

Women Labor Force in the Industrial Sector: An Exploratory Study of their Problems

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Abstract

In the recent years, there has been a considerable growth of women labour force in the industrial sector of Bangladesh. Realising the importance of the issue this study made an attempt to identify, in an urban setting, the motivating factors behind women participation in the industrial sector, to examine the working environment and wages payment system, and to identify the major problems of women workforce in the industrial sector. This study is an empirical study based on primary data. Total sample was 30 industrial organizations and 60 women labours. It is found that economic distress, family need and dissatisfaction with household work are the major motivating factors of women involvement in the industrial sector; nearly 80% women labours in the industrial sector work over 8 hours daily; 58.33% women labours do not get maternity leave; 80% of them are not satisfied with their working environment; 47% of them are not regularly paid, 86% of them are facing wages discrimination with their male colleagues; insecurity of job, sexual harrasment and lack of leave facilities are the major problems of women labours in the industrial sector.

Keywords: Industrial sector, working environment, payment, discrimination, women labours.

Introduction

In the traditional society, women's role was limited to the household activities. For many reasons women perceived clearly that if they want to contribute to their families and society, the most effective way is to go out and earn money (Bhuiyan, 2010). In the 1980s and 90s, shrinkage in employment opportunities made it difficult for men and women to get jobs (Chowdhury, 2000). Therefore, their entry into industrial sector had to happen as a natural course. Employment leads to economic empowerment (Bhuiyan, 2011). For promoting women's economic empowerment, income-generating activities can play a vital role (Begum, 2010). After the liberation of Bangladesh a significant change has occurred in the state policy by recognizing the fact that women constitute about half of the total population of Bangladesh (Begum, 1993). The government has given emphasis on women development through creating employment opportunities. As a result, recently a new trend has emerged where women of all levels are searching jobs in various fields including industrial sector. Now, they are not performing quite secretarial jobs in the offices or as teachers in the educational institutions but also in various jobs in the industrial sector with technical skills (The 2nd 5 year plan, GOB). Their interest is also concentrated in the posts of high executives (Sharma, 1985). On the other hand, all over the world women are accepted as equal partners with men in development works (Khan, 1993) and they are

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not now limited in their traditional works. They are working in all the major sectors of economy with their courage and morale (Begum, 1999). The trend of women participation in the industrial sector of Bangladesh is also highly positive (Haider and Rahman, 1997).

Literature Review

For the purpose of the study a number of related studies were reviewed. Considering space a few of them are presented below:

Rina (2008) viewed that in a male dominated society like Bangladesh women get minimum chance to work outside their houses but since the 1970s women are increasingly participating in the labour force all over the world.

Majumder (2011) found that since 1960 women participation in agriculture is reducing in developing countries and they are increasingly joining non-agricultural activities. Women participation in agriculture was 89% in 1960 and it became 54% in 2010.

Mondol (2007) confirmed that lower wages and long working hours than that of male workers, insecurity in jobs, nasty working environment etc. are the characteristics of women labour. At the same time, the women labours are receiving only 54% wages of male workers.

The study by Zohir (2001) revealed that when women include themselves in labour force, they face some challenges such as suppression from owners, negligence of management, unwilling over-time, unhygienic environment and risk in work.

Begum (1997) mentioned that women labours in garments sector are suffering from the problems of housing, transportation, food and nutrition in personal life and absence of minimum wages, unlimited working hour, lack of leave facilities, unwilling over-time, unhygienic working environment and absence of rules and regulations in their working environment.

Purohit and Bhattacharjee (1993) identified that from the dawn of civilization women played complementary role with men. In Bangladesh it has no exception. They also showed, mainly economic reasons draw the women of Bangladesh in industrial sector.

Begum (1999) showed, women are not now limited in their traditional activities. They are working in all the major sectors of economy with their courage and morale.

Bhuiyan (2010) conducted a survey and identified that women employees in the garment sector are mainly suppressed by the owner groups in terms of payment and job conditions.

