

# MONITORING WORK AND WORKING CONDITION OF WOMEN EMPLOYED IN READY-MADE GARMENT INDUSTRIES OF BANGLADESH

March 2019

Published by  
Karmojibi Nari  
Green Avenue Park  
House 01, Flat B8, Road 03, Block A, Section 06  
Mirpur, Dhaka 1216

Tel: 02- 58051545  
Fax: 02- 58051546  
www.karmojibinari.org  
Email: karmojibing1@gmail.com

Date of Publication  
March 2019

Copyright  
Karmojibi Nari

Printed by  
Kharimati Ad.com  
kharimati@gmail.com

## MONITORING WORK AND WORKING CONDITION OF WOMEN EMPLOYED IN READY-MADE GARMENT INDUSTRIES OF BANGLADESH

Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry has been playing a significant role in economy by earning lion's share of export income (81.23 percent) and creating jobs for millions of people. RMG directly employs 4.2 million people (European Commission 2016)—of whom majority is women.<sup>1</sup> Women RMG workers are plagued with various problems (e.g insufficient wage, irregularity in timeliness of wage payments, unsafe working conditions. Specifically, women workers have many issues that need to care especially in areas of workplace discrimination and career prospect, harassment, work and working time including rest, occupation health and safety, welfare provision, social protection and freedom of association, collective bargaining and social dialogue. Although gender-based wage discrimination is not seen that much now a day, discrimination exists in areas of equal treatment— women are forced to do overtime more than the men and the cut from the overtime allowance is more for women workers than men. Women workers face severe discrimination with regard to the scope of promotion and their career prospect is limited. A study shows that only 5-10 percent of the women workers to become supervisors (The Daily Star, March 8, 2015). Women workers' workplaces are not free from sexual harassment which ranges from simple insults and demeaning remark to unwelcome touching and grabbing.

Despite legal provision there is still variation in practicing maternity leave —there are factories that violate the provision in different ways e.g. leave without payment, payment for fewer months than the stipulated months mentioned in law. Few RMG workers get the day care and in many garment factories, mothers do not have space or time to breastfeed. Breastfeeding rates by working women in garment factories can be as low as 10 per cent. (UNICEF 2015). Workplaces of these workers are not gender sensitive— there are insufficient numbers of toilets for women; no arrangement of sanitary napkins at workplace; and most of the factories also do not arrange women doctors. Besides, disproportionate representation of women workers in different channels of negotiation and bargaining (e.g. TU, participation committee, safety committee, welfare committee, canteen management committee) is also widely marked.

Bangladesh is signatory of UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Following the eighth periodic report of Bangladesh the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommends that the State party: (a) Take

<sup>1</sup> It has been widely understood, though based on limited data, that women made up around 80 per cent of the labour force of the garment industries. Recent data, however, shows a much lower percentage. A 2015 survey by Asian Centre for Development reported that 65 per cent of workers in the RMG sector were women. The study by EC (EC 2016) puts the number at 55 per cent. In the factories under the ILO RMG programme (Better Work Bangladesh), it was found that 58 per cent of the labour force consisted of women

effective measures to monitor and improve the working conditions of women in the informal and private sectors by ensuring regular labour inspections and social protection coverage; (b) Address the gender wage gap by applying gender-neutral analytical job classification, evaluation methods and regular pay surveys and establishing effective monitoring and regulatory mechanisms for employment and recruitment practices; (c) Regulate and monitor the working conditions of women employed in the garment sector, in order to protect them from unsafe labour conditions, through regular inspections and increased fines for abusive employers; (d) remove all obstacles to the establishment of trade unions, especially for women employed in the agricultural sector; (e) Adopt and implement specific legislation concerning the protection of women from sexual harassment in the workplace in accordance with the High Court Division guidelines.

In this backdrop, present study is an endeavor to unearth the prevailing situation of women workers of garment sector in terms of their working condition. The findings of this study would be instrumental to recommend policy options to improve the condition. The main objective of this study is twofold:

- To explore and document the status of working condition of women employed in RMG sector in Bangladesh; and
- Prepare a set of recommendations that would be placed before the government for improving the working condition for women RMG worker.

