



**Research Monograph**  
**on**  
**"Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of**  
**Bangladesh: A Study"**

This Research Monograph Submitted for the partial fulfillment of the award of the degree  
in

**LLB (Honours)**  
**Department of Law**  
**Sonargaon University (SU), Dhaka.**

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# Letter of Transmittal

To

Naimul Razzaque

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Subject: Submission of Research Monograph on “A Study on Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of Bangladesh”.

Sir,

With great respect and humble gratitude, I am pleased to submit my research monograph entitled “A Study on Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of Bangladesh”, conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the [LL.B. (Honours) Program] at the Department of Law, Sonargaon University (SU).

This research explores the intricate dynamics of women’s labor rights in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector of Bangladesh—a field that continues to shape our economy, gender relations, and global perception. The study critically examines the existing legal framework, practical discrepancies, and institutional challenges that affect female workers in the industry. Drawing upon both qualitative and quantitative insights, I have also proposed policy recommendations aimed at fostering gender equity and sustainable labor standards.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation for your continuous support, valuable guidance, and encouragement throughout the course of this research. I am also indebted to the participants, organizations, and peers whose contributions have enriched the quality and relevance of this monograph.

I sincerely hope that this work will meet your expectations and contribute meaningfully to the discourse on gender and labor rights in Bangladesh. I am open to any suggestions and feedback that may enhance its quality.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely yours,

---

Hlahlaee Mogh

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Program: LL.B. (Honours)

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## **Supervisor Certificate**

This is to certify that the Research Monograph on “**A Study on Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of Bangladesh**” is done by **Hlahlae Mogh** is partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of LL.B (Honours) from Sonargaon University (SU), Dhaka. The Research Monograph has been carried out under my guidance and is record of the bonafide work carried out successfully.

It is also certifying that the work presented here is original and suitable for submission as the style and contents, for fulfillment of LL.B. (Honours) program.

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Naimul Razzaque

Lecturer

Department of Law

Sonargaon University (SU)

## Declaration

I do hereby declare that the Research Monograph Title “**A Study on Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of Bangladesh.**” prepared solely by me and which has been submitted to the department of Law, Sonargaon University (SU) for achieving the LL.B. (Honours) Degree. This is an original work of mine. No part of this research, in any way of or in from, has been submitted to any University or Institution for any Degree, Diploma or for other similar purposes.

---

Hlahlaee Mogh

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Program: LL.B. (Honours)

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## Acknowledgement

With a mind of gratitude and a heart grounded in compassion, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to those who have guided and supported me throughout the journey of completing this research monograph entitled **“A Study on Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries of Bangladesh.”**

First and foremost, I offer my heartfelt thanks to my **supervisor, Naimul Razzaque**, Lecturer, Department of Law, Sonargaon University (SU), Dhaka, for his generous guidance, patience, and insight. His mentorship has been instrumental in shaping the direction and depth of this research.

I extend deep appreciation to my teachers and peers, whose thoughtful encouragement created a nurturing environment for inquiry and growth. To the women whose voices and experiences informed this study—your strength and resilience are the true essence of this work.

To my classmates, family, and friends, I am grateful for your unwavering support and kind presence in every step of this academic endeavor. Your compassion has been a source of balance during moments of challenge.

Last but not least, I dedicate this work as an offering for the welfare of all beings. May it serve as a step toward justice, equality, and right livelihood for the women of the RMG sector, and may the insights gained here contribute to a more compassionate and mindful society.

Thank you

Hlahlae Mogh

## **Abstract**

The readymade garment industry in Bangladesh has experienced rapid growth due to the availability of local labor. This study examines the labor rights of women in Bangladesh's ready-made garment sector, exploring the legal framework, implementation challenges, and potential solutions for promoting their well-being and empowerment within the industry. Specifically, the research delves into the existing legal protections for female garment workers, investigates the prevalence of discrimination and unfair labor practices, and assesses the effectiveness of current enforcement mechanisms.

The study also investigates the discrepancies between legal provisions and actual practices, along with the underlying causes of these gaps. Furthermore, this research contributes to addressing gender discrimination issues in the workplace and promoting equity and the empowerment of women in Bangladesh's RMG sector, ultimately supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals related to women's participation in the workplace.

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# Chapter 1

## General Introduction

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh is a critical engine of economic growth and a significant source of employment, particularly for women. The RMG sector's remarkable success has elevated Bangladesh's status in the global arena, influencing its economic and social development indicators. The sector has provided opportunities for women's progress by allowing them to utilize their skills and aptitude for the betterment of their families, society, and the country. The current study primarily emphasizes exploring the current position and status of women in the workplace within Bangladesh's RMG sector, with particular attention to wages, promotions, safety, and security. Despite its economic contributions, the industry is plagued by persistent issues regarding labor rights, particularly for its female workers. These issues encompass a wide range of concerns, including unsafe working conditions, inadequate wages, long working hours, and gender-based discrimination. Many economic actors find justification in outsourcing production to Bangladesh, and the RMG sector has successfully met this demand.

Existing research highlights the challenges faced by female workers, including physical and mental difficulties, as well as gender discrimination. Labor rights violations, such as denial of maternity benefits and unfair termination, remain prevalent. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring sustainable and equitable development in the industry, aligning economic progress with social justice and gender equality. Furthermore, issues such as discrimination, harassment, and a lack of access to trade unions exacerbate the vulnerability of women workers in the RMG sector.

The research examines the extent to which existing laws and regulations are enforced, and it identifies the obstacles that hinder effective implementation. This study aims to identify the challenges and opportunities for empowering women in the workplace, promoting gender equality, and upholding labor rights within the RMG sector. It also investigates the discrepancies between legal provisions and actual practices, along with the underlying causes of these gaps. The sector employs approximately 4.2 million

workers, with over 90% being women from rural areas ([Haque et al., 2020](#))<sup>1</sup>. These women often migrate to urban centers in search of economic opportunities, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The research will also identify strategies to strengthen labor rights protection for women in the Bangladeshi RMG industry, including policy reforms, enforcement mechanisms, capacity building, and empowering women workers.

The Bangladeshi garment industry not only contributes to the economic growth of the country, it has also provided opportunities for employment of women. Assessing the achievements and drawbacks of the wage struggle, studies envision women's more effective role in securing wider labor rights in the RMG sector. The study also looks at the gender-based pay disparity, safety and security, and promotional discrimination that women face.

### **1.1 Introduction and Background of the Study**

The Ready-Made Garment industry in Bangladesh has emerged as a pivotal sector, significantly contributing to the nation's economic growth and providing employment opportunities to millions of people, predominantly women. It has played a crucial role in poverty reduction and women's empowerment, transforming the socio-economic landscape of the country. The ready-made garment sector accounts for approximately 14.07% of Bangladesh's GDP and 83% of its total export earnings ([Shakirullah et al., 2020](#))<sup>2</sup>. The sector employs approximately 4.2 million workers, with women constituting a significant portion of the workforce. The industry's growth has been fueled by factors such as low labor costs, preferential trade agreements, and a favorable investment climate. Despite its economic success, the RMG sector has faced persistent challenges related to labor rights, working conditions, and safety standards. The tragic Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, which claimed the lives of over 1,100 garment workers, brought international attention to the precarious conditions in many factories. The accident led to heightened scrutiny from international brands, consumers, and labor organizations, prompting calls for improved safety measures and greater transparency. This study aims to address this problem by investigating the extent of labor rights violations, analyzing the factors contributing to these violations, and proposing

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<sup>1</sup> Haque et al., 2020

<sup>2</sup> Shakirullah et al., 2020

recommendations for strengthening labor rights protection for women in the Bangladeshi RMG industry.

The rise of the RMG sector has had a profound impact on women's empowerment in Bangladesh. Employment in garment factories has provided women with economic independence, increased social mobility, and greater decision-making power within their families and communities. However, women workers in the RMG sector continue to face numerous challenges, including low wages, long working hours, gender-based discrimination, and sexual harassment. The study will explore the prevailing working conditions for women in the Bangladeshi RMG industry, and to what extent these conditions adhere to national and international labor laws and standards this includes an examination of wages and working hours. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for policymakers, factory owners, labor organizations, and international stakeholders seeking to promote labor rights and improve the lives of women workers in the RMG sector. The industry is also affected by workplace safety compliance of RMG industry in Bangladesh ([Ansary & Barua, 2015](#))<sup>3</sup>.

The article discusses the ongoing efforts to improve workplace safety and worker organization in the RMG sector. However, these efforts have faced challenges such as inadequate enforcement, limited resources, and resistance from factory owners. These non-compliances expose the employees to unsafe working environment, leading to RMG employee turnover ([Rahman et al., 2023](#))<sup>4</sup>.

In brief, the issue of health and safety of female garment workers in Bangladesh, is related to the industry environment, their residential environment, working condition, age, problem of health, causes of diseases, causes of fire accident and their medical facilities etc. This will lead to a very unsafe working environment, which does not promote employee retention. The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh has not only contributed to the nation's economic development, but has created income opportunities for women, benefiting their whole family. However, instances of labor rights violations persist and there is a continuous creation of gaps between legal

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<sup>3</sup> Ansary, M. A., & Barua, U. (2015). Workplace safety compliance of RMG industry in Bangladesh: Structural assessment of RMG factory buildings. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 14, 424. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2015.09.008>

<sup>4</sup> Rahman, M. M., Rose, R. C., Som, H. Md., & Newaz, H. Q. (2023). Impact of Social Compliance on Conflict Management in the Readymade Garment Industry. *Canadian Journal of Business and Information Studies*, 112. <https://doi.org/10.34104/cjbis.023.01120118>

frameworks and actual practices, undermining the well-being and economic security of women RMG workers and hindering the industry's sustainable development. This indicates that work-related health risks, which may result in occupational diseases or exacerbate existing health conditions, are becoming increasingly prevalent in developing countries where work is becoming more mechanized. As a result, workers are often treated as tools in production, which puts their lives and health in danger ([Tania & Sultana, 2015](#))<sup>5</sup>. Garment industries in Bangladesh face challenges related to sustainability, including environmental impact, labor practices, and workplace safety ([Asif, 2017](#)). To remain competitive, the industry must address issues such as reducing carbon emissions, promoting fair wages, and improving working conditions. The main aim of this study is to look at the health issues and the causes of health problem of female workers of garment industry in Bangladesh. The goal is to find out how often health problems occur, what causes them, and what can be done to fix them. For some countries, this industry is the leading earning and employment sector. But when it comes to the workers' health and safety, globally the industry does not meet the expected standard and when referring to the developing countries, the standards are not satisfactory and underdeveloped compared to the developed and industrialized countries ([Mahmud et al., 2017](#))<sup>6</sup>. A safe and healthy workplace not only protects workers from injury and illness, it can also lower injury/illness costs, reduce absenteeism and turnover, increase productivity and quality and raise employee morale.

## **1.2 The statement of Problem**

As indicated earlier that, apparel manufacturing industry has emerged as the leading exporting sector in Bangladesh. But the garment industries of Bangladesh have been criticized severely for poor working condition, lower wages, health hazards and other issues such as long working hours, sanitation, insufficient medical facilities, workplace environment, fire safety measures and so on. Although both men and women are vulnerable to health and safety hazards in the garment industry, women are unquestionably more exposed to a wider range of risks as they work in the stitching section that requires more labor and intensity. Besides the health issues, female workers

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<sup>5</sup> <https://doi.org/10.18034/mjmbr.v2i1.384>

<sup>6</sup> <https://doi.org/10.21839/jaar.2017.v2i3.91>

are often subjected to different types of violence and sexual abuse in garment factories. The existing literatures reveal that the female garment workers are vulnerable to different health hazards due to poor working environment, lack of sanitation, lack of pure drinking water, long working hours etc. As a result, they suffer from different occupational diseases such as headache, fever, skin diseases, weakness, back pain, dysentery, jaundice, ulcer, asthma etc. and other health problems. The health and safety status of the female garment workers in Bangladesh is a critical issue that needs to be addressed to ensure their well-being and productivity. This research aims to study the various health problems faced by the female garment workers in Bangladesh, identify the causes of these problems, and provide recommendations to improve their health and safety status. The International Labour Organization developed a code of practice on safety and health in the textile, clothing, leather, and footwear industries, to protect workers and hence limit any harm or threats (Seidu et al., 2024)<sup>7</sup>. According to this code, governments, employers, and workers should cooperate to create a safe and healthy work environment in the textile, clothing, leather, and footwear industries. This code includes information on preventing workplace hazards, emergency preparedness, and other important topics. However, research on occupational safety and health in the RMG sector of Bangladesh is still relatively limited.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh is a vital contributor to the national economy, and it also provides employment opportunities for a large number of women. However, the industry has faced criticism for its poor working conditions, low wages, and safety concerns.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The study's goal is to assess the current state of labor rights for women in Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry, identify the challenges and opportunities for improvement, and develop policy recommendations to promote gender equality and decent work in the sector.

The following are the specific objectives of the study:

- To assess the labor rights situation for women in the RMG industry in Bangladesh, focusing on key issues such as wages, working hours, health and

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<sup>7</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1093/jocuh/uiae007>

safety measures, forced overtime, legal protections, and the broader socio-economic context.

- To identify the challenges and barriers that women workers face in exercising their labor rights, including gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence.
- To assess the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional frameworks in protecting the labor rights of women in the RMG sector.
- To explore strategies and interventions that can be implemented to strengthen labor rights protection for women in the Bangladeshi RMG industry and promote decent work.
- To determine the effectiveness of current occupational health and safety activities in the RMG business.
- To analyze the causes of health issues among female workers.

#### **1.4 Significant of the Study**

The study on labor rights for women in the ready-made garment industries in Bangladesh is significant for several reasons. The RMG industry is a major contributor to the Bangladeshi economy, accounting for a significant portion of the country's exports and employment ([Swazan & Das, 2022](#)). Given the sector's critical role in the country's economy and the employment of millions of women, understanding and addressing labor rights issues is essential for promoting sustainable and inclusive growth. The findings of the study can inform policy recommendations and interventions aimed at improving the working conditions and protecting the labor rights of women in the RMG sector. By identifying the challenges and barriers that women workers face, the study can help to inform the design of targeted interventions and policies that address their specific needs and concerns. Finally, the study can contribute to raising awareness among stakeholders, including government, employers, trade unions, and international organizations, about the importance of protecting labor rights and promoting gender equality in the RMG sector ([Nuruzzaman, 2015](#))<sup>8</sup>. The study will

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<sup>8</sup> . <https://doi.org/10.1108/s1069-096420150000022016>

make a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge by identifying the main problems and difficulties that female RMG workers encounter, including things like unequal pay, insufficient health and safety measures, and limited access to social security benefits. The study will also assess how well laws like the Bangladesh Labor Act of 2006 and other pertinent regulations protect women's labor rights. The study will use a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data gathering strategies to give a thorough grasp of the subject. In-depth insights into the experiences and difficulties that women in the industry encounter will be provided through interviews with female garment workers, labor rights activists, and industry stakeholders. The research will offer evidence-based insights to guide policy choices pertaining to labor rights, gender equality, and industrial development. Additionally, it will act as a resource for academics, researchers, and organizations working to promote ethical and sustainable practices in the garment industry.

This research will be conducted over a 12-month period, with distinct phases to ensure a systematic and thorough approach. The timeline will include the following stages: Literature Review and Research Design, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Report Writing, Dissemination and Validation.

Phase 2 will involve data collection, where surveys and in-depth interviews will be conducted with women garment workers to gather primary data on their experiences and perspectives regarding labor rights issues.

### **1.5 Research Question**

What are the key issues and challenges related to labour rights of women workers in the RMG industry in Bangladesh?

1. What are the working condition and wage rate of female workers in RMG sector?
2. What are the occupational health & safety measures provided for the female RMG workers?
3. How effective are the existing legal and policy frameworks in protecting the labor rights of women workers in the RMG sector?
4. What are the recommendations to promote and protect the labour rights of women workers in the RMG sector in Bangladesh?

5. How do the perceptions of female garment workers align with the legal protections and safety standards mandated by the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006?
6. What are the major causes of health problems of the female RMG workers?
7. What measures should be taken to solve the health issues of female workers of garment industries?
8. How can compliance with prescribed standards in the RMG sector influence employee turnover intentions, and what mediating roles do job satisfaction and organizational attraction play in this relationship?
9. What strategies and interventions can be implemented to promote gender equality and decent work for women in the RMG sector in Bangladesh?
10. How do global sustainability demands affect the adoption of cleaner technologies and management practices in the RMG industry?
11. What are the major impediments to implementing effective supply chain management practices in the RMG industry, and how do these challenges impact workplace safety and material availability?
12. How can the principles of the Job Demands-Resources model be applied to understand the dynamics of job satisfaction and turnover intention among RMG workers in the context of compliance with industry standards?
13. What are the measures should be taken to ensure safe working environment for female workers?
14. How does non-compliance with sustainability standards affect the company's goodwill?
15. How can factory owners and managers cultivate a positive company image through compliance?
16. How to improve health safety measures to ensure a safe working environment?
17. What is the role of trade unions in protecting labour rights?
18. How does workplace safety influence female workers' overall job satisfaction?
19. What are the existing laws and policies pertaining to labour rights?

