

# Socio-Economic Condition and Medical Facilities of Garments Workers of Gazipur District, Bangladesh

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**Abstract:-** Among the industries of Bangladesh, garments industry is the most export earning industry. Objective of this study is to investigate the socio-economic condition and medical facilities received by the garments workers of this industry. This study mainly based on primary data. Data and information are collected through a structured questionnaire by face to face interview from the garments workers in the study area. Collected information are being analyzed with descriptive statistics. This study highlighted the basic information about the age structure, family condition, medical facilities, sources of recreation, working hours and income of the workers. The study results show that, 37.5 percent garments workers are aged between 20 to 25 years, came from rural areas are now in better financial condition than their village but they are living with many chronic diseases because of the working environment but don't have the ability to take proper treatment. On the other hand, with their little income they have to maintain all the family responsibilities. As a result, the living standard of these garments workers is very low. They have to live in unhealthy environment with vulnerable health condition.

**Keywords:-** Garments Industry, Garments Workers, Socio-Economic Condition, Health Condition, Garments of Gazipur, Workers in Bangladesh.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Garments industry of Bangladesh drives the economic growth, contributing to an impressive economic growth of the country in the recent decades. About 3.6 million people works in the garments industry of Bangladesh. Among the 4621 garments factories, most of them are concentrated in the capital city Dhaka and the districts around the capital [1]. Millions of rural people came to these cities to get a job and for a better life for their families.

Gazipur is one of the central districts of Bangladesh near the capital city Dhaka. This districts has 898 (Gazipur Sadar-822, Kaliakair-51, Sreepur-25) garments factories in three of its Upazilas [2]. Garments workers are those who work as labour in the garments factories where different types of products such as shirts, pants, T-shirts, trousers, jackets, knit wares, oven garments are produced. Along with other parts of Dhaka division, number of garments in this district is also increasing day by day. According to Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) of Bangladesh, it holds the 2<sup>nd</sup> position as apparel supplier in the world. In which Gazipur

district has a huge contribution. The following table shows the changing patterns of readymade garments (RMGs) industry of Bangladesh for past three decades:

Fiscal years	No. of garments factory	Exports Earnings (Million USD.)	Percentage of total export earnings
1989-90	759	624	32.45%
1999-00	3200	4349.41	75.61%
2009-10	5063	12496.72	77.12%
2018-19	4621	34133.27	84.21%

Table 1:- Changes of readymade garments industry of Bangladesh in past three decades

\*Source Export Promotion Bureau Compiled by BGMEA

Table 1 is self explanatory i.e. garments industry of Bangladesh is expanding at a huge rate and contribution of RMGs in total export income of Bangladesh is 84.21% in recent fiscal year (2018-19). But, the garments workers are the most neglected and less facilitated workers in this country. Earlier 2018, a new minimum wage of Tk. 8,000 (USD 97) is announced for the garment workers. This is a notable step forward for the RMG industry and, although some international NGOs and unions were calling for a larger increase, it has to be borne in mind that this was an over 50 percent increase on the previous minimum wage, which was set five years ago.