This study employs quantitative approach. The study team has carried out questionnaire survey to collect necessary information. A set of sample survey questionnaire was prepared and administered to collect data from 1000 garment workers from 100 factories located in Dhaka and Narayanganj. Factories were selected randomly from different zones of Dhaka and respondents of those factories were chosen purposively based on availability, accessibility, and their willingness to give answer (Table 1).

Table-1: Distribution of respondents according to survey location

Study area		Number	Percent
Dhaka	Dhaka 4	229	22.9
	Dhaka 5	271	27.1
Narayanganj	Narayanganj 1	320	32.0
	Narayanganj 2	10	1.0
	Narayanganj 3	170	17.0
Total		1000	100.0

## KEY FINDINGS

### Personal information of women workers

**Age of women workers:** Women workers are mostly young. The mean age of these workers is 23.74 years. 18-30 years is the age range of 81.9% workers. Only 9.7 % women workers are over 30 years of age. Contrary, women workers of less than 18 years is 8.4%.

**Education:** Primary level education is the most common among women workers. 23.8 % women workers are educated up to primary level. 23.8% worker have JSC level education, and one in every ten has secondary level education. 12.5% women worker of RMG can sign only.

**Number of family members:** The average family size of women workers is 4.73 which is larger than the national scenario (4.04). Majority (53.7%) of the women workers belong to families comprised of 4-5 member. Families of 6 and more member have been reported by 28.5% women; and 16.8 % have families having less than four members.

**Dependent member in family:** Workers' family have on an average 2.37 dependent members. However, the largest segment (37.2%) of the workers have two dependent members followed by three members (26.1%). 12.5% workers have four or more dependent members.

**Earning member in family:** On an average, workers' family have 2.53 income earners. Majority (55.2%) of the workers have two earning members and 26.7% have three income earners. More than three income earners have been found in families of 14.2% workers.

### Work and Workplace Related Information

**Type of factory:** Majority (51.3%) of the women work in woven factories. Women workers working in knit and composite factories are 34.6 % and 14.1% respectively.

**Work experience in RMG sector:** Average work experience in RMG sector is not so long, 4.38 years. The largest section has 1-3 years experience. 28.1% workers have been working in RMG sector for 4-6 years, and 14.1% for 7-10 years. Only 6.6% workers have more than ten years of working experience in RMG sector.

**Work-length in the current workplace:** At the current/present factory, the average work experience of the workers is 2.32 years, where more than two-thirds (68.5%) of all workers have been working for 1-3 years, and 13.5% workers have 4-6 years experience. Only 4.4% workers have been found who have more than 6 years experience at their respective current factories.

**Number of factories where respondents worked:** The largest proportion (36.8%) of women has worked in two factories in their total experience of work in RMG sector. 32.2%

workers have worked in one factory. One in every five workers has worked in three factories. Besides, 11.2% workers have experience of working in four and more factories.

### Working Conditions of the Factories

Employment Contract: Violation of employment contract related provisions are evident. Among several employment contract related provisions service book is the least implemented, and in contrast, attendance card is the most implemented.

- 43.1 % workers do not have appointment letter.
- 27.1% do not have identity card.
- More than two-thirds (37.4%) are not provided with pay-slip.
- More than three-quarters (78.6%) do not have service book.
- 86.1% workers have attendance card.

### Wage and benefits

One in every four workers report that wage and overtime is kept due--often or always. Where wage is kept due always for 16.5% workers. However, 74.7 percent worker claim that wage and overtime are not kept due.

In preceding month of this survey average personal income of women workers was BDT 8943.96. A little more than half (51%) of women's income was BDT 8001-12000. 38.3 percent worker earned maximum (upto) BDT 8000. Just 10.7 percent workers' had personal income over BDT 12,000.

