

**JOB DISSATISFACTION IN THE BANGLADESH READY-MADE GARMENT
SECTOR- TO WHAT EXTEND HR/IR PRACTICES CAN GROW EXHILARATION
OF RMG WORKERS?**

FERDOUS AHAMED, Ph.D

Faculty of Business, Economics and Law, La Trobe University Australia

Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in General History

University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Master of Business Administration in Marketing and HRM

Northern University, Bangladesh

Master of Commercial Law, La Trobe University, Australia

Post-graduation TESOL (in progress), La Trobe University, Australia

E-mail: Tel:0610433051172

ABSTRACT: *The Readymade Garments (RMG) industry of Bangladesh has been the key export industry and a main source of foreign exchange for the last 25 years. The sector rapidly became important in terms of employment, foreign exchange earnings and its contribution to the national economy. Currently the industry provides employment to about 3 million workers of whom 90% are women (EPB, 2007; BB Report, 2008). Notwithstanding the impressive success of the RMG sector, poor working conditions in the factories and the lack of Social compliance¹ are serious concerns which have, since 2006, led to labour unrest and damage to institutions and properties. Indeed, working conditions in the RMG sector is substandard, and do not meet the Codes of Conducts (Qudus and Uddin, 1993). Recruitment policies are highly informal compared to western standards and there are no written formal contracts and appointment letters (Dasgupta S., 2002). Therefore they are vulnerable to losing their jobs at any time. Garments workers are embarrassed with long working hours or double consecutive shifts, personally unsafe work environment, poor working conditions, wage and gender discrimination (Kumar A., 2006). Long working hours without leave with breaks and compulsory overtime are common problems in this sector. Workers can be fired for refusing overtime. The level of wages is the most significant source of dissatisfaction for workers in the RMG industry. RMG owner often deny that they have the power to improve the wages or conditions of workers. Without full payment or being paid on time, worker often worry and are anxious about the future. This results in low work productivity and job dissatisfaction (Morshed, 2007). On the other hand, prospects of promotion in the RMG industry of Bangladesh are rare. The research suggests that there are many benefits from the introduction of modern HR and IR activities through the establishment of HRM or personnel management unit in the RMG sector. The government needs to pay much more attention to monitoring compliance. A modified Code of Conduct and an effective Compliance Monitoring Cell (CMC) are also required.*

KEYWORDS: ILO, WTO, Gross National Income, BGMEA, RMG, HR and IR, GDP, MFN, TATA, Social compliance, Better Factories Cambodia, Code of Conduct, Compliance Monitoring Cell (CMC)

¹ Compliance is defined as code of conduct, specification and or standard that must be followed by business organizations. Compliance issues are recognised by ILO and WTO mechanisms (Anand, 2006).

INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is an important element in modern industrial commercial organization, government, non-government and private sector as well as manufacturing industry. Job satisfaction, a worker's sense of achievement and success, is directly linked to productivity as well as to personal wellbeing (Source: Harvard Professional Group, 1998). A satisfied worker is more likely to be creative, flexible, innovative and loyal. Unhappy employees are motivated by a fear of job loss, and will not give 100 % of their effort for very long. Though fear is a powerful motivator, it is also a temporary one, and as soon as the threat is lifted, performance will decline. It has been a matter of growing interest for the individuals concerned with quality of working life and organization efficiency. Therefore, job satisfaction is a product of the events and conditions that people experience on their jobs. *If a person's work is interesting, pay is fair, promotional opportunities are good, his or her supervisor is supportive, and co-workers are friendly, then a situational approach leads one to predict worker is satisfied with their job* (Brief, 2002). Job satisfaction benefits the organization includes reduction in complaints and grievances, absenteeism, turnover, and termination; as well as improved punctuality and worker morale. Job satisfaction and occupational success are major factors in personal satisfaction, self-respect, self-esteem, and self-development (quoted in Brown, 1996: p.123). The level of wages is the most significant source of dissatisfaction for workers in the RMG industry. RMG owner often deny that they have the power to improve the wages or conditions of workers. Workers often try to complement their law wages by overtime, which in effect is mandatory practice in Bangladesh RMG factories (Ahamed F., 2011).

