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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF APPAREL INDUSTRIES IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The Textile and Clothing Sector in Bangladesh is by far the main and most important industry with 85.9% of all exports. Very low wages and trade deals with Western countries have helped make Bangladesh the world's second-largest garment exporter after China, with 60% of its clothes going to Europe and 23% to the US. The Ready Made Garment and Apparel Industries has a more excellent potential than whatever available part as far as other employments and foreign trade profit to diminish state of extreme poverty and make a commitment to the social and the national economy. Minimum Wage Context Living Wage Bangladesh 5,300 taka a month (68 USD; 54 EUR). It is estimated that workers have to spend 25,687 taka is the living Wage calculated by this is below the average in Asia. However working conditions in this imperative division are poor, which impacts directly on the Social and Economic condition of the country. One of the biggest challenges currently faced by our Bangladesh's RMG factories to ensure Workplace safety and better Working Condition for the millions of garments workers.. That is, they don't conform to labor rehearses that guarantee the social welfare of their workers. This article surveys the literature review on working conditions in Bangladesh's Ready Made Garment and Worker personal interview which located in center of Dhaka. In order to find out an in-depth study of the respondent worker through interview process and data collection method was implemented in addition to this, quantitative result was examined intended for attaining superior outcome.

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INTRODUCTION

The country Bangladesh got the most awaited independence on 1971. The "Made in Bangladesh" tag has also brought glory for Bangladesh, making it a prestigious brand across the globe. Bangladesh which was once termed by cynics a "bottomless basket" has now become a "basket full of Wonders". The readymade garments Bangladesh has exported \$31.2bn worldwide at the fiscal year (FY) 2014-15. Where Readymade garments industry of Bangladesh comprises 81.69 percent, in monetary terms the export was \$25.49 bn. More specifically export of knitwear sector has exceeded \$12.43bn comprising 39.83 percent the total export. Last five consecutive fiscal years from 2010-11 to 2014-15 share of knitwear sector in the gross domestic product (GDP) was 7.2 percent on Average." (<http://www.bgmea.com.bd>) The industry plays a key role in employment generations and in the provision of income to the poor. Bangladesh has 5 000 textile and garment factories & nearly four million Workers are directly and more than twelve million inhabitants are indirectly associated with the industry.

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Ready-made garments manufactured in Bangladesh are divided mainly into two broad categories: woven and knit products. Shirts and trousers are the main woven products at same time undergarments, socks, stockings; T-shirts, sweaters and other casual soft garments are the main knit products. Woven garment products still dominate the garment export earnings of the country. The share of knit garment products has been increasing since the early 1990s; such products currently account for more than 40 per cent of the country's total RMG export earnings. Owing to the emergence of strong backward linkages within the country, the knitwear industry is adding up to 75% value, which opens up enormous potential for foreign and domestic investor to spend in the areas of spinning, weaving, sewing, packaging, and accessories manufacturing (www.bgmea.com.bd). The garments sector is the largest employer of women in Bangladesh. Women's are paid far less than men mainly due to their lack of education. Women's are reluctant to unionize because factory owners threaten to fire them. Even though trade unionization is banned inside the Export Processing Zones (EPZ), the Working environment is better than that of the majority of garments factories that operate outside the EPZs. Garments Workers Have protested against their low wages. Because the country's labor wages is very cheap, buyer are interested in the garments

sector of Bangladesh. Two Major accidents, the Tazreen fire and the Rana plaza collapse, have brought the issue of workplace safety to the fore and led all stakeholders to act accordingly. Following the unfortunate incidents, Various platforms such as the Bangladesh Accord on fire and building safety , the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety and national plan of Action Have been formed to improve building and fire Safety of Bangladesh's garments industry (Textiles on the WTO Website, 2008).