20. What is the monthly income of female workers?
21. What are the initiatives have been taken by the GO and NGO to ensure the rights of female workers?
22. How to minimize the gender discrimination at workplace?
23. What are the impacts of gender discrimination on female workers?
24. What are the major reasons of turnover intention of female workers?

## **1.6 Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to comprehensively analyze the labor rights of women in the Readymade Garment industries of Bangladesh, with a focus on understanding the challenges they face and identifying opportunities for improvement.

The specific objectives are:

- To assess the working conditions, wage rates, and occupational health and safety measures provided to female workers in the RMG sector.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal and policy frameworks in protecting the labor rights of women workers in the RMG sector.
- To identify the key issues and challenges related to labor rights of women workers in the RMG industry in Bangladesh.
- To measure level of job satisfaction among female workers.
- To explore the relationship between compliance with prescribed standards and employee turnover intention in the RMG sector.
- To determine strategies and interventions that can promote gender equality and decent work for women in the RMG sector in Bangladesh.
- To analyze the major causes of health problems of the female RMG workers.

The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh is pivotal, significantly contributing to the nation's economy through exports and employment. Garment factories have greatly increased economic opportunities, especially for women in Bangladesh ([Bhuiyan,](#)

[1970](#))<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, the ready-made garment sector significantly contributes to Bangladesh's socio-economic progress, particularly in women's empowerment and poverty reduction. Despite its economic importance, the sector faces significant challenges related to labor rights, especially concerning women workers, who constitute a substantial portion of the workforce. It is imperative to address these challenges to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all workers in the industry. Despite various regulations and initiatives, women garment workers often face issues such as low wages, long working hours, unsafe working conditions, gender-based discrimination, and limited access to healthcare and social security. This contradiction necessitates a comprehensive examination of the existing labor rights framework and its practical implementation in the RMG sector. The RMG industry's competitiveness is crucial, especially with competition from other garment-producing countries, highlighting the importance of efficient supply chain management. Improving internal control practices is also vital for the RMG sector's long-term sustainability and economic role. It is important to address workplace safety, employment opportunities, and supply chain challenges to maintain competitiveness and ethical standard. Additionally, studies on employee turnover in the RMG sector highlight the importance of compliance with prescribed standards and the roles of job satisfaction and organizational attraction in retaining workers. Lean manufacturing principles can enhance productivity and reduce waste, offering a pathway to improve overall efficiency. The study is conducted to address the pressing issues related to women's labor rights in Bangladesh's RMG sector, aiming to provide insights and recommendations for improving working conditions, ensuring fair treatment, and promoting gender equality in the industry.

## **1.7 Methodology**

The research methodology adopted for this study is designed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the labor rights issues faced by women in the Readymade Garment industries of Bangladesh. This chapter provides a detailed

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<sup>9</sup> <https://doi.org/10.3329/jbt.v5i2.9984>

overview of the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and data analysis procedures employed in this study.

### **1.7.1 Research Design**

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather and analyze data.

**Quantitative Approach:** A structured questionnaire survey will be conducted among female workers in selected RMG factories to collect quantitative data on various aspects of their working conditions, wages, health and safety measures, and job satisfaction.

**Qualitative Approach:** In-depth interviews and focus group discussions will be conducted with key stakeholders, including female workers, factory managers, trade union representatives, and NGO workers, to gather qualitative data on their experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding labor rights issues.

### **1.7.2 Study Area and Population**

The study will be conducted in selected RMG factories located in Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narayanganj districts of Bangladesh. These areas are major hubs for the RMG industry and have a high concentration of garment factories employing a significant number of female workers. The target population for this study includes all female workers employed in the selected RMG factories.

### **1.7.3 Sampling Technique**

A multi-stage sampling technique will be used to select a representative sample of female workers for the study.

**First Stage:** A purposive sampling technique will be used to select a sample of RMG factories from the study area, based on factors such as factory size, ownership, and compliance with labor standards.

**Second Stage:** A simple random sampling technique will be used to select a sample of female workers from each selected factory. The sample size will be determined using statistical formulas to ensure adequate representation and statistical power.

Sample Size: A total sample of 384 female workers will be selected for the questionnaire survey. Additionally, 20 in-depth interviews and 4 focus group discussions will be conducted with key stakeholders.

#### **1.7.4 Data Collection Methods**

The study will employ a variety of data collection methods to gather relevant information from different sources.

Questionnaire Survey: A structured questionnaire will be administered to the selected sample of female workers to collect quantitative data on their working conditions, wages, health and safety measures, job satisfaction, and other relevant variables.

In-Depth Interviews: In-depth interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including female workers, factory managers, trade union representatives, and NGO workers, to gather qualitative data on their experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding labor rights issues.

Focus Group Discussions: Focus group discussions will be conducted with small groups of female workers to explore their experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding labor rights issues in a more interactive and participatory manner.

Document Review: Relevant documents, such as factory records, labor laws, and NGO reports, will be reviewed to gather secondary data on labor rights issues in the RMG sector.

#### **1.7.5 Data Analysis Techniques**

The data collected through the questionnaire survey will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques.

Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, will be used to summarize and describe the characteristics of the sample and the key variables under investigation.

Inferential Statistics: Inferential statistics, such as t-tests, chi-square tests, and regression analysis, will be used to examine the relationships between different variables and to test the hypotheses of the study. The qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring themes and

patterns in the data and interpreting them in the context of the research questions and objectives.

### **1.7.6 Ethical Considerations**

**Informed Consent:** Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study.

**Confidentiality:** The confidentiality of participants will be protected by ensuring that their responses are kept anonymous and confidential.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in the study will be voluntary, and participants will be free to withdraw at any time without any penalty.

**Do No Harm:** The study will be conducted in a manner that minimizes any potential harm to participants.

By employing a rigorous research methodology, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the labor rights issues faced by women in the Readymade Garment industries of Bangladesh, ultimately contributing to the development of evidence-based policies and interventions to promote and protect the rights of female garment workers ([Rajbangshi & Nambiar, 2020](#))<sup>10</sup>. The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the practical application of occupational health and safety measures in garment factories, referencing the Bangladesh Labor Act of 2006 as a benchmark. This will involve on-site assessments and data collection to determine the extent to which factories adhere to the legal standard. Another focus involves assessing the physical and mental health status of female garment workers through surveys and health check-ups, aiming to reveal the health challenges unique to their work environment. The research will also explore the prevalence of workplace harassment, including both physical and verbal forms, using survey data and personal interviews to capture the experiences of female workers ([Chowdhury, 2015](#))<sup>11</sup>. The aim is to identify the nature and frequency of harassment incidents. Moreover, the study seeks to understand the wage disparities between male and female workers, controlling for factors such as experience and job role, to determine if gender-based wage

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<sup>10</sup> <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-020-1147-3>

<sup>11</sup> Chowdhury, S. H. (2015). The Necessities of HR practices in RMG Sector of Bangladesh. 1(1), 7. <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/64805/>

discrimination is present. The research extends to examining the influence of trade unions and worker representation in advocating for women's rights. This involves assessing the effectiveness of unions in addressing gender-specific issues and promoting equality.

The constitutional guarantees for women workers in Bangladesh mandate equality and non-discrimination across all facets of state and public life, ensuring equal rights with men, alongside the right to guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage that considers work quality and quantity, plus adequate rest and leisure. These guarantees also encompass the freedom of association and the right to form unions, yet challenges persist in their full realization. The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 incorporates several provisions aimed at safeguarding the rights of women workers, addressing occupational hygiene, safety measures, industrial accidents, working conditions, trade union participation, and working hours. However, the efficacy of these provisions is undermined by their general nature and, in some instances, substandard implementation, leading to significant violations, especially concerning workplace safety, thereby exposing women workers to considerable vulnerability. Despite the legal requirement for employers to provide appointment letters detailing the terms of employment, a significant number of workers do not receive such letters, hindering their ability to substantiate their employment and pursue legal recourse when necessary. Additionally, the Act does not adequately address gender-based violence and harassment, leaving women workers unprotected against these pervasive issues within the RMG sector. Wage justice is a crucial aspect of labor rights, and women workers are actively striving to secure it, envisioning a more effective role for women in achieving broader labor rights within the RMG sector. However, studies reveal instances of gender discrimination in the RMG sector, including verbal harassment by male coworkers, the exploitation of female workers by owners and supervisors, and the imposition of mandatory overtime for female subordinates. These practices not only undermine the dignity of women workers but also perpetuate inequalities within the industry.

Moreover, the burden of managing both household responsibilities and workplace demands disproportionately affects women workers, impacting their health and well-being. The existing legal framework in Bangladesh, while providing a foundation for labor rights, requires strengthening to effectively protect women workers in the RMG

sector, necessitating comprehensive reforms that address gender-based violence, ensure fair wages, and promote safe working conditions. There is an indication of payments being made to women for childbirth, with the duration of maternity leave for female workers in the RMG sector of Bangladesh being four months according to the Labour Act 2006. The purpose of the study is to show the application of the RMG sector's maternity leave and to assess the level of cash benefit payment for maternity leave. Decent work deficits in the ready-made garment industry and ship-breaking industries in Bangladesh are caused by limitations and ineffectiveness in the application of labor laws. In consideration of safety and security for female garment workers, the Bangladesh government has amended the Bangladesh Labour Act. The law stipulates that if 40 or more female workers are employed in a factory, a suitable room has to be arranged for the children of those female workers. This provision is helpful for female workers to ensure their peace of mind during work.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh stands as the largest single industrial employer, officially employing an estimated 2,997,000 individuals in 2013, which accounts for approximately 5% of the total employed population of 58,073,000. Women constitute a substantial portion of this workforce, comprising roughly 60% of the employees in the RMG sector. This significant female labor force participation has profound implications for women's empowerment, poverty reduction, and overall economic development in Bangladesh. The RMG sector has played a pivotal role in driving economic growth, contributing substantially to the country's GDP and export earnings. Bangladesh has made significant strides in the ready-made garments industry, securing the second position in global exports within this sector. The industry's expansion has not only generated employment opportunities but has also facilitated the entry of women into the formal workforce, challenging traditional gender roles and norms. The apparel industry serves as the economic backbone of Bangladesh, experiencing remarkable growth since its inception in the 1970s. The sector accounts for over 80% of Bangladesh's total exports, making it a crucial driver of economic progress. The industry's contribution to the country's economic growth reached an impressive 6 percent growth rate for nearly a decade. Despite the significant strides made by the RMG sector, challenges persist, particularly concerning labor rights, working conditions, and gender equality.

The industry plays a pivotal role in creating job opportunities for the poor, uneducated, or half-educated, contributing to the overall socio-economic development of the country. Approximately 4 million workers are employed in the RMG sector, of which 80% are women. The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh has transformed the nation's economy through labor-intensive, export-oriented manufacturing. The industry's growth has been supported by factors such as low labor costs, preferential trade agreements, and government policies promoting export-oriented industrialization. Yet, alongside these achievements, concerns remain regarding the sustainability and ethical practices within the RMG sector, particularly concerning fair wages, safe working conditions, and environmental sustainability. In 2018, only 21.8% of the population were below the national poverty line. In terms of contribution to the GDP, the industry contributed 11.16% in the fiscal year 2016–2017. The ready-made garment industry has emerged as a vital source of foreign exchange earnings for Bangladesh, making it an indispensable pillar of the national economy. However, the pursuit of economic progress must not come at the expense of workers' rights and well-being.

The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh is heavily concentrated on apparel products, which constitute over 85% of the country's total merchandise exports in 2023 ([Razzaque et al., 2024](#)).<sup>12</sup> Within the apparel sector, knitwear and woven garments are the primary product categories, catering to international markets. While the RMG industry has brought about economic prosperity, it has also faced scrutiny for its labor practices, workplace safety, and environmental impact. Despite the remarkable contributions of the apparel industry, manufacturers encounter numerous challenges in meeting customer demands and expectations. These issues include extended lead times, elevated labor expenses, constrained availability of raw materials, and frequent disruptions in production. This sector is a significant contributor to Bangladesh's foreign exchange earnings, accounting for approximately 77%, and employing 50% of the industrial workforce ([Shahria, 2019](#)). As such, there is a pressing need for comprehensive labor rights, encompassing fair wages, safe working conditions, and freedom of association. The RMG sector of Bangladesh has a crucial role to play,

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<sup>12</sup> Razzaque, M. A., Rabi, R. I., & Dey, B. K. (2024). Expanding and Diversifying Exports in Bangladesh. In ADB briefs. <https://doi.org/10.22617/brf240209-2>

because the economic development of the country depends mostly on agriculture and secondly on the industry ([Alom, 2016](#)).<sup>13</sup>

The pursuit of sustainable and inclusive growth in the RMG sector necessitates a multi-faceted approach that addresses labor rights, environmental sustainability, and ethical business practices. The Bangladesh Accord and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, formed in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse, have played a crucial role in improving factory safety standards and worker protections. It is anticipated that Bangladesh is going to face stiff competition from a large number of apparel-producing countries, notably China, India, and Pakistan ([Masud et al., 1970](#)). These collaborative initiatives, involving brands, retailers, trade unions, and civil society organizations, have demonstrated the potential for positive change in the RMG industry. The industry needs to adopt modern technology and improve the quality of its products to compete effectively. In light of these challenges and opportunities, a comprehensive study on labor rights for women in the ready-made garment industries of Bangladesh is of paramount importance.

Such a study can provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of female garment workers, the challenges they face, and the measures needed to promote their rights and well-being. Furthermore, the sector needs to be more efficient and productive. Additionally, the study can inform policy recommendations and interventions aimed at fostering a more equitable and sustainable RMG sector that benefits both workers and the broader economy. The implementation of special strategies and approaches to ensure sustainability is crucial, as it benefits vulnerable workers, promotes long-term relationships between suppliers and transnational companies, and contributes to economic growth.

## **1.8 Literature Review**

Existing literature provides valuable insights into various aspects of the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh, including its economic significance, labor practices, and challenges. Many researchers have focused on the economic contributions of the RMG sector to Bangladesh's development, highlighting its role in employment

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<sup>13</sup> Md. M. (2016). Effects on Environment and Health by Garments Factory Waste in Narayanganj City, Dhaka. *American Journal of Civil Engineering*, 4(3), 80. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajce.20160403.13>

generation, export earnings, and poverty reduction. However, the pursuit of economic growth must be accompanied by a commitment to ethical and sustainable practices that prioritize the well-being of workers. Some studies have examined the labor conditions and rights of garment workers in Bangladesh, shedding light on issues such as low wages, long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and gender-based discrimination. Lean practices such as increased information exchange, pull production, enhanced focus on just-in-time production, and the establishment of cross-functional quality inspection teams can potentially tackle such problems.

Furthermore, there has been research on the role of international initiatives, such as the Bangladesh Accord and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, in improving factory safety and worker protections. These initiatives underscore the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, including brands, retailers, trade unions, and civil society organizations, in promoting positive change in the RMG industry. The supply chain management strategies of RMG should align, work together with all the supply chain partners, share information among the stages of the supply chain, have a standard SCM procedure, comply with the code of conduct, adapt changing technologies, minimize corruption and bureaucratic tangles in customs, cut lead time etc to sustain its growth ([Hossain & Roy, 2016](#)). The implementation of ethical and sustainable practices in the RMG sector is not only a moral imperative but also a business imperative.

Consumers are increasingly demanding transparency and accountability from brands and retailers, and companies that fail to meet these expectations risk reputational damage and loss of market share. While existing literature provides a valuable foundation for understanding the RMG industry in Bangladesh, there remains a need for more in-depth research on the specific challenges and opportunities facing women workers. Although case studies have enabled a better understanding of causal relationships between management practices and exploitation in the local context of Bangladesh, a quantitative approach to establish causality between different factors could be the focus of future research ([Uddin et al., 2022](#)).<sup>14</sup> A comprehensive study on

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<sup>14</sup> , Md. A., Azim, M. T., & Haque, M. M. (2021). Does Compliance to the Prescribed Standards in Readymade Garments Sector Predict Employee Turnover Intention? The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction and Organizational Attraction. *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review*, 10(2), 209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2277975221989109>

labor rights for women in the RMG industries can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the issues at stake and inform effective strategies for promoting gender equality and worker empowerment.

