



Human rights Report
On
The Impact of Covid-19 on
Garment Workers' lives in
Bangladesh

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Glossary:

BGMEA: Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association

CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

GoB: The Government of Bangladesh

ILO: International Labour Organization

ICCPR: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

LU: Labour Union

RMG: Ready-made garment

UDHR: Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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The Impact of Covid-19 on Garment Workers' lives in Bangladesh

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Bangladesh's garment industry and workers significantly, which is a vital part of the country's economy. The sector employs more than four million people and accounts for 84% of the country's total exports (Hossain, 2020, para 2). The overall impact of the pandemic on the garment sector in Bangladesh is affecting millions of workers and businesses in the supply chain and causing 'ripple effects' in various areas, especially millions of garment workers' lives (ILO, 2020, p. 6). Within this context, based on empirical research methodology, firstly, this report focuses on the historical background of the garments industry in Bangladesh with overall economical situations before and during the pandemic. Then, this report discusses the international and national legal framework and policy, which are related to garment workers' rights in Bangladesh. Thirdly, based on collected data and legal framework/policy this report discusses the human rights consequences on garment workers' lives in Bangladesh during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Foreign buyers have not been able to receive their pre-ordered clothes and have reduced the order volume during the pandemic. As a result, numerous garment factories were forced to close or were unable to pay workers on time. Many workers have been laid off or were forced to leave. Political rights like freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of assembly and associations or rights to the trade union of workers were violated randomly. Moreover, during the pandemic as well as the aftermath of the pandemic, it has been more difficult for garment workers to access their social and economic rights, specific access to food and safe drinking water as a spiraling effect caused by the pandemic. Garments owners did not follow the procedures of layoff, wages and working hours. Apart from this, female garment workers faced gender-based discrimination in the wages and layoffs process, faced existing inequalities in workload and unpaid care work, and occupational segregation. They also faced sexual harassment or living in fear of sexual harassment while commuting workplace, and domestic violence. Child labour was identified in the garment industry. Children of garment workers have been forced to drop out of school during the Covid-19 pandemic and girl children have been subjected to child marriage during the Covid-19 pandemic. After analysis of the consequences, this report mentioned a few challenges with a conclusion. Lastly, gives some recommendations to promote, protect and establish garment workers' rights in Bangladesh.

Introduction

The readymade garment sector, which is currently Bangladesh's top source of export revenue, has been instrumental in helping to rebuild the nation and its economy. 4,500 factories produced 33.07 billion USD in revenue at the end of 2019, a few months before the global Covid-19 pandemic (Ashraf and Strumpell, 2023, Introduction). According to Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) (2020, para 8) with exports worth more than \$27.9 billion in the 2019–20 fiscal year, the apparel sector is Bangladesh's largest foreign exchange earner.

Covid-19 pandemic creates huge impacts on the export and import division on Ready-made garment (RMG) sectors. The crisis has been exacerbated by the closure or reduced operation of businesses both in Bangladesh and abroad due to lockdowns. According to the latest Global Economic Prospects report, global growth is expected to slow from 5.5% in 2021 to 4.1% in 2022 and 3.2% in 2023 as financial and monetary support is removed worldwide. Growth in developing economies is predicted to decrease from 6.3% in 2021 to 4.6% in 2022 and 4.4% in 2023 (Bank, 2022a, para 2). In the financial year of 2019-2020, exports experienced a high downturn of 17% (Raihan, 2020, para 1). According to the World Bank (2022b, para), the country's GDP growth was projected to slow down from 7.9% in the 2019-2020 financial year to 5.2% in 2020-2021, due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic. The pandemic also increased unemployment, as many businesses were forced to lay off workers or shut down completely in Bangladesh. Within the first year of the pandemic, the unemployment rate in Bangladesh went from 4.22% in 2019 to 5.3% in 2020 (Uddin, 2021, para 2).

Historical background

Garments industries in Bangladesh have a long history. In short, in the 1980s, Bangladesh's apparel industry progressed to where it is today. The late Nurool Quader Khan founded the ready-made clothing industry in Bangladesh. He sent 130 trainees to South Korea in 1978 where they learned how to make readymade garments. Among them only 18 were women. He established the first factory, "Desh Garments", with those trainees to make clothing for export. Men continued to work in managerial, supervisory, and highly skilled positions (the cutting and finishing sections, or repairing machines) when the RMG industry in Bangladesh took off in the middle of the 1980s. However, especially in sewing operations, it began to rely heavily on young women workers from the countryside who were forced to urban labour markets in Dhaka and Chittagong by an agrarian crisis that increased the share of landless households in the overall population between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s from one-third to almost 50%. According to the owners of garment factories and the urban elite to which they belonged, these female workers had "nimble fingers" and would work in urban factories for a short period before returning to their villages and getting married. The most labour-intensive component of the "cutting-trimming-making" process in Bangladesh's RMG industry was sewing, so starting in the middle of the 1980s; women started to noticeably outnumber men and eventually made up about 80% of the workforce (Ashraf and Strumpell, 2023, The first

RMG labour forces).

Methodology

This report is based on a qualitative interview-based research method. Primary data is collected based on semi-structured interviews from different sectors in Bangladesh who is related to the RMG sector, these being; Garment workers, officers in the garment sector, as well as a Lawyer, a representative of an International NGO, a Member of a labour union, a University Professor, and a Researcher, who both does research in the garment sector. The interviews have been conducted in zoom. The respondents for this report are the following, including coding names -how they will be referred to in the analysis:

| Respondents | Interview Date | Coding name |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Garment worker 1 (m), Narayanganj City, Dhaka | 2023-03-05 | Worker 1 |
| Garment worker 2 (f), Narayanganj City, Dhaka | 2023-03-07 | Worker 2 |
| Garment supervisor and member of a labour union (m), Narayanganj City, Dhaka | 2023-03-07 | Member of LU |
| Garment Industrial Engineer, Gajipur City, Dhaka | 2023-02-11 | Industrial Engineer |
| Officer 1 of a compliance garment in Dhaka | 2023-02-14 | Officer 1 |
| Officer 2 in RMG sector, Gajipur City, Dhaka | 2023-02-12 | Officer 2 |
| Officer 3 of a compliance garment in Dhaka | 2023-02-11 | Officer 3 |
| Bangladesh Representative from International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) | 2023-02-18 | Representative of INGO |
| Associate Professor, Public University, Dhaka | 2023-02-15 | Professor |
| Lawyer and activist, Dhaka | 2023-02-25 | Lawyer |
| Researcher, Dhaka | 2023-02-27 | Researcher |

The method used to collect the primary data for this report is qualitative- semi-structured interview-based. This is to respond to the purpose of the project and best to capture the unique experiences of the focus group. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with open-ended descriptive questions (Smith, R. & Smith, L, 2018, p.74), focusing on 8 main subjects. Questionnaires have been created based on each group separately which are added to the appendix section. This is in order not to limit the interviewees and ask leading questions that give a certain type of answer, but instead to have more flexibility, allow more space for the different experiences of the respondents, and take into account the different experiences of different people in aspects such as gender for example.

