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GARMENT WORKERS IN BANGLADESH

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND HEALTH CONDITION

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Preface

This monograph was an outcome of the research undertaken by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) at the request of the Ministry of Planning, Government of Bangladesh (GOB) in 1990. During the late 1980s, garment factories drew attention not only as earners of foreign exchange, but also due to the rush of women workers walking in groups that one saw in the early morning hours, and after the sunset. Not all could appreciate the advent of such social changes. Complaints were raised, often in news media, on possible labour lawlessness including employment of child labour, exploitation of labour by providing low wages, social insecurity of female workers, etc. Most of these were based on wild guesses rather than direct observation. BIDS was requested to provide data based information on the condition of female workers in the garment industry. The researchers went beyond, and added a gender dimension to it by including both male and female workers in the study.

Besides providing data base on the socio-economic condition of garment workers by gender, the study provides analysis on organisational aspect of the firms, and their impact on workers. There is also information on child labour. It has extensive analyses on economic conditions, social security, and health conditions of the workers. Furthermore, it discusses legal rights of the garment workers as well as opinion of the entrepreneurs regarding labour laws. A particularly interesting dimension is the analysis on the status of the workers within their families, and in the society at large.

Due to unavoidable delays in publishing the study, a postscript has been added to highlight some of the changes in the condition of the garment workers between 1990 and 1995. The latter briefly touches upon some of the emerging issues, recognising that a resurvey would be needed in order to comprehend the changes in these years.

A unique outcome of this research was that it was disseminated both in English and Bangla. This was possible since the two researchers took initiatives to write them at the same time: one author wrote in English and the other in Bangla. This gave the authors opportunities to look into a wide range of issues, and disseminate it within one year of the research in 1991.

This research crucially depended on the cooperation of the owners of firms as well as the workers who shared their personal experience with us. The authors are extremely grateful to them, and also to the twelve Research

Assistants whose untiring effort are greatly appreciated. Thanks are also due to Messrs Mobarak Hossain and Khalilur Rahman for their painstaking typing of the manuscript and to Mr. Abdul Hakim for his valuable support in data processing. The authors are also grateful to the anonymous referees whose comments were extremely helpful. Thanks are also due to the publication section for bringing the monograph out in a short time. The authors have benefited from helpful suggestions on several occasions by Mr. Abu Abdullah, Director General, BIDS. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Dr.Mahabub Hossain, Dr. Abdul Ghafur and Professor S.A.L. Reza for frequent advice and institutional support provided to the study. The study was financed by the Ford Foundation research grant of BIDS; and we express our gratitude for the support. The authors are alone responsible for any shortcomings that remain.

It is hoped that the research will be useful for donors, researchers and policymakers.

BIDS, 1996

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The garment industry of Bangladesh has been expanding rapidly since the late 1970s. During 1977/78, only about one lakh taka was earned by exporting garment, while the figure rose to Taka one core by 1980. In 1989/90, the industry earned Tk. 2,000 crore. It was expected that the export earning will be Tk. 2,700 crore during 1990/91, i.e. about 44.48 per cent of the total export earnings.[1] Jute was once the main export earner for Bangladesh, accounting for 75 per cent of the total export earnings in 1978; this has, however, increasingly been replaced by garments. Garment is now the largest export earner in Bangladesh. But only 25-30 per cent of garment exports is value-added, since the fabrics and accessories were imported under a back-to-back arrangement.

Bangladeshi garments were increasingly becoming visible in the markets of developed countries. For example, Bangladesh was the 9th supplier in 1989 to the US market having a market share of 3 per cent. For the cotton garments, Bangladesh was the 4th supplier, having a market share of 5 per cent. The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) expected that, in 1990/91, Bangladesh will overtake both Mexico and Indonesia, and will become the 7th largest supplier of garments to the US market.[2] Besides the US, Bangladesh also supplied readymade garments to the European Community (EC) market and Canada.

Garment industry not only accounted for the lion share of the export earnings of the country, but also accounted for a large part of the employment. In terms of employment, the garment industry was the fourth largest employing sector in 1990. According to BGMEA, about 350,000 workers were employed alone in the garment industry. Estimates from various sources of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) suggested that the manufacturing sector employed about 2.8 million workers in 1989/90. Of these, only 28 per cent were women. Moreover, women were mostly employed in the small-scale and cottage industries, and about 22 per cent

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[1]This however includes the value of re-exported materials that go as inputs.
[2]BGMEA Bulletin August 23, 1990.

were employed in the medium and large-scale industry. The garment industry alone absorbed about 14 per cent of the female employed in the manufacturing sector and about 65 per cent of those employed in medium and large-scale enterprises. It, thus, deserves special attention given the fact that women were not allowed unhindered access to work in factories because of the religious and social stringencies.

The growth of export-oriented industries in Bangladesh in the last decade had created opportunities for factory jobs for women. This was mainly because the garment industry is quite susceptible to fluctuations in employment as a result of seasonal variations and fashion changes. These characteristics demand a labour market with high flexibility, a market in which labour is easily found when it is needed, and is easily disposed off when not wanted. Very little was known about the socioeconomic conditions of the garment workers. Some studies were carried out on female workers only, but none have shown that Bangladeshi women provide cheaper labour than Bangladeshi men. The availability of a large number of unskilled or semi-skilled women workers for employment has been an important contributing factor in the growth of the garment industry in Bangladesh. Moreover, it is also important to know to what extent female employment in the garment industry has enhanced the welfare and social mobility of women in the low-income group.

In spite of the great contributions made to the national economy, the garment industry in Bangladesh was beset with innumerous complains, such as wide-scale labour lawlessness, including employment of child labour, exploitation of labour by low wage and over work, large-scale social insecurity of female workers, etc. which very often captured the headlines of the country's newsmedia. The recent complaint of the American Federation of Labour Council of Industrial Organization (AFLCIO) against the working conditions of garment workers in Bangladesh also called for an appropriate attention to this issue. The study, therefore, aimed to fill up the gap in our knowledge with regard to the gender-specific socioeconomic conditions of the garment workers. Thus, at the request of the Government of Bangladesh, this study was undertaken by BIDS to investigate into the extent and truthfulness of the complaints reported in the country's newsmedia.

1.2 Objectives and Scope of the Study

The study intended to look into the socioeconomic conditions of the Bangladeshi garment workers, with particular emphasis on the following aspects:

i) Economic conditions, such as wage, regularity in wage payment, recruitment procedures, nature of overtime work, regularity in overtime payment, provision of leave, and gender-differences in earnings;

ii) Social security: (a) at work place, (b) while commuting to work, and (c) at the place of residence;

iii) Work environment and health condition: physical working environment, such as adequate toilet facilities, rest rooms, and related illness;

iv) Status of garment workers in the society at large; and

v) Legal rights of the garment workers.

The study will also look into some of the characteristics of the firms in terms of their size, organisation, locational concentration, and subcontracting. Before analysing the socioeconomic conditions of the garment workers, characteristics of the workers will also been discussed.

1.3 Methodology and Sources of Data

1.3.1 Selection of Firms

The major concentration of the garment factories was within the city limits of Dhaka, Chittagong and Narayanganj, where, respectively, about 76, 21 and 3 per cents of the 750 registered factories were located.[3] It was, therefore, decided to get a proportionate sample from each of these areas. The target was to cover about 5 per cent of the manufacturing firms.[4] The target could not, however, be fully achieved. Due to the rapid political changes during the survey period, and because of the resource and time constraints, we could not conduct the survey in Chittagong. Results of the survey are, therefore, based on 4 per cent of the all these firms; and these

[3]Information obtained from BGMEA in 1990.
[4]Of these, 3.8 per cent, 1.1 per cent and 0.1 per cent would be from Dhaka, Chittagong and Narayanganj respectively.

were surveyed during October-November 1990, covering Dhaka city, Tongi and Rupganj.

A list of the garment manufactures was collected from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). This list had information on employment size for 242 firms located in Dhaka city and Narayanganj. The data on employment and location (address) of the listed firms were computerised and sorted according to the ascending order of their size. The firms were then divided into three groups in accordance to employment size, each consisting of about 81 firms. From each of the groups, 10 firms were drawn randomly. The 30 firms were then contacted. Of them, 13 entrepreneurs refused to let us interview their workers. These firms were again replaced randomly.

There were several reasons why some firms refused to cooperate with us. Our survey focussed on the garment workers, and one refused as the factory had an active union. Some refused as they were doing sub-contract work, which the owners perceived to be illegal. Moreover, due to strikes and curfew, production was hampered, and there were general unwillingness to waste any time which would hamper production further. We had finally covered 30 factories in Dhaka city, and 2 factories outside Dhaka. One of them was in Tongi and another in Rupganj, Narayanganj. To represent 5 per cent of the firms located in Dhaka and Narayanganj, we should have covered 29 factories. During our survey, we observed that many firms were owned by groups of persons or were under one proprietor. Since we took all four factories belonging to one group, our sample included 32 firms.

1.3.2 Selection of Workers

The first group of randomly selected 30 firms gave us an average of 371 workers per firm. We decided to take 5 per cent of the workers of this average figure, i.e. 19 workers from each factory. To have a representative sample, we grouped the workers according to the three sections: cutting, sewing, and finishing. Attempt was made to get a proportionate sample by gender from each section and occupation category. At least one worker was chosen from each occupation category, and we ended up selecting 21 workers from each firm. Later, we added one worker from quality control section to our list. A total of 673 workers from 32 garment factories were interviewed. Of them, 245 workers were male and 428 female. The workers were selected randomly and proportionately to the sex ratio of the garment

industry. The male workers were included in the surveys especially with an intention to measure the gender differential in wages and other facilities provided by the garment factories to the workers.

1.3.3 Data Collection

We administered two structured questionnaires – one for the management of the selected firms and another for the selected workers. Successful completion of the survey crucially depended on the cooperation of the owners of the firms. Twelve research officers were recruited to carry out the interviews. In the beginning, the research officers were sent to the garment factories with a letter. In one factory the management declined to allow interview and also stopped another firm from cooperating with us. In some, the research officers could not pass through the security guard and the locked gates. Based on the experiences gained during the first week, the researchers took a different strategy. The researchers personally made appointments with the Managing Directors who could be contacted after several phone calls and sometimes after 5 p.m. only or on Fridays. The Managing Directors had to be convinced about the purpose of the study. In some instances, it took lot of persuation to convince them. The researchers also participated in filling out the questionnaires to get a good feel of the problems faced by the workers and the management. Each respondent took about 25-30 minutes to complete a questionnaire. The workers were randomly selected from each occupation group by the research officers themselves. This eliminated possible bias which could have been there if they were selected by the factory management. As the interview was conducted within the factory premise, adequate care was taken to ensure that the interview was confidential, and none of the management personnel was around during the interview.

1.3.4 Method of Analysis

In this study, most of the analysis will be done by using bi-variate tables. Multivariate analysis was carried out for estimating earning function. The analysis will be done by gender and job category.

CHAPTER 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIRMS

The firms surveyed had some specific characteristics which are pertinent to issues related to the workers. These are: size distribution of the firms, organization of the firms, locational concentration of the firms, and subcontracting arrangement. In this section, the discussion will be limited to these characteristics.

2.1 Size Distribution of Firms

Since data were not available on all 750 firms, we could take 242 firms available from BGMEA to be representative of the garment industry in Dhaka city. Table 2.1 shows that the highest concentration (50 per cent) of firms was in the employment category, consisting of 250–499 workers, and they employed about 52 per cent of the workers. The second concentration of the firms was in the small size, consisting of 249 workers or less. This group consisted of about 38 per cent of the firms but provided employment to only about 19 per cent of the workers. Lastly, about 12 per cent of the firms were of the size, consisting of 500 or more workers, and they absorbed about 29 per cent of the labour force engaged in the garment industry. The average employment size of a firm for the industry as a whole was 330

TABLE 2.1

SIZE DISTRIBUTION OF THE FIRMS

Employment Size (No. of Workers)	% of Firms	Average Size	Percentage of Workers			% Female
			Male	Female	Total	
Upto 249	38.0	168	20.4	18.9	19.4	69.4
250-449	50.0	342	50.4	52.4	51.8	71.6
500+	12.0	792	29.2	28.7	28.8	70.3
All firms (%)	100.0	330	100.0	100.0	100.0	70.7
All Firms (no.)	242		23,319	56,449	79,768	

Source: Population from which the sample was drawn.

workers, while it was 168, 342 and 729 workers respectively for the small, medium and large size. On an average, about 29 per cent of the workers were male and 71 per cent of the workers were female. This distribution was almost the same in all size-groups of factories. It may be noted here that the proportion reported by BGMEA was 90 per cent females[5] while Table 2.1 shows that it was only 71 per cent. This could be due to the following reasons:

(1) In this list there was one firm, consisting of 100 per cent male workers.

(2) In most of the knit factories the proportion of male workers was much higher, i.e. about 70 per cent. In recent years, there was an increasing demand for the knit garments, thus there was more demand for the male workers.

(3) Quite a number of firms had started to pay workers on a piece-rate basis. Such piece-rate arrangement was likely to be more prevalent for the male workers since the latter were perceived to be more productive than female workers.

(4) Figures given by the official sources could be a guestimate as proper data may not have been maintained.

Moreover, if we assume that all the 750 firms were actually in operation, and if an average firm employed 330 workers, then about 247,500 workers were employed in the garment industry. This figure was also much lower than the official estimate of 350,000 workers.[6]

2.2 Organisation of the Firms

The legal ownership status of all the firms surveyed was private limited. During 1984/85, there was mashroom growth of the garment factories. In January 1985, quota was imposed on import of garments (men's shirts) from Bangladesh by Italy, the UK and France. Then the US followed with quotas on men's and boy's coats (category 334) and men's and boy's non-knit (woven) shirts (category 340). The quota was for 55,000 and 33,000 dozens respectively.[7] Since 1985, the government had restricted the entry of new firms in the garment industry. Thus, firms that were surviving today are those which came into existence prior to 1985. We now find two types of firms: "group" and "non-group." The firms in "group" had either bought

[5]Information obtained from the BGMEA Newsletter (November 1989).

[6]Another recent study, from a survey of 40 firms in Dhaka city, reported an average size consisting of 279 workers. See Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, 'A Study of Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh,' Dhaka 1990 (mimeo).

[7]See Narbye, O.D.K (ed): Bangladesh faces the future, 1989, p. 155.

sick firms and/or have leased the management of the factory where the Chairman (actual owner) got a fixed sum each month, irrespective of whether the firm made profit or not. There was a parent firm within each group which was usually a firm established prior to 1985, whereas the take-over or leased firms were called "sister concerns." When quota was introduced, it was distributed according to performance of the previous year. Most of the firms had sanctioned capacity for basic shirts. Now-a-days, however, there were orders for designer shirts, and since the designer shirts are complicated and needed more time, the actual capacity was lower. While this was so, the quota distribution and bank finance still depended on the initial sanctioned capacity of basic shirts. To successfully use the quota order on time, the firms used their sister concerns. Since the parent firms had control over management, they could distribute their work-order and plan accordingly. It was also easier to monitor the quality if it was under the same management. There were other rationale as well for purchasing sick firms. The latter may have had quota allocations, which the parent firms could avail. Opening the Letter of Credit (L/C) in the name of different firms also allowed for spreading out risk. The entrepreneur could also diversify their products and use the machine and labour more efficiently, a case of horizontal integration. Alternatively, specialization could be achieved through vertically integrating the processes across firms. For example, in two factories of our sample, we found that all the finishing work of the sister concerns was done in the parent firm. The accounts were, however, separately maintained for each firm to evade tax.

Table 2.2 shows the distribution of the sample firms according to the size of groups they belonged to (third column). The last column provide the frequency distribution which suggests that around 20.7 per cent of the entrepreneurs owned 39.6 per cent of the firms.

TABLE 2.2

DISTRIBUTION OF FIRMS BY THE NUMBER OF FIRMS, OWNED

No. of Firms Owned	No. of Sample Firm	%	Hypothetical Distribution*
1	11	34.4	19.0
2	12	37.5	41.4
3	3	9.4	15.5
4	2	12.5	13.8
5+(6)	4(1)	12.5	10.3
	32(29)	100	100

Note: *Since four firms of the same "group" were selected, we consider one firm in the row corresponding to 5+. Assuming the latter group to have 6 firms, the hypothetical distribution has been calculated.

Table 2.3 shows that 37 per cent of the firms were non-quota, and all products of 22 per cent of the firms were marketed through a quota arrangement. The rest of the firms availed both the quota and non-quota. Relatively, the medium-sized firms were more diversified and they were less dependent on the quota. The small 100 per cent quota firms were mostly those firms which had changed hands as they were sick. Large firms with 100 per cent quota were older firms.

TABLE 2.3

DISTRIBUTION OF FIRMS BY EMPLOYMENT SIZE AND QUOTA STATUS

(row percentage)

Employment (No. of Workers)	No. of Firm	Non-Quota (%)	Quota (%)	Mixed (%)
Upto 249	11	36.4	27.3	36.3
250-499	14	42.8	14.3	42.9
500+	7	28.6	28.6	42.8
All firms	32	37.5	21.9	40.6

The non-quota medium-sized firms were mostly the non-group firms. They produced mostly for the EU countries. They usually sought orders from the buying houses and sometimes directly. There was, however, the risk of rejection if orders were taken directly. Firms, thus, prefered to get orders through the buying houses.

2.3 Locational Concentration

It was probably a unique characteristic to see that the city of Dhaka, Chittagong and Narayanganj had the same characteristics of Export Processing Zone (EPZ) of other countries. Even within Dhaka city, one observed that the neon lights of the garment factories were getting concentrated in certain areas of the city and around the market places. Factories were now being located in the same building or next to one another. There was concentration in Mirpur, Rampura, Malibagh, Kawran Bazar, Banani, Airport Road, Mohakhali, Tejgoan, Elephant Road, Mohammadpur, and Shamoly. Some firms reported that they had to move from Mirpur as the *mastans* (local touts) disturbed them too much. Moreover, over the years, many buildings were being built especially for the garment factories with proper ventilation, toilet facilities, etc. Thus, when the period of contract expired, the owners prefered to move to an area which had better transport facilities, proper buildings and less hassle of *mastans*.

When a firm shifted location, the workers usually moved with it to the new location. Many owners reported that there was scarcity of skilled labourers. Hence, locating an enterprise beside other firms may be advantageous since one could bid away workers from other firms. During the peak season, which was usually from October to January for firms availing the quota, there was an excess demand for labour. As the workers were mobile, they went to the firms who offered higher wages. There appeared to be no explicit collusion among the owners for not hiring each other's workers; so competition among the firms had bid up the wages to some extent.

Locational concentration of the firms facilitated the workers in finding accomodation and commuting to and from work. Many pucca buildings with tin shed were increasingly being made available for rent in neighbourhoods surrounding such concentrations. Workers employed in different garment factories often lived in the same mess. Such cohabitation facilitated the flow of information about wages and other facilities offered in nearby garment factories. The workers also felt secured while commuting to and from work, if they did so in groups.

In our survey we selected the firms randomly. The thana-wise location of these firms is shown in Table 2.4. Major concentrations were found to be in Tejgoan and Mirpur (18.8 per cent each), followed by Motijheel (15.6 per cent) and Gulshan (12.5 per cent). About 65 per cent of our sampled firms were concentrated in these four thanas.

TABLE 2.4

LOCATIONAL CONCENTRATION OF FACTORIES

Location	No. of Firm	%	No. of Workers Interviewed[1]
Tejgoan	6	18.8	127
Gulshan	4	12.5	85
Motijheel	5	15.6	108
Mirpur	6	18.8	123
Mohammadpur	3	9.4	50
Dhanmondi	3	9.4	63
Ramna	1	3.1	30
Tongi	1	3.1	22
Rupganj	1	3.1	22
Others (Lalbagh and Sutrapur)	2	6.2	43
All firms	32	100	673

Note: 1. Two of the female workers did not know their monthly pay, hence were dropped in later analysis.

Moreover, our survey data showed that about 56 per cent of the sampled firms were located in the commercial area, 25 per cent in the residential area and 19 per cent in the industrial area. The highest concentration in commercial area was of small and large firms, while the medium sized firms were located more in the residential and commercial areas (Table 2.5).

TABLE 2.5

DISTRIBUTION OF FIRMS BY TYPES OF LOCATION AND FIRM SIZE

(row percentage)

Employment Size (no. of Workers)	Total No. of Firms	Residential Area	Commercial Area	Industrial Area
0-249	11	27.3	54.5	18.2
250-499	14	35.7	35.7	28.6
500+	7	-	100.0	-
All firms	32	25.0	56.3	18.7

2.4 Subcontracting

Subcontracting was widely practised in the garment industry. Broadly, there were two rationale for subcontracting. Among horizontally placed firms, discrepency between capacity and orders to be met at the individual firm level may be reduced at the industry level through subcontracting. In the case of vertically placed firms, since orders for final output were placed to the principal firms, the latter may subcontract out some of the production processes. In both the cases, subcontracting facilitated better labour management and more effective use of resources. The general trend in the Bangladesh garment industry was to subcontract out the whole process (cutting, sewing, and finishing) to another firm. The responsibility of quality control lied with the principal firm, i.e. the firm that gave the subcontract. Sometime it was the buyers who fixed up the subcontractor. Thus, subcontracting was sometimes found between firms that worked for the same buyer or buying houses. In the case of orders from the buying houses, the latter were responsible for quality control too. The performances were, however, reported in the name of the principal firm. It was reported by one management that two-fifths of the orders were done through subcontracting. In general, we found the following types of subcontracting in the garment industry (Table 2.6):

TABLE 2.6

DISTRIBUTION OF THE FIRMS BY TYPE OF SUBCONTRACTING

(row percentage)

Employment Size (no. of workers)	Total No.	Subcontract-out Only	Subcontract-in Only	Both Ways	None
Upto 249	11	27.3	18.2	36.3	18.2
250-449	14	14.3	14.3	14.3	57.1
500+	7	14.3	28.6	-	57.1
All Firms	32	18.8	18.8	18.8	43.6

(a) Firms that only subcontracted-out work to other firms were usually those who availed 100 per cent quota. There were 18.8 per cent of the firms in our sample belonging to this group. These firms were usually those which were a parent firm of a group or a non-group firm. These firms usually allowed overtime on a regular basis, and out-migration of workers were lower.

(b) Firms that subcontracted both ways were firms which had a small amount of quota, usually free quota. Thus, during the peak quota period, they subcontracted-out work, while in the slack period they subcontracted-in work. About 18.8 per cent of our sample belonged to this group. They usually succeeded in providing regular work to their workers.

(c) Firms that only subcontracted-in work throughout the year constituted 18.8 per cent of our sample. They were usually subsidiary firms of the groups usually called sister concern. These firms were either bought as sick firms from the bank or were leased. It was likely that the working conditions of these firms were fairly poor as they had to cover all costs from “cutting and making”. Wages in such firms were likely to be low. Moreover, irregularity in the payment of wages and overtime were expected to be more in these firms. This was partly due to the fact that the payment for the subcontract work was not regular and sometimes delayed by two to three months.

(d) Firms that did not engage in any subcontract work throughout the year accounted for 43.6 per cent of our sample. This group consisted of firms who produced for either 100 per cent quota or for 100 per cent non-quota. Their work schedule was very organised, and work was available throughout the year. If they sought more order, they preferred to expand their factory rather than subcontract-out work. These firms usually belonged to “group”, and they did subcontract for group member firms only.

Subcontracting among the vertically placed firms was more commonly observed in the case of finishing. About four per cent of the firms reported that they did not have any finishing section. If the firm belonged to a group, the aforesaid activity was carried out by the parent firm. In the case of a non-group firm, the work was contracted out to a contractor who provided the service of finishing. One guestimate suggests that about 25 finishing firms exist in Dhaka city each of whom engaged about 20-25 persons for finishing service. The finishing work consisted of ironing, folding and packaging. The contractor was responsible for delivering the work on time. Thus, the entrepreneur did not have to face the problem of nightwork which was usually common for the finishing section.

One firm reported that for woven production, some women did the stitching work in their residence. They used to collect the cut cloth from the factory, and only stitching was done in their house employing 10-15 female workers. The products were later brought back to the factory for finishing. Thus, the firm saved their overhead cost on such items as factory space, machine, supervision and electricity. This service was, however, no longer required, since the firm was now producing knit wear.

Another interesting aspect was the fact that some entrepreneurs used firms located at Chittagong to do the subcontracting work. By doing so, they saved their inland transport cost and also saved the transportation time.

There were several other cases of subcontracting which more appropriately may be identified as special types of labour arrangement. In almost all cases of knit work, we found that the work was contracted out to contractors. The latter took the responsibility of finishing the work by a certain date. The principal firm was free from the responsibility of supervision and managing workers. The contractor got the required number of workers for the task who were paid on a piece-rate basis. The workers worked within the factory premise. The quality was ensured by the factory owner. It has been reported by one firm that the contractor took as much as 40 per cent of the labour cost.

The concentration of firms in certain location, merger of firms, and subcontracting arrangements have stabilised wages across firms and improved working condition in the garment industry.

CHAPTER 3

PROFILE OF THE GARMENT WORKERS

The characteristics of the workers, such as age, education, marital status, and previous occupation, can be looked at from different perspectives. Such characteristics may vary across gender, job categories, and even across resident status of the workers (i.e. by migrant or non-migrant workers). These are presented in this chapter along with a separate focus on child labour in the garment industry.

3.1 Characteristics of the Workers by Gender

As indicated in Table 3.1, the proportion of female in our sample was 64 per cent. To some extent, men were over-represented in our sample. This should be borne in mind in interpreting some of the findings relating to averages for the overall workforce (e.g. their wages and earnings). It should not, however, affect the findings related to male and female workers separately.

3.1.1 Age Distribution

Majority of the workforce in the garment factories were found to be young: about 73 per cent of all workers were 24 years or younger (Table 3.1). The female workers on the whole tended to be younger, and the differences in the age structure between the sexes were also pronounced. The extent of child labour, i.e. age 10-14 years, was almost double for female than male. About 45 per cent of the female workers were aged less than 20 years, while for male, the corresponding figure was only 26 per cent. The reverse was, however, the case for age 25 years and above.

Of the total 671 workers, about 58 per cent were unmarried and 42 per cent were “ever-married.” Of the ever-married workers, 88 per cent were currently married. The proportion of unmarried workers was higher for males (66 per cent) than for females (54 per cent). It is interesting to note that, of the female ever-married workers, 84 per cent were currently married. It is usually said that women join the labour force after getting divorced, separated, or widowed. But, our sample survey, of the 426 female workers, 2.1 per cent were widowed, 3.5 per cent were divorced, and 1.9 per cent were abandoned/separated. The fact that more currently married

women were employed implies that if job was available, the “purdah” and cultural factors were no longer a hindrance, and hence the demand factors dominated.