Bhuiyan (2011) found that the banking sector in Bangladesh is now very favorable for educated women folk. They are working there with confidence and satisfaction.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to focus on the overall conditions of women participation in the labour force in the industrial sector of Bangladesh. The specific objectives are as follows :

- (i) to profile the sample women labourers;
- (ii) to identify the motivating factors behind women participation in the industrial sector as labour force;
- (iii) to examine the working environment of women labourers in the industrial sector;

- (iv) to investigate into the relevant issues regarding wages payment to women labourers in the industrial sector;
- (v) to identify the major problems of women labourers in the industrial sector; and
- (vi) finally, to suggest policy recommendations.

Methodology of the Study

Sample Size

Selection of sample was made by considering the objectives of the study. This study is based on primary data. Total sample was 30 industrial organizations and 60 women labourers. To select 30 industrial organizations first a list of 60 (20 belonging to garments sector, 20 belonging to pharmaceuticals sector, 20 belonging to textiles sector) industrial organizations from Tajgaon industrial area, Dhaka was prepared considering the number of women workers working in those industries. It is pertinent to note that industrial enterprises, having less than 300 women workers, were not considered in this list. Then from that list 30 industries were selected randomly (10 belonging to garments sector, 10 belonging to pharmaceuticals sector, 10 belonging to textiles sector). To select 60 women labourers another list of 300 women labourers (100 belonging to garments sector, 100 belonging to pharmaceuticals sector and 100 belonging to textiles sector) was prepared from previously selected 30 organizations considering experience of work. Women workers with working experience under 5 years were not considered in this list. Then 60 (20 belonging to garments sector, 20 belonging to pharmaceuticals sector and 20 belonging to textiles sector) women workers were selected randomly from the list. Here it should be specially mentioned that women clerks, typists and supervisors were considered as women labours for this study.

Questionnaire Preparation

A structured and an unstructured questionnaire were prepared on the basis of literature review, experts' opinion and consultation with prospective respondents. The questionnaire was piloted with 10 women workers to judge the appropriateness of the questionnaire.

Method of Data Collection

Structured and unstructured questionnaire had been used to collect data. In addition to this, some selected respondents were exclusively interviewed for in-depth analysis to strengthen the dimension of the study. Unstructured questionnaire was used to take interview.

Data Processing

The data collected through the field survey were analyzed by applying SPSS programme. In some cases only percentage and cross table analysis is done.

Profile of the Sample Women Labourers in the Industrial Sector

The present study made an attempt to understand the profile of the sample women labourers in the industrial sector of Bangladesh. This profile is presented in figure-1.

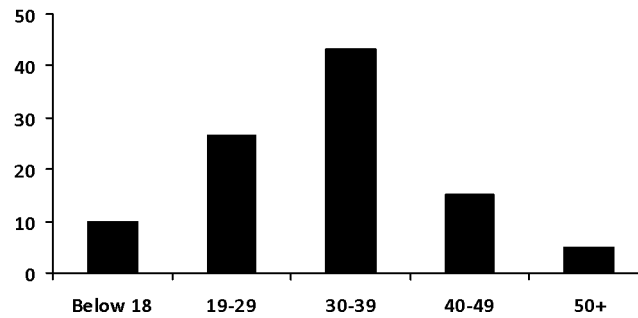
Figure-1 : Age Levels of the Sample Women Labours, N=60

Figure-1

Figure-1 indicates that 10% women labourers in the industrial sector are in the age group of below-18 years; 26.67% are in the age group of 19-29; 43.33% are in the age group of 30-39 years; 15% are in the 40-49 years and only 5% women labourers in the industrial sector are in the age group of 50-above ages. The figure confirms that majority of the working women (70%) in the industrial sector are young (19-30 years). It is also to be noted that some minor girls are working in the industrial sector as women labourers. That means the industrial sector of Bangladesh is not free of child labour. At the same time, a very few older women are working in the industrial sector.