A huge number of skilled, semi-skilled and non-skilled labour forces of Bangladesh helping the readymade garments industry to grow at a faster speed. This sector has created the vast opportunity for both the urban or the rural female workers. Women who were either unemployed or working in the informal sector like- part-time or full-time maid servant, cleaner or helper in small shops, hotels and restaurants, now getting the opportunity to work in the garments sector. In many ways they are now safe and secured from previous informal sectors [3]. Objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To find out the facilities and problems of the garments workers in the study area,
2. To evaluate the availability of medical services of the garments workers in the study area, and
3. To present the working environment of the garments workers.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study mainly based on primary data. Data and information are being collected with a structured questionnaire by face to face interview with the respondents. To know the socioeconomic status of the garments workers of the Gazipur districts we have conducted a field survey in three upazilas named- Gazipur Sadar, Kaliakair and Sreepur. The survey was conducted over 40 workers who work in the garments in those three upazillas. Primary data was collected in the last quarter of the year 2018. The interviews with the respondents were taken at their home not in their offices or factories because of some constraints. In the questionnaire we have chosen some factors about which the study will focus on, those are- age of the respondents, gender of the respondents, education of the respondents, income of the respondents, facilities in residence of the respondents, medical facilities of the respondents, working hours of the respondents, etc. Collected data and information are described and analyzed using simple descriptive statistics.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Readymade garments sector of Bangladesh made the women of Bangladesh to be advantaged by employment but in case of socio-economic structure they are still vulnerable [4]. Another study focused on the working conditions of the garments workers of Bangladesh. In a previous study the number of garments factories of Bangladesh which was started about 5000, they found it 7000. Among them, government inspectors can't visit 80% of the factories [5]. A study conducted on the working environment of garments workers shows that, there is a huge gap between the employers and the workers in the garments sector. Trade unions can't play sufficient role in establishing the rights of the workers and they are not so strong to bargain or negotiate with the authorities. Because of this gap demand of the garments workers never reach to the owner or to the authority [6].

Another study focused on the sexual harassment of female garments workers. Other issues like lower wages, job insecurity are also present here. But, most of the incidences of sexual harassments are kept secret and the victims are not willing to file any report against the harassments. Female workers are harassed and molested in public spaces; even some of the night shift female workers are being raped by the superior authorities. After all that they don't have the courage to go to the police [7]. A survey report of Asian Centre for Development, focus on the statistical scenarios of the positive impact of the RMG sector in Bangladesh. They presents a positive changes in socio-economic conditions of garments workers. Things like family income, household facilities, food habit, level of education etc have been changed positively among the garments workers and their family members [8].

Another study also analyzed the socio-economic condition of garments workers. They also found a positive impact on socio-economic condition of the workers by factors like improving working environment and better salary structure [9]. An ethnographical study on the working conditions and rights of garments workers presents the key facts which are responsible for the torture and harassment in garments factories. Problems like irregularity in salary payments, forced resignation of workers without any compensation or benefits are very common in RMG sector [10]. Trends of garments industry and prediction about future situation are described in another study. He shows the contribution of readymade garments industry in development of Bangladesh and how the vulnerability of this economy has been removed [11].

Garments industry of Bangladesh holds the highest amount of foreign exchange earnings for last two or three decades among all the goods and services produced by Bangladesh. It also has the highest amount of production and employment among all the industries. Almost the necessary raw materials of garments industry are imported from different countries, but without own raw materials Bangladesh holds the position of world's 2<sup>nd</sup> largest amount of readymade garments exporter. International market of Bangladeshi readymade garments is so strong that, it has sufficient amount of export even in the time of world recession [12]. After seven years of the liberation war of Bangladesh it started the journey of readymade garments (RMGs) which has become the major source of huge employment and foreign currency earnings. At the beginning period of RMG there were about fifty factories were producing readymade garments and a thousand people were working there. But at present there are a few thousand factories and millions of people are working in this industry [13].

In another study most of the female workers stated that they are now in better condition than the life before joining in the garments industry. Although there are some worse things in garments industry, but women workers especially like it the most [14]. Male workers are earning more than the female workers, despite of having the same qualifications of male and female workers. In that study the authors also suggested that, better law enforcement and better education will make these women strong and make themselves ready to overcome the crisis [15]. Garments workers receive a very little salary but they have to work about eleven hours or more every day. Huge population of Bangladesh is helping this industry to develop but the peoples who are developing this industry are always being deprived or neglected [16].

**IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

➤ *Age Distribution*

Workers start their work in garments industry at a very early age, that is most of them are young. In my study, highest portion of workers (37.5%) are in the age group of 20 to 25 years. The second highest numbers of workers are at the age of 26 to 30 years (Table 2).

Age group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
20-25	15	37.5%
26-30	12	30%
31-35	6	15%
36-40	6	15%
41-45	1	2.5%

Table 2:- Percentage of Workers as Per Age Group  
\*Source: Own surveyed data.