Secondary data is collected and reviewed using desk-based research methods with a focus on the legal framework and the previous research in this field. It will be collected from several resources of international and domestic law and ILO reports, but also from websites, newspaper articles, journal articles, public statements, reports, announcements and policy papers.

In regards to the topic of this report, it can be sensitive for the respondents to give their personal experiences and it is therefore important to ensure their anonymity and secure informed consent. This is safeguarded by first contacting the respondents by email with information on information about the writers of this report, what this report is about and how the information provided will be used, as well as a guarantee the respondents identities will be kept confidential in the finished report as well as during the process. It was made sure that the respondents were in a safe place when interviews were held on Zoom and after the interviews were finished all names/specific job positions were coded to that presented above to be general and non traceable to individuals. The gender aspect as well as other vulnerable positions was also considered in relation to research ethics and we made sure that no sensitive information given in the interviews would be traceable to individuals.

International Legal Framework

Bangladesh became a full member of the United Nations on 17 September 1974 and is bound by several international agreements including principles that can be related to Garments workers' rights as well as in the context of the effects of the pandemic. This report will focus on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as well as a number of International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

In the context of this study, the safety and security of garment workers are firstly represented in Article 3 of the UDHR, which affirms the right of all individuals to life, freedom, and protection. Article 19 of UDHR declares that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Another relevant article for this report is article 20, which states that “1. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. 2. No one may be compelled to belong to an association”. Article 22 of the covenant states the right to social security that is granted to, in the case of this study, every garment worker under the premise of Article 22 recognizing all individuals as members of society. A more specific article for garment workers is Article 23 declares that

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. 2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. 3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. 4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Lastly, Article 25(1) affirms that all individuals are entitled to a certain standard of living and well-being. This includes the right to sufficient housing, food, clothing and medical care, as well as access to necessary social services. Where this article more explicitly relates to the social security of garment workers, is that the article also declares the right to protection in situations such as unemployment, illness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other circumstances beyond one's control. According to article 25 (2) of UDHR, “Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance”. Article 26 of UDHR “Everyone has the right to education” (UDHR, 1948).

International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

Another international agreement that Bangladesh ratified in 1998 is the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The first article that relates to garment workers' rights is Article 8 which declares that state parties of the covenant shall ensure that everyone has the right to join a trade union of their choice, to promote and safeguard their economic and social interests, subject only to the rules of the organization. This right can only be restricted as prescribed by law if it is necessary in a democratic society for national security or public order, or to safeguard the rights and freedoms of others (ICESCR, 1966). Although not directly related to individual garment workers, the rights of trade unions are important for promoting and safeguarding the rights of workers, especially during pandemic times. Article 8 also includes the right of trade unions to join or form international trade union groups and continues to declare that trade unions should not be limited for any other purpose than the same mentioned above about national security, prescribed by

law or necessary in a democratic state. Article 8 does not however prohibit legal limitations of this article by police, military forces, or state administration. Lastly, article 8 declares that states are not authorized to pass such legislations that would prohibit guarantees that are provided in the ILO convention of 1948 concerning the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize (ICESCR, 1966). Another article in the ICESCR relevant for garment workers is article 9, which promotes all countries that have ratified the Covenant to acknowledge the right of all individuals to social security, which includes social insurance as well. Lastly, article 11 in the ICESCR, similar to art 25 in the UDHR, asserts that all states under the Covenant acknowledge the entitlement of every person and their family to a satisfactory standard of living. This includes adequate provisions for food, clothing, and housing, as well as the continuous betterment of living conditions. To ensure that this right is fulfilled, states must take the necessary measures, recognizing the crucial significance of international cooperation based on free consent (ICESCR, 1966).

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Bangladesh ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on 6 September 2000. According to ICCPR, article 19 (2) “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice”. Article 21, “The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (order public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others”. Article 22(1), “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests” (ICCPR, 1966).

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Bangladesh ratified The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1984. According to CEDAW (1979) Article 11 (1) and (2) “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment” and “In order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work”.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Bangladesh ratified the convention in 1990. Article 32 1. Declares the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from work harmful to the child's health or social development. It also states that State Parties should “Provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment” (CRC, 1989), and “Provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article”(CRC, 1989).

International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention

According to the ILO website, Bangladesh has been a member of the International Labor Organization since 1972 and Currently has ratified 36 ILO Conventions of which 31 are in force by the writing of this report. The ratified conventions include 8 of the so-called core Conventions included in the ILO Declaration (ILO, 2023), these being the most relevant out of the ILO conventions for garment workers' rights in this report. The first one of these core conventions is the **Forced Labor Convention (1930)**. This Convention concerns the responsibility of Member States to eradicate all forms of forced labour. The second convention is the **Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (1948)**, which implies that individuals have the right to join trade unions without discrimination and the right to collective organisation. Similarly to that, the **Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (1949)**, is about safeguarding the employees' right of organisation and to prevent discrimination based on the employee's involvement with a trade union, as well as the right to collective bargaining with the employer through a trade union. Another one of the core conventions relevant to this study when looking at the gender aspect of garments workers and if there is a difference in terms of how their lives were affected by the pandemic, is the **Equal Remuneration Convention (1951)**, which stipulates that all workers are entitled to receive equal pay and should not be subjected to any form of discrimination based on their gender. In addition to looking at the possible different discriminations against garments workers in this report, the **Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (1958)**, articulates that employees should be given equal opportunity, and not be discriminated against based on ethnicity, gender, religion, political affiliation, social origin etc. Also relating to how the lives of garment workers may have been affected by the pandemic, is the **Abolition of Forced Labor Convention (1957)**, which puts the obligation on member states and requires actions by the state to actively abolish forced labour. In regard to the aspect of child garment workers, Bangladesh recently ratified its 8th ILO core convention in 2022 called the **Minimum Age Convention (1973)** which will be in force by 22 march 2023 (ILO, 2023), implies that states under the convention shall implement steps to gradually eradicate child labour as well as establish a minimum age for individuals to engage in any form of employment excluding certain light work and artistic performances. Lastly, related to the prior convention is the **Worst Forms of**

Child Labor Convention (1999), which puts the responsibility on the member states to take measures in order to banish the worst forms of child labour.