### **1.9 Clarification of Study**

This thesis examines the labor rights of women in Bangladesh's ready-made garment industries. It intends to investigate the difficulties that female garment workers encounter, their working conditions, and the enforcement of labor regulations and international standards. The study will analyze how gender affects workplace dynamics, opportunities, and treatment while also evaluating the efficacy of current policies and initiatives to protect women's rights. Furthermore, gender discrimination at the workplace needs to be resolved in order to contribute towards the equity and empowerment of women in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. By analyzing laws, factory compliance, and the perspectives of female employees, the research aims to provide insights into the complexities of labor rights in the RMG sector. It also seeks to pinpoint areas where improvements can be made and offer practical suggestions to promote gender equality, empower women, and improve working conditions. The ready-made garment industry is essential to Bangladesh's economy, providing a substantial amount of the country's exports and jobs, particularly for women. The RMG sector has facilitated the advancement of women in a society where they were previously limited to the private sphere. The rise of the RMG sector has provided women with unprecedented employment prospects, promoting their economic independence and societal empowerment. Although the RMG sector has enabled women to become financially secure and autonomous, it is imperative to address the persistent obstacles and inequalities that they encounter in the workplace.

Women in Bangladesh's RMG sector frequently encounter difficult working conditions, low wages, long hours, and a lack of job security ([Haque et al., 2020](#)).<sup>15</sup>

These difficulties are made worse by pervasive gender stereotypes, cultural standards, and power imbalances that make women more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. In addition, the enforcement of labor regulations and adherence to international standards

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<sup>15</sup> , M. F., Sarker, Md. A. R., Rahman, Md. S., & Rakibuddin, M. (2020). Discrimination of Women at RMG Sector in Bangladesh. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.31014/aior.1991.03.01.152>

are still inadequate, which weakens the defense of women's rights in the workplace. Examining the intersection of economic development and social justice will shed light on the long-term implications for female garment workers and their communities. It is important to ensure that women's contributions to the RMG sector are acknowledged, protected, and valued. In order to promote an inclusive and sustainable RMG sector that upholds the rights and dignity of all workers, it is imperative to investigate the labor rights situation of women in the RMG industry and advocate for policies and practices that advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Political stability, workplace safety, and raw material availability are crucial for Bangladesh's RMG industry. Furthermore, the ready-made garment sector makes a substantial contribution to Bangladesh's foreign revenue, and approximately 90% of the sector's 4.2 million workers are women from rural areas. To maintain the sector's progress, it is essential to tackle the obstacles encountered by female workers and to make sure they have safe working conditions and fair treatment.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this thesis provides a comprehensive examination of the labor rights of women in Bangladesh's ready-made garment industries, providing light on the difficulties, possibilities, and systemic issues that affect female garment workers. The RMG sector has become a cornerstone of Bangladesh's economy, significantly boosting export revenues and providing jobs, particularly for women. This research emphasizes the necessity of tackling gender-based inequalities and power imbalances in the workplace, as well as improving the enforcement of labor regulations and international standards, by analyzing working conditions, gender dynamics, and the efficacy of current policies. A stable political climate, workplace safety, and access to raw materials are essential for the RMG sector's long-term viability. Furthermore, this study aims to provide practical insights and recommendations for promoting gender equality, empowering women, and improving working conditions in the RMG sector through a thorough analysis of legal frameworks, factory compliance, and female workers' perspectives. This paper emphasizes how Bangladesh's unique "political settlement" has fostered a favorable environment for the RMG sector's continued expansion. The research emphasizes the need for inclusive and sustainable growth that protects the rights and dignity of all workers by acknowledging the significant contributions of

women to the RMG sector. Ultimately, this thesis adds to the continuing discussion on labor rights and gender equality in the RMG sector, with the goal of influencing policies and practices that advance women's empowerment and well-being in Bangladesh and beyond. Many people have found economic justification in outsourcing production functions to Bangladesh. The RMG sector in Bangladesh has grown significantly over the last three decades, contributing to the development of physical infrastructure through approximately 4560 RMG units and the development of human capital through the employment of approximately 4 million workers ([Shakirullah et al., 2020](#)). It has also greatly empowered women, as they make up approximately 90% of the workforce.

The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh accounts for a substantial portion of the country's export revenue and jobs, with women making up the majority of the workforce.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Concept of Definition**

#### **2.1 Definition of Labour Rights and Women Empowerment**

Labor rights are rights that relate to the conditions of employment, such as safe working conditions, fair wages, and the right to organize. These rights are essential for ensuring that workers are treated with dignity and respect, and that they have the opportunity to earn a living wage and support their families. Women's empowerment is the process of enabling women to have control over their own lives and to participate fully in economic, social, and political decision-making. When women are empowered, they are more likely to be able to exercise their labor rights, and to demand fair treatment in the workplace. It necessitates altering power dynamics and societal norms that maintain inequality, as well as ensuring women have equal access to resources and opportunities. It is also critical to address issues such as gender-based violence and discrimination, which can have a significant impact on women's ability to exercise their labor rights. Women's empowerment and labor rights are inextricably linked, as empowered women are better equipped to advocate for their rights and seek redress when those rights are violated. Promoting women's empowerment and protecting labor rights are critical for achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Empowering women is critical for Bangladesh's industrial reform and economic progress (Reza et al., 2017). The ready-made garment sector is essential to Bangladesh's economy. Ensuring workplace safety and upholding labor standards are critical for sustainable growth (Gu et al., 2021). The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh has grown rapidly over the last few decades, becoming a major source of export revenue and employment (Mustafa & Hussain, 2023).<sup>16</sup>

#### **2.2 Concept of Media**

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<sup>16</sup> What are the Factors Making Pakistan's Exports Stagnant? Insight from Literature Review. The Pakistan Development Review, 449. <https://doi.org/10.30541/v62i3449-460>

The concept of media encompasses a wide array of communication channels and platforms through which information, news, entertainment, and various forms of content are disseminated to the public. Media can take many forms, including print media (newspapers, magazines), broadcast media (television, radio), digital media (websites, social media), and outdoor media (billboards, posters). The concept of media also includes the various actors and institutions involved in the production, distribution, and consumption of media content, such as journalists, editors, publishers, broadcasters, advertisers, and audiences. One of the key functions of media is to inform the public about important issues and events, providing citizens with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions. In addition, media can serve as a platform for diverse voices and perspectives, promoting dialogue and debate on critical social, economic, and political issues. Media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing social and cultural norms. However, media can also be used to manipulate or distort information, spread propaganda, and reinforce harmful stereotypes ([Manzoor et al., 2016](#)). Therefore, it is essential for media consumers to critically evaluate the information they receive and to be aware of the potential biases and agendas that may be present.

The media can have a significant impact on public perceptions and attitudes towards women's labor rights. The media has the potential to raise awareness about challenges such as discrimination, harassment, and unsafe working conditions that women face in the RMG industry. In addition to raising awareness, the media can also play a role in holding companies and governments accountable for their actions.

### **2.3 Significance of Labour Rights for Women in RMG Sector**

Recognizing the importance of labor rights for women in the RMG sector is critical for a number of reasons. Labor rights, at their core, are fundamental human rights that ensure fair treatment, safe working conditions, and equitable opportunities for all workers, regardless of gender. Given that women make up a sizable portion of the workforce in Bangladesh's RMG sector, protecting their labor rights is critical for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. When women's labor rights are respected and protected, they are more likely to have economic security, social mobility, and the ability to make decisions about their own lives. Furthermore, upholding labor rights for women in the RMG sector can have a significant impact on overall economic development and sustainability. When women are treated fairly and

have access to decent work, they are more productive, innovative, and engaged, which benefits both businesses and the economy as a whole.

Respecting and protecting women's labor rights in the RMG sector is also essential for ensuring social justice and reducing inequality. Women in the RMG sector frequently face unique challenges and vulnerabilities, such as gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, and unequal pay. By upholding their labor rights, we can address these injustices and create a more equitable and inclusive society. Furthermore, prioritizing labor rights for women in the RMG sector is essential for maintaining ethical and responsible business practices. Consumers all over the world are increasingly concerned about the social and environmental impact of the products they buy, and they expect companies to uphold high labor standards throughout their supply chains. By prioritizing labor rights for women, RMG factories in Bangladesh can improve their reputation, attract more customers, and contribute to a more sustainable and responsible global economy. Moreover, compliance with international labor standards and conventions is essential for Bangladesh's RMG industry to maintain its competitive edge in the global market ([Rahman et al., 2023](#)). Protecting and promoting women's labor rights in the RMG sector is essential for promoting gender equality, economic development, social justice, and ethical business practices.

#### **2.4 Overview of the RMG Sector in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh's RMG sector is a critical component of the country's economy, accounting for a sizable portion of export revenues and employing millions of people, primarily women. The sector has grown rapidly since its inception in the late 1970s, owing to factors such as low labor costs, preferential trade agreements, and a conducive investment climate. The RMG sector has played an important role in poverty reduction and economic empowerment, particularly for women in rural areas, in addition to its economic contributions.

The RMG sector, on the other hand, faces numerous challenges, including low wages, poor working conditions, and a lack of effective labor rights enforcement. These issues have resulted in widespread labor unrest, factory accidents, and reputational damage for the industry. The collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013, in which over 1,100 garment workers were killed, brought global attention to the sector's systemic problems and prompted calls for urgent reforms. In response to these challenges, various initiatives

have been launched to improve working conditions and labor rights in the RMG sector, including the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety. These initiatives have contributed to significant progress in areas such as factory safety inspections, remediation of structural defects, and worker training programs ([Ansary & Barua, 2015](#)). However, significant challenges remain, particularly in terms of ensuring fair wages, preventing gender-based violence, and strengthening worker representation.

Furthermore, the sector must address emerging challenges such as automation, climate change, and evolving consumer preferences in order to maintain its competitiveness and sustainability. Addressing these challenges will require collaborative efforts from governments, businesses, workers, and civil society organizations to promote innovation, sustainability, and social responsibility throughout the RMG value chain. Despite these obstacles, the RMG sector remains a critical engine of economic growth and social development in Bangladesh. By addressing the sector's challenges and capitalizing on its opportunities, Bangladesh can unlock its full potential as a leading global hub for sustainable and ethical garment manufacturing.

## **2.5 Salient Feature**

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh stands as a pivotal economic force, significantly contributing to the nation's GDP and export earnings ([Akter, 2021](#)).

This sector's expansion has not only fueled economic growth but has also played a crucial role in generating employment opportunities, particularly for women, thereby fostering socio-economic development. Characterized by labor-intensive operations, the RMG industry has become a major source of livelihood for millions of workers, predominantly from rural backgrounds, who migrate to urban centers in search of employment ([Asif, 2017](#)). Women constitute a substantial portion of the RMG workforce, highlighting the sector's role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment by providing them with economic independence. However, the industry faces persistent challenges such as low wages, long working hours, and inadequate workplace safety measures, which have been subjects of intense scrutiny and debate. Despite improvements in recent years, ensuring fair labor practices and safe working conditions remains a paramount concern for the sustainability and ethical integrity of the RMG sector. Moreover, the industry's reliance on imported raw materials and

limited value addition within the country pose challenges to its long-term competitiveness and resilience in the global market ([ATM et al., 2018](#)). Addressing these structural issues and promoting innovation, diversification, and skills development are crucial for enhancing the RMG sector's contribution to Bangladesh's economic prosperity and social well-being.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh has experienced a significant transformation in recent decades, evolving from a nascent sector to a global leader in apparel manufacturing. Driven by factors such as competitive labor costs, preferential trade agreements, and a strategic geographic location, the industry has witnessed remarkable growth in export volumes and market share.

This expansion has not only boosted Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves but has also stimulated investment in related industries, including textiles, accessories, and logistics. However, the industry's rapid growth has also brought about social and environmental challenges, including labor exploitation, workplace safety hazards, and pollution. The sector's sustainability hinges on addressing these issues through effective regulatory enforcement, technological innovation, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Moreover, the RMG industry plays a crucial role in poverty reduction and social development in Bangladesh, providing employment opportunities for millions of people, particularly women from marginalized communities. As the industry continues to evolve, it must prioritize inclusive growth, environmental stewardship, and ethical business practices to ensure its long-term viability and positive impact on society.

The pursuit of sustainability within Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates environmental, social, and economic dimensions ([Hasan et al., 2020](#)).

This entails adopting cleaner production technologies to minimize pollution, promoting fair labor practices to protect workers' rights, and fostering innovation to enhance competitiveness. Social sustainability improvements can particularly benefit vulnerable workers and help suppliers develop longer-term relationships with transnational companies, further contributing to economic growth. Furthermore, promoting transparency and traceability throughout the supply chain is essential for building consumer trust and ensuring accountability. This involves implementing robust monitoring and auditing mechanisms to identify and address social and environmental

risks. Investing in skills development and training programs for workers can enhance productivity, improve working conditions, and promote career advancement opportunities. Collaboration among stakeholders, including government, industry, civil society, and International organizations, is crucial for driving systemic change and achieving sustainable development goals within the RMG sector. Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives can add value to society through community development, environmental protection, and socially responsible business practices.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh is intricately linked to the global fashion industry, serving as a major manufacturing hub for apparel brands and retailers worldwide. This interconnectedness exposes the industry to both opportunities and challenges arising from evolving consumer preferences, trade policies, and supply chain dynamics. The industry's ability to adapt to changing market conditions, embrace innovation, and maintain ethical standards is crucial for sustaining its competitive edge and reputation. The fashion industry's increasing focus on morality and ethical issues underscores the importance of implementing special strategies and approaches toward sustainability. Moreover, the RMG industry's contribution to Bangladesh's economy extends beyond direct export earnings, as it also stimulates growth in ancillary sectors such as transportation, finance, and telecommunications. Strengthening these linkages and promoting diversification can enhance the industry's resilience and create new avenues for economic development.

Addressing labor rights violations, analyzing contributing factors, and proposing recommendations for strengthening labor rights protection for women in the Bangladeshi RMG industry requires multifaceted strategies.

Qualitative research through in-depth interviews, combined with quantitative data analysis techniques provides a comprehensive understanding of the labor rights situation.

This approach facilitates the identification of patterns, trends, and correlations related to labor rights violations and their impact on women workers ([Swazan & Das, 2022](#)).

<sup>17</sup>The Bangladesh Labor Act 2006 and other relevant regulations, focusing on the roles of government agencies, employers, and trade unions should be analyzed.

Effectiveness of labor rights enforcement mechanisms, including labor inspections, dispute resolution mechanisms, and judicial processes should be evaluate. The root causes of labor rights violations, such as gender discrimination, power imbalances, and lack of awareness among workers and employers should be identified to propose targeted interventions.

Implementing advanced manufacturing and management systems, such as lean manufacturing, can enhance productivity and competitiveness while addressing social compliance requirements. Additionally, incorporating sustainable design principles and materials can reduce environmental impacts and differentiate products in the global market ([Tumpa et al., 2019](#)).<sup>18</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusion

This study investigates the impediments in applying sound Supply Chain Management in the RMG industry, employing a mixed research method with a questionnaire survey to objectively determine these impediments. This is important considering Bangladesh needs to find other options where they can have core competency ([Azad, 2022](#)).

The RMG sector is accused of not executing sustainability issues. Environmental sustainability is an evolving issue at the present stage of industrialization. There have been initiatives taken to promote environmental sustainability.

Sustainability should be incorporated into the industrialization project in Bangladesh. The proper execution of supply chain management can help to get sustainability.

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<sup>17</sup> ). Bangladesh's Emergence as a Ready-Made Garment Export Leader: An Examination of the Competitive Advantages of the Garment Industry. *International Journal of Global Business and Competitiveness*, 17(2), 162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42943-022-00049-9>

<sup>18</sup> Barriers to green supply chain management: An emerging economy context. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 236, 117617. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.117617>

## **Chapter 3**

### **Legal Regime of Labour Rights in Bangladesh**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The legal landscape governing labor rights in Bangladesh is a complex interplay of constitutional provisions, statutory enactments, and international conventions.

The Constitution of Bangladesh enshrines fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of association, the right to equality before the law, and the right to protection against discrimination.

#### **3.2 Policy Review**

To promote sustainability, special strategies should be taken. Social sustainability development helps vulnerable workers, helps suppliers build longer-term relationships with multinational companies, and promotes economic growth. Transparency in the supply chain can help maintain consumer trust.