METHODOLOGY

There is an extensive literature on the RMG industry in Bangladesh. Key features of the industry are that the garments workers are grossly illiterate; they have very limited knowledge of human rights, working conditions and labour standards. Most of the garments factories owners maintain good links with political parties and maintain a regimented environment in the factory through an alliance between the police force and their own security personnel. In most cases, researchers were prevented from visiting the factory to monitor the working conditions. Consequently the research technique has relied on secondary data, collected through Literature review, Case studies in other countries, Journals, Research articles, Thesis papers, Newspapers, Online news and survey reports, Garments Manufacturing Industries Annual reports, BGMEA Yearly report and Files and Focus group discussions. Apparently secondary data often runs the risk of being journalistic with the potential of being superficial and can be difficult to analyse. However, the research attempts to provide an insight into condition in the industry that avoids this difficulty.

Wage is compensation, usually financial, received by workers in exchange for their labour. Workers in the Bangladesh RMG sector often work long hours for unusually low pay, regardless of laws mandating overtime pay or a minimum wage. The RMG wage level is one of the lowest in the world. Even by South Asian Standards, it remains very low with average hourly wage in Bangladesh being 42%, 50% and 33% at those in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka (BBS, 1999; Absar and Anand, 2001). In contrast with US apparel labour charge per hour (wage and fringe benefits) of US\$ 16.00, the RMG worker receives a minimum wage of US\$ 0.15 (Islam, 2001; Rahman, 2004; Chowdhury, 2006). The unit labour cost of \$0.22 per hour

is the lowest in Asia, behind Cambodia and Nepal (Stuart and Kirsten, 2010). See below the table

Table 1: Inter-country comparative average hourly wage in the RMG industry

No.	Country	Wage/hour (US\$)	No.	Country	Wage/hour(US\$)
1.	Germany	25.00	9.	China	0.5
2.	USA	16.00	10.	Sri Lanka	0.45
3.	Turkey	7.3	11.	Pakistan	0.41
4.	South Korea	5.00	12.	Indonesia	0.40
5.	Mexico	2.40	13.	India	0.35
6.	Thailand	1.75	14.	Cambodia	0.32
7.	Poland	1.40	15.	Nepal	0.30
8.	Vietnam	0.85	16.	Bangladesh	0.15

Source: The Financial Express, Dhaka, 15 June 1995 and VINATEX and Türk Harb-İş Sendikası, May 2005, Cambodian Ministry of Commerce; USITC (2004) and Source : Islam S. (2001). The Textile and clothing Industry of Bangladesh in a changing World Economy; Cambodian Ministry of Commerce, 2007

Table 1 illustrates that the wage level in the RMG industry is low compared to other garment producer countries, while Table 2 compares workers in a similar category in other sectors of the Bangladesh economy (Khandker, 2002). These low wages are caused by a lack of government interest, poor infrastructure, policy makers' and stakeholders' ineffective activities. The main reason for cheap labour is women. Earlier, women were mainly involved in domestic work and earned little. But the RMG industry has given them the opportunity to earn money. Initially the private entrepreneurs started the garment industry on a small scale and the role of the government was limited. As a result, the garment owners will able to fix salaries at a low level and did not provide good working conditions in spite of large profits. In Bangladesh, only about one quarter of the adult population is in the workforce. So there is a considerable supply of labour.