Lastly, Bangladesh has not yet ratified some conventions. For this report, the following two are identified; **Termination of Employment Convention, 1982**, which mentions that the “employment of a worker shall not be terminated unless there is a valid reason for such termination connected with the capacity or conduct of the worker or based on the operational requirements of the undertaking, establishment or service” (ILO convention no 158, 1982). **ILO convention called Violence and Harassment Convention (2019)** is about acknowledging the right of every individual to a work environment that is devoid of any form of violence or harassment, this including gender-based violence and harassment. This convention is identified as relevant for this report but **has not yet been ratified by Bangladesh**.

Domestic Legal Framework and policy

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

According to the fundamental principles of state policy [provision 15(a) and (b)] in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh “food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care” are necessities, as well as “the right to work, that is the right to guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage having regard to the quantity and quality of work”. According to part III, Fundamental Rights of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, articles 27 and 32 mentioned that “All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law” and “No person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty save in accordance with law”. The article 37 state that, “Every citizen shall have the right to assemble and to participate in public meetings and processions peacefully and without arms, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of public order or public health”. Under article 38, “Every citizen shall have the right to form associations or unions” and article 39 mentioned that:

(1) Freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed. (2) Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence– (a) the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression; and (b) freedom of the press, are guaranteed”.

Bangladesh Labour Act 2006

The government of Bangladesh has also enacted various laws and regulations to protect workers’ and labour rights. Among them, this report emphasized the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006. The Act

was enacted on October 11, 2006, and became effective on July 1, 2007. Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 is a comprehensive law that aims to protect the rights of workers and promote their welfare. The Act also provides for the right of workers to form and join trade unions and to engage in collective bargaining. Penalties are imposed on employers who violate the Act. The Act sets out various conditions of employment, including minimum age of employment, working hours, and leave entitlements in the section. The minimum age of employment is 14 years, and no child under the age of 18 is allowed to work in any hazardous occupation. The maximum working hours per week is 60 hours, and workers are entitled to one day of rest per week. The Act also provides for annual leave, sick leave, and maternity leave for female workers. Employers are to pay wages and benefits to their workers in accordance with the minimum wage rates set by the government. The act also states that employers ensure the safety and health of their workers. The act also includes the right of workers to form and join trade unions and engage in collective bargaining. The Act also prohibits discrimination against workers on the basis of their trade union membership or activities (Gazette, 2015).

Findings and Analysis

Right to life and dignity

According to article 1 of UDHR (1948), “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”; Article 3 of the UDHR mentioned, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person”. Article 23(3) of UDHR also states, “Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection”.

However, the findings of this report suggest that during the pandemic, the rights to life and dignity of garment workers were violated.

Then, in what ways was it violated? During the pandemic, Bangladesh was under lockdown in the name of public holidays and almost all the establishments were closed but only the garment industry was open. Officer 1 (2023) and the Professor (2023) mentioned that although restrictions were strict for most sectors, the garment sector was open during most of the pandemic. The workers needed work to survive and their economic needs put them in a situation where it did not matter whether they were contaminated by Covid-19 or not. The Member of LU (2023) states that:

We did not think about the risk of dying from Covid-19. We just thought about how to run the family without money. On the other hand, we were told by the employer that we would lose our jobs if we did not join the factory. So, the risk of dying from Covid-19 was more acceptable to us than dying of starvation.

Their vulnerable situations forced them to risk their lives for work. The Professor (2023) and the Representative of INGO (2023) also noted separately that it was spread as a common phrase that, “garment workers have different immune systems and will not get infected with Covid-19” or “poor people do not get corona”. Moreover, policymakers are supposed to protect the worker’s rights but “they also have their business interest because many of the business people and factory owners are members of parliament” (Professor, 2003).

On the one hand, following the recommendation of the World Health Organization (WHO), the government of Bangladesh (GoB) made covid-19 recommendations for their citizens and demanded that people need to maintain social distance. However, there is no transportation due to the reason for the lockdown/holidays declared by the government. Nevertheless, all garment factories were open during that lockdown, so how could 4 million workers travel to their workplaces in a safe way? Since there was no special transportation for garment workers during the pandemic, which made social distancing very difficult. Worker 1 (2023) mentioned that there was no transport for workers during the pandemic so they faced risks during the journey from their homes to their workplaces. The member of LU (2023) also mentioned that when everything was closed, both men and women had to walk from home to work. The government did not provide any vehicles and did not take any initiative to pressure the owners to bring the workers back to the factories with vehicles. However, Officer 3 (2023) says that they organised transportation for workers to travel from home to work. Therefore, these workers put their life at risk to be infected by Covid-19 in order to not lose their job and to save their families from starvation, where most of the population of Bangladesh worked from home.

This report also found-out that during the Covid-19 pandemic garment workers and their families were not treated with proper human dignity and rights. According to the Professor (2023), “one of the influential garment owners said that “Amra sromic pali” (We nurture workers) or “We feed them, so they need to work for us”. In a sense of farming, people do nurture cattle, chickens and poultry. Their attitude towards workers differentiates them, as they are the provider so they can do whatever they want. The factory owners showed their class characters and feudalistic attitude towards workers. The way work was treated, and the way the workers were separated from others by the owners, brands, and governments that attitude clearly showed how they did not respect workers' dignity.

Political rights

The second part of the findings of this report is that there were breaches of the garment workers' rights to opinion and expression, as well as freedom of assembly and association during the pandemic.