##### **3.2.1 The Constitution of Bangladesh:**

The Constitution of Bangladesh serves as the supreme law of the country, laying the foundation for the protection and promotion of fundamental rights, including labor rights.

Article 27 of the Constitution guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the law for all citizens, irrespective of gender, religion, race, or social origin.

This provision prohibits discrimination in employment and ensures that women workers are entitled to the same rights and opportunities as their male counterparts.

Article 28 of the Constitution specifically empowers the State to make special provisions in favor of women and children.

This provision enables the government to enact laws and policies that address the specific needs and challenges faced by women workers, such as maternity benefits, childcare facilities, and protection against sexual harassment. Article 31 of the Constitution recognizes the right to a healthy and safe working environment, ensuring that all workers, including women, are protected from hazardous conditions and occupational risks.

Article 34 prohibits forced labor and guarantees the right to fair wages and reasonable working hours.

These constitutional provisions provide a framework for the protection of labor rights in Bangladesh, affirming the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and decent work.

In addition to these fundamental rights, the Constitution also directs the State to ensure social justice and economic well-being for all citizens. This includes promoting equal opportunities in employment, providing social security benefits, and improving working conditions in accordance with international standards ([Omar, 1996](#)). Article 11 of the constitution ensures fundamental human rights and freedom ([Faruque & Islam, 2023](#)).<sup>19</sup> Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation in 1971, and its legal system reflects a blend of common law principles inherited from British colonial rule and customary laws and practices ([Alam & Mashraf, 2023](#)).<sup>20</sup> The Constitution of Bangladesh, adopted in 1972, establishes the fundamental rights of citizens, including the right to equality, freedom of association, and protection against discrimination. The judiciary plays a crucial role in interpreting and enforcing labor laws and ensuring that the rights of workers are protected ([Patwari, 1991](#)).

The Constitution mandates the government to safeguard and advance freedoms, ensuring a dignified standard of living for every citizen ([Das & Saibabu, 2014](#)).

### **3.2.2 Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006:**

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<sup>19</sup> Human Rights in Bangladesh: Success and Challenges. In IntechOpen eBooks. IntechOpen. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.112233>

<sup>20</sup> Fifty Years of Human Rights Enforcement in Legal and Political Systems in Bangladesh: Past Controversies and Future Challenges. *Human Rights Review*, 24(1), 121. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-023-00679-3>

The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 is the primary legislation governing labor rights in the country, consolidating and amending various labor laws to provide a comprehensive framework for the regulation of employment relationships. The Act applies to both formal and informal sectors, covering a wide range of industries and establishments, including the ready-made garment sector. The Act defines the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers, addressing issues such as wages, working hours, leave, holidays, termination of employment, and occupational safety and health.

However, it is important to note that the Labour Act does not apply to all categories of workers, particularly those in the informal sector, such as domestic workers and agricultural workers ([Fahim, 2020](#)). The Labour Act, 2006, serves as the cornerstone of labor legislation in Bangladesh, consolidating and updating previous laws to address contemporary challenges in the workplace. It outlines the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees, encompassing crucial aspects such as working conditions, wages, and workplace safety. The Act also establishes mechanisms for resolving labor disputes, including conciliation, arbitration, and adjudication.

Furthermore, the Act mandates employers to provide written employment contracts, maintain accurate records of workers' employment, and establish grievance procedures to address workers' concerns. The Act addresses key issues such as working hours, leave entitlements, and overtime compensation, ensuring that workers receive fair treatment and adequate rest.

The Act specifies the maximum number of working hours per day and week, as well as the minimum requirements for annual leave, sick leave, and festival holidays.

The Labour Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, race, and social origin, ensuring that women workers are not subjected to unfair treatment or bias in employment ([Saha, 2023](#)).<sup>21</sup>

The Act also prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace and mandates employers to take measures to prevent and address such misconduct. The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 is applicable only to the formal private sector within Bangladesh. There are

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<sup>21</sup> Framing Corporate Social Responsibility to Achieve Sustainability in Urban Industrialization: Case of Bangladesh Ready-Made Garments (RMG). *Sustainability*, 13(13), 6988. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13136988>

provisions covering occupational hygiene, safety measures, industrial accidents, conditions of work, trade union, working hours, welfare facilities etc.

### **3.2.3 International Conventions and Commitments:**

Bangladesh is a signatory to several international conventions and treaties that protect and promote labor rights, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

These conventions impose obligations on the State to ensure that women workers enjoy equal rights and opportunities in employment. Bangladesh has ratified core International Labour Organization conventions, including those related to freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the elimination of forced labor and discrimination. These conventions provide a framework for national labor laws and policies, guiding the government's efforts to improve working conditions and protect the rights of workers. Bangladesh has ratified several International Labour Organization conventions that address various aspects of labor rights, including freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the abolition of forced labor. By ratifying these conventions, Bangladesh has committed to aligning its national laws and policies with international standards.

Acknowledging the importance of labor rights, the government has integrated them into its national policies, particularly in sectors like the ready-made garment industry, demonstrating a commitment to upholding international norms.

### **3.3 Rights of Women Workers in RMG Sector**

Women workers in the RMG sector are entitled to various rights under national laws and international conventions, including the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to maternity benefits, and the right to a safe and healthy working environment.

They also have the right to form and join trade unions and to participate in collective bargaining to improve their working conditions and wages.

#### **3.3.1 Equal Pay and Non-Discrimination:**

Women workers are entitled to equal pay for equal work and equal opportunities for promotion and training. The principle of equal pay for equal work is enshrined in the Constitution and the Labour Act, prohibiting wage discrimination based on gender.

Employers are prohibited from discriminating against women workers in recruitment, hiring, promotion, and termination of employment. The principle of equal pay for equal work is enshrined in the Constitution and the Labour Act, prohibiting wage discrimination based on gender.

### **3.3.2 Maternity Benefits:**

The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 includes many positive points for the protection of rights of the women workers. For example, Section 46 to 50 of the Act discussed about the maternity benefit for women workers. Women workers are entitled to maternity leave with pay, as well as other benefits such as nursing breaks and childcare facilities.

The Act mandates employers to provide maternity leave with full pay to women workers for a specified period before and after childbirth. The law also prohibits employers from terminating the employment of pregnant women or discriminating against them because of their pregnancy.

Proper execution of existing regulations regarding maternity leave is not observed in all factories.

### **3.3.3 Safe and Healthy Working Environment:**

Women workers have the right to a safe and healthy working environment, free from hazards and risks to their physical and mental health. Employers are required to take measures to prevent accidents and injuries in the workplace and to provide adequate safety equipment and training to workers.

The ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh is a critical sector that significantly contributes to the nation's economy through exports and employment. Despite its economic importance, the industry has faced considerable challenges regarding the safety and well-being of its workforce. Workplace safety is crucial for the garment industries of Bangladesh, as it is the topmost earning and employment sector. However, the sector is underdeveloped, and the safety standards are not satisfactory compared to developed countries. Poor working conditions where workers are exposed to a healthy and safe hazardous environment, one cannot expect a healthy economy, high quality of products or services, and long-term productivity from that working group. Recent accidents around the world have highlighted the potential hazards inherent in many industrial operations. The Rana Plaza tragedy has been a stark reminder of the unsafe working conditions prevailing in the garment industry and the urgent need for reforms

to ensure worker safety. Recent incidents relating to labor unrest and garment building collapse in Savar turned into a hot issue in Bangladesh as well as in the rest of the world due to its thousands of labors death. After the Rana Plaza building collapse in April 2013, more than 190 international clothing brands and retailers signed an “Accord on Fire and Building Safety” with two international union federations ([Brown, 2015](#)). The accord is a legally binding agreement for five years to improve factory safety.

To ensure strict adherence to safety standards by manufacturers within the textile and fashion industry, the International Labour Organization developed a code of practice on safety and health in the textile, clothing, leather, and footwear industries, to protect workers and hence limit any harm or threats ([Seidu et al., 2024](#)).

In response to the disaster in Savar, the Bangladeshi government amended the Bangladesh Labour Act. These amendments address key areas such as occupational safety, workers' compensation, and trade union rights, signaling a commitment to improving labor standards and ensuring better protection for workers.

#### **3.3.4 Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining**

Workers, including women, have the right to form and join trade unions and to bargain collectively with their employers to improve their working conditions and wages. The Constitution guarantees freedom of association, and the Labour Act provides for the registration and recognition of trade unions.

Trade unions play a vital role in protecting the rights of workers and promoting their interests through collective bargaining and advocacy.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh, a cornerstone of the nation's economy, has been under intense scrutiny regarding labor rights, particularly those of women who constitute a significant portion of its workforce. Following the collapse of the Rana Plaza garment factory building, Bangladeshi labor unions have become central to global initiatives aimed at enhancing factory safety. These external connections can protect union federations and leaders but might also introduce agendas that differ from the needs of the workers themselves. After the Rana Plaza incident, there was a noticeable change in the industrial relations landscape, marked by increased compliance with safety inspections and technical labor standards; however, challenges persist in safeguarding fundamental labor rights. The establishment of trade unions and

the practice of collective bargaining are critical for ensuring fair labor practices and safe working conditions.

Trade unions in Bangladesh's garment sector face numerous challenges, including limited resources, weak bargaining power, and resistance from employers.

Despite legal provisions, many employers resist the formation of trade unions in their factories and engage in anti-union activities, such as intimidation and harassment of union leaders.

Moreover, internal barriers to change within trade unions, shaped by external pressures, further complicate their ability to effectively represent workers and drive meaningful change in the industry ([Kumar et al., 2012](#)).

### **3.3.5 Equal Remuneration and Non-Discrimination**

Women workers have the right to equal remuneration for work of equal value and to be free from discrimination in employment ([Ahmed & Peerlings, 2008](#)).<sup>22</sup> The principle of equal pay for equal work is enshrined in the Constitution and the Labour Act, which prohibits discrimination based on gender in wages, promotions, and other terms and conditions of employment.

Despite legal provisions, wage discrimination and gender-based discrimination remain pervasive in the ready-made garment industry, with women often earning less than men for performing similar work.

To address wage disparities and promote gender equality, policymakers and stakeholders must enforce existing laws and regulations and implement measures to ensure equal pay for equal work.

Additionally, efforts should be made to challenge and eliminate discriminatory attitudes and practices that perpetuate gender inequality in the workplace.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh, while being a significant contributor to the nation's economy, grapples with multifaceted challenges concerning the labor rights of its predominantly female workforce. These challenges span from workplace safety and freedom of association to equal remuneration and protection against gender-

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<sup>22</sup> ). Addressing Workers' Rights in the Textile and Apparel Industries: Consequences for the Bangladesh Economy. *World Development*, 37(3), 661. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2008.06.003>

based violence and harassment. The industry's competitiveness is increasingly challenged by other garment-producing countries, necessitating improvements in productivity, worker standards, product design, and overall management skills. Lean implementation, a strategy focused on minimizing waste and maximizing efficiency, is seen as a promising approach to enhance the industry's performance. Despite the industry's economic importance, issues such as political instability, supply chain management, and workplace safety persist, impacting its global competitiveness. These issues, coupled with the need for better labor practices, highlight the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to ensure the sustainability and ethical integrity of the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh.

The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh has transformed the nation's socio-economic landscape, primarily through the employment of a predominantly female workforce ([Mahmud, 2017](#)). This sector has not only bolstered economic growth but has also played a pivotal role in empowering women, fostering entrepreneurship, and enhancing livelihoods across the country. The industry's substantial export revenue, which constitutes a significant portion of Bangladesh's total export earnings, underscores its importance in driving economic development. The ready-made garments sector has paved the path for the development of that section of the society, which has been limited to the private sphere, i.e., women ([Sharma, 2020](#)). Moreover, the sector has facilitated skill development, technology transfer, and infrastructure development, contributing to the overall modernization of Bangladesh's economy. The industry has also spurred investment in related sectors such as textiles, accessories, and logistics, creating a multiplier effect throughout the economy. The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh has not only generated employment opportunities but has also contributed to the reduction of poverty and inequality. The advancement of activities aimed at empowering the local workforce is crucial for overcoming existing challenges and fostering business expansion. The sector's growth has improved living standards, healthcare access, and educational attainment, particularly for women and their families.

Despite its economic contributions, the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh faces persistent challenges regarding labor rights, particularly for its female workforce. From the onset, garment entrepreneurs have strategically employed women to maintain control over the workforce, leading to labor exploitation through low and irregular

wages. Many women workers face long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and limited access to healthcare and social protection. The lack of effective enforcement of labor laws and regulations further exacerbates these issues, leaving women workers vulnerable to exploitation. Discrimination, harassment, and limited access to trade unions heighten the vulnerability of women workers in the ready-made garment sector. The Sustainable Development Goals emphasize women's participation in the workplace as a key objective for achieving gender equality and economic empowerment worldwide. The absence of a conducive working environment for women impedes their economic empowerment, with over 90% of the 4.2 million workers in this sector being women from rural areas of Bangladesh. The importance of this sector to the economy of Bangladesh cannot be understated, with over 83% of the country's total exports coming from this industry.

Addressing these labor rights challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving collaboration among government, employers, trade unions, and international organizations. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing enforcement mechanisms, and promoting social dialogue are essential steps towards improving working conditions and protecting the rights of women workers.

Ensuring fair wages, safe workplaces, and access to healthcare and social protection is crucial for promoting decent work and empowering women in the ready-made garment sector (Chowdhury et al., 2019; Mahmud et al., 2017). Additionally, promoting gender equality and addressing gender-based violence and harassment are necessary for creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment. In Bangladesh's ready-made garment sector, women frequently encounter discrimination, particularly in terms of earnings, promotions, safety, and overall workplace conditions. Empowering women workers through education, skills training, and leadership development can further enhance their participation and decision-making in the industry. The insights from this study highlight the need for concerted efforts to address labor rights challenges and promote decent work for women in the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh. The ready-made garment industry has contributed significantly to the GDP of Bangladesh, accounting for approximately 14.07% and 83% of total export earnings.

The sector's dependence on 'timid' women to ensure administrative control perpetuates labor exploitation through low and irregular wages. The study underscores the importance of ensuring fair labor practices, safe working conditions, and gender

equality to promote sustainable and inclusive development in Bangladesh. The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh accounts for a substantial portion of the nation's export earnings. Addressing health and safety concerns among female garment workers is crucial for fostering sustainable development in Bangladesh. Many female workers consistently suffer from physical health complexities, such as headaches, eye problems, hand pain, and respiratory difficulties. These statistics emphasize the necessity of implementing policies that safeguard the well-being of female employees within the garment industry. It is imperative to prioritize this aspect in conjunction with advancing women's rights within the ready-made garment sector.

### **3.4 International law**

Bangladesh is a signatory to several international conventions relating to labor rights, including those promulgated by the International Labour Organization. These conventions provide a framework for promoting decent work, protecting workers' rights, and ensuring social justice. Relevant international legal instruments include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the ILO core conventions on freedom of association, collective bargaining, forced labor, child labor, and discrimination. The Bangladesh Labor Act serves as the primary legislation governing labor relations in the country, prescribing minimum standards for working conditions, wages, working hours, and occupational safety and health. The Act also establishes mechanisms for resolving labor disputes and enforcing labor rights. However, gaps and weaknesses remain in the implementation and enforcement of labor laws, particularly in the RMG sector.

A comprehensive study of labor regulations and laws in Bangladesh is necessary to analyze the ready-made garment industry. It will also help to address wage disparities, and issues with health and safety. Bangladesh is dedicated to following international labor laws and conventions in order to protect the rights of garment workers. It includes laws on factory inspections, regulations, and labor. There have been initiatives taken to promote environmental sustainability ([Hemphill & White, 2018](#)).<sup>23</sup> Social sustainability

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<sup>23</sup> Multinational Enterprises, Employee Safety and the Socially Responsible Supply Chain: The Case of Bangladesh and the Apparel Industry. *Business and Society Review*, 123(3), 489. <https://doi.org/10.1111/basr.12153>

development helps vulnerable workers, helps suppliers build longer-term relationships with multinational companies, and promotes economic growth.

Transparency in the supply chain can help maintain consumer trust.

The Rana Plaza tragedy spurred significant policy responses, including amendments to Bangladeshi labor law, international buyer-coordinated building inspections, tariff penalties, and efforts to improve social dialogue involving international buyers, unions, and the Bangladeshi government ([Islam et al., 2022](#)). Following the Rana Plaza disaster, several global initiatives emerged to improve factory safety, offering unions the chance to influence labor standard governance despite low factory unionization rates. However, resistance persists regarding the protection of fundamental labor rights.

### **3.5 The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006**

The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 serves as the primary legislation governing labor relations, working conditions, and workers' rights in Bangladesh.

