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Health Facilities and Safety Issues of Female Garments Workers: A Study at Savar Area, Dhaka

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ABSTRACT

As most of the female workers in Bangladesh tend to low educational qualification due to drop out from school in early-stage to support their families and they have a lack of awareness about health and safety issues especially many of those workers still do not get pregnancy care although it is the prime concern for women. They are very often harassed by co-workers in the factory and face social trolls due to work in the garments. This study aims to investigate the health care facilities and safety hazards of female workers in the garments industry in Bangladesh. Primary data are collected (female workers) from different garments at Savar area through the questionnaire survey method. In this study, descriptive statistics, contingency analysis, and binary logistic analysis are used to examine the factors' effect on female workers' social situation and health facilities. Results reveal that about 93.6% of females have come from the village and a large number (43.9%) is a young adult (25-34 years). About 32.8% female has trolled socially due to work in the garments. Contingency analysis has been revealed that educational status, family types, educational status of the husband, occupation of husband, reason of job, spend income in own way, social status for doing the job, inequality in higher rank and reason of dropout from a job have a significant association with the social troll of the female garments worker. From the binary logistic regression analysis, it has been found that family types, husband education, and occupation, reason of job, spend income in own way, inequality in higher rank and dropout from a job have a significant effect on social troll of the female garments worker. Garments authority and the government should take effective programs and enforce labor law for improving health facilities and safety issues in Bangladesh for female workers.

1. Introduction

Most of the workers particularly female workers in Bangladesh tend to low educational qualifications due to drop out of school in early-stage to support their families and some are illiterate. Due to poor educational qualifications and illiteracy, they have lack awareness about health and safety issues (Akterujjaman and Ahmad, 2016; Gupta *et al.*, 2015; Akhter *et al.*, 2010; Attanapola, 2004).

They are more malnourished than men at every stage of life but this phenomenon is more visible in the case of adolescent girls and pregnant mothers. But the safety and health condition record of Bangladeshi garment factories is unacceptable and requires a collective effort. Most of the garments provide only primary care for

their workers. It is very disappointing to learn that many of the garment workers still do not get maternity leave and pregnancy care and found that the different factors are responsible for the harassment of female garment workers in Bangladesh (Akhter *et al.*, 2010; Khan *et al.*, 2015; Naved *et al.*, 2018). Female workers are sexually harassed by their co-workers in the factory or by police or by eve-teasers in the street several times but no security actions are taken by the respective authorities (Gupta *et al.*, 2015; Islam *et al.*, 2017 & 2018; Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000). Several times they have been faced social troll at the workplace. They do not get a job without signing an agreement. In Bangladesh, it is very easy to get cheap labour, since inception is the main formula for being so successful in the industry. But the cost-saving practice in the industry often affects the health and

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safety of the workers. The Bangladesh garment industry is vulnerable to a wide range of safety issues, such as poor electrical wiring and insufficient fire safety arrangements affecting its young, vibrant and urbanizing workers from diverse ranges of safety hazards ranging from simple cut injury to premature death (Mahmud *et al.*, 2018; Mohmu and Rajath, 2017; Khosla, 2009).

As the garments industry is now the major sector of Bangladesh to earn the foreign currency and a lot of different types of highly educated, semi-educated, and illiterate people are directly and indirectly involved with this sector as their major occupation. For this reason, improving female workers' health and safety issues can play a great role in the national economy. This study aims to determine the health facilities and safety issues of female garment workers at Savar area, Dhaka. The objectives of the study are to explore the health care facilities of the female garment workers; to identify the major safety issues of the female garment workers and to investigate the factors affecting the social toll of the female garment workers.

2. Materials and Methods

According to the nature of the study, female workers

of Bangladeshi garment industries who have at least one-year job experience preceding the survey data were considered as respondents. In Bangladesh, the total number of garment industries is 4560 (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association BGMEA) which are situated at Savar, Gazipur, Tangail, Narayanganj, Dhaka and Chittagong. Among them, the present study randomly considers Savar area (Figure 1) as a study population area. A total of 500 garment industries are situated in Savar area (Figure 1). Among them, three (3) garment industries are selected randomly following the presence of female garment workers. A total of 375 respondents were selected using a purposive sampling method from three considered garment industries (125 respondents from each) from the study area. Thereafter, check the inaccuracy and finally 314 respondents were found as sample data for this study.

All data were collected using a structured questionnaire by direct interview. The frequency distribution, contingency analysis and binary logistic regression analysis are applied to explore the relationship by Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 16. Safety issue like a social toll is evaluated by various socio-economic and demographic variables. The complete study is based on the proportion and percentage distribution.



Figure 1. Green colored area (Savar) is the study population area

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Characteristics of the Respondents

The Table 1 depicts that the second largest part of respondents are in age bracket 38.3% are 18-24 years, 43.9% young adult (25-34 years), and remaining 17.8% in 35 years and above. From this evidence, it is clear that most of the female garment workers are young adults.

