

PRESENT STATUS OF WORKERS IN READY-MADE GARMENTS INDUSTRIES IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

The Ready Made Garment (RMG) industry has been placed the largest export earnings of Bangladesh where more than 5000 garment factories are running, employing over 4 million people of which more than 80% workers are women. RMG industry is considered as the back bone of the country's economy-The main strength of RMG sector in Bangladesh is poorly paid garment workers. This article depicts the wages level, age group, gender, family life and working hours of workers in RMG industries in Bangladesh. It is notable that the living situation of garments workers may change last couple of years. Nowadays their children also go to school & they can serve their old parents. Already government fixed the minimum wages for their better standard of living. Though it is not sufficient but it is improving.

Keywords: Garment worker, Textile workers, working hour, Living hour, Wages, Residence facility

1. Introduction

Readymade Garment (RMG) is the leading sector of Bangladesh in terms of employment, production and foreign exchange earnings (Ali, 2008). Despite the fact that Bangladesh does not produce cotton, the country is the second largest exporter of garment products in the world for last three decades. Even during the global economic recession when imports by major sourcing countries dropped significantly, our garment industry remained the favorite choice for many countries. In 1982-83, the readymade garment

sector had a 1.1% stake in the total export. In 2013-14 this grew to 79.63%. It makes up of GDP (Mahmud, 2012). The apparel industry took the export earnings from USD 31.57 million in 1983 to USD 21.5 billion in 2013 (BGMEA, Members' Directory 2013-2014). However, there was no magic wand that helped the sector to come to today's position; rather various factors act as impetus for steady growth of RMG sector in Bangladesh. It is still surprising to many that how the garment industry in Bangladesh continues to show robust performance even sometimes rowing against the tide. There are number of reasons why Bangladesh has been a favorite sourcing destination to international customers.

With confidence, determination and hard work the apparel industry started its journey in 1980s and has come to today's position. The industry emerged at the time when Bangladesh began its struggle for achieving economic emancipation and leading the country to prosperity with its limited resources. That time jute industry was the major export product, which contributed to the herculean task of rebuilding the war-ravaged country. But the 'Golden Fiber' lost its golden days. The readymade garment (RMG) sector emerged after that, which within a short span of time appeared to be crucial to our economy as a source of export earnings and employment generation. In 1980, there were 50 in the country and they employed a few thousand (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004). At present there are 5,400 factories in the country and over four million workers (BGMEA, Members' Directory 2013-2014). Garment factories in Bangladesh are expanded mainly on the easy availability of labor especially of the female labor accessibility. The RMG industry created employment opportunities i.e. especially for female workers and now this sector is considered as one of the main sources of employment for female workers of Bangladesh. This industry has provided the largest employment opportunities for women in the industrial sector where more than 85 percent of the production workers are women (Islam and Zahid, 2012).

Kabeer (2000) in his study examined that the majority of women workers rated their access to employment in the garment factories in positive terms because of its improvement on what life had been like before. Paul-Majumder (2003) conducted a study on the physical and mental health status of garment workers and how problem affect labour productivity, competitiveness of the garment industry in the world market and the working life of the workers, particularly of female workers. However, employers prefer female workers not only because they are cheaper and abundantly available, but also because they are more vulnerable, docile and manageable than male workers. They accept without protest the flexible terms of employment and are also seen less likely to be organized and susceptible to "anti-management propaganda" from outside (Khan 2001).

One of the most important factors that caused the rapid development of RMG industry in Bangladesh is the population. Whether population is a boon or bane for a country depends largely on how it is managed and utilized. Besides, the prospect of a country's economy hugely depends on the management of its population. The populace has appeared to be the blessing for Bangladesh as it is the driving force behind success of RMG industry, which requires a good number of workforces. The demographic profile of Bangladesh's population has helped the apparel industry to thrive. Most of the female workers are very young & their average is below 30 years (Md. Mehedi, 2014). The vibrant and young population of this country is the major strength of RMG sector.

Garments & textile workers are the lifeblood of our apparel industry. So, after some recent unfortunate accidents in our RMG sector, several initiatives have been taken to improve working conditions in garment factories. Both national and international organizations are making concerted efforts to improve working conditions in garment factories and significant progress has been made in this regard.

Also present government improve their salary to improve their living standard, their children now can go to school. Here data has been collected from different garments industry & taken workers opinion directly to understand their feelings about the change.

The aim of this study is to access the present conditions of garment workers in Bangladesh especially in Dhaka & Gazipur area.

