Level of Women Empowerment in Ready Made Garments Industry of Bangladesh: Reasons and Consequences

By Samirah Mustafa & Kamol Gomes

Notre Dame University Bangladesh

Abstract- Ready Made Garment industry is an emerging industry in Bangladesh, which made it the second largest RMG exporting country in the world. At present, the scope of employment in this sector is over 4 million people the majority of which are women. However, the majority of people involved in this sector are women but the level of women empowerment in this sector has been barely seemed satisfactory. This paper is aimed to identify the level of women empowerment in Bangladesh RMG industry and its reasons and consequences. In this paper, data has been collected by conducting a survey by using a questionnaire. This research is a descriptive research where qualitative and quantitative both types of analysis have been used. This study has validated some facts as women are more preferred as a worker but downcast in the managerial position, by default abolition of women from mid-level management, lack of empathy in management decision because of male-dominated management.

Keywords: RMG (Ready Made Garments), women empowerment, women workers, social structure, cultural influence.

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Abstract - Ready Made Garment industry is an emerging industry in Bangladesh, which made it the second largest RMG exporting country in the world. At present, the scope of employment in this sector is over 4 million people the majority of which are women. However, the majority of people involved in this sector are women but the level of women empowerment in this sector has been barely seemed satisfactory. This paper is aimed to identify the level of women empowerment in Bangladesh RMG industry and its reasons and consequences. In this paper, data has been collected by conducting a survey by using a questionnaire. This research is a descriptive research where qualitative and quantitative both types of analysis have been used. This study has validated some facts as women are more preferred as a worker but downcast in the managerial position, by default abolition of women from mid-level management, lack of empathy in management decision because of male-dominated management. This study provides a concise idea of the level of women empowerment in the RMG sector and their participation in decision-making and its impacts on the productivity of the Blue-collar women workers.

Keywords: RMG (Ready Made Garments), women empowerment, women workers, social structure, cultural influence.

I. Introduction

Bangladesh is a developing country with few emerging export sectors and Ready Made Garments is the pioneer of them. Bangladesh Ready Made Garments industry has been mounting with an expansionary route exporting $28 billion in 2016-2017. (Export.gov, 2012) RMG industry is a source of employment for approximately over 4 million people and most of them are female. However, RMG sector of Bangladesh is a women-driven industry but male dominates it. 60.8% of the total workers are female but there are only about 0.5% of managers in RMG enterprises are female, and only about 9.3% of HR managers in the RMG sector are female. (Centre for Policy Dialogue, 2018) It seems that, despite of being a female-driven industry, women do not seem that much in the managerial positions. Therefore, very few women seem to participate in decision-making and organizational policy making of RMG sector, which results the male dominance in the management level of RMG sector, which might affect the women workers.

II. Literature Review

a) Status of female leadership in RMG sector

However, the blooming of RMG sector enhances the level of women empowerment in the society by creating scope of employment for the unskilled or semiskilled women but the level of women empowerment within the industry does not give the impression of satisfaction. After interviewing eight (8) women from different organizations from RMG sector, some indicators like Organizational Behavioral Influences and Cultural Influences have been identified as the reasons behind the low number of female in the leading position of RMG. (Islam M. A., Jantan, Hashim, Chong, & Abdullah, 2018) Besides these Social Structure & Culture, Organizational Culture and Less number of Encourager are also identified as the indicators of having low number of female leaders in RMG from the interviews of ten (10) prospective female respondents. (Islam & Jantan, 2017) Social culture is supportive to male leaders than female leaders, which may provoke denial of female leadership and their contribution, sometimes, even harass them. (Islam & Jantan, 2017)