Freedom of opinion and expression

According to article 19 of the UDHR (1948), “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression”. Article 19 (2) of the ICCPR (1966) mentions that “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression”. According to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh under article 39, every citizen is guaranteed the right to “freedom of speech and expression”; and “freedom of the press”. Our findings on the freedom of opinion and expression in the garment industry, as well as the rights of the workers in this regard, are that there are some indications that they cannot fully enjoy this right. Due to surveillance and continuous threats from law enforcement agencies or factory owners, people related to the garment sector fear expressing their opinions on worker rights and welfare. The lawyer (2023) mentioned that when members of labour unions speak out about the rights of garment workers, they are threatened with dismissal from their jobs and forced to do what the owner dictates. The Professor (2023) mentioned that:

In the last 7 years, the way trade union federations were made powerless under controlled surveillance from police intelligence, now they are less active. Last 5 years all the trade union federations were threatened by the secret police and military intelligence. I talked to one of the leaders last week and he shared with me how the government and secret police monitor their work to keep resistance. Secondly; the national media is pretty much controlled by political leaders. The way workers were treated by factory owners and the government is not covered by the media. Civil society also cannot be critical because of the government’s surveillance system.

Rights to form Trade Union and freedom of assembly and association

According to article 20(1) of the UDHR (1948), “Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association”. Articles 21 and 22 (1) of the ICCPR (1966) “The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized”, and “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others”. According to the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, under articles 37 and 38, every citizen has the right to freedom of assembly and association; besides these conventions, there are also ILO conventions regarding this matter. The Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention (1948), implies that individuals have the right to join trade unions without discrimination and the right to collective organization. Similarly to that, the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention (1949), is about safeguarding the employees' right of organization and to prevent discrimination based on the employee's involvement with a trade union, as well as the right to collective bargaining with the employer through a trade union.

According to the Statistics provided by the Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh (Nations, 2018, p. 18), 8,015 registered trade unions and 202 trade union federations are functioning. However, the labour union in the RMG sectors is not able to act properly. Worker 1 (2023) mentioned that there is

no labour union in his factory and no labour union has worked for their rights. The member of LU (2023) also stated that he did not observe any work of the labour union nor did he take any actions to demand workers' rights during the pandemic. Therefore, the question is then why he is selected as a member of the union. According to him, the company selected him because they thought he would not say anything against them, and they would not face any problems with him. Although sometimes he talks about workers' problems, they do nothing about it. On this issue, the Industrial Engineer (2023) stated, "members of labour unions are usually leaders of workers who can organise any kind of movement for their rights, which is a threat to employers, therefore most garment factories do not have labour unions or are not allowed to form labour unions". In conclusion, there are few labour unions in the garment sector, wherever there is a labour union it does not work properly for the worker's rights and welfare. Hossain, Akter, and Ahmed write in the report called "The impact of Covid pandemic on the garment workers in Bangladesh" (2021) about how RMG workers were affected during the pandemic and write that 7 % of workers involved in workers' movements and/or protests during the pandemic lost their job because of their involvement in these areas (Hossain et al., 2021, p. 60). According to Hossain et al. (2021, p. 64-65), 45% of the respondents don't join trade unions for fear of losing their job, and 60% fear being assigned disadvantageous work. In addition to this, workers during the pandemic had less knowledge about the existence of trade unions in the garments sector and if there were any awareness of trade unions, there was a lack of awareness from the workers if employers had discussion or issues raised with trade unions.

Because of brands and retailers cancelling orders and delaying payments to their suppliers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, garment workers in Bangladesh have been protesting outside factories over unpaid wages. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) have identified at least 46 factories as having failed to pay employees' wages for the month of March 2020 despite repeated requests (Centre, 2020, p.1). 46 garment factories that ignored repeated requests from the BGMEA to pay their employees' wages for March should be shut down, the association has recommended to the ministry of labour and employment. A little over 99% of the BGMEA's members, except these 46 factories, have paid their salaries for March, according to the letter. However, since these factories have not received their March salaries, they are not qualified to apply for interest-free loans under the government's stimulus plan for the apparel industry. It is one of the main requirements that borrowing companies must be satisfied to receive loans from the stimulus package. The majority of the protesting workers in Ashulia, Savar, Gazipur, and Narayanganj are employed by these 46 factories (Mirdha, 2020, p. 1). Workers from several garment factories in Savar, Narayanganj, Gazipur, and Chittagong staged protests on May 14, 2020, demanding their salaries and other obligations be paid in full before Eid-ul-Fitr. As accusations of vandalism against the irate workers increased, protests in Savar turned violent, prompting police to use water cannons and tear gas to disperse the workers (Hussain, Rita, Akand, & Hossain, 2020, p. 1-2). The Professor (2023) mentioned that "police filed cases against hundreds of unnamed workers so that they can arrest anyone". Workers organised assemblies for their due wages and it is their right

to collectively organise, however as seen above, the findings of this report are that their right to assembly and freedom of association was violated during the pandemic.

Social and economic rights

Standard of living

According to article 25 (1) of UDHR, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control”(UDHR 1948). Article 11 in the ICESCR, similar to art 25 in the UDHR, asserts that all states under the Covenant acknowledge the entitlement of every person and their family to a satisfactory standard of living. This includes adequate provisions for food, clothing, and housing, as well as the continuous betterment of living conditions.

During the pandemic as well as the aftermath of the pandemic, it has been more difficult for garment workers to access their social and economic rights, specifically access to food and safe drinking water as a spiralling effect caused by the pandemic.

Due to the reason for job layoffs, and partial or no salary from the employer, the workers' livelihood has during the pandemic been and is still challenging in various ways. Worker 1 (2023) states “We as garment workers are all dependent on our work as there is no other source of economic income. Moreover, with this income, we care for our family. The sudden closure of the factory and then not getting a salary is very difficult for us.” The Industrial Engineer (2023) stated, “I borrowed a lot of money to manage my livelihood. I was able to repay some of that borrowed money with the help of my relatives. However, I have not yet overcome the financial loans that I have. Therefore, I would say that financially and emotionally I am still suffering.” Moreover, due to the reason for the lockdown, food prices increased. Officer 2 (2023) mentioned that “as there was a lockdown everywhere, the food and goods from the villages could not come to the cities and we saw that the prices of the goods went up and the labour who lived around the workplaces became very difficult to sustain their lives due to that increase at that time”. Many of the workers manage their livelihood from their family's support and take loans from different NGOs.