TABLE 3.1

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORKERS BY GENDER

(column percentage)

Characteristics	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Age group (years)						
10-14	19	7.7	70	16.3	89	13.2
15-19	45	18.4	169	39.5	214	31.8
20-24	82	33.5	103	24.1	185	27.5
25-29	54	22.0	43	10.5	97	14.7
30-34	31	12.7	26	6.1	57	8.5
35-39	9	3.7	14	3.3	23	3.4
40-65	5	2.0	1	0.2	6	0.9
Average age	24		19		21	
Marital Status						
Unmarried	161	65.7	231	54.2	392	58.7
Currently married	82	33.5	163	38.3	247	36.8
Widow			9	2.1	9	1.3
Divorced	1	0.4	15	3.5	16	2.4
Abandoned	-	-	2	0.5	2	0.3
Separated	1	0.4	6	1.4	7	1.0
Education						
Can sign at best	24	9.8	125	29.3	149	22.2
Up to class V	35	14.3	147	34.5	183	27.1
Class VI to Class X	97	39.6	116	27.2	213	31.7
Above class X	89	36.3	36	8.5	126	18.6
Don’t know	-	-	1	0.2	1	0.1
No information	-	-	1	0.2	1	0.1
Previous occupation						
Previously employed	70	28.6	31	7.2	101	15.1
Sewing/Tailoring	14	5.7	12	2.8	26	3.9
Maid servant	3	1.2	10	2.3	13	1.9
Labourer	23	9.4	6	1.4	29	4.3
Small business	30	12.2	3	0.7	33	4.9
Previously not employed	175	71.4	395	92.7	570	84.9
Student	81	33.1	102	23.9	183	27.3
Household work	38	15.5	209	49.1	247	36.8
Others	27	11.0	12	2.8	39	5.8
No information	29	11.8	72	16.9	101	15.1
Origin						
Rural		82.9		69.4		74.3
Urban		17.1		30.6		25.7
Number of workers	245		426		671	

Participation of women in the labour force is often claimed to have negative impact on their reproductive behaviour, and when counterposed, women in their reproductive age were less expected to participate in the labour force. Distribution of the female workers by marital status and age in Table 3.2 suggests that although less percentage of the female workers was married, they were of prime reproductive age groups. The former proposition of negative impact on reproductive behaviour is quite apparent in findings presented in Table 3.3. At an aggregate level, the average number of children per married women worker was only 1.2. It is worth noting that 38.8 per cent of the married women workers did not yet have any children. Even for the age group 20-24 years, 41.7 per cent of women were yet to have children.

TABLE 3.2

DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE WORKERS BY MARITAL STATUS AND AGE

(column percentage)

Age Group (years)	Marital status					Total
	Unmarried	Currently Married	Widow	Divorced	Abandoned/ Seperated	
10-14	29.0	1.8	-	-	-	16.4
15-19	56.7	18.8	-	37.3	25.0	39.5
20-24	12.2	36.4	33.3	50.3	50.0	24.0
25-29	1.7	21.2	33.3	13.3	12.5	10.5
30-34	0.4	13.3	22.2	-	12.5	6.1
35+	-	8.5	11.2	-	-	3.5
All age (row %)	54.0	38.5	2.1	3.5	1.9	100

TABLE 3.3

CHILD BEARING BY MARRIED WOMEN WORKERS

Age Group (years)	Average No. of Children per Worker	% of Women with no Children
10-14	0	100.0
15-19	0.2	77.4
20-24	0.9	41.7
25-29	1.7	11.4
30-34	1.3	27.3
35 and above	2.7	14.3
All age	1.2	38.8

3.1.2 Education Level

Of the total workers, 78 per cent were found to be literate and only 22 per cent illiterate, i.e. can at best sign their names (Table 3.1). There, however, existed a significant difference between the education levels of the male and female workers. Only 10 per cent of the male workers were illiterate, while for female it was 30 per cent. About 75 per cent of the male workers had education beyond primary level, while for female it was only 36 per cent. While the current figures reflected low female enrolments in schools beyond primary level, there was demand by the garment industry for educated female from rural areas. This, coupled with the fact that education up to class VIII has been made free for girls in the Fourth Five-Year Plan (FFYP), would probably induce parents to send their daughters to school beyond primary level.

3.1.3 Previous Work Experience

Only 15 per cent of all the workers interviewed reported to have previous work experience. Relatively, a greater number of men had previous work experience (29 per cent) than that of women (7 per cent). They were engaged mostly in small business and as labourers. Of the female workers with past work experience, 39 per cent were previously engaged in sewing/tailoring and 32 per cent had worked as house maids. This implied that 2.3 per cent of the female workers engaged in the garment industry were drawn from the household service sector (i.e. maids). It is, however, to be noted that 70 per cent of the female garment workers were from rural areas which was also the source of domestic maid. Thus, as increasingly more women are gaining entrance into the garment factories, the supply of domestic maid is likely to have reduced. From Table 3.1 we note that about 27 per cent of the total workers were dropouts from school; 33 per cent of the male workers and 24 per cent of the female workers were previously students. It is possible that due to economic pressure, parents cannot continue to send their children to school. Most of the workers had left schooling after Class V.

Thus, the overriding impression about the workers in the garment factories was that they were young: the female workers were younger than the male workers. Most of the male and female workers were single. They were mostly literate; female workers having education up to primary level, while most male workers had education beyond primary level. The policy of the firms was to draw mostly from those who were previously not

employed; thus, they operate at relatively a low cost segment of the labour market.

3.2 Characteristics of the Workers by Occupation

The characteristics of the workers may also vary across job categories. Table 3.4 shows the mean age of the workers across job categories. There was a concentration of young workers (below mean age of 21) in job categories like sewing helpers and finishing helpers. Job categories in which older workers were employed were in positions like quality controller, cutting master/cutter, and supervisors: mean age ranging between 26 and 28 years.

TABLE 3.4

MEAN AGE OF WORKERS

Job Category	Mean Age (years)
Quality Controller	60
Cutting Master/Cutter	26
Cutting Helper	22
Supervisor	28
Operator	21
Sewing Helper	16
Ironman	22
Folding	21
Finishing Helper	19
All Categories	21

Table 3.5 shows that 34 per cent of the workers were sewing operators, while 24 per cent were sewing helpers. Atleast one sewing helper was needed to help two operators. Another 8 per cent of the workers were found to be working as sewing supervisor. Thus, there was one supervisor for 4-5 operators. Moreover, atleast 37 per cent of the sewing helpers and 24 per cent of the finishing helpers were child labour. There was no child labour working as quality controller, cutting master/cutter, or supervisors. These jobs required one to be atleast 20 years of age. Table 3.4 shows that very few were beyond age of 35 years in job category like cutting master/cutter, ironman, folding and finishing helper. Thus, we note that in the finishing section, the age group concentration was between 20 and 35 years. This was the highly productive age. Most of these workers were likely to have high turnover rates and some years of experience on the job.

TABLE 3.5

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GARMENT WORKERS BY OCCUPATION CATEGORY

(column percentage)

Characteristics	Occupation Category									Total
	Quality Control	Cutting Master/ Cutter	Cutting Helper	Sewing Supervisor	Sewing Operator	Sewing Helper	Iron-man	Fol-ding	Fini-shing Helper	
Age group (years)										
10-14	-	-	8.1	-	4.8	36.6	2.8	3.6	24.3	13.3
15-19	15.0	-	32.4	3.6	37.7	41.6	33.3	23.6	35.8	31.9
20-24	30.0	38.5	32.4	20.0	33.8	14.3	33.3	43.6	18.9	27.6
25-29	25.0	26.9	10.8	32.7	16.2	3.1	16.7	14.5	13.2	14.5
30-34	5.0	30.8	8.1	30.9	4.4	2.5	11.1	14.5	3.8	8.5
33-39	20.00	3.8	8.1	7.3	2.2	1.9	2.8	-	3.8	3.4
40-65	5.0	-	-	5.5	0.9	-	-	-	-	0.9
Education										
Can sign at best	5.0	-	5.4	-	17.5	39.1	39.6	21.8	37.7	22.2
Up to Class V	-	-	10.8	-	33.3	39.8	30.6	18.2	32.1	27.1
Class VI – X	20.00	50.00	45.9	25.5	41.2	15.5	30.6	45.5	18.9	31.7
Above Class X	75.0	50.0	37.8	74.5	7.9	4.3	8.3	14.5	11.3	18.6
No information	-	-	-	-	-	1.2	-	-	-	0.2

(Contd.)

TABLE 3.5 *(contd.)*

Characteristics	Occupation Category									Total
	Quality Control	Cutting Master/ Cutter	Cutting Helper	Sewing Supervisor	Seweing Operater	Sewing Helper	Iron-man	Fol-ding	Fini-shing Helper	
Stay in City										
Urban origin	25.0	7.7	18.9	25.5	28.9	28.0	16.7	27.3	24.5	25.8
Up to 1 year	10.0	-	32.4	7.3	8.8	29.8	22.2	9.1	37.7	17.7
2-3 year	15.0	15.4	16.2	5.5	14.5	22.4	13.9	23.6	20.8	17.0
4-5 year	20.0	7.7	16.2	10.9	15.4	6.2	16.7	16.4	5.7	12.1
6-10 year	15.0	57.7	8.1	34.5	23.7	7.5	25.0	18.2	9.4	19.4
10+	15.0	11.5	8.1	16.4	8.8	6.2	5.6	5.5	1.9	8.0
Previous Occupation										
Sewing/Talloring	10.0	3.8	2.7	7.3	3.9	3.7	2.8	-	3.8	3.9
Maid Servant	-	-	-	1.8	1.3	3.9	5.6	-	1.9	1.9
Labourer	-	11.5	8.1	3.6	1.3	4.3	13.9	5.5	5.7	4.3
Small Business	5.0	11.5	8.1	10.9	2.6	1.2	16.7	7.3	3.8	4.9
Student	45.0	57.7	37.8	27.3	28.1	21.7	8.3	30.9	20.8	27.3
Household work	20.0	11.5	16.2	23.6	46.5	42.2	36.1	30.9	32.1	36.8
Others	15.0	3.8	13.5	7.3	4.8	3.7	5.6	5.5	7.5	5.8
No Information	5.0		13.5	18.2	11.4	19.3	11.1	20.0	24.5	15.1
Total No.	20	26	37	55	228	161	36	55	53	671
Row %	3.0	3.9	5.5	8.2	34.0	24.0	5.4	8.2	7.9	100
% Female	50.0	3.8	16.2	46.4	83.0	83.0	13.9	38.2	67.9	63.5

It is important to note from Table 3.5 that about one-third of the workers in job categories belonging to sewing helpers, ironman and finishing helpers had education only up to Class V, and about one-third were illiterate. Almost all the workers in job category, like cutting master/cutter, supervisor and quality controller, had education above Class VI. This implies that education was an important screening devise for position like cutting master/cutter, supervisor or quality controller. Moreover, we note that females dominated in jobs like sewing helper and finishing helper and males in categories like cutting master/cutter, supervisor and quality controller. Thus, we see that females were dominant in jobs requiring lower level of education, while men dominated in those requiring higher level of education. This shows that females with higher education were not taking up jobs at the garment industry as such jobs were not considered prestigious by the society. The factories that were surveyed complained that they were unable to find women for quality control positions, although women were preferred for these positions.

More than 75 per cent of the workers were unmarried in job categories like cutting helper, sewing helper and finishing helper (Table 3.5). On the other hand, more than 45 per cent of the workers were currently married in job categories like quality controller, cutting master/cutter and supervisors. Of the operators, about 50 per cent were unmarried, and 50 per cent were ever-married. In the case of ironman and folding, about 55-60 per cent of the workers were unmarried and the rest were married. In male dominated jobs like cutting helper, ironman and folding we found a large proportion of them to be unmarried. Similarly, a large proportion of females in jobs like sewing helper and finishing helper were likely to be unmarried. Married women were dominant in position like operators while married men were likely to be engaged as quality controller, cutting master/cutter or supervisors.

Less than 25 per cent of the workers in job categories like cutting master/cutter, cutting helper and ironman were of urban origin, while in the rest at least 25 per cent were of urban origin (Table 3.5). About 30 per cent of the workers were recent migrant from the rural to urban areas (i.e. they have been in the city for a year or less) in jobs like cutting helper, sewing helper and finishing helper. On the other hand, more than 30 per cent of the workers who were holding jobs, such as quality controller, cutting master/cutter, supervisor, operators and ironman, had been living in the city for more than 2 years.

With regard to previous occupation, we note from Table 3.5 that about 10 per cent of the workers holding position of operator and sewing helpers had previous job experience prior to joining the garment industry. The operators were experienced in tailoring/sewing or small business, while the sewing helpers were previously engaged as labourers, maid servant, or sewing/ tailoring. Hence, for 90 per cent of these workers (operators and sewing helpers), job at the garment industry was their first job outside home. This implied that the entrepreneurs prefered untrained and inexperienced persons for these job categories. Only 25 per cent of the workers engaged as cutting master, supervisors and ironman had previous job experience. Most of them were previously managing small business or working as labourer.

As mentioned earlier, about 27 per cent of the workers were previously students. It is very important to know what positions they were presently holding in their jobs. About 30 per cent of the workers who were dropout from school prior to joining the garment industry were holding the positions of either quality controller, cutting master/cutter, cutting helper or working in folding section. On the other hand, more than 30 per cent of those working as sewing operator, sewing helper, ironman or finishing helper were previously doing household work. The latter jobs were mostly female dominated. Hence, the demand for labourers by the garment industry has drawn a significant number of women/men in to the labour force who were previously not employed.

3.3 Characteristics of Migrant and Non-migrant Workers

3.3.1 Types of Migration

In our survey, we have recorded the "current" place of residence of the workers and the duration of stay at the current place of residence. A person living in Dhaka city since birth was considered as resident of Dhaka city. The rest were considered as migrant workers, broadly grouped into two: temporary migrants and long-term migrants. They are further described below.

Temporary migrants consisted of those who changed the place of activity but not their "usual" residence. They are "short-term migrants." The essence of this type of mobility was that a move was made for a short period with the intention of returning to the place of usual residence. An important group of such migrants consists of workers who worked on contract and

combined activities in several places according to seasonal labour requirements and the availability of seasonal work opportunities. In our study, such workers came from Narayanganj, Mymensingh, and Pabna. They were found to be more engaged in the production of knit wear.

Another category of "temporary migrants" consisted of commuters who moved to take up a specific activity in a garment factory, but who retained his/her residence elsewhere. If a worker in Dhaka city resided outside Dhaka city, we considered him/her to be in this category of commuters. We found that workers were commuting from Joydevpur and Narayanganj in three factories. These factories provided transport facilities to them, at least for pick up in the morning and charged a subsidised rate for transportation. As the worker resides elsewhere, his/her family life was not disrupted and furthermore, it did not put pressure on housing, sanitation and other urban facilities. The phenomenon of commuting also involved flow of income and goods from Dhaka city to other areas and vice versa. Of the 671 workers, about 3.1 per cent were found to be commuter migrants; 2.6 per cent of the female workers and 4.1 per cent of the male workers. Most of the female commuters were sewing operators or sewing helpers. The men were mostly supervisors or finishing helpers.

In contrast to the above, the long-term migrant category consisted of those who, in moving, changed both their "usual" residence and their place of activity for a prolonged period. This group was most commonly regarded as migrants. Such people usually retained some link with their "home" area. About 72 per cent of the sampled workers were long-term migrants; 68 per cent of the female workers and 80 per cent of the male workers.

The non-migrants were those who had never moved nor had changed either the place of residence or activity within a specified period (ten years) or since birth. About 26 per cent of the sampled workers were of urban origin; 31 per cent of the female workers and 17 per cent of the male workers.

3.3.2 Migration Flows

It will be interesting to distinguish between individual migration flows consisting of individuals or groups of individuals, and those consisting predominantly of family migration. In the case of family migrant, the worker was likely to feel secured socially. In the garment industry it was usually the individual migrants who found it difficult to adjust with the

urban environment and hence were socially less secured. About 26 per cent of the migrant workers were individual migrants. Individual migration among the female migrant workers was much less (17 per cent) than that of the male migrant workers (40 per cent). Most of these workers were unmarried and lived in mess or with relatives.

3.3.3 Selectivity of Migration

Studies on migration have found that the propensity to migrate usually varied due to variations in age, sex and education. In this study, we found that migrants aged 15 to 30 years dominated for both male and female workers (Table 3.6). This was due to the fact that the young ones had a higher propensity to migrate because the return on investment in human capital declined with increase in age, while the older people tended to have developed stronger attachments to their property and family.

The selectivity of migrants was clearly evident from our survey. Table 3.6 shows that the process of in-migration of the garment workers, working in Dhaka city, was highly selective. Of the in-migrants, 40.8 per cent were male and 59.2 per cent female. Moreover, of the male migrants, 57.2 per cent belonged to the age group 20-29 years, while 62.7 per cent of the females belonged to the age group 15-24 years. Furthermore, 54.9 per cent of the male migrants and 64.5 per cent of female migrants were unmarried. This has a great significance in a society like Bangladesh where females aged above 12 years were often expected to observe *purdah*. It showed that there has definitely been a cultural change with the advent of the garment industry. It is also interesting to note that the education level of the migrants, especially the females, was considerably higher than that for Bangladeshi female in general. Thus, our study showed that the migrants were relatively young and better educated than the rural population in general.

Why do the more educated have a higher propensity to migrate? It is largely because they are usually more aware of outside opportunities and are better able to benefit from them. They can also earn relatively higher incomes in urban areas compared to that of the rural areas.

Motives for migration were somewhat different for women because of the social constraints on their mobility and their work. Prior to 1980, economic and educational reasons were less important, and family reasons were more important for women than for men. But there has been a dramatic change with the growth of the garment industry; economic reasons are becoming at least as important as family reasons.

TABLE 3.6

SELECTIVITY OF MIGRATION

(column percentage)

Characteristics	Migrant			Non-migrant		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Age group (years)						
10-14	6.4	18.0	13.3	14.3	13.0	13.3
15-19	17.7	37.6	29.5	21.4	44.3	38.7
20-24	32.5	25.1	28.1	38.1	22.1	26.0
25-29	24.7	9.8	15.9	9.5	10.7	10.4
30-34	13.8	5.4	8.8	7.1	7.6	7.5
35-39	3.4	3.7	3.6	4.8	2.3	2.9
40-44	1.5	0.4	0.8	-	-	-
45-65	-	-	-	4.8	-	1.2
Education						
Can sign at least	10.3	31.5	22.9	7.2	24.5	20.3
Up to class V	12.3	32.2	24.1	23.8	39.7	35.8
Class VI to Class X	37.9	26.4	31.1	47.6	29.0	33.5
Above class X	39.5	9.1	21.5	21.4	6.9	10.4
Don’t know	-	0.4	0.2	-	-	-
No information	-	0.4	0.2	-	-	-
Marital status						
Currently married	34.5	37.3	36.1	28.6	40.5	37.6
Unmarried	64.5	54.9	58.8	71.4	52.7	57.2
Widow	-	1.7	1.0	-	3.1	2.3
Divorced/ Separated	1.0	6.1	4.1	-	3.7	2.9
Total no. of workers	203	295	498	42	131	173

Thus, we see that the garment industry was mobilising young girls with some years of schooling from rural areas. These girls were new to industrial work, coming from a background of small family business or subsistence farming where the rythmn of work was organised around the household. They were employed because they were “easy to control,” “pleasant” and “do not talk back.”

3.4 Characteristics of Child Labour

Recently, the employment of child labour in the garment industry has become an important issue. In our survey of the garment workers, we did not get any workers aged less than 10 years. It should be mentioned here

that in Bangladesh, a person aged 10 years and above was considered to be in the working population.[8] In our survey we found that 13.2 per cent of the total workers were child labourers (i.e. age 10-14). Of the male workers, about 8 per cent were child labourers and of the female workers 16 per cent were child labourers. Interestingly, about 45 per cent of the child workers were concentrated in only 6 factories, i.e. in 18.7 per cent of the factories surveyed. In rest of the factories, child labour accounted for about 10 per cent of the work force. According to the 1985/86 Labour Force Survey, the extent of child labour was 9 per cent in Bangladesh.

Table 3.7 shows that about 75 per cent of the child labourers had come from rural areas. The proportion of female child migrants from rural to city was twice than that of males. About 25 per cent of the child workers had been in the city for a year or less, and another 25 per cent had been in the city for 2-3 years. Of the male workers, 25 per cent had been in the city for more than 6 years, while of the female workers the percentage was 15. The recent trend of young girls coming to the cities from the rural areas for seeking jobs in the formal sector is a major departure from the past social norms. Sometime the daughter came to the city first and then the whole family gradually migrated. It was observed that most of these young girls had atleast one relative in the factory. Thus, to have stable worker and less turnover, the policy was to employ the whole family, so that they feel a part of the team.

All the male child labourers and 96 per cent of the female child labourers were found to be unmarried. Traditionally, rural girls had usually been married off by the age of 14 years. The fact that girls of age 10-14 years were coming from rural areas to cities for job (and only 4 per cent of them were married) implies that there has been a social change in attitude towards marriage. Instead of getting their daughters married, parents were sending daughters to earn their own livelihood. Earlier, these unmarried girls were dependent either on the father or brother. Thus, there was one mouth less to feed in the rural areas and also the family could get some remittance from these workers.

About 45 per cent of the child workers were illiterate and were not going to school. Of the 54 per cent literate, most had education up to Class V. Of the male child workers, only 26 per cent were student prior to their

[8]See any Labour Force Survey, published by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

TABLE 3.7

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILD LABOUR

(column percentage)

Characteristics	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Origin						
Rural	13	68.4	53	75.5	66	74.2
Urban	6	31.6	17	24.3	23	25.8
Marital status						
Unmarried	19	100	67	95.7	86	96.6
Married	-	-	3	4.3	3	3.4
Residence type						
Family	18	94.7	55	78.6	73	82.0
Mess	1	5.3	6	8.6	7	7.9
Relative house	-	-	9	12.8	9	10.1
Education						
Can sign at best	8	42.1	32	45.7	40	45.0
Up to class V	10	52.6	33	47.1	43	48.3
Class VI to Class X	1	5.3	4	5.7	5	5.6
No information	-		1	1.5	1	1.1
Previous occupation						
Maid servant	1	5.3	2	2.8	3	3.4
Labourer	3	15.8	-	-	3	3.4
Student	5	26.3	23	32.9	28	31.5
Household work	5	26.3	33	47.1	38	42.7
Others	4	21.0	2	2.9	6	6.7
No information	1	5.3	10	14.3	10	12.4
Present occupation						
Cutting helper	-	-	3	4.3	3	3.4
Operator	2	10.5	9	12.9	11	12.4
Sewing helper	10	52.6	49	70.0	59	66.3
Ironman	1	5.3	-	-	1	1.1
Folding	1	5.3	1	1.4	2	2.2
Finishing helper	5	26.3	8	11.4	13	14.6
Social barriers						
No one objected	10	100	47	67.0	66	74.2
Objected	-		23	33.0	23	25.8
of which						
People talk badly	-		9	12.9	9	10.1
Women get spoilted	-		10	14.3	10	11.2
Nightwork spoils	-		2	2.9	2	2.2
Others	-		2	2.9	2	2.2
Total Child Labour	19	100	70	100	89	100
% of Total Labour		7.8		16.4		13.2

employment in the garment factories, while of the female workers 33 per cent were students. Thus about a third of the child workers were school dropouts. It is quite plausible that economic pressure, coupled with better employment opportunities in the garment factories, may have induced school dropouts. About 43 per cent of the child workers were previously

doing household work. Hence, their employment in the garment industry has increased the work load for house work for their mothers. Some female workers reported that they preferred to send their daughters who were in their puberty age to work. This was because there was a social risk in leaving such young girls all alone in the house in the urban areas.

Child labourers were mostly engaged as sewing helpers (66 per cent) and finishing helpers (15 per cent) which were the lowest paid jobs in the garment industry. The average monthly pay was Tk. 464 for sewing helpers and Tk.624 for finishing helpers, and estimated take home earnings were Tk.657 and Tk. 894 a month respectively.[9] The fact that child labour constitutes about a third of the total workers engaged as sewing helpers and finishing helpers implied that the availability of child labourers was probably depressing the wage for these job categories.

Before joining the garment factory none of the male child workers had faced any objections, while only a third of the female child workers faced objections. These included remarks such as working in the garment factory is bad, it spoils girls, and nightwork spoils girls. The findings of the survey generally suggest that both the parents and the society agree that child labour may be productively employed. The parents of these children were usually those who could not afford to send them to school.

While talking to the management, it was observed that they were reluctant to employ child labourers. They reported that usually they had to employ them on humanitarian ground. Usually they had to employ child workers due to pressure from their family members who also worked in the same factory. Sometimes, all the eligible members of the family worked in the same garment factory. Sometime a mother refused to work as she had a daughter aged 10-14 years, who could not be left alone at home. Thus, to keep the skilled adult worker, the management often had to employ such child labour.

[9] This includes wage, overtime, bonus, etc.

CHAPTER 4

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF GARMENT WORKERS

Workers usually seek employment to earn a living. An important indicator of their economic conditions was the monthly wage earned by a worker. Besides the monetary remuneration, returns to workers are also influenced by the nature of employment contract that includes recruitment procedure, work schedule, leave provision, on-the-job training and job mobility in the garment industry. In this section, these issues have been focused.

4.1 Factory Norms Regarding Work Schedule

4.1.1 Work Hour

We found one shift of work to be the norm in the garment industry. Only in one factory, two shifts had been introduced. As in any other industry, the normal working hours in the garment industry is 8 hours a day, usually from 7.30 or 8.00 a.m. to 4.30 or 5.00 p.m. As there is seasonality in its production, work hours varied accordingly. The peak season was from October to January, while the slack season was from March to June. As the labour requirement increased during the peak season, the workers were required to work overtime.

This study was conducted during October-November 1990. It will, hence, reflect the work hours of the peak season. On an average, a worker had to work 11-12 hours a day. Of the total 671 workers, 10 per cent worked the normal 8 hours a day, 20 per cent worked 2 hours of overtime, 35 per cent worked 4 hours of overtime, and 30 per cent worked for 6 hours of overtime (Table 4.1). Significant differences existed between the male and female workers in terms of overtime work hours. Of the total female workers, 30 per cent had worked more than 4 hours of overtime, while for the male workers the corresponding figure was 44 per cent. The work hours also varied according to job category. The supervisors and finishing helpers worked about 13 hours a day; cutting masters, cutting helpers, ironmen, folding and quality controllers worked for 12 hours a day; while the operators, sewing helpers worked for 11 hours a day. Since the finished

TABLE 4.1

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY HOURS OF OVERTIME DONE PER MONTH

(column percentage)

Hour/	Sex		Age group (years)							Total
Month	Male	Female	10-14	15–19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-65	
1-26	5.5	11.8	8.6	14.1	10.8	2.4	-	-	-	9.2
27-52	11.8	20.2	22.9	12.1	17.2	19.5	8.3	40.0	33.3	16.7
53-78	22.0	18.0	11.4	26.3	21.5	14.6	8.3	10.0	33.3	19.7
79-104	25.2	23.6	28.6	16.2	22.6	26.8	50.0	30.0	33.3	24.3
105-130	16.5	12.4	5.7	18.2	12.9	14.6	16.7	10.0	-	14.1
131+	18.9	14.0	22.9	13.1	15.1	22.0	16.7	10.0	-	16.1
Total no. of workers	245	426	87	214	185	97	57	23	6	671
Average hour/month	94	87	92	87	90	96	102	80	60	90

products of the sewing section had to be ironed and packed, the supervisors and finishing helpers had to work for longer hours. Most management people admitted that sometime the workers in the finishing section had to work whole night, usually up to 3 a.m., especially when there was a backlog, and goods had to be delivered on time. Sometime, one line of the sewing operators had to work whole night. If whole night work was done, the management provided dinner worth Tk.20-25 depending on the job category. Table 4.1 shows that work hours do not vary with age.

During the peak season, a worker had to work even during weekly holidays. Although they were paid for overtime work on holidays, no alternate holidays were, however, given. This was contrary to the Factory Act 1965, which provided for a weekly holiday, i.e. Friday, and no workers were required to work more than 10 days consecutively without a holiday. Sometime, the workers had to work all days of a month without any holidays. The peak period of the garment industry had, in the past, tended to coincide with the season for *hartals*. It was also a season for *hartals* when the survey was conducted. The workers had to work on Fridays, instead of the *hartal* days.

4.1.2 Breaks During work

A morning tea-break was usually not allowed in the garment industry. Only one factory reported that they gave a morning break for 15 minutes and also tiffin worth Tk.4 per worker at that time. In other factories, the workers did not get any break before lunch.