2. Methodology

For assessing the family condition of textile & garment worker, a survey was conducted in the Dhaka & Gazipur city. Workers were selected as sample from knit garments manufacturing unit. The survey covered total number of 90 respondents, which were drawn from 5 factories situated in different locations of Dhaka (Padma Polycotton Knit Fabrics LTD) & Gazipur (Renaissance Apparels LTD, Southern Garments, Fashion House Millennium, Cotton Mart LTD) area using a convenient sampling technique. Data were collected during 02 January to 20 January, 2015 where a self-constructed questionnaire was used to collect primary data considering the objective of the study. The questionnaire chart related with workers family condition. These included age, sex, marital status, family members, residence environment, children study, transportation facilities, wage, overtime and children status, income and expenses problems, recreation facility within salary. Simple statistical technique like frequency distribution, percentage of frequency was used to analyze the collected data.

3. Result and discussion

3.1 Age group wise workers

Most of the workers are very young. The result shows that most of workers are aged in between 22-25 years which is the about 42.22% of the total (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of Workers as per age Group.

Characteristics	Categories	Respondents	Percentage
Age group (years)	18-21	20	22.22
	22-25	38	42.22
	26-29	25	27.77
	30-33	6	6.67
	34-37	1	1.1



Figure 1: Percentage of Workers as per age Group.

This implies that workers cannot work in the garment fully for long time because of occupational hazards and the employers do not prefer aged experienced workers in the factories may be to reduce cost by employing fresh workers at low remuneration.

3.2 Gender wise workers.

Maximum 42.22% workers are from 22-25 years old which create great empowerment to RMG sector. This energetic worker just change the development & they contribute greatly in country's GDP growth.

In garment industry 66.66% workers are female where 33.33% workers are male, which means garment industry empowered by women shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentage of Workers as per Gender.

Characteristics	Categories	Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	30	33.33
	Female	60	66.66

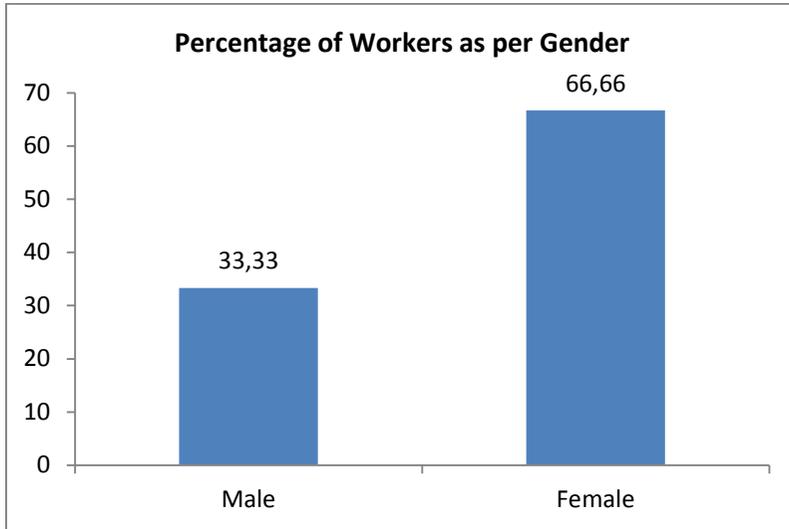


Figure 2: Percentage of Workers as per Gender.

Also before 20 years back the ratio of man & woman working in Bangladesh is 9:1. Just unbelievable development occurs in this sector. It is now a dream ratio for women workers. There is a great contribution towards national economy. GDP now just depends on these women workers.

3.3 Schooling and family of workers

It is very hopeful that all the children of garment workers are now going to school with dress, books as well as essential things. Unbelievable contribution towards worker’s parents now. If we see the statistics some years ago of their lifestyle and their parents’ lifestyle, it was very poor in shape; they couldn’t take regular food & wear dress. But nowadays after their revised salary; now they can help their parents continuously, not only this they provide them festival dress (Table 3).

