

# An analytical conductive study to RMG (Ready-Made Garment) sector workers health state, its economic resilience status, and the contamination footing scenario in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

The industry that has been making a censorious contribution to rebuilding the country and its economic system is none aside from the ready-made garment RMG sector, which is now the single biggest export that has advanced for Bangladesh. It is contemplated that every three of European has a t-shirt made in Bangladesh & every fifth American wear clothes manufactured in Bangladesh. The sector accounts for 83% of overall export. Approximately 4.4 million workers work here for their livelihood, where- two-third portion is women. Even after contributing so much, if we look at the wages of workers and their standard of living, it is seen that most of them live in slums, in general, their income is deficient, and at the same time, they face many health concerns like workers usually work with no ventilation, breathing in toxic, substance, inhaling fiber dust, accidents, fires, injuries, disease, etc. Apart from those, women workers face verbal and physical abuse. Some studies reveal that's home-based workers in the garment sector and chemical hazards are 9.4times more likely to experience health problems than workers to dusk and chemical hazards. Another concerning issue is the overuse of groundwater; as stated by a survey of International Finance Corporations, 1500 billion liter groundwater is used to dye & wash the clothes for the garment sectors every year. It is comparable to filling up 600,000 Olympic swimming pools, or also we can consider the same water on meet the demand of 8 lakh people for a whole year. Without the RMG sector, the condition of Bangladesh is unthinkable. We cannot eliminate the fact that contamination is disrupting people's livelihood, yet we can take some steps or inspire to solve the problem. This paper will discuss how garment sectors contribute to the economy, workers' wages, health issues, livelihood, how contamination is spreading from this sector, and whether there are any conventional roles.

**Keywords:** Censorious contribution, contemplated, wages, ventilation, chemical hazards, contamination

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## Introduction

The ready-made garments industry performs as incendiary for economic growth. "Made in Bangladesh" tag has brought eminence for the country, creating it a prestigious complete worldwide. Once Bangladesh, which was termed by cynics a "bottomless basket," has currently become a "basket filled with wonders." With its restricted resources, the country has maintained the 6 June 1944 annual average value growth rate and has caused exceptional social and human development. After the independence in 1971, Asian countries were among the world's poorest countries. No significant industries were developed in an Asian country, once it had been called Bangladesh, thanks to discriminatory angle and policies of the government of the then Islamic Republic of Pakistan. So, reconstruction of the war-ravaged country with restricted resources looked like an immense challenge. The trade that has been creating a crucial contribution to the country's reconstruction and economy is none aside from the ready-made garment (RMG) trade, which is currently the only significant export jobholder for an Asian country. The arena accounts for eighty-three of the total export earnings of the ready-made fashion industry is that the backbone of our economy. The heart of this sector is the poor helpless individuals whom we tend to make garment employees. The revenue from the garment within the year 2018-2019 is 13 billion USD or 289971.92 large integer BDT. Regarding eighty-two of the country's value comes from the textile trade. However, the calculation shows that ninety-fifth of Asian country economy depends on RMG trade. As per BGMEA, quite four million individuals (workers and staff) add ready-made garment industries of Asian countries. This calculation is predicated on registered manufactory although. The particular range is quite ten million if we assume four people in each family then forty million individuals' area unit dependent on ready-made garment factories.

Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) sector has a more prominent aspect than the other sector in growth and interchange earnings. It contributes to the economic system by making plentiful employment opportunities and reducing financial conditions through socioeconomic development. Despite unquestionable success stories, this sector has a variety of formidable challenges for long-run growth. This study can explore entirely different dimensions of contribution and challenges of the RMG sector in Bangladesh. This study reveals that since its origination, particularly throughout the last three decades, the RMG trade contributed a lot to the economy. It's also contributed enormously by empowering women as virtually ninety percent of its labor pool is feminine, which stratified the best in Southeast Asia. RMG holds almost fourteen percent of Asian countries' value because of eighty percent of the total export earnings in core economic thought. This study will identify some challenges towards its future development together with unskilled employees, improper infrastructure, energy crisis, loan and high rate of interest, a high charge per unit, involved social compliance, political turmoil, lack of market and products diversification, compliance pressure of accord and alliance and lack of integration. Therefore, cooperative and coordinated steps from each public and the personal sector should be initiated to beat these challenges.