The Act consolidates and amends existing labor laws, aiming to provide a comprehensive legal framework for regulating employment relationships and promoting harmonious labor relations.

The Act contains provisions on various aspects of employment, including working hours, wages, leave, health and safety, and dispute resolution.

It also addresses specific issues related to women workers, such as maternity benefits and protection against sexual harassment.

However, the Labour Act does not apply to informal workers, who make up a large portion of the labor sector.

In regards to dispute settlement for workers in the informal sector, there are no statutory regulations or systematic policies available.

Further reformulations of essential labor legislation are needed to protect workers' labor rights and safeguard their social security in the modern world ([Rapatsa, 2014](#)).

### **3.6 Amendment of Labour Law and Rules**

To address the growing demand for compliance with international labor standards, the government has undertaken several amendments to the Labour Act and related rules.

These amendments aim to strengthen labor rights protection, enhance enforcement mechanisms, and promote social dialogue.

For example, amendments have been made to provisions on trade union registration, collective bargaining, and occupational safety and health.

The Labor Relations Act was enacted to promote labor peace and positive relations in the workplace ([Ntimba et al., 2020](#)). The National Employment Policy promotes equal opportunity to all citizens and aims to create new employment opportunities.

### **3.7 Implementation and Enforcement**

Despite the existence of a comprehensive legal framework, the implementation and enforcement of labor laws remain a significant challenge in Bangladesh. Weaknesses in labor inspection systems, inadequate resources, and lack of awareness among workers and employers hinder effective enforcement.

Corruption, political influence, and lack of accountability further undermine the rule of law and impede the realization of labor rights.

To ensure effective implementation and enforcement, there is a need to strengthen labor inspection mechanisms, increase resources for labor law enforcement agencies, and promote awareness-raising programs for workers and employers.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh is a critical sector, significantly contributing to the nation's economy through exports and employment. However, this industry has also been associated with instances of labor rights violations, particularly concerning women workers ([Akhter et al., 2019](#)). Therefore, a comprehensive study is essential to understand the multifaceted challenges faced by women in this sector and to propose informed recommendations for improvement. This research holds substantial practical implications. It aims to provide valuable insights into their lived experiences and perspectives on labor rights issues. The ultimate goal is to promote gender equality and social justice within the RMG industry, fostering a more equitable and sustainable future for all stakeholders.

A thesis on labor rights for women in the ready-made garment industries of Bangladesh necessitates a comprehensive examination of the legal, social, economic, and cultural factors shaping their experiences. The study should begin by contextualizing the RMG sector's significance in Bangladesh's economy, highlighting its role as a major employer

of women and a key contributor to export earnings. It is crucial to emphasize the importance of ensuring safe and healthy workplaces, as this directly impacts workers' well-being and productivity.

Furthermore, the thesis needs to analyze the effectiveness of existing labor laws and regulations in protecting women's rights, identifying gaps and loopholes that need to be addressed. The health and safety of garment workers are paramount concerns, given the potential for occupational diseases and injuries in the industry. Poor working conditions, including exposure to hazardous environments, can compromise workers' health, productivity, and overall well-being. Moreover, the thesis should assess the role of trade unions and worker organizations in advocating for women's rights, examining their effectiveness in collective bargaining and grievance resolution. This study's findings will be valuable for multiple stakeholders: Policymakers, Industry Stakeholders, and Civil Society Organizations. By identifying the systemic issues and proposing actionable recommendations, this research can contribute to shaping policies and programs that promote gender equality, decent work, and social justice in the RMG sector. Assessing the achievements and drawbacks of the wage struggle, our study envisions women's more effective role in securing wider labor rights in the RMG sector. Moreover, compliance with prescribed standards in the RMG sector has a significant impact on employee turnover.

This study should investigate the influence of external stakeholders' elements to the demand-side and supply-side drivers and barriers for improving competitiveness of the Ready-Made Garment industry in the way of analyzing supply chain ([Nuruzzaman, 2015](#)). An efficient Supply Chain Management can increase the competitiveness and the satisfaction of the customers ([Chowdhury et al., 2019](#)). There is a paramount importance of the Readymade Garments industry of Bangladesh as it is the highest contributor in earning foreign exchange for the country. Despite the identification of constraints by numerous researchers in the past and the presentation of diverse models with valuable suggestions to ensure workplace safety and security for employees, the reasons behind the lack of appropriate and adequate measures to safeguard against insecure workplaces in garment industries remain a mystery. The primary goal of this paper is to analyze workplace safety in Bangladesh's garment industries, which serve as the country's top source of income and employment. There are workplace safety, building construction and design, fire safety, electrical safety, and worker behavior. The

garment sector has experienced rapid growth since 1980, and it accounts for 75% of exports of Bangladesh. This sector accounts for 45% of total industrial employment ([Mahmud et al., 2017](#)). The sector faces challenges, including poor infrastructure, political unrest, and weak law enforcement. The RMG sector is essential to Bangladesh's economic growth, but it has recently encountered unforeseen challenges. Numerous fire incidents have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of garment workers, and fires have become a frequent occurrence in the current environment.

### **3.8 Labour Law Reform**

The RMG sector is an industry of vital importance for Bangladesh ([Ruba et al., 2021](#)).

<sup>24</sup>But in recent years, several serious disasters have taken place in this sector. The Rana Plaza accident, the Tazreen Fashions fire etc. have caused many deaths and injuries.

After these disasters, national and international organizations have stressed improvements in labor standards and workplace safety in Bangladesh.

After the disasters in the RMG sector, several initiatives have been taken to improve the situation.

A comprehensive analysis of labor laws, factory inspection reports, company policies, collective bargaining agreements, and reports from NGOs and international organizations provides insights into the legal framework, existing policies, and reported cases of labor rights violations.

Statistical data on wages, working conditions, workplace safety, and access to healthcare from government sources, industry associations, and research institutions, can highlight the gaps between legal provisions and actual practices.

Collecting primary data through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with women workers in the RMG industry can provide valuable insights into their lived experiences and perspectives on labor rights issues.

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<sup>24</sup> The Ready-Made Garment Industry: An Analysis of Bangladesh's Labor Law Provisions After the Savar Tragedy. Brooklyn Journal of International Law, 40(2), 7.  
<https://brooklynworks.brooklaw.edu/bjil/vol40/iss2/7/>

### 3.9 Power and Function

The roles and responsibilities of government agencies, employers, trade unions, and civil society organizations in promoting and protecting labor rights should be examined.

The effectiveness of existing monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, such as labor inspections, dispute resolution mechanisms, and judicial processes should be assessed.

The implementation of sustainable practices in the RMG industry necessitates a collaborative approach involving stakeholders across the value chain, integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations into business operations.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh stands as a pivotal economic force, significantly contributing to the nation's export earnings and employing a substantial workforce, predominantly women. However, the industry has faced substantial hurdles, notably concerning workplace safety, labor rights, and environmental sustainability. Despite its economic importance, the sector has been plagued by reports of unsafe working conditions, low wages, long working hours, and restrictions on freedom of association. These issues have drawn international condemnation and prompted increased scrutiny from consumers, brands, and regulatory bodies.

The legal framework governing labor rights in Bangladesh comprises constitutional provisions, statutory laws, and international conventions. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees fundamental rights, including the right to equality, freedom of association, and protection against exploitation. The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 serves as the primary legislation regulating labor relations, outlining provisions related to working conditions, wages, industrial relations, and occupational safety and health. Bangladesh is also a signatory to several International Labour Organization conventions, committing to uphold international labor standards. Despite these legal safeguards, challenges persist in effectively enforcing labor laws and ensuring compliance with international standards ([Fahim, 2020](#)).

The ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh, a cornerstone of the nation's economy, plays a crucial role in driving export earnings and providing employment opportunities, particularly for women ([Ahmed et al., 2021](#)). However, the sector grapples with significant challenges pertaining to workplace safety, labor rights, and environmental sustainability. There is paramount importance of the Readymade

Garments industry of Bangladesh as it is the highest contributor in earning foreign exchange for the country.

### **3.10 Procedures**

Despite its economic importance, the industry has faced persistent challenges related to labor rights, workplace safety, and environmental sustainability ([Asif, 2017](#)). These challenges include unsafe working conditions, low wages, long working hours, restrictions on freedom of association, and gender-based discrimination, which have drawn international scrutiny and raised concerns about the well-being of garment workers.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of the legal and regulatory framework governing labor rights in Bangladesh, as well as the social, economic, and political factors that shape the experiences of women workers in the RMG industry. The country's legal framework for labor rights is multifaceted, comprising constitutional provisions, statutory laws, and international conventions. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees fundamental rights to all citizens, including the right to equality, freedom of association, and protection against discrimination. However, the extent to which these rights are effectively enforced and upheld in the RMG sector remains a subject of concern. The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 serves as the primary legislation governing labor relations, outlining provisions related to working conditions, wages, and occupational health and safety.

### **3.11 Judgements**

The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 serves as the primary legislation governing labor relations, outlining provisions related to working conditions, wages, health, safety, and welfare measures for workers across various sectors, including the RMG industry. In addition to national laws, Bangladesh has ratified several international conventions related to labor rights, particularly those promulgated by the International Labour Organization, thereby committing to uphold international labor standards and principles ([Chowdhury et al., 2019](#)). However, the effective enforcement of labor laws and international standards in the RMG sector remains a significant challenge, with reports of non-compliance, inadequate monitoring, and weak enforcement mechanisms undermining the protection of workers' rights.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh is not only a significant contributor to the national economy but also a major employer, providing livelihoods for millions, predominantly women ([Mahmud et al., 2017](#)). However, the industry has also been associated with significant labor rights challenges, including unsafe working conditions, low wages, long working hours, restrictions on freedom of association, and gender-based discrimination.

Ensuring compliance with prescribed standards in the ready-made garment sector is crucial for fostering a safer working environment for employees and reducing turnover intention ([Uddin et al., 2021](#)). Numerous factors can impede the effective enforcement of labor laws and standards in the RMG sector, including inadequate resources for labor inspections, corruption, lack of awareness among workers about their rights, and pressure from factory owners to meet production targets. The collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013, which resulted in the death of over 1,100 garment workers, served as a stark reminder of the human cost of prioritizing profit over worker safety and highlighted the urgent need for systemic reforms in the industry ([Islam et al., 2022](#)). Women workers in the RMG industry often face specific challenges related to gender inequality, including unequal pay, sexual harassment, and limited access to healthcare and maternity benefits ([Saha, 2023](#)).

The economic significance of the RMG sector is undeniable, as it contributes substantially to Bangladesh's exports, foreign exchange earnings, and overall economic growth. However, this success has come at a cost, with reports of exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and violations of labor rights tarnishing the industry's reputation. The RMG sector accounts for a substantial portion of the country's export earnings, making it a vital source of foreign currency and a key driver of economic development.

**\*\*A Study on Labor Rights for Women in the Readymade Garment Industries in Bangladesh\*\***

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh stands as a critical pillar of the national economy, providing employment to millions, a significant portion of whom are women. The industry's remarkable growth has propelled Bangladesh onto the global stage, enhancing its economic and social development indicators. Despite the progress made in the RMG sector, challenges persist, particularly concerning the labor rights of women workers who constitute a significant portion of the workforce. Addressing these

challenges is crucial for fostering a more equitable and sustainable industry that upholds the rights and dignity of all workers. The ready-made garment industry's prominence in Bangladesh is due to its capacity to meet the demands of international outsourcing, highlighting its crucial role in the country's economic narrative.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

Despite the socio-economic advancements propelled by the RMG sector, the female workforce encounters numerous challenges in their workplaces, both physically and mentally ([Mahmud, 2017](#)).

Addressing these multifaceted challenges necessitates collaborative efforts from various stakeholders, including governments, factory owners, trade unions, international organizations, and civil society groups. These collaborative initiatives should focus on strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing enforcement mechanisms, promoting social dialogue, and empowering women workers to claim their rights. In the pursuit of achieving sustainable development goals, women's participation in the workplace is a crucial objective. The empowerment of women in the RMG sector holds immense potential for fostering inclusive economic growth, reducing poverty, and promoting gender equality in Bangladesh. The study's findings are poised to offer valuable insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and advocacy groups striving to promote gender equality and enhance working conditions in Bangladesh's RMG sector. The empowerment of women in the RMG sector not only contributes to their individual well-being but also has broader implications for household incomes, community development, and overall economic prosperity. It aims to contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality and labor rights, advocating for policies and practices that promote the well-being and empowerment of women workers in global supply chains ([Haque et al., 2020](#)). Ultimately, the goal is to promote decent work and ensure that women in the RMG sector can contribute to Bangladesh's economic success while enjoying fair treatment, safe working conditions, and equal opportunities.

## Chapter 4

### A Conceptual Framework

#### 4.1 Labour Rights and Women in the RMG Sector:

The lack of proper implementation of labor laws in the RMG sector contributes to labor unrest and disputes, highlighting the need for effective enforcement mechanisms ([Kamal et al., 1970](#)).<sup>25</sup> Numerous initiatives have been undertaken to improve workplace safety and worker rights in the RMG sector, including building inspections, safety training programs, and the establishment of worker hotlines. The long-term sustainability of the RMG industry depends on addressing issues related to environmental protection, resource efficiency, and responsible waste management. By adopting sustainable practices, the RMG sector can reduce its environmental impact, enhance its competitiveness, and contribute to the overall well-being of society.

The persistent gender pay gap in the RMG sector reflects systemic inequalities that need to be addressed through policy interventions and cultural shifts that promote equal pay for equal work. Many women workers lack access to adequate healthcare services, including reproductive health services, highlighting the need for comprehensive healthcare programs tailored to their specific needs. Trade unions play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of women workers, negotiating better wages and working conditions, and providing a platform for collective action. However, women are often underrepresented in trade union leadership positions, limiting their ability to influence decision-making processes and advocate for their specific concerns.

The importance of the RMG sector to Bangladesh's economy cannot be overstated, as it contributes significantly to the nation's gross domestic product and provides employment for a large segment of the population. The sector's growth has been instrumental in alleviating poverty and improving the living standards of many families, particularly in rural areas. However, the rapid expansion of the RMG sector has also

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<sup>25</sup> Labor Unrest and Bangladesh Labor Act 2006: A Study on Ready Made Garment Factories in Gazipur. *Journal of Business and Technology (Dhaka)*, 5(2), 1. <https://doi.org/10.3329/jbt.v5i2.9932>

brought about significant environmental challenges, including water pollution, air pollution, and waste generation. The RMG sector's reliance on cheap labor has led to concerns about exploitation and poor working conditions, particularly for women workers who constitute a large segment of the workforce. There is a pressing need for greater transparency and accountability in the RMG supply chain, with increased monitoring and enforcement of labor laws and environmental regulations. The complexity of global supply chains poses challenges for ensuring that labor rights are respected and environmental standards are met throughout the production process.

Addressing the root causes of labor rights violations requires a comprehensive approach that tackles issues such as poverty, lack of education, and social inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the RMG sector, leading to factory closures, job losses, and reduced wages for many workers. The pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of RMG workers and the need for stronger social safety nets to protect them during times of crisis. The importance of promoting social dialogue and collective bargaining as mechanisms for resolving labor disputes and improving industrial relations cannot be overstated. Investing in education and skills training for women workers is essential for enhancing their employability, increasing their earning potential, and empowering them to participate more fully in the economy.

#### **4.2 Working Conditions of Women in the RMG Sector**

The ready-made garment industry has emerged as a cornerstone of the Bangladeshi economy, standing as the second-largest clothing exporter globally, following China ([Hossain & Khan, 2020](#)).<sup>26</sup> This sector's remarkable growth trajectory has not only propelled economic development but has also played a pivotal role in providing employment opportunities, particularly for women from rural areas. The RMG sector has become a vital source of income for numerous families, contributing significantly to poverty reduction and improved living standards. The RMG sector's impact extends beyond economic indicators, playing a crucial role in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Despite the sector's remarkable contributions, it also faces significant challenges, particularly in relation to labor rights and working conditions, with women workers being disproportionately affected. A significant portion of the workforce in the

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<sup>26</sup> Effectiveness of Workplace Nutrition Programs on Anemia Status among Female Readymade Garment Workers in Bangladesh: A Program Evaluation. *Nutrients*, 11(6), 1259. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11061259>

RMG sector comprises women, who often face challenges related to low wages, long working hours, and unsafe working conditions.