Table-1 : The Rank and Status of Women Workers in the Industrial Sector, N=60

Rank and Status	Frequency	%
Labour	45	75.00
Typist	04	6.67
Clerk	05	8.33
Supervisor	06	10.00
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

Table-1 indicates, 75% women workers in the industrial sector are working as labourers; 6.67% are as typists; 8.33% are as clerks and 10% as supervisors. Here, it is to be noted that majority (75%) of the women workers are working as labourers in the industrial sector. Women supervisors are holding the second position (10%).

Table-2 : Education of the Sample Women Workers in the Industrial Sector. N=60

Education levels	Frequency	%
Under S.S.C	33	55.00
S.S.C	14	23.33
H.S.C	09	15.00
Graduation	03	05.00
Masters	01	01.67
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

Table-2 indicates, 55% of the sample women workers in the industrial sector have education under S.S.C; 23.33% S.S.C; 15% H.S.C; 05% graduation and 01.67% Master degree. Table-2 also shows, mainly lower educated women folk are selecting industrial sector for their job. A small number of women labourers in Bangladesh are holding higher degree but they are mainly in office job not in machine (Bhuiyan, 2010).

Table-3 : Marital Status of the Sample Women Workers in Industrial Sector, N=60

Marital status	Frequency	%
Married	24	40
Unmarried	14	23.33
widowed	10	16.67
Divorced	08	13.33
Living separately	04	06.67
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

Table-3: shows, 40% of the sample women workers in the industrial sector are married; 23.33% unmarried; 16.67% widowed; 13.33% divorced and 06.67 are living separately. These data indicate that industrial sector of Bangladesh is one of the shelters of divorced and widowed women of the society. A large number of unmarried women are working there. So, industrial sector is increasing social safety (Bhuiyan, 2010).

Motivational Factors of Women Labourers to Participate in the Industrial Sector

Motivational factors motivate anyone to participate in a particular issue. Regarding industrial sector a number of motivational factors motivated women labourers to join there. The present study identified the motivational factors which have driven women labourers to take part in this sector. The factors are presented below in table-4.

Table 4 : Motivational Factors for Choosing the Industrial Sector by the Women Labours, N=60

Factors	Frequency	%
Economic distress	18	30
Family need	15	25
Dissatisfaction with household work	14	23.33
Social prestige	13	21.67
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

Table-4 indicates that 30% women labourers have selected industrial sector for the reason of economic distress; 25% for family need; 21.67% for increasing social prestige, these types of women are financially lower class who were previously as house hold labours (Bhuiyan, 2011) and 23.33% selected industrial sector for their dissatisfying attitude to serve as household labors or as house wives. From the above data it is to be noted that industrial sector is upgrading the social status of lower class women. This sector is also an option to face economic distress and family need (Bhuiyan, 2011) because, the highest portion (55%) of women labours came here to face economic distress and family need.

Here chi-square test is done to judge the relationship between major percentage holding factor economic distress and women labours.

Ho : There is no relationship between taking work as women labour and economic distress

□ : There is a relationship between taking work as women labour and economic distress

Here test static is $\chi^2 = \{(O-E)^2 / E\}$

$\chi^2 = 3.73$, degree of Freedom = $(r-1)(c-1) = 1 \times 1 = 1$

At 5% level of significance and under two tailed test table value of χ^2 is 3.84 which is higher than that of calculated value 3.73. So, null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Working Environment

The present study made an attempt to understand the working environment of women labours in the industrial sector. To achieve this end working hours, leave facilities and opinions regarding satisfaction level toward working environment of the respondents are analysed.

Table-5 : Working Hours of Women Labourers in Industrial Sector, N=60

Hours	Frequency	%
8	13	21.67
9	17	28.33
10	22	36.67
over 10	08	13.33
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

Results showing in table-5 indicate that 21.67% women labourers are working eight hours; 28.33% are working 9 hours; 36.67% are working 10 hours and 13.33% are working over 10 hours. Results clearly indicate that majority of the women labourers are working over 8 hours though according to ILO charter 8 hours working period is a right of a labourers. It is observed that this excess working hours are not counted as overtime. So, these hours are the means of exploitation.