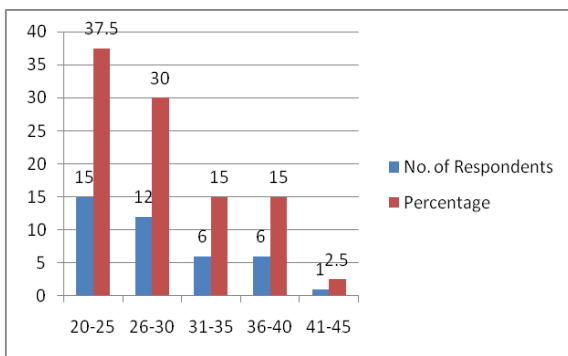


Fig. 1:- Distribution of Age of Garments Workers  
(\*Source: Own surveyed data).

This indicates that workers frequently leave job and transfer to other factories and also the employers prefer young and industrious workers in the factory. Because aged workers become less efficient in modern technologies and salary of experienced aged workers is higher than the fresher's (Fig. 1). Moreover they want to employ new workers since its really cost effective to hire workers at a lower wage.

➤ *Gender Classification*

In my study, it is evident that, 77.5% workers are female and only 22.5% are male which is a real picture of garments industry. This also implies that, women empowerment plays a vital role in garments sector. These information are shown in Table 3.

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 (Fig. 2).

In garment industry 77.5% workers are female where 22.5 % workers are male, which means garment industry empowered by women shown in (Table 3).

Gender	Number	%
Male	9	22.5
Female	31	77.5

Table 3:- Gender wise percentage of workers  
\*Source: Own surveyed data.

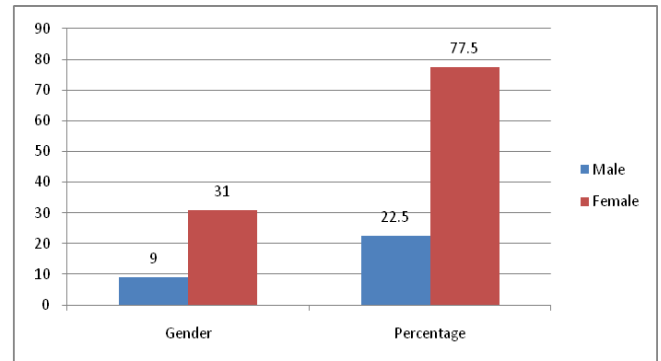


Fig. 2:- Percentage of Workers as per Gender (\*Source: Own surveyed data).

If we look back to 20 years from now, the ratio of working man and women was just 9:1. A huge development has occurred in this sector. Now a greater number of women are working and their contribution to develop the economy is really appreciating. It is also true that, most of our export earnings depends on garments sector so on the women workers.

➤ *Schooling and Family of Workers*

From Table 4 it is clear that, garment workers' children are getting school facilities such as- food, new dress, books and other important study materials. It reveals that, by getting employment opportunity into the garment sector parents can contribute to the education facilities of their children. Some years ago it was very difficult for them to provide such types of facilities.

Characteristics	Categories	Respondents	Percentage
Children	School	90	100
	Book	90	100
	Dress	81	90

Table 4:- Parents contribution to their children's education  
\*Source: Own surveyed data.

➤ *Residence Facilities*

In case of residence facilities, they are improving a lot of issues, such as- proper sanitation and water supply, gas and electricity supply, mobile and television facilities. It is found from Table 5 that, about 19% of the workers is getting proper sanitation and water supply whereas 18% of them are getting proper electricity facility. Moreover, workers are using mobile phone (18%) and television (12%) facilities for communication and entertainment purposes. In addition, about 14% of the workers has got the connection of gas supply.

Categories	Number of respondents	Percentage
Sanitation facility	40	18.69%
Water supply	40	18.69%
Gas supply	31	14.48%
Electricity supply	39	18.22%
Mobile	38	17.75%
Television	26	12.14%

Table 5:- Distribution of workers by their residence facilities  
\*Source: Own surveyed data.