TABLE 4.2

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY LUNCH TIME AND PLACE

(column percentage)

Time and place	Male	Female	Total
Lunch time			
30 minutes	54.3	66.7	62.1
45 minutes	2.4	2.6	2.3
60 minutes	43.3	30.7	35.6
Lunch place			
Factory lunch room	17.1	38.3	30.6
Factory roof	11.8	20.4	17.2
Verandah	3.3	6.3	5.2
Work place	18.4	12.7	14.8
Hotel	20.8	6.6	11.8
House	28.6	15.6	20.4

Of the total 671 workers, 62 per cent reported that they had a half an hour lunch break, and about 36 per cent reported that they had a one-hour lunch break. Only in one factory, they had 45 minutes lunch break (Table 4.2) According to the Factory Act of 1965, no workers were to be compelled to work for 6 hours at a stretch without an hour break or two half-hour breaks. The management felt that as they allowed a lunch break after 5 hours of work, they were not violating the law. In all developing countries, lunch breaks are paid breaks. But in Bangladesh, even in the public sector, lunch breaks are unpaid breaks. It was observed during the survey that those firms which had a higher proportion of the male workers had a one-hour lunch break.

4.1.3 Provision for Lunch Room and Food Facilities

According to the Factory Act 1965, if a factory employed more than 250 workers, the canteen facilities should be provided, and where there were more than 100 workers, there should be a suitable lunch room. Most factory owners reported that they had a lunch room. But in some, due to the shortage of space, the lunch room was used as a store. We observed during our survey that there were 19 firms (59 per cent of the firms surveyed) in which more than 25 per cent of the workers reported that they took their lunch in the factory lunch room. In another 11 factories, more than half the interviewed workers reported that they ate lunch in the lunch room. Of the total workers interviewed, about 32 per cent reported that they ate lunch outside the factory– either at home or at the hotel (Table 4.2). In total, about 30 per cent of the workers reported that they ate lunch in the lunch room. Another 18 per cent of the workers used the factory roof as the lunch place, while 5 per cent and 15 per cent ate their lunch in the verandah and work place respectively. The owners of the garment factories felt the need to have a separate lunch room, but for those located in rented houses, such provisions were often not available. Some factories also had lunch tables and chairs and one had also a provision for heating foods.

None of the factories visited had any canteen facility. The owners of the factories did not feel the need to have a canteen as the workers usually preferred to bring in food from home; and those who did not bring food, ate at the nearby restaurants. Thus, there was no real demand for the canteen. In one of our sampled firms, free lunch was offered to the workers and the management personnel. The cost was about Tk.10 per person. The owner

felt that free food ensured proper diet for the workers and also commitment to work for the factory. After the introduction of free lunch, the turnover rate had drastically reduced in that firm. But some entrepreneurs felt that giving anything free brings more trouble, e.g. after a while the workers may complain about the quality of food given to them.

Workers of most firms reported that they got "tiffin" in the evening worth Tk.2 or Tk.3 per worker. But this was so only if they had overtime work to be done beyond 7 or 8 p.m. Thus, a worker was expected to work from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. only with one lunch break of half an hour to one hour. This is contrary to the Factory Act 1965. According to this Act, a worker should get two hours of break during 12 hours of work. One suggestion is to have a break after every three hours of work. It will not only reduce fatigue, but will also increase the productivity of the workers. Those firms who did not provide "tiffin" at all, felt that its introduction would bring in more problems: as the worker usually eat "tiffin" at the work place, hence clothes were likely to be stained. Some firms, therefore, provided cash instead of tiffin.

4.1.4 Prayer Facilities

It was observed that no factory in Dhaka city allowed the prayer time or provided any room for prayer. Only in one factory at Rupganj, prayer was encouraged and there was a separate space, enclosed by curtains, for praying. Moreover, in that factory, women were provided with *burkhas*. This served two purposes: (a) it brought in social prestige for the workers, and (b) it reduced the risk of abuse while commuting.

4.2 Factory Norms Regarding Earnings and Related Aspects

4.2.1 Regularity of Pay and Overtime

There was a well-established monitoring system in the garment industry to keep an account of work hours. We found that all the factories used time-cards or time sheets. Sometimes, the worker got a card too. There was a "time-keeper" in each of the factories that we surveyed. Some also used an automatic punching machine to record the arrival and departure time. About 45 per cent of the workers could say the exact number of hours they had worked overtime. They also reported that most of the time there was no discrepancy between their estimate and the firms calculation of overtime

hours. In some cases it was noted that the workers did not keep any account on their own, and they had complete faith on the firm's calculation.

According to the Factory Act of 1965, wage in a factory employing less than one thousand persons is to be paid within seven days after the expiry of the wage period. Of the 671 workers interviewed, only 13 (1.9 per cent) reported that there was irregularity in payment of the wages. The rest said that they received their salaries on due date. Table 4.3 shows that 22 per cent of the firms paid the salary of their workers by the first week of a month, while another 68 per cent paid by the second week. Only in about 10 per cent of the firms, the salary was irregularly paid. Wages were generally paid on a monthly basis; only in case of two factories, wages were paid on a weekly basis.

It was observed that most irregularity in payment was with regard to the payment of overtime earnings. In 22 per cent of the factories, overtime was paid during the fourth week of the following month. About 35 per cent of the total workers reported that they received this overtime payment by the fourth week. Another 17 per cent reported that they received their overtime payment along with their monthly pay. In this case the firms kept one month payment of overtime as security money to deter the workers from leaving the factory. That is, overtime of the previous month was paid along with the regular pay of the current month. The workers got the security money back, provided they gave one month notice prior to leaving the factory.

TABLE 4.3

REGULARITY OF PAY AND OVERTIME

(percentage of firms)

No. of days within which paid	Regular wages	Overtime payment
1 - 7	21.9	-
8 - 15	68.8	-
16 - 30	3.1	21.8
31 - 45	3.1	25.0
46 - 60	3.1	6.2
61 - 75	-	12.5
76 - 90	-	9.3
91+	-	25.2
No. of firms	32	32

Table 4.3 also shows that about 28 per cent of the sampled firms paid overtime money between one and a half month and three months and another 25 per cent paid after about four months. About 24 per cent of the workers reported that they received the overtime payment after 2-4 months, and another 8 per cent reported that there was irregularity in overtime payment. It was observed that a worker considered his/her job to be secured if the factory paid overtime on a regular basis.

TABLE 4.4

PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS WHO RECEIVED FULL PAYMENT FROM FIRST EMPLOYMENT

Job category	Male	Female	All workers
Quality Controller	87.5	75.0	83.3
Cutting Master	60.0	-	60.0
Cutting Helper	50.0	75.0	58.3
Sewing Operator	57.1	58.6	58.4
Sewing Helper	83.3	50.0	55.0
Ironman	66.6	-	75.0
Folding	64.3	92.3	77.7
Finishing Helper	50.0	80.0	75.0
All Categories	67.0	63.5	65.6

It was usually reported that the workers did not receive their full payment at the time of leaving jobs. Result of our survey showed that, of those workers who changed jobs, about 65 per cent had received full payment from their first employers: it was 67 per cent for the male workers and 65 per cent for female workers. Table 4.4 shows that only 50 per cent of the female sewing helpers and 50 per cent of the male finishing helpers and cutting helpers had received their full payment. Thus, these groups of workers were most deprived and hence were insecured in their jobs.

4.2.2 Overtime Work

(i) The Need for Overtime Work

During our survey, we asked the entrepreneurs why regular overtime was needed. The reasons they gave were the following:

(a) Usually when they schedule the work order, they consider that each day a labourer would work for 10 hours.

(b) Some entrepreneurs reported that they had to overbook work order. This was because there was the risk of cancellation of the work order as fashion often changes.

(c) Most of them reported that unless there was overtime, workers would not work. This was because the workers considered the total earnings i.e. wage plus overtime earnings to be their monthly income.

(d) As the workers were not educated, it was difficult to train them. Due to lack of required skills, they often made mistakes in their jobs. Hence, they had to spend atleast an additional one hour for alteration work each day.

(e) Some entrepreneurs, who had quota allocation, reported that there was always a delay in distributing the quota, and hence there was a backlog during October-January. Furthermore, some firms may fail to use their quota and make it available for others (i.e. sell it) only at a later period. The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) also redistributed the unused quota around October. So, there was a backlog of work order from October to January, and consequently, overtime work was needed.

(f) Due to malnutrition of the workers, their hourly productivity was low, and hence, they had to work overtime.

(g) Each day about 5-20 per cent of the workers were usually absent from their work. Hence, others had to work overtime.

(h) As the garment factories were highly dependent on the imported raw materials, overtime work was needed due to the following delays:

  (i) Delays and unnecessary difficulties created in opening back-to-back L.C. by the banks.

  (ii) Custom clearance at the Chittagong port was often a problem. Sometime, it took as long as 1-2 months.

  (iii) Some time the fabrics were defective, and hence, the management had to reorder the fabrics. About one per cent of the defective fabrics was acceptable for normal production.

  (iv) There was often delay in shipping accessories.

  (v) Delays could be due to the lack of shipping connection and obtaining berthing for cargo vessels due to congestion.

  (vi) Dock worker’s strike may also cause delays.

An average estimate of days required for an order to be completed in 120 days was the following:

1.	Opening of L.C. for raw materials	7
2.	Production of raw materials	45
3.	Shipping of raw materials	15
4.	Releasing raw materials from shipment	20
5.	Transport from port to factory	2
6.	Cutting and making	30
7.	Electricity failure	2
8.	Lack of availability of workers	7
9.	Fridays/holidays	16
	Total	144

From the above we note that these delays were often unavoidable, mostly due to dependence on imported raw materials. With a time limit of 120 days for the delivery of the finished goods, even 7 days' delay could be disasterous. Some of the factories had installed their own generator to ensure the continued electricity supply, so that delays from electricity failure could be avoided. Release of the imported raw materials from the port took atleast 7 days and sometimes took more than a month. Measures should, therefore, be taken to reduce such delays. Entrepreneurs import raw materials from India to reduce delays in shipping. Entrepreneurs suggested that 180 days time would reduce the overtime work to a great extent. Moreover, the custom procedures should be simplified. Local production of accessaries will also reduce the delays. There was general consensus that quality, shading and colouring were in most cases uniform for the imported fabrics. Moreover, all possible variations in quality of demand by the buyers could be accommodated if fabrics were imported. Hence, an immediate attention should be given to remove the delays caused due to dependence on the imported fabrics.

(ii) Workers' Attitude Toward Overtime

It was often alleged that the workers in the garment industry were compelled to work overtime against their will. We, however, found that 63 per cent of the workers had not worked overtime unwillingly a single day during the whole month. Only 37 per cent reported that atleast once a month

they had done overtime unwilling (i.e. they did not feel like doing, but had no choice). Table 4.5 shows that there was some variation across gender: relative to men more women did overtime unwillingly, 34 per cent of the male workers against 38 per cent of the females. Moreover, variations also exist across job categories — usually the operators (41 per cent) and quality controllers (53 per cent) did overtime unwillingly atleast once a month. Across age distribution, we note that usually the workers aged above 20 years did overtime unwillingly (38 per cent) more than the younger ones (35 per cent). There was, however, a general feeling among the workers that it was a part of their job contract to do overtime work during the peak season to meet the deadline.

TABLE 4.5

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS SHOWING OVERTIME WORK DONE UNWILLINGLY BY JOB CATEGORY AND AGE GROUP

Job category	%	Age group (years)	%
Quality Controller	53.8	10-14	36.0
Cutting Master/Cutter	36.4	15-19	34.9
Cutting Helper	35.7	20-24	39.5
Sewing Supervisor	28.6	25-29	38.5
Sewing Operator	41.0	30-34	36.7
Sewing Helper	34.2	35-39	38.5
Ironman	26.1	40-65	-
Folding	39.0	Sex	
Finishing Helper	33.3	Male	34.0
		Female	38.4
All Workers			36.8

(iii) Overtime Rate

According to the Factory Act 1965, no person can be employed for more than 8 hours a day in a factory. Work in excess of these hours should be paid for at the overtime rates, which is twice the basic salary. Usually, the basic salary was considered to be 60 per cent of the monthly pay. Thus, a worker should get 1.2 times his/her hourly pay for one hour of overtime. As per the minimum wage legislation, the basic salary of the garment workers is expected to be 45-47 per cent of the total salary (Table 4.11). Interestingly, none of the workers in our sample knew what was their basic salary! They reported their monthly pay as their basic salary. On the other hand, all the

factory owners reported that they paid overtime according to the rules. Workers usually knew their monthly pay and the overtime hourly rate. But they were ignorant about how the rate was calculated. We calculated the overtime rate from the overtime hours worked and overtime earnings. An average worker in our study earned 107 per cent of his/her wage rate as overtime. A male worker earned slightly more (108 per cent) than a female worker (106 per cent).

4.2.3 Monetary Benefits and Deductions

Workers at most factories received a number of benefits beyond their monthly salary and overtime. In most factories, the following benefit and penalty measures were introduced:

(i) Attendance bonus: given by the firms for better attendance was as follows:

Present all days	=	Tk.100 for operators.
	=	Tk.50 for helpers.
Absent one day	=	Tk.50 for operators.
	=	Tk.25 for helpers.

Of the workers who had perfect attendance, about 13 per cent had received an attendance bonus. There was no gender difference.

(ii) Efficiency bonus: The productivity targets were enforced by most firms. They were achieved through payment by results, and penalties if output norms were not reached. In some factories, targets were set for the day. If the achievement by 4.30 p.m. was more than the target, a bonus was given. If target was not achieved, sometimes the workers had to finish the work without getting any overtime pay. In one firm, it was reported that if the target was not fulfilled, one day was marked as absent. About 14 per cent of the workers received an efficiency bonus.

(iii) Production bonus: Usually this was paid to the supervisors for completion of work on time.

(iv) Eid bonus: Usually ½ of basic or ½ of monthly pay was paid. Some gave one Eid bonus and some two. In our sample, 20 firms gave

Eid bonus. About 52 per cent of the sampled male workers and 43 per cent of the female workers had received Eid bonus.

(v) Picnic without contribution or with contribution was arranged in some firms.

(vi) Late fine: The factory gates were closed 10 minutes after the starting time. Most factories had introduced such penalties as, 3 days late = 1 day absent, and 2 days late = some hours of overtime deducted.

(vii) For one day absent without notice, the management deducted another one day without salary. In some firms, if Eid holidays were given for (say) three days and a worker overstayed one day, then four days were marked as absent.

4.2.4 Types of Payment

It is well known that the garment industry was very susceptible to fluctuation in employment as a result of the irregular work order and fast changes in fashion. These characteristics demand a labour market with high flexibility, in which labour is easily found when it is required and easily disposed off when not wanted. To reduce capital cost, machines need to be kept running without any interruption. Work was, therefore, organised on: (a) salaried basis with overtime, and (b) on contract basis. The salaried workers were hired on a monthly basis to work for eight hours of a day and 26 days a month, i.e. 208 hours a month. Beyond eight hours each day, if the worker had to work overtime, he/she was paid an hourly overtime rate which was higher than the usual hourly pay. These workers were made permanent usually after a year of service, after which they enjoyed the yearly increment and paid casual, annual and medical leaves. They were usually paid wages, irrespective of whether they had worked or not. On the other hand, the contract workers were hired for completing a specific work order on a piece-rate basis. In the garment industry, the hiring of workers on a piece-rate basis was gradually gaining importance. This was because the management did not have to take the responsibility of supervision, and also the problem of monitoring overtime did not arise. Furthermore, from the management's perspective, they could follow the principle of "no work no pay." In one factory, we found that the normal work was done on a salaried

basis, while the overtime work was done on a piece-rate basis. Here the problem faced by the management was that the workers usually spend the time leisurely up to 4.30 p.m. rather than do intensive work. But after 4.30 p.m. they worked intensively. Hence, the management complained that sometime the output in regular eight hours of work was equal to that of four hours of overtime. In such cases they were trying to find ways to punish them. But in other factories, they hired workers either on a salary or on a piece-rate basis for both regular and overtime work. In most factories surveyed, it was found that the cutting master/cutter, supervisor, floor-in-change, and production manager are paid a normal fixed salary on a contract basis, and they could not claim any overtime. Thus, their salary was inclusive of overtime.

It was observed that the position of women has been weakened by the tendency to introduce piece-rate work, the growth of which has been greater in factories producing knitwear. When the labour market is relatively tight, usually between October and January, both the employer and employees (usually male workers) gain from a piece-rate hiring system. The male worker usually gave up his salaried job to work on a piece-rate basis. He did not have to follow the regular 8 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. work schedule and could take up an employment in another firm during this time by working more intensively. Thus, the employer could also get more work from the available skilled and semi-skilled labour force. Moreover, after the peak season was over the workers could go back to a salaried job.

4.3 Sex Segregation at Work Place

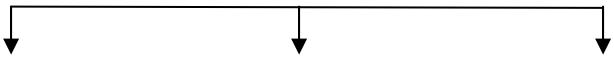
Within a garment factory, tasks were allocated largely on the basis of sex (Chart 4.1). Women were virtually all machine operators and helpers in the sewing section. By contrast, men were virtually non-operators, working either as a cutter/cutting master or helper in the cutting section, or work as an iron-man in the finishing section. According to the management, this division of labour was established by the company rather than due to choice of the workers themselves. The prospective workers usually do not apply for a specific job but rather for openings of unspecified nature. The management then assigns the jobs on the basis of sex. They feel that men are more suited to heavy work. The cutting section was fully dominated by men. The cutter/cutting master usually had several years of experience. The

cutting machines were quite heavy and needed steady hands to control that equipment. Some factories had experimented with job changes. They reported that they had tried to have women do the work of a cutting helper, but such work has proved to be too heavy for them. In our survey, we found that only 11 per cent of the workers in the cutting section were females. While in the sewing and finishing section, it was 78 per cent and 43 per cent respectively.

The management of six firms reported that they had all female operators. Some firms had few male operators. Moreover, firms producing knitwear had 70 per cent male operators while some of those producing woven had 100 per cent female operators. In the woven factories, some firms reported that they had once engaged males to work as machine operators; they worked very fast, and had burnt 2/3 belts of the machine each day. These men were now working as supervisors.

Chart 4.1

Production Manager (M)



Cutting Section	**Sewing Section**	**Finishing Section**
(Average pay = Tk.1624)	(Average pay = Tk.1025)	(Average pay = Tk.810)
Cutting Master (M)	Floor-in- charge (M/F)	Floor-in- charge (M)
Cutter (M)	Supervisor (M/F)	Supervisor (M)
Cutting Helper (M)	Operator (F)	Iron-man (M)
	Sewing Helper (F)	Folding (F/M)
		Finishing Helper (F/M)

Note: M=Male preferred.
F= Female preferred.

In the finishing section, about 84 per cent of the firms surveyed had all males as iron-men. Folding was equally assigned to men and women; while the finishing helpers were mostly females, and the male workers performed the packaging and cartoning work. Among the management personnel interviewed, we found that only one factory had a female production manager who was responsible for the overall management, from cutting to shipment. Usually, the males were preferred in the management as they

were required to get in touch with the foreign buyers and meet them at hotels. The entrepreneurs felt that it was not safe to send women at odd hours to a foreigner's room at the hotel.

There was usually a floor-in-charge who was responsible for the whole of sewing or finishing floor. The floor-in-charge of sewing was usually a female, while that of finishing was a male. Also, the finishing supervisor was usually a male. On the other hand, the supervisors of the sewing section were 75 per cent male and 25 per cent female. Each supervisor was responsible for about 25 machine operators. It was important that the supervisors be knowledgeable about the work. The position was generally filled through internal promotion. Men had a somewhat greater opportunity for upward mobility in the cutting and finishing sections, while upward mobility for women was limited to the sewing section only. The number of supervisory positions was relatively small. The pay differences reflected longer length of service rather than benefits from promotion. It should be noted here that employment in a garment factory was generally a dead-end job for both sexes.

TABLE 4.6

SEX-SEGREGATION AT WORK PLACE

Job category	Percentage			Female Share	Under/over representation*
	Male	Female	Total		
Cutting Section					
Cutting Master/Cutter	10.2	0.2	3.9	3.8	0.06
Cutting Helper	13.7	1.4	5.5	15.8	0.25
Sweing Section					
Supervisor	11.8	5.9	8.0	36.4	0.73
Operator	15.9	44.4	34.0	82.9	1.31
Sewing Helper	10.6	31.7	24.0	83.8	1.32
Finishing Section					
Quality Controller	4.9	1.9	3.0	40.0	0.63
Ironman	12.7	1.2	5.4	13.9	0.22
Folding	13.9	4.9	8.2	38.9	0.60
Finishing Helper	6.9	8.5	7.9	67.9	1.07
Total	100	100	100	63.5	1.00
Number	245	426	671		

Note: *See text for definition adapted from R. Anker and C. Hein, 1985. Employment of Women Outside Agriculture in Third World Countries: An Overview of Occupational Statistics, World Employment Research, ILO, Geneva.

It was mentioned earlier that our survey covered 671 workers from 32 firms. Table 4.6 shows the composition of workers by occupation and sex. The table also shows that 36 per cent of the sampled workers were males while 64 per cent were females. Reasons for the relatively lower female participation in our estimates had been discussed in Chapter II. Table 4.6 further shows the ratio of women's share in each job category to their overall share in the sampled factories. Under or over-representation is defined as the ratio of female share in each occupational category relative to their average share. A ratio of female/male above 1.00 indicates over-representation of the female workers in a particular occupation and below 1.00 indicates under-representation. Women were found to be over-represented in job categories like operators, sewing helpers, and finishing helpers. On the other hand, men were over-represented in cutting section, ironman, folding, and supervisory position.

Table 4.7 shows that about 66 per cent of the total workers were employed in the sewing section, and here about 78 per cent of the workers were females. It is important to note that there existed significant wage differentials across sex in all the sections. A female worker got about 66 per cent of the pay of a male worker. Even in the female-dominated sewing section, the same differential existed.

TABLE 4.7

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY SECTIONS

Section	Workers		Monthly pay (Tk.)		
	Female share	Total	Male	Female	All workers
Cutting	10.9	64	1637	1032	1571
Sewing	78.8	443	1410	922	1026
Finshing	42.6	164	1099	689	924
Total	63.5	671	1344	886	1053

4.4 Gender Differential in Earnings

Table 4.8 shows the take-home income of a worker at the end of the month. These include the monthly pay, overtime payment, Eid or festival bonus, attendance bonus, and efficiency bonus. The table also shows that, on an average, the monthly pay of a worker was Tk.1,053, while overtime was

Tk.363 and other benefits Tk.34 per month. Thus, the take-home income of a worker, on an average, was Tk.1,450 per month. The table further shows that the monthly pay was 73 per cent of the take-home income, while the overtime earning was 25 per cent and 2 per cent was accounted for by other benefits. This was true for both the male and female workers. An interesting finding emerges from the table. There existed a sex differential in the wage rate. The female worker earned only 66 per cent of the male workers' pay, and take-home income. On an average, a female worker earned Tk.1,210.50 per month, while a male worker earned Tk.1,838 a month.

Table 4.8 also shows that there were wide variations across job categories. It ranged from Tk.656 to Tk.3,353 per month. The workers who earned below the average pay of Tk.1,053 were the sewing helpers (Tk.464), finishing helpers (Tk.624), cutting helpers (Tk.887), ironmen (Tk.911), and the folding section workers (Tk.923). Thus, these workers may be identified to be insecured in terms of low wage. Of the total 671 workers, 51 per cent belonged to these categories.

Most of the differences in earnings across sex was probably due to the fact that there was a higher proportion of the women workers who were "helpers", and a higher proportion of the male workers who were skilled or highly skilled. The average work hour for a female worker was 11.61, while that of a male worker was 12.00. Thus, earnings from overtime do not reflect the differences due to the difference in work hours. There was also some variations in Eid bonus across sex. Moreover, the female workers earned only 60 per cent of the male workers on account of attendance bonus, and efficiency bonus. This implied that men tend to be more efficient, and regular on the job than women.

TABLE 4.8

MONTHLY TAKE-HOME INCOME OF GARMENT WORKERS

(Tk/worker/month)

Occupation Category	Male					Female					Total				
	pay	over time	eid bonus	other bonus	total income	pay	over time	eid bonus	other bonus	total income	pay	over time	eid bonus	other bonus	total income
Quality Controler	2196	957	62.83	33.33	3249.16	1075	622	21.00	7.25	1725.25	1748	808	46.08	7.92	2606.00
Cutting Master/ Cutter	2602	584	60.67	15.50	3262.17	2000	0	100.00	100.00	2200.00	2578	584	62.17	18.75	3292.92
Cutting Helper	890	380	10.75	1.42	1282.17	870	370	51.08	0	1291.08	887	378	38.42	23.75	1327.17
Supervisor	2316	787	50.83	6.67	3160.50	2426	867	90.41	10.5	3393.91	1462	814	69.25	8.42	3353.67
Operator	1237	471	20.25	3.25	1731.50	1069	395	21.92	1.75	1487.65	1132	411	27.08	4.83	1574.91
Sewing Helper	597	200	9.33	0.25	806.58	438	171	6.00	1.33	616.33	464	176	11.08	5.75	656.83
Ironman	971	314	18.75	2.75	1306.50	540	175	0	3.33	718.33	911	299	16.08	2.83	1228.91
Folding	997	474	19.33	1.58	1491.91	804	259	19.17	0.17	108.34	923	407	19.38	1.00	1350.33
Finishing Helper	764	438	10.75	0.75	1213.50	558	186	7.92	2.58	754.50	624	247	20.92	2.00	893.97
Total	1344	463	26.83	4.17	1838.00	886	302	20.00	2.50	1210.50	1053	363	27.58	6.42	1450.00
% of Income	73.12	25.19	1.46	0.23	100	73.19	24.95	1.65	0.21	100	72.62	25.03	1.90	0.45	100

Note: "Other Bonus" includes efficiency bonus and attendance bonus.

Table 4.9 shows that the monthly pay varied not only by job categories across gender but also by marital status, education, and the total job length in the garment industry. Of the married workers, a female workers pay was only 60 per cent of a male worker. The differential was lower for the divorced workers (87 per cent).

TABLE 4.9

PAY DIFFERENTIALS BY GENDER

(Tk./Worker/month)

Characteristic	(1) Male	(2) Female	(3) 1/2X100
Job category			
Quality Controller	2196	1075	49.0
Cutting Master	2602	2000	76.9
Cutting Helper	890	780	97.8
Supervisor	2316	2426	104.7
Sewing Operator	1237	1069	86.4
Sewing Helper	597	438	73.4
Ironman	971	540	55.6
Folding	997	804	80.6
Finishing Helper	764	558	73.0
Marital status			
Married	1871	1138	60.8
Unmarried	1080	715	66.2
Widow	-	934	-
Divorced	850	736	86.6
Abondoned	-	475	-
Seperated	1000	1000	100.0
Education			
Can sign only	811	620	76.4
Up to Class V	863	746	86.4
Class VI to X	1334	1047	78.5
Above Class X	1687	1884	111.7
Total job length (in month)			
0-6	750	542	72.3
7-12	1048	675	64.4
13-24	1046	583	55.7
25-48	1370	888	64.8
49-72	1793	1189	66.3
73-96	2149	1444	67.2
97+	3666	1656	45.2
Total	1344	886	65.9

It has been found that there was a high positive correlation between the level of education and wage rate. The relation was statistically significant at

one per cent level. If education is considered, then the genderwise discrimination in the wage rate is not as large as it first appeared. The ratio of female to male wages among the garment workers with different levels of education is shown in Table 4.9. By education the wage differential was around 76 per cent to 86 per cent. But for those whose education was above Class X, the female workers received 12 per cent higher wage than the male workers. One, however, needs to note that the number of observations in this category was too few. Females with higher education rarely entered the garment industry in better paid jobs from the middle class families who are very conservative, and valued cultural norms of *Purdah*.[10] Since, for educated workers, the index rises above 100%, one may conclude that the difference in education, and skill level of the workers may be important reasons behind the wage differential.