Table-6 : Views of the Respondents Regarding their Leave Facilities, N=60

Types of leave	Frequency		Frequency	
	Available for women labours	%	Not available for women labours	%
Festival leave	36	60	24	40
Weekend	42	70	18	30
Sick leave	31	51.67	29	48.33
Maternity leave	25	41.67	35	58.33

Source : Field Survey

Table-6 indicates that 60% women labourers enjoy festival leave where as 40% do not get the same leave; 70% get weekend but 30% do not get ; for 51.67% women labourers sick leave is available but not for 48.33%. 41.67% women labourers get maternity leave where as 58.33% do not get. These findings indicate that majority of the women labourers in the industrial sector do not get maternity leave. This is so inhuman and drastic. In some organizations overtime is done at the weekend. So, a large percentage of women labourers do not enjoy weekend in those organizations. Some women labourers are not getting sick leave.

Table7: Opinions of the Respondents Regarding their Satisfaction Level toward their Working Environment, N=60

Opinions	Frequency	%
Satisfied	12	20
Dissatisfied	30	50
Strongly dissatisfied	18	30
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

Table-7 indicates that 20% women labourers are satisfied; 50% are dissatisfied and 30% are strongly dissatisfied with their working environment. The results confirm that majority of the women labourers in industrial sector are not satisfied with their work environment.

The present study claimed that 20% women labourers are satisfied in the industrial sector. To judge the statement an attempt to make Z test is taken.

Here, n = 60, x = 12

Ho : $\pi = 0.20$

□ $\pi \neq .20$

$$\text{Test static } Z = \frac{p - \pi}{\sqrt{\frac{\pi(1-\pi)}{n}}} = 1.91$$

At 5% level of significance under two tailed test table value of Z is ± 1.96 which is greater than that of calculated value 1.91. So, null hypothesis is accepted. That means the claim of the study is correct.

Some Important Issues Related to Wages

The present study made an attempt to judge the opinions of the respondents regarding wages related some important issues in the industrial sector. These issues are wages determining systems, overtime, amount of wages and discrimination between male and female labours regarding wages.

Table-8 : Wages Determining Systems of the Respondents, N=60

Determining Systems	Frequency	%
Piece rate system	37	61.67
Monthly based system	23	38.33
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

Results indicated in table-8 show that 61.67% women labourers in the industrial sector are working under piece rate system where as 38.33% are working under monthly system. It is to be noted that women typists are brought under women labourers in the present study and no women typist is paid under piece rate system. It is perceived that majority of the women labourers are performing their job seriously because of piece rate system of payment (Zohir, 2001).

Table-9 : Opinion of the Respondents Regarding Overtime, N=60

Opinions	Frequency	%
Overtime is obligatory	44	73.33
Overtime is not obligatory	16	26.67
Total	60	100%

Source : Field Survey

Table-9 confirms, 73.33% respondents do obligatory over-time. It is also observed, in some organizations obligatory over-time is arranged at the weekend. In those cases women labourers do not get chance to enjoy the weekend. Some organizations do not practice pre-fixed over-time rate. Though recognised over-time rate is 150% of the normal wages.

Table-10 : Opinions of the Respondents Regarding the Amount of Wages, N=60

Opinions	Frequency	%
Amount is enough	32	53.33
Amount is not enough	28	46.67
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

From the above table it became clear that 53.33% women labourers in the industrial sector think, they are getting enough wages from their organizations. Women labourers are not getting enough wages from their organizations for their sound life. But these women folk are so cornered in the society that majority of them are happy with the amount of the wages they are receiving.

Z test is applied to judge the opinion of the respondents .