Access to food, safe drinking water and sanitation

Access to safe drinking water is a basic human right in Bangladesh. Bangladesh Water Act, 2013 formally recognizes the right to water and makes provisions for the coordination, creation,

administration, distribution, utilization, and protection of water resources. However, this report identified that during the pandemic garment workers faced challenges in getting access to safe drinking water at their homes. The representative of INGO (2023) mentioned, “Usually, garment workers live in congested areas and it is seen that two to three families are living in one house. The amount of water that a family needs is not there, and the necessary water has to be collected from another distant place”. Workers were not able to maintain isolation and hygiene for sanitation. The representative of INGO (2023) also stated, “If someone in the family has a fever during Covid-19, they have to be kept in isolation but where to keep them in isolation? Hygiene was not possible because several people used the same toilet in a dirty environment, through which the health risk increased more”.

Layoff procedures, wages, working hours, and Health and safety measures

This report finds that during the pandemic, garment owners did not follow the procedures of layoff, wages and working hours.

According to article 23 of UDHR, everyone has the right to work, to a variety of jobs that they can choose from, to fair and benevolent working conditions, and protection from unemployment. Everyone has the right to equal pay for equal work without any form of discrimination. Every person who works has a right to just and favourable compensation that ensures for himself and his family a life worthy of human dignity and is supplemented, as needed, by other forms of social protection. According to the fundamental principles of state policy provision 15 (b) in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh “the right to work, that is the right to guaranteed employment at a reasonable wage having regard to the quantity and quality of work”. According to Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, the maximum working hours per week is 60 hours, and workers are entitled to one day of rest per week, employers are to pay wages and benefits to their workers by the minimum wage rates set by the government. Moreover, Labour Act 2006 also mentioned that employers ensure the safety and health of their workers, they need to provide the letter of appointment to their employees, which includes information about the position's title, responsibilities, salary, and working hours, as well as it mentioned termination of employment, which details the process for doing so, including the duration of any notice periods and any severance pay obligations.

However, this report observed that within the RMG sectors, not all employers followed the formal or legal procedures retrenchment process of employees, and workers were not informed before their retrenchment. Relating to income security, the study discovered that many of the workers did not receive a wage or overtime payment after retrenchment (Hossain et al., 2021, p. 61). After the so-called “lockdown” garment factories opened gradually and not all garment workers were called in at the same time, they were called in slowly (Garment worker 1, 2023). The Member of LU (2023) as

well as the Lawyer (2023) both mentioned that those who had the slightest fever and were unsure whether they were infected by Covid-19 were fired without notice or did not get their salary. Moreover, they were not paid for the days they spent on leave as directed by the government or on minimum sick days. Worker 1 (2023) mentioned that they did not get basic salaries for the first few months, but when everything went back to normal they got total wages. The member of LU (2023) and the Industrial Engineer (2023) mentioned that an unlimited number of workers did not get their due salaries when they lost their job. The industrial engineer mentioned that there was no prior notice or termination letter for her layoff and she did not get her salary when she was laid off. She also mentioned that the employer did not follow the labour act policy processes. Every week 50-70 workers were called to the office together by the HR manager saying ‘you are fired you cannot come to the office.’” On the other hand, not all factories laid off workers. According to Officer 3 (2023), his/her company did not lay off any workers, provided basic salaries, and divided working hours and workers within three shifts. Moreover, as soon as everything became normal with shipments, every worker got a full salary and all the benefits were entitled again. However, the number of unemployed in Bangladesh increased a lot from that time.

Moreover, workers did not receive support from the government to help them access their social and economic rights: the GoB has announced a \$588 million stimulus package for the sector to pay wages. On the loan to factory owners, 2% interest will be charged. This financial package would only pay wages for one month after dividing the total by the number of employees (Hossain, 2020, p.2). When workers lost their jobs, they did not receive any relief or subsidies. Worker 1 (2023), a member of LU (2023), and the Professor (2023) said that the garment workers did not receive any direct support from the government. The industrial engineer (2023) who lost her job during the pandemic said that “We did not get any support from the government during the Covid-19 pandemic or later, especially those of us who worked in garments. The owner never told us if the government took any action.”

Those who lost their jobs at that time could not overcome the financial problems that they are in now. It has been seen that many people have taken loans from various NGOs to support their families, but they did not have any income, which made it difficult to pay their installments, so interest increased gradually. Now even if they get a job, they are not able to repay that loan with their salary (The member of LU, 2023). As several factories were shut down shortly after the outbreak of the epidemic and workers lost their jobs, unemployment increased. The factories are not getting the number of orders that they are supposed to get. Many factories have to shut down many lines due to low orders.

Working hours

To maintain social distance, factories divided the workers and times into night and day shifts (the Industrial Engineer, 2023). But, sometimes many workers worked all night and had to come in the

morning to work the next shift (the Researcher, 2023).

Health and safety measures

The representative of an INGO observed that some garment workers may have worn masks, but in most cases, most of the workers did not use masks, especially in those densely populated areas where garment workers live. The Member of LU (2023) mentioned that the workers did not obey or enforce the government Covid-19 restrictions and health policy. It has been seen that these rules are followed when any senior person or official visits the company but after they are gone, the rules no longer exist. The researcher (2023) also mentioned that

“After the pandemic, when the buyers come to audit the garments, some garment employers taught workers that they must tell in front of the buyers that they have followed the hygiene rules during the pandemic”.

The lawyer (2023) states that due to a lack of health awareness among the workers, many people have been infected with corona multiple times. Not only that Masks or handsets were not used in all areas. The representative of an INGO (2023) mentioned that during the pandemic, they did not visit physically inside the garments due to various restrictions. As people gradually understood the online world, they had meetings with workers virtually. They also monitored covid policy of the garment virtually. As a result, there has been a deviation in the monitoring system as per the legal standard and a big gap has been created in the collection of data.