Literature Review

The Bangladeshi textile & readymade garments industry the greatest challenges have had to face so far in the year of 2005. The changed of international policy regarding the export of textiles and readymade garments. There is much speculation at present about the situation of the RMG exporters in the Post-MFA period, when the World Trade Organization (WTO), instead of GATT will control the sector. Under the WTO all quotas will be removed, resulting in a free market worldwide. Bangladesh's garment and textile manufacturers will have to face gradual competition from countries such as India, Pakistan, China, and Thailand, from whom the country now imports fabric to meet the demands of its RMG sector (Textiles on the WTO Website, 2008). When the WTO free market is established, all these countries will be able to expand their RMG exports. As a result, these countries will be able to utilize more of their locally produced yarn and fabrics nationally, resulting in the rise of prices for these in the export market and putting pressure on the industries of countries such as Bangladesh. United States and EU cuts imports of textile goods and readymade garments from Bangladesh: after the cut of import facility and impose the high duties on import of textile goods and readymade garments from Bangladesh. After that there was huge fall of the textile and readymade garments orders from united state ([http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/trade information](http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/trade%20information)). Nonetheless, US and EU are the major importer of Bangladesh textile which creates a huge difference in export of Bangladesh textile after imposing a restriction on import of Bangladeshi textile goods.

Some important phases of the Bangladesh RMG industry (Mazedulet *al.*, 2013)

Period	Event
1977-1980	Early period of growth
1982-1985	Boom days
1985	Imposition of quota restrictions
1990s	Knitwear sector developed significantly
1995-95	Child labor issue and its solution
2003	Withdrawal of Canadian quota restriction
2005	Phase-out of export-quota system

ILO reports that since the 1980's, the Apparel & RMG industry in Bangladesh has encountered fast development and is at present stacked up as one of the top exporters in the world of economy. The RMG business has made a significant commitment to the economy and social order by basically giving a wellspring of occupation for about three and a half million (3.5 million) workers, for the most part women. By "Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA)" of "General Agreement Tariff and Trade (GATT)" and supportive policies of the "Government of Bangladesh (GoB)" along with many other sources, it is known that Bangladesh Garment Industries have

been at their highest peak in the last few years. It procured a high profile as far as foreign trade profits, mass industrialization and commitment to the national GDP in a short period of time. Nonetheless, social improvements for this sector have not yet been gone so far as it has gone up above the expectations for the national economy. Several reports show that the working environment of RMG sector does not meet the standard of "International Labor Organization (ILO)." Although, the women are the main workforce of this sector, the biggest mover of country's economy wheel; they are not given their deserved due. The workers of RMG sector in the last decade experienced a number of miserable experiences. Looking on the recent attractive growth of economy of Bangladesh, the highest number of billions has come from export oriented Ready Made Garment products. But the collapse at Spectrum garment factory in 2005, killing 64 workers and critically injuring more than 100 workers. Fire at Tazreen Fashions in 2012 and the collapse of the Rana Plaza in 2013 generated a huge outcry about the working conditions and labor relations in the Readymade Garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh, and led to the adoption of the multi-stakeholder agreements Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (Accord) at the international level and the National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA) at the domestic level (<http://asiafoundation.org/media/view/slideshow/66/Bangladesh-garment-workere>). The International Labor Organization (ILO) acts as the independent chair.⁵⁵ The Accord entails inspections of factories building standards for factories and compilation of reports on the safety standards. What triggered brands to become signatories to the Accord was the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in 2013. (Housing five garment factories), which killed more than 1300 workers and seriously injured 200 worker. Moreover, the improvement of the condition of labors in this sector was being discussed long before the accidents occurred so far. Majumder P, stated that the social compliance of RMG factories lack nonappearance of labor standard observing framework and inadequate building regulations, "poor authorization" and antiquated labor laws, and an absence of cognizance of labor rights around laborers (Majumder, 1998).

Occupational safety and health

- Establishments are required to put up for every 150 workers one first aid box and one trained person per first aid box, and an equipped dispensary with a patient-room, doctor and nursing staff.
- Employers are required to take appropriate measures to protect workers from danger and damage due to fire.
- Every establishment is required to be kept clean and free from effluvia arising out of any drain, privy or other nuisance.
- The work room should not be overcrowded and injurious to the health of the workers.
- Every establishment should provide pure drinking water, sufficient light and air, and separate toilets for its male and female workers (Bangladesh Labour law Reform directions, 2010).