Marital status is an important characteristic of research activities. When considered the percentage distribution, it reveals that a large portion of the respondents (83.4%) are married followed by 14.7% unmarried, and the remaining 1.9% divorced or separated. Among 314 respondents about 93.6% of respondents come from a rural area and 6.4% from an urban area of Bangladesh (Table 1). From this percentage distribution, it is clear that most of the female garments workers are moving towards town although their permanent address is a village.

No nation can progress without education. Therefore, education is the most important factor in this study. From Table 1, it is also observed that 13.4% of garment workers are illiterate, 43.3% completed primary level, 25.8% secondary level and only 17.5% completed a higher education level. This percentage indicates most of the female workers are primarily educated and very few are higher educated. Family types play a very important role in human life. It is highly effective in the respondent's behavior. From Table 1 it is observed that about 73.6% of respondents live with the nuclear family and 26.4% live with joint families. From this distribution, it is perceived that maximum respondents live with a single-family.

Reasons for working in the garments reveal that about 38.5% of women work for financial insolvency, 1.5% work for own interest, 3.2% work for the negligence of husband and the remaining 56.7% work for the family. It may be clear that most of the garments workers are

Table 1. Percentage distribution of female garment workers according to their characteristics

Characteristics/ Personal profile	Number	Percentage (%)
Age		
18 - 24 years	120	38.3
25 - 34 years	138	43.9
35 years and above	56	17.8
Marital status		
Unmarried	46	14.7
Married	262	83.4
Divorced/ Separated	6	1.9
Reasons of job		
Financial objections	121	38.5
For own interest	5	1.6
For neglect of husband	10	3.2
For family	178	56.7
Level of education		
Illiterate	42	13.4
Primary	136	43.3
Secondary	81	25.8
Higher	55	17.5
Place of residence		
Urban	20	6.4
Rural	294	93.6
Family types		
Nuclear	231	73.6
Joint	83	26.4
Monthly salary (in taka)		
8000	31	9.9
8000-9999	84	26.8
10000- 14999	159	50.6
15000 and above	40	12.7
Working hours (per day)		
<8 hours	233	74.2
>8 hours	81	25.8
Total	314	100

worked for financial insolvency and family purposes in Bangladesh (Table 1).

3.2. Medical Facilities and Safety Issues of Female Garments Workers

Overall, most of the respondents express their opinion that medical facilities are available and free for only primary health care and only 0.6% of respondents said they get pregnancy care also. From Table 2 it's found that

among 314 respondents 32.8% of females have trolled socially for doing the job. This percentage indicates, still, now most of the females are neglected in society due to work in the garments. Table 2 also depicts that about 80.9% of females do not face any harassment on the way of working place whereas 19.1% face harassment. Still, now harassment does not remove completely from our society. Moreover, 70.0% of females have signed an agreement for getting a job and it indicates that the

Table 2. Percentage distribution of female garment workers according to medical facilities and social safety issues.

Characteristics	Number	Percentage (%)
Availability of medical facilities		
No	3	1
Yes	311	99
Type of medical facilities		
Primary care	270	86
Pregnancy care	2	0.6
Others	42	13.4
Expenditure for medical care		
Full free	311	99
Full paid	3	1
Troll for doing job		
No	211	67.2
Yes	103	32.8
Harass at working place		
No	254	89.9
Yes	60	19.1
Discrimination at work place		
No	304	96.8
Yes	10	3.2
Agreement sign for job		
No	90	28.7
Yes	221	70.4
Inequality in higher rank		
No	192	61.1
Yes	121	38.5
Total	314	100

majority of the females do not get a job without signing an agreement. Still now about 38.5% of women are considered inequality in the higher rank and it indicates that in a society there exists inequality and females are deprived of their common rights in the workplace (Table 2).

In this study, the majority of the respondents (38.5%) leave the job for the family's disgust and the rest of them (27.7%) drop out from jobs for the social situation. Likewise, about 13.1% for the husband's disgust, 12.4% for the problem in the factory and 6.7% for a personal reason leave their job. This percentage indicates that family and society do not permit them to continue work

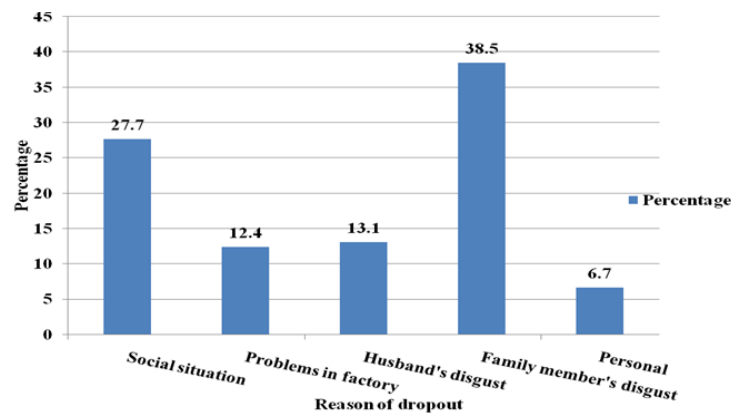


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of the respondent's dropout reason from their job

in the garments (Figure. 2).

