

## **Collapse of Garments Factory and Sufferings of Garment Workers in Bangladesh: A Sociological Study on the Safety and Security Crisis of Garments Workers**

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**Abstract:** This study mainly aims at justifying the status of compliance regarding security and safety net of the garments workers in Bangladesh in line with national and international legal framework and standard practice coupled with the view to investigate the main loopholes of the present labor condition in the country. This study has employed both qualitative and empirical approach because of mixed nature of the problem with a view to achieving the best outcome of the research. The study focused on understanding how health problems are associated with labor productivity, competitiveness of the garment factory in the world market, particularly of female workers. The survey reveals that a large member of garment workers suffer from a number of chronic diseases and illnesses they have also been creating health hazards continuously for more than one year. Moreover, tremendous physical and mental sufferings were the unfortunate outcome resulted from the collapse of garments factory named as Rana Plaza which was situated in the suburban area of Dhaka city that created a big spectrum question about the safety and security of the garments workers.

**Keywords:** Garments Factory; Safety and Security; Health Hazards; Garments Workers

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The industrial sector has historically been the sector that has driven growth as countries have moved from low to middle-income status. This is because industry can provide high-wage employment for large numbers of workers and can raise social productivity by producing high-value goods on a mass scale. Poor countries can earn valuable foreign exchange by exporting manufactured products and the foreign exchange can be used to invest in newer machines and technologies so that a rapid move up the technology ladder becomes possible (Mathur, 1985).

Industrialization is central to economic development and improved prospects for human well-being. The benefits of industrial production can be seen in all aspects of life from the range of consumer goods available, to the efficiency of transportation systems, to the astounding advances made in computers and communications technology. Since the 18th Century, wealth in the developed countries has paralleled industrial growth, and developed countries continue to produce the lion's share of manufactured goods indeed, about 74 percent of the world's industrial output takes place in the developed world (Anderson, 1991). Today, many developing countries are experiencing an Industrial Revolution of their own, capturing an ever-increasing share of industrial growth.

The Readymade garment industry is a key sector of the Bangladesh economic. Starting in the late 1970 as a negligible non-traditional sector of export, the RGM industry has by now emerged as the largest export earner in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh garments manufacture and exporters association, there are at present more than 3500 garment factories contributing about 76 percent of the country's export earnings (BGMEA Report, 2013). This teamer success is greatly Attributable to women workers, who account for the lion share of the total labor force employed in the sector. At the present level of technological development, the Bangladesh garments industry is dependent on these workers strength and stamina .thus, the competitiveness of the Bangladesh garments industry in the world market greatly depends on the workers health particularly on the female health and even related of Safety and Security of garment workers (BGMEA,2013). Since 1990, more than 400 workers have died and several thousand more have been wounded in 50 major

factory fires. We can give the examples of Tazreen Fashions and Rana Plaza incidents in this matter (Palash Ghosh, 2013).

Recent collapse and loss of lives and injury in consequence has once again brought the issues of Safety and Security of garment workers particularly working in the garment sector under time light nationally and internationally .Most of such tragedies taken place so far are due to fire or Collapse of building the Bangladesh labor act 2006 is the Primary law for the workers (The daily Star, 2013). The considering dangerous state of building, the employer in order to remove such danger to human life or Safety and Security. Since the collapse of the issues of workers Safety, labor right and work place environment came into the world line light. Various social, national and international originations, UN bodies' buyers and regulatory authorities concerned to apply the compliance issues strictly otherwise buyers many boycotts. With rising the death toll from the collapsed of workers weighty threats and harsh wards are pouring in pope Francis, pope of the Catholic Church condemned the conditions of workers who died in garments collapse as "slave labor" saying unjust salaries and the unbridled quest for profits were 'against God'. We are concerned over Bangladesh (Labor Act, 2006).

The plight of workers in Bangladesh has long been a concern but for all the problems the textile industry has also drawn million of young women into the labor force, allowed them to send money home to village families and has probably delayed child bearing and marriage from the early teen – a dramatic cultural shift in the predominately Muslim nation .when some social facts and problems tragedy the social order and bother human mind and embed on which Influence to- floor space per workers, ventilation, exhaust fan and powerful blower, Safe droning water, use of mask and apron, clearing, washing facilities including soap and nail bush or other Suitable means of cleaning, service of qualified nurses and doctors within the factory, Ambulance facility, and provision of rest room are at least a bad for ailing workers at time(The Daily Star ,2013).