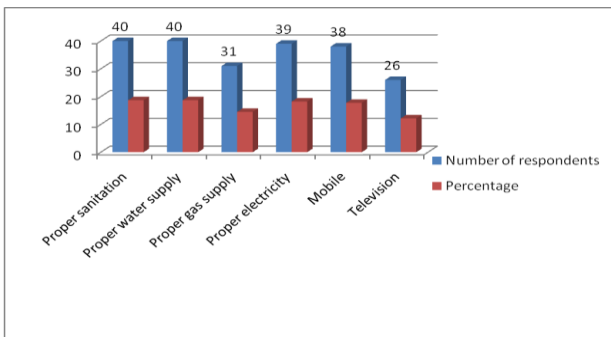


Fig. 3:- Percentage of workers as per residence facilities  
(\*Source: Own surveyed data).

Although some of the workers are getting residence facilities, most of the workers are not happy with the electricity, gas and housing conditions. Miss-connection of gas line and load shading are commonly uttered issues by the garment workers. They usually live in a small house with no ventilation or cooling facilities. Some of them made argument that their lives in their house are like a prison. These problems are very much severe in extreme weather like summer and winter.

➤ Working duration of the garment workers

RMG sector in Bangladesh is underprivileged with low wages and festival allowance. The factory workers have to spend much time in their working places with loaded works. That is why the workers are discouraged to work sufficiently for producing maximum products. In recent years it is observed that, the production and export volume of factory products in Bangladesh have decreased. Moreover factory owners argued that, the supply of gas and electricity is not enough to continue the current level of production.

From Fig. 4 and Table 6 it is found that, the maximum number of respondents (35%) are spending about ten hours in their factory, followed by eleven (30%), eight (22.5%), twelve (10%) and nine (2.5%) hours per day.

Categories	Number of respondents	Percentage
08 Hours	9	22.5
09 Hours	1	2.5
10 Hours	14	35
11 Hours	12	30
12 Hours	4	10

Table 6:- Classification of Working Hours  
\*Source: Own surveyed data.

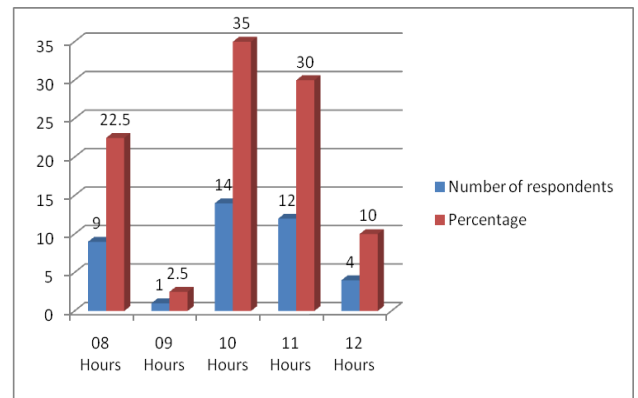


Fig 4:- Percentage of Workers as per Working Hours  
(\*Source: Own surveyed data).

➤ Income of Workers

In past, workers had twelve hours working day. Now the condition has been improved because of workers movements, interventions of concerned authorities and influence of foreign customers. The most concerned and discussed issue of garments workers is related with their income. There are so many records when valuable lives have been lost and injured due to movements or unexpected accidents. To recover their losses and for the betterment of the labours the wage board declared first minimum wage for garments workers back in 2013. After that a minimum monthly salary has been raised to taka 8000 from 5300 in 2018. Details of that minimum wages are described in the following table (Table 7).

S. L.	Items	Amount (Taka, 2013)	Amount (Taka, 2018)
1.	Basic	3000	4100
2.	House rent	1200	2050
3.	Medical allowance	250	600
4.	Transport allowance	200	350
5.	Food allowance	650	900
Total salary		= 5300	= 8000

Table 7:- Changes in minimum wage of the garments workers.

Source: Wage gazette of Bangladesh, 2018.