For those workers whose job length was less than 6 months, the pay differential was lower, i.e. 75 per cent. While there were limitations of bi-variate analyses, the findings generally support the assertion of wage differential across sex. It also conforms to the view that the entrepreneurs were employing women in the garment industry due to cheap labour. Women have to be paid only 66 per cent of male earnings as their reservation wage was lower.

The monthly earning differential between a salaried worker, and a contract worker is shown in Table 4.10. Of the total 671 workers surveyed, 97 workers (i.e. 14 per cent) did not get any overtime, although they had worked overtime hours. Of the rest 574 workers, 41 per cent worked on a piece-rate basis, and the rest were salaried. An average worker earned Tk.1,313 a month if salaried, and Tk.1,385 a month if hired on a piece-rate basis. Thus, on an average, a piece-rate worker earned only 5 per cent more than a salaried worker. The difference in the means was not statistically significant. Table 4.10 shows that there was a great variation between the male and female monthly earnings. A male worker earned Tk.1,313 while a female worker earned only Tk.1,107 if salaried: which is only about 84 per cent of the male earnings. Also, if hired on a piece-rate basis, a male worker earned Tk.1,387, while a female worker earned Tk.1,137. The difference between the male and female monthly earnings was found to be statistically

[10]Here Purdah denotes the male-female seclusion.

significant. This reflects the possible existence of significant discriminations between sexes.

Table 4.10 also shows the difference in earnings of a salaried, and a piece-rate worker by job categories. The piece-rate earnings were higher than the salaried workers for jobs, such as cutting master/cutter, cutting helper, ironman, and finishing helper. But the difference in earnings was statistically significant only for the cutting master/cutter. The jobs for which earnings were higher, if employed on a contract basis, were all male-dominated jobs. The job of a cutting master requires specialised skill which was in high demand. If they worked on contract, they could work for more than one firm. On the other hand, supervisors and quality controllers were hired on a contract basis, but were paid on a monthly basis. Almost 65 per cent of the cutting masters/cutters, and supervisors were employed on a contract basis. In the finishing section, more than 30 per cent of the workers were hired on a contract basis.

TABLE 4.10

MONTHLY EARNINGS FOR A GARMENT WORKER BY TYPE OF PAYMENT

(Tk./month/worker)

Criteria	Salaried				% of workers employed on contract	Contract (piece-rate)		
	Wage	Overtime	Bonus	Total		Wage	Bonus	Total
Sex								
Female	787	303	17	1107	-	1101	36	1137
Male	928	363	22	1313	-	1347	38	1385
Job Categories								
Quality Controller	1592	805	35	2432	38.9	2157	97	2254
Cutting Master/ Cutter	1953	584	78	2615	65.2	3167	96	3263
Cutting Helper	791	378	13	1182	29.0	1265	33	1298
Supervisor	2231	814	53	3098	65.4	2482	99	2581
Operator	1063	411	25	1499	45.4	1167	25	1192
Sewing Helper	500	177	11	688	33.1	437	4	441
Ironman	787	299	21	1107	41.9	1149	23	1172
Folding	979	407	23	1409	30.4	846	21	867
Finishing Helper	585	247	10	842	2.9	880	20	900
Total	926	363	22	1313	41.1	1347	38	1385

A rigorous analysis is shown in the earning function which have yielded some interesting results. Two regression equations were run, and their estimates are provided in Table 4.11. The first of these includes only human capital variables (education and experience); while the second extends the list to include demand side variables and few additional individual-specific characteristics. In terms of the human capital variables, all the variables have been found to have significant positive impact on earnings. The reference category for education was those with "no education". The regression result conform to our earlier findings that there is a premium for education in the garment industry. Moreover, the premium increases with the level of education. Those with primary level education (class I to V) earn about 10 per cent more than those with no education. Workers with secondary level education (class IV to X) earn 36 per cent more than those with no education while workers with education higher than secondary level earn 64 per cent more than the reference group. However, when demand related factors and other variables were included in the regression, no significant differences in earnings existed between workers with no education and those with education upto primary level (class I to V). Also, the value of the coefficient associated with education dummies decreased when other variables were included in the regression. Experience, was captured by the length of job in months (TJLENG) and its square term (TJLENG2). Earning increased at a decreasing rate as experience increased and both the coefficients were statistically significant. The variable distinguishing the earnings of male and female was GENDER and took the value one when the worker was a male. It was positive and significant, showing that female workers earn significantly less than their male counterpart having the same education and experience. Controlling for the latter variables, male workers received 23 per cent higher pay than the female workers.

The demand for labour is likely to vary across job classification and across firm size defined in terms of their number of employees. The reference group in the job classification was the sewing and finishing helpers. SKIL2 to SKIL4 were the three dummy variables representing three different categories of jobs; highest skill level denoted by SKIL4. The size of the firm, quantified by the number of employees, was denoted by the variable SIZE. Also, conventional variables like marital status and

TABLE 4.11

REGRESSION ESTIMATE OF EARNINGS FUNCTIONS

Dependent Variable: Natural Log of Monthly Pay

Variables	Short name	(1)	(2)
Class 1-V	ED2	.10	.04
		(2.19)*	99.850
Class VI-X	ED3	.36	.16
		(7.79)*	(4.03)**
Class X and above	ED4	.64	.22
		(11.47)**	(4.34)**
Job length (in months)	TJLENG	.02	.01
		(11.50)**	(5.38)**
Square of Job length	TJLENG2	-.00009	-.00003
		(5.45)**	2.46)**
Gender	GENDER	.23	.23
		(6.01)**	(6.80)**
Ironman/folder/cutting helper	SKIl2		.03
			(6.76)**
Operator	SKIL3		.55
			(13.63)**
Cutter/Supervisor/Quality controller	SKIL4		.96
			(16.55)**
Marital status	MARRIED		.08
			(2.67)
Duration of stay in Dhaka (in years)	MIGYEAR		.0007
			(2.24)*
No. of Job change	NOJCHANGE		.02
			(1.46)
Size of firm (employment)	SIZE		.0001
			(2.38)*
Constant		5.86	5.82
		(128.17)**	(138.13)**
N		672	671
Adjusted R^2		.55	.71

Note: 1. The figures are the coefficients and the t-statistics are given in the parenthesis.
2.** denotes significant at 1 per cent.
* denotes significant at 5 per cent.

migratory status have been included. The Variable MARRIED was the dummy for being currently married, while MIGYEAR was the period of residence (in years) in Dhaka city. Workers may also increase their earnings through job changes. The variable NOJCHANGE was the number of times the worker had changed firms within the garment industry.

Table 4.11 shows that garment workers cannot improve their earnings significantly through job hopping from one firm to another. The job category variables has positive and significant impact on earnings. An ironman/folder/cutting helper (SKIL2) earned 30 per cent more, an operator (SKIL3) earned 55 per cent more, while a cutter/quality controller/ supervisor (SKIL4) earns 96 per cent more than the reference group: sewing and finishing helper. The income difference between male and female remains at 23 per cent even after all the relevant variables have been controlled for. The length of stay in the city and the size of the firm also have significant positive impacts on earnings. An interesting result is that being currently married was no longer a barrier to entry into the wage labour market—rather it earned a premium.

The most important finding is that the standard human capital model was useful in explaining significant variation in the monthly pay of the garment workers in Dhaka city. Results in the regression analysis showed that education and experience were the most important factors affecting gender difference in earnings. This confirmed our earlier findings that women are discriminated in wage payment in garment industry. Education beyond primary level contributed significantly to their earnings.

4.5. Minimum Wage Legislation and Remuneration to Garment Workers

The Government declared the minimum wage rates for the various categories of workers employed in the garment industries in Bangladesh on 24 December 1984. Table 4.12 shows that the list of occupation category was not exhaustive. No mention had been made of the category sewing helper. One could include finishing helper under the category packer; it is, however, not very clear. Moreover, job categories like quality controller, cutting master and supervisor were also production workers, but they have not been included in the regulation. Besides those listed in Table 4.12, the regulation also included electricians, mechanics, and other administration, and clerical workers. But since our focus is on production workers, we have ignored them.

TABLE 4.12

MINIMUM WAGE OF GARMENT WORKERS

Skill category and occupation	Tk/month				Wage rate/ hour	Over-time** rate/ hour
	Basic salary	Fringe* benefit	Dearness allowance	Total		
Highly skilled: Sewing Operator Cutter	530 (47.66)	264	318	1112	5.35	5.10
Skill – 1: Cutter Sewing Operator	420 (46.51)	239	252	903	4.34	4.04
Skill – 2: Cutter Sewing Operator Presser/Folder Marker/Drawingman Overlock Operator	370 (45.79)	216	222	808	3.88	3.56
Semi-skilled Cutter Marker/Drawingman Sewing Operator Collar Turning Operator Button Operator Pocket Operator Overlock Operator Presser/Folder	320 (44.88)	201	192	713	3.43	3.08
Unskilled: Line Presser Packer	270 (43.06	195	162	627	3.01	2.60

Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage of the total.

Note: *Fringe benefit includes:

1. Housing allowance – 30% (of Basic) but minimum Tk.90.
2. Medical allowance Tk.60
3. Travel allowance Tk.20
4. Ration allowance Tk.25

**Overtime rate has been calculated as twice the basic.

Source: Adapted from the Bangladesh Gazette Extraordinary, Thursday, December 27, 1984.

The wage rates per hour had been calculated on the basis of 26 working days a month, and 8 working hours a day. The overtime rate had been calculated as twice the basic. From the table we note that the minimum

wage for an unskilled garment worker was Tk.627 a month, while that of a semi-skilled, skilled and highly skilled worker was Tk.713, Tk.808, and Tk.1,112 respectively per month. References are sometime made to the State Department Human Rights report of 1989 saying, "Regulations regarding minimum wage rates, hours of work, and occupational safety, and health security are not strictly enforced." Our survey data may be used for verifying this statement.

From our survey of the garment workers, we found that two-thirds of the garment workers (67 per cent) got their monthly salaries above the minimum wage of Tk. 627 (Table 4.13). About one-third got the minimum salary of a highly skilled worker, i.e. above Tk.1,112 a month; while one-third got lower than the minimum wage of a unskilled worker. About 42 per cent of the sewing operators received a minimum salary of highly skilled, 41 per cent received that of semi-skilled, and about 2 per cent got minimum salary of an unskilled worker. The rest 7 per cent of the sewing operators got below the minimum wage of an unskilled worker. As mentioned earlier, the sewing and finishing helpers were not in the published list. These workers formed about 32 per cent of the total work force in the garment industry, while quality controllers and supervisors constituted only about 11 per cent of the total. About 84 per cent of the total 214 sewing and finishing helpers earned less than the minimum wage of the unskilled workers, while 84 per cent of the total 75 quality controllers and supervisors earned above the minimum salary of a highly skilled worker. To ensure the legal provisions of minimum wages to these categories of workers, they should be incorporated in the list.

Looking at the gender composition of the garment workers, Table 4.13 shows that there was sex discrepancy in the labour market. Of the total male workers, only 17 per cent got below the minimum wage of the unskilled workers; while for the female workers, it was 42 per cent. This was mainly because both the low paid jobs were female-dominated — 83 per cent of sewing helpers and 68 per cent of finishing helpers were female. On the other hand, 45 per cent of the male workers earned more than minimum wage of the highly skilled workers while for females it was 25 per cent. This is because the quality controller and supervisory jobs were male-dominated.

It will be interesting to see why the entrepreneurs paid some workers below the minimum wage of an unskilled worker, although they worked, on an average, the same number of hours as the rest of the work force. Some

factors that may explain the wage variations across job categories are mentioned below.

The garment workers could be grouped into four categories. In the first group, we could include the sewing and finishing helpers. It is likely that in these jobs:

(a) Given that less reliable information is available for this category of the workers, the cost of uncertainly with respect to their productivity (or alternately, the costs of reducing the uncertainty of additional information) is shifted from the employers to this affected group of workers.

(b) It was earlier shown that these workers did not have any work experience, hence were likely to be paid low.

(c) Most of these workers also lacked necessary skills; about 31 to 38 per cent of them were illiterate.

(d) Since these jobs were disproportionately filled by the young workers who may be described as relatively unstable with relatively loose attachment to the labour force, hence they were paid less. About 37 per cent of the sewing helpers, and 24 per cent of the finishing helpers were child labour.

(e) This group was likely to face the high turnover rates.

(f) Since most of these workers were females and unmarried, they were considered “secondary” workers, as they could often rely on other “primary” members of the family for support.

(g) It was earlier observed that most of these workers were either students or doing household work. Hence, they were paid low wages as they were less likely to have any other meaningful opportunities.

(h) As mentioned earlier, the sewing helpers and finishing helpers were not explicitly included in the minimum wage legislation.

In the second group we would include workers who were employed as cutting helpers, iron-men, and folders. These jobs had 75 per cent male workers. Of these workers, about 20 per cent were highly skilled, and only about 20 per cent received less than the minimum wage of the unskilled worker. It is likely that:

TABLE 4.13

DISTRIBUTION OF GARMENT WORKERS BY WAGE LEVEL AND OCCUPATION

(column percentage)

Wage levels	Quality controller	Cutting master	Cutting helper	Supervisor	Sewing operator	Sewing helper	Ironman	Folding workers	Finishing workers	Total
Male										
Up to 626	-	-	16.1	-	2.6	57.7	19.4	14.7	58.8	17.1
627-712	-	-	25.8	3.4	-	11.5	9.7	-	-	5.1
713-807	8.3	-	22.6	-	7.7	19.2	19.4	2.9	11.2	10.2
808-902	-	-	12.4	-	5.7	7.7	16.1	5.9	6.5	8.0
903-1111	8.3	8.0	3.7	3.3	25.6	3.8	12.9	44.1	-	14.3
1112+	83.3	92.0	19.4	93.3	58.4	-	22.6	32.4	23.5	45.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	(12)	(25)	(31)	(30)	(39)	(26)	(31)	(34)	(17)	(245)
Female										
Up to 626	12.5	-	50.0	-	7.4	93.3	60.0	14.3	80.6	42.0
627-712	-	-	16.7	-	2.1	1.5	40.0	23.8	2.8	3.5
713-807	-	-	-	-	8.5	1.5	-	14.3	11.1	5.9
808-902	12.5	-	-	-	13.8	7	-	19.0	-	7.5
903-1111	62.5	-	-	4.0	29.1	7	-	28.6	-	16.0
1112+	12.5	100.0	33.3	96.0	39.2	2.2	-	-	5.6	25.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	(8)	(1)	(6)	(25)	(189)	(135)	(5)	(21)	(36)	(426)
Total										
Up to 626	5.0	-	21.6	-	6.6	87.6	25.0	14.5	73.6	32.9
627-712	-	-	24.3	1.8	1.8	3.1	13.9	9.1	1.9	4.5
713-807	5.0	-	18.9	-	8.3	4.3	16.7	7.3	11.3	7.5
808-902	5.0	-	10.8	-	12.7	1.9	13.9	10.9	1.9	7.3
903-1111	30.0	7.7	2.7	3.6	28.5	1.2	11.1	38.2	-	15.4
1112+	55.0	92.3	21.6	94.5	42.1	1.9	19.4	20.0	11.3	32.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	(20)	(26)	(37)	(37)	(228)	(161)	(36)	(55)	(53)	(671)

Note: Income groups are based on minimum wage incomes. Figures in parentheses are the number of observations.

(a) These workers were mostly in the active age group 15-29 years, and had education at least up to secondary level. But as more young males were in these jobs, their turnover rate was likely to be high. Hence, they were likely to be paid a relatively lower wage.

(b) They had very little work experience prior to entering the garment industry and hence were likely to be paid low.

(c) Of these workers, the ironmen were likely to be marginally better off as they had some work experience. But most workers employed as cutting helpers, and in folding were inexperienced. Hence, their pay was likely to be lower.

In contrast to the earlier mentioned two groups, workers in the third and fourth groups were paid higher wages; some reasons are discussed below.

In the third group, we could include skilled workers like operators. These workers were likely to have stable job and about 80 per cent of them were skilled, and highly skilled. Hence, for these workers we see that:

(a) There were "overhead costs" of scrutining, placing, and laying off such workers; costs which were positively related to the wage level of the skilled groups.

(b) The fringe benefits and overhead costs tied to an employee have increased over time because of the preference of workers, and employers. These increases were both a cause and effect of the large amount of firm-specific on-the-job training.

(c) These workers were mostly females and married and were likely to stay on the job. They got moderately higher pay, and their turnover rates were likely to be low.

(d) High transaction cost of hiring, and allocating the work force made turnover expensive, and fringe benefits served to reduce turnover. The result was a stable employment along with fringe benefits.

(e) Since these workers had mostly secondary (41 per cent) or primary education (9.3 per cent), they were likely to earn more than the previous group.

The last group of workers may consist of workers who had specialised skills such as cutting masters/cutters, supervisors and quality controllers. These workers were mostly highly skilled, and hence, highly secured in their job as:

(a) The employers were likely to know more about the experience of these workers. So, it was likely that there will be less variability in job offer.

(b) For these highly skilled workers, the overhead cost of labour was likely to be high.

(c) It was observed during the survey that some of the highly skilled workers had foreign training. The "Desh" garment industry along with the Korean firm "Daewoo" had trained a large group of mid-level managers in 1979. Their collaboration included six-months training of Bangladeshi garment workers in Korea. For on-the-job training, 130 workers were selected and at least college level education was required. It is important to note that 14 of these were women. This was the first time that female workers had received training abroad. The workers learnt not only production skills but also the whole system of production, marketing and management that "Daewoo" had developed over the years. These experiences were invaluable not only to "Desh" garment but created a good number of future managers/entrepreneurs for the garment industry. During our survey, it was noted that they were in high demand. Ironically, the workers were known as "Korean" and their salaries was very high. Many of them did not fulfil their bond with "Desh" garment and were now working as production managers/entrepreneur in other firms.

(d) Along with the production manager, this group can be included in the management of the production side. Hence, they were paid quite high.

The above suggests that there exists a dual labour market: secondary and primary. The secondary workers were those who were paid below the minimum wage of unskilled workers as they were young, unmarried, mostly female, mostly illiterate, had no experience, were secondary earners, and mostly of rural origin. These workers were most insecured in their jobs. It may be that, due to the availability of such workers, wages were depressed below the minimum wage. If the minimum wage was strictly enforced, about one-third of the workers would loose their jobs. Some entrepreneurs suggested that an acceptable minimum wage would be Tk.500 per month.

4.6 A Further Look into Skill Levels of Garment Workers

It may be mentioned here that the wage-structure summarised by a fact-finding mission report (comprising members from BGMEA, and EPB) was as follows:

Skill level	**Pay-scale**
Unskilled	Tk. 350-500
Semi-skilled	Tk. 650-850
Skilled	Tk.1000-1800

The above wage structure means that the garment workers are paid no less than Tk.350 and above Tk.1,800, which was not true. Moreover, in the absence of any continuity in grouping, we adopted the following grouping:

Skill level		**Pay-scale**
Unskilled	- Trainees	Tk. 300-350
	- Confirmed	Tk. 351-500
Semi- skilled	- Probationary	Tk. 501-650
	- Confirmed	Tk. 651-850
Skilled	- Probationary	Tk.851-1000
	- Confirmed	Tk.1001-2000
Highly skilled		Tk.2001 and above.

Table 4.14 shows that 25 per cent of the workers in the garment industry were unskilled, 23 per cent semi-skilled, 44 per cent skilled, and only 8 per cent highly skilled. There also exists gender differences; 34 per cent of the female workers were unskilled, while only 9 per cent of the male workers were unskilled. Thus, the female workers are relatively more insecured in their jobs in terms of wages.

TABLE 4.14

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY SKILL LEVELS

(column percentage)

Skill level	Male	Female	Total
Unskilled	9	34	25
Semi-skilled	27	21	23
Skilled	49	41	44
Highly skilled	15	04	08
No of workers	245	426	671

While reviewing the representation of the workers by skill level in different job categories, we can observe a direct correlation between the skill and job category. Table 4.15 shows that about 67 per cent of the skill I

(sewing helpers and finishing helpers) workers were unskilled, while 27 per cent were semi-skilled. This group consisted mostly of young, female and unmarried workers. Earlier it was hypothesized that this is likely to be the most insecured group in terms of low wages. Most workers in skill II (cutting helper, ironman and folding) were semi-skilled, while that of skill III (operators) were skilled. Fourty-nine per cent of the specialised workers of skill IV (cutting master/cutter, quality controller, supervisor) were skilled, and 47 per cent highly skilled. Hence, they were the most secured in terms of wages.

TABLE 4.15

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS UNDER VARIOUS JOB CATEGORIES BY SKILL LEVELS

(column percentage)

Skill level	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total
Unskilled	67	11	3	1	25
Semi-skilled	27	41	19	3	23
Skilled	06	46	76	49	44
Highly skilled	-	2	2	47	8
No. of workers	214	128	228	101	671

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

4.7 Perception of Workers About Gender Differential in Earnings

The concentration of jobs for women in the garment industry is a case of occupational segregation. The labour market is said to be segregated when some socioeconomic groups face limited opportunities in employment in terms of low wages, and a relatively limited range of accessible jobs. The two dimensions are interrelated. It is due to "occupational crowding" of the workers who were in some way set apart from, and were unable to compete with others that the prevailing wage level for them was lower than for others. The sub-markets could be identified by the distinctive supply, and demand conditions which potentially result in differential prices (wages). In Bangladesh, employment prospects in the garment industry for men and women differ along these dimensions.

The workers were asked whether there was any sex difference in wages for the same job category. About 52 per cent of the female workers, and 23 per cent of the male workers reported that there existed sex difference in

wages. Across the job categories, more male workers of skill I perceived a wage differential (37 per cent) than in skill II (20 per cent), skill III (17.9 per cent), and skill IV (22.9). But the reverse was the case for the female workers. Less of those in skill I perceived a wage differential (39 per cent) than those in skill II (50 per cent), skill III (64 per cent), and skill IV (47 per cent). The main reason for the sex difference as perceived by the workers was that men were more efficient (Table 4.16). Sixty-five per cent of the female workers and 85 per cent of male workers reported that there was a sex difference. About 14 per cent of the female workers felt that males received higher wages because they were males, and 8 per cent said that higher wages were paid to men because they were more productive. The responses generally suggest that sex difference exists in the garment industry.

TABLE 4.16

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS SHOWING THEIR PERCEPTION ABOUT SEX DIFFERENCE IN WAGES BY CATEGORY OF SKILLS

(row percentage)

Skill catagory	Sex difference exists	Reasons for differences					Total Workers
		More efficient	More production	As they are male	Higher education	Others	
Male							
Skill I	37.2	87.5	-	-	-	12.5	16
Skill II	19.8	89.5	-	-	5.3	5.3	19
Skill III	17.9	71.4	-	-	-	28.6	7
Skill IV	20.9	85.7	-	-	-	14.3	14
Total	22.9	85.7	-	-	1.8	12.5	56
(No)	(56)	(48)	-	-	(1)	(7)	
Female							
Skill I	39.8	58.8	13.2	13.2	-	14.7	68
Skill II	50.0	62.5	6.25	12.5	6.2	12.5	16
Skill III	64.0	68.3	4.9	14.6	-	12.2	123
Skill IV	47.1	68.7	6.3	6.3	6.3	12.5	16
Total	51.9	65.0	7.6	13.5	0.9	13.0	223
(No)	(223)	(145)	(17)	(30)	(2)	(29)	

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

4.8 Attendance and Leave

Table 4.17 shows that, on an average, 27 per cent of the workers came late to work, i.e. late by more than 10 minutes. Moreover, only 20 per cent of the male workers came late to work, while it was 32 per cent for the

female workers. The table also shows that across all job categories, except operators, larger proportion of the female workers came late to work than the male workers. Factories had introduced fining system for the late comers to maintain discipline in the factory. Table 4.17 shows that relatively more workers in skills I and II had to pay fine than those in other groups. They not only received lower pay but also had to pay a late fine.

TABLE 4.17

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS WHO COME LATE TO WORK AND PAID FINE FOR LATE BY CATEGORY OF SKILLS

(worker/monthly)

Skill level	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total
Male workers					
Come late	8	18	13	11	50
	(18.6)	(18.7)	(33.3)	(16.4)	(20.4)
Paid fine	3	3	3	2	11
	(7.0)	(3.1)	(7.7)	(3.0)	(4.5)
Female workers					
Come late	58	9	57	12	136
	(33.9)	(28.1)	(30.2)	(35.3)	(31.9)
Paid fine	20	8	13	4	45
	(11.7)	(25.0)	(6.9)	(11.8)	(10.6)
All workers					
Come late	66	27	70	23	186
	(30.8)	(21.1)	(30.7)	(22.8)	(27.7)
Paid fine	23	11	16	6	56
	(10.7)	(8.6)	(7.0)	(5.9)	(8.3)

Note: Figures in parentheses represent percentage of the total of male, female and total workers respectively in each skill.

1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

On an average, a worker got Tk.37 as an attendance bonus per year. A male worker got Tk.50, while a female worker got Tk.30. Although 13 per cent of both male and female workers got an attendance bonus, the rates for female were lower as the bonus rate varied with job categories. Table 4.18 also showed that when it comes to perfect attendance, the females were as regular as the male workers: 54 per cent had perfect attendance during the month preceding the survey. Moreover, though the attendance rate was almost same across job categories, workers in skill I and skill II received relatively less benefits on account of attendance bonus.

TABLE 4.18

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS WHO HAD PERFECT ATTENDANCE AND RECEIVED ATTENDANCE BONUS

(worker/month)

Characteristic	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	Average bonus (Tk)/yr
Male workers						
Perfect attendance	27	53	26	31	137	
	(62.8)	(55.2)	(66.7)	(46.3)	(55.9)	
Received Bonus	3	10	4	15	32	50
	(7.0)	(19.4)	(10.3)	(22.4)	(13.1)	
Female workers						
Perfect attendance	94	19	98	19	230	
	(55.0)	(59.4)	(51.6)	(54.3)	(53.7)	
Received Bonus	20	5	24	9	58	30
	(11.7)	(15.6)	(12.7)	(265)	(13.6)	
All workers						
Perfect attendance	121	72	124	50	367	
	(56.5)	(56.2)	(54.4)	(49.5)	(54.7)	
Received Bonus	23	15	28	24	90	77
	(10.8)	(11.7)	(12.3)	(23.8)	(13.4)	

Note: Figures in parentheses represent percentage of the total of male, female and total workers respectively in each skill.
1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

Normally, an entrepreneur had to bear some fixed cost per worker, such as provision of paid leave and increment. After working for one year a worker was usually granted the following types of leaves:

Casual leave	10 days per year
Sick leave	14 days per year
Annual leave	14 days per year

During the probationary or training period, a worker was not entitled to any paid leave. This probationary or training period may vary from 3 to 12 months depending on the productivity of a worker and the factory in question. Table 4.19 shows that, on an average, about 23 per cent of the total workers in the garment industry reported that they had enjoyed the paid leave last month. The incidence of paid leave was higher for the male workers (29 per cent) than the female workers (20 per cent). The incidence also varied across job categories. The paid leave was enjoyed mostly by the specialised skill IV; about 39 per cent of the skill IV workers had enjoyed

the paid leave in a month. On the other hand, the incidence was lowest for skill I, i.e. sewing helpers and finishing helpers: only 17 per cent had enjoyed the paid leave. For those in skill II, more of the male workers (28 per cent) enjoyed paid leave than the female workers (15 per cent). The incidence of paid leave was also higher for the male skill IV workers (42 per cent) than the female skill IV workers. Moreover, 12 per cent of child labourers aged 10-14 years had enjoyed the paid leave.

