

Social Safety & Security of Women Workers in RMG Sector of Bangladesh

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Abstract: Female workers is an indispensable part of the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Among all the workers female workers constitute almost 90% of RMG sector hence the workforce of the sector. Productivity and production efficiency greatly influenced by the female workers. Discrimination, security and safety in the workplace for female workers were always questionable even at present the scenario did not change significantly. Despite being hard working and devoted towards the organization they are not being treated as similar as their fellow male workers. Deprivation from the basic rights like wages, maternity leaves, no reward for effort, other leaves, sanitary facilities became very common in most of the factories. Existing law regarding the rights of the workers are not followed by the authority. As a result, they are being demotivated and unsatisfied towards the management and to the organizations day by day. To keep balance in this emerging RMG sector the authority and the law enforcement must monitor the scenario and provide female workers with the rights they deserve. When female workers will feel safe and are provided by the facilities, they need productivity will increase at its peak, hence the RMG sector.

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I. INTRODUCTION

RMG sectors is the most prominent and potential sector in terms of employment, productivity and social and economic development of our country in the age of industrialization. The most significant driving force of any sector is its workers and female workforce indispensable part of the RMG sectors of Bangladesh. RMG industry dominates the total export trade of Bangladesh. About 80% of the country's total income from garment sectors have been attributed by exporting mainly to the US and Europe in 2012^[1]. RMG industries have contributed 81.13 % of Bangladesh's total export by 2014^[2]. This remarkable growth and the contribution to the growing economy is due to the availability of cheap labor. Labors are the powerhouse of these sectors. Of the four million workers employed by the RMG industry, 85% are illiterate women from rural villages^{[1][3]}. Satisfaction of the workers are significantly relevant with the working environment and condition of the factories which has undergone criticism in recent years due to the worker safety and fair wages and they failed to offer opportunities to the female workers in this age of globalization. This study is concerned with the female worker's needs, demands and expectations and of course their rights. In recent years we have faced several unwanted catastrophes like Rana Plaza & Tazreen Fashion House. These tragic accidents have pointed to the fact that workplace safety and security for workers, even in the globally competitive RMG sector of Bangladesh, is far behind than the required standard. The results of this study area unit expected to be helpful for numerous apparel industry for taking remedial measures to keep the female workers satisfied as well as to avoid unwanted accidents which will simultaneously have a positive impact to the overall production for any factory.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Implementation of privatization policies and other liberalized trade policies to cope with the world economy has been trying by our government since the independence of Bangladesh. Since Bangladesh is a labor abundant country, the garment industry gained the highest focus and become the largest export sector in Bangladesh. From the very beginning the RMG sector largely depended on low skilled women workers because low skilled rural women are available at very low wages. Thus, women became the main workforce in garment sector ever since. Developing countries create many opportunities for their marginalized-like low skilled garment workers who got the option to work in RMG industry to earn money for their family. It also creates

vulnerabilities for them which are largely related to their safety and security. In Bangladesh case, women's from RMG sectors are very much prone to various risks, because of working in unsafe garment factories and under unrealistic factory rules which increase their security endangered. It has before been explored in this study how far the rapidly growing garment industry is prompting violation of women garment worker's rights.

Significance of the Project: Exchange of materials, needs, goods and services among the organizations or countries are easily possible. But the only resource which is not easily exchangeable is human resources. Human resource is the most competitive assets of any organizations. Female workers are the most significant part of this nonexchangeable assets and are the prime force in case of productivity of the RMG sectors of Bangladesh. Thus, the productivity of this sectors is largely dependent of their satisfaction regarding various measures and incentives provided by the authority. This globally competitive RMG sector of Bangladesh, is far behind the required standard. Most of the women workers are paid low wages and they are less skilled, as a result the graph of work hazards is higher ^[4].

Scope of the Study: The findings from the study will help to highlights those areas where female workers are deprived of the rights that are ensured by labor law 2016. Its specially focus on gender discrimination, working condition, sexual harassment they face, uncongenial working conditions, late-night overtime work, absence of weekly holiday and leave facilities, non-cooperation from family and society, their conjugal life and some other important relevant issues. These findings will help in differentiating between actual environment and the required one for the women safety in the work place.