Table 2: Real wage Indices of Industrial Workers (all employees)

BSIC 1986 code	Name of Industry	Indices (base 1986)		
		1989-	1990-91	1991-92
311-312	Food manufacturing	133	124	143
313	Beverage industries	77	61	99
314	Tobacco manufacturing	71	47	48
315	Animal feed manufacturing	80	78	78
321-322	Textile manufacturing	112	99	98
323	Wearing apparel (except footwear)	86	87	84
324	Leather and leather products	96	94	99
325	Leather footwear (except rubber and	44	46	39
326	Ginning, pressing and baling of fibres	104	94	91
331	Wood and wood cork products	102	89	110
332	Wooden furniture and fixture	50	54	59
341	Paper and paper products	107	96	127
342	Printing and publishing	124	89	118
351	Drugs and pharmaceuticals	102	117	120
352	Industrial chemicals	96	81	91
353	Others chemical products	96	53	60
354	Petroleum refining	174	168	197
355	Misc. petroleum, cool products	138	102	109
356	Rubber products	79	75	81
357	Plastic products NEC	119	106	150
361	Pottery, china and earthenware	128	116	83
362	Glass and glass products	115	55	128
369	Non-metallic mineral products	111	91	118
371	Iron and steel basic industries	73	90	88
372	Non-ferrous metal basic industries	81	65	101
381-382	Fabricated metal products	83	84	88
383	Non-electrical machinery	92	101	90
384	Electrical machinery	73	66	66
385	Transport equipment	86	88	88
386	Scientific measuring instruments and	155	125	131
387	Photographic and optical goods	85	89	108
393-394	Photographic and optical goods	89	84	78
Total	All industries	112	96	96

Source: C.M.I., BBS (Rashid M.A, 2006)

According to Rashid (2006), a comparison based on wage data provided by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics shows that the average monthly wage of skilled RMG factory workers is 1.4 to 2 times lower than that of similar factory workers in the textile and other sectors.

The Payment of Wages Act, 1936 has continued in Pakistan and Bangladesh up to the present. A major amendment was made to the Act in 1980. The Act as amended sets minimum wages, in cases where there is no system of collective bargaining, through a board called the Minimum Wages Board, established under the Minimum Wages Ordinance (ILO and BGMEA, 2003; ILO-NATLEX, 2005). However, in practice there is no salary structure

and wage commission for garments industry. On the other hand, the rate of overtime payment is not fixed in any garments factory. They are usually paid only half as much for overtime work as for *normal* hours, unless there are high profits from certain work orders, or high demands to fill new work orders (Kabeer, 2004; Shimu, 1999; Mondal, 2000). Although the government, garments owners and workers have decided on a salary structure, this has had limited application to date. Most of the factories pay the same low wages for the same job (Repon and Ahmed, 2006). Therefore, a moderate and standard wage should be fixed for the RMG sector. Many countries in the world have a commission for setting wages in the private sector. For example, in Japan, pay is determined according to the recommendation of an independent body formed by workers, employers, and public authorities, called the National Personnel Authority. Minimum wages are set but vary from region to region and from industry to industry (ICC, 2007). In El Salvador, a tripartite commission consisting of members of government, labour, and business fixes wages (Ahamed F., 2011 : Case study 1). In contrast, Australian wages are expected to continue rising faster than in most other western countries. A Minimum Wage Panel in Fair Work Australia (FWA) is responsible for setting minimum wages for employees in the national workplace relations system. Fair Work Australia is responsible for reviewing modern award minimum wages as well as making a national minimum wage order for award-free employees each year (FWO Factsheet-Australia, 2010; Maconachie, Glenda, Goodwin and Miles, 2009). In Cambodia, the government, factory association, the labour unions and international institutions have all played an important role in improving wage rates and labour conditions. As a result, the wage increased from US\$27 to US\$40 a month in 1997, to US\$45 a month in 2000, and to US\$58.8 in 2007 (Morshed, 2007). Consequently, the Bangladesh government can form a wage commission comprising government representatives, RMG owners, buyers, TU representatives and other stakeholder groups, to set a fresh minimum wage structure. In addition, the compliance cell should also monitor whether the wage paid complies with that set by the commission (Ahamed F., 2011).