Organizational behavioral influences can be explained by several factors like Lack of Work-life Balance, Negative perception about women leadership and Bias Employment Process. (Islam M. A., Jantan, Hashim, Chong & Abdullah 2018). Low use of Succession planning and flexibility can also be considered as organizational influences behind low female participation in leading position in the RMG organizations of Bangladesh. (Islam, Jantan, & Saimoon, 2017) These authors have also validated these factors by conducting a survey where 98.2% and 96.7% participants have supported the existence of low use of succession planning and less flexibility in work process respectively. Male managers get 21% higher payment than their female counterpart does. (Mahmud & Afrin, 2017).
Cultural influences can be explained by gender stereotyping, cultural expectations from women, unwillingness of male leaders to include women in managerial positions (Islam M. A., Jantan, Hashim, Chong, & Abdullah, 2018). The social structure can also become an obstacle of women leadership. Women leaders or prospective leaders usually find very small number of career encouragers in their professional and personal life. Many women have been discouraged to peruse leading positions because their families think they will become busier with their professional life and will be unable to perform their responsibilities to their families as women have more strong family ties and more responsibilities to their families because of the social structure of Bangladesh. (Islam & Jantan, 2017)

b) Current scenario of Women workers in RMG sector

Women workers in Bangladesh RMG sectors are suffering for Long Working Hour, Discrimination in Wages and Promotions, Absence of Maternity Leave, Lack of Medical and Lunch Facilities, Sexual Harassment, Lack of Transportation, Termination without any Notice (Mahmud & Afrin, 2017). Long Working Hour, Lack of Medical, Transportation and Accommodation Facilities have also been supported by the research of (Sikdar, Sarkar, & Sadeka, 2014). Moreover, wrong mindset of the industry owners regarding the level of commitment of married female workers for work has also been found as a reason of sufferings of women workers.

Besides Low and Irregular Wages, Job Insecurity, Sexual Harassment, Communication Problem and Housing Problem, Women workers of RMG sector have to go through Misbehaviors of the Co-workers, Pattern of Diseases & Illness and Substandard Payment for over time. Moreover, they are not only becoming the victim of harassment inside the factory premises but also outside the factory by the local goons and police. (F. Begum, 2010).

Poor activation or introduction of female labor union, hazardous working environment, workplace stress and replacement of aged-experienced workers with low paid fresh workers are also behind the distress of women workers of RMG sector. (Chowdhury & Ullah, 2010)

c) The paradox: Female Manager Vs Female Workers

Ultimately, male middle managers and female garment workers often conform to the same patriarchal structure found in many family settings and within the social structure of Bangladesh, which sometimes even provokes abusive behavior and harassment of the women workers by the male managers. (Saxena, 2014)

According to research, 80% of machine operators in the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh are female. However, only about 5% to 10% of the supervisors are women. This may confine communication and leads to quality defect and delays. Reduction of this gender disparity in managerial positions might play a significant role in enhancing productivity. Appointing more Female officers and well-trained male officers may reduce the torture and harassment towards female workers. (Chowdhury & Ullah, 2010)

The relationship between women empowerment and garment factory productivity output has been found correlated while conducting research on the work forces of two garments. The average productivity scores of empowered workforce are around 22% higher than that of the less empowered workforce. (Chakrobarty, 2017)

III. Conceptual Frameworks

After reviewing the existing literature, the following conceptual frameworks have been developed for this paper from two perspectives; one is from women managers’ perspective and other is from women workers’ perspectives.

![Conceptual Framework 1: Empowerment of Women Managers in RMG](image)
IV. Objectives of the Study

- To explore the level of women empowerment in RMG sector of Bangladesh.
- To identify the reasons behind the existing level of women empowerment in RMG sector of Bangladesh and their consequences.
- To understand the impacts of the existing level of women empowerment on the blue-collar workers working in RMG sector of Bangladesh.

V. Research Hypothesis

H0 Women empowerment in the managerial positions of RMG sector of Bangladesh is satisfactory.

H1 Women empowerment in the managerial positions of RMG sector of Bangladesh is not satisfactory.

H0 There is no positive relationship between the Empowerment of Women Managers in RMG of Bangladesh and the level of productivity of Blue-collar women workers.

H2 There is a positive relationship between the Empowerment of Women Managers in RMG of Bangladesh and the level of productivity of Blue-collar women workers.