Research Objective: This study mainly aims at justifying the status, safety and security of women workers in RMG sector of Bangladesh in the line with national and international legal framework and standard practice coupled with a view to investigating the main loopholes of the present labor safety and security in RMG sector. The study strives to explore in a bid to assure the required safety and security of the women workers. We are going to highlight the following topics-

- i. Family affairs
- ii. Factory conditions
- iii. Violation of labor rights
- iv. Trade union
- v. Work place environment
- vi. Transportation support
- vii. Unrealistic factory rules
- viii. Govt. initiative to support garments industry
- ix. Discrimination in payment of overtime wages

Limitations: Since the workers do not have knowledge properly about their rights the manager can easily deceive them. Again, sometimes workers do not feel ease to answer accurately in fear of the authority of embarrassment. So, it is necessary to investigate internally through strict rules to ensure their safety and security. This finding is associated with certain limitations. The limitations regarding this study are:

- i. Inadequate time and less cooperation by the organization and employees.
- ii. Resource limitation.
- iii. Limited responses by the workers to the research questionnaires promptly and adequately.
- iv. Organizational policies.
- v. Most of the employees were afraid of delivering the correct answer.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Labor rights are a group of legal rights and claimed human rights having to do with the labor relations between workers and their employers, usually obtained under labor and employment law. Several researchers and publisher gave explanations about labor laws existed. But these explanations are not enough for several sections. Specific rights of the women workers are not clearly said in the ILO convention. Also, sufficient guide lines have not been provided by either BGMEA and BKMEA regarding rights of women workers in the work place and the mentioned rules and regulations of BGMEA and BKMEA are also not followed or applied by the garment's owner. Moreover, there is no forfeit for the company owners for violation of the existing rules and regulations regarding women workers rights.

In the articles 28, 29, 34, 38, 14, 15 and 20(1) of The Constitution of Bangladesh various elementary rights of female workers at work places along with emergent social defense has well mentioned. In the article 28 of the Constitution it has been stated clearly that on any grounds of religion, race, caste or place of birth no discrimination shall adopt against any citizen of the state and in all arena of the state or in public life equal rights

must ensure for women along with men. Reasonable wages depending on the quality and quantity of works, amusement and vacation are the rights of the employee that has also stated as a responsibility of the state in the article 15 of the Constitution ^[5].

To upkeep female workers and their rights great number of labor rights has comprised by Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006 (BLA). BLA Act (2006) sections 11, 51, 52, 53, 56, 57, 58, 61, 62, 91, 92, 93,94 and, 109, BLA, 2006 includes various legal rights regarding the work place safety and security of women some of them are safety measures, wage and paying of maternity benefit, occupational hygiene, occupational diseases, industrial accidents, protection of women and young persons in dangerous occupations and also covers conditions of work, payment for extra working hours, room for children, welfare facilities, leisure etc. But due to various limitation they are barely followed by the garment authorities. Absence of proper practice of this labor act became acute in most of the factories. Despite being various positive labor rights, they are not being practiced by the authorities due to the deficiency of enough discipline and penalty regarding the violation of Labor Act 2006. Due to this scope violation of acts became common in almost all the factories ^[6].

Gender imbalance in the garment industry of Bangladesh has been discussed by Pratima Paul Majumder and Anwara Begum in their study. They evaluated gender difference in the condition of employment and the work environment and looked at the difference among export-oriented garment industry and other industries and nonexpert industries ^[7]. The problem of health and safety issues of female workplace in garment industries of Bangladesh in now very important regarding international workplace norms in the International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions and the UN's Universal Declaration and Human Right. Endorsement of freedom of association and collective bargaining and also Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women has agreed by Bangladesh in the 87th and 98th ILO conventions.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is basically a descriptive study. It is a valuable means of finding out 'what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light'. In our study we studied different factories of several textile industries. This is a survey-based study and for this purpose we mainly selected our respondent works in the factory floor. We used different questionnaires to our respondent women workers.