Table 3: Percentage of Workers as per Contribution towards their Children & Parents

Characteristics	Categories	Respondents	Percentage
Children	School	90	100
	Book	90	100
	Dress	81	90
Parents	Food	54	60
	Monthly amount	81	90
	Dress	45	50
	Festival amount	27	30

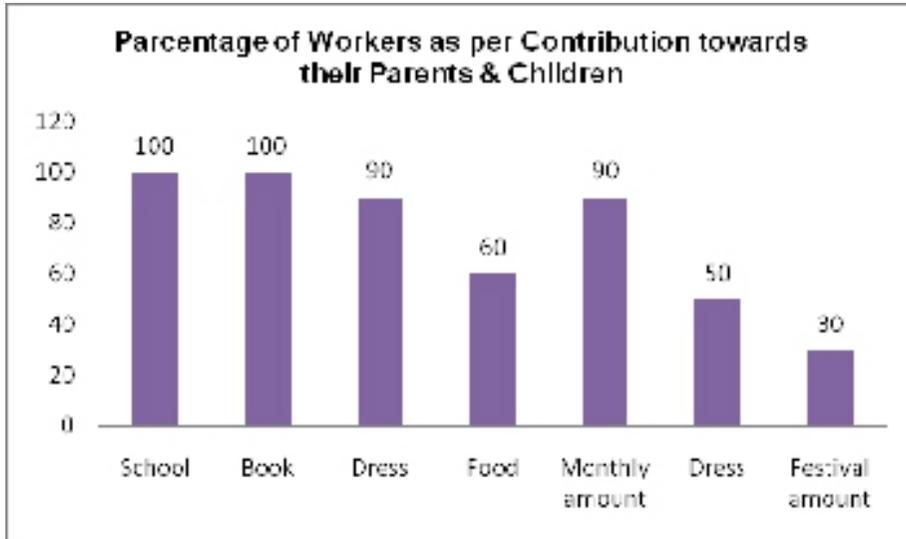


Figure 3: Percentage of Workers as per Contribution towards their Children & Parents.

3.4 Residence facilities

Proper sanitation issue now also improving not only for garments workers but also for total Bangladesh. This is a massive improvement for Bangladesh. 80% of garments & textile workers get sanitation. But main problem is sharing of a toilet; about 20-30 persons now use one toilet which create not only problem but also unhygienic. Maximum workers want a toilet for every 10 persons. Water supply is a very big issue, now they are very much struggling for clean water supply. About 61.1% workers get water (Table 4) but not sufficient for their bath & washroom as well as workers are unhappy for pure drinking water. So it is very needed to solve their clean water supply. But in their working place now they are getting pure drinking water which is supplied by the factory management.

Table 4: Percentage of Workers as per Residence Facilities.

Characteristics	Categories	Respondents	Percentage
Residence	proper sanitation	72	80
	proper water supply	54	61.1
	Proper gas supply	84	93.33
	proper electricity	12	13.33
	Television	90	100

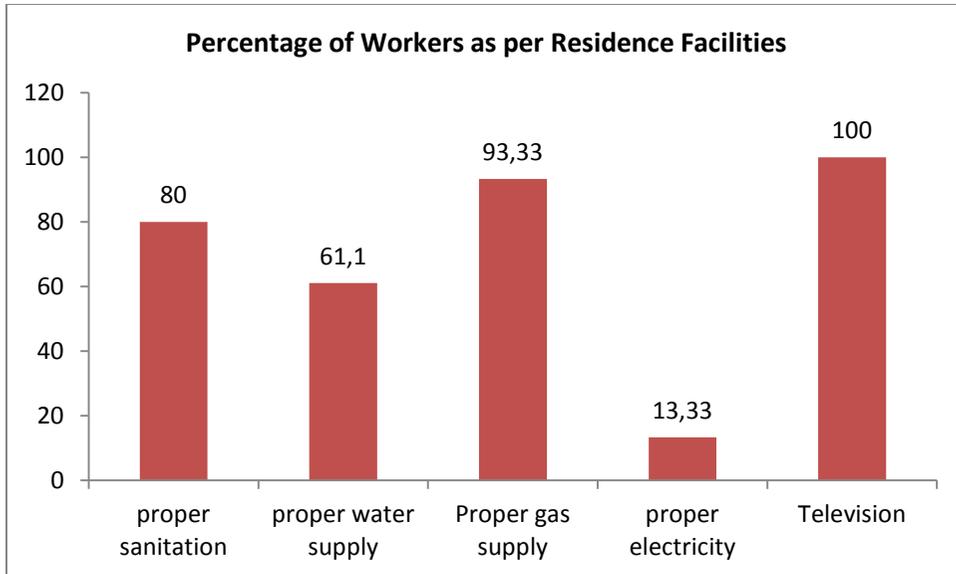


Figure 4: Percentage of Workers as per Residence Facilities.

The most of the workers satisfied about their gas supply in residence for cooking in Dhaka & Gazipur zone and the percentage is 93.33% (Table 4).