Moreover, **overtime** is a source of dissatisfaction for worker but not always for the same reason. Workers motivation for favouring overtime is financial, since substantial overtime of doubles rates means substantial additions to wages. Overtime payment represents an important, routinely expected compound of earnings, and workers add of this. Without full payment or being paid on time, worker often worry and are anxious about the future. This results in low work productivity and job dissatisfaction (ILO, 2005; Morshed, 2007).

In the RMG sector, workers *never receive their payment regularly and late payment* is common. Payments are delayed routinely by two or three months or more, sometimes held back deliberately to ensure that workers do not leave, or because employers themselves face delays in payment from buyers (Priyo, 2010). Irregular wage payment is a violation of the Labour Law, 1965 which provides that wages in a factory employing less than one thousand persons is to be paid within seven days after the expiry of the wage period (Kibria, 1995; Hossain, 1990; Kabeer, 1991; Majumder, 1998). While employers are no legally obliged to pay monthly wages on the same day each month, there is a legal limit to delays in payment, which many employers violate regularly in the RMG sector. Usually most of the factories do not provide any pay slip. The factories, which provide pay slips, don't have transparency (Priyo, 2010). It is not uncommon for garments workers to be dismissed without payment following several months of devoted work (Absar and Kumar, 2006). Moreover, if any workers leave the job he would have to lose the overtime benefit and sometime wages of the last month (Priyo, 2010). In spite of the circulation of laws by the Government, the majority

of garments workers remain deprived of any legal rights since the enforcement of these laws in small and medium enterprises is poor. However, the government has the responsibility for implementing labour legislation and regulation and for establishing effective monitoring mechanisms. In an example Vietnam has in place an extremely progressive national Labour law and has adopted a new labour code in 2002 which is designed to regulate working conditions and the government is trying to enforce these laws effectively (Nelson, Justice and Skuba, 2006).

There is also *no mechanism for benefit sharing* in RMG industry. There is no bonus payment system for workers as required in the labour laws nor do they have any provision for salary increases to reflect profitability and inflation. Profit sharing involves various incentive plans introduced by a company to provide direct or indirect payments to employees for improved profitability. Workers' entitlement to the company's profit was made compulsory by the Companies Profit Workers' Participation Act, 1968 (Halim & Rahma, 2006: 2007). Those companies which employ 100 workers or which have a paid-up capital of five million fixed assets exceeding 10 million covered by this Act². Under the provision of this Act, as amended in 1985, two funds, namely the Participation Fund and the Welfare Fund created with the company's contribution for the welfare of the workers (Ahamed F., 2011). But in reality garments worker are not entitled to any fringe benefits, including accommodation allowances, health care, emergency funds, or transportation (Muhammad, 2006). However, labour unions, government officials and experts tend to hold the view that such benefit sharing mechanisms are conspicuous by their absence in the garment industry. From this perspective, offering potential workers a profit share opportunity will create better outcomes, as RMG workers would be more willing to work for a company offering a share of the company's profits (Ahamed F., 2011).

Discrimination in the workplace is illegal but the wage gap between genders and other groups is a persistent problem (ILO and BGMEA, 2003; ILO-NATLEX, 2005). *Fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 23.2* (Source: Fact Sheet Australia, 2010). The ILO adopted two conventions that are now listed among the eight core Conventions, Convention No. 100 (1951) on equal remuneration and Convention No. 111 (1958) on non-discrimination in employment and occupation (ILO and BGMEA, 2003; ILO-NATLEX, 2005). *Despite the fact that Bangladesh has ratified ILO Core Labour Conventions 100 and 111 and that the national law prohibits certain forms of discrimination based on gender, the enforcement of these legal instruments is very weak* (ILO, 2004). Legal provisions demonstrate specific rules for employment such as women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life. The Act provides for the payment of equal remuneration to men and women workers and for the prevention of discrimination, on the ground of sex, against women in the matter of employment and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto (Ali, 2003). In general, the level of wages in the RMG sector is low for both males and females. Low wages go a long way in illuminating the attractiveness of Bangladesh readymade garments to foreign buyers. Mostly abundant cheap labour and its low opportunity cost lead to low wage levels, providing a comparative advantage to female labour in particular operations in the RMG production sector. In the

² (irrespective of his or her designation and functions, who draws salary less than taka 9000 per month is deemed a worker under the Act)

RMG sector female workers are considered low-skill, workers (Kabeer, 1991).