Research Scheme: Our scheme regarding this survey was to collect data against our selected questionnaires and analyze them to explain the situation. This scheme also includes some suggestions regarding our study whose ratification may help to overcome the situation. We collected data from both primary and secondary origins. Our own survey with the women workers were the primary source and different sites, journals, published paper and reports were our secondary data source. In designing the questionnaires, we followed the following procedure:

- i. Deciding what information should be sought.
- ii. Deciding what type of questionnaires should be asked
- iii. First draft of the questionnaires
- iv. Editing the questionnaires and specifying procedure for its use.

The scale of the response on the questionnaires were,

From Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree to Strongly Disagree

Target Population and Sample Size: Female workers from different garment factories of different ages were our targeted respondent. Some the workers were permanent workers in the various RMG industries. About 110 female workers of different factories and of different ages were selected for this study.

Data Collection Tools and Analysis Technique: As it is a conclusive research, so questionnaires were used to collect responses from the sample selected for our study. Most of the workers had difficulty understanding the questionnaires. Also, our respondents were afraid of answering our questions. When we realized we asked them using local dialects to get required answer. The questionnaires contained dependent variables which were designed to get responses from the respondents. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis were performed using basic simple analytical tools data. The collected data are represented in analytical charts and pie charts using percentage method.

Formula: (Frequency/Population) × 100

V. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The prime aim of this survey was to determine the dimension to build a framework required for retention policies of an industry. In this chapter we have presented and discussed our findings and results of the data analysis of the survey conducted in the apparel manufacturing industry in Bangladesh. A conclusive analysis of the survey results returned by the research questionnaire respondents is reflected in our findings.

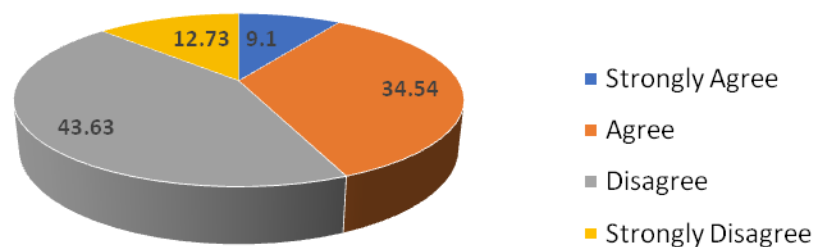
i. Wages and wages discrimination

The salary is insufficient to correspond with their daily basic need and the owners are indifferent in following the government prescription regarding their salary. Also, they are victim of wage discrimination with compare to their corresponding male workers in some cases though they perform the same labor as the male worker. During interview they said that due to this low income they can't maintain basic demands like adequate foods, education of their children's, medical facilities etc.

Satisfaction of female workers regarding the wage provided (Table-1):

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	10	09.10
Agree	38	34.54
Disagree	48	43.63
Strongly Disagree	14	12.73
Total	110	100

Satisfaction regarding the wage provided



ii. Transportation facilities to and from the work place

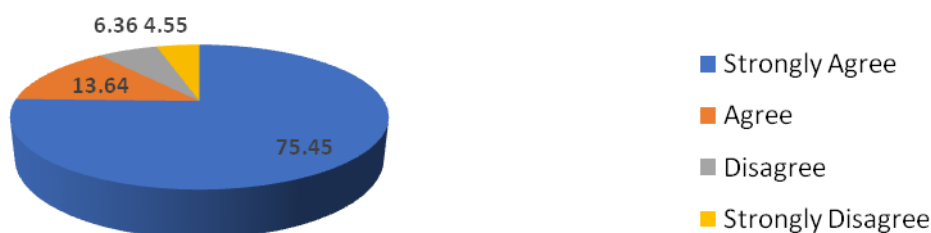
Public transportations are not adequate and also commuting facilities are not provided by the factory owners. In most of the cases female workers walk down the street to reach their workplace which is very weary for them both physically and mentally. During their come and go they face various uncomfortable situation like eve teasing, love proposal, rebuke by goons and street boys, snatching and sometimes harassment by the police on the way to and from the work. During their interview they clearly mentioned about their harassment in the street coming to their factory.