In this study Table 3 depicts the statistically highly significant ($p < 0.000$) association between social troll for working garments with educational status of the respondents. It is also observed that 14.3% illiterate, 26.5% primary, 37.0% secondary and 57.4% higher educated respondents have trolled socially for working garments. Among the respondent no higher educated females are socially trolled. The findings of the study indicate that social troll due to work of the respondents has significant ($p < 0.01$) association with family types of the garments worker. It is found that about 37.7% of the total respondents who are trolled socially belong to

a singular family and 20.3% of joint family. Here it can be observed that the workers from joint family are less trolled than singular families. Table 3 shows that husband's education of the respondents has highly significant ($p < 0.000$) association with social troll due to work of the garments workers in Bangladesh. The study also reveals that among the workers 22.2% are trolled socially whose husbands are unemployed. This percentage is higher for those whose husband works with their wife.

Determinants Association of Social trolls due to work of Female Garments Workers with Selected Socio-economic and Demographic Factors

A significant ($p < 0.000$) association has been found

Table 3. Association between social troll of female garment workers and their some selected characteristics.

Characteristics	Social troll due to work			Significance
	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total (%)	
Level of education***				
Illiterate	36 (85.7)	6 (14.3)	42 (100.0)	Significant
Primary	100 (73.5)	36 (26.5)	136 (100.0)	
Secondary	51 (63.0)	30 (37.0)	81 (100.0)	
Higher	24 (42.6)	31 (57.4)	55 (100.0)	
Family types**				
Nuclear	144 (62.3)	87 (37.7)	231 (100.0)	Significant
Joint	66 (79.7)	16 (20.3)	82 (100.0)	
Place of residence				
Urban	14 (69.2)	4 (30.8)	18 (100.0)	
Rural	195 (63.3)	99 (33.7)	294 (100.0)	
Husband's education***				
Illiterate	43 (81.1)	10 (18.9)	53 (100.0)	Significant
Primary	83 (74.1)	29 (25.9)	112 (100.0)	
Secondary	29 (56.9)	22 (43.1)	51 (100.0)	
Higher	17 (41.0)	23 (59.0)	40 (100.0)	
Husband's occupation***				
Unemployed	14 (77.8)	4 (22.2)	18 (100.0)	Significant
Job	82 (79.6)	21 (20.4)	103 (100.0)	
Business	35 (53.0)	31 (47.0)	66 (100.0)	
Others	17 (89.5)	2 (10.5)	19 (100.0)	

Reasons of job***

Financial objections	108 (89.3)	13 (10.7)	121 (100.0)	Significant
For own interest	4 (80.0)	1 (20.0)	5 (100.0)	
For neglect of husband	8 (80.0)	2 (20.0)	10 (100.0)	
For family	91 (51.1)	87 (48.9)	178 (100.0)	

Spend income in own way***

No	55 (90.2)	6 (9.8)	61 (100.0)	Significant
Yes	156 (61.7)	97 (38.3)	253 (100.0)	

Change social status for doing job***

No	46 (90.2)	5 (9.8)	51 (100.0)	Significant
Yes	165 (62.7)	98 (37.3)	263 (100.0)	

Inequality in higher rank***

No	154 (80.2)	38 (19.8)	192 (100.0)	Significant
Yes	56 (46.3)	65 (53.7)	121 (100.0)	

Reason for dropout from job ***

Social situation	73 (83.9)	14 (16.1)	87 (100.0)	Significant
Problems in garments	34 (87.2)	5 (12.8)	39 (100.0)	
Husband's disgust	23 (56.1)	18 (43.9)	41 (100.0)	
Family disgust	59 (48.8)	62 (51.2)	121 (100.0)	
Personal	17 (81.0)	4 (19.0)	21 (100.0)	

N.B:* indicates 0.05; ** indicates 0.01 and *** indicates 0.000 level of significance

between social trolls due to work and spend income in their way of the respondents. Moreover, about 38.3% of females who can spend income in their own way are also socially trolled. It means that they have trolled socially when they spend their own income through their self-interest. Table 3 shows that inequality in higher rank of the respondents has highly significant ($p < 0.000$) association with the social troll due to work of the garments workers in Bangladesh. Among the workers, about 53.7% of females have considered inequality in higher rank for social troll and 80.2% of females who do not consider inequality in higher rank do not face any social troll. From these findings, we may conclude that social trolls will minimize from society when inequality removed.