## Materials and method

Some studies have shown that workers have been working in garments working overtime for many years; as they work overtime for extra income, they face many health problems ranging from insomnia to various health risks. The environment in the slums where they live is dirty and unhealthy, which is the cause of their malnutrition and serious diseases. From the conception, it is realistic that the health of 4,444 female garment workers is not so good that they cannot work correctly. With this in mind, some studies were conducted to check working women's health

status, which showed that 200 working women in Bangladesh were interviewed to identify the significant diseases they faced. Studies show that most women in the clothing industry suffer from bone problems, abortion difficulties, dermatitis, back pain, melasma, itching, malnutrition, respiratory problems, hepatitis (grass), abdominal pain, and fatigue: fever, stomachache, colds, and parasites. Most garment workers suffer from a variety of chronic health problems. These non-fatal or non-traumatic health conditions are common among women with low socioeconomic status in developing countries. Others may arise or be exacerbated by the detrimental effects of the working environment and factories that employ garment workers. Bangladesh's factory owners, Western retailers, worker advocates, and politicians appear to lack the equipment to meet the health needs of this extensive workforce, primarily women.

A study-based survey provided much-needed primary data on self-reported chronic conditions among female garment workers. The following health conditions were reported as the most common in this population: dysuria; joint pain; High blood pressure; vision problems; obesity; asthma; unrest; ventilation; diabetes; and heart attack. Clothing workers should be aware of these health conditions. It is not surprising that health conditions such as dysuria (sick or brutal urination) are prevalent among young female garment workers. Urinary tract infections, vaginitis, urinary retention, and sexually transmitted diseases are associated with difficulty urinating. Certain conditions can predispose these workers to urinary tract infections, such as diabetes and problem urinating. Mineral and nutritional supplements have been suggested to relieve some of these symptoms.

Plant management can conduct health education and awareness campaigns on highlighted avertible issues. The generality of joint pain in this young workforce may be partly explained by the nature of these activities or occupations. Lack of treatment and prolonged joint pain can shorten the duration of work and jeopardize job prospects and productivity in the long run. Surprisingly, the incidence of insomnia is high among garment workers. This chronic lack of sleep will lead to decreased concentration and productivity at work, not only in a significant and stressful work environment but also despite all the adverse effects we face daily. It also raises the chances of making mistakes and increases your risk of injury at work. Vision problems are an anticipated finding, given the nature of clothing handling. Relentless attention to small items and machines and very long hours of sewing can cause severe eye strain, which is only exacerbated if the lighting in the production hall is insufficient or poorly adjusted. Sometimes breaks, job changes, dietary supplements, and lighting adjustments in the workplace can help protect and preserve or at least delay vision loss in workers. Most tailors don't wear glasses.

Asthma has previously been reported to be prevalent among garment and textile workers. Most garment workers are more likely to get asthma while working in factories. Their living conditions imply poor living conditions combined with the external air pollution that worsens the situation. Providing industrial-grade respirators in the workplace can significantly help respiratory protection. Relocating an injured worker to a workplace that is less exposed to cotton or cloth dust may benefit workers who already have respiratory problems. Air quality in manufacturing facilities must be carefully monitored to reduce suspended solids. Occupational or not, asthma can be exacerbated by inhaling chemical vapors, gases, dust, or other substances at work. Garment factories use numerous chemicals and substances to which workers may be sensitive. Workers may feel chest tightness, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Those who suffer from allergy or asthma are more likely to develop asthma. A factory health screening program or an annual lung function screening organization can help screen workers at risk during the

hiring process. Plant-initiated health promotion and disease control campaigns will benefit other chronic conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes. RMG industry can take initiatives to educate workers on healthy eating.

## Results

It is terrifying news for our country that this leading industry is going through a decisive moment right now. The recent instability of several garment factories threatens their existence. Since the year, RMG employees in various sectors have resorted to violence in processions, vandalism, and road blockades to raise minimum wages, attendance benefits, and other opportunities. It is typical for most garment factories in Savar, Mirpur, Rugganj, Joydebpur, Gazipur, Kaspur, Ashulia, Nishintapur, Norahinghpur, Zamgara, and other garment factories.

Last year, around 140 garment factories closed due to unrest and low prices from international buyers due to the energy and gas crisis, rising yarn prices, poor infrastructure, and rising production costs. It is the main reason factories stop production. Whatever the situation, the authorities will have to find a solution to compensate for the enormous economic loss. Low wages are a significant cause of worker insecurity. Currently, the minimum wage paid to workers in garment factories is 1662.50 Tk per month, and workers need 5000 Tk per month. The current minimum wage is minimal and inadequate given current inflation in both food (7.85%) and non-food (5.49%). On the other hand, headline and average inflations are 6.89% and 7.69%, respectively (July-March 200910, BBS). Taka's minimum wage of 1,662.50 was enacted in June 2006, when the cost of living was lower than it is now. Bangladesh Bank and the Bangladesh Development Institute report that the cost of living for RMG workers has increased by at least 35% since 2006. However, the Center for Policy Dialogue reports that the average cost of living has risen by about 70% due to increasing rent, gas, and electricity prices. The big news is that the minimum wage for garment workers in Bangladesh (less than US\$25) is the lowest among garment manufacturing countries. At the entrance, workers receive \$90, Vietnam \$101, India \$135, and China \$217. Moreover, garment workers live in extreme poverty, earning less than \$1 a day, but the international poverty line is \$1.25.