Need for transportation to and from the work (Table-2):

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	83	75.45
Agree	15	13.64
Disagree	07	06.36
Strongly Disagree	05	04.55
Total	110	100

iii. Sexual Harassment

Need for transportation to and from the work

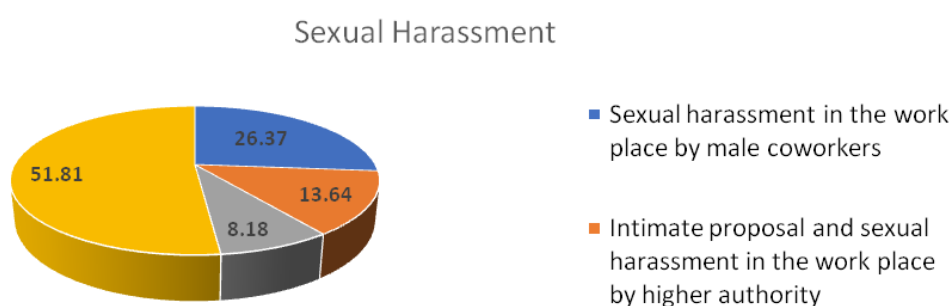


Sexual harassment is a very common and significant origin for both mental and physical vexation for female workers now a days. This is a very sensitive issue for the female workers specially for unmarried women and they were very shy and were unwilling to talk and disclose any information regarding sexual harassment. They,

often face this problem simultaneously in work place by the coworkers and senior management, in the street by the strangers and goons and it even extends to home too which includes abusive language and comments, objectionable touching and grabbing and even physical onfall in some cases. This harassment is comprehensive in case of young women. F. Begum et al studied some cases and found that policemen also involved in this harassment rather than protecting the female workers^[8]. Our respondents were very less responsive regarding this issue.

Sexual harassment in the work place and the street (Table-3)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Sexual harassment in the work place by male coworkers	29	26.37
Intimate proposal and sexual harassment in the work place by higher authority	15	13.64
Sexual harassment in the street	09	08.18
No comment	57	51.81
Total	110	100

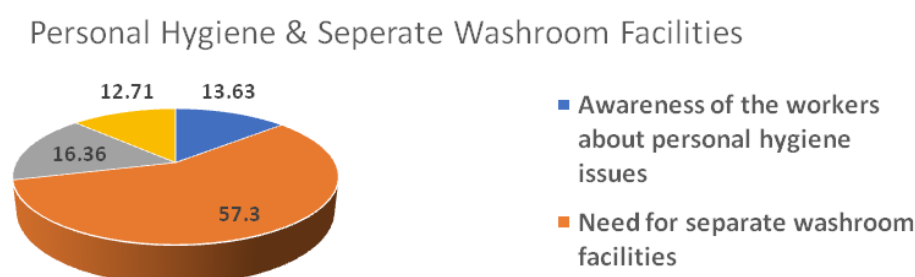


iv. Personal hygiene and separate washroom facilities

Personal hygiene is a significant issue to maintain health and mind. But most of the workers are not concern about their personal hygiene issue and in most of the garments health and safety codes are violated and are not followed specified in the Bangladesh Labor Law-2006 which clearly states that the employee must maintain basic health and safety standards in the sections 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 59, and 60. In most of the factories female employees share washroom with men workers. In terms of health and safety issue female workers are most disadvantaged than the male workers. Also, the facilities are not adequate in terms of number of workers and washroom are very dirty with least standard. This dirty environment also effects neighboring area. Most of the toilets don't have any soap or towels and sanitary concerns are totally obsolete. This working environment affects mostly on female workers specially during their menstruation periods. Frequent sickness is common amongst the female workers regarding the hygiene issues. Upon asking on the personal hygiene and washroom facilities we got unsatisfactory answer from majority of the female respondents.