Table 3: Gender differentials in Wages in Garment industry

Categories of workers	Male wages Tk/pm	Female wages Tk/pm
Operator	2,254	1,536
Cutting Master	3,935	-
Ironer	1,894	1,106
Sewing helper	1,200	762
Cutting helper	1,512	837
Finishing helper	1,209	1,023
Folder	1,528	1,157

Source: Absar, S.S. (2001). *Problems surrounding wages: the readymade garments sector in Bangladesh, LMD, Volume2, No.7, pp-5*

Table 3 shows the differential in wages between female workers and their male counterparts in the garments sector.

Moreover, *women are generally discriminated* against in terms of access to higher-paid white colour and management positions. They are generally considered only for helpers, machinists, finishing helpers and sewing helpers frequently and as line supervisors and quality controllers. It is rare to find women working as cutting masters, production managers, supervisors, finishing and machine operators, or as in-charges who draw salaries varying from 2-10 times that of the average operator (Absar, 2001). Although Table 3 is 10 years old, the situation has changed little in the intervening period. With respect to wages, gender discrimination is prohibited by Japanese law under the LSL (Art. 4). Female and male employees are subject to the same regulations in terms of overtime, night work and rest days (Ahamed F., 2011: Case study 6). The government of Bangladesh must undertake an effective initiative to eliminate discrimination based on gender, particularly in the RMG sector where 90% of the workers are women (EPB, 2008).

Garments worker often change their jobs because of wage arrears, lay-offs, irregular payment, excessive working hours, forced labour, ill health or harassment from bosses and their security guards (DWP, 2000). Moreover, the prospects of promotion in the RMG sector are rare. Frequently work causes disappointment, produces anxiety and low productivity (Krueger, 1989). Organizations can improve job satisfaction by introducing systems such as flexible work arrangements, training opportunities, safety work environment, job security or continuity; flexible benefits including childcare and exercise facilities, competitive salary and opportunities for promotion (Philip, 1995). In Australia, particularly in the private sector operates flexi-time, standard working week, moderate wages, overtimes rates of either-time and-a-half or double time, offer compensation and others benefits and existing induction and training opportunities. In addition, OHS legislation ensures a safe working environment. Therefore, workers in Australia are more satisfied with their jobs compared to other western countries.

Alternatively, good management has the potential for creating high morale, high productivity, and a sense of purpose and meaning for the organization and its employees (Ahamed F., 2011). The behaviour of the workers is greatly influenced by their treatment and by the behaviour of manager. The manager represents management to the workers. Manager, who wants to maintain a maximum level of job satisfaction in the work force, must be concerned with the working environment and employee's rights and benefits as well as their managerial actions. For example during the early 1800s in UK working and living conditions of worker were very poor. Child workers of five or six years of age were commonly employed. The standard day was thirteen hours long. At that time, Robert Owen was the manager of several cotton mills in Scotland. He became concerned about the evils and inhumanity; he monitored the industrialization of process. He felt that the living machine should be treated with kindness and supplied with sufficient quantities of necessities of life. He therefore, *advocated devoting more attention to the human beings*. He built better houses for the workers, provided company stores where goods were made available cheaply, reduced the working days 10 ½ hours and refused to hire children below the age of ten years. Thus, Owen made all possible efforts to win the confidence of workers by improving working conditions and extending several facilities as result of which he was able to strike a better productivity rate among his employees (Rao and Rao, 1998).