Here $n = 60$, $x = 32$

$H_0 : \pi = .53$

$\square : \pi < .53$

$Z = \frac{p - \pi}{\sqrt{\frac{\pi(1-\pi)}{n}}} = -1.59$

At 5% level of significance and under left tailed test table value of $Z = \square 1.64 \square$, which is more than that of calculated value $\square 1.59 \square$. So, null hypothesis is accepted.

Table-11: Opinions of the Respondents Regarding Regularity of the Wages Payment, N=60

Opinions	Frequency	%
Regularly paid	32	53.33
Regularly but with a delay	16	26.67
Not regularly	12	20
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

Table-11 shows, 53.33% women labourers are receiving wages regularly; 26.67% are regularly but with a delay and 20% are receiving their wages irregularly. Results clearly indicate majority of the women labourers are receiving wages regularly. This issue is inspiring women labourers to continue their jobs in the industrial sector. Organizations which are not paying regularly should be careful about this issue to motivate the women labours.

Table12: Opinions of the Respondents Regarding Wages Discrimination between Male and Female Labours, N=60

Opinions	Frequency	%
Wages discrimination is existing	52	86.67
Wages discrimination is not existing	8	13.33
Total	60	100

Source : Field Survey

The above results indicate, 86.67% women labourers think, they are in discrimination with male labourers regarding wages, only 13.33% think, they are not in discrimination. Majority of the women labourers are facing discrimination regarding wages. ***

The present study made another attempt to judge the opinion of women labourers through Z test.

Here, $n = 60$, $x = 52$

$P = x/n = 52/60 = .8667$

Let, $H_0 : \pi = .8667$

$\square : \pi > .8667$

$Z = \frac{P - \pi}{\sqrt{\frac{\pi(1-\pi)}{n}}} = 1.60$

At 5% level of significance and under right tailed test table value of z is 1.64. which is greater than calculated value 1.60. So, hypothesis is accepted.

Major Problems of the Women Labours in the Industrial Sector

Over 50% of the population of Bangladesh are women (census, 2010). In this situation, if women remain totally absent from the development process it will be very difficult to make the development process forward. Industrial sector could be an area where a group of women folk could be engaged. In Bangladesh women folk are newly engaging themselves in various industrial activities. As a new area women workers are facing some sort of problems there. So, the present study made an attempt to understand the major problems of their working station. Table-13 is presenting such problems.

***According to the constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh; Article 29(A) and (B), universal human rights declaration-Article-23 (B) and (C), ILO Convention- Article 100, CIDO-Article 11 male and female workers preserve the right to get same wages.

Table-13: Opinions of the Respondents Regarding Major Problems of their Jobs in Corporate Sector, N=60

Opinions	Frequency	%
Unhygienic work place	14	23.33
Insecurity of jobs	36	60
Discrimination with male colleagues	27	45
Lack of fire protection arrangement	30	50
Use of filthy language by colleagues	26	43.33
Lack of leave facilities	32	53.33
Obligatory overtime	29	48.33
Sexual harrasment	33	55
Not taking responsibilities of accident by the organization	28	46.67

Source : Field Survey

Note : The total does not agree because of multiple responses

The above table indicates that 23.33% respondents' major problem is unhygienic work place; 60% felt insecurity of job as their major problem; 45% are in discrimination with male colleagues which is their major problem; 50% respondents' major problem is lack of fire protection arrangement which always keep them in the feelings of insecurity; 43.33% informed that their major problem is humiliating ill spoken; for 53.33% respondents' major problem is lack of leave facilities; 48.33% women labours believe that their major problem is obligatory overtime, 55% feel, their major problem is sexual harrasment and last of all 46.67% women labourers in the industrial sector opined that their major problem in the working environment is not taking responsibility of accidents by the organization. Analyzing the above result it will be realized that insecurity of job is the major problem to the majority of the women labourers though the constitution of Bangladesh categorilly assured the citizens' security of jobs (Article 15-A and B, Bangladesh constitution); 53.33% women labours confirmed that their major problem is not getting leave in need where as the constitution also agreed the right of getting leave of workers in need (article-34). 45% women labourers are facing discrimination while the constitution of Bangladesh does not agree with any kind of discrimination among the citizens. A large percentage of women labours are tolerating sexual harrasment as their major problem. It could hinder expansion of women activities. Lack of fire protection arrangement is the testimony to negligency of valuable life of the women labours. Obligatory overtime is hampering the personal life of the women labours.