Personal hygiene and separate washroom facilities (Table-4)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Awareness of the workers about personal hygiene issues	15	13.63
Need for separate washroom facilities	63	57.30
Need for well sanitized washroom facilities	18	16.36
No Comment	14	12.71
Total	110	100

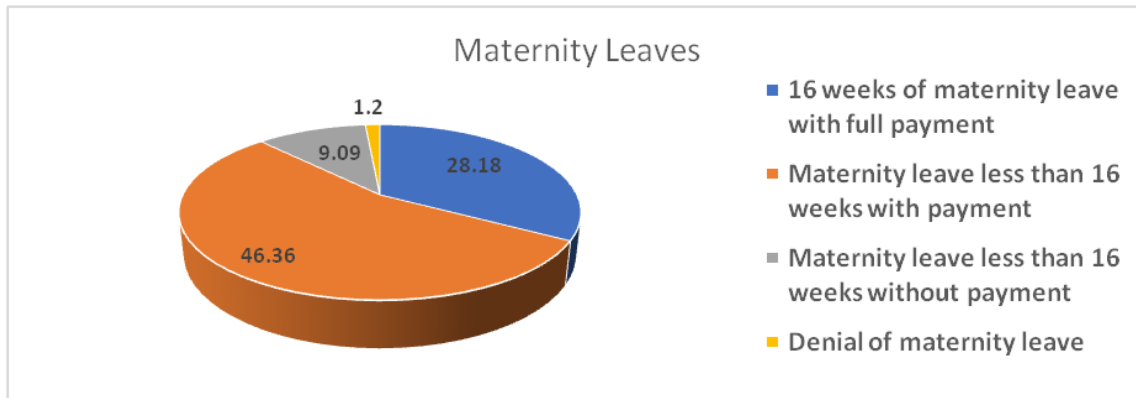


V. Maternity and Other Leaves

Most of the respondents were not aware about the existing provision about the maternity leaves. Maternity leave is a humanitarian right for female workers in both private and civil services. Female workers are guaranteed to have 16 weeks paid leave as 8 weeks before child birth and 8 weeks after child birth provisioned by The Bangladesh Labor Law-2006. Most of the respondents were not clear about the maternity leave. As it provisioned in the Bangladeshi Labor Act-2006, but the maternity leave varies in different garments. Some respondents also mentioned they have been denied for maternity leave. Also, the labor law states that no women will be entitled to maternity leave if she already has two children. Some respondent mentioned though they got maternity leave but they did not get the stipend they are supposed to have. In case of other leaves in any sort of emergency it is very difficult to have leave and even if the leave is granted it become non pay leave most of the time. Some women also mentioned that they did not get any leave even in festival time.

Maternity Leaves (Table-5)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
16 weeks of maternity leave with full payment	31	28.18
Maternity leave less than 16 weeks with payment	51	46.36
Maternity leave less than 16 weeks without payment	10	09.09
Denial of maternity leave	18	16.36
Total	110	100

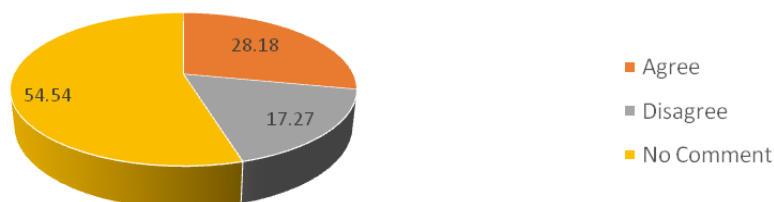


VI. Management Behavior: Management plays most of the vital role in any organizations. Their behavior with the workers determined the relation between the workers and the management itself. While we were investigating our female respondents, we found mixed reaction about management behavior. Some of our respondents were not satisfied with the management behavior whereas some were satisfied and some did not make any comments. Also, they were afraid of mentioning the specific personnel. They mentioned that they are not treated as their fellow male workers.