The rapid industrial growth has made water pollution, air pollution, and hazardous wastes pressing garments worker problems in many areas of the developing world. Industrial emissions combine with vehicle exhausts to cause air pollution, while concentrations of heavy metals and Ammonia loads are often high enough to cause major fish kills downriver from industrial areas. The lack of hazardous waste facilities compounds the problem, with industrial wastes often Discarded on fallow or public lands, in rivers, or in sewers designed to carry only municipal wastes (Pashupati and Siddha, 1900).

## **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study mainly aims at justifying the status of compliance regarding Security and Safety of the garments workers in Bangladesh in line with national and international legal framework and Standard practice coupled with the vow to investigate the main loopholes of the present labor Law in the country. In particular, the provisions concerning the Security and Safety of the garment Workers in Bangladesh will be examined in the light of the international legal framework, especially with the ILO Conventions dealing with the same agenda. The study strives to explore in a bid to prove that if the garments workers are assured required Security and Safety in his or her work, the productivity of the RMG sector as well as their personal wellbeing will be improved paving the way for sustainability for all stakeholders. Another radiant purpose of the study is to delve into the lacuna and dilemma of theoretical and practical part of the labor law in Bangladesh with a view to propose necessary amendments and recommendations to mitigate such problems in a congenial way.

## **III. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

The Factory Act 1965, Fire Regulations and welfare Act under Factory Rules 1979 contains adequate provisions to ensure Safety and congenial condition and industries. Different Survey Results show that most the Garment factories do not comply with these regulations. Existing regulations for ensuring Safety and Security condition are not in place in most of the Garments Factories. The amendments were done aiming to protect the interests and rights of the workers

and ensuring their safety, incidentally in the wake of a strong plea from the western consumers of Bangladeshi products for such legal reforms.(Factory Act, 1965) However, the ILO also observes that new labor laws as amended and enacted by the Bangladeshi Parliament fall far short of protecting workers' rights and meeting international standards(ILO, 22 July 2013,Geneva). The New York Times commented as "Half hearted Labor Reform in Bangladesh (The New York Times, 2013).

The Brussels-based International Trade Union Confederation has criticized the amended Bangladesh Labor Act 2013 stating that it is 'falling well short of international labor standards'(Financial Express, 2013). There are, in fact, very few Garments factories where some good practices confirm to the Act and regulations. As results workers face serious risk of fire, other accidents and severe Security hazards. Negligence by the managements and relevant governments has affected both industrial output and productivity of workers faire accident in the garment factor, led to physical loss, life risk and delay in schedules. The poor working environment (in terms of ventilation floor space per worker, drinking water, toilet facilities, cleaning facilities

inadequate health service) affects the workers, health status negatively, the poor health of garments workers results in physical disability and chronic fatigue. It impairs productivity and affects the competitiveness of the Bangladesh garments industry in the world market. An assessment of cost of providing health and Safety facilities and the benefits derived from it can provide necessary economic arguments for the provision of Safety and Security of Garments Workers in Bangladesh.

#### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

It focuses upon the methodological issues; especially the choice of data collection technique, informant selection, insider and outsider approach based on my own field work experience, challenges of data collection and the ethics of data collection. Whether a research should be based on qualitative or quantitative research method depends upon the research questions and its linkage with the research issue.

This study has employed both qualitative and empirical approach because of mixed nature of the problem with a view to achieving the best outcome of the research. The qualitative methodology of research has been applied for subjective assessment based on secondary sources to investigate the loopholes in the current legal framework on the Safety and Security of the garments workers in Bangladesh. We have used in-depth interviews as a method of data collection. In-depth interviews based on semi-structured interview guide helped me explore the personal and social experiences, opinions and feelings of the interviewees. While doing this part of the research, the existing literature on the labor Act have been explored and examined thoroughly. Through application of this approach, findings have been reinvigorated and compiled suggesting better Security and Safety along with propositions for necessary amendments of the current labor law. For the empirical part of the study primary data have been collected through a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire includes 30 statements. Another statement is related to workers' satisfaction as to feeling of Safety and Security. Other statements are related to Safety factors. Population of this study is about 4.5 million garments workers working in more than 5440 factories in Bangladesh. 120 samples (garments workers) have been investigated from 35 garments factories. Out of these 35 factories, 27 are situated outside the centre of Dhaka (Saver and Mirpur-1). Among them, good quality, average quality and below-average quality factories have been selected for this study to ensure proper representation.