In a developing country like Bangladesh, readymade garments play a vital role to the development of the economy. But they are not treated properly as I have seen in my survey that, new workers get a wage of only 7000 to 8000 taka per month including overtime (Fig. 5). If they migrate or get promoted their salary increases to 9 to 10 thousand per month. Because of huge market place and availability of factories, workers can move easily from one factory to another. Most of respondents (i.e. 37.5%) in my study area get a salary ranging from 9 to 10 thousand (Table 8).

Categories	Number of respondents	Percentage
7000-8000 Tk.	11	27.5
8000-9000 Tk.	2	5
9000-1000 Tk.	15	37.5
10000-11000 Tk.	8	20
Less than 7000	1	2.5
More than 11000	3	7.5

Table 8:- Income of the workers as percentage

\*Source: Own surveyed data.

Skilled labours are blessings for the readymade garments sector. So it's the great responsibility of our human resource department to select the skilled workers for their factories. Many factories provide various kinds of incentives to their skilled workers. It helps the workers as extra gain and makes them more active in their works. If any worker promoted to supervisor, his/her salary increases to 20 thousand taka per month.

From Fig. 5 we can observe that 72.5% workers has a income of less than 10 thousand and we all are aware that, this amount is not sufficient but we hope it will improve in future.

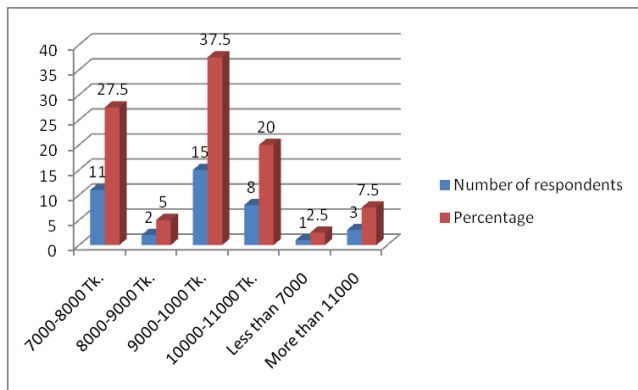


Fig. 5:- Percentage of Workers as per Income (\*Source: Own surveyed data).

Also skilled 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 skilled 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 37.5% workers income is 9000-10000 BDT/month (Table 7) though it is not sufficient but the situation is continuously improving (Fig. 5).

➤ *Health Issues of the Garments Workers*

A good health is the key to hard work. Though, the workers of garments industry of Bangladesh works hard, but they are not in good health. Most of the workers are suffering from different types of diseases. Some of them are working with regular diseases like cold-fever or diarrhea maybe its okay, but some of the workers are suffering from chronic

diseases. There are so many health issues working in a garments factory such as- noise induced hearing loss, problem of breathing because of dust and broken fabrics, skin problems because of chemical used in dying, exposure of toxic agents, problems of back pain and joint pain in early age because of long duration of seating and standing while working.

Accidents like building collapse, fire are now very common in garments industry. But, workers don't have the medical insurance in case of any accident. Incidence like break down of hand or leg or any part of the body while working, they don't get proper treatment from the authority. In case of fire or electric shock, some of the garments workers are injured and some died, if they become unable to work they are being sacked from their job because of their disability.

In case of illness, they don't have the facility of instant treatment because they must have to be present at the factory before due time. Workers can't take a day off even because of physical illness. In case of surgery, workers don't get any allowance from the authority. From the very low income of the garments workers they can't save enough for treatment like surgery or any kind of chronic diseases. Either they have to borrow from their close relatives or suffer without any treatment.

Factors like long working hours, fewer breaks between work, improper food habit, physical and mental pressure, lack of proper residence facilities makes the garments workers more weak and sick. On the other hand, low income doesn't allow them to take proper treatment or care of themselves.

**V. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION**

Garments workers are the most important labour force of our economy. About 5 million peoples are directly involved with readymade garments industry and at least 10 million people are related with this industry. The major export earning sector of Bangladesh, which has about 75% of export earnings are always neglected and tortured both physically and mentally. About 90% workers of garments workers are women, who are illiterate or little educated running this sector. This study mainly focused on the socio-economic status of these garments workers and their availability of medical services. It is found that, most of the women has the most vulnerable economic situation and doesn't get enough medical facilities by themselves or by their employers. Contribution of garments industry in the economy proves the potentiality of competition in the international market. This sector specially helped the rural people to change their fate by creating a new wide horizon.