- Knowledge among the women workers about calculation of overtime compensation is poor. Three in every four women do not know the calculation method.
- Workers (84.2 percent) generally get festival bonus, though not all. About 14.3 percent claimed that they do not get festival bonus.

In the preceding month of this survey workers' monthly average family expenditure was BDT 17944.14. BDT 12001-20000 was the monthly family expenditure of 50.6 percent workers. 21.9 percent workers had an expenditure over BDT 20,000. On the other hand, 8.2 percent workers' family expenditure was less than BDT 12,000.

### Working hour, leave and rest

The violation of national legal provisions and international norms is widely marked. Majority (55 percent) of the workers work 10 hours daily. More than one-third (34.2%) workers work more than 10 hours every day.

Almost all workers do overtime work which is mostly mandatory for the workers.

- 92% workers do overtime work.
- 86% workers claim that overtime is mandatory.

Interestingly, almost all workers prefer to work overtime hours.

- 98% workers prefer to do overtime.

Women workers get lunch break. However, except lunch break workers are not provided with opportunity to take rest.

- 100% workers get lunch break.
- 96% workers do not get chance to take rest, except the lunch break.

There is wide variation of in practice of leave provisions. Among several types of leave weekly holiday is the mostly enjoyed. Many workers are even unaware about the practice of leave at their workplaces.

- 99.4% workers get weekly holiday
- 74.4% workers get casual leave, whereas 11.9% workers do not know whether casual leave is given.
- 79.3% workers get sick leave, though not paid in most cases
- 32.5% workers get annual leave, and 23.6% do not know whether annual leave is given
- 65.4% workers get maternity leave, and 16.4% workers lack awareness on availability of maternity leave at workplace.

Night duty is mandatory for many women workers. In other words, when night duty is scheduled these workers are left with not options but to do night duty. There are workers who lack awareness in this regard. Lack of awareness has also been among many workers regarding practice of taking written consent from workers for night duty. However, largest segment of the workers claim that employers never take written consent from them.

- Night duty is mandatory in opinion of 28.7% workers.
- 7.6% workers do not know whether night duty is mandatory.
- 48.6% women worker inform that employer never take written consent for night duty.
- 46.7% women are unaware of taking written consent for night duty.

### Safety at Work

Not all employers generally do provide workers with information regarding risks at workplace. One in every four workers claims that their employers do not inform workers in this regard.

RMG workers who have faced/observed accidents (pricking of needle during work, cutting finger or hand, fracturing leg and fracturing hand, fire) at workplaces are quite high. 40.4 percent workers have this experience. There are also workers, though few, who don't know whether any accident took place at their workplaces.

Most workplaces maintain/have made available different facilities/arrangement for ensuring workplace safety. However, it is also true that still some factories have not made sufficient arrangement.

- 96.8 percent women worker claim workplaces have that fire extinguishers.
- About 10.6 percent workers' workplaces do not have emergency exits.
- 18 percent workers' do not get training for risk prevention/reduction.
- PPE is available at 86.2% workers' workplaces.
- Evacuation plan is available at 86.3% workers' workplaces.
- About 19% workplaces do not arrange fire drill.

### Availability of safety committee

Although workplaces have to have safety committees according to Bangladesh Labour Act, violation of legal provision is noticed by many workers. 25.7% workers informed that employers had not formed safety committees at their workplaces. Lack of awareness among workers about safety committee is also significant. 17.7% workers do not know whether safety committees exist at workplaces. 26.3% respondents claimed that they participated in the activities of safety committee.

### Workplace environment

Workers have diverse opinion on condition of different factors that the workplace environment entails. Majority of the workers perceive that the conditions of various factors are good except for sound. Majority consider condition of sound is moderate.

- 65.4% workers consider that condition of cleanliness is good.
- 46.6% percent consider the sound condition as moderate.
- 56.5% percent consider temperature condition as good
- Ventilation condition is good to 65.5% workers.
- 65.9 % workers think that lighting condition is good.
- Condition of dust and fume is considered as good by 55.7 percent workers.
- 69% workers perceive humidity condition as 'good'.
- 50.6% percent workers consider the condition of safe drinking water is good, 15.4% as moderate.