Management Behavior (Table-6)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	31	28.18
Disagree	19	17.27
No comment	60	54.54
Total	110	100

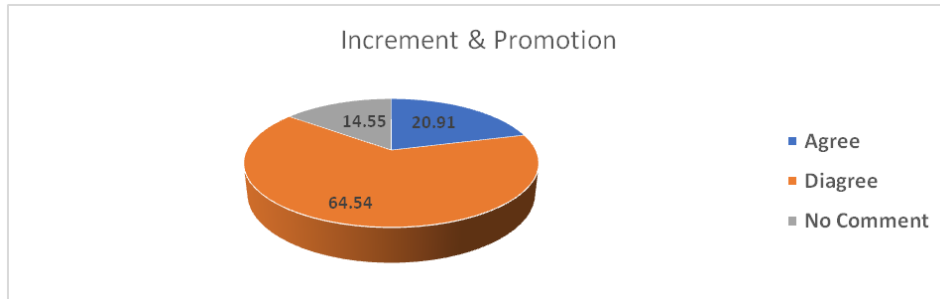
Management Behavior



VII. Increment & Promotion: In most of the factories female workers are being deprived from regular increments and promotion compare to their fellow male workers. Though they are giving same labor and effort in some cases but not getting desired increment and promotions. Our respondents were very upset and frustrated for this partiality in the work place. They are being demotivated and unsatisfied due to this partiality.

Increment & Promotion (Table-7)

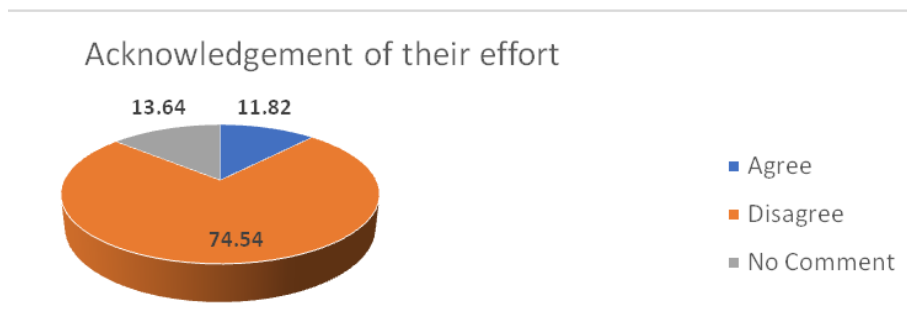
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	23	20.91
Disagree	71	64.54
No comment	16	14.55
Total	110	100



VIII. Acknowledgement of their effort: Likewise, most of the female workers are deprived of any kind of acknowledgement of their contribution and effort in the workplace. It is another factor of their unsatisfaction towards the management and organizations. Most of the respondent mentioned that they are not given any kind of rewards for their performance and of the workers had no idea about it.

Acknowledgement of their effort (Table-8)

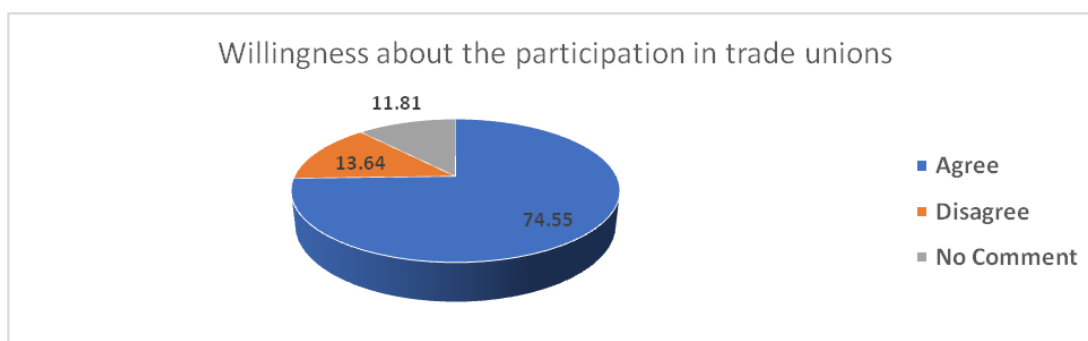
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	13	11.82
Disagree	82	74.54
No comment	15	13.64
Total	110	100



IX. Participation of female workers in trade unions: Labor union are most likely obsolete of any female workers. Even female membership is not considered. Life before they are deprived from the participation of decision making. But their presence may ensure the right of female workers. Our respondents were very much responsive about the participation in such important unions but they are not given any chance in most of the cases.