Women's Rights

Gender-based discrimination in wages and the Layoff process

According to CEDAW (1979) Article 11 (1), “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment”. The Equal Remuneration Convention (1951) of ILO stipulates that all workers are entitled to receive equal pay and should not be subjected to any form of discrimination based on their gender. In addition to looking at the possible different discriminations against garments workers in this report, the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (1958) of ILO, articulates that employees should be given equal opportunity, and not be discriminated against based on ethnicity, gender, religion, political affiliation, social origin etc.

However, this report find-out that due to the pandemic, women garment workers faced gender-based discrimination in the wages and layoffs process.

In the last few years, the number of automated services and computer-generated operators increased in the factories. According to the Associate professor, male workers get these jobs because they have the kind of training which is needed for this work. In Bangladesh, families invested in the male child more than women because in future they will run the family and investment or inspiration from family male workers have opportunities to get training to operate this computer automation in the factories., Officer 2 (2023) mentioned that “women in the garment sector are often very poor and come from rural backgrounds” and their families did not want to invest in them. In addition, getting this kind of training for women comes with more risks since they would have to travel to the capital to stay for this training, where fewer women can support themselves financially as well as be safe during this time (The Professor, 2023). Therefore, this report notified that there is a gender gap in wages since these kinds of machine or computer-operated jobs have higher wages, as well as fewer women being able to have a job and income. The report by Hossain, Akter and Ahmed (2021, p. 61) provides data that the wage gap between male and female garment workers is BDT 162 and that males have a higher average income of 2% than female workers. The average income decreased during the pandemic, but when it increased in May 2020 the wage gap between genders still existed during the pandemic.

According to The Lawyer (2023), during the pandemic factory owners laid off workers in different stages, firstly they dismissed the elderly workers, and secondly the women. They did not lay off male workers who were strong enough to attend to multiple tasks simultaneously. Moreover, since the post-pandemic period, women workers have returned to the workforce less frequently than men have. Another important finding is that due to the lockdown, all workers suffered a lot but women suffered differently. Some women workers are pregnant or breastfeeding, or who are menstruating or suffering from illness; they were forced to use dangerous transport or walked from home to work or from work to home (The member of LU, 2023). Moreover, The Lawyer states that after the pandemic women who were pregnant or had children returned very few garments to the factories. According to article 25 (2) of UDHR, “Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance”. And According to CEDAW (1979) Article 11 (2) “To prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work”; however, this report finds out that due to the reason of pregnancy or motherhood, the rights to work are violated for women.

Lack of Child care/daycare centres

According to the Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh, (Nations, 2018, p. 17) The Ministry of Labour and Employment has established 4,264 Day-Care centres in various factories and establishments to help female workers. However, during this pandemic, numerous factories closed their daycare centres and after the pandemic, they tried to reopen that. The Researcher (2023) mentioned that a few garment companies are now working to overcome the damage, one of which is

to set up childcare centres for children. Providing breastfeeding space for employees who have breastfed babies. Nevertheless, if it was in almost all the garments and not just a few garments.

Sexual harassment while commuting to work

This report finds out that female garment workers in Bangladesh faced sexual harassment or lived in fear of sexual harassment while commuting workplace. The researcher (2023) mentioned that in some areas of the Gajipur district female garment workers experienced sexual harassment while they were commuting to the workplace especially when they travel to the workplace for the night shift. They faced various lewd comments and sexually harassing words from the harassers. As a result, most women workers are forced to wear a *burkha* or *hijab* (veil) to escape this sexual harassment. On the other hand, The Industrial engineer (2023) stated that she did not have any living places close to her office so for almost 15 days she travelled from home, which is nearly 100 kilometers far. For commuting, she spent an average of 5 hours each day. During this travelling time, she suffered mental and physical stress from waiting for transport, road accidents, and sexual harassment because; road accidents, robbers, and sexual abuses are common issues in Bangladesh. It is important to mention that according to a 2022 online survey of more than 5,000 women in 24 districts, 87% of Bangladeshi women reported experiencing harassment at least once, 36% reported experiencing sexual harassment in public places regularly, and 57% thought that public transportation was the most dangerous place to be in comparison to other public places like streets, malls, and online platforms (Rahman, Suwal, & Yan, 2022, p. 2).

Domestic violence

Although the government of Bangladesh (GoB) enacted The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, in 2010, and facilitated the effective implementation of this the GoB enacted Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Rules in 2013, but, this report observed that during the pandemic female garment workers faced domestic violence. The Industrial Engineer (2023) mentioned that

When the husband lost his job, he could not control the stress to maintain the family's daily necessities and at one point he/they started to do violent behaviour with his wife, sometimes it went to the level of physical abuse. Therefore, the number of divorces also increased during the pandemic. Many of my female colleagues are divorced now.

The representative from INGO (2023) also mentioned that

During lockdown/general holidays, husbands stay at home all the time and during that time, it has been observed that the amount of violence has increased a lot. Moreover, the woman is not able to go outside or not able to seek legal help from anyone, the situation was terrible for them. Moreover,

women who have worked in the garment sector have been victims as well as those who have been our trainers or volunteers also have been victims of domestic violence in their families.

On the other hand, the researcher (2023) stated that she worked at a specific place in the Gajipur district where a huge number of garment workers live. At that place, Most of the husbands of women workers are either gambling or doing nothing, spending idle time. Their husbands withdrew the salary of the female workers without informing them because the reason of Covid-19 salary came through a mobile app. After withdrawing, they waste that money on various frivolous activities including gambling. Moreover, if the women do not want to pay this money, their husbands torture them in various ways. They are subjected to physical and mental abuse in their own homes. Moreover, at the beginning of the pandemic when female workers did not have work or salary, at that time their husbands or other members of the husband's families tortured them physically and mentally.

Child Rights

Dropout from school and Child marriage

According to article 26 of UDHR, “Everyone has the right to education”. Article 3(1) of the CRC guarantees that “in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.” Article 19(1) of the CRC also requires States to take all appropriate measures to protect the child from all forms of abuse, neglect, or maltreatment while in the care of parents. Article 27 of the Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972 declares that all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law. Therefore, children are no exception to the constitutional guarantee. Bangladesh took Legislative measures for the implementation of child rights treaty obligations at the national level adoption as act the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017. This act prohibits the marriage between a male under twenty-one and a female under eighteen years of age.