- Working space is considered good by 70.3% workers.
- State of separate toilet is considered as good by 51.9% workers, and as moderate by 18.8% workers.

### Workplace harassment and discrimination

Workplaces of the women workers are not free from harassment. In other words, women workers experience different forms of harassment at workplace. Of the different forms verbal abuse/harassment is the most common one.

- Three out of every four women workers have reported verbal harassment.
- Six of every ten women workers have talked about psychological harassment.
- Physical harassment has been reported by 14.8 percent workers.
- Sexual harassment has been noticed by 12.2 percent workers.

Despite having evidences/existences of harassment of different forms most workplaces lack anti-harassment committee. Even workers in a large number are not aware in this regards.

- Anti-harassment committee is absent at workplaces of majority workers (59.2 percent).
- Only 15% women workers have claimed that their workplaces have anti-harassment committees.
- 25.8% are unaware of availability of such committee.

Employers mostly do not provide women workers with any transport facility when they do the night duty, even many workers are not aware of this issue. 68.1 % workers claim that they do not get such facility. Availability of this facility has been reported by 10.4% workers, and rests (21.5%) do not know whether such facility is provided.

Discriminatory practice with regard to promotion of women in upper position is wide spread. 70% workers report discrimination in this regard. However, the matter of concern is that large number of workers (24.2%) are not aware of this issue.

### Welfare provisions and social protection

Welfare provisions are being implemented/available at varied degree at the workplaces. However, 100% availability has not been reported by women workers for any of the among several welfare-related provisions/facilities. Important to note, first aid, separate place for lunch, and recreational facility are more available facilities; whereas accommodation, canteen, and restroom are less available facility.

- 63.3%, 59.5%, and 64% women workers have reported respectively the availability of first aid, separate place for lunch, and recreational facility.
- None claimed the availability of accommodation facility.
- Day-care is absent at workplaces of 59.2% workers. Although 32.2% claim availability, they further inform that in most cases workers hardly get chance to use day care.
- Breast-feeding corner is absent at workplaces of 53.7% workers, 12.5% are unaware of this provision.
- 71.7% workers claim that employers reduce workload during pregnancy.
- Rest room is not available at workplaces of 87.6% workers.

Women workers are mostly deprived of social protection related facilities at workplace. High prevalence of ignorance/unawareness among workers concerning the social protection facilities is a striking feature in this regard.

### Workers' organization at workplace

Workers' organization/committees of different forms are available at workplaces of majority workers (52.2%). Many workers (14.7%) do not know whether organizations/committees exist at workplace. Among different committees/associations availability of OSH committee is the most frequent (77.8%), followed by participation committee (74.1%). On the other hand, trade union is available at workplaces of only 18% workers.

- Provident fund is absent at workplaces of two-third (66.3%) workers, and 21% are not aware in this regard.
- Welfare fund is absent for 51.3% workers, and 40.4% have no idea.
- Absence of health and life insurance facility has been reported by 58.5% workers; the rests (41.5%) do not know the issue.
- 55.7% workers report the unavailability of group insurance; and remaining workers (44.3%) do not know.
- 51.5% workers claim the unavailability of accident insurance; and 34.2% are unaware.
- About 45.9% claim that gratuity is given.
- 48.3% claim that compensation is not given; 25.4% are not aware.
- Maternity leave with pay is available at workplaces of 55.5% workers.

Majority of women workers generally are not members of the organization/committees available at workplaces. Three in every five workers are not members of any organization/association at workplace.

35.3% workers claim that they faced repercussion following speaking up on issues of work and workplace.

Second Fact Sheet on

**MONITORING WORK AND WORKING  
CONDITIONS OF WOMEN EMPLOYED  
IN THE READYMADE GARMENT  
INDUSTRIES OF BANGLADESH**

March 2019

কর্মজীবী নারী  
KARMOJIBI NARI (KN)