It has also found that reasons of job of the respondents

has highly significant ($p < 0.000$) association with social troll due to the work of the garments workers in Bangladesh (Table 3). The findings of the study also revealed that about 10.7% of female workers work for financial insolvency, 20.0% work for their own interest, 20.0% work for the negligence of husband and the remaining 48.9% work for the family. It may be clear that most of the garments workers are worked for financial insolvency and family purposes in Bangladesh

3.3. Determination of the effect of the factors on Social trolls of the Female Garments Workers

Table 4 depicts that the female garments worker with a joint family, have a significantly 8.7% higher risk of facing social troll compare to those workers who live in a nuclear family. In the case of the illiterate and primary educated

Table 4. Multivariate logistic regression estimates for facing social troll of female garment workers

Different independent variables	Odds ratio Exp.(b)	95% C.I.	
		Lower limit	Upper limit
Level of education			
IlliterateRC	1	-----	-----
Primary	1.209	0.381	3.835
Secondary	1.174	0.326	4.231
Higher	1.248	0.311	5.004
Family types			
NuclearRC	1	-----	-----
Joint	1.087*	0.489	2.417

Place of residence			
RuralRC	1	-----	-----
Urban	0.675	0.186	2.448
Husband's education			
Illiterate	0.319**	0.083	1.22
Primary	0.291**	0.089	0.946
Secondary	0.492*	0.171	1.416
HigherRC	1	-----	-----
Husband's occupation			
UnemployedRC	1	-----	-----
Job	0.589	0.2	1.738
Business	1.326**	0.486	3.622
Others	0.859	0.28	2.638
Reasons of job			
Financial objections	0.400**	0.173	0.925
For own interest	0.543**	0.129	2.292
For familyRC	1	-----	-----
Spend income in own way			
NoRC	1	-----	-----
Yes	2.668**	0.945	7.533
Change social status for doing job			
NoRC	1	-----	-----
Yes	1.03	0.319	3.325
Inequality in higher rank			
NoRC	1	-----	-----
Yes	1.897**	0.923	3.897
Reason for dropout from job			
Social situationRC	1	-----	-----
Problems in garments	1.101	0.312	3.887
Husband's disgust	1.438**	0.47	4.402
Family disgust	1.889**	0.746	4.784
Personal	0.648*	0.161	2.608

N.B:* indicates 0.05; ** indicates 0.01 and *** indicates 0.001 level of significance

husband, female garments workers have significantly (31.9% and 29.1%) less risk of facing social troll. Female garments workers have significantly 32.6% higher risk of facing social trolls whose husband business holder. In the case of job reasons, financial objection and personal interest have significantly 40.0% and 54.3% respectively less risk of facing social troll of female garments worker than family necessity. Spending self-income money by own decision has a significantly 166.8% higher risk of facing social troll than who can't. In the case of inequality in a higher rank, it has revealed that female garments workers have significantly 89.7% higher risk of facing social troll due to. Female garments workers who are dropout from a job due to husband disgust and family disgust they have significantly 43.8% and 88.9% more risk respectively and personal interest has 64.8% less risk of facing social troll.

4. Recommendations

The Readymade garments (RMG) sector is the oxygen of the economy of Bangladesh. This sector is leading foreign currency earner of the country that received more than three fourth (about 81.32%) of total export earnings (Bangladesh Bank, 2015). So, it is necessary to develop the plan and policy for the garments sector. Some recommendations have been placed to overcome the problems, which are faced by most female garments workers in Bangladesh.

Followings are recommended to include in the planning and implementation strategy for the garments sector-

- The government should take initiative to ensure security by garments owners for the female workers as well as male workers where they will able to work safely,
- The government should increase formal education regarding moral education to reduce the social troll,

- The government should enforce the empowerment of women to lessening female harassment,

5. Conclusion

The conducted present study is an attempt to evaluate the medical facilities, expenditure as well as health issues and safety issues such as harassment, inequality in the workplace and social troll of female garment workers in Bangladesh. In this study, the basic information of the respondents has investigated in short-lived and expressive form as anyone gets a preliminary idea about the study population and their socio-economic status. The study reveals that most of the female workers have come from the village and live in town for the preference of their job. Most of the female workers of the garment industries do not get pregnancy care although it is very crucial and priority for them. Moreover, it is found that the majority of female garment workers are facing social trolls for continuing their job in garments industries yet. Therefore, female garment workers face so many constraints to carry on their job. Poor workplace safety, one of the most important issues of Bangladesh garment industries is facing for a long period. Finally, government, industry associations such as BGMEA and buyers all should work together to improve the workplace with health facilities and safety issues of the garment industries in Bangladesh.

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