#### **V. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Many researchers have investigated the working conditions in the Bangladesh garments industry. In fact, working conditions in the RMG sector are below standard and do not meet the ILO standards. Labor standards and rights are commonly ignored in the RMG factories in Bangladesh.

Work areas are often over crowded with limited workspaces, causing occupational hazards such as musculoskeletal disorders and contagious diseases. Injuries, fatalities, disablement and death from fire and building collapses are frequent in the RMG sector. The absence of labor standards monitoring system and ineffective building codes, poor enforcement and outdated labor laws, and a lack of awareness of labor rights among workers are the major problems in this sector.

In his study in 2012, Md. Nasir Uddin has identified various factors which relate safety issue which are the important cause of the accident such as Routes are blocked by storage materials,

Machine layout is often staggered, Lack of signage for escape route, No provision for emergency lighting Doors, opening along escape routes, are not fire resistant, Doors are not self-closing and often do not open along the direction of escape, Adequate doors as well as adequate staircases are not provided to aid quick exit, Fire exit or emergency staircase lacks proper maintenance, Lack of proper exit route to reach the place of safety Parked vehicles, goods and rubbish on the outside of the building obstruct exits to the open air, Fire in a Bangladesh factory is likely to spread quickly because the principle of compartmentalization is practiced, Lack of awareness among the workers and the owners ( Nasir Uddin, 2012).

Nasir Uddin studied 101 workers (samples) from 4 garments and found that 34.65% of the respondents feel their job place is unsafe and insecure for them. They have anxiety for electrical faults, fire accidents, building collapse, stampede, etc. On the other hand 65.35% respondents feel their job place safe and secure for them. So it is clear that garment workers received alarm for accident of Rana plaza tragedy and Tazrin garment accident in RMG sector in Bangladesh ( Nasir Uddin, 2012).

This literature review indicates that most garments factories in Bangladesh pay little attention to labor standards and labor rights, disallow trade union activities, unsafe working environment, and ineffective laws and discard fair labor practices, and compliance enforcement is limited and limited role of stakeholders. The factors that affect the safety net of garments workers in Bangladesh have been identified after synthesis of various articles, expert opinions along with Accord<sup>5</sup> and Alliance<sup>6</sup> findings regarding safety issue of garments workers. In 2013 Accord and Alliance focused on the factors for having working environment as Condition of structure of factory building, Adequacy of fire extinguishing appliances, Fire fighting practice facility, Adequate and wide fire doors, Effective smoke detection system, Wide aisles for fire fighters to entre and

rescue, Openness of machineries, Training as to use of machine safely, Condition electric connections, Sufficiently wide floors, stairs and pathways, Floors, stairs and pathways free from blockade and Effective lighting, ventilation and room-temperature control system.

Kibria (1998), in her article entitled *Becoming a Garments worker: The Mobilization of Women into the Garments Factories of Bangladesh* discussed how women become involved in the garment sector. Kibria (1998) states that “ while for some the job is a matter of basic survival, for others it is a way of improving their standard of living ” (Kibria, 1998: 2). She showed that women workers join the garment industry because of various ‘pull’ and ‘push’ factors (Kibria, 1998: 1). The push factors include financial hardship or poverty, household crises of different types like economic losses in the business, unemployment, illness or death of the male head of family and most often the chief source of the family income (Kibria, 1998: 1-2). The pull factors are the attractive forces for those women who wanted to improve their standard of living (Kibria, 1998: 2).

Absar (2002), in her article titled *Women Garment workers in Bangladesh*, showed that female workers do not receive job contract papers during their recruitment process. Moreover, she also revealed from her study that most of the female garment workers face problems in finding accommodation when they migrate from rural to urban areas in order to find jobs in the garment industry (Absar, 2002). Furthermore, she found that the amount of money female workers earn is not sufficient for housing and food cost. In her article *Problems surrounding wages: the readymade garment sector in Bangladesh*, Absar (2001), further argued that women are discriminated against in comparison with male workers in getting their wages earned and access to higher ranking positions within the factory.

Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000) in their studies used data from the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies’ (BIDS)2 surveys of 1990, 1993 and 1997 (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 2). In 1990, BIDS carried out a survey using samples of 32 garment factories and 426 female and 245 male garment workers from these factories (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 2). In 1993, BIDS carried out another survey taking samples of 50 garment factories and 376 female and 140 male workers from these factories. Again, in 1997, BIDS continued its survey of 34 garment factories involving 589 female and 219 male workers from these factories (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 2-3). These surveys by BIDS followed up with structured interviews showed that most of the garment factories did not maintain a satisfactory working environment. Moreover, Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000) also found that most of the factories violated the Factory Rules mandated by the government. This affected the health status of the garment workers. Furthermore, their research also mentioned that female workers are the victims of physical, sexual and verbal harassment at the work place and in public space (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 10-16).

