care of oneself financially and build one's own future, thus reducing the burden and responsibility of the family for one's upkeep and well-being. The economic status of the sending family households of these women, as suggested by an analysis of patterns of land ownership, was poor. The majority came from landless or functionally landless households, while the remainder came from households that can be categorized as small or medium land-owning. An intriguing characteristic concerns the position of the worker within the sending family household. In a large number of cases, the rural migrant garments worker was the eldest sibling of the household.

### **6.4 Poverty and the mobilization of women garments workers**

Among the different groups of women that the garments sector has mobilized are women from poor urban households. For these women, wage employment, whether it is brick-breaking or domestic service is a necessity. The ability of the garments sector to recruit such women has stemmed from the relative attractions of garments work in comparison to the other types of unskilled employment available to women with low levels of education in urban areas. Besides women from poor urban households, the garments sector has also mobilized into its ranks women who would quite likely not be engaged in wage employment if jobs in garments were not available. For these women, garments work is a way to enhance personal and/or household economic resources. It is also a way to gain a measure of economic and social independence.

### 6.5 Marriage dynamics and the mobilization of women garments workers

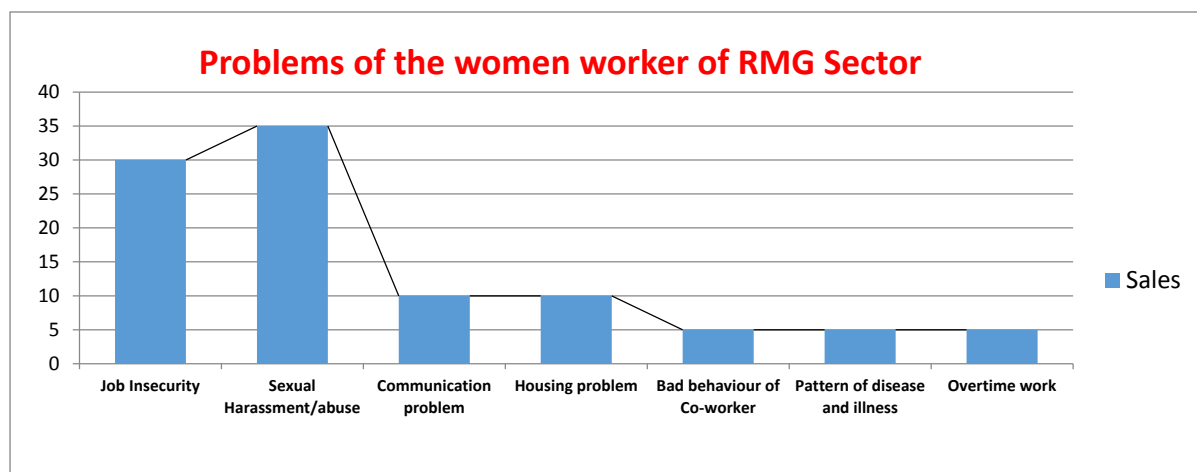
The instability and uncertainty of marriage for women is an important dynamic underlying the mobilization of women into the garments workforce. As I have noted, a significant proportion of the sending family households of the garments workers are female headed, a condition that is related to the poverty of the households. Also, for some women, the decision to enter into garments work may be triggered by the experience of a failed marriage. A number of these marriages are dissolved immediately or shortly after they commence, often due to demands for dowry on the part of the bridegroom and his family. In general, the problem of dowry seems to play a critical role in the dynamics of garments work entry among single rural women. Further research and analysis is sorely needed on the issue of dowry inflation, in particular its causes and consequences for women.

### 6.6 Community networks and the “pull” of garments work

It is perhaps stating the obvious to say that the entry into garments work does not occur in a social vacuum. Information and support from community members is a critical part of the garments entry process. Those who come from communities where garments work is an established course of action are more likely to enjoy the assistance of sending community members in the garments work entry process. The information provided by community networks about garments work is effective in mobilizing women because of the distinctive opportunity that garments work represents for women.

### 7. Problems of the women worker of RMG Sector:

The study identified some points of problems whom facing everyday by women workers. These inserted below:



#### 7.1 Job insecurity

Most of the jobs in the garment industry are temporary in nature. Workers are hired when needed and fired when the need is over. The study finds that 30 percent of garment workers suffer greatly from job insecurity. Their jobs are insecure not only because of the temporary nature of their jobs, but also because of the informal nature of recruitment. The garment industry belongs to the formal sector, but few time workers employed in this

industry do not receive appointment letters. Therefore, terms and conditions of their employment are unknown to them. They do not know for how long they will be employed, although a temporary worker has the right to know the tenure of his/her employment. Because of this informal nature of their jobs, the female workers reported that they feared dismissal from their jobs. This condition of their employment causes one kind of mental harassment.