Most of the garments workers are from villages of different districts of Bangladesh who came to this city to change their life. But the real situation is that, now they have a better financial situation but their hardships are still so much acute. They don't get enough medical facilities from the authority and don't have the ability to have better medical

facilities. In case of regular illness like cold-fever, dysentery, physical weakness or pain the local pharmaceuticals store is their only hope, from where they get the necessary medicine and use those medicine sometimes according to the suggestions of the pharmaceuticals store or as they like best.

They don't have the financial ability to have their treatment from a registered doctor or from a better private clinic. Garments worker's monthly salary depends on the attendance in work, so they have to go to the garments regularly. Absence in any day either because of illness or any other reason they don't have the opportunity to take a day off. Per-capita income of Bangladesh is 1950.US dollars that means about 14000 taka per month. Minimum salary of the garments worker is taka 8000. There is a huge gap between the Per-capita income and the average income of the garments workers of Bangladesh. After meeting all possible family demand they can't save any money for medical treatment or can't save for the future. A day off for a garments worker means he/she will get the reduced amount of salary in the next month, that's why even in the time of illness they don't miss office.

Garments products of Bangladesh have a huge market all over the world. All these high quality products produced by these poor garments workers made this economy strong but their socio-economic condition is still weak than any other country who uses the products made by them. This study suggests that, garments workers should be treated with more importance. Salary of garments workers should be increased at a certain amount that they could reach a higher living standard. An increased salary will also increase the productivity of the garments sector. Each of the garments factories should have a medical section for day to day treatment and should have enlisted with a specific hospital or clinic so that they could have necessary medical services from the specific hospital or clinic. Garments workers should have medical insurance and should have the facility of medical leave and other leave facilities. Although, most of the garments workers are female, facilities like maternity leave, maternity allowance should be provided by the garments authority. They also should have the allowance facilities for chronic diseases and for surgery if needed.

Garments workers are mainly the physical labours, so they should remain fit both physically and mentally. They works for a very long period, sometimes it takes to work for 10 to 12 hours per day. Normally, they have only one day off in a week, that is Friday. The study suggests that, working hours should be strictly maintained by the authority. Physical harassment, tortures are very common in this sector. Strict laws should be imposed and implemented against physical harassment and torture in this sector as well as in the whole economy.

Most of the victims of harassment and physical assaults don't go to the police or any law enforcing organization because of shame and risk of losing job. They are garments workers, so they have to work any of the garments factories. Here the

picture is almost same in every factory. That's why the workers think that, they will be harassed or tortured either in this factory she currently working or in some other new factory. Some other policy for the garments workers are given as follows:

- Prohibition of Forced labor: Workers should not be worked forcefully.
- No Discrimination: There should be no wage discriminations among the garments workers; either it is a male/female or others.
- Occupational Health & Safety (OHS): Safety of the workers should be ensured in their workplaces, such as fire safety, earth-quake safety etc.
- Disciplinary Practices/ Harassment: No labour should be harassed or tortured either physically or mentally in their workplaces.
- Formation of labour unions or associations and their freedom should be ensured for collective bargaining. For the betterment of the workers.
- Welfare facilities: Welfare funds and facilities of garments workers should be raise for their better and secured life.
- Compensation & Benefits: Workers who are injured in their workplace, there should be a compensation payments for them.
- Working Hours: According to ILO the workers should have work 8 hours a day, but garments workers in our country has to work up-to 12 hours or more per day.
- Environmental Protection: Workers environment of a garments worker should be safe and sound.
- Inspections in the factories by the government should be more frequent and strict to ensure the rights of the workers.
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) could play a vital role to increase the awareness among workers about their rights.

Huge population of Bangladesh made this country a country of huge possibilities. Proper utilization of this population can lead this country to better future. Garments industry is an appropriate sector of employing this huge labour force and these labours should be treated with what they actually deserve.

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