Trade Unions there are around 120 registered garment trade unions in Bangladesh. Bangladesh's largest and most important trade union for the garment sector is the National Garment Workers' Federation (NGWF) which has 27,000

Overview of relevant Labour Laws, International Law and implementation

Area	International Law	Ratified	National Law	Implementation
Women	CEDAW	Ratified	Art 27 of the Constitution provides for equality of all citizens. Art 45 of the Labour Act grants 8 weeks of maternity leave.	Sexual harassment and discrimination occurs in factories and the right to maternity leave is often not granted.[9]
Freedom of Association/ collective Bargaining	ILO Conventions 87 (1948) 98 (1949)	Ratified (both in 1972)	Art 176 of the Labour Act gives the right to form and join unions.	Some sectors are excluded from forming unions, such as factories in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ). Moreover, workers often get fired for joining trade unions.[10] However, the Accord provides that joining trade unions and collective bargaining are allowed. Women often have less access to unions than men.[11]
Living Wage	ILO Conventions 26 131		Art 15 of the Constitution states that the right to a reasonable wage is fundamental. Arts 10 and 14 of the Constitution prohibit exploitation of "man by man" and oblige the state to make sure there is no exploitation.	The wages in Bangladesh are amongst the lowest in the world and the situation, many workers are in could be regarded as economic exploitation.
Safe Working Conditions	ILO Convention 155		Art 51 of the Labor Law provides that clean and healthy standards must be upheld in work places. Chapter VI further prescribes certain safety standards.	Often, workers face unsafe, cramped and hazardous conditions at work which can lead to health problems of the workers and to dangerous situations in the factories such as fires and collapses.[12]

Members, mostly women. Other trade unions are a.o.: IndustriAll Bd IBC, BIGUF, BGIWF, Garment Workers Unity Forum (GWUF), Garment Workers TU Center and Pana Plaza Garment Workers Union. Other organizations active around the garments workers issue are: BILS (Bangladesh Institute of labor Studies), BLAST (legal aid), SromikNirapotta Forum (Workers Security Forum), Activist Anthropologists (Bangladesh Apparel View, 2014). This literature review shows that most articles of clothing factories in Bangladesh give careless consideration to labor standards and labor rights, refuse trade union exercises, risky working environment. The current condition of social lives of the workforces as well as the economy played some vital roles in the changes of Bangladesh. The literature review considers the current, past and future condition of Apparel & RMG and its impact on Bangladesh by responding to the following question:

- Which way did the worker improve the social life?
- How do the recent disasters, violence and price hiking protest create problems?
- Does the code of conduct required for taking the action?
- What are the contributions of RMG in Bangladesh economy?

RMG workers' family, education, medication, working environment, everyday life activities, trade union, salary hiking protest, available facilities, workers' safety issues, women rights all together relate to the social lives and economy of Bangladesh. By all means, it cannot be denied that the recent disasters are impacting on the socio-economic condition of Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study

To focus on the following issues:

- Apparel & RMG workers' social condition including earning and demands.
- Safety issues of the workforce in the Garments & Apparel sector.

- Economic conditions and contributions of RMG & Apparel in Bangladesh.
- Disasters timeline over the RMG & Apparel industries so far.
- Proposed "Code of conduct" and suggestions.

METHODOLOGY

Data sources of the research paper

- Primary research (data collection) by performing surveys in the form of personal interviews on 50 RMG workers.
- Using IBM SPSS Statics software (International Standard of Primary Research) to analyze and present data.
- Secondary research (data source) is online, websites, blogs, economic studies of BGMEA and CPD.

The main Limitation of the Study

- Constraints to reach and collect the data from lower level of worker.
- Majority are the female workers lack of Proper Education.
- Respondent sample are narrow
- Only the mechanism of interview process sources is not sufficient to reach actual data

Analysis and Presentation of Primary Research

The primary research was performed on garments who worked in knitwear based factory on two locations, at Dhaka, Maradia Slums on some garments workers and at a Garments factory of the top floor of BUFT, BGMEA. There are the statistics of the 50 respondent, participated in the interview. The table shows the sex, age, education, marital status and children of the response.

Table 1.Statistics

	Sex of the respondent	Age of the respondent	Education of the respondent	Marital Status	Children of the respondent
N Valid	50	50	50	50	50
Missing	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1.1. Sex of the respondent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	12	24.0	24.0	24.0
	Female	38	76.0	76.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.2. Age of the respondent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	19	5	10.0	10.0	18.0
	20	3	6.0	6.0	24.0
	22	5	10.0	10.0	34.0
	23	5	10.0	10.0	44.0
	26	2	4.0	4.0	48.0
	27	4	8.0	8.0	56.0
	28	3	6.0	6.0	62.0
	30	5	10.0	10.0	72.0
	31	3	6.0	6.0	78.0
	35	6	12.0	12.0	90.0
	40	3	6.0	6.0	96.0
	48	2	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.3. Education of the respondent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary	15	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Post Primary	27	54.0	54.0	84.0
	Illiterate	8	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.4. Marital Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	8	16.0	16.0	16.0
	Married	35	70.0	70.0	86.0
	Divorced	7	14.0	14.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.5. Children of the respondent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2	26	52.0	52.0	52.0
	3above	4	8.0	8.0	60.0
	none	20	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