## **7.2 Sexual harassment/abuse**

Sexual harassment is an important source of mental stress for female workers. The incidence of sexual harassment ranges from insults directed at a person's gender, suggestive comments, or language, and demeaning remarks to unwelcome touching and grabbing and other physical assaults. These types of sexual harassment were under reported since female workers were very shy to disclose any information on this subject. Moreover, unmarried workers were afraid of disclosing any information on sexual harassment since it decreases their marriage possibility. Little number of female workers encountered with sexual harassment in the factory. But case studies disclose the fact that sexual harassment is largely prevalent among the young garment workers. However, sexual harassment is not limited in the workplace. It extends to home too. The police, who could have protected them from this harassment, were themselves involved in harassing the women garment workers.

## **7.3 Communication problem**

Most female workers travel to and from the workplace on foot. It has been estimated that, on an average, a garment workers travels more than 5 kilometres a day on foot (Paul-Majumder, 2003). This long- distance travels is not only physical strenuous but also mentally stressful, since garment workers worry about attacks by mastans, by touts, harassment by police, harassment by boys in the street, etc.

## **7.4 Housing problem**

Most of the women workers lived in unhygienic conditions of the slum areas the rooms were very small. The most dangerous aspect of their living condition was the type of toilet they used and the number of user per toilet. Most of the female workers used 'katcha' toilet. In many families only one toilet was used by many women workers. The condition of the toilet was very unhygienic. In most cases, urinary tract infection may result from the use of this unhygienic toilet. However, garment workers have access to safe drinking water. The workers drank water supplied by water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) or from tube wells. Water supplied by WASA is not safe to drink unless boiled. All these unhygienic living condition of the garment workers may adversely affect their health status.

## **7.5 Bad behaviour of the co-workers**

Bad behaviour of the co-workers is another important problem for female workers. In fact, for garment workers the workplace is their second home, since they spend about 12 hours a day in this place. Hence, good relation among the workers is very important. But in many cases, the same does not happen. Most of the female workers complained that they were beaten in the factory and their colleagues were beaten too. In many cases, the female workers were found to be brusque with each other. It is mainly because of the fact that the

workers could not develop a sense of empathy, since the majority of the workers were migrants coming from different villages of the country.

### 7.6 Pattern of diseases and illnesses

Work in the garment factory severely affects women's health, as they are confined in a small factory. Moreover, the hot and humid climate of Bangladesh makes the environment of these small factory buildings unhygienic and this condition is largely responsible for widespread prevalence of some illness and diseases among the garment workers. Prolonged standing is also common in the garment factory. In the finishing section of the factory, the ironer category workers have to keep standing up throughout their work period. The case is similar with the folder category workers. The helper category workers in the sewing section also have to work standing up for a long time. According to occupational physicians, low back pain, sore feet, varicose veins, swelling in the legs, general muscular fatigue and other health problems have been associated with prolonged standing (Carson, 1994).

### 7.7 Overtime work

The normal working hours in the garment factory is 10 hours a day, usually from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. There is Seasonality in its production, hence work hours vary accordingly. The peak season is from October to January, while the slack season is from March to June. As the labour requirement increases during the peak season, the workers are required to work overtime. The extent of stress can be measured from the workers unwillingness to do overtime work and also from the workers job dissatisfaction due to the extended work hours. Besides, overtime work is also stressful for married workers, since they often have to face severe censure for reaching home late at night after finishing the overtime work. Female workers also encountered various mishaps while returning home late at night after finishing overtime work.

## 8. Prospects of Women Worker of RMG Sector:

The Prospects of women in RMG sector can be viewed in following topic:

- **Cheap Labour:** Bangladesh is a third world country. Labour is cheap here particularly women labour. Garments industry has become flourishing here because of cheap labour of women.
- **Skill:** Bangladeshi women are traditionally expert in sewing. They are creative in clothing. With their creative work, they put an importance in the success of garment industry here.
- **Attract the Foreign Investors:** Bangladeshi women are expert garment related work. Bangladeshi govt. also provides training for them. So, they become an asset to RMG. As a result, foreign investor feels interest to invest in Bangladesh.
- **Earning Foreign Currency:** Bangladesh exports garment products. By exporting garment products, she earns huge foreign currency. Women are like engine of RMG sector of Bangladesh. So, there is no doubt the participation of women in earning foreign currency is very important.
- **Adding value in GDP:** Garment industry added GDP. As women drive the garment sector, we can say, women are adding value in GDP.