TABLE 4.19

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS WHO HAD ENJOYED LEAVE

(worker/month)

Characteristic	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total
Male workers					
Paid leave	8	27	8	28	71
	(18.6)	(28.1)	(20.5)	(41.8)	(29.0)
Unpaid leave	8	20	9	13	50
	(18.6)	(20.8)	(23.1)	(17.9)	(20.4)
Female workers					
Paid leave	29	5	40	11	85
	(17.0)	(15.6)	(21.2)	(32.4)	(20.0)
Unpaid leave	54	8	59	6	127
	(31.6)	(25.0)	(31.2)	(17.6)	(29.8)
All workers					
Paid leave	37	32	48	39	156
	(17.3)	(25.0)	(21.1)	(38.6)	(23.2)
Unpaid leave	62	28	68	19	177
	(29.0)	(21.9)	(29.8)	(18.8)	(26.4)

Note: Figures in parentheses represent percentage of the total of male, female and total workers respectively in each skill.

1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

As the paid leave was not readily granted, and not everyone was eligible, the workers in the garment industry, therefore, had to take the unpaid leave. About 26 per cent of the total workers had taken unpaid leave. Relatively more of the female workers (30 per cent) took the unpaid leave than the male workers (20 per cent). Also, the incidence of unpaid leave was higher for skill II and skill III jobs than the rest. These jobs were female dominated. Moreover, since most of those in skill III (i.e. operators) were married, they had to take leave to meet family demands. About 41 per cent of the child labours had taken unpaid leave.

Table 4.20 shows that leave was not easily granted. Only 36 per cent of the workers reported that leave was easily granted, while another 40 per cent

said that leave was sometimes granted. In 24 per cent of the cases, leave was not granted. There seemed to be no difference between gender regarding the granting of leave. Across the job categories, more leave of skill IV was easily granted than the rest. Moreover, children were treated equally as the rest of the workers.

TABLE 4.20

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY REPORTED EASE IN GETTING OF LEAVE

(Row percentage)

Characteristic	Yes	No	Sometimes	Total
Skill				
I	34.1	26.2	39.7	100
II	33.6	25.8	40.6	100
III	34.6	24.6	40.8	100
IV	44.6	14.9	40.6	100
Sex				
Male	36.3	23.3	40.4	100
Female	35.4	24.1	40.4	100
All workers	35.8	23.7	40.4	100
10-14 years	36.0	24.7	39.3	100

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

4.9 Recruitment Procedure

In most factories surveyed, the workers reported that they had to apply, in writing, for a post, and had to face an interview. During the interview, all workers were required to know how to sign their names. In some factories they were also required to know numbers in English and English alphabets, and recognise colour/shade differences. Those workers who were skilled/ semi-skilled also had to face a practical examination. For example, those applying for the operator position had to appear before a practical test where speed, accuracy and neatness of the work was judged. Besides, assessments were made to know whether candidates were arrogant, or had a tendency to migrate, or whether there was any labour problem in the factories where they had previously worked. Some factories also examined whether the applicants had any eye problems.

The value, attached by the employers to social cohesion of a firm-specific labour force, often compelled them to depend on the existing employees or their supervisors to introduce new applicants for vacancies. The importance of kinship ties in the recruitment process was reflected in our finding; 38.8 per cent of the working members in the surveyed female

workers' families worked in the garment industry. About 17 per cent of the total respondents got the job through neighbours, 49 per cent through friends and relatives, and 33 per cent searched on their own (Table 4.21). There was also a gender difference in the search process. About 22 per cent of the female workers sought jobs in garment industry through neighbours, while for men it was 10 per cent. About 53 per cent of the female workers were recruited through relatives/friends, while 47 per cent of the male workers were recruited through this medium. Of the total male workers, 37 per cent searched job on their own, while 30 per cent of the female workers did so. Moreover, there was a difference in the medium of recruitment depending on the age and job category. About 22 per cent of child workers sought job through neighbours, and only 17 per cent searched on their own. This is expected because child workers lacked experience, and therefore they had to be introduced by someone. But the older workers aged 30-34, who were likely to have some job experience, usually searched job on their own (46 per cent). They sometimes received information about jobs in the newspaper and posters outside the factory gate.

TABLE 4.21

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY MEDIUM OF RECRUITMENT

(row percentage)

Characteristic	Neighbour	Relative/ Friends	Searched on their own	Total number	Column %
Skill					
I	23.8	52.3	23.8	214	31.9
II	14.1	50.8	35.2	128	19.1
III	16.7	49.6	33.8	228	34.0
IV	11.9	40.6	47.5	101	15.1
Sex					
Male	9.8	53.1	37.1	245	36.5
Female	22.3	47.2	30.5	426	63.5
Age					
10-14	22.5	60.7	16.8	89	13.3
15-19	21.5	53.7	24.8	214	31.9
20-24	16.8	42.2	41.0	185	27.6
25-29	9.3	50.5	40.2	97	14.5
30-34	15.8	38.6	45.6	57	8.5
35-39	17.4	47.8	34.8	23	3.4
40-65	-	38.3	61.7	6	.9
Total	17.7	49.3	32.9	671	100.0

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

Across job categories we observed that 76 per cent of the sewing helpers and finishing helpers (skill I) sought job at the garment through neighbours, relatives, or friends; while only 52 per cent of those who were supervisors, quality controllers, or cutting masters (skill IV) used this medium of recruitment. In the case of the latter jobs, recruitments were usually done through advertisement in the newspapers or by postering on the factory gates.

Moreover, as noted earlier, the labour market of the garment industry drew upon the rural sector rather than the informal urban economy. It was further observed that the jobs at the garment industry were pre-allocated to a certain extent. Thus, job search and migration were interrelated. About 74 per cent of the surveyed workers were of rural origin. Of them, 53 per cent came with full information about getting a job at the garment industry. There was also a gender difference: about 57 per cent of the female workers originating from the rural areas came with job information in the garments, while for the male workers it was 47 per cent. The findings of the survey generally suggest that access to the garment industry is a function of social connection.

There were also differences in job information across sex groups by job categories (Table 4.22). About 66 per cent of the female workers in job categories, like sewing helper and finishing helper (comprising skill I), came with information, while for the male workers it was only 30 per cent of the migrants. On the other hand, for the male-dominated jobs belonging to skill II, 71 per cent of male workers in this category had migrated with full

TABLE 4.22

EXTENT OF MIGRATION BY SKILLS

(percentages)

Criteria	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total
Female					
Non-migrant	28.1	37.5	31.2	35.3	30.8
Migrants	71.9	62.5	68.8	64.7	69.2
% of migrant who came with prior information	66.1	62.5	56.2	22.7	57.3
Male					
Non-migrant	23.3	16.7	17.9	13.4	17.1
Migrant	76.7	83.3	82.1	86.6	82.9
% of the migrant who came with prior information	29.8	71.1	59.4	34.5	47.3

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

information, while for the female it was 45 per cent. For higher category job like skill IV, more male workers (34 per cent) migrated with full information than the female workers (23 per cent). Job information were sent to rural areas through employees. Thus, in the absence of market for information, "networking" was the commonly sought alternative. An employer could, thus, reduce transaction cost, screening cost, and moral hazards by relying on recommendations of current employees regarding new recruitment. The cost of supervision was also low for known persons. Moreover, the workers could also live with these intermediaries after coming to the urban areas.

It is also important to know what was the waiting period to get a job in the garment factory. Table 4.23 shows that about 55 per cent of the total workers reported that they had to wait 1-5 days to get a job in the garment industry. Another 10 per cent got jobs within 6-10 days, and 12 per cent got jobs within 11-20 days. Only for 12 per cent of the workers, it took more than one month to get a job. Given that the waiting period was very short, one would expect that migration of these workers did not cause unemployment. Relatively, the waiting period for the female workers was shorter. About 58 per cent of them got job within 1-5 days; the corresponding figure for the male workers was 53 per cent. Operators had to wait a longer time than other categories of workers to get a job in the garment industry.

TABLE 4.23

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY WAITING TIME TO GET A JOB

(column percentage)

Days of waiting	Male	Female	Total
0	1.2	0.9	1.0
1-5	51.8	57.0	55.1
6-10	11.4	8.5	9.5
11-20	14.3	10.3	11.8
21-30	10.2	11.0	10.7
30+	11.1	12.2	11.8
Total no. of workers	245	426	671

Various factors affecting costs of seeking employment were all the more important since 74 per cent of the workers originated from the rural areas. Table 4.24 shows that about 30 per cent of the workers originated from Dhaka district (old), followed by 14 per cent from Faridpur and Barisal each, 10 per cent originated from Comilla, and 9 per cent from

Mymensingh. Faridpur, Barisal, Dhaka, and Comilla were also found to be major districts from where the migrant population of slums in Dhaka city originated. All these districts were generally characterised by high proportion of landlessness. Among the female workers, most originated

TABLE 4.24

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY DISTRICTS OF ORIGIN

(column percentage)

District of origin	Male	Female	All workers
Dhaka	23.7	34.7	30.7
Faridpur	14.3	12.9	13.4
Mymensingh	6.1	11.3	9.4
Noakhali	8.2	2.8	4.8
Tangail	8.2	1.6	2.5
Comilla	13.7	7.8	9.7
Barisal	12.2	15.3	14.2
Kushtia	2.0	2.1	2.1
Jessore	2.9	2.4	2.5
Others	13.5	9.2	10.7
Total no of workers	245	426	671

from Dhaka (35 per cent), followed by Barisal (15 per cent) and Faridpur (13 per cent). Mobility from these areas was easier; water transport was cheap, and easily available from Barisal and Faridpur.

4.10 On the Job Training

In the garment industry, most workers received on-the-job training. About 57 per cent of the workers surveyed had received training in the present factory, whereas about 40 per cent had received training in the previous factory. There was not much difference in gender pattern. On an average, the period of training as helper was for 9 months. During this period, workers were paid less than the minimum wage for at least six months, during which they were considered apprentices. Some management personnel admitted that a new operator could learn his/her job in a week or at most two.

Most entrepreneurs reported that turnover rate was higher for the sewing and finishing helpers. The reason for leaving was mostly voluntary migration in expectation of higher wages. Some women workers also migrated due to getting married or as the family migrated to another place.

4.11 Job Mobility

Job mobility may take place interfirm or intrafirm. Interfirm mobility or "job hopping" occurs usually when there is no upward mobility in the same factory. We discuss the two types of mobilities separately in this section.

4.11.1 Intrafirm Mobility

It is usually said that promotion prospects were rather slim for both men and women workers in the garment industry. Job at the garment factory was usually considered to be a dead-end job.

Table 4.25 shows that about 73 per cent of the workers surveyed did not get any promotion in their present factory. For the male workers, 30 per cent got promotion, while for the female workers it was 25 per cent. Thus, here too there was a gender difference. Promotion prospects were minimal for women. On an average, a worker had to stay for nearly 32 months in the factory to get the first promotion. Usually, about 25 per cent pay increase took place with the first promotion, and then the pay rose at a much slower rate with subsequent promotions. The prospect for promotion was lower because the jobs in the garments industry were mostly of temporary nature. Only 30 per cent of the workers felt that they had permanent jobs. About 60 per cent of the workers said that they felt their jobs at the garment to be of temporary nature; and another 5 per cent felt that as they were contract workers there was no prospects for promotion. The rest felt that they were probationary workers.

Table 4.26 shows that 26 per cent of the female workers started as sewing helpers and 51 per cent as finishing helpers in their first job at the garment industry. For the male workers, 62 per cent started as finishing helpers, and 9 per cent as cutting helpers. Of the current supervisors, about 35 per cent started as finishing helpers; while about 40 per cent of the quality controller and cutting masters had started as finishing helpers. Thus, about 35-40 per cent of the workers had the opportunity for upward mobility.

TABLE 4.25

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY NUMBER OF PROMOTION

No. of promotion	Male	Female	Total	Average total service (months)			Average pay (Tk/month)		
		(percentages)		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0	69.8	74.9	73.0	32	32	32	1251	776	942
1	22.4	19.2	20.4	32	47	41	1424	1030	1209
2	4.5	2.8	3.4	50	43	46	1468	1065	1239
3	2.8	0.7	1.9	58	58	58	2467	1933	2307
4+	0.4	2.3	1.3	80	88	84	3600	3250	3337

TABLE 4.26

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS SHOWING THEIR FIRST OCCUPATION IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY

(column percentage)

First occupation	Present occupation									Total	Male	Female
	Quality controller	Cutting master	Cutting helper	Sewing super-visor	Sewing operator	Sewing helper	Iron-man	Folding	Finishing helper			
Quality controller	30.00	-	-	-	0.4	-	-	1.8	-	1.2	2.0	0.7
Cutting master	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.8	-	-	0.1	0.4	-
Cutting helper	5.0	46.2	21.1	1.9	0.4	-	-	-	-	3.4	9.0	-
Sewing supervisor	5.0	-	-	14.8	0.9	-	-	-	-	1.8	2.4	1.4
Sewing operator	15.0	-	-	20.4	15.8	-	-	-	-	7.5	4.9	8.9
Sewing helper	-	7.7	2.6	5.6	34.6	21.1	5.6	5.5	15.1	19.7	7.8	26.5
Ironman	-	-	-	1.9	1.3	0.6	-	7.3	-	1.3	3.3	0.2
Folding	-	3.8	5.3	5.6	4.4	1.9	8.3	18.2	1.9	4.9	4.9	4.9
Finishing helper	40.0	42.3	68.4	35.2	34.6	75.2	82.6	67.3	83.0	55.7	62.4	51.9
Trainee supervisor	5.0	-	-	3.7	-	0.6	-	-	-	0.6	1.6	5.2
Trainee operator	-	-	2.6	9.3	7.5	0.6	-	-	-	3.6	0.8	-
Trainee helper	-	-	-	1.9	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	0.4	0.3
Total no. of Workers	**20**	**26**	**38**	**54**	**228**	**161**	**36**	**55**	**53**	**671**	**245**	**426**

Although the prospect for promotion was low, there were indeed provisions for yearly increments. Of the total 671 workers surveyed, 55 per cent reported that they had received increments last year. Of the male workers, 56 per cent received increments, while 54 per cent of the female workers did so. Table 4.27 shows that although there was not much difference across gender, increments varied across occupation and age groups. At the lower end of the scale (skill I), only 42 per cent received increments, while for the higher job categories, 60-65 per cent of the workers had received increments. Table 4.27 also shows that sewing helpers and finishing helpers were the worst off. Moreover, they were often deprived of increments. Only 40 per cent of them had received increments.

TABLE 4.27

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS SHOWING INCREMENTS RECEIVED LAST YEAR

Category	Received Increments (percentage of each group)	Tk/Year		
		Total	Male	Female
Skill				
I	42.1	50	60	48
II	59.8	87	97	93
III	63.3	96	108	57
IV	60.0	168	187	120
Sex				
Male	56.4			
Female	53.4			
Age group (years)				
10-14	39.4	39	60	33
15-19	52.0	83	89	82
20-24	55.5	93	120	72
25-29	61.5	101	123	59
30-34	66.7	92	97	85
35-39	92.3	174	287	124
40-45	75.0	75	83	50
Education				
Can sign at best	37.0	67	76	65
Upto class V	61.7	73	100	66
Class VI to class X	76.2	90	117	70
Above Class X	92.6	122	116	146
All workers	54.5	85	110	71

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

The average increment per worker per year was about Tk.85: for the male workers it was Tk.110, while for the female workers it was Tk.71 only. Hence here too there was sex discrimination. Across age groups, we saw that a child labour received Tk.39 only. The increment amount usually rose

with age and education of a worker. Variations across gender were found to exist for each job category.

During our survey, the workers were asked to mention the factors on which increments depended. Of the total 671 workers, 56 per cent reported that it depended on productivity, 5 per cent said that it depended on owner's will or his profit, 8 per cent thought that there were no rules, and another 5 per cent said that it depended on experience. About 25 per cent of the workers had no knowledge about how increments were given. Table 4.28 shows that about 36 per cent of the sewing and finishing helpers (skill I) had no knowledge about increments. Across gender, more male workers (62 per cent) felt that it depended on productivity than did the female workers (54 per cent). With higher job categories, the productivity difference was cited as the main criterion.

TABLE 4.28

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY OPINION ON METHOD OF INCREMENT

(Row percentage)

Catagory	Increment methods					Total no.
	Produc-tivity	Owners will/ preference	No rules	Experience	No knowledge	
Skill						
I	46.7	4.7	7.0	5.6	35.9	214
II	63.3	5.5	8.6	3.1	19.5	128
III	58.3	4.4	8.3	6.1	23.0	228
IV	65.3	9.9	5.0	3.0	16.8	101
Sex						
Male	61.6	5.3	5.3	3.3	24.5	145
Female	53.8	5.6	8.7	5.9	26.0	426
All workers	56.6	5.5	7.5	4.9	25.5	671

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

4.11.2 Interfirm Mobility

The rate of job hopping depended on job conditions. It was reported that in the past the migration of workers was high. As there was usually no written contract, the workers changed jobs very frequently, usually in search for a higher wage. We found that 53 per cent of the workers surveyed had not worked in any other garment factories beside the existing one, 28 per cent had worked in one garment factory prior to the present, 17 per cent had worked in 2-3 garment factories prior to joining the present one (Table 4.29).

We also found that 50 per cent of the female workers, and 58 per cent of the male workers had not changed their jobs at all. Usually, the management complained that men do not stay on a single job for long, and migrate frequently. They therefore, preferred to employ female workers. But contrary to this, we find that the turnover rate was higher for females (50 per cent) than for males (42 per cent).

TABLE 4.29

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS SHOWING INTER-FIRM MOBILITY

(column percentage)

No. of firms worked	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	Male	Female
0	75.2	60.2	34.2	39.6	53.0	57.9	50.2
1	21.9	22.7	37.7	23.7	27.7	19.6	32.3
2-3	2.9	17.1	25.0	28.7	17.0	18.4	16.2
4-5	-	-	2.6	8.0	2.1	3.7	1.1
6+	-	-	0.5	-	0.2	0.4	0.2
Total workers	214	128	228	101	671	245	426

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

Table 4.29 also shows that 75 per cent of the sewing and finishing helpers (skill I) had not worked in any other factories beside the existing one. About 60 per cent of the workers belonging to job category, like ironman, cutting helper, and folding (skill II), had not changed job. The workers in skill I and II were mostly untrained. They acquired the skill usually in the present factory. Operators (skill III), on the other hand, were very mobile: about 66 per cent of them had at least worked in another factory, and 25 per cent had worked in 2-3 factories besides the present one. This shows that there was hardly any scope for promotion. On the other hand, 60 per cent of the specialised skill IV-level workers had changed their jobs at least once. This was because their skill was in high demand. For the unskilled workers, promotion prospects were minimal; nor they could improve their earnings by rather frequent “job hopping” from one firm to another.

Although the average stay of a worker in a firm was about 23 months, the workers belonging to skill I stayed for only 14 months (Table 4.30). Moreover, relative to the male workers, the female workers tended to stay longer on the job (24 months) than the male workers (21 months) did. This

was true also across all job categories. Moreover, the married workers tended to stay longer (29 months). Hence, some entrepreneurs preferred to keep the married workers for some positions like operators and supervisors. The average stay of a worker in a firm also increased with age, and with better job category. Thus, as worker got older, and occupied a better position, he/she tended to stay longer in a factory.

It was usually complained that the workers were laid off or dismissed in the garment factory. But we found that about 70 per cent of the workers had left their last job voluntarily while only 13 per cent had to leave due to being laid off or dismissed (Table 4.31). As there was no written contract or appointment letter the workers could move freely from one firm to another. Usually, they searched for jobs with higher wages.

TABLE 4.30

AVERAGE STAY OF WORKERS IN A FIRM

(months)

Category	Male	Female	Total
Skill			
I	13	14	14
II	20	25	21
III	19	30	28
IV	27	35	30
Age group (years)			
10-14	14	11	13
15-19	13	18	19
20-24	21	20	24
25-29	26	24	29
30-34	28	23	30
35-39	20	25	29
40-65	20	-	30
Marital status			
Married	28	30	29
Unmarried	17	19	18
Widow	-	29	29
Divorced	30	21	21
Abondoned	-	6	6
Seperated	7	21	9
Total	21	24	23

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

Of those who had changed jobs, about 27 per cent reported that they had done so due to low wage (Table 4.31). The second important reason given was that wages were not paid on time. This was reported by 20 per cent of

those who had changed jobs. For women, long distance from residence was also an important factor for changing jobs (16 per cent), while for men it was not so important (5 per cent). Moreover, the female workers had a tendency to leave jobs more than men do due to their own illness.

TABLE 4.31

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY THEIR REASON FOR LEAVING LAST JOB

(column percentage)

Reasons	Male	Female	Total
Lay off/dismissal	14.6	12.6	13.2
Wage not paid on time	23.3	18.2	20.0
Very low wage	23.3	29.0	27.1
Long distance from residence	5.8	15.9	13.0
Abusive behaviour of management	5.8	4.6	4.7
Due to own illness	3.9	5.2	4.7
Others	21.4	14.0	16.4
No information	1.9	0.5	0.9
Total no. of workers	103	214	317

4.12 Firm Size and Economic Conditions

Table 4.32 shows the characteristics of sampled firms by firm size. In our sample, 34 per cent of the firms were small, 44 per cent were medium, and 22 per cent were large. Thus compared to the distribution of population, (Table 2.1) relatively more of the larger firms were included in the sample. The average employment was 185, 350, and 751 workers respectively for the small, medium, and large sized firms. About 62 per cent of the workers in the sampled firms were female. Relatively, the large-sized firms had more female workers than the smaller firms.

The number of days in operation did not vary with size. In September 1990, the firms were in operation for 27 days. The pay day on an average was on the 12^{th} day of the month. But the smaller firms delayed by two days. The average overtime hours worked was 81 hours a month during the peak time. In the smaller firms, the workers had to work longer hours (98 hours a month). Relatively, the medium-sized firms spread their work evenly throughout the year. Hence, during the peak time, the workers worked about 68 hours a month as overtime.

The overtime wage rate per hour was Tk. 2.60 on an average. The average overtime wage rate for males was found to be higher in the large-

sized firms. It was about three times that offered by the smaller firms. But for the female workers, the overtime rates were higher in medium firms.

TABLE 4.32

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLED FIRMS BY SIZE OF FIRMS

Characteristic	Size of employment			Total
	Up to 249	250-499	500+	
Percentage of firms surveyed	34.4	43.8	21.8	100
Average no. of workers	185	350	751	380
Female workers (%)	55.5	60.8	65.7	61.9
No. of Days operated/month	26.9	26.7	25.8	12
Pay day (day of the following month)	14	11	11	
Overtime hours/month				
Male	97	70	75	81
Female	98	67	82	81
Total	98	68	79	81
Overtime wage rate (Tk./hour)				
Male	1.7	4.5	5.2	3.4
Female	1.2	2.8	2.5	2.2
Total	1.5	3.4	3.5	2.6
Other bonuses (Tk./day)				
Male	2.6	6.7	2.6	4.2
Female	1	3.1	3.3	2.5
Total	1.7	4.2	3	3.1
Eid bonus: (Tk/month)				
Male	19	36	26	27
Female	16	17	33	20
Total	17	23	30	23
Monthly pay (Tk./month)				
Male	1231	1434	1392	1344
Female	847	877	959	886
Total	1014	1053	1115	1053
Yearly increment				
Male	118	142	117	127
Female	66	84	98	81
Total	88	101	105	97

The medium sized firms give more bonus. On an average, Eid bonus was higher for larger firms. The average yearly increments did not vary much between the medium-sized and larger firms. The table also shows that monthly pay varied with firm size. The smaller firms paid about 4 per cent less than the average wage, while the large ones paid 6 per cent more than an average worker's pay. The pattern was same for females, but for the male workers, the average pay was higher in medium-sized firms than in larger firms.

CHAPTER 5

SOCIAL SECURITY OF GARMENT WORKERS

We had previously looked into the state of economic security of the garment workers. The present chapter addresses (i) social security at the work place, (ii) security while commuting to work, and (iii) security at the place of residence.

5.1 Security at Work Place

A worker was likely to feel socially secured at work place if the work environment is congenial. The value attached by employers to social cohesion of a firm-specific labour force lead them to depend on the existing employees or their supervisors to introduce new applicants for vacancies. The importance of kinship ties in the recruitment process was found to be very important. Moreover, as noted earlier, the labour market of the garment industry drew upon the rural sector rather than the informal urban economy. The behaviour of workers of both sex was very important. Workers also preferred to stay in those factories where the behaviour of the management was good. A global reflection of the congenial atmosphere could be measured by job satisfaction. Hence, this measure will also be used. Lastly, we will look into the occurrence of harassment or other incidences within the factory, either in the case of the respondents or any other garment workers.

5.1.1 Relative at the Factory

We had mentioned earlier that quite often employments in factories were provided to persons belonging to one family. This was done for the following reasons:

(a) The employer was more assured that the worker would stay on the job, and would not leave after the training period.

(b) The employees also felt secured to have relatives at the factory, so that the could commute to work together.

(c) Having relative at the factory gave women security against bad behaviour of male supervisors or co-workers.

(d) It also helped them to have joint accommodation near the factory.

It is interesting to note from Table 5.1 that 39 per cent of the total garment workers had at least one relative in that factory. Compared to males (34 per cent), a higher proportion of the female workers had relatives (43 per cent) working in the same factory. About 13 per cent of the workers had their sister, six per cent had brother, four per cent had spouse, two per cent had mother, and another 13 per cent had other relatives, including children. Moreover, almost 25 per cent of the female workers had their sister or brother (beside another 6 per cent with mother or spouse) in the same factory, while only 10 per cent of the male workers had so. Employment of two sisters in the same factory was likely to ensure safe commuting, and facilitate the finding of an accommodation. Our survey found four per cent of women workers to live in the mess with sisters.

TABLE 5.1

DISTRIBUTIONS SHOWING WORKERS HAVING RELATIVE IN THE SAME FACTORY

(column percentage)

Type of relative	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	Male	Female
Mother	2.8	0.8	3.5	1.0	2.4	2.8	2.1
Sister	16.3	7.0	16.2	7.0	13.1	3.3	18.8
Brother	6.1	6.2	6.6	5.0	6.1	6.5	5.8
Spouse	-	4.7	6.1	5.0	3.7	3.7	3.8
Other relatives	15.9	12.4	12.7	12.00	13.6	17.6	11.3
Don't have relatives	58.9	68.9	54.9	70.0	61.1	66.1	58.2
Total workers	214	129	228	100	671	245	426

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

According to job category, 45 per cent of the operators (skill III) had at least one relative in the same factory, and it was 40 per cent for the sewing and finishing helpers (skill I). Workers in job categories, like supervisor, quality controller and cutter/cutting master (skill IV), had relatively less relatives in the factory (30 per cent). One should recall that they were the most economically secured adult and married workers. Those who were sewing helpers and finishing helpers were young, and mostly unmarried. Hence, having a relative in the factory gave them social security at the work place. Moreover, having a relative at the work place also gave them security against bad behaviour of the co-workers and supervisors.