However, this report shows that children of garment workers have been forced to drop out of school during the Covid-19 pandemic and girl children have been subjected to child marriage during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In order to stop the spread of Covid-19, all educational institutions are on general leave as of March 18, 2020. The representative of INGO (2023) mentioned, “Children have been forced to stay at home and many children have had their education stopped. At that time, a large part dropped out of school”. Girls began helping out around the house, which made them a burden in many households. As such, many girls became victims of child marriage. In general, in Bangladesh, compared to 2019,

the child marriage rate rose by 44%, in 2020, according to a *Manusher Jonno* Foundation study. The Lawyer (2023) stated, “Parents who lost their jobs in the garment industry stopped education for their young children, and they were not allowed to get to school. They gave the girls married off, increasing the rate of child marriage in Bangladesh”. Child marriages violate many human rights; including education, access to reproductive and sexual health care, reproductive rights, employment, freedom of movement, and the right to consensual marriage. Moreover, because of their parents' declining income, children were unhappy with their home lives and were underweight for a lack of proper nutrition.

Child labour

The government of Bangladesh has pledged to eliminate child labour by 2025. According to the national report for the Universal Periodic Review of Bangladesh 2018, RMG and Shrimp sectors are free from child labour (Child labour has been prohibited in 38 hazardous jobs). However, this report identified that Child labour still exists in the RMG sector. The representative of LU (2023) mentioned “On paper, child labour is not seen especially in the factories that have compliance but in the rest of the factories child labour is observed or there is”. So the question is, child labour is banned in RMG sectors but how can it be seen? To answer this question he also mentioned that

To join garments industries workers needs to show his/her birth registration certificate. A person may be 15 years old and his/her birth certificate shows that he/she is 18. So somehow their birth registration certificates are changed and children are taken by the employers”.

The Professor (2023) also mentioned that during the pandemic, he observed that physical appearance is like child workers going to garment factories in the morning. However, not all the factories were the same, certified factories, which are regularly inspected, always check certificates with physical appearance. A few owners also printed on their gates that they “do not employ anyone below 18 and child labour is prohibited”. However, a certain number of factories are inspected but many factories are not inspected regularly. So there is a gap for inspection.

Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this report shows that workers' lives often were seen as less valuable compared to others during the pandemic in Bangladesh. The pandemic put garment workers in a difficult situation having to choose between putting themselves at risk and going to work to be able to keep their families from starvation. In this aspect, it was also shown that the garment industry exploited the situation and posed threats to workers to return to work in order not to lose their jobs. Another finding of this study is that employers did not follow the international or domestic conventions, laws and policies in relation to the workers' freedom of assembly and association where their rights were

violated during the pandemic, as well as the right of joining or forming trade unions. The findings were that the number of labour unions in the garment sector is very few or close to non-existing, where there have been indications of this being due to employers trying to keep workers from organising movements for their workers' rights since it poses a threat to the garment industry. The report also found that there were violations of the worker's right to collectively organise where there were situations of police using teargas on workers who were forming protests for their wages as well as filing police cases against random names and arresting these people which shows indications of arbitrary or unlawful arrests during the pandemic. This study also found that there is a general lack of awareness about workers' rights and trade unions among workers.

This study found that garment workers had difficulties providing for themselves and their families and had lower access to food, safe drinking water and sanitation. The findings also were that factory owners did not follow the procedures of layoff, wages and working hours, as well as health and safety procedures, as many workers did not get their due salaries when they lost their job and that employers did not follow the Labour Act 2006 when terminating workers. This report also found that there were gender gaps in wages, as well as gender discrimination in the layoff process. Moreover there are not enough daycare centers for the children of working mothers in the garment sector. This group of women were not called back to work while the garment sector was open during and after the pandemic. Female garment workers also faced sexual harassment when commuting to the workplace during the pandemic when there was no safe transportation. Apart from this, this report also observed that there was domestic violence against some female garment workers during the pandemic by their husbands or husband's family. Furthermore, when they faced domestic violence they were not able access legal help from any legal establishment as well as law enforcement agencies due to the lockdown. Also, findings were that some women did not have decision-making power over their own lives and were not allowed to spend their own money as they wanted to.

Additionally, about the child labour issue this report found that although child labour in the RMG sector is banned by the Government, there is still child labour in this sector during and after the pandemic. Furthermore, due to the loss of their parent's jobs (who are garment workers), children dropped out of school and there were reports of child marriage and lack of nutrition. Lastly, the findings of this report showed that manufacturers of Bangladesh's garments sectors are vulnerable in front of donors. When donors violate the deed or cancel the orders, manufacturers are not taking any action against them, because they thought international donors are more powerful than them.

Challenges for Report Writers

In the report making process, there were some challenges to collect interviewees. It was especially hard to reach garment workers because they were often afraid to speak about their employment and the industry or government agency. There were also problems with getting information from one of

the female interviewees because during the interview, her husband -who is also a garment worker, was trying to control her and her answers not to talk about difficulties in the workplace.

Moreover, another challenge in the making of this report was that there is no specific statistic on how many garment workers faced domestic violence or gender-based discrimination within the family or workplace during the pandemic. Apart from this there were also no statistics on how many children of garment workers dropped out of school or were involved in child marriage during the pandemic. Both of these issues would need further in-depth research.

Recommendations

Recommendation for the government

1. Develop awareness raising program for employers and factory owners about human rights
2. Take stronger legal protections, and greater transparency and accountability from international brands and retailers.
3. Develop funds and take initiatives in order to maintain an adequate standard of living for the health and wellbeing of the garment workers and their families.
4. Ensure freedom of opinion, expression, association, and assembly in order to maintain effective democratic systems because they are a tool for it. In both the law and in practice, respect is shown for dialogue, plurality, tolerance, and understanding.
5. Ensure that no threats or use of violence, or harassment are made against garment workers, members of labour unions, or civil society members who exercise their rights to freedom of expression and association.
6. Ensure, protect, and promote a safe environment for garments workers exercising or seeking to exercise their right to trade unions in accordance with international, regional and national laws.
7. Free the trade unions from the influence of the ruling political parties and let them work diligently to protect the rights of workers.
8. Take initiatives to provide financial support to businesses to prevent bankruptcies and job losses during a crisis.
9. Implement the enforcement mechanisms of labour Act 2006 to create better working conditions, wages, and social protections for workers.
10. Ratify the Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 no 158 to ensure that termination of workers are based on a valid ground.
11. Ensure proper implementation of human rights conventions to prevent gender-based discrimination against women garment workers.