VI. Research Methodology

However, after reviewing the literature several methodological approaches have been found for identifying the reasons behind the Level of Women Empowerment on Ready Made Garments Industry in Bangladesh and their consequences but in this study descriptive research has been adopted. For the purpose of this study, both primary and secondary data have been used. As secondary data sources, previous research reports, journals, books, websites etc. have been used. However, many of the researchers, for example, (Islam M. A., Jantan, Hashim, Chong, & Abdullah, 2018) and (Islam & Jantan, 2017) have used Qualitative techniques like in-depth interviews, case studies for collecting data from women managers instead of using quantitative measures but here survey method has been used for quantifying the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. Two surveys have been conducted for collecting primary data by using two structured questionnaires. 16 women managers of RMG have participated in one survey and 25 women workers have participated in the other one. Five-point Likert Scale was used for the second section ranging from “1=Strongly Disagree” to “5=Strongly Agree”. Respondents have been selected by using judgmental sampling technique in accordance with convenience sampling technique. In this paper, Multiple Regression Analysis and Pearson Correlation have been used for analyzing the data.

VII. Analysis and Findings

a) Analyzing the factors influencing the level of Women Empowerment in the managerial position of RMG sector in Bangladesh

At first to check the reliability of the collected data from women managers, reliability test has been done.

i. Reliability Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.908</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To check the reliability of the collected data Cronbach’s alpha was used. Cronbach’s alpha indicates overall reliability for a set of variables. The standard value of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.70. In this study, the value of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.908, which demonstrates high level of internal consistency for the scale of this sample.

ii. Multiple Regression Analysis

To test the research hypothesis one (H1), a multiple regression analysis has been done. It predicts Empowerment of Women Managers (dependent variable) with independent variables like Organizational Behavioral Influence, Social Structural Influence, Cultural Influence and Threats of Harassment. The following table (Table-7.2) shows the model summary.
From the table 7.2, it has been found that the value of R square, which refers to coefficient of determination, is 0.761. It means that the model fits the data appropriately as the dependent variable is explained 76.1% by the independent variables.

The table 7.3 indicates that the statistical significance of the regression model is 0.002, which is less than 0.05. That means all the independent variables can significantly predict the dependent variable Empowerment of Women Managers. Therefore, H0 is rejected. That means Women Empowerment in the managerial positions of RMG sector of Bangladesh is not satisfactory.

According to table 7.4, the value of b coefficient from the above mentioned coefficient table indicates that, how many units of dependent variable increases or decreases for a single unit increase in each independent variable. Here, “1” point increase in Organizational Behavioral Influence, corresponds to “0.019” unit increase in the level of Empowerment of Women Managers. Similarly “1” point increase in Social Structural Influence, Cultural Influence and Threats of Harassment will corresponds to “0.311”, “0.367” and “0.611” unit increase in the level of Empowerment of Women Managers respectively. Here, all significant values are more than 0.05, which means that no b Coefficients are statistically significant.

According to this table 7.3, there is no Multicollinearity in this regression model as the values of VIF for all the independent variables fall within the range of 1 to 10. Therefore, it can be said that independent variables of the model are not similar and this regression model is a standard regression model.

Empowerment of Women Managers = -1.070 + (0.019* Organizational Behavioral Influence) + (0.311* Social Structural Influence) + (0.367 * Cultural Influence) + (0.611 * Threats of Harassment)

According to this table 7.3, there is no Multicollinearity in this regression model as the values of VIF for all the independent variables fall within the range of 1 to 10. Therefore, it can be said that independent variables of the model are not similar and this regression model is a standard regression model.

iv. Pearson Correlation

Table 7.5: Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empowerment of Women Managers</th>
<th>Organizational Behavioral Influence</th>
<th>Social Structural Influence</th>
<th>Cultural Influence</th>
<th>Threats of Harassment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment of Women Managers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.722***</td>
<td>.658**</td>
<td>.722***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pearson correlation has also been conducted to check the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. Pearson correlation shows the degree of relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. Correlation output of this study illustrates that level of significance are less than 0.05 for all the independent variables. That means there is a significant relationship between all the independent variables (Organizational Behavioral Influence, Social Structural Influence, Cultural Influence, and Threats of Harassment) and the dependent variable (Empowerment of Women Managers).