5.1.2 Behaviour of Management and Co-workers

It was often claimed that the management in the garment industry behaved very badly with the workers. In this study, we found that such claims were far from truth. We had asked the workers about the behaviour of the management people, their female co-workers and male co-workers. Their responses are summarised in Table 5.2. Of the total 671 workers, about 65 per cent reported that the behaviour of the male as well as the female workers was good or very good, while 60 per cent had similar view about the management. Relative to the male workers, more female workers (about 64 per cent) responded that the behaviour of the management, male and female co-workers was either good or very good. This was true across job categories as well as age groups. This suggests that in general the female workers were relatively more satisfied with the work environment than men. Across job categories, we noted that in the female-dominated jobs like operators, only 44 per cent of the male operators were satisfied (i.e. felt that they were good or very good) with female co-workers, while the corresponding figure for the female operators was 65 per cent. On the other hand, in the male-dominated job category – skill II, only 53 per cent of the female workers were satisfied with the male co-workers' behaviour, while for males belonging to this group, 66 per cent were so. This shows that the minority workers (in terms of sex) of any group always perceived themselves to be at a disadvantage. In one factory, a young male operator reported that the management rebuked them even when they were not at fault, and that the management usually took the side of the girls. Sometimes, "girls" reportedly made false complaint against "boys". In this survey, we found that seven per cent of the workers reported job dissatisfaction due to bad behaviour of the management. Many said that they tended to stay on the job if the management personnel were good. The workers felt that there had been an improvement in the work environment, as well as in the sitting arrangements over the years. Some firms reported that sometimes they faced problem when men and women worked together. Thus, they were distributing work according to sex. Moreover, priority was given to one's behaviour in assessing his/her candidature during recruitment.

TABLE 5.2

DISTRIBUTION SHOWING BEHAVIOUR OF WORKERS AND MANAGEMENT

(column percentage)

Behaviour of	Male					Female					All workers
	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	
Women co-workers											
Very good	7.6	6.3	5.8	5.9	6.6	2.3	1.0	-	1.5	1.2	4.6
Good	64.9	56.3	64.0	61.8	63.6	53.5	63.5	43.6	61.2	58.0	61.5
Not so good	26.9	37.5	28.0	26.5	28.2	27.9	27.1	33.3	32.8	29.8	28.8
Not good	0.6	-	2.1	2.9	1.4	2.3	2.1	-	-	1.2	1.3
Don't know	-	-	-	2.9	0.2	-	1.0	2.6	-	0.8	0.4
Not applicable	-	-	-	-	-	14.0	5.2	20.5	4.5	9.0	3.3
Male co-workers											
Very good	4.7	3.1	3.2	5.9	4.0	2.3	-	7.7	1.5	2.0	3.3
Good	60.8	50.0	61.9	70.6	61.3	60.5	65.6	53.8	64.2	62.4	61.7
Not so good	31.6	43.8	29.1	20.6	30.5	34.9	32.3	35.9	31.3	33.1	31.4
Not good	2.9	3.1	5.8	2.9	4.2	2.3	2.1	-	1.5	1.6	3.3
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.6	1.5	0.8	0.3
Management											
Very good	3.5	6.3	5.8	23.5	6.3	4.7	2.1	10.3	6.0	4.9	5.8
Good	62.0	43.8	55.6	55.9	57.3	58.1	54.2	43.6	62.7	55.5	56.6
Not so good	29.8	37.5	30.7	17.6	29.8	27.9	37.5	28.2	26.9	31.4	30.4
Not good	4.7	12.5	7.9	2.9	6.6	9.3	6.3	15.4	4.5	7.8	7.0
Don't know	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.6	-	0.4	0.1
Total no. of workers	171	32	189	34	426	43	96	39	67	245	671

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

5.1.3 Job Satisfaction

A global index of congenial work environment is the extent of job satisfaction of workers. During the survey, the workers were asked whether they are satisfied or dissatisfied with their present jobs; the responses are presented in Table 5.3. About 59 per cent of the workers surveyed were found to be satisfied with their present jobs. Relatively, more female workers (60 per cent) were satisfied with their jobs than the male workers (58 per cent). The difference was, however, not statistically significant. There was, however, significant difference in the extent of job satisfaction across some job categories. The least satisfied workers were of skill II, i.e. cutting helpers, ironman and folding. It may be recalled here that this job category was male dominated. The dissatisfaction was more among the male workers of this group (56 per cent) than among the female workers (41 per cent). The most satisfied workers belonged to skill IV, i.e. quality controller, cutting master/cutter, and sewing supervisors (66 per cent). This job category was also male-dominated. Here the satisfaction was more among the male workers (69 per cent) than the female workers (62 per cent). For the female workers, the satisfaction level did not vary across job category, but it did in the case of the male workers.

TABLE 5.3

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS EXPRESSING SATISFACTION WITH THEIR JOBS

Sex	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total
Male	60.5	43.8	69.2	68.7	57.6
Female	61.4	59.4	59.3	61.8	60.3
Both	61.2	47.7	60.9	66.3	59.3
Total no. of workers	**214**	**128**	**228**	**101**	**671**

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

The reason for job satisfaction and distribution of workers by such reasons are shown in Table 5.4. The most popular reason was that the alternative to working at the garment industry was to be unemployed. This was expressed by 20 per cent of the workers. The second reason for job satisfaction was good behaviour of the management as expressed by 19 per cent of the workers. The third reason was that wages in the respective firms were higher than elsewhere. This was expressed by 18 per cent of the workers. There was a gender difference in response. The women workers were more satisfied with their present jobs because of good behaviour of the

management (23 per cent), the alternative was to be unemployed (18 per cent), and better wage at the present factory (14 per cent). The order of preference was different for men; the responses were higher wage (25 per cent), the alternative was to be unemployed (23 per cent), and timely payment (14 per cent). Another factor, namely nearness from residence, was relatively more important for the female workers (11 per cent) than the male workers (8 per cent).

TABLE 5.4

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY REASON FOR JOB SATISFACTION

(row percentage)

Job category	Reasons							
	High wage	Less work	Near from resi-dence	Not being unem-ployed	Good behaviour of manage-ment	Timely pay-ment	Others	Not repor-ted
Male								
Skill I	15.4	7.7	7.7	23.0	15.4	15.4	15.4	-
Skill II	14.6	4.2	6.2	27.1	8.3	18.7	16.7	4.2
Skill III	34.4	3.1	3.1	21.9	9.4	12.5	15.6	-
Skill IV	35.4	2.1	12.5	20.8	12.5	8.3	8.3	-
Total	25.3	3.9	7.8	23.4	11.0	13.6	13.6	1.3
Female								
Skill I	8.8	2.6	9.6	20.2	22.8	8.8	25.4	1.8
Skill II	13.6	-	13.6	18.2	31.8	9.1	4.5	9.1
Skill III	14.9	2.5	13.2	14.9	23.1	14.9	16.5	-
Skill IV	29.2	12.5	4.2	20.8	12.5	8.3	12.5	-
Total	13.5	3.2	11.0	17.8	22.8	11.4	18.9	1.4
All workers								
Skill I	10.0	3.6	9.3	20.7	21.4	10.0	23.6	1.4
Skill II	14.3	2.9	8.6	24.2	15.7	15.7	12.9	5.7
Skill III	19.0	2.6	11.1	16.3	20.3	14.4	16.3	-
Skill IV	33.3	5.6	9.7	20.8	12.5	8.3	9.7	-
Total	17.7	3.4	9.9	19.8	18.6	12.2	17.0	1.4

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

The reason for job satisfaction also differed across job categories. Those in skills I and II were more satisfied with their jobs because of good behaviour of management, and being employed rather than remaining unemployed, while for those in skill groups III and IV, high wage was an important factor. Relatively, more men than women in the latter groups were satisfied with their present job due to high wages.

Table 5.5 shows the extent of reason-specific dissatisfaction with the present job. The most popular reason given was low wage as reported by 57

per cent of the workers who were dissatisfied with their present jobs. This was followed by more work as reported by 22 per cent of the workers. There was not much difference in response across sex or job categories. Distance from residence was important for the skill IV workers, especially for the female workers (19 per cent). The female skill IV workers also reported that the behaviour of the management was bad (13 per cent), while none of the male workers of skill IV expressed that to be a reason for dissatisfaction. The delay in payment was identified by only 3 per cent of the dissatisfied workers. There was, however, a gender difference in such reporting; only 1.5 per cent of the male workers, and 3.4 per cent of the female workers were dissatisfied for this reason. These suggest that workers were mostly satisfied with the timing of payment; but when there were discrepancies, the female workers were likely to be affected most. This was also true for the behaviour of management.

TABLE 5.5

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY REASON FOR JOB DISSATISFACTION

(row percentage)

Job category		Reasons for job dissatisfaction						
		Low wage	More work	Far from residence	Better to be employed	Bad behaviour of management	Payment not on time	Others
Male								
Skill	I	60.9	21.7	-	4.3	-	-	13.0
Skill	II	58.7	25.0	1.5	4.4	1.5	1.5	7.4
Skill	III	53.3	33.3	-	-	-	6.7	6.7
Skill	IV	54.8	29.0	-	3.2	-	-	12.9
All male		57.7	26.3	0.7	3.6	0.7	1.5	9.5
Female								
Skill	I	70.5	15.4	-	2.6	5.1	1.3	5.1
Skill	II	46.7	33.3	-	13.3	-	-	6.7
Skill	III	51.6	18.9	5.3	5.3	3.2	6.3	9.5
Skill	IV	37.5	18.8	18.8	6.2	12.5	-	6.2
All male		57.4	18.6	3.9	4.9	4.4	3.4	7.4
All workers								
Skill	I	68.3	16.8	-	3.0	4.0	1.0	6.9
Skill	II	56.6	26.5	1.2	6.0	1.2	1.2	7.2
Skill	III	51.8	20.9	4.5	4.5	2.7	6.4	9.1
Skill	IV	48.9	25.5	6.4	4.3	4.3	-	10.6
Total		57.5	21.7	2.6	4.4	2.9	2.6	8.2

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

5.2 Security While Commuting

In the garment industry, it was common for a worker to work overtime during the peak season. On an average, a worker had to work 2-4 hours of overtime a day. Hence, it is very important to know how the worker commuted to work, how far they lived, time taken for commuting to work, at what time they returned home, and with whom. Finally, we will also look into the incidence of harassments in the streets faced either by the respondents or by some other garment workers (on which the respondents reported).

5.2.1 Mode of Transport

The most secured mode of transport was by factory bus. Some management disagreed with this because if there was an accident, the workers would blame the owners. Having factory bus, however, could ensure that workers were at work on time, especially in the morning. In two factories located in Dhaka, and another located at Tongi, there were factory buses. In one, the workers were brought from Narayanganj while in the other two, workers were brought from Joydebpur. About 21 workers in our sample, i.e. three per cent of the total workers, commuted from periphery of Dhaka city every day. Most of them commuted more than six kilometers each way.

TABLE 5.6

DISTRIBUTION OF GARMENT WORKERS BY MODE OF TRANSPORT AVAILED IN COMMUTING TO WORK PLACE

(row percentage)

Job category	Mode of transport							Total no of workers
	Walk to work	Bus tempo or rickshaw	Rick-shaw	On foot or by bus	On foot or by rickshaw	Factory bus	Others	
Skill								
I	69.2	14.0	-	12.1	0.5	4.2	-	214
II	57.8	22.7	4.7	7.8	-	4.7	2.3	128
III	57.5	20.2	3.5	14.5	0.9	2.2	1.3	228
IV	39.6	27.7	13.9	12.9	3.0	1.0	2.0	101
Sex								
Male	55.1	24.1	4.1	8.2	1.6	4.1	2.9	245
Femle	60.6	17.4	4.2	14.6	0.5	2.6	0.2	426
All workers	58.6	19.8	4.2	12.2	.9	3.1	1.2	671

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

About 61 per cent of the female workers and 55 per cent of the male workers walked to work everyday (Table 5.6). Relative to men (24 per cent), less of the women workers (17 per cent) used bus/tempo to commute to work. The relative use of various modes of transport also differed across job categories. Table 5.6 shows that about 70 per cent of the sewing helpers and the finishing helpers (skill I) walked to work, while only 40 per cent of those who were supervisors, quality controller and cutting master (skill IV) walked to work. Those in skill IV mostly took bus or rickshaw to work (42 per cent).

TABLE 5.7

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY LOCALITY AND MODE OF COMMUTING

(column percentage)

Mode of transport	Locality		
	Residential	Commercial	Industrial
Walk to work	57.1	58.6	61.8
Bus/Tempo	25.6	17.2	22.8
Rickshaw	5.8	4.8	0.8
On foot/rickshaw	10.9	12.4	13.8
On foot/bus	0.6	7.1	-
Factory bus	-	4.5	-
Other	-	1.5	0.8
All modes	100.0	100.0	100.0

About 59 per cent of the workers commuted by walking to and from the factory. Moreover, only those firms located in the commercial areas had introduced factory bus. About 4 per cent of the workers working in a commercial area commuted by factory bus. The workers, especially women, felt more secured if the factories were located in the residential and commercial areas. Thus, they could commute in groups. In this regard, banning the operation of all existing commercial establishments at Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, and Uttara Model Town[11] would seriously affect the garment industry, at least at the initial stage. Such prohibition was expected to affect adversely both the export-oriented factories and socioeconomic conditions of the workers. Since the market determines the location of such factories, the government should not hasten in imposing the aforesaid restrictions. Since the garment factories do not pollute the environment, it is not harmful to locate the factories in the residential areas. Moreover, if they are located in the residential and commercial areas, the workers could easily find housing close by.

[11]See, The Daily Newspaper Ittefaq, Nov. 2, 1990.

TABLE 5.8

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS SHOWING COMMUTING DISTANCE AND MODE

(column percentage)

Commuting person	Commuting mode							Total	Male	Female
	Walk to work	Bus/te Tempo	Rickshaw	On foot or by rickshaw	On foot or by bus	Factory bus	Others			
1	73.8	9.0	28.6	47.6	33.3	4.8	-	52.5	51.0	53.3
2	11.7	21.8	32.1	29.3	33.3	4.8	62.5	17.3	15.1	18.5
3	7.1	15.0	3.6	4.9	-	-	-	7.9	7.3	8.2
4	2.5	10.5	21.4	4.9	16.7	-	12.5	5.4	4.9	5.6
5	2.5	11.3	3.6	6.1	-	14.3	12.5	5.2	6.1	4.7
6+	2.3	32.3	10.7	7.3	16.7	76.2	12.5	11.8	15.5	9.6
Total no. of workers	393	133	28	82	6	21	8	671	245	42
% of all workers	58.6	19.8	4.2	12.2	0.9	3.1	1.2	100.0	36.5	63.5

5.2.2 Average Distance Commuted

About 53 per cent of the total workers lived within one kilometer of the factory premise (Table 5.8). The management also reported that they usually preferred to hire workers who lived close by, so that they could come to work on time. Moreover, a worker was more likely to leave the factory once he/she got an employment in another firm close to his/her residence. Sometime when a factory relocated, about 50 per cent of its workers also moved to nearby areas. About 15 per cent of the male workers and 10 per cent of the female workers commuted more than six kilometers each way everyday. They mostly commuted by local bus or factory bus. Table 5.8 also shows that about 72 per cent of female workers and 65 per cent of male workers lived within two kilometers away from the factory.

5.2.3 Social Barrier to Mobility

It is very important to know with whom do the workers commute from the factory after work. We noted that in the garment industry, some workers commute alone, some with guardians, some with colleagues, some with the factory people, and some stayed at the factory. Table 5.9 shows that the most common way was to commute with colleagues (47 per cent), followed by commuting alone (43 per cent). The management reported that usually escort from the factory was not needed as the workers commuted in groups or their guardians came to pick them up. But only 7 per cent of the workers reported that their guardians came to pick them up. Interestingly, there was a vast differences between the responses of the male and female workers. About 72 per cent of the male workers responded that they commuted alone, while 26 per cent of female workers commuted alone. While only 23 per cent of the male workers commuted with an escort — either with colleagues or with guardians, the corresponding figure was 72 per cent for the females workers. Although more female were coming out to work, the social barrier to their mobility still remained. The female workers could not commute without an escort. Some women workers had succeeded to cross this barrier.

Table 5.9 also shows that about 2 per cent of the workers worked whole night, and stayed at the factory. Of the 13 such workers, two were female. All these workers belonged to the finishing section. Getting escort from the factory was not commonly found. Only five workers reported that they were escorted home by the factory people.

TABLE 5.9

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY WITH WHOM THEY COMMUTE

(column percentage)

Commuting person	Male					Female					All workers
	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	
Don't return	4.65	4.13	-	7.58	4.49	0.58	3.13	-	-	0.46	1.94
Return with guardian	2.33	-	-	-	0.41	12.28	9.38	10.05	2.94	10.33	6.71
Alone	62.79	72.16	74.36	78.78	72.65	18.71	25.0	29.63	50.0	26.53	43.36
Return with Colleague	30.23	22.68	25.64	13.64	22.04	67.84	59.37	59.26	47.06	61.74	47.24
Factory people	-	1.03	-	-	0.41	0.59	3.12	1.06	-	0.94	0.75
Total no. of workers	426	43	97	39	66	245	171	32	189	34	671

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

Workers were often attacked by mastans on their way home. About 6 per cent of total workers reported that they were attacked by mastans on the street. Our findings suggest that (Table 5.10) relatively more male workers (10 per cent) had been attacked by mastans than the female workers (4.5 per cent). The incidence of mastan attack was highest for those female workers who commuted with their sisters or alone. None of the workers who had their mothers in the factory had any incidence on the street. Those having brother/sister or husband/wife were also relatively secured. Thus, the most insecured were those workers who had no relative at the factory, and those female workers who had sisters in the same factory.

TABLE 5.10

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ATTACKED BY MASTAN BY EXISTENCE OF RELATIVE IN THE FACTORY

(row percentage)

Relative in the factory	Male		Female		All workers	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Mother	-	100.0	-	100.0	-	100.0
Sister	-	100.0	6.2	93.7	5.7	94.3
Brother	6.2	93.7	4.0	96.0	4.9	95.1
Spouse	11.1	88.8	-	100.0	4.0	96.0
Other relations	16.3	83.7	2.0	97.9	8.8	91.2
None	9.6	90.4	4.6	95.4	6.5	93.5
Total	10.0	90.0	4.3	95.7	6.4	50.1

5.3 Security at the Place of Residence

In our survey we found that 74.3 per cent of the total workers (69.4 per cent for female workers) hailed from the rural areas. Thus, it was very important to know with whom these workers resided. It is likely that some will be living with their family, while the rest with friends, relatives, or in mess. Moreover, the type of residence, whether it was in bastee or not had important implications for their overall social security.

5.3.1 Residential Arrangement

Table 5.11 shows that 73 per cent of the workers lived with their family, while 17 per cent lived in the mess, 8 per cent in the relative's house, one per cent in factory accommodation, and only two workers (of 671)lived in the government quarter. There was a clear difference between the male and female workers. The female workers usually lived with family or relatives, but the male workers usually lived with the family or in a mess. About 8 per

TABLE 5.11

RESIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENT OF WORKERS

(column percentage)

Commuting person	Male					Female					All workers
	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	
House	62.8	52.1	61.5	67.2	59.6	76.6	90.6	82.5	88.2	81.2	73.32
Mess	32.6	40.6	30.8	26.9	33.9	9.9	6.3	6.9	2.9	7.7	17.29
Relative house	4.7	7.3	5.1	4.5	5.7	12.9	3.1	8.5	5.9	9.6	8.20
Rented by factory	-	-	-	-	-	0.6	-	1.1	2.9	0.9	0.60
Govt. quarter	-	-	2.6	1.5	0.8	-	-	1.1	-	0.5	0.60
Total no. of workers	43	96	39	67	245	171	32	189	34	426	671

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

cent of the women workers lived in the mess. This was an important social change that had taken place with the growth of the garment industry. These mess were brick building with tin shed. About 5 to 6 workers lived in one room.

In terms of security, living in a factory accommodation was the most secured place. One of the factories located outside Dhaka city provided accommodation to its supervisors, so that work could start on time. The quarters were located inside the factory premise. In our sample, a female supervisor had a free factory quarter. Within Dhaka city, two factories provided some housing facilities to their workers. Interestingly, in one of them at Rampura, about 70 Garo[12] women workers had been provided accommodation. We had four of them in our sample. These workers were charged Tk.150 for the accommodation, and Tk.300 for food per month. The current management had bought this factory recently. This practice was there since before, so they continued it. They said that these workers were very docile, and did not complain. Another factory located at Elephant Road had provided free accommodation to 30 workers. These workers mainly originated from Pabna district.

The above findings suggest that the entrepreneurs in the garment industry had started to think about providing an accommodation to their workers. Now that the factories were located in clusters, it would be easier to have some sort of housing facilities. Many property owners were now interested in building mess for the garment workers, and the demand for these mess were on the rise. But those living in the mess, especially women, were the most insecured. About 33 female workers of our sample lived in the mess. Of them, 17 had at least a sister living with them. Having a sister or a relative in the same mess gave moral support and social security. Sometimes, these mess were owned by *mastans* or local *touts*, and women staying there become an easy prey. These mess were usually very cramped, and there was no room for any recreation. Most of the time women had to share a stove with other members of the mess. One of them reported that she had to get up at 4 a.m. in the morning to cook meals for the day. There was also long waiting for going to the toilet. Hence, living in a mess was bad for health.

There were variations in types of residences according to job categories. The sewing and finishing helpers lived mostly with the family members or with relatives. None of those in skill II of our sample had availed of the

[12] Tribal people who live on Garo hill.

factory accommodation. Two female operators reported that they lived in the government quarters, implying that either their husband or father was a government employee.

5.3.2 Location of Residence

There was a misconception that the garment workers lived in bastee or slums and squatter settlement. In our study we found that (Table 5.12) only 14 per cent of the total workers lived in the *bastees*, and the rest lived outside the bastee. Moreover, relative to men (10 per cent), more female workers lived in the *bastees* (16 per cent). About 23 per cent of the sewing or finishing helpers lived in the *bastees*. Given that the *bastee* environment was likely to be the worst among the various locations reported, these workers were insecured at home too. Only 5 per cent of workers in skill IV lived in the *bastee* as they could not afford a better living. On the other hand, children aged 10-14 years were more exposed (29 per cent) to the unhealthy environment of the *bastees*. Those living in the *bastees* were insecured in the sense that sometime these *bastees* were uprooted by the law enforcing agencies. Moreover, the space in the house was usually quite congested, and the surrounding area was often quite unhealthy.

TABLE 5.12

DISTRIBUTION OF FIRMS BY "BASTEE"/"NON-BASTEE" RESIDENCE

(row percentage)

Category	Bastees	Non-bastees	Total no. of workers
Skill			
I	3.8	96.2	24
II	11.7	88.3	128
III	10.1	89.9	228
IV	5.0	95.0	101
Sex			
Male	9.8	90.2	245
Female	16.4	83.6	416
Age			
10-14	29.2	70.8	89
15-19	16.8	83.2	114
20-24	8.1	91.9	185
25-29	8.2	91.8	97
30-34	10.5	89.5	57
35-39	13.0	87.0	23
40-65	24.7	75.3	6
Total	14.0	86.0	671

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

5.4 Residential Arrangement

It was often said that a lot of mishappenings occurred within, and outside the garment factories. The incidence could take place inside the factory, or on the street, or at the residence of the workers. It was very likely that the workers would underreport such incidences. We found that, of the total workers, 5 per cent reported that they were beaten in the factory; about 6 per cent of the female workers, and 3 per cent of the male workers were beaten in the factory. About 6 per cent of the workers reported that their colleagues were beaten too. These workers mostly belonged to skill I and II (Table 5.13). About 15 per cent of the workers reported that they suffered from the fear of dismissal. It was more among the female workers (18 per cent) than the male workers (9 per cent). Operators (male and female) were relatively more afraid of being dismissed. The incidence of rape in the factory was reported by only one worker. But about 2 per cent of the workers reported that rape in the factory took place in the case of colleagues.

TABLE 5.13

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS REPORTING INCIDENCE OF MISHAPPENING

(percentage of all respondents)

Types of mishappening	Self			Colleagues		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Factory						
Beating in the factory	3.3	5.9	4.9	6.5	5.6	6.0
Fear of dismissal	8.6	18.3	14.8	5.7	15.0	11.6
Raped in the factory	-	0.2	0.1	-	2.1	1.8
Street						
Attacked by mastan	9.8	4.5	6.4	-	10.0	6.3
Got afraid in the street	7.3	14.3	11.8	5.7	7.7	7.0
Harassed in the street	6.1	19.0	14.3	-	21.5	13.6
Harassed by police	2.0	1.4	1.6	2.0	1.9	1.9
Raped in the street	-	-	-	3.3	4.0	3.7
Residence						
Fear of theft	2.9	4.9	4.2	-	-	-
Got afraid in residence	1.2	2.3	1.9	-	1.2	0.7
Fear of evacuation from home	1.6	4.0	3.1	-	-	-

Many incidents, such as attack by *mastans*, harrassment by police and harrassment by boys in the streets, had been reported by the workers. *Mastan* harrassments had been reported by 6 per cent of the workers, and more male workers (10 per cent) than the female workers (5 per cent) had

reportedly been attacked by *mastans*. About 10 per cent of the female workers reported that their colleagues were attacked by *mastans* in the streets.

The female workers were generally more afraid of mishappenings in the street (14 per cent) than the male workers (7 per cent). Mostly unmarried female workers, especially those engaged as sewing operators or sewing helpers, were scared while commuting. The female workers were also harrassed in the street (19 per cent). Most of them belonged to the age group 15-19 years. Rape incidence in the street was reported for the colleagues by four per cent of the workers. Harrassment by police was reported by about 2 per cent of the workers. The workers also expressed (5 per cent) the fear of theft while working in the factory. Some factory owners had started giving them lockers to keep their belongings. At home too, the workers sometime were afraid of theft or mishappenings; about two per cent of the workers expressed such fear. There was also the fear of evacuation from home as expressed by three per cent of the workers.

Thus, the incidence of mishappening was quite minimal compared to the number of workers engaged in the garment industry. Most of the mishappenings occurred in the street which was due to poor law and order situation in the country. The workers were in general quite secured inside the garment factories.

CHAPTER 6

HEALTH CONDITION OF THE GARMENT WORKERS

As more and more women were coming out to work, they were likely to come in contact with occupational hazards in increasing numbers. There were reasons for special concerns on occupational health for women because (a) physiological factors, such as differences in physical strength and women's ability to become pregnant, may result in different health outcomes, (b) men and women held different jobs and, consequently, were exposed to various hazards, and (c) men and women differed in the amount of control they had on their own jobs. This section will look into the incidence of illness, reasons for taking leave, occupational safety and health, sanitation and cleanliness, maternity leave and medical expenses as the indicators of health conditions of the garment workers. Besides, the willingness of the workers to have health insurance for themselves will also be explored.

6.1 Incidence of Illness

Till today, there had been no estimate on the overall incidence of occupational illness and injury of the garment workers in Bangladesh. During our survey, the employers had often complained that the female workers were weak and suffered from malnutrition. A number of firms reported that the female workers fainted during work, especially in the months of June and July. On average, about 5 per cent workers fainted in a year per factory. Beside this, no other occupation related diseases were mentioned by the employers.