12. Ensure road safety for female garment workers so they are not sexually harassed while commuting to work.
13. Ensure special means of transportation for garment workers to commute to work safely during a crisis.
14. Ratify the ILO convention 190 that addresses the various types of harassment or problems faced by workers during their travel from home to workplace or workplace to home.
15. Create an awareness-raising program for female garment workers about the decision-making process so that women are able to make decisions for their own earnings.
16. Give pressure on the owners to arrange for day care centres in every garment factory.
17. Form a strong inspection committee to monitor child labour in the garment industry.
18. Make early arrangements for the return of children who have drop-out of school.
19. Strongly implement the “Prevention of Child Marriage Act 2017” to prevent child marriage.

Recommendations for factory owners in the garment industry

1. Follow the ILO conventions and Bangladesh labour law to establish workers rights when laying off workers as well as paying wages according to the legal standards.
2. Allow garment workers to access freedom of association and assembly as well as freedom of expression in the workplace.
3. Create funds for workers to be able to maintain a future crisis.
4. Create opportunities to establish active trade unions and develop a safe environment for workers to join such unions without discrimination.
5. Ensure special means of transportation for garment workers to commute to the workplace safely.
6. Develop an awareness raising program to stop the verbal violence and harassment in the workplace.
7. Develop daycare centers for workers with children.
8. Ensure health and safety measures at the workplace according to legal policies.
9. Take initiatives with government to protect women workers against sexual harassment during commuting to the workplace.
10. Take measures to abolish child labor in the garment industry.

Recommendations for international and national NGOs

1. Take initiatives to raise awareness about the garment workers rights in the RMG-sector.
2. Create programs or workshops to raise awareness about garment workers rights for both employers and workers.
3. Put pressure on the government and factory owners for implementation of human rights conventions to prevent gender-based discrimination against women garment workers.
4. Create an awareness-raising program for female garment workers about the decision-making process so that women are able to make decisions for their own earnings.

5. Put pressure on the government to ensure that workers are able to practice their right to peaceful assembly and association as well as freedom of opinion and expression.
6. Put pressure on the government to ensure that there are active trade unions in every garment factory.
7. Put pressure on the government to ensure special means of transportation for garment workers to commute to work safely during a crisis.
8. Put pressure on the government to ratify the ILO convention 190 and ensure road safety for female garment workers so they are not sexually harassed while commuting to work.
9. Develop a strong monitoring system to monitor the violations of worker rights.
10. Develop stronger monitoring systems in order to monitor the garment industry during periods of crisis.

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Appendix:

Questionnaire for Industrial Engineer:

1. What was your working experience with the garment industry during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. What kind of initiatives were taken by the employer during the covid-19 pandemic?
3. Have you received subsidies from the owner when they lay off the job?
4. Have you received any government assistance or support during this time?
5. How did you manage your livelihood when you lost your job or did not receive a full salary during or after the pandemic?
6. have you observed any differences in the consequences for different groups like women, men, and children? If there is a difference then what was that?
7. How do you think the pandemic will affect your and your colleagues' lives in the long run?
8. If there is a new epidemic, what do you expect from the government and garment owners to support the rights and welfare of garment workers?
9. Was there a labour union at your workplace that worked for garment workers' rights during the pandemic? If so, what did they do?

Questionnaire for Garments workers, and a garment supervisor/ member of a labour union:

1. What was your working experience with the garment industry during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. What kind of initiatives were taken by the employer during the covid-19 pandemic?
3. Did you receive full or partial pay during the pandemic? If received a partial salary, did you receive any government aid or subsidy during this time?
4. How has the pandemic affected the health and safety situation in your workplace?



5. Have you observed any differences in the consequences for different groups like women, men, and children? If there is a difference then what was that?
6. How do you think the pandemic will affect your and your colleagues' lives in the long run?
7. If there is a new epidemic, what do you expect from the government and garment owners to support the rights and welfare of garment workers?
8. Was there a labour union at your workplace that worked for the rights of garment workers during the pandemic? If so, what did they do?

Questionnaire for officers in the RMG sector:

1. What was your working experience with the garment industry during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. What kind of initiatives were taken by you as an employer during the covid-19 pandemic?
3. Did you follow the government policy for maintaining health and safety for garment workers during COVID-19?
4. How do you think the pandemic will affect the garment industry in Bangladesh in the long run?
5. Have you seen any changes in the demand for garments in the international market during covid-19?
6. If a new pandemic returns, what do you expect from the government and garment owners to support the rights and welfare of garment workers?

Questionnaire for Bangladesh Representative from INGO:

1. What was your working experience with the garment industry during the Covid-19 pandemic?
2. What role did employers, donors and manufacturers play during the pandemic?
3. What was the role of your INGO during or after the pandemic concerning garment workers' rights?
4. Has your INGO researched or reported the consequences for garment workers during or after the pandemic? If so, then what are the findings?
5. Have you observed any differences in the consequences for different groups like women, men, and children? If there is a difference then what was that?
6. Did gender-based violence increase due to the reason of losing jobs during or after the pandemic?
7. Have you heard of any measures taken by the Bangladesh government to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on garment workers? If they had any action, was it properly implemented?
8. How do you think the pandemic will affect the garment industry in Bangladesh in the long run?
9. If a new pandemic returns, what do you suggest to the government and garment owners to support the rights and welfare of garment workers?

Questionnaire for lawyer/activist, researcher, and Assistant professor:

1. Did you notice any consequences for the garment industry or violations of workers' rights during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What role did employers, donors and manufacturers play during the pandemic?
3. Have you heard of any measures taken by the Government of Bangladesh to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the workers in the garment industry? If there were any policies, were these appropriately implemented during the pandemic?
4. Was there any support from civil society for those who lost their jobs during the pandemic? If so, what was it?
5. Have you observed any differences in the consequences for different groups like women, men, and children? If there is a difference then what was that?
6. Did gender-based violence increase due to the reason of losing jobs during or after the pandemic?
7. How do you think the pandemic will affect the garment industry in Bangladesh in the long run?
8. If a new pandemic returns, what do you suggest to the government and garment owners to support the rights and welfare of garment workers?