The current state of labor rights for women in the RMG industry is a complex issue, influenced by a combination of legal frameworks, industry practices, and socio-economic factors. Trade unions and worker advocacy groups have been instrumental in raising awareness about labor rights violations and advocating for improved working conditions in the RMG sector. The role of international organizations, such as the International Labour Organization, in promoting and monitoring labor standards in the RMG sector cannot be overstated. Some of the primary challenges faced by women in the RMG sector include gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence in the workplace. Many women workers lack access to adequate healthcare services, including maternal healthcare, highlighting the need for improved healthcare provisions in the workplace.

The RMG sector has been grappling with issues related to workplace safety, including fire hazards, structural instability, and inadequate safety training. The Rana Plaza tragedy in 2013, which resulted in the death of over 1,100 garment workers, served as a stark reminder of the urgent need for improved safety standards and building codes. Several initiatives have been undertaken to improve workplace safety in the RMG sector, including the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in ensuring that all factories meet the required safety standards and that workers are adequately protected from hazards.

### **4.3 Current Labor Issues**

Noncompliance with labor laws remains a significant problem in Bangladesh's RMG industry, with factories often failing to adhere to minimum wage requirements, working hour regulations, and safety standards. The lack of effective enforcement mechanisms and inadequate monitoring contribute to the persistence of labor law violations. There is a need for stronger government oversight and increased collaboration between government agencies, employers, and worker representatives to ensure compliance with labor laws. Despite the existence of labor laws, many women workers are unaware of their rights and lack the knowledge and resources to assert them. The lack of awareness about labor rights is often compounded by cultural and social barriers that

prevent women from speaking out against exploitation and abuse. Efforts to empower women workers through education and training programs can help them become more aware of their rights and advocate for better working conditions.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh is a critical sector, contributing significantly to the nation's economy and employing millions of workers, predominantly women. Despite its economic importance, the sector has faced persistent challenges regarding labor rights, particularly for women, who often encounter issues such as low wages, poor working conditions, and gender-based discrimination. Several factors contribute to the vulnerability of women workers in the RMG sector, including their socio-economic background, lack of education, and limited access to information and resources. The government has amended the Bangladesh Labour Act 15 to align with international labor standards, including provisions related to freedom of association, collective bargaining, and protection against discrimination.

However, implementation and enforcement of these laws remain a challenge, due to factors such as inadequate monitoring, corruption, and a lack of political will. The ready-made garments industry accounts for a substantial 14.07 percent of Bangladesh's GDP and a remarkable 83 percent of its total export earnings ([Shakirullah et al., 2020](#)). This robust economic contribution underscores the industry's pivotal role in driving the nation's financial growth and international trade. Women workers are moving forward to ensure wage justice. The garment industry is the largest industrial employer in Bangladesh, officially estimating 2,997,000 employees in 2013, accounting for approximately 5% of the total employed population ([Carlson & Bitsch, 2018](#)).<sup>27</sup>Unofficial estimates go as high as 4.5 million workers.

The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh has become a cornerstone of the national economy, but its success has come at a cost, particularly for the women who comprise a significant portion of its workforce. These women often face exploitative working conditions, including long hours, low wages, and unsafe environments, highlighting a critical need for comprehensive labor rights protections ([Sharma, 2020](#)). Addressing these issues is not only a matter of social justice but also essential for the sustainable development of the industry and the overall well-being of the nation. The

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<sup>27</sup> Social sustainability in the ready-made-garment sector in Bangladesh: an institutional approach to supply chains. *The International Food and Agribusiness Management Review*, 21(2), 269. <https://doi.org/10.22434/ifamr2017.0114>

RMG sector's rapid growth has provided unprecedented employment opportunities for women, particularly those from rural areas where alternative employment options are limited to domestic service or informal. These opportunities have the potential to empower women economically, enhance their social status, and contribute to poverty reduction. The Bangladesh Labor Act of 2006 serves as the primary legal framework governing labor relations in the country, including the RMG sector.

However, the Act has been criticized for its limited scope and weak enforcement mechanisms, failing to adequately protect the rights of workers, especially women. Despite being the second-largest garments exporter worldwide, the country's laborers earn only 68 USD per month, highlighting the prevalent issue of low wages within the sector ([Adnan, 2018](#)).<sup>28</sup> This figure starkly contrasts with the average wages in other garment-producing nations, raising concerns about fair compensation and decent work standards in Bangladesh. Many factories fail to provide adequate health and safety measures, exposing workers to risks such as fire hazards, structural collapses, and exposure to hazardous chemicals. The absence of proper safety training and equipment further exacerbates these risks, leading to accidents, injuries, and fatalities.

#### **4.4 The Role of International Organizations and NGOs**

International organizations, such as the International Labour Organization, play a crucial role in promoting labor rights and improving working conditions in Bangladesh's RMG sector. These organizations provide technical assistance, conduct research, and advocate for policy reforms to strengthen labor protections. Numerous non-governmental organizations operate in Bangladesh, working to empower women workers, raise awareness about labor rights, and provide legal assistance to victims of exploitation. These organizations play a critical role in monitoring factory conditions, advocating for policy changes, and holding the government and employers accountable for ensuring compliance with labor standards.

The Bangladesh Accord and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety are two prominent initiatives that have been instrumental in improving factory safety in the RMG sector. Following the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013, these initiatives conducted

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<sup>28</sup> Low Wage Crisis: Impacts on Bangladeshi Garment Sector Workers. *Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.4172/2165-7912.1000357>

comprehensive inspections of factories, identified safety hazards, and implemented remediation plans to address structural, fire, and electrical safety issues ([Hemphill & White, 2018](#)). These efforts have contributed significantly to enhancing workplace safety and preventing future accidents, though challenges remain in ensuring the long-term sustainability of these improvements. To ensure effective enforcement of labor laws, the government needs to strengthen its inspection mechanisms, increase the number of labor inspectors, and provide them with adequate training and resources. Furthermore, the government should establish specialized courts or tribunals to handle labor disputes and ensure speedy resolution of cases. Trade unions and worker organizations play a vital role in representing the interests of workers and advocating for their rights. However, the trade union movement in Bangladesh faces numerous challenges, including legal restrictions on organizing, employer intimidation, and a lack of resources.

The Bangladesh Labour Act was amended in 2013 following the Rana Plaza disaster, yet many argue that it does not fully comply with ILO standards, especially concerning freedom of association and collective bargaining. While the amendments have addressed some gaps, further reforms are needed to align the Act with international norms and ensure that workers can freely exercise their rights. It is imperative to promote social dialogue and collaboration between the government, employers, workers, and civil society organizations to address labor rights issues effectively. This involves establishing platforms for regular consultations, negotiations, and joint problem-solving to foster mutual understanding and build consensus on policy reforms and implementation strategies. To promote gender equality and empower women in the RMG sector, it is essential to address the specific challenges they face, such as sexual harassment, discrimination, and unequal pay. This requires implementing policies and programs that promote gender-sensitive workplace practices, provide access to childcare facilities, and ensure equal opportunities for training and promotion.

Despite constitutional guarantees and legal provisions, women workers in the RMG sector often face various forms of exploitation and discrimination. There's a pressing need to address the root causes of poor implementation and defects within the current labor law framework. The constitution of Bangladesh ensures fundamental rights, including equality and freedom of association. However, the practical realization of these rights for women in the RMG sector is often hindered by a combination of factors,

including inadequate legal enforcement, social norms, and power imbalances in the workplace. It also aims to identify barriers preventing women from accessing legal recourse and explore challenges in implementing existing labor regulations.

It also aims to identify barriers preventing women from accessing legal recourse and explore challenges in implementing existing labor regulations.

The ready-made garment industry is a critical sector in Bangladesh, significantly contributing to the nation's economy through exports and employment. The sector's rapid growth since the 1990s underscores its economic importance ([Swazan & Das, 2022](#)). Yet, this expansion has not always been accompanied by adequate protection of labor rights, especially for women workers. There is an urgent need to address forward linkages, develop research and development, and create stronger marketing strategies to maintain a competitive edge. Addressing these issues can boost productivity and profitability. While the RMG industry has propelled economic growth, concerns persist regarding working conditions, safety standards, and fair labor practices.

Ensuring decent work conditions through proper legal regulation is crucial for Bangladesh's key industries, including ready-made garments. The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh has experienced substantial growth since the 1970s and now significantly contributes to the country's socio-economic development. This sector plays a crucial role in generating employment opportunities, reducing poverty, and enhancing the overall quality of life in the country. As the leading sector in terms of foreign currency earnings, the RMG industry's success is closely tied to the well-being and rights of its workforce. The development of the Ready-Made Garments industry, personal remittances and stable macroeconomic conditions are the main contributory factors behind this growth.

4.5 million people are employed in the RMG sector, 80% of whom are women. The concentration of women in the RMG sector is due to several factors, including their willingness to accept lower wages and their perceived dexterity for garment work. Despite their significant contribution, women workers often face exploitation, discrimination, and unsafe working conditions. The ready availability of women at low wages has been termed a "cheap labor rate," providing a competitive advantage for Bangladesh. However, this reliance on low-wage labor has perpetuated a cycle of poverty and inequality, hindering women's economic empowerment and social

mobility. The pivotal role of the RMG sector in Bangladesh's economy cannot be overstated, as it accounts for a substantial portion of the nation's export earnings ([Razzaque et al., 2024](#)). However, the relentless pursuit of economic growth must not come at the expense of workers' rights and well-being.

#### **4.5 Current Labour Rights Movement in Bangladesh**

The current labor rights movement in Bangladesh is multifaceted, involving trade unions, NGOs, international organizations, and advocacy groups. These actors work to promote and protect the rights of workers through various means, including advocacy, collective bargaining, legal aid, and awareness-raising campaigns. Despite these efforts, the labor rights movement in Bangladesh faces numerous challenges, including legal restrictions on organizing, employer intimidation, and a lack of resources. The current labor rights movement in Bangladesh is multifaceted, involving trade unions, NGOs, international organizations, and advocacy groups. These actors work to promote and protect the rights of workers through various means, including advocacy, collective bargaining, legal aid, and awareness-raising campaigns. Despite these efforts, the labor rights movement in Bangladesh faces numerous challenges, including legal restrictions on organizing, employer intimidation, and a lack of resources.

Given the significant role of the RMG sector in Bangladesh's economy and the vulnerability of women workers, a comprehensive study on labor rights for women in this sector is crucial. Such a study can provide valuable insights into the challenges faced by women workers, identify gaps in legal and policy frameworks, and inform strategies for promoting gender equality and decent work. It is imperative to address these challenges to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth that benefits all members of society. There are issues such as high youth unemployment, job market informality, a mismatch between the demand and supply of skilled labor, and limited female participation. These challenges need immediate policy attention and steps to promote decent work and ensure inclusive economic growth. The absence of robust enforcement mechanisms, coupled with a lack of awareness among workers about their rights, further exacerbates the problem.

Bangladesh has ratified several international conventions related to labor rights, including those of the International Labour Organization. These conventions provide a

framework for ensuring decent work conditions, fair wages, and freedom of association. However, the effective implementation of these conventions remains a challenge, as evidenced by persistent reports of labor rights violations in the RMG sector. Bangladesh's legal framework, including the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006, includes provisions for protecting the rights of women workers. However, gaps and loopholes in the law, coupled with weak enforcement, undermine its effectiveness. The Bangladesh Labour Act applies only to the formal private sector, leaving workers in the informal sector without statutory rules for dispute settlement.

The complexities inherent in Bangladesh's RMG industry necessitate rigorous academic investigation to ensure the protection and promotion of women's labor rights. By analyzing the legal and practical challenges faced by women in this sector, this research aims to propose comprehensive strategies for improvement. The Bangladesh government has undertaken various initiatives to improve working conditions and protect workers' rights in the RMG sector, including amendments to the Labour Act, factory inspections, and awareness campaigns. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is limited by factors such as inadequate resources, corruption, and a lack of political will. The RMG sector must prioritize compliance with safety standards and labor laws, ensuring that women workers are not subjected to hazardous working conditions.

Increased minimum wages for unskilled, low, and medium-skilled workers can have adverse effects on these workers in the aggregate and the economy as a whole, negatively impacting exports, GDP, and overall welfare. This is primarily due to subsequent decreases in employment following wage increases. Many businesses fail to maintain proper records of working hours, wages, and other employment-related information, making it difficult to monitor compliance with labor laws. Moreover, there is a lack of effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that factories comply with safety standards and labor laws ([Mia et al., 2020](#)). The lack of cooperation from employers in recording data on workers' health and safety problems presents another obstacle to ensuring effective occupational health and safety. Additionally, government officials often face resource constraints and limited authority, which hinder their ability to enforce compliance with regulations. The absence of worker involvement in health and safety issues further undermines the effectiveness of safety programs.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

The RMG sector in Bangladesh holds immense significance for the country's economy. The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh has experienced remarkable growth, becoming a cornerstone of the national economy. The growth of this sector has provided employment opportunities for millions of Bangladeshis, particularly women. Despite its economic importance, the RMG sector faces numerous challenges, including labor rights violations, poor working conditions, and safety concerns. Women workers in the RMG sector often face multiple forms of discrimination and exploitation, including lower wages, longer working hours, and sexual harassment.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth in Bangladesh.

## Chapter 5

### Protection of Labour Right in Bangladesh

#### 5.1 Overview

The ready-made garments industry has been the economic lifeline of Bangladesh in the last two decades. Bangladesh is the second largest garments exporting country in the world. The sector accounts for more than 80% of total export earnings. In this sector 4.5 million workers are working and about 80% of them are women ([Parveen et al., 2019](#)).<sup>29</sup> In this sector, there is a complex interplay of economic, social, and political factors that shape the realities of women's labor rights. It is essential to acknowledge the significant contributions of the ready-made garment industry to Bangladesh's economy. The progress of apparel industries in Bangladesh is significant.

Despite its economic importance, the ready-made garment sector faces numerous challenges, including labor rights violations, poor working conditions, and safety concerns. Women workers in the ready-made garment sector often face multiple forms of discrimination and exploitation, including lower wages, longer working hours, and sexual harassment. The garments industry in Bangladesh is known for its challenging working conditions, including long hours, low wages, and unsafe environments ([Mahmud et al., 2017](#)). Many of the workers are subjected to verbal abuse, denied leave, or forced to work overtime without compensation.

Bangladesh has made significant strides in the ready-made garment industry, but challenges persist regarding labor rights and working conditions. The ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh is currently facing many challenges to meet customer demands and expectations. The RMG sector has a crucial role in Bangladesh's economy, contributing significantly to the nation's exports and employment opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from government, employers, trade unions, and international organizations. The government plays a vital

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<sup>29</sup> ). A Study on Minimization of Injury and Accidental Causes in Different Operational Sections of RMG Industries in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Industrial and Manufacturing Systems Engineering*, 4(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijimse.20190401.13>

role in enforcing labor laws and regulations, as well as promoting social dialogue and collective bargaining.

Employers should prioritize worker well-being by providing fair wages, safe working conditions, and opportunities for skill development. Trade unions can advocate for workers' rights, negotiate collective agreements, and monitor compliance with labor standards. International organizations can provide technical assistance, promote best practices, and facilitate collaboration among stakeholders. It should address the underlying issues that perpetuate labor rights violations in the ready-made garment sector of Bangladesh. Empowering women workers and ensuring their equal participation in decision-making processes are crucial for achieving sustainable and equitable development in the RMG industry.

## **5.2 Garments Industries in Bangladesh: Scenario**

The ready-made garments industry is the economic lifeline of Bangladesh in the last two decades ([Chowdhury et al., 2019](#)). It is the second largest garments exporting country in the world. This sector accounts for more than 80% of total export earnings. About 4.5 million workers are involved in this sector, and about 80% of them are women. Despite its economic significance, the readymade garment sector faces numerous challenges, including labor rights violations, poor working conditions, and safety concerns. Many businesses fail to maintain proper records of working hours, wages, and other employment-related information, making it difficult to monitor compliance with labor laws.

Moreover, there is a lack of effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to ensure that factories comply with safety standards and labor laws. The absence of worker involvement in health and safety issues further undermines the effectiveness of safety programs. The RMG sector in Bangladesh holds immense significance for the country's economy. The progress of apparel industries in Bangladesh is significant. Despite its economic importance, the ready-made garment sector faces numerous challenges, including labor rights violations, poor working conditions, and safety concerns. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth in Bangladesh.

The RMG sector is known for its challenging working conditions, including long hours, low wages, and unsafe environments ([Tania & Sultana, 2015](#)). Many workers

are subjected to verbal abuse, denied leave, or forced to work overtime without compensation. These workers are engaged to work for long hours, for low wages and in unsafe working environment. The absence of worker involvement in health and safety issues further undermines the effectiveness of safety programs.