The workers were asked whether they had suffered more now than before joining the garment industry. Almost all workers said that they had healthy life before entering the garment industry. One exception was a young girl who said that she suffered from cough and fever more frequently before than now. The reason she gave was that she used to play in the rain and puddle before. Since joining the work, she cannot do that, hence her health has improved. Interestingly, across job categories, operators, finishing helpers, and quality controllers were found to suffer most from the eye troubles (Table 6.1). This complaint was followed by an urine trouble. Although there were separate toilets for males and females in the garment factories, the workers had to seek permission from the management to go to

TABLE 6.1

INCIDENCE OF ILLNESS AT GARMENT INDUSTRY BY OCCUPATION CATEGORY

	Quality Controller	Cutting Master	Cutting helper	Super-visor	Operator	Sewing helper	Ironman	Folding	Fishing helper	All worker	Male worker	Female worker
Eye trouble	50.0	34.6	36.8	46.3	57.0	47.2	41.7	43.6	56.6	49.6	42.4	53.8
Headache	65.0	76.9	76.3	53.7	75.0	75.8	75.0	60.0	71.7	71.8	62.4	77.2
Cough & fever	60.0	65.4	76.3	70.4	80.7	82.0	83.3	78.2	75.5	78.2	73.5	81.0
Weakness	70.0	69.2	71.1	63.0	74.1	70.2	75.0	69.1	71.7	71.2	65.7	74.4
Jaundice	10.0	30.8	21.1	24.1	28.9	15.5	22.2	30.9	15.1	23.1	23.3	23.0
Stomach upset	40.0	42.3	23.7	35.2	32.5	32.9	27.8	34.5	18.9	31.7	32.2	31.5
Urine	25.0	34.6	15.2	25.9	24.1	21.7	16.2	18.2	17.0	22.2	17.4	25.1
Other illness	10.0	11.5	7.9	11.1	14.5	8.1	5.6	10.9	11.3	11.0	11.0	11.0
Total workers	20	26	38	54	228	161	36	55	53	671	245	426

toilet. Some factories had introduced a card system for using the toilet. The line supervisors kept track whether the toilets were occupied or not. Such practices restricted the number of times one may go to the toilet. Urine infection was reported to be more common among the female workers, especially among the operators and sewing helpers.

Results of our survey shows (Table 6.1) that the incidence of illness was higher for the female workers than the male workers for almost all types of illness. The most frequent illness reported by the workers was cough and fever. Even during our survey, a few reported that they were sick but still had to come to work. When the management people were asked why the workers could not get leave, the usual reply was that there was a labour shortage during the peak time, and October-November were the months for cough and fever. Cough and fever were more prevalent among the younger workers, especially more among the operators, sewing helpers and ironmen. The second common complaint was weakness. In general, all workers suffered from some kind of weakness. This occurs due to long hours of work and low quality of food that they ate for lunch. Interestingly, the findings shows that the incidence of illness occurred at a lower age for female than male (Table 6.2). This was true for all types of illnesses. The most vulnerable age for illness among the male workers was around 23-25 years, while for the female workers it was 19-20 years. About 54 per cent of the women workers reported that they were having eye trouble after joining the garment industry. Of the male workers, about 42 per cent complained so. Most operators were women and most of them had this compliant. The eye trouble was more prevalent among the male workers aged 20-24 years, and among female workers aged 25-29 years, whose total service in the garment industry was more than three years.

The incidence of illness may also vary across firm sizes. Our survey showed that the incidence of all types of illnesses was the highest in the medium sized firms employing 250-499 workers, followed by the small sized firms (Table 6.3). For all types of illnesses, the incidence was lower in the large firms employing 500 or more workers. This could be due to the fact that the large firms were likely to be less congested, and had better ventilation and lighting facilities.

It was also important to know whether the incidence of illness increased with the length of job at the garment industry. Table 6.4 shows that eye

TABLE 6.2

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY AGE AND INCIDENCE OF ILLNESS

	14-15	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40+	Total	Average age (years)
				Male					
Eye trouble	26.3	35.6	46.3	48.1	41.9	33.3	60.0	42.4	24
Headache	68.4	68.9	69.5	57.4	48.4	55.6	20.0	62.4	22
Cough and fever	73.7	82.2	72.0	74.1	71.0	55.6	60.0	73.5	23
Weakness	63.2	66.7	63.4	70.4	58.1	100.0	40.0	65.7	23
Jaundice	15.8	17.8	30.5	25.9	19.4	11.1	-	23.3	23
Stomach upset	31.6	20.0	30.5	40.7	38.7	33.3	40.0	32.2	24
Urine trouble	5.3	8.9	26.8	16.7	12.9	11.1	20.0	17.1	24
Others	-	8.9	11.0	13.0	16.1	11.1	20.0	11.0	25
Total no. of female workers	19	45	82	54	31	9	5	245	
				Female					
Eye trouble	51.4	52.7	53.4	62.8	57.7	50.0	-	53.8	20
Headache	80.0	75.7	76.7	76.7	84.6	71.4	100.0	77.2	19
Cough and fever	77.1	81.7	83.5	81.4	69.2	92.9	100.0	81.0	19
Weakness	71.4	75.1	74.8	72.1	76.9	85.7	-	74.4	19
Jaundice	20.0	21.9	23.3	25.6	34.6	21.4	-	23.0	20
Stomach upset	25.7	33.7	32.0	34.9	15.4	42.9	100.0	31.5	19
Urine trouble	10.0	25.4	30.1	37.2	30.8	14.3	-	25.1	20
Others	8.6	8.3	14.6	16.3	11.5	14.3	-	11.0	20
Total no. of female workers	90	169	103	43	26	14	1	426	

trouble was found to be more frequent among those whose job length was about 7-12 months with the garment industry. But among the female workers, it was also frequent among those whose job length was 4-6 years. These workers mostly belonged to the operator categories. The incidence of headache was more among the male workers with 6-8 years of service at the garment industry while for the female workers, it was more at around 1-2 years of service. Hence, women suffered from headache at an earlier year of service than men. Weakness was found to increase with the length of job at the garment industry. The male workers with 2-4 years of service complained of weakness at a greater proportion (37 per cent), while about 50 per cent of the female workers started suffering from weakness after about one year of service at the garment industry. Urine trouble also increased with the length of service, this being especially true for the female workers. The highest incidence of urine trouble was for the female workers with 6-8 years of service at the garment industry.

TABLE 6.3

INCIDENCE OF ILLNESS BY FIRM SIZE

Firm size	Upto-249	250-499	500+
Eye trouble	50.4	52.5	42.4
Headache	75.7	70.4	68.8
Cough & Fever	75.7	78.7	81.3
Weakness	70.4	71.4	72.2
Stomach upset	27.0	34.2	34.0
Jaundice	22.6	24.6	20,8
Urine infection	19.0	24.6	22.2
Other infections	10.6	10.6	12.5
Total workers	226	301	144

Thus, the incidence of physical illness resulting from work in the garment factory was considerably high. The turnover rate was high partly due to sustained exhaustion from work. Measures should thus, be taken to reduce the exhaustion phenomena to ensure a healthy work force.

6.2 Medical Expense of the Garment Workers

The relative medical expenditure by gender also confirms that the incidence of illness was higher in the case of female workers than the male workers. As the workers suffered from poor health, they had to spend, on an

TABLE 6.4

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS SHOWING INCIDENCE OF ILLNESS BY JOB LENGTH

Total job length (months)	Eye trouble			Headache			Weakness			Urine trouble		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
0-6	12.8	11.5	12.1	15.4	36.5	27.5	15.4	38.5	28.6	2.6	7.7	5.5
7-12	26.5	31.1	29.5	32.4	41.0	37.9	20.6	34.4	29.5	8.8	11.5	10.5
13-24	20.0	13.8	16.0	37.8	40.0	39.2	20.0	45.0	36.0	4.4	8.8	7.2
25-48	16.9	13.7	14.9	25.4	34.3	31.1	37.3	47.1	43.0	10.2	9.8	9.9
49-72	7.5	33.8	25.0	20.0	47.5	38.3	22.5	50.0	40.8	7.5	15.0	12.5
73-96	16.0	20.0	18.6	28.0	62.2	50.0	20.0	48.9	38.6	8.0	17.8	14.3
97+	-	12.5	9.1	-	37.5	27.3	-	50.0	36.4	-	12.5	9.1

average, Tk. 95 per month for medical expense, such as on doctors, medicine and pathology. About 8.84 per cent of monthly pay were spent on medical expenses. A male worker on an average, spent Tk. 73 (15.43 per cent of his pay), while a female worker spent Tk. 108 (12.19 per cent of her pay) per month. Table 6.5 shows that medical expenses varied across job categories, marital status and age. The lowest medical expense was for the ironmen (Tk. 44) and cutting master (Tk. 169 per month). Except for the cutting master, the expense of the female workers was much higher for all other job categories and in some cases it was more than double of that for males.

TABLE 6.5

AVERAGE MEDICAL EXPENSE INCURRED BY THE WORKERS

(Tk/worker/month)

	Male	Female	All workers
Job category			
Quality controller	72	163	108
Cutting master	173	60	169
Cutting helper	87	177	102
Sewing supervisor	97	225	156
Sewing operator	72	125	116
Sewing helper	37	54	51
Ironman	43	50	44
Folding	32	155	79
Finishing helper	57	100	86
Marital Status			
Married	93	158	137
Unmarried	60	65	63
Age			
10-14	23	58	50
15-19	68	78	76
20-24	55	123	93
25-29	82	151	113
30-34	130	300	208
35-39	120	130	126
40-65	72		60
All workers	73	108	95

Across marital status, the medical expenses were higher in the case of the married than the unmarried workers. For the female workers, the expense was Tk. 65 for the unmarried girls, while that of married women was Tk. 158 per month. For the male workers, the figures were Tk. 60 and Tk. 93

respectively. As the younger workers tend to suffer less, so, they also spent less as medical expenses. A child labour (10-14 years) spent Tk. 50 per month — a female child spent Tk. 58, while a male child spent Tk. 23 only. Across all age groups, a female worker spent much more than a male worker. Earlier we saw that a male worker earned much higher than a female worker. The female workers had to spend 12 per cent of their income on account of medical expenses. Thus, the increasing entry of women in the formal labour market was also bringing about occupational hazards. As women in the rural areas were always the last and least to eat in the household and usually did not get a balanced diet, hence, the full-time work brought in fatigue. May be due to fatigue, they could not continue to work for a longer period of time. Hence, the intensity of work should be reduced, and care should be taken to give breaks for rest.

6.3 Reasons for Taking Leave

Earlier we noted that the granting of leave was minimal in the garment industry. During peak season, the workers had to work even on weekly holidays. Although they got paid for the overtime work on holidays, no alternate holidays were, however, given. The Factory Act 1965 provided for a weekly holiday, i.e. Friday, and no worker was to work more than 10 days consecutively without a holiday. About 55 per cent of the workers in the garment industry worked without taking any leave in a month. Of those who took leave during September 1990, 60 per cent reported sickness to be the main reason for taking leave (Table 6.6). This was followed by going to village (17 per cent). More female workers took leave for sickness (64 per cent), and it was followed by "visiting family in the village" (14 per cent), and "for looking after family members when they were sick" (10 per cent). On the other hand, the male workers took leave for their own sickness (54 per cent), "visiting family in the village" (23 per cent), and "for doing household work" (10 per cent). As most workers were migrant from the rural areas, they had to maintain link with their family. On an average, a worker took two days leave in a month.

Taking leave due to sickness was more common among the lower income groups - skill I and skill II. This reflects that these workers were relatively more malnourished. About 98 per cent of the workers ate cereal, i.e. rice (91 per cent) or bread (7 per cent). About 65 per cent of the workers ate fish,

meat, or egg (Table 6.7). It should be noted that the fish was usually small shrimps, cooked with some vegetables. About 3 per cent of the workers reported that they did not take any lunch. Their pay ranged from Tk. 300 to Tk. 1,000 per month. More female workers worked without taking any food (5 per cent) than the male workers (2 per cent). This shows that even after coming out to work, the female workers did not want to spend money on food. We, however, noted that there was not much difference between male and female in their food consumption pattern. This was an important change that had taken place, as traditionally women were last and least to eat. Women were still found to suffer more from illness and that too at an early age. This could possibly be explained by deficient food intake during their childhood.

TABLE 6.6

REASONS FOR TAKING LEAVE

(column percentage)

Reasons	Male	Female	All workers
Own sickness	54.1	63.5	60.2
Household work	10.3	5.1	6.9
Visit to village	23.4	14.2	17.4
Family member sick	4.7	10.2	8.2
Other reason	7.5	7.1	7.2
Total no. of workers	109	197	306

TABLE 6.7

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY FOOD AT LUNCH

(column percentage)

Item eaten at lunch	Male	Female	All workers
Rice	89.80	92.48	91.50
Bread	8.57	5.40	6.56
(Cereal)	(98.37)	(97.88)	(98.06)
Fish	57.14	53.99	55.14
Meat	7.35	4.22	5.37
Egg	4.90	4.93	4.92
(Protein)	(69.39)	(63.15)	(65.42)
Pulse	24.49	22.30	23.10
Vegetables	45.31	50.23	48.44
Biscuit/tea	1.22	0.94	1.04
None	0.4	1.4	0.73
Total no. of workers	245	426	671

6.4 Maternity Leave for the Women Workers

According to the Maternity Benefit Act 1950, an employee must have been employed by the employer from whom she claimed maternity benefit for a period not less than nine months immediately preceding the day of delivery. Moreover, a woman was entitled to benefit six weeks preceding and including the day of her delivery, and for the six weeks immediately following that day. Of the 32 firms surveyed, 13 claimed that the maternity leave was granted to their female workers during 1990. Of these, in only three firms, leave was granted with pay and in one firm with half pay. The maternity leave was usually granted to a woman after she had worked for about 9-12 months. In seven firms, the leave was for 12 weeks, and in six firms it was for six weeks or more. The maternity leave for 12 weeks should be enforced by law. The owner claimed that usually the workers did not claim any maternity leave. Hence, the workers need to be made aware of this facility. Usually, the workers left on their own and again returned to work after about 12 weeks. In one factory, the owner observed that pregnancy rate had increased when the firm started providing paid maternity leave.

6.5 Occupational Safety and Health

It was alleged that safety equipment and precautions were largely unknown in the garment industries of Bangladesh. The Factory Rules 1979 (Rule 52) required that safety measures were necessary in the industry against fire accidents. In all the factories surveyed, a fire protection system was found to be in place. But it was not at all adequate. One garment factory in Mirpur was on fire due to short-circuit in December 1990. The garment industry was the only industry which was set up in multi-storied buildings. Every factory had fire extinguishers and buckets with sand, but there were no trained persons to use them; fire extinguishers were not even tested by the inspectors. There was a need to have an adequate number of trained inspectors. Moreover, regulations should be made for proper wiring of the buildings. Each building should also have a separate fire exit. Furthermore, gates should not be locked at all.

The two common accidents which often happened in the garment industry were “pricking of fingers by needle” in the sewing section and

"hurting finger tips" while buttoning in the finishing section.[13] According to the factory laws, any employee who sustained a personal injury by accident arising out of his/her work in the course of his/her employment was entitled to workmen's compensation at a specified rate. But this law had never been enforced. At best the owner gave the injured workers a first aid. According to the Factory Act 1965, the first aid boxes were to be kept on the premises, one box for every 150 workers and where more than 500 workers were employed, there needed to be an ambulance and a room provided with a qualified medical practitioner in charge, assisted by at least one qualified nurse. In all the factories surveyed, although the first aid boxes were found, supplies were often inadequate. The requirement of one box for every 150 workers had not been followed either. This rule need to be strictly enforced. None of the factories with more than 500 workers had an ambulance or a qualified doctor/nurse. Some factories had appointed doctors for the treatment of their workers. One factory owner said that doctors/nurses generally did not want to work for the garment factories. As the garment factories were getting locationally concentrated, specialised medical centers needs to be established in those areas. BGMEA could take such initiatives.

6.6 Sanitation and Cleanliness

All the factories surveyed had seperate toilets for the male and female workers. The management complained that the female workers lacked training on basic cleanliness. They often threw garbage in the toilet which created problems for the owner. Women usually ate tamarind, and were not in a habit of washing their hands after eating. Some management people suggested that NGOs could help by providing training on basic cleanliness. In most factories, toilets were poorly maintained. There were also inadequacies in the supply of soaps and towels. The management, however, complained that these were often stolen by the workers.

According to the factory laws, there should be one latrine for every 25 females, and one for every 25 males, for the employment size of up to 100 workers of single sex. Beyond that, it was necessary to have additional latrines at the rate of one for every extra 50 workers. Thus, for an average firm employing 380 workers, the law required the firm to have 11 latrines.

[13] Another accident which occurs during June-July and only women are affected is "fainting."

In our survey, we found that an average firm had eight latrines. The small-sized firms had seven latrines, although they were required to have six (for 184 workers); the medium-sized firms (350 workers) had nine latrines, and the larger firms (751 workers) had 10 latrines. The latter firms were legally required to have 12 latrines.

According to the factory laws, adequate washing facilities were to be provided for each sex, and it would have to be conveniently accessible and clean. We, however, found that only a few factories had such facilities. This law should, thus, be strictly enforced.

6.7 Willingness of the Workers to Have Health Insurance

During our survey, we asked the workers whether they were willing to pay 2.5 per cent of their pay as premium to have health insurance. Of the total workers, 29 per cent were willing to do so (Table 6.8). Among the female workers, 27 per cent were willing, while among the male workers 33 per cent were willing to have health insurance. The unmarried girls often said that they were not sure whether they would be able to work after getting married — hence they were reluctant to go for health insurance.

TABLE 6.8

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS ACCORDING TO DESIRE FOR HEALTH INSURANCE

(row percentage)

	Yes	No	Don't know	No information	Total workers
Sex					
Female	27.2	56/1	6.6	10.1	426
Male	32.7	50.0	3.3	13.1	245
Age (Years)					
10-14	20.2	59.6	10.1	10.1	89
15-19	31.8	54.2	4.7	9.3	214
20-24	36.2	44.3	7.0	12.4	185
25-29	23.7	56.7	2.1	17.5	97
30-34	28.1	64.9	1.8	5.3	57
35-39	17.4	73.9	-	8.7	23
40-45	-	66.7	16.7	16.7	6
Total no.	196	364	36	75	671
Row %	29.2	54.2	5.4	11.2	100.0

The workers aged 20-24 years were most eager to have health insurance. About 36 per cent of the workers of this age group wanted health insurance.

Earlier we saw that the incidence of illness was highest among the workers aged 19-24 years. Thus it suggests that as the workers of this age group suffered more, they were, therefore, more willing to have health insurance.

Although the workers were willing to have health insurance, there was practically no positive response from the management. This was because they currently spent less then one per cent on medical expense for the workers. But as there was now locational concentration of factories, a medical centre at each location would be beneficial for the garment workers as well as their employers.

CHAPTER 7

STATUS OF GARMENT WORKERS

7.1 Status in Society

It is very important to know the changes in status of the workers due to gaining entrance in the garment industry. Prior to that one must know what barriers they faced before joining the garment industry. About 70 per cent of the total workers reported that they did not face any objection, and the rest faced some sort of objection. The most common objection reported was that "people talk badly about the garment industry." This was reported by 15 per cent of the total workers. Another 11 per cent faced objection like "women get spoil in the garment industry" and only one per cent faced objection like "night work spoils women" (Table 7.1).

There was a gender difference too — 37 per cent of the female workers and 18 per cent of the male workers had faced objection before entering the garment industry. Some women were also opposed by the household members. There was also a difference between occupation categories. About 56 per cent of the female workers in skill IV, i.e. supervisors and quality controllers, had faced objection before entering the garment industry. Some entrepreneurs reported that although they would prefer to have female workers for these jobs, they did not get them. This was because women suitable for such jobs were likely to be highly educated and married. The upper class still viewed jobs at garment industry as bad.

Information was collected on the worker's own perception about their work, as well as what she/he thought neighbour's and relative's perceptions to be. About 56 per cent of the total workers reported that working in the garment industry was good, or very good and 32 per cent considered it not so good. Table 7.2 shows that relatively more female workers (60 per cent) considered work at garment industry to be good/very good than the male workers (49 per cent). Interestingly, although those in skill I (i.e. sewing and

TABLE 7.1

SOCIAL BARRIER FACED BY WORKERS

	Male					Female					All workers
	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	
People talk badly	7.0	9.4	20.5	16.4	12.7	11.7	9.4	18.5	26.5	15.7	14.61
Women get spoilt	-	-	2.6	1.5	0.8	17.0	21.9	14.3	23.5	16.7	10.88
Night work spoils	-	-	-	-	1.2	1.2	-	2.1	2.9	1.6	1.49
Husband oppose	-	-	-	-	-	0.6	-	2.9	1.4	-	0.89
Should continue education	4.7	3.1	-	-	2.0	0.6	-	0.5	-	0.5	1.04
Other	2.3	1.0	-	1.5	1.2	1.2	3.1	1.6	-	1.4	1.34
No one objected	86.0	83.3	76.9	80.6	82.0	67.8	65.6	60.8	44.1	62.7	69.75
Total workers	43	96	39	67	245	171	32	189	34	426	671

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

finishing helper) got low wages, yet 64 per cent thought that it was good to work in the garment industry. Across gender, there were differences in perception among operators. Only 36 per cent of the male operators considered job at garment industry to be good, while about 58 per cent of the females thought it to be so. Even for other occupation categories, more females perceived it better than the males did. This was also true across age groups.

TABLE 7.2

PERCEPTION ABOUT WORKING IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY

(row percentage)

	Very good information	Good	Not so good	Very bad	Bad	No
Own perception						
Male workers	3.3	45.7	35.5	2.4	11.4	1.6
Female workers	7.3	52.3	30.5	0.7	8.7	0.5
All workers	5.8	49.9	32.3	1.3	9.7	0.8
Neighbours' perception						
Male workers	0.4	27.3	32.7	1.6	23.7	14.3
Female workers	0.2	24.2	30.0	3.8	28.2	13.6
All workers	0.3	25.3	31.0	3.0	26.5	13.8
Relatives' perception						
Male workers	0.8	27.3	30.2	3.7	29.4	8.5
Female workers	0.9	28.4	34.3	2.6	28.4	5.4
All workers	0.9	28.0	32.8	3.0	28.8	6.5

Of the total workers, only 29 per cent perceived that their relatives considered the work at garment industry to be good, while 33 per cent said that their relatives considered it not so good. There was no significant difference across gender. But across job categories (Table 7.3), we noted that relatively more of the lowest category job holders (skill I) said that their relatives considered it to be good (35 per cent).

Although a relative may consider working in the garment industry to be good, but only 25 per cent of the respondents reported that they thought their neighbours considered it good. The rest said that neighbours usually considered it not so good (or bad). Across age groups, we noted that child labour and workers aged 40-65 years perceived that their relatives or neighbours considered their work at garment industry to be good. But few workers aged 20-24 years perceived that their relatives or neighbours considered their work to be good. The response patterns generally suggest that even though the workers considered their jobs at garments to be good, they still had a long way to go to change the perception of the society - both relatives and neighbours.

From the above it follows that although 70 per cent of the parents and relatives did not consider work in the garment industry to be good, the extreme poverty forced families to allow their daughters to migrate to the cities to work in the garment factories. This is shown by the fact that 70

TABLE 7.3

PERCEPTION ABOUT WORKING IN GARMENT INDUSTRY BY OCCUPATION CATEGORY AND AGE GROUP

	Own perception (good/very good)			Neighbours' perception (good/very good)			Relative perception (good/very good)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Skill									
I	60.5	62.5	62.4	41.9	30.4	32.9	34.9	35.1	35.1
II	40.6	46.9	42.2	20.8	9.4	17.9	25.0	12.5	21.9
III	35.9	58.2	54.4	20.5	27.2	21.1	25.6	27.0	26.8
IV	61.2	64.7	62.4	32.8	26.5	30.7	29.9	29.4	29.7
Age group (years)									
10-14	73.7	68.6	69.6	52.6	40.0	42.7	63.2	48.6	51.7
15-19	53.3	55.6	55.1	33.3	24.3	26.2	33.3	27.2	28.5
20-24	37.8	57.2	48.6	20.7	13.6	16.8	20.7	15.5	17.8
25-29	48.1	65.1	55.4	20.4	23.3	21.6	18.5	37.2	26.8
30-34	54.8	57.7	56.1	29.0	23.1	26.3	25.8	26.9	26.3
35-39	55.6	64.2	60.8	22.2	35.7	30.4	33.3	42.9	39.1
40-65	60.0	100.0	66.7	80.0	-	66.7	80.0	-	66.7
Total	49.0	59.6	55.7	27.7	24.4	25.6	28.2	29.3	28.9

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

per cent of the workers did not face any objection while coming to work. Thus, families allowed their daughters to move to the cities as it helped to increase the family's income. This study suggests that the female workers contributed as much as 46 per cent to their family income. This financial support became decisive in sending their daughters to work. Parents sometimes became so dependent on the daughter's income that they resisted any effort by the latter to get married. Although women were now dependent on their own earnings, and many were also the main income earners, we have earlier noted that pay differentials by gender were considerable. This was because firms took the traditional gender-specific division of labour for granted, a decision which assumes that women do not support families.

7.2 Status in the Family

7.2.1 Status in Decision-making

It was quite common in Bangladesh to find that the husband or father usually decided how the income would be spent. The results of the survey, however, shows that 48 per cent of all respondents spent their income on their own, 33 per cent said that their husband/parents decided wholly, while 19 per cent spent it through a joint decision (Table 7.4). There were significant gender differences in the decision pattern. While 71 per cent of the male workers spent income at their own discretion, only 35 per cent of the female workers did so. About 43 per cent of female workers gave their income to their husbands/parents, and they decided how to spend it. In spite of this gap, job at garment had empowered women, to some extent, with the right over their income. This was a very significant cultural change that had taken place with the advent of the garment industry.

TABLE 7.4

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS SHOWING WHO SPENDS INCOME

(row percentage)

	Male				Female			
	Total spending self	Total spending others	Jointly	Total workers	Total spending self	Total spending others	Jointly	Total workers
Skill								
I	46.5	32.6	20.9	43	28.1	54.4	17.5	171
II	72.9	14.6	12.5	96	18.8	43.8	37.5	32
III	71.8	15.4	12.8	39	39.5	36.8	23.7	190
IV	83.6	7.5	9.0	67	51.4	20.0	28.6	35
Age								
10-14	21.1	57.9	21.1	19	21.4	67.1	11.4	70
15-19	53.3	28.9	17.8	45	30.8	52.7	16.6	169
20-24	75.6	12.2	12.2	82	36.9	27.2	35.9	103
25-29	83.3	3.7	13.0	54	55.8	16.3	27.9	43
30-34	83.9	6.5	9.7	31	38.5	23.1	38.5	26
35-39	88.9	11.1	-	9	50.0	35.7	14.3	14
40-65	100.0	-	-	5	100.0	-	-	1
Marital status								
Married	87.8	4.9	7.3	82	32.5	28.2	39.3	163
Unmarried	62.1	21.7	16.1	161	31.2	55.8	13.0	231
Widow	-	-	-	-	88.9	-	11.1	9
Divorced	100.0	-	-	1	66.7	20.0	13.3	15
Abandoned	-	-	-	-	-	100.0	-	2
Separated	100.0	-	-	1	66.7	33.3	-	6
Total	71.0	15.9	13.1	100	34.5	42.7	22.8	100
	(174)	(39)	(32)	(245)	(147)	(182)	(97)	(426)

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

Across job categories, we note that relatively those in lower category jobs, like skills I and II, hardly had any say on how to spent their income. But in better jobs, women mostly spend their income on their own or jointly. Children aged 10-14 years usually gave their whole income to their parents. About 67 per cent of the female child's income and 58 per cent of the male child's income were spent by parent's decision. Women aged 25-29 years were the most liberated as 56 per cent of them spent their income on their own decision. Table 7.4 also shows that relatively the unmarried girls had to let their parents decide on how to spend their income, while the married women did so on their own or jointly with their husbands.

7.2.2 Status as Primary Earner

It is evident that the jobs at garment industry were contributing to enhance family income (Table 7.5). The primary earner was defined as the member whose earning was the highest in the family. About 43 per cent of the garment workers were the primary earners of their families, and the rest were secondary earners. Only earnings of members residing in the city were taken into account.