It is a matter of sorrow that maximum workers are unhappy with supply of electricity for daily needs in their residence. Only 13% workers are covered with good electricity support (Table 4). Load shading is a common issue in each & every industrial area. Though they are very tired after their hard work in factory they want a sound sleep at night. On the other hand they cannot manage a generator if the electricity supply is not sufficient. They live in a very tiny house if they have no electricity at night they feel very bored. Also in summer there is very much problem of humidity and temperature. The temperature in summer is almost out of control. Sometimes it goes about 34 degrees centigrade. Due to very small residence they feel very unhappy in summer during the absence of electricity and table 4 shows that, about 100 percent of workers spend their leisure by watching television.

3.5 Working hours of Workers

In recent time it is argued that the crisis in the Ready Made Garment (RMG) sector is not only limited to the wages and allowances of the workers but also with working hours. Productions and exports of the factories have been decreased and the price of the apparels is also decreasing in the international market. The owners of this industry allege that, the supply of gas and electricity is not continuous, because of which they are compelled to use generators to keep the production process of the factories uninterrupted,

resulting in the increasing cost of productions. But it is urgent to reduce the cost of production to comply with the foreign customer’s demand and the competitive international price. Moreover, serious and untoward incidents in the form of chaos and confusions are frequently happened in this sector on the basis of rumors and petty demands of the workers.

Working hour is a very important factor for every workers life. Textiles & apparels sector is a sector where workers are doing their work each & every day because it is directly related with physical production. If working hour is more than production is more. Table 5 shows 50 percent of worker’s working hours is 10 hours although standard working hour is 8 per day (ILO, 2005).

Table 5: Percentage of Workers as Per Working Hours.

Characteristics	Hours	Respondents	Percentage
Working hour	9	30	33.33
	10	45	50
	11	10	11.11
	12	5	5.55

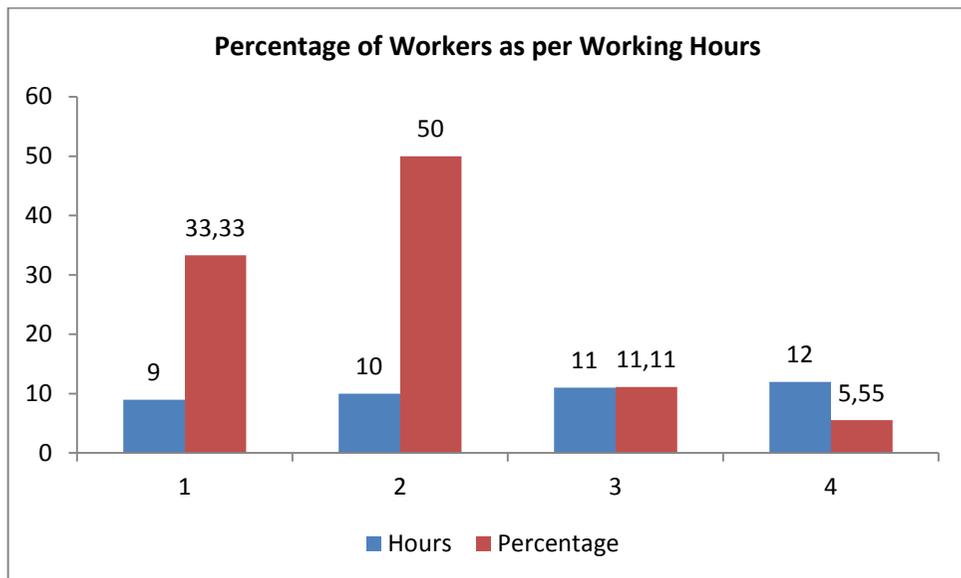


Figure 5: Percentage of Workers as per Working Hours.

3.6 Income of Workers

Maximum worker doing work 10 hours a day, the situation is improve day by day due to pressure of complains, Government & International customers.

The most important & highlighted issue for garments worker is their income. Amidst some of the biggest worker movements and unrest in the history of Bangladesh in which precious lives have been lost and hundreds

injured, the wage board published the gazette declaring BDT 5300 as the minimum wage for workers (Wage Gazette, 2013). In this gazette, the distribution is 3,000BDT as basic, 1,200BDT as house rent, 2,50BDT as medical allowance, 200BDT as transport allowance and 650BDT as food allowance under the new minimum wage structure (Wage Gazette, 2013). In Bangladesh there is huge demand of garment workers. It has been observed in survey that entry level garments & textile workers are called helper and their wage is 7000-8000 BDT per month including overtime and it will continue for months. When they migrate to other factory or they promoted to assistant operator or operator they get monthly 9000-10000BDT per month. Also it is a blessing for Bangladeshi workers that they have huge facility to migrate from one factory to another for the availabilities of factories as well as it is a big marketplace of workers. This is only reason they can increase their salary after a certain period of time.