Hossain and Akter(2010) examined the Factories Act, 1881 which was the first legislation of its kind in the undivided India .The legislation was enacted in the wake of pressure of the British merchants and mall-owners as well as on the basis of a report of Major Moore, Inspector in Chief of the Bombay Cotton Department in 1872-1873 in a bid to regulate the working conditions in factories. Subsequently, the British Government introduced several other laws relating to various labor issues such as working hours, wage, trade union activities, employment of children, maternity benefit etc (Mishra , 2012). Prior to the present version of the BLA 2006 there were as many as 50 scattered laws regulating employer and establishment with regard to the rights and interest of workers? Out of those 50 laws, 15 were enacted during the colonial British regime, 23 were passed during the Pakistan period and only 12 were made during Bangladesh period. Establishment of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 1919 galvanized the legal framework as to labor rights (David Waugh, 1982). After the separation of the India and Pakistan in 1947, almost all the laws during the pre partition period have been kept in force with some minor modifications and amendments.

After the independence in 1971, the government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh retained the previous laws and also enacted additional laws in response to the changing circumstances and needs of the working class and the employers. In many cases those existing laws were outdated, scattered, inconsistent and often overlapping each other. As a result, in 1992 a Labor Law Commission was formed by the Government which examined 44 labor laws and recommended to repeal 27 laws preparing a draft Labor Code in 1994(Siddiqi, 2004).This draft of Labor Code, 1994 underwent series of changes in its vetting stages and finally the Bangladesh labor Act, 2006 was passed by the Parliament on October 11, 2006. This law is one of the very recent laws with major overhauling changes in the field of labor legislation ( Siddiqi, 2004).

## **VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

There are data analysis is an important part of any research work. As this is a piece of quantitative research and this type of research is challenging by a nature and it is important in the content of subject and the measurement. The objective of this empirical study is to identify the perception of garments workers as to Safety and Security measures at their working place.

Table -1 shows that 46.25% respondents Damage of leg collapse of garments. About 26.25% respondents said about their loss in damage of hand because of collapse .the table further shows more than

16.25% respondents said they lat their damage body. The table 1 - it is observed that more than 15% of the respondents encountered eye pain where as about 17.5% of the respondents were theft and more than 32.5% respondents faced robbery .the table –that more than 28.75% of the respondents faces sexual harassment ,1.25% rape and 5.00 testing during collapse garments. The above table 1- indicates that 5.00% Of respondents encountered the problems of gastritis, only 12.5% of the respondents suffered from Anemia, 38.75% respondents told about the Blood pressure. The table also represents that 15.00% of respondents faces of the Sexually transmitted disease, 22.50% of the respondents of skin disease of the pr Table 8: Mechanism of the respondents after the collapse of garments.

**1) Effect of the Collapse of Factory**

Table- 1 Effect of the collapse of Factory		
Effect of Factory	Physical Damages	Percentage
Physical damages	Damages of Total Body	11.25%
	Damages of Hand	26.25%
	Damages of Leg	46.25%
	Damages of Eye	16.25%
	Total	100%
Social Problems	Social Problems	Percentage
	Eye pain	15%
	Theft	17.5%
	Robbery	32.5%
	Sexual Harassment	28.75%
	Rape	1.25%
	Teasing	5%
	Total	100%
Chronic Diseases	Chronic Diseases	Percentage
	Garment	5%
	Anemia	12.5%
	Blood Pressure	38.75%
	Sexually Transmitted	15%
	Skin Diseases	22.5%
	Brattling Problems	0.0%
	Heart Diseases	6.25%
	Total	100%

(Source: Field work-2014)

**2) Coping Mechanism and Level of Satisfaction with Facilities**

Table -2 Coping Mechanism and level of satisfaction with facilities		
Level of satisfaction with facilities	Coping Mechanism	Percentage
Coping Mechanism	Pressuring and tools	17.5%
	Staring Medicine	31.25%
	Service in the well	30%
	Service in the well	21.25%
	Total	100
Coping with difficulties	Woman Cope	Percentage
	Way to gather in shelter	13.75%
	Using Vail	43.75%
	Do not go outside at night	21.25% 13.75%
	Keep late with them	13.75%
	Using torch light	7.5%
	Total	100%
Level of satisfaction with facilities	Level of satisfaction with facilities	Percentage
	Strongly disagree	0%
	Disagree	9.5 %
	Somewhat disagree	11.5%