Moreover, Organizational Behavioral Influence, Social Structural Influence and Cultural Influence are Highly Correlated with the level of Empowerment of Women Managers. On the other hand, Threats of Harassment is perfectly correlated with the Empowerment of Women Managers.

b) Analyzing the impacts of Women Empowerment in the managerial position of RMG sector on the Blue-collar women workers

At first to check the reliability of the collected data from women workers, reliability test has been done.

i. Reliability Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cronbach's Alpha</th>
<th>N of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.775</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To check the reliability of collected data Cronbach’s alpha was used. Cronbach’s alpha indicates overall reliability for a set of variables. The standard value of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.70. In this study, the value of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.775, which demonstrates high level of internal consistency for the scale of this sample.

ii. Multiple Regression Analysis

To test the research hypothesis one (H2), a multiple regression analysis has been done. It predicts Productivity of Women Workers (dependent variable) with independent variables like Organizational Policy, Empathy, Organizational Culture and Safety & Security.

The following table (Table-7.7) shows the model summary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.978a</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>.947</td>
<td>.11692</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), OP, EP, OC, SS

From the above table, it has been found that the value of R square, which refers to coefficient of determination, is 0.956. It means that the model fits the data appropriately as the dependent variable is explained 95.6% by the independent variables.
The above table indicates that the statistical significance of the regression model is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. That means all the independent variables can significantly predict the dependent variable Productivity of Women Workers. Therefore, $H_0$ is rejected. That means there is a positive relationship between the Empowerment of Women Managers in RMG of Bangladesh and the level of productivity of Blue-collar women workers.

The value of $b$ coefficient from the above mentioned coefficient table indicates that, how many units of dependent variable increases or decreases for a single unit increase in each independent variable. Here, “1” point increase in Organizational Policy, corresponds to “1.966” unit increase in the level of Productivity of Women Workers. Similarly, “1” point increase in Empathy, Organizational Culture, and Safety & Security will correspond to “0.075”, “1.002” and “1.096” unit increase in the level of Productivity of Women Workers respectively. Here, all significant values are less than 0.05 except Empathy. Therefore, Organizational Policy, Organizational Culture, and Safety & Security have statistically significant effect.

According to this table, there is no Multicollinearity in this regression model as the values of VIF for all the independent variables fall within the range of 1 to 10. Therefore, it can be said that independent variables of the model are not similar and this regression model is a standard regression model.

### Table 7.9: Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
<td>-14.502</td>
<td>2.593</td>
<td>-5.593</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OP</td>
<td>1.966</td>
<td>.321</td>
<td>.463</td>
<td>6.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EP</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>1.104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OC</td>
<td>1.002</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>5.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1.096</td>
<td>.439</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>2.495</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: Productivity of Women Workers

### Table 7.10: Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Productivity of Women Workers</th>
<th>Organizational Policy</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Organizational Culture</th>
<th>Safety &amp; Security</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.824**</td>
<td>.561**</td>
<td>.930**</td>
<td>.419*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed) N</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Policy</th>
<th>Productivity of Women Workers</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>.824**</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed) N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Pearson correlation has also been conducted to check the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. Pearson correlation shows the degree of relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. Correlation output of this study illustrates that level of significance are less than 0.05 for all the independent variables. That means there is a significant relationship between all the independent variables (Organizational Policy, Empathy, Organizational Culture, Safety & Security) and the dependent variable (Productivity of Women Workers).

Organizational Policy and Organizational Culture are highly correlated with the level of productivity of women workers. On the other hand, Empathy and Safety & Security are moderately correlated with the level of productivity of women workers.

**REFERENCES**