1. Social Impacts of RMG Workers

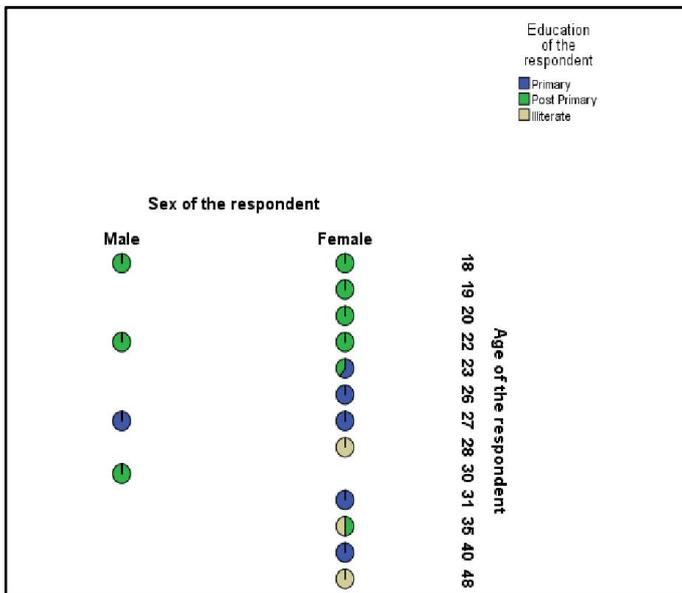
In the table 1.1, study shows 76% female and 24% male are working in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. From this perspective, female workers are more in number than the male workers in this sector. Nearly, 80% women in RMG are contributing directly to the growth of Bangladesh's economy and social welfares. In the table 1.2, ages of the respondents are displayed in terms of valid percentage. The youngest respondents are of 18 years old in the sector; they are of 8% whereas the oldest respondents are 48 years old, their percentage is 2%. The most percentage comes from the age level of 35 years, they are of 12%.

Most of the workers are from rural areas who are working in the lower level of all the available employments. So, their social lives are centering into Dhaka, Chittagong, Gazipur and of the like industrial cities. Although, education is an important part of our society, RMG workforces lack in this portion of social necessity. 15% passed primary level whereas 27% workers are having passed post primary level. 16% are totally illiterate. If the society could send properly educated employers to this sector the result would be something positively different from what it is today. Married life requires more expenditure than that of single life. The study shows in this Table: 1.3, 70% of the RMG workers are married whereas only 16% are single and rest 14% is married but the current status is divorced. Excessive pressure of expenditure impacts

on earning that propels employees to take part in the “wage hiking protest”. Workers have to pay in the expense of their children. This table of data presents that only 20% workers are having no children. The rest 80% are bearing the burden of children expenditure. This with their pay scale of 5,000 BDT to 12,000 BDT is almost impossible. Their standard of social life is not exactly what it should have been.

Multi-Pie Chart of Social Data

This multi-pie chart of data combines all the separate tables of data. It shows respondents’ position in the respect of Age, Sex and Education. Age level of 18 to 22 attained “post primary” education in the research. From the age of 23 to 27 passed “primary” education generally in the research. Age 28, 35 and 48 were found totally illiterate.



2. Economic Impacts of RMG

Table 2.1. Wages of the respondent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4000	3	6.0	6.0
	4400	6	12.0	18.0
	4800	3	6.0	24.0
	5300	16	32.0	56.0
	6000	3	6.0	62.0
	8000	12	24.0	86.0
	10000	2	4.0	90.0
	12000	5	10.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The Salary ranges from 4,000 BDT to 12,000 BDT while the interview was ongoing. After the recent “wage hiking protest” in 2013, minimum salary is increased and adjusted at 5,300 BDT. However, at the time of interview many workers (24% shown in the table: 2.1) blamed that they are yet to receive newly announced amount.