Table 6: Percentage of Workers as per Income.

Characteristics	Income per month	Respondents	Percentage
Income	7000-8000	21	23
	8000-9000	22	24
	9000-10000	43	48
	10000-11000	4	4

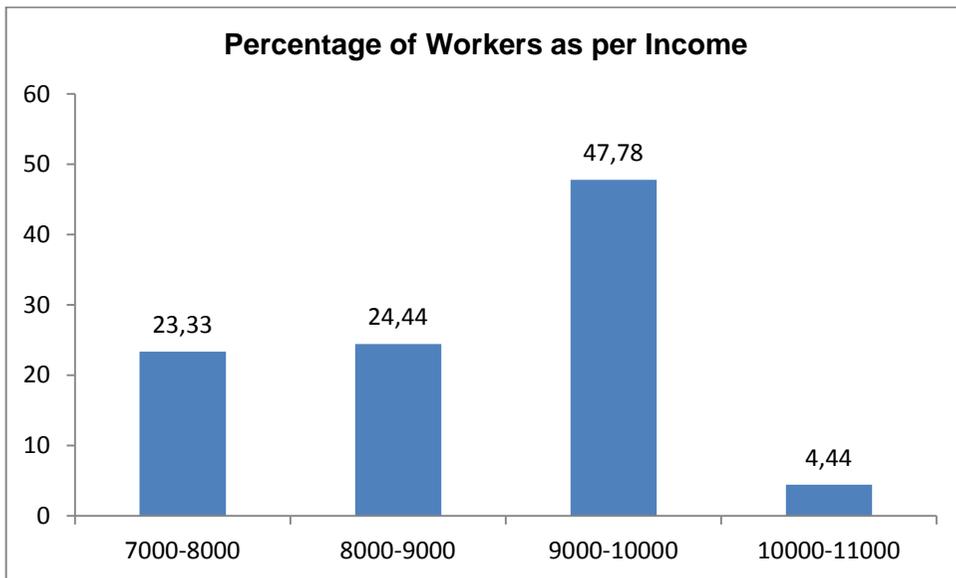


Figure 6: Percentage of Workers as per Income.

Also skill worker is the key for RMG products, so Human Resources department have a great responsibility to find out skill worker for their factory. Some of the factory provides incentive to skill workers as per production so there is huge scope to income. Income also may increase if

workers get promotion as a supervisor or in charge which means his/her earning almost 20000 BDT/month.

Maximum about 47.78% workers income is 9000-10000 BDT/month (Table 6) though it is not sufficient but the situation is continuously improving (survey, 2015).

Suggestions: we have seen the status of garments workers from various points of view above. Moreover, for improving the working conditions, setting a better working place and flourishing the readymade garment sector, industries should maintain the following COC issues those have been asked by different EU or USA buyers:

1. Prohibition of Child Labor
2. Prohibition of Forced labor.
3. No Discrimination.
4. Occupational Health & Safety (OHS).
5. Disciplinary Practices/ Harassment.
6. Freedom of association and right to collective bargaining.
7. Welfare facilities.
8. Compensation & Benefits.
9. Working Hours.
10. Grievance procedure.
11. Environmental Protection.
12. Custom compliance.
13. Security compliance.

Conclusion:

Bangladesh is a developing country with high growth opportunity. It has huge opportunity in its garment & textile industry. The country is a part of Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) which enabled the country to become the second largest exporter to the European Union. It also has a significant share of United States market. Bangladesh enjoyed duty-free access to Western markets. This benefit plus the low wages helped the country to become the world's second largest apparel exporter after China. Though Bangladesh has high foreign demand for its garments, it has to bring improvement in some areas like labor wages, business climate, trade logistics and skills of the workers. If the country can eliminate all limitations related to garment export, it can become world's number one largest exporter. Also, the quality of the product has to be ensured to sustain in the long run. Bangladesh has to improve the productivity to sustain in the market. The labors of Bangladesh have low skills which are the constraint of the productivity and growth of RMG exports of the country. If the country can overcome these constraints, it could do much better in the garment industry. Once Bangladesh can ensure best and high quality products along with better

labor condition, then it can be the market leader for exporting the RMG in the world. The key point of this study is that the worker's life status is improving now but not the optimum level. If the productivity is increased & ensure strong training opportunities for these workers then the factory can provide them more facilities.

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