There were significant gender differences—about 65 per cent of the male workers were primary earners, while only 30 per cent of the female workers were so. But the fact that women were becoming primary earners was an important cultural change to take note of. Moreover, 35-40 per cent of the women who worked as operators, supervisors or quality controller were primary earners. In our sample, 25 per cent of all workers were female-headed: of the female workers, 37 per cent were female-headed, while in the case of male workers it was only 4 per cent. The percentage of the female-headed households was considerably higher than the national figure of 16 per cent of the urban households headed by women as reported in the 1981 census. This also reflected that women were migrating out of rural areas on their own, leaving their husbands or parents behind. About 40 per cent of the female operators, supervisors and quality controllers said that their households were female-headed, i.e. either themselves, or their mother or sister was the primary earner of the family. It was usually said that female headedness was a phenomenon which was more prevalent when women faced widowhood. Our survey data, however, shows that, of the 159 female workers who were female-headed households, 86 per cent were either married or unmarried. This was an important social change that had taken place.

TABLE 7.5

DISTRIBUTION OF PRIMARY EARNER'S BY OCCUPATION CATEGORY

Primary Earner	Male					Female					All workers
	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	
Self	39.5	64.6	61.5	85.1	65.3	24.6	15.6	35.4	41.2	30.0	42.92
Mother	2.3	1.0	-	-	.8	2.3	-	1.1	-	1.4	1.19
Father & Brother	44.2	19.8	30.8	9.0	22.9	40.9	43.8	21.2	2.9	29.3	26.97
Husband & Wife	2.3	1.0	2.6	-	1.2	-	3.1	2.1	-	1.2	1.19
Spouse	2.3	3.1	-	3.0	2.4	11.1	34.4	28.0	47.1	23.2	15.65
Other	7.0	8.3	5.1	3.0	6.1	11.1	2.7	7.9	8.8	8.9	7.90
All workers	43	96	39	67	245	171	32	189	34	426	671
Female headed Household	3	6	-	2	11	63	5	77	14	159	170
% of column total	6.97	6.25	0	2.98	4.48	36.84	15.63	40.74	41.16	37.32	23.33

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, ironman and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, quality controller.

TABLE 7.6

WORKER'S CONTRIBUTION TO FAMILY INCOME

Job category	Male			Female			All workers		
	Family income	Workers income	Workers contri-bution	Family income	Workers income	Workers contri-bution	Family income	Workers income	Workers contri-bution
	(Tk/month)		%	(Tk/month)		%	(Tk/month)		%
Quality controller	4459	3249	72.9	2473	1725	69.7	3758	2606	69.3
Cutting master/cutter	3875	3262	84.2	2200	2200	100.0	3802	3292	86.6
Cutting helper	1769	1282	72.5	3060	1291	42.2	2027	1327	65.5
Sewing supervisor	3365	3160	88.6	6280	3393	54.0	4814	3353	69.6
Operator	2482	1731	69.7	2727	1487	54.5	2682	1574	58.6
Sewing helper	3750	806	21.5	1956	616	31.5	2271	656	28.9
Ironman	1837	1306	71.1	2140	718	33.6	1878	1228	65.4
Folding	2445	1491	61.0	2415	1082	44.8	2435	1350	55.7
Finishing helper	1923	1213	63.1	2008	754	37.5	1984	893	45.0
All workers	2811	1838	65.4	2640	1210	45.8	2705	1450	53.6

7.2.3 Contribution to Family Income

It was usually said that the garment workers' contribution toward family income was very negligible. But contrary to the expectation, our survey results shows that 54 per cent of the family income was contributed by the workers (Table 7.6). It also varied across gender: a male worker contributed 65 per cent to the family income, while a female worker contributed 46 per cent toward family income. Thus, the fact that women were contributing half of family income earned in urban areas was a definite positive change that has been brought about by the advent of the garment industry.

Table 7.6 shows that even the lowest earning workers, such as sewing helpers, contributed about 30 per cent toward family income. All these suggest that parents were sending their daughters and sons to the garment industry to enhance family income. Not only were they becoming an additional earner, but also they were no longer treated as "another mouth to feed." In this sense, especially women view themselves as "liberated" from the patriarchial family system.

7.3 Attitude Changes in Workers

The jobs at garment industry have not only enhanced status of the women in the family, but had also given them personal freedom. They now had a wide range of life experiences and activities. Some of these aspects are highlighted below.

7.3.1 Unmarried Workers

Of the total 392 unmarried workers in our sample, about 10 per cent reported that the possibility of their marriage had increased, 14 per cent said that it had decreased, and 54 per cent said that it had, remained the same (Table 7.7). Relative to the male workers (5 per cent), more female workers (13 per cent) reported that they thought the possibility of their marriage had increased after joining garment industry. Relatively, the possibility of marriage had increased for those aged 15-19 years. This indicates that men now preferred to marry those women who earned an income. There were, however, exceptions. One of the respondents said, during the interview, that she was going to leave her job at the garment industry as the society thinks that young girls undergo moral degradation by working in the garment industry. Her boyfriend was getting married to a girl who lived in the rural

area. It is true that, still now, many young women faced great social difficulties when they returned to their villages. This definitely has a toll on the emotional health of these women. Modernisation often introduces new role possibilities that cannot be handled by traditional perception of women.

TABLE 7.7

POSSIBILITY OF MARRIAGE FOR UNMARRIED WORKERS

(row percentage)

	Increased	Decreased	Unaltered	Don't know	No Information	Not applicable	Total workers
Age group (years)							
10-14	8.1	2.3	20.9	1.2	2.3	65.1	86
15-19	13.7	15.4	60.6	2.9	6.9	0.6	175
20-24	3.3	18.7	71.4	1.1	4.4	1.1	91
25-29	8.6	25.7	62.9	-	2.9	-	35
30-34	-	-	80.0	-	20.0	-	5
Total	9.4	14.0	54.8	1.8	5.1	14.8	392

The unmarried workers were also asked whether any factory worker was willing to marry them. About 6 per cent of them reported that some workers were interested. It is likely that they would be shy to admit this, but still we note that 7 per cent of the female unmarried workers and 5 per cent of the male unmarried workers said that some co-workers in the factory were interested in marrying them (Table 7.8). Moreover, about 9 per cent of the

TABLE 7.8

DISTRIBUTION SHOWING FACTORY WORKER'S WILLINGNESS TO MARRY

(row percentage)

	Yes	No	Don't know	No Information	Not applicable	Total workers
Sex						
Female	7.4	75.3	-	1.3	16.0	231
Male	5.0	62.1	1.2	6.2	25.5	161
Age group (years)						
10-14	2.3	33.7	-	2.3	61.6	86
15-19	8.0	82.9	0.6	3.4	5.1	175
20-24	8.8	75.8	1.1	1.1	13.2	91
25-29	2.9	77.1	-	8.6	11.4	35
30-34	-	80.0	-	20.0	-	5
All	6.4	69.9	0.5	3.3	19.9	100.0
No. of workers	25	274	2	13	78	392

workers in the age group 15-24 years reported that some garment workers were willing to marry them. Thus, it seems that these workers could now decide who to get married to. Some female workers told us that they would not accept a rural boy for marriage. The right to decide who to get married to is something which is usually denied to a rural girl. It was also observed that some of these young girls were saving money for their own dowry.

7.3.2 Married Women

Some changes have also occurred in the life of the married workers. When women went out to work, they also had to perform their regular household work. It is interesting to note that husband's participation in the household work increased with the increasing participation of women in the garment industry. Those women who did not do any overtime, their husbands did household work, on average, for about 2 hours. On the other hand, those who worked for 6-7 hours of overtime daily, their husband put in on an average of about 4 hours of household work (Table 7.9). The table shows that those women who spent longer time in outside work and women who earned more, received more help from their husband in doing domestic work. This is an important social change, as it reflects the recognition of female earning and participation in the labour force. There is a need to create awareness about the participation of husband in doing household work.

TABLE 7.9

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TIME SPENT BY HUSBAND ON DOMESTIC ACTIVITY AND WIFE'S OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT

Criteria	Husband's domestic work (hours)
Women's outside work (hours)	
Upto 8	72
9-10	173
11-12	87
13-14	97
15 and above	72
Women's earnings (Taka)	37
Upto 500	43
501-1000	32
1001-1500	57
1501-2000	93
2001 and above	60
All women	73

Participation of women in the labour market also increased the chance of broken home. Table 7.10 shows that those who were new in the garment industry, none faced the threat of divorce, while those who had been working for 4-6 years in the garment industry faced the highest threat of divorce (18 per cent). The workers also gave their views on relationship with their husbands. About 33 per cent of the married female workers said that their relationship with their husbands had improved, while 6 per cent said that it has deteriorated after joining the garment industry. For the rest, the relationship has not changed. The relationship deteriorated most for those who had been working in the garment industry for 7-12 months. Hence for women, the second year of working in the garment industry appeared to be the most vulnerable time of her married life. Special effort needs to be taken to counsel these women, so that they could have a better married and working life.

TABLE 7.10

DISTRIBUTION OF MARRIED FEMALE WORKERS SHOWING CHANGE IN PERSONAL LIFE

(row percentage)

Total length (months)	No threat to divorce	Relationship with husband	
		Improved	Deteriorated
0-6	100.0	37.5	-
7-12	85.7	28.5	21.4
13-24	91.3	30.4	13.0
25-48	86.5	37.8	2.7
49-72	82.1	35.9	2.6
73-96	88.6	31.4	5.7
97-776	85.7	14.3	-
Total	87.1	33.1	6.1

7.3.3 Change in Housing Condition

Before coming to work in the garment industry, most workers (51 per cent) used to live in houses with tin roof, 27 per cent lived in *Katcha* houses, and 22 per cent in *pucca* houses. After coming to work, 43 per cent lived in *pucca*, 46 per cent in "Tin roof" and 12 per cent in *katcha* houses (Table 7.11). Thus, the standard of living was found to have improved in terms of housing condition. Of the workers who were staying in *katch*a houses before, 18 per cent were now staying in tin roof/pucca houses. Only for about 2 per cent of the workers who were previously living in pucca/tin roof, the housing condition had deteriorated; they now lived in *katcha* houses.

TABLE 7.11

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY CHANGE IN HOUSING CONDITION

After	Male				Female				All workers			
	Pucca	Tin roof	Katcha	Total	Pucca	Tin roof	Katcha	Total	Pucca	Tin roof	Katcha	Total
Before												
Pucca	16.7	2.4	.8	20.0	20.4	1.6	.2	22.2	19.1	1.9	.4	21.4
Tin roof	18.4	38.8	1.2	58.4	13.6	32.4	1.2	47.2	15.4	34.7	1.2	51.3
Katcha	6.9	9.0	5.4	21.3	9.4	8.7	12.4	30.5	8.5	8.8	10.0	27.3
Total	42.0	50.2	7.8	100.0	43.4	42.7	13.8	100.0	42.9	45.5	11.6	100.0
No.	103	123	19	245	185	182	59	426	288	305	78	671

Note: The percentages are of 245 males, 426 females and 671 total workers respectively.

Moreover, there was also a change in the quality of life. Earlier, about 47 per cent of the workers had access to electricity, but now about 87 per cent of the workers had such access. For 41 per cent of the workers who did not have access earlier, the quality of life has definitely improved (Table 7.12). There was not much difference by gender. Another indicator was the access to tap water. Only 32 per cent of workers had access to tap water prior to joining the garment industry. But now, about 68 per cent of them had access to tap water. Thus, much of the time spent in carrying water was now saved. About 38 per cent of the workers who did not have access to tap water earlier were now enjoying this better facility. But still, after joining the garment industry about 32 per cent of the workers did not have access to tap water.

TABLE 7.12

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS SHOWING CHANGE IN QUALITY OF LIFE

After		Male		Female		All workers	
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Before							
Electricity							
	Yes	47.3	2.0	44.6	0.9	45.6	1.3
	No	43.5	7.2	39.9	14.5	41.1	12.0
	Total	90.8	9.2	84.5	15.4	86.7	13.3
Tap water							
	Yes	25.3	2.9	32.6	1.6	30.0	2.1
	No	43.3	28.5	34.3	31.5	37.5	30.4
	Total	58.6	31.4	66.9	33.1	67.5	32.5
Gas							
	Yes	22.8	3.7	27.7	1.9	25.9	2.5
	No	43.7	29.8	37.3	33.1	39.7	31.9
	Total	66.5	33.5	65.0	35.0	65.6	34.4

Note: The percentages are of 245 males, 426 females and 671 total workers respectively.

Life in the city also provided access to gas. About 29 per cent of the workers had access to gas earlier. The rest used to use wood/kerosene as fuel. Using gas also saved a lot of woman's time. About 66 per cent of the garment workers had access to gas. There was an improvement for about 40 per cent of the workers. It is important to note that there was no gender difference in improvements in the quality of life.

7.3.4 Change in Socioeconomic Conditions

We had noted that an average worker earned Tk. 1,450 per month: a male worker earned Tk. 1,838, and a female worker earned Tk. 1,210. This income was much higher than that of the urban informal sector. About 72 per cent of the male workers and 90 per cent of the female workers were unemployed prior to joining the garment industry. Thus, their earnings from the garment industry were likely to have raised their economic status. Of those who were previously employed in jobs like labourers, maid servant, small business, etc. did not have earnings of more than Tk. 7-8 a day. Thus, the garment industry in general had raised the economic status of the workers from their previous level.

TABLE 7.13

EXPENDITURE PATTERN OF THE WORKERS

Expenditure head	Male		Female		All workers	
	Tk./mo	% of earning	Tk./mo	% of earning	Tk./mo	% of earning
Expenditure						
Self	165	9.0	119	9.8	136	9.4
Brothers/sisters' education	60	3.3	57	4.7	58	4.0
Transport	69	3.7	59	4.9	63	4.3
Medical	73	4.0	108	8.9	95	6.6
Remittance	92	5.0	41	3.4	60	4.1
Saving	70	3.8	65	5.4	67	4.6
Monthly earning	1838		1210		1450	
Joint expenditure						
House rent	438		464		454	
Food	781		682		729	

It was usually perceived that the earnings of the female workers were spent on consumption goods for themselves. It has been observed that the female workers spent about 10 per cent of their earnings for themselves, and the male workers spent 9 per cent. These expenses were mainly on basic

needs such as clothing and shoes. The workers reported that they were now able to buy more clothes and afford a better living than before. Table 7.13 shows that the garment workers were taking up new family responsibilities. About four per cent of their income were spent for the education of their brothers/sisters/children. Moreover, about four per cent of their income were remitted to the rural areas. Thus, work in garment industry was also helping to alleviate rural poverty to a certain extent. Assuming that 350,000 workers were employed in the garment industry, about Tk. 21 lakh were remitted to the rural areas each month.

Even though the income of the garment workers was low, and they had low level of education, yet they had developed a saving habit. Our survey shows that 14 per cent of the male workers and 18 per cent of the female workers had bank accounts. This was a significant change considering that most workers originated from rural areas where banking habit was not predominant. The female workers saved relatively more (5 per cent of their earnings) than the male workers (4 per cent). Moreover, the female workers spent proportionately more on medical expenses (9 per cent) than the male workers (4 per cent). Earlier we noted that the incidence of illness was higher for the female workers than the male workers. Although most workers walked to work, yet the average expenditure on transport was about four per cent of their earnings.

The expenditures on house rent and food were usually done jointly from the total family income. The average house rent was Tk.454, and the average expenditure on food was Tk. 729 per month.

Not only have women workers learnt to earn and spend their income, they had also acquired new social roles. Before joining the garment industry, about 12 per cent of the female workers went to the market, while 19 per cent of them now went to the market. Table 7.14 shows that for 8 per cent of the workers, the status remained the same: they went to the market both before and after joining garment industry. About 43 per cent of the female workers did cooking both before and after entering the garment industry. About 13 per cent of the female workers who previously did not cook were now doing so. It is interesting to note that 44 per cent of the female workers did not cook. They either had a relative or a part-time maid to cook for them. This shows that work in the garment industry had not only created jobs for the workers but had increased the demand for the part-time maids. Even though their income was low, the garment workers could afford to feed another relative or buy the service of a maid.

TABLE 7.14

SOCIAL CHANGES IN GARMENT WORKERS

Social changes[1]	After			
	Male		Female	
	Yes	Total[2]	Yes	Total[2]
Before				
Went to market				
Yes	69.8	82.0	8.0	11.7
Total[3]	73.9		18.8	
Cooking				
Yes	4.9	9.0	43.2	54.0
Total[3]	6.9		56.3	
Taking decision				
Yes	59.2	59.6	21.6	23.2
Total[3]	74.7		39.2	
Going out alone				
Yes	87.8	89	16.7	20.4
Total[3]	90.6		46.1	

Note: 1. The percentages are of 245 males and 426 female workers respectively.
2. The column totals indicate after entering garment industry.
3. The row totals indicate before entering garment industry.

Previously, only 23 per cent of the female workers used to take decision, but now about 40 per cent took family-level decisions. Thus, work in the garment industry had given participating women workers greater decision-making power. This was also true for male workers. Prior to entering the garment industry, only 20 per cent of the female workers used to go out alone. But now about 46 per cent of the workers went out alone. Thus it shows that women workers had gained self confidence and were gradually developing themselves to adjust to the urban working life. One should note that most of these workers were from rural areas where they had very protected life. Thus, work in garment industry had changed their socio-economic status to a great extent.

CHAPTER 8

LEGAL RIGHTS OF THE GARMENT WORKERS

8.1 Workers and Unionisation

The conventional assumption of policymakers and employers is that the garment industry actively seeks women workers, because women are a docile work force and are, therefore, willing to accept relatively low wages and poor working conditions. When the management people were asked why they preferred women workers, they replied that the garment work was light and, thus, suitable for women. Moreover, women are more patient and nimble and for that reason they are better suited to the garment work. Most of them also said that women were more controllable than men, they are less mobile and less likely to engage in the union activities. One of the owners stated that there was union in the 1980s, and its leader was a woman. The factory was closed by the workers for one day, and the management was assaulted. Then the owner closed down the factory for three days. There was a change of ownership, and when the workers were retrenched, the leader could not join as she was abroad. Of the 671 workers interviewed, only 14 workers of four firms said that the trade union existed in those firms. Of these four firms, the management of two firms did not report the presence of the trade union. About 1.5 per cent of male and 2.6 per cent of the female workers reported the existence of trade union. The management of a factory reported that the trade union exists but none of the workers interviewed said so. In three firms, there were a trade union in the 1980s, but it was not in existence during the survey period.

The workers were asked why they did not have trade union. About 26 per cent of the male workers and 51 per cent of the female workers had no knowledge about the trade union. Some have never heard of it, and some did not think about it. The fear of being dismissed was expressed by 23 per cent of the male workers and another 21 per cent (of the male workers) said that there was no unity (Table 8.1). On the other hand, the fear of being dismissed was expressed only by 10 per cent of the female workers. The management also reported that they dismiss the male workers if they join the trade union. One usually hears that the management opposes the

TABLE 8.1

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY REASON FOR NOT HAVING TRADE UNION

	Male					Female				
	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total	Skill I	Skill II	Skill III	Skill IV	Total
No unity	16.3	24.7	20.5	19.7	21.2	8.8	25.0	20.1	17.7	15.7
No need	7.0	6.2	12.8	25.8	12.7	4.7	-	10.1	20.6	3.0
Fear of dismiss	18.6	25.8	12.8	28.8	23.3	5.8	3.1	15.3	8.8	10.1
Absence of leader	2.3	1.0	10.3	3.0	3.3	3.5	9.4	4.2	8.8	4.7
Owner unwilling	2.3	3.1	7.7	4.5	4.1	0.6	3.1	3.2	5.9	2.3
Don’t know	39.5	31.9	28.2	9.1	26.5	70.8	56.3	21.2	29.4	50.9
Others	14.0	5.2	5.1	9.1	7.8	3.5	-	8.5	5.9	5.6
Not applicable	-	2.1	2.6	-	1.2	2.3	3.1	2.6	2.9	2.6
Total workers	43	97	39	66	245	171	32	189	34	426

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

TABLE 8.2

DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS BY AWARENESS ABOUT LABOUR LAWS

	Awareness about labour laws		Women cannot work after 8 p.m.	Notice for dismissal	Annual leave	Casual leave	Maternity leave	
	Yes	Know partially					Paid	Not paid half paid
Skill								
I	1.4	13.1	8.9	16.4	5.6	5.6	11.2	4.2
II	7.0	28.1	14.8	21.1	11.7	11.7	12.5	2.3
III	8.3	25.4	13.6	15.8	8.8	13.6	11.4	7.9
IV	20.8	44.6	20.8	32.7	22.8	26.7	38.6	5.0
Sex								
M	11.0	20.7	14.7	25.3	13.9	19.2	20.8	2.4
F	5.9	32.2	12.7	16.2	8.5	8.9	12.7	6.8
Age group								
10-14	-	9.0	7.9	12.4	3.4	2.2	5.6	6.7
15-19	2.3	18.7	10.7	17.3	5.6	10.7	12.6	3.2
20-24	12.4	28.1	14.1	20.5	16.2	13.5	17.8	7.0
25-29	15.5	39.2	19.6	22.7	1.8	19.6	16.5	4.1
30-34	8.8	36.8	19.3	24.6	12.3	19.3	28.1	7.0
35-39	13.0	21.7	17.4	21.7	21.7	17.4	21.7	4.3
40-65	16.7	50.0	-	66.7	16.7	16.7	50.0	-
Total	7.7	24.9	13.4	19.5	10.4	12.7	15.6	5.2

Note: 1. Skill-I includes sewing helper and finishing helper.
2. Skill-II includes cutting helper, iron-man, and folding.
3. Skill-III includes operators.
4. Skill-IV includes cutting master/cutter, supervisor, and quality controller.

formation of a trade union. We could not, however, confirm this from our survey. Only 4 per cent of the male workers and 2 per cent of the female workers reported that there was no trade union because of the unwillingness of the owner of the industry. The lack of leadership was expressed by 3 per cent of the male workers and about 5 per cent of the female workers. Relatively more male workers (13 per cent) than the female workers (3 per cent) felt that there was no need for a trade union.

The aforementioned findings suggest that there is a general lack of awareness about the trade union created among the garment workers. There was an association for the production managers of the garment workers. Such association should be formed among other group members. The management was usually supportive of a healthy trade union, but in Bangladesh, such trade union activities are still one's dream.

8.2 Awareness about Labour Laws

The labour laws provide protection to organised sections of the labour force, mainly wage earners in industrial/commercial establishments in the urban sector. It was often reported by the management that the labour laws were not implemented by the factories as the workers did not ask for it. Hence, it is important to know whether the workers were aware of the labour laws. Of the total 671 workers surveyed, only about 8 per cent reported that they were aware of the labour laws, while about 24 per cent reported that they knew some laws and the rest had no knowledge about the labour laws. There was also a gender difference in knowledge about the labour laws. About 73 per cent of the female workers had no knowledge about the labour laws, while it was true for only 56 per cent of the male workers (Table 8.2). Moreover, the workers in better job categories had greater awareness about the labour laws. Only one per cent of those in skill I were aware about the existence of the labour laws, while it was true for 21 per cent of those in skill IV. Thus, it shows that with education and experience, the awareness about the labour laws increases. There was, however, no clear relation between the age of the workers and awareness about the labour laws. Even though the garment workers were covered by the labour laws, many of them did not get protection due to inadequate implementation and awareness of the labour laws.

8.2.1 Women Cannot Work after 8 p.m.

One of the most cited labour laws is that "women are only allowed to work in a factory from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m." This is in the Factory Act 1965, article 65(b), Shop and Establishment Act and in the Tea Garden Act. About 13 per cent of the garment workers surveyed had knowledge about this law. There was not much difference by gender — 13 per cent of the female workers and 15 per cent of the male workers were aware of this law. There was a difference in awareness by job category. Only 9 per cent of those in skill I, 15 per cent of those in skill II, 14 per cent of those in skill III and 21 per cent of those in skill IV were aware of this law.

8.2.2 Notice of Dismissal

The Employment of Labour (standing orders) Act made adequate provisions to protect workers against any unjustified dismissal. An employer had the right to terminate a worker's service by serving a 90-day notice or wages in lieu of the notice. Most garment workers, by virtue of their nature of work and employment, were casual/temporary and contact workers, who did not enjoy the legal protection against any unjust dismissal afforded to the regular workers. About 20 per cent of the workers surveyed had knowledge about this law. More male workers (25 per cent) than the female workers (16 per cent) were aware of this protection. Here too, the awareness was more for skill IV (33 per cent) than for skill I (16 per cent).

8.2.3 Leave Facilities

(i) Annual leave

The Shop and Establishment Act, 1965, and the Factory Act, 1965, provided an annual leave facility to the workers who had been employed for 12 months. The Shop & Establishment Act provided for one day of leave for each 18 days employed; and in the Factories Act 1965, it was one day for each 22 days employed. About 10 per cent of the garment workers surveyed were aware of this facility. Here too, we see that awareness differed by gender and by job category.

(ii) Casual leave

The abovementioned Acts also provided for 10 days of casual leave annually. About 13 per cent of the garment workers were aware of such leave facilities. Of the male workers, 19 per cent were aware, while it was 9

per cent for the female workers. The variation across job categories was also noted here: 6 per cent for skill I and 27 per cent for skill IV.

(iii) Sick and medical leave

There was a provision for 14 days of sick/medical leave in Article 80 of the Factory Act 1965, and in Article 16 of the Shop and Establishment Act 1965. None of the workers were aware of this provision.

(iv) Festival leave

Both Article 79 of the Factory Act 1965 and article 14 of the Shop and Establishment Act 1965, provide for 10 days of the festival leave. The workers were not aware of this leave facility.

(v) Maternity leave

The Maternity Benefit Act, 1939, provides for the maternity leave facility. An employee must have been employed by the employer from whom she would claim maternity benefit, for a period not less than nine months immediately preceding the day of delivery. A woman was entitled to benefit for six weeks preceding and including the day of delivery and for the six weeks immediately following that day. About 16 per cent of the garment workers surveyed had knowledge about this facility. About 5 per cent workers thought that this leave was unpaid or half-paid leave. About 21 per cent of the male workers and 13 per cent of the female workers were aware of this facility.

8.3 Labour Laws and Suggested Changes by Entrepreneurs

The list of labour laws which were applicable for the garment industry is given below. The entrepreneurs were asked to give their opinion on them.

Labour laws	Entrepreneur's opinion
1. An employer has the right to terminate a worker's service by serving 90-day notice or wages in lieu of the notice	1. a. It should be a one-month notice or wage in lieu of the notice. b. It should not be applicable if the worker has to be terminated for stealing. c. Usually the workers were not terminated; they left on their own. d. As most of the workers were not permanent / confirmed, so this was not applicable.
2. There should be one latrine per 25 females and one per 25 males. Where there were more than 100 male/female workers, it was sufficient if after the first 4 latrines were provided, further latrines were to be provided at the rate of one for every 50 workers.	2. If the factory building is rented, it may not be possible.
3. Adequate washing facilities were to be provided for each sex, and it will have to be conveniently accessible and clean.	3. If the factory building is rented, it may not be possible.
4. First aid boxes were to be kept on the premises; one box for every 150 workers and where more than 500 were employed, there should be an ambulance and a room provided with a qualified medical practitioner in charge, assisted by at least one qualified nurse.	4. a. A qualified medical practi-tioner does not want to work for the garment industry. b. Nearby nursing home can provide emergency medical facilities.
5. If a factory employed more than 250 workers, canteen facilities should be provided, and where there were more than 100 workers, there should be a suitable lunch room.	5. a. Space is a problem in a rented premise. b. All factories should have a lunch room. c. Canteen facilities were not needed as there were nearby shops/hotels.

6. If more than 50 female workers were ordinarily employed, they shall be provided a suitable room or rooms for use by children aged less than six years.	6. a. Workers should be free to work and keep their family problems at home. b. Due to the space problem, it cannot be implemented. c. So far, there was no demand for