Table 2.2. Wage Hiking Protest

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	50	100.0	100.0

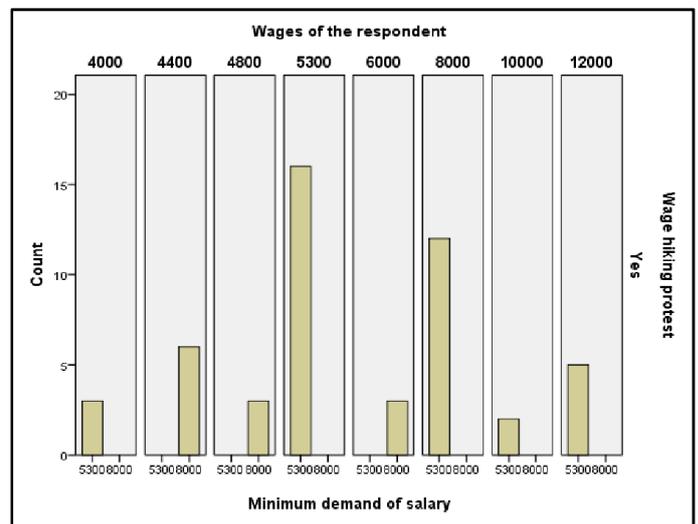
This Table: 2.2 represent the status of recent “wage hiking protest”. One of the most discussed issues of 2013 took place mainly in Dhaka, Gazipur and Savar industrial areas. Reuters (2013) reported “about 50,000 garment industry workers held their largest protest so far in the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka”. The research establishes, 100% respondents are agreed with the “protest” and the demand. If their economic conditions remain fair, without question their social condition will develop. Therefore, according to the study, the recent “wage hiking protest” was mandatory. Gradual unstoppable price hike in every product and service has included extra unbearable burden of expenditures into the every level of society.

Table 2.3. Minimum demand of salary

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	5300	38	76.0	76.0
	8000	12	24.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table: 2.3 points that the minimum range of demanded salary. In an online version of Reuters news portal (2013) it is stated “Bangladesh's \$20-billion garment export industry employs roughly 4 million workers who earn about 3,000 taka (\$38) a month, or half what Cambodian factory workers now earn. They want a raise to 8,000 taka (\$103) per month.” However, finally it was settled down to 5,300 BDT. Except for 24% of the total respondents in the research agreed with the newly decided rate of wage as minimum pay scale.

Bar Graph of RMG Workers Salary Demand



In spite of the fact that, 100% workers say “yes” for “wage hiking protest”; there is still a difference between the minimum demands of wage 5,300 BDT and 8,000 BDT in the Bar Graph. Employees, whose current salary is minimum 4,000 BDT, are agreed with 5,300 BDT as their minimum pay scale. On the other hand, workers, whose wage ranges are 4,400 BDT, 4,800 BDT and 6,000 BDT; want it to be settled down at 8,000 BDT as their minimum salary per month. On the contrary, workers whose salary scales are 5,300 BDT, 8,000 BDT, 10,000 BDT and 12,000 BDT showed their positive attitude with the newly settled 5,300 BDT salary level as their minimum wage range per month.

3. Safety Issues of RMG Workforce

Working conditions in the RMG sector frequently violate International Labour Standards (ILO), and Codes of Conduct (Qudus and Uddin S., 1993; Dasgupta S., 2002). During the field work of this research, several major reasons came across with the administrators of the survey regarding the “social compliance” of the RMG workers.

Table 3.1. Workers safety

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid safe	18	36.0	36.0	36.0
Not safe	9	18.0	18.0	54.0
In danger	23	46.0	46.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

In Table: 3.1, survey proves that the most of the workers in RMG workforce (46%) are ‘in Worker safety’ condition. only 18% among them are considered to be ‘safe’ in their workplace. Rest 9% workers are in ‘not safe’ condition. They, do not even aware of their rights as RMG workers.

Table 3.2. Drug and treatment

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	43	86.0	86.0	86.0
No	7	14.0	14.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

In table 3.2, it depicts the percentage of ‘drug & treatment’ given by the employers of RMG industries to the workers. Though, 86% are given ‘drug & treatment’ some opine that they are only given treatment of ‘Paracetamol’. 14% workers are yet not given any ‘drug & treatment’. These, badly hampers and affects their social lives. Finally, when they fall into with incurable major diseases it impacts to their financial conditions.