Furthermore, gender-based violence and harassment are pervasive issues in the RMG sector, with women workers being particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Despite the existence of laws and regulations, enforcement remains weak, and impunity for perpetrators is widespread. Garment factories in Bangladesh often face challenges related to workplace safety, including fire hazards, structural issues, and inadequate safety measure. The sector contributes significantly to the nation's exports and employment opportunities. The occurrence of electrical short circuits is a frequent cause of fire hazards in the RMG sector of Bangladesh, resulting in substantial economic losses ([Mizanuzzaman, 2016](#)). After the Tazreen Fashion fire in December 2012 and the Rana Plaza building collapse in April 2013, more than 190 international clothing brands and retailers signed an “Accord on Fire and Building Safety” with two international union federations ([Brown, 2015](#)).<sup>30</sup>

### **5.3 Legal Provision**

Bangladesh's labor laws and regulations are often inadequate to protect the rights of women workers in the ready-made garment sector. Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 (amended 2018) and the Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority Labour Law 2019 are the main legal instruments governing labour rights in Bangladesh. Labor laws are designed to protect the rights and well-being of workers, and compliance is essential for fostering a fair and productive work environment. These laws provide for minimum wages, working hours, overtime compensation, maternity benefits, and protection against discrimination and harassment. However, enforcement is often weak, and many factories fail to comply with legal requirements. Moreover, there are gaps in the legal

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<sup>30</sup> Bangladesh: Currently the Worst, but Possibly the Future's Best. *NEW SOLUTIONS A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy*, 24(4), 469. <https://doi.org/10.2190/ns.24.4.b>

framework regarding issues such as gender-based violence and harassment, freedom of association, and collective bargaining.

Constructional guarantees enshrined in the Constitution of Bangladesh aim to protect women workers from discrimination. These guarantees, however, often face challenges in their implementation and enforcement within the RMG sector. The legal framework mandates workplace safety standards to ensure a secure working environment for all employees.

Compliance with these standards is essential for minimizing the risk of accidents and injuries. Many factories fail to maintain proper records of working hours, wages, and other employment-related information, making it difficult to monitor compliance with labor laws. The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 is the primary legislation governing labour relations in Bangladesh, including the RMG sector. The act outlines provisions related to working conditions, wages, health and safety, and dispute resolution mechanisms. The act prohibits discrimination based on gender and provides for equal pay for equal work.

Bangladesh has ratified several International Labour Organization conventions related to labor rights, including Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration and Convention No. 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation. These conventions establish international standards for labor rights and provide a framework for national laws and policies. The Labour Act does not apply to many informal workers such as domestic workers, agricultural workers and individuals doing managerial functions though these informal workers compose a large portion of labor sector in Bangladesh.

#### Maternity Leave and Cash Benefit Payment System:

Maternity leave and cash benefits are essential components of labor rights for women workers, particularly in industries like the RMG sector, where a significant portion of the workforce is female.

Providing adequate maternity leave and cash benefits is essential for protecting the health and well-being of women workers and their children. These benefits enable women to take time off work to care for their newborns without facing financial hardship. The payment of maternity benefits is a crucial aspect of ensuring that women workers can avail themselves of their right to maternity leave without facing financial insecurity.

However, many factories fail to comply with legal requirements regarding maternity leave and benefits, leaving women workers vulnerable to economic hardship and health risks. Ensuring compliance with maternity leave and cash benefit regulations is essential for promoting gender equality and supporting the well-being of women workers in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

The RMG industry significantly contributes to Bangladesh's economic growth by accounting for a substantial portion of the country's exports and foreign exchange earnings. The garment sector is a vital source of employment, particularly for women from rural areas, contributing significantly to poverty reduction and women's empowerment. Despite its economic importance, the RMG industry in Bangladesh faces numerous challenges related to labor rights, workplace safety, and environmental sustainability.

#### **5.4 Institutional Framework**

The institutional framework for protecting labor rights in Bangladesh is complex and involves various government agencies, employer organizations, trade unions, and international organizations. The Ministry of Labour and Employment is the primary government agency responsible for overseeing labor law enforcement and promoting workplace safety in Bangladesh. The Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments is responsible for conducting inspections of factories and other establishments to ensure compliance with labor laws and safety regulations.

The Bangladesh Employers' Federation is the primary employer organization in the country, representing the interests of RMG factory owners and other businesses. Trade unions play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of workers and promoting collective bargaining in the RMG sector. However, trade union activity in Bangladesh is often restricted, and unions face challenges in organizing workers and negotiating with employers. Several international organizations, including the International Labour Organization and the World Bank, are involved in promoting labor rights and improving working conditions in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

The RMG sector of Bangladesh has experienced substantial success in the global market, contributing significantly to the country's economic and social development. This industry employs millions of workers, primarily women, and plays a crucial role

in poverty reduction and women's empowerment ([Md. I. Mahmud, 2017](#); [Md. S. Mahmud et al., 2017](#)).

Despite its economic importance, the RMG sector faces numerous challenges related to labor rights, workplace safety, and environmental sustainability. The Rana Plaza disaster prompted global initiatives to improve factory safety, with Bangladeshi labor unions playing a central role in these efforts ([Ashraf & Prentice, 2019](#)).<sup>31</sup>The Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety emerged as significant transnational governance initiatives in response to the Rana Plaza tragedy. These initiatives aimed to improve factory safety standards and working conditions in the RMG sector.

These agreements facilitated significant advancements in workplace safety by implementing comprehensive inspection programs, remediation efforts, and safety training for workers and management. However, challenges remain in ensuring the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives. Ensuring the effective implementation of labor laws and regulations is essential for protecting the rights and well-being of women workers in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

### **5.5 Inter Protection of Labour Rights**

The RMG sector in Bangladesh has a predominantly female workforce, with women constituting a significant proportion of workers in garment factories.

Many women workers in the RMG sector face numerous challenges, including low wages, long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and gender-based discrimination. Women workers often lack access to adequate healthcare, childcare facilities, and other essential services, further exacerbating their vulnerability. Despite legal protections, women workers in the RMG sector often face discrimination in hiring, promotion, and access to training opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach involving government, employers, trade unions, and civil society organizations.

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<sup>31</sup> Beyond factory safety: labor unions, militant protest, and the accelerated ambitions of Bangladesh's export garment industry. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 43(1), 93. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10624-018-9539-0>

The ready-made garment industry has emerged as the backbone of Bangladesh's economy, driving foreign exchange earnings, employing a large workforce, and stimulating growth in other sectors ([Kamal et al., 1970](#)).

The sector's success is underpinned by a ready supply of labor, particularly women, who constitute a significant portion of the workforce ([Dey & Basak, 2017](#)).<sup>32</sup>

However, the industry's rapid expansion has also given rise to concerns about labor rights, working conditions, and workplace safety. While the RMG sector has significantly contributed to women's empowerment by providing employment opportunities, it has also exposed them to various forms of exploitation and discrimination ([Sharma, 2020](#)).

The Bangladesh Accord and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety have played pivotal roles in improving factory safety and working conditions in the RMG sector. These initiatives have facilitated inspections, remediation efforts, and safety training programs, leading to significant improvements in workplace safety standards.

However, challenges remain in ensuring the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives, including the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and greater worker participation.

Ensuring the protection of labor rights and promoting gender equality in the RMG sector are essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive development in Bangladesh. The purpose of this study is to identify the issues related to each sustainability aspect in the RMG industry, to find out the significance of such sustainability aspect, and to find out the relevant barriers to achieving the sustainability goals at the workers' level ([Akhter et al., 1970](#)).

By addressing the challenges faced by women workers and promoting their rights, Bangladesh can unlock the full potential of its RMG sector and achieve its sustainable development goals. The study will examine the existing legal framework governing labor rights, including the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006 and other relevant regulations. The research will focus on key areas such as wages, working hours, workplace safety, freedom of association, and protection against discrimination and harassment.

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<sup>32</sup> ). Out of the shadows: Women and wage struggle in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. *Asian Journal of Women s Studies*, 23(2), 163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2017.1317702>

The legal framework will be assessed to determine its effectiveness in protecting the rights of women workers in the RMG sector, including identifying any gaps or shortcomings in the law.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The study will analyze the implementation and enforcement of labor laws in RMG factories, including the role of government agencies, factory owners, and trade unions. It will assess the extent to which labor laws are effectively enforced and the factors that hinder or facilitate their implementation. The aim is to evaluate the effectiveness of labor rights enforcement mechanisms in protecting women workers' rights and promoting compliance with labor laws. The research will also examine the practical realities of working conditions in RMG factories, including wages, working hours, workplace safety, and access to healthcare and other benefits. It will analyze the challenges faced by women workers in these areas and the impact on their health, well-being, and economic empowerment.

## Chapter 6

### Constitution

#### 6.1 Constitutional Provision

It will further provide a comparison between foreign and local owned factories in the application of maternity leave rules. This analysis will reveal the extent of labor rights violations and the factors contributing to these violations. This study emphasizes understanding women's agency and their struggle for wage justice within the RMG sector.

The Constitution of Bangladesh includes several articles that guarantee fundamental rights and protections for all citizens, including women working in the RMG sector ([Saha, 2023](#)):

**Article 28:** This article ensures equality and prohibits discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Specifically, Article 28 states that women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and public life.

**Article 15:** This article addresses the provision of basic necessities. It makes the State responsible for ensuring the right to work, which includes guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage, considering the quantity and quality of work, along with reasonable rest, recreation, and leisure.

**Article 20:** This proclaims that work is a right, a duty, and a matter of honor for every citizen capable of working, and everyone shall be paid for their work.

**Article 34:** This prohibits all forms of forced labor, making it punishable by law.

**Article 38:** This guarantees the right to freedom of association and the right to form unions.

These constitutional guarantees provide a foundation for labor rights and aim to protect women workers from discrimination and exploitation. The Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 also includes provisions covering occupational hygiene, safety measures, industrial accidents, conditions of work, trade union rights, working hours, and welfare facilities.

## 6.2 ILO Convention

The RMG sector in Bangladesh has experienced phenomenal growth over the past few decades, becoming a major contributor to the country's economy and a significant source of employment. However, this growth has been accompanied by persistent challenges related to labor rights, working conditions, and workplace safety, particularly for women workers. The issues of health and safety of female workforce of garment industries in Bangladesh are based upon the industry environment, their residential environment, working condition, age, problem of health, causes of diseases, causes of fire accident and their medical facilities.

The sector employs approximately 3 million women, and despite its economic contributions, faces challenges such as low wages, job insecurity, and a lack of respect for female workers' rights. These challenges often lead to noncompliance with labor laws, impacting productivity and overall sustainability. The garment industry in Bangladesh, heavily reliant on female labor, witnesses frequent violations of women workers' rights, thereby raising concerns about wages, promotions, and workplace safety ([Haque et al., 2020](#)). Therefore, creating a conducive work environment for women is essential for their economic empowerment, as Bangladesh earns the majority of its foreign revenue from the ready-made garment sector, where over 90% of the 4.2 million workers are women from rural areas. The ready-made garments industry has been the best performing sector in Bangladesh in terms of revenue and profitability in foreign currency since its independence ([Chowdhury & Keya, 2022](#)).<sup>33</sup> It has significantly impacted the national economy by creating numerous job opportunities and alleviating poverty through social development. The industry has grown to become the second-largest exporter of clothing in the world, following China, and its exports reached \$32 billion in the last fiscal year ([Hossain & Khan, 2020](#)).<sup>34</sup> However, this success is underpinned by low wages, with Bangladeshi laborers earning approximately \$68 USD per month ([Adnan, 2018](#)). Despite comprising a small fraction of the total employed population, the RMG sector generates substantial annual earnings,

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<sup>33</sup> Readymade Garments Exports from Bangladesh: Challenges and Possible Way-Out. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 17(7), 19. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v17n7p19>

<sup>34</sup> Water Footprint Management for Sustainable Growth in the Bangladesh Apparel Sector. *Water*, 12(10), 2760. <https://doi.org/10.3390/w12102760>

highlighting its pivotal role in Bangladesh's economic landscape ([Carlson & Bitsch, 2018](#)). This sector significantly contributes to women's empowerment by employing millions of female workers and offering unprecedented employment opportunities for women from rural areas where domestic service was the primary alternative ([Zohra et al., 2025](#))<sup>35</sup> ([Mahmud, 2017](#)). Despite its economic benefits, the ready-made garment sector has faced extensive criticism for its labor practices, particularly concerning the rights and working conditions of women ([et al., 2020](#)). These issues include gender-based discrimination, inadequate health and safety measures, and suppression of freedom of association. These practices undermine the dignity and well-being of female workers and impede their ability to fully realize their potential ([Sharma, 2020](#)). These challenges persist despite the industry's vital role in Bangladesh's economy and its contribution to women's employment. Furthermore, the sustainability of the RMG sector is questioned due to the violation of labor rights. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that promote gender equality, ensure fair wages, and improve workplace safety. These strategies should also focus on enhancing the overall socio-economic development of the country and ensuring the sustainable development of the RMG sector. The focus must also incorporate the integration of green initiatives to ensure long-term sustainability and ethical production within the industry. Achieving sustainable competitive advantage requires that human resource practices receive significant attention, especially given that human resources are a primary driver for industrial growth and quality performance improvement within Bangladesh's RMG sector. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, a comprehensive understanding of labor rights for women in the Bangladeshi RMG industry can be achieved. Such assessment is crucial for making factories resilient by addressing structural issues ([Ansary & Barua, 2015](#)).

The International Labour Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations that sets international labor standards and promotes decent work ([About Us, 2023](#)).

<sup>36</sup>Bangladesh has been a member of the ILO since 1972 and has ratified a number of ILO conventions, including eight of the ten fundamental conventions. These conventions cover a range of labor rights, including freedom of association, the right to

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<sup>35</sup> Work ability and associated factors among female ready-made garment workers in Bangladesh. PLoS ONE, 20(6). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0325309>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Aboutus/lang--en/index.htm>

collective bargaining, the abolition of forced labor, and the elimination of discrimination in employment.

Some of the most relevant ILO conventions for women workers in the RMG sector in Bangladesh include:

**Convention No. 100: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951:** This convention requires countries to ensure equal pay for men and women for work of equal value.

**Convention No. 111: Discrimination Convention, 1958:** This convention requires countries to eliminate discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin.

**Convention No. 190: Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019:** This is the first international treaty to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

These conventions provide a framework for protecting the rights of women workers in the RMG sector and promoting gender equality in the workplace. They address issues such as equal pay, discrimination, and violence and harassment, which are all critical concerns for women in this industry. Bangladesh is committed to upholding these standards as a member of the ILO.

### **6.3 Relevant Case Laws**

Compliance to legal requirements and standards prescribed by international certification bodies and/or foreign buyers in the readymade garments industry in Bangladesh is a burning issue regarding a safer working environment for employees. Research demonstrates that noncompliance is a significant problem in Bangladesh's RMG industry. There is gap between labor laws and their implementation.

The Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006<sup>37</sup> includes several provisions for safeguarding the rights of women workers, yet these are frequently disregarded, particularly concerning workplace safety. This discrepancy highlights the urgent need for more robust enforcement mechanisms and greater awareness among both employers and employees regarding labor rights. This necessitates an examination of the existing legal framework

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<sup>37</sup> The Bangladesh Labour Act 2006

and its practical application to identify areas of improvement and ensure the effective protection of women's labor rights. The research will explore barriers preventing women's access to legal recourse and challenges in implementing existing labor laws. Moreover, the Constitution of Bangladesh provides fundamental rights to its citizens, including women, ensuring equality and protection against discrimination based on sex.

#### **6.4 Geneva Conventions**

These rights are further reinforced by the Bangladesh Labour Act and international conventions ratified by Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, encompasses provisions addressing occupational hygiene, safety protocols, and welfare amenities, which are generally applicable but may fall short of international benchmarks ([Saha, 2023](#)). Following the collapse in Savar, several global organizations have come together to promote safety inspections and improvements in RMG factories. It also suggests recommendations for effectively implementing labor standards to protect workers' rights and promote social justice, thereby safeguarding the national economy from losses. The Accord on Fire and Building Safety and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety are two key organizations driving efforts to improve fire and building safety, although their effectiveness in ensuring comprehensive corporate responsibility has limitations ([Hemphill & White, 2018](#)). These initiatives emerged in response to the critical need for enhanced safety measures and structural integrity within the sector ([Barua et al., 2020](#)). There are inadequate numbers of trained personnel and resources available for monitoring workplace safety and health, which hinders the collection of data for informed decision-making. Such limitations can threaten the health and safety of the predominantly female workforce. These challenges underscore the necessity for a comprehensive approach that includes stricter penalties for noncompliance and the establishment of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety as a minimum standard for corporate responsibility. It also aims to pinpoint the reasons for the inadequate enforcement and shortcomings of labor legislation in Bangladesh. The readymade garment industry of Bangladesh is the largest employment sector for women, with women comprising 85% of the workforce across more than 5000 factories. Therefore, ensuring workplace safety compliance is essential for business sustainability and competitiveness in the global market ([Parveen et al., 2019](#)). The sustainability of the RMG industry relies on improving social aspects, nurturing long-term supplier relationships, and fostering economic advancement, especially for vulnerable workers.