Willingness about the participation in trade unions (Table-9)

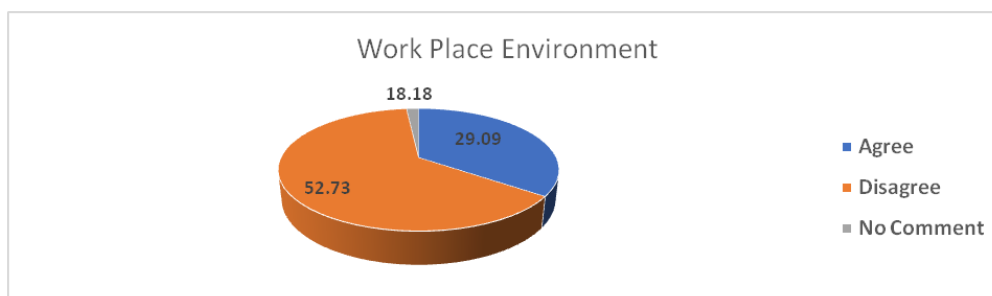
Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	82	74.55
Disagree	15	13.64
No comment	13	11.81
Total	110	100



X. Work Place Environment: Workers are the driving force of the garment sectors. Among all the workers female workers accounts for majority in numbers. Being driving of production and productivity efficiency, workers are being neglected from the beginning regarding the safety and environment issue. Though some of the garment industries made sure about the appropriate working environments for female workers but majority did not yet. Female worker has to work in the same production with then male workers in most of the factories. The work place in not female friendly said most of the respondents.

Satisfaction Regarding Work Place Environment (Table-10)

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	32	29.09
Disagree	58	52.73
No comment	20	18.18
Total	110	100



VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In our study we also interviewed some management and higher authority personnel also. It was noticed that while asking same question to the manger and workers contradictory answers were obtained. The workers said that they are not given adequate facilities they need in the workplace while manger said they are providing those to the workers. Since most of the workers are illiterate and they also don have proper knowledge about their rights the authority can easily deceive them. During our survey we also found that workers are intimidated by the authority and were afraid of giving answer. So, it is necessary to investigate internally and take step to ensure female workers safety in the workplace by ensuring their rights. By the end of our survey we came up with some recommendations that might help in ensuring the rights of the female workers in the work place:

1. Fix equal and logical wages for both female and male workers
2. Ensure proper allowance for overtime work
3. Provide transportation facilities to and from work.
4. Provide adequate and separate toilet and urinary facilities.
5. Ensure pure and safe drinking water
6. Provide all time medical assistant and first aid treatment with female doctor and highly trained nurses.
7. Ensure maternity leave according to the existing Act-2006.
8. Provide quota for female membership in the trade union.
9. Make them feel safe and create female friendly working environment.
10. Give then proper acknowledgement of their work and arrange motivational program to avoid ill treatment for female workers in work place.
11. Record injury and analyze register accordingly.

12. Put up and welfare officer to provide enough knowledge about their right in the workplace according to the labor law.
13. Council female workers on a regular basis.

VII. CONCLUSION

Large scale entry of female workers in the labor market specially in the garment sector became one of the most striking features of recent industrialization of Bangladesh. RMG is the backbone of the economy of Bangladesh and provides opportunity to the low skilled women workers. The growth of RMG sector allowing more and more entry of the workers specially females. They are constituting about 90% of the sector workforce. Since they are the driving force of this sector there are no substitute way of denying them or treating them or forced them to work in inhuman conditions. Welfare of these women workers must be ensuring to maintain the development and harmony of this sector.

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