	Uncertain	9.5%
	Somewhat agree	38.5%
	Agree	21.5%
	Strongly agree	9.5%
	Total	100%

(Source: Field work-2014)

The table 2- also shows that more than 17.5% Preserving dry foods ,31.25% of respondents strong medicine .it is also evident from the table that more than 30.00% of the respondents service in the well and 21.25% of respondents with the opportunity. Tables 2- reveals that to combat with different types of violence women took various coping mechanism after collapse .it is evident from the table that 13.75% stay to getter ,43.75% using veil ,21.25 % do not go outside at night ,13.75% keep late with than and 7.5% using torch light of the respondents. Above shows Table 3- that 9.50% of the respondents strongly agreed with the view that they are satisfied with existing safety facility provided by their factory. No respondent strongly disagreed. 38.5% of the respondents either strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed with this view which means they are satisfied. 21.5% of the respondents are dissatisfied.

The findings of the study generally suggest that the conditions of the female garments workers was not as precarious as often portrayed in news media of the country. it is bed found that the socio-economic problems faced by the workers in the garments industry are the outcome of a number of reasons which are as follows:

- 1) Unplanned and rapid development of the garments industry
- 2) A large scale dependence of the garments industry on the imported materials
- 3) An unorganized labor market for the workers
- 4) Some demographic characteristics of the workers such as their very young age, their marital status and their migratory status which created some social problems for the female workers.
- 5) Low level of education of the workers and as result low-level of their very young age, their skill – acquisition was also responsible to a great extent in creating some socio-economic problem for them.

It has been found from the present study that entrepreneurs are helpless for most social problems facing the workers in the garments industry, but they are responsible for most economic problems, such as low level of wages, irregularity in wage payment –regular and overtime wage, level of bonuses, absence of promotion and increment. A large scale dependence of the garment industry on the important materials created many socio-economic problems for the garment workers. it faced the problem of delays in opening L/C with the banks, clearance at the port ,which shorten the time available for production .moreover ,much of the backlog was also created due to the delay in quota distribution-it has been found that ,on an average ,a garment workers had to work 11-12 hours a day. it has been found in the present study that overtime work .Moreover ,the status of the garment workers was also looked down upon by the society, namely due to thus overtime work.

In security of health was a severe problem for the garment workers. Almost all workers said that they had healthy like before entering the garment industry. It was reported by a number of firms that the women workers fainted in summer. This usually happened for those who were new on the job. the evidence of illness was found to be higher for the female workers was cough and fever followed by general weakness. this was because most of the larger firms had their own buildings with proper ventilation, better lighting facilities and were less congested .Many incidents, such as attack by matins, harassment by police and harassment have been reported by six percent of the workers and more male workers (10 percent) then the female workers (5 percent) have reportedly been attacked by masters. About 10 percent of the workers reported that their colleagues were attacked by matins in the street. Interestingly enough, it has been found that in spite of all these problem, work in the garment factory empowered the female garment workers, both socially and economically status of the garment workers, in the family has increased as the female workers contributes 46 percent, and the male workers contributed 64 percent of their respective family income women are now spending their own income.

## VII.CONCLUDING REMARKS

Undoubtedly the RMG industry is creating opportunity for both men and women despite their semi-skilled or unskilled position. Finding no other job opportunities they join there but they become skilled workers within few years contributing to the best of their capacity. They are doomed to this present condition terming them as modern day slaves. In most of the industries, workers are not getting proper working environment with Security and Safety in accord of compliance to neither the BLA, 2006 nor the ILO based international standard. The working conditions and pay for the Bangladeshi workers who work in these clothing factories are among the world's worst. The tendency of the owners of RMG industries to flout the laws engaging unscrupulous compliance by wild running factories, endangering workers lives, ruining environments and undermining the future image of the country to overseas countries should be revamped for the upward surge of workers and

employers. All stakeholders involving employers, workers, governments and international as well as national bodies should come forward with the sense of togetherness to bring significant change in this industry. The monitoring of compliance to satisfy buyers cannot bring meaningful changes for the sustainable industry with stability rather ethical compliance of laws by the employers can make a booming difference yielding name, fame and glory for the nation.

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