These factors are vital for the industry to thrive economically while upholding ethical labor practices and ensuring worker well-being.

It is also found that the existing health and safety standards are not up to the mark, and workers are common victims of different health problems.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

Therefore, ensuring compliance and improving working conditions are crucial for the long-term sustainability and ethical viability of the RMG sector in Bangladesh. This requires stakeholders to collaborate to promote sustainable practices. To fully understand the legal and policy environment, various sources such as labor laws, factory inspection reports, company policies, and reports from NGOs will be analyzed. This analysis will provide a comprehensive view of the labor rights situation for women in the RMG industry, identifying gaps and opportunities for improvement. The study will evaluate the effectiveness of legal frameworks like the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006 and other relevant regulations in protecting women's labor rights.

## Chapter 7

### Finding, Analysis, Interpretation of the Study

#### 7.1 Observation

This evaluation will involve assessing the enforcement mechanisms, compliance levels, and the accessibility of legal remedies for female garment workers. By identifying the discrepancy between legal provisions and on-the-ground realities, this research will offer targeted recommendations for policy reforms and improved implementation strategies. The collected data will be analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods to identify key themes and trends. These methods will provide insights into the challenges faced by women workers, the effectiveness of existing interventions, and the areas that require further attention. Such analysis is pivotal for enhancing labor rights and workplace conditions in Bangladesh's RMG sector. The RMG sector in Bangladesh faces challenges like the absence of research and development sections and comprehensive marketing strategies, hindering its sustainability in the global apparel market. Addressing safety concerns in garment industries not only protects workers but also enhances productivity and morale, contributing to the sector's overall growth. The industry's supply chain management requires decision-makers and planners to align their strategies, collaborate with partners, share information, implement standard procedures, adhere to codes of conduct, and adapt to changing technologies to maintain growth ([Hossain & Roy, 2016](#)).<sup>38</sup> This necessitates a holistic approach from top management to implement lean practices, fostering sustainable improvements. The RMG industry of Bangladesh has been a key source of foreign exchange for the last 25 years, though the poor quality of products and services are considerable factors in the sector's development. Proper education and training for employers in apparel manufacturing and textile-based education is paramount ([ATM et al., 2018](#)). This will lead to the sector meeting expected standards for workers' health and safety, which are currently unsatisfactory compared to developed countries. Further research could employ quantitative methods to ascertain the causal relationships among various factors

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<sup>38</sup> Supply Chain Management for Sustainable RMG Growth in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 5(4), 1242. <https://doi.org/10.21275/v5i4.nov162740>

influencing exploitation in the RMG supply chain, potentially extending the study's applicability to other sectors ([Uddin et al., 2022](#)). The industry significantly contributes to the country's exports and foreign exchange, reducing poverty and creating jobs, especially for women. The ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh is essential to the national economy, offering jobs for millions of people, most of whom are women. Despite this growth, workplace incidents have marred its economic success.

## **7.2 Recommendation**

To ensure its sustained contribution to the economy, focus should be given on improving productivity, quality, and efficiency, along with marketing and management skills ([Bashar & Hasin, 2019](#)).<sup>39</sup> Given that the ready-made garment industries have become a crucial socioeconomic sector in Bangladesh, empowering women through employment, it is imperative to address the physical and mental challenges they encounter, including gender discrimination. Investing in technology, firm capabilities, and addressing informational barriers are crucial for the sector's continued advancement.

These steps will facilitate the industry's transition from traditional practices to environmentally friendly and ethical operations, ensuring both profitability and a supportive working environment. By adopting greener practices, Bangladesh's garment sector can align with global environmental goals and enhance its competitiveness ([Reza et al., 2017](#)). By addressing these issues, the industry can enhance its environmental condition and improve waste management systems ([Alom, 2016](#)). The industry, employing approximately 4.5 million individuals, predominantly women, across around 4,500 factories, plays a pivotal role in Bangladesh's economic development. This sector significantly contributes to the nation's foreign exchange earnings and progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals. The ready-made garment industry needs to address labor management practices and enforce labor laws to prevent turmoil. By highlighting challenges and proposing solutions, research can empower women, improve working conditions, and strengthen collective bargaining efforts. Moreover, Bangladesh's RMG industry, which accounts for about 77% of the country's foreign exchange earnings and employs 50% of its industrial workforce, necessitates

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<sup>39</sup> Lean Implementation: The Progress and the future challenges of Apparel Industry to achieve the Manufacturing Competitiveness. *Journal of Mechanical Engineering*, 48(1), 30.  
<https://doi.org/10.3329/jme.v48i1.41092>

stringent environmental standards, especially in dyeing and finishing processes, to mitigate water contamination and energy usage ([Shahria, 2019](#)). Further research could analyze barriers to adopting green supply chain management practices within Bangladesh's textile sector to promote sustainability.

### 7.3 Conclusion

The RMG sector must prioritize environmental factors alongside financial considerations by integrating environmental management with human resources to promote sustainability. This can lead to an improvement in the health and safety of female workers. Thus, the ready-made garments sector requires continuous monitoring and improvements to adhere to both environmental and social standards ([Aziz et al., 2020](#)).<sup>40</sup> The legal and ethical frameworks need strengthening to ensure the well-being of women in the RMG sector. Green management practices can significantly improve the work environment and promote environmental sustainability within the RMG industries ([Rahman & Kazi, 2021](#)).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The Impact of Green Human Resources Managerial Practices on Environmental Sustainability: Evidence from Garments Industry of Bangladesh. *Asian Journal of Empirical Research*, 10(3), 81. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.1007/2020.10.3/1007.3.81.96>

<sup>41</sup> Implications of Green Management Practices in the RMG Industries of Bangladesh- An Environmental Sustainability Perspective. *International Journal of Management and Accounting*, 122. <https://doi.org/10.34104/ijma.021.01220129>

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion and Recommendation

#### 8.1 Conclusion

The industry's sustainability hinges on integrating climate change and water scarcity considerations into long-term business strategies ([Hasan et al., 2020](#)). By prioritizing worker safety, the garment industries can enhance their reputation and operational efficiency. Several studies have shed light on the systemic exploitation of labor through low and irregular wages, highlighting the need for wage justice and the empowerment of women workers. Analyzing maternity leave policies and comparing their application between local and foreign-owned factories can reveal disparities and areas for improvement ([Akter, 2021](#)). Exploring the barriers to green supply chain implementation and understanding the perspectives of practitioners can guide policy formulation and promote awareness of greening the supply chain ([Tumpa et al., 2019](#)). On the other hand, the promotion of sustainable practices in the supply chain is vital for environmental responsibility, and blockchain technology can enhance traceability and compliance with environmental regulations ([Amin et al., 2025](#)). It is crucial to implement strategies and approaches that foster social sustainability, benefiting vulnerable workers and fostering long-term relationships between suppliers and transnational companies, thereby contributing to economic growth ([Asif, 2017](#)). Simultaneously, it is important to note that the absence of unified global legislation and inter-governmental cooperation poses challenges to achieving sustainability in the textile sector, thus necessitating shared responsibility in mitigating negative impacts.

Furthermore, addressing challenges such as discrimination, harassment, and limited access to legal remedies is essential for empowering women workers in the RMG sector ([Sharma & Narula, 2020](#)). This necessitates the formation of new initiatives, organizations, and standards aimed at promoting social and environmental

sustainability ([Siliņa et al., 2024](#)).<sup>42</sup> This involves examining the legal framework, investigating working conditions, and understanding the roles of different stakeholders. Understanding the challenges of implementing social sustainability initiatives can aid policymakers and apparel industry managers in enhancing social sustainability practices ([Akbar & Ahsan, 2020](#)). Addressing unauthorized subcontracting and enforcing social compliance codes are also essential steps toward ensuring labor rights. Post COVID-19, a sustainable sourcing model should be adopted that incorporates disruption risk sharing contracts between brands and suppliers ([Majumdar et al., 2020](#)). This involves evaluating the extent of labor rights violations, examining contributing factors, and developing recommendations to strengthen labor rights protections for women in Bangladesh's RMG industry. This research aims to investigate the labor rights of women working in the Bangladeshi ready-made garment industry to understand the interplay of factors influencing their working conditions and legal protections. It involves a comprehensive review of existing literature, analysis of relevant laws and policies, and empirical research to gather firsthand insights into the experiences of female garment workers. Ultimately, the objective is to reduce ecological harm and address social injustices within supply chains by embracing sustainability as a guiding principle ([Chan et al., 2024](#)).

It also seeks to identify strategies for strengthening labor rights protection, promoting gender equality, and achieving sustainable development in the RMG sector ([Haque et al., 2020](#)). The current study emphasizes the need to explore the present status of women at the workplace, particularly concerning wages, promotions, safety, and security, while also identifying areas of discrimination and proposing solutions to eradicate. The research methodology includes a comprehensive literature review and primary data collection through questionnaires administered to 200 female workers in 24 garment factories. The study's findings will have significant implications for advancing gender equality and enhancing working conditions within Bangladesh's most vital economic sector. This involves assessing the achievements and drawbacks in wage struggles and envisioning women's more effective roles in securing broader labor rights ([Dey & Basak, 2017](#)). It also highlights the necessity of addressing health and safety

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<sup>42</sup> Sustainable textile industry – wishful thinking or the new norm: A review [Review of Sustainable textile industry – wishful thinking or the new norm: A review]. *Journal of Engineered Fibers and Fabrics*, 19. SAGE Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15589250231220359>

concerns, as many female Bangladeshi RMG workers face issues like anemia due to inadequate nutrition, resulting in productivity loss ([Hossain et al., 2019](#)). The RMG sector has significantly contributed to women's empowerment by employing millions of female workers, and the industry environment impacts their health and safety ([Zohra et al., 2025](#)).<sup>43</sup> The RMG sector in Bangladesh has faced challenges, including infrastructure issues and political instability, but has significantly contributed to the economy through job creation ([Chowdhury & Keya, 2022](#)). HRM practices and total quality management are crucial for organizational sustainable competitive advantage within Bangladesh's RMG sector, emphasizing the need for further research in this area ([Rashid et al., 2020](#)). The industry's sustainability depends on adopting cleaner technologies and management practices to align with eco-friendly production demands from apparel buyers. To fully understand the labor rights situation, a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data will be employed. This approach will facilitate a thorough investigation into the realities faced by female garment workers and the effectiveness of existing protective measures. The industry's revenue and profitability in foreign currency have made it a top performer since 1971, significantly impacting the national economy by creating jobs and reducing poverty.

## **8.2 Recommendation**

The ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh is pivotal for the country's economy, being the second-largest exporter of garments globally and employing over 5000 factories, most of which are women. This sector contributes significantly to the GDP, offering approximately 4.2 million employment opportunities ([Hossain & Khan, 2020](#)). Despite employing a small percentage of the total population, the RMG industry contributes significantly to the country's foreign exchange earnings ([Carlson & Bitsch, 2018](#)). This industry not only bolsters the economy but also plays a crucial role in providing job opportunities for individuals from poor socioeconomic backgrounds and with limited education, thus contributing to the overall socio-economic advancement of Bangladesh. It is imperative to address the challenges related to labor rights and working conditions within the RMG sector, as numerous studies have highlighted issues such as low wages, long working hours, and unsafe work environments. These issues not only affect the well-being of the workers but also impact the reputation and

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<sup>43</sup> Work ability and associated factors among female ready-made garment workers in Bangladesh. PLoS ONE, 20(6). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0325309>

sustainability of the industry. Recognizing the pivotal role of the RMG sector in Bangladesh's economy, it is essential to promote internal controls and sustainability to ensure its long-lasting contribution. By protecting women's labor rights, it is possible to promote decent work and achieve sustainable development in the RMG industry. Interviews with female garment workers, labor rights activists, and industry stakeholders will offer comprehensive insights into the challenges and lived experiences of women in this sector. Still, nearly 1000 factories remain to be assessed to ensure workplace safety, and these assessments are not an end in themselves; weak factory buildings need to be made resilient by addressing structural issues ([Ansary & Barua, 2015](#)). Therefore, enhancement of the activities for moving forward and local workforce will overcome those challenges as well as expand this business. It is crucial to balance cost considerations with safety measures to safeguard the industry's image and sustainability ([Rab & Hoque, 2017](#)). A sustainable approach that integrates environmental stewardship and social justice is essential for long-term success, considering the industry's impact on workers' lives and the country's economy. The expansion of the RMG sector has generated unprecedented job opportunities for women, particularly those from rural areas where domestic service was once the primary alternative. Addressing workers' rights through increased minimum wages and improved factory conditions can positively impact both workers' incomes and overall welfare. Implementation of lean practices, such as enhanced information exchange and just-in-time production, can tackle problems in the sector, but requires a holistic approach from top management. Research indicates that noncompliance is a significant issue within Bangladesh's RMG sector, underscoring the importance of ensuring compliance with labor laws to protect workers' rights and promote ethical production practices. International organizations and NGOs have played a pivotal role in ensuring safety inspections and enhancing building improvements in RMG factories, necessitating continued support and collaboration to foster a safe working environment ([Rubya, 2015](#)). The Rana Plaza accident led to various national and international initiatives aimed at improving workplace safety, but the effectiveness of these initiatives in ensuring structural safety remains a concern. There is a need for cooperation from employers in recording data on worker's health and safety problems, as well as adequately trained staff and equipment to monitor occupational health and safety. Such cooperation could enhance evidence-based decision-making and safeguard the health and safety of the predominantly female workforce ([Akhter et al., 2019](#)).

Addressing these areas can minimize injuries and accidental causes, ensuring business sustainability in the global market ([Parveen et al., 2019](#)). Addressing the sustainability of the RMG industry requires implementing strategies that benefit vulnerable workers and promote longer-term relationships between suppliers and transnational companies ([Asif, 2017](#)). The rights of women workers are often violated in key areas such as working conditions, health and safety, minimum wages, working hours, and maternity welfare facilities, making them vulnerable ([Saha, 2023](#)). These violations can be addressed through stricter enforcement of labor laws, ensuring fair compensation, and providing access to essential services. Despite advancements, the garment industry still faces challenges related to protecting women's rights, necessitating proactive measures to protect workers and promote sustainability ([Manzur et al., 2017](#)). Ensuring better working conditions and safety can help the Bangladeshi apparel industries avoid losing their position in the global market ([Asif, 2017](#)). Full implementation of provisions and safety regulations would significantly change standard practices in Bangladesh's garment industry and serve as a positive model for other nations ([Brown, 2015](#)). This necessitates continued support and collaboration to foster a safe working environment.

The study will evaluate the effectiveness of legal frameworks and regulations in protecting women's labor rights. It will also propose recommendations for strengthening these frameworks and promoting decent work. The research will employ both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather and analyze data, utilizing surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions to gain a holistic understanding of the issues.

The collected data will be analyzed to identify key themes, patterns, and trends, which will then be interpreted in the context of existing literature and research questions. This comprehensive approach will contribute to the development of informed policies and interventions aimed at improving the lives of women working in the RMG sector. The goal is to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities in promoting gender equality and protecting labor rights in Bangladesh's RMG industry, thereby fostering sustainable and inclusive growth ([Nuruzzaman, 2015](#)) ([Asif, 2017](#)). The garment industry significantly contributes to many economies, serving as a leading sector for employment and earnings ([Mahmud et al., 2017](#)). Poor working conditions

can compromise the health and safety of workers, which negatively impacts productivity and economic outcomes ([Mia et al., 2020](#)).

Therefore, ensuring safety in the workplace is crucial for protecting workers from injuries and illnesses, which can reduce costs, absenteeism, and turnover while increasing productivity and morale ([Ahmed et al., 2021](#)). Specifically, the study will explore the prevalence of health hazards among female garment workers in Gazipur, where numerous factories are located ([Mahmud et al., 2017](#)).

The study will also analyze the relationships between corporate citizenship efforts, remediation efforts, and nonmarket strategies to improve factory safety for employees ([Hemphill & White, 2018](#)). The ultimate goal is to contribute to the knowledge and strategies needed to build a more equitable and sustainable RMG industry that respects and protects the rights and well-being of its female workforce ([Asif, 2017](#)) ([Fahim, 2020](#)).

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