In addition to salaries, other benefits and benefits, including bonuses, insurance coverage, financial assistance in the event of illness, and favorable working conditions, are also denied. To address the wage issue in these circumstances, BGMEA proposed to the Minimum Wage Board (MWB) a minimum wage of Taka 2,000 for new hires, as opposed to Taka 6,200 offered by garment workers' representatives. Authorities must set a minimum wage, including other incentives, to save this foreign currency-earning industry and the 4 million workers it employs. The largest sector in Bangladesh, the ready-made garment (RMG), is a resource-intensive and highly polluting sector contributing to gross domestic product (GDP). And the industry will increasingly need to monitor its environmental impact in the future. According to the World Bank, it is well known that washing, dyeing, and finishing fabrics require large amounts of clean, fresh water and can range from less than 100 cubic meters to more than 300 cubic meters per ton of material.

Assuming an annual textile production of 5 million tonnes, it is estimated that the average mill in Bangladesh consumes 300 liters of water per day. Also, most of this water comes from groundwater wells. The total water consumption of the Bangladesh textile industry is estimated at 15 million cubic meters, mainly groundwater. It is estimated that about 70% of this water consumption comes from wet fabrics, including washed, dyed, and finished materials. Nationally, the textile industry faces problems using coagulants and chemicals for wastewater discharge and treatment. It poses a big problem for the industry, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

that do not always have the funds to invest in the latest wastewater treatment technologies. Governments and industries must respond accordingly. On the one hand, they must make water conservation a priority, and on the other hand, they must ensure that the industry treats and treats this water in the right way. These dual challenges are critical to the RMG industry and its future environment.

Some industries have agreed that water conservation and rainwater harvesting can be better promoted, and many RMG operators are already moving in this direction. They invest in modern technology, including process equipment that uses water more efficiently and improved treatment technologies, including advanced wastewater treatment equipment. The industry is on the right track yet we need additional aid from government and foreign buyers who are highly reliant on this sector. It is worth taking into consideration that saving water and other inputs makes economic sense in the long run. It is well documented that simple changes in manufacturing techniques to improve efficiency can deliver financial returns in reduced water, energy, and chemical use. But this is an investment that every business in our industry urgently needs to address for the long-term well-being and our country and planet. Policymakers and other interested parties must take the necessary steps to ensure garment workers' health. This will help women workers work more productively and contribute to the country's development.

## Discussion

Despite the active efforts of relevant authorities in this regard, our ready-made garment (RMG) department remains controversial. This issue is flatter more important as more than 3.6 million workers make a living in Bangladesh and are the largest female employer in all formal sectors of the economy. From the last few years, a great debate about the dire living conditions of RMG workers and the need to find the right answer to the problem. According to an analysis based on a Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD) survey of 3,856 factories, the living conditions of most workers are many in terms of both private facilities and the pursuit of sustainable and healthy living. Requests are left. Another study conducted by Bangladesh clothing Sramik Sanghati (BGSS) on nearly 200 workers at 31 RMG factories from June to July 2018 found that many workers needed to be rented to survive. In most cases, it turns out that it takes an additional 60 hours on average. You have to work a month in addition to your daily obligations. It, in turn, deprives them of sufficient rest and harms their health. Recall that the Ministry of Labor and Employment had set up a Minimum Wage Commission and has carefully studied various aspects of the sector's development since 2013, when the RMG sector's salary system was last revised.

The minimum wage at that time was 5,300 taka per month. It was 3,000 taka in 2010, 1,662.50 taka in 2006, 940 taka in 1994, and 627 taka from the beginning of 1985. After consultation with the Bangladesh Clothing Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the salary system was revised. Once again. The starting salary has been raised to 8,000 taka per month. It consists of a basic salary of 4,100 taka, a housing allowance of 2,050 taka, a sickness allowance of 600 taka, travel expenses of 350 taka, and food expenses of 900 taka. Clothing industry owners tried to limit it to a total of 7,000 taka, but Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina intervened and asked owners to add another 1,000 taka to their payroll packages. This dynamic means that some progress has been made. However, some sections of civil society and some RMG Workers' Associations say that this increase in funding was not sufficient. You have begun lobbying for foreign buyers and civil society representatives from developed countries. The Workers' Rights Organization chairman, Sammillita Garment Sramik Federation, called for a slight increase in

base salary from the government's announced monthly salary of 4,100 taka, as other benefits such as bonuses and compensation on the worker. Basic wage.