Considering that job satisfaction consists of many factors and these vary from one worker to another and from day to day (Islam, 2001). Apart from the factors mentioned above, job satisfaction is also influenced by the employee's personal characteristics, the manager's personal characteristics and management style, and the nature of work. For example, when allocating work to any employee, managers must consider the employee's backgrounds, work performance, experience, and knowledge on modern technology, flexi-time and other employees' auspicious issues. A good manager always take care of his employees, evaluate their performance, provide benefits and rewards, and ensures a safe work environment (Ahamed F., 2011). This research suggests that HR practices in the RMG sector and the HR manager could play a key role in achieving employees' satisfaction.

Job satisfaction, better productivity, employee efficiency and skill development depend on training. Training transfers' knowledge, develops skills, change attitudes, and imparts a set of organizational and societal values. It also keeps employees up-to-date with new technology and current best practices, resulting in superior job performance (Redfern, 2002). Training is another area where Bangladesh severely lags behind most of its competitors. Training facilities are not common in both public and private organization; few garment owners realize training will increase productivity. However, many organization arranged trainings on periodic basis but frequent trainings are necessary, as garment is business fiercely competitive and require skilled labour force (Source: National Research Council, 2003). The Cambodia garment manufacturers initiated factory based training program with the support of the US and ILO program has resulted in over 20% sustainable efficiency gains as well as higher job satisfaction and earnings (Gunsell and Yana, 2008). Training is the single, most important tool in building a more efficient and effective organization through improved performance. Therefore, a comprehensive training strategy should be well organized and relevant to the organization's needs. In response, the Bangladesh Garments Manufactures and Exporters Association undertook a training program in 1995 sponsored by ILO-UNDP. Only 20 percent of the trainees were females and the rest of the trainees are male (Richthofen, 2002). This training program is not yet widely implemented in the industry. The government

also lacks trained officials to negotiate with international trade. Indeed labour productivity is essentially important in RMG sector stay behind technology developing day by day.

CONCLUSION

Standard working conditions, better wages, minimum working hours, incentives and respect for equality can change into better and more satisfied workers and a lower turnover of staff. In the RMG sector workers constantly feel that they have been largely deprived of the rights and benefits in the existing labour laws, especially the rights and benefits related to issue of appointment letters, job security, provident fund, gratuity and working hours. The reasons is that most of the garment factories do not practices HR and IR issues and have no well-defined HR or Personnel unit. In the RMG sector, workers are controlled by a work supervisor who works on behalf of the factory owner. But the typical work supervisor has no training in leadership, human resource policies, law and legislation, and health and safety policies (Ahamed F., 2011). The human resources or personnel managers are adequately qualified and handle the issues professionally and efficiently. Therefore the research suggests that the RMG sector would benefit by the introduction of modern HR and IR activities through the establishment of HRM or personnel management functions unit in the industry. As a powerful stakeholder, the Bangladesh government can put pressure on garment manufacturing enterprises for the improvement of working conditions through best practice of HRM and IR activities. For example, in 1980 the New Zealand Government introduced an ordinance for reform of public sectors employees called *Good Employer Obligation*. This provided a mandate for all public sector employers to develop and implement policies aimed at promoting best practice HRM practices in the four functional areas of health and safety, training and development, equal employment opportunity (EEO), and recruitment and selection under section of 56 and subsection 2, the State Sector Act 1988 (Edgar, Fiona, Geare and Alan, 2007). In fact, the infrastructure of Bangladesh RMG sector is poor due to a lack of financial support as well as government and policymaker's inadequate attention to this sector. Assuring job satisfaction, over the long-term, requires careful planning and effort both by management and by workers. Therefore, the government, international community and stakeholder should work in synergy in improving working conditions in the RMG sector with the establishment of a HRM unit or Personnel Management unit in each RMG industry.

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