- **EPZ:** In Bangladesh, there are 9 EPZs. In these EPZs women are the main labour. Because of the labour of women, these EPZs are running successfully. So, they are also adding contribution in our EPZs.
- **Standard of living:** In past Bangladeshi women were confined in home. But time has changed. They are working in different sectors. Among the sectors garment industry is one. They are also earning money from working in garments. As a result, standard of living is increasing day by day. In this regards, their contribution can't be eliminated.

#### 9. Possible way to Face the upcoming Challenges for RMG sector in Bangladesh:

To face the upcoming challenges in RMG sector, the country should take the following measures:

- Formulation of a national policy on RMG industry
- Unconditional and quick implementation of core labour standards and labour laws at workplace of all RMGs.
- Establishing a compulsory social safety net package for RMG workers.
- Exploration of new market for RMG to protect the industry and the workers and take maximum advantage of free excess to Canadian, Australian and other markers.
- Capacity building training and re-training activity for employers and workers in RMG sector to develop productivity and efficiency level.
- Develop backward linkage industries for RMG.
- Export and product diversification.
- Building alliances with likeminded neighbours and competitors.
- Continuous training program to sensitize the workers about their rights and interest should be undertaken in cooperation with and financial assistance from the fraternal organizational abroad.

#### 10. Recommendations

The study recommends the following to protect the interest of the female workers and to save them from various problems:

- In maximum cases, the amount of salaries paid to the female workers and the date of payment of salaries negatively affects the life standard of the female workers and creates dissatisfaction among the workers. Therefore, the Government, BGMEA and owners of the garment industries should take initiative to provide reasonable and standard amount of salaries as per their position and services just at the end of the month or within the 5th day of the next month.
- Long working hours due to working at more regular and overtime hours create many problems for the female workers at their families. If salaries and remuneration are increased up to a level of standard, then the intention of doing more overtime can be reduced and thus the length of working hours can be minimized; as a result, more employment facilities will be created in the garment industries for female workers.
- Job environment is to be made more hygienic and safe for the female workers and compliance report may be sought for sustainable development of the industries. The

owners or the management may arrange day care centre, school, etc. for the children of the female workers at the factory premises.

- Accommodation and transportation facilities are very acute for the female workers of the garment industries. Therefore, housing and transportation facilities (both way) are to be arranged by the garment industries.
- Educational level of the female garment workers is very low; they work at lower positions due to this their productivity is poor. Hence, they get poor salaries and they cannot claim for more. If the educational level of the workers can be developed then their productivity will increase and they will be able to perform better and earn more. For educational development, the garment owners should establish educational institutes and training centres to make them educated about different rules and regulations as well as make them aware of their responsibilities.
- Torture and different types of harassment are very common in the garment industries; in some cases these tortures cause deaths of the workers during office time. Female officers may be appointed or the male officers may be given sufficient training to reduce torture and harassment towards female workers.
- Activation or introduction of labour union as bargaining authority in real sense is to be ensured in each garment industry to communicate the claims of the workers to the higher authority and the message from the higher authority to the workers. Female representative is to be ensured in the leadership of the union.
- Though Bangladesh has enacted Labour Law (Act) to ensure the rights and obligations of the female workers in the garment industries but the provisions of the labour law are far from implementation. Basically, the management of the garment industries is frequently violating the law. Therefore, government and BGMEA should be aware of the violation of the law against the poor female garment workers.

## 11. Concluding Remarks:

The Bangladesh readymade garment industry is the backbone of the country's economy. It also provides good employment opportunities to the poor, especially for skilled women workers. While it does provide low-skilled women workers the ability to earn by themselves, it also creates several vulnerabilities related to health, life standard and life threatening risks. Findings showed in this article that factory owners' desire to gain profit by rules for the workers to attain production targets, neglecting women workers' health rights, etc. have made the entire work environment dangerous and insecure for women. Since the concept of trade liberalization is gender neutral and there are no specific and strong policies to ensure women workers' rights in the free trade policies, garment factory owners do not feel accountable for their deeds. There is also wage discrimination between male and female workers. The buyers' responsibility in upholding women workers' rights are also very much important. Thus, the poor women workers of Bangladesh will be greatly benefited if all the stumbling blocks are taken in consideration. Moreover, proper coordination between national and international measures should be ensured to uphold women RMG workers' rights.

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