The above study claimed that 60% women labourers believe, insecurity of job is their major problem. This study tested the opinion through Z test. Here, $n = 60$

$X = 36$ (60%, of n)

$P = .60$

$H_0 : \pi = 60$

$\square : \pi \neq .60$

$Z = 1.93$

At 5% level of significance and under two tailed test table value of $Z = \pm 1.96$. which is greater than that of calculated value 1.93. So, null hypothesis is accepted. That means their major problem is insecurity of job.

Summary of the Findings and Implications

The present study focused as working environment, wages payment, personal life, education, job status, problems of workplace, motivators and motivating factors of women labourers in the industrial sector. All the findings of this study are not encouraging and optimistic. In many dimensions they are deprived and frustrated. In some cases joining of women labourers in the industrial sector helped to develop their status. Since, our society look down upon the household labours, the industrial sector opened an option to break through that status of household labourers. Industrial sector has given opportunity to lower class women to face economic distress and family need. A study (Islam, 2009) revealed that 86.84% women labourers in the industrial sector were in zero income group prior to joining this sector. So, joining this sector and achieving income they became valuable in the society and family. Though they are facing a lot of problems in this sector; however, the contribution of this sector to their lives is significant. This study came up with some valuable findings, which could be very important for policy implications:

- (i) In the industrial sector of Bangladesh, majority of the working women labourers are between the age level of 30-39 (Figure-1).
- (ii) Majority of the women labourers in the industrial sector are serving in the position of labor while a very little number are as office staff (Table-1).
- (iii) Educational qualification of 55% women labourers are under S.S.C while graduation and master degree holder are only 6.66% (Table-2).
- (iv) 16.67% women labourers in the industrial sector are widowed and 13.33% are divorced (Table-3).
- (v) Economic distress has brought majority (30%) of the women labourers in the industrial sector (Table-4).
- (vi) Largest percentage (78.33) of women labourers in the industrial sector had to work over 8 hours (Table-5).
- (vii) A vast number (35%) of women labourers are not to enjoy maternity leave which could not be thought in a normal sense (Table-6).
- (viii) Working environment of 80% women labourers could not make them satisfied (Table-7).
- (ix) The present study identified that insecurity of job is the major problem of the women labourers.

Recommendations

The present study provided the following recommendations for policy makers :

- (i) Any kind of discrimination could break the courage of the women workers. Payment discrimination is a great problem in this sector. So, owners of the industries should take steps to resolve the problem of payment discrimination. A committee including owners, managers, trade unions and workers could be formed in this regard.
- (ii) A national committee should be formed to look after the issues of women labourers in the industrial sector.
- (iii) Government could inspire owners of the industries to employ more women workers by providing tax facilities because, more employment of women folk could reduce women oppression in the society.
- (iv) A large number of widowed and divorced women are performing their jobs in industrial sector as labours. So, government may form some policies and can establish some institutions to provide skill-training for the disadvantaged women to develop their working capacity in the industrial sector.
- (v) Researchers could select the issues for their research works to attract the attention of the various corners of the society to the women labourers. At the same time, they could sensitize the owners, managers and government to solve the problems of women labourers in the industrial sector of Bangladesh.
- (vi) The present study observed that majority of women labourers in the industrial sector are performing over 8 hours. It is a way for exploitation. This excess labour hours should be counted as overtime. Government and respective authorities should monitor the issue.
- (vii) The present study found that some of the women labourers in the industrial sector do not get weekend holidays and some of them do not get maternity leave. Both of these practices are inhuman. So, owners, managers and the Government should ensure weekend holidays and maternity leave for the women labourers.

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