Table 3.3. Fire Exit Training

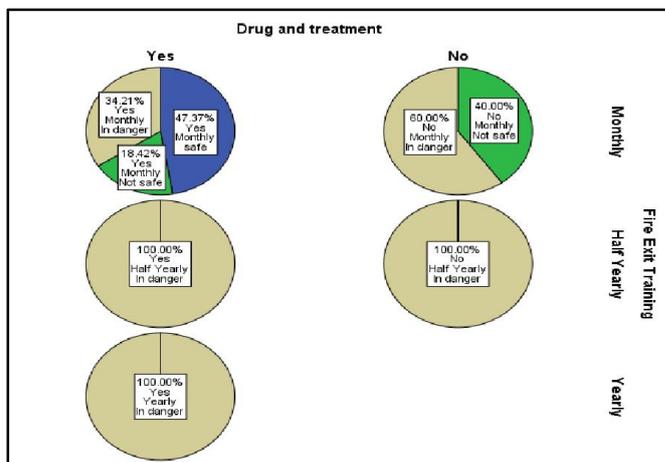
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Monthly	43	86.0	86.0	86.0
Half Yearly	4	8.0	8.0	94.0
Yearly	3	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

ILO (2013) states “Fire at Tazreen Fashions leads to the deaths of 112 workers”. The study shows that 86% respondents are trained ‘monthly’ for ‘fire exit training’, 8% workers are ‘half yearly’ and the rest 6% workers are given training ‘yearly’. Although, the percentage of ‘monthly’ training is high and positive, RMG Manufacturers’ further effort can make it 100% within a month.

Multi-Pie Chart of Safety Issues of RMG Sector

From this pie chart, study presents that, the result from the multi-pie chart of safety issue, 34% of the employers who get Drug (Medicine) & treatment. Also the fire and exit training, Still they claim they are in danger conditions, 18% workers who are of the category claim that they are in ‘not safe’ condition. But, to the contrary, 47% workers among them are

in ‘safe’ condition. Workers, who are not given any ‘drug and treatment’, are all ‘in danger’ and ‘not safe’ condition. The study did not find any ‘safe’ conditioned workers in this category. All the other employees practicing ‘fire exist training’ ‘half year’ and ‘yearly’ whether under ‘drug & treatment’ or not, are ‘in danger’. The study also found that the workers of this huge community are unaware of industrial ‘Code of Conduct’, ‘Trade Union’ and their Rights.



They even wanted justice for ‘Rana Plaza’ Tragedy in the interviews. Most of them left a message for the garments community to be united as soon as possible to save this sector from being extinguished.

Recommendation

A project has been taken to set up a well-planned industrial park beside the Dhaka-Chittagong highway where the structurally weak garments factories will be able to relocate. Researchers believe the government of Bangladesh, BGMEA and BKMEA, with the support of global brands, international development partners, will be able to ensure the safety of the RMG industry and maintain the momentum of socio-economic development in the Country. They implementation of workplace safety measures the Accord makes adequate corrective action plan. The accord said the platform was conducting independent engineering inspection for fire, electrical and building structural safety at every factory in Bangladesh. Trade Union Congress (TUC) aid program in conjunction with National Garments Workers Federation (NGWF) worked for training the female worker regarding the Labor Law and Trade Union Rights. TUC is umbrella group for trade union in the UK. Women’s make up (85%) of workers in garments and apparel industry in Bangladesh.

Conclusion

The primary research and the importance of workplace co-operation are prerequisite to ensure sustainable growth the RMG sector in Bangladesh. There is need for efforts to facilitate confidence and mutual trust among the executives and workers. An enormous emphasis is necessitating on the capacity building of mid-level managers and workers so as to promoting the effective labor-management relations in RMG & Apparel sector in Bangladesh. In the direction of developing a code of conduct is mandatory which will characterize the

relations between the managements and workers. It is desire that, workers should provide a opportunity to form a trade union within an enterprise. A standard practice of workers' rights, practices of 'Code of Conduct' along with application of best Labor Law may broaden the situation. In this instance, workers suggested that only unity can make them stronger and save them from the indirect attacks of counterpart. Apparel &RMG is the core resource of foreign trade, which is taking Bangladesh to the top notch in the world. People of Bangladesh generally should aware of the current humiliating circumstances as the downfall of RMG sector means the broken socio-economy of Bangladesh.

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