The group also provides workers with higher subsidies for housing, food, health, and education (for children) to not be overwhelmed by additional work to cope with rising living costs and inflation. I requested the government to provide it. Some marginal activists seem to suggest that the total hawk-equivalent wage claim should be at least equal to Bangladesh's current per capita income of \$ 1,500. All these aspects reveal the sensitivity of the paradigm and different perspectives on the subject under the surface. The equation also includes a discussion of trade union rights enjoyed by workers in the RMG sector. Despite the improved workers' rights since the terrible collapse of Lana Plaza in 2013, the RMG sector seems to be a long way from still having a working union at the factory. The lack of this element has led to some foreign countries' discussions with Bangladeshi representatives on the issue of Bangladesh manufacturers in the RMG sector, providing better economic opportunities when exporting products to these countries.

The government pointed it out to the competent authorities. In this regard, studies conducted by CPD show that worker organizations in various factories are still vulnerable or inoperable. According to this survey, most workers are also unaware of their rights. It pointed out that the lack of a universal insurance system affects workers needing treatment. It must be noted that the Accord and the Alliance have broken their relationships with the 195 factories due to the lack of compliance required in various areas. It cast a shadow over this sector.

However, criticisms of the proper formation of trade union institutions have paid off. According to media reports, the Chief Cabinet Secretary has announced that the participation rate of workers required to form a union at the factory will be reduced from the previous 30% to 20% following the Bangladesh Labor Law (Revised) 2018. The bill does not allow children to work in factories. Section 47 of the amendment states that workers giving birth will be given eight weeks of leave within three days of notifying the competent authority. If company authorities do not allow her vacation, she will be fined 25,000 taka. Several other worker-friendly factors have also been introduced. All workers who start work during the festival receive one day off and two days after the festival wages. In the case of natural death, the employee's family will receive compensation of 200,000 taka (20,000 rupees) compared to 100,000 taka (10,000 rupees) in the previous law. In case of injury, the worker will receive Tk 250,000 (2.50 lakh). It is twice the current Tk 125,000 (1.25 lakh). The application must, of course, comply with the legal consequences. Only 51% of workers need support for the current requirement that two-thirds of all workers agree to make a call.

## Conclusion

Over the last decade, the modification of Bangladesh's RMG sector has killed more than 1,000 textile workers. It has been slightly catalyzed by a series of workplace tragedies that have become a hot topic worldwide. A fire at the Tazreen fashion factory in 2012 and the collapse of the Rana Plaza in 2013 caused significant problems with working conditions, causing some international buyers to stop sourcing from Bangladesh and withdraw the preferential tariff agreement with the United States. Now, Bangladesh's RMG sector is at the spearhead of transparency regarding factory safety and responsibility in the value chain, all thanks to the authority for initiatives initiated after that disaster.



Those persuasive measures have terminated hundreds of unsafe low-level factories and dilated repair activities in other factories. It helped restore Bangladesh's clothing to the global clothing market, resulting in the rapid growth of 10 years.

Ten years ago, growth was expected to be 7-9%. RMG exports from Bangladesh doubled from the US \$ 14.6 billion in 2011 to the US \$ 33.1 billion in 2019, with an average annual growth rate of 7%, as claimed by the Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce. Through this period, the RMG industry increased Bangladesh's share of global garment exports from 4.7% to 6.7%<sup>3</sup>. It is within our expectations, but it also shows that we are not fully reaching the potential we expected ten years ago. The second half of 2019 showed negative growth compared to 2018, showing signs of a slowdown after covid19 occurred. The global epidemic in 2020 reduced orders, canceled them, delayed payments, and renegotiated terms.

As the pandemic intimidated the lives and livelihoods of Bangladeshi workers, many small, low-funded factories closed doors, and competition for small jobs intensified. RMG exports from Bangladesh fell 17% in the first year of the pandemic, with sales losses of up to \$ 5.6 billion. A regular survey of the fashion industry's chief procurement officers (CPOs) found Bangladesh remains an attractive place to shop for clothing. Nevertheless, Bangladesh has faced intensifying competition in recent years, exacerbating the pandemic challenges. Bangladesh pointed out as one of the world's leading procurement hotspots in a 2019 CPO survey, but Vietnam was just behind and the country of choice among US executives. Still, World Trade Organization (WTO) has not yet released comparable data on world exports in 2020, but data from imports from Europe and the United States suggest that Vietnam overtook Bangladesh in 2020. Policymakers and other interested parties must take the necessary steps to ensure garment workers' health. It will help women workers work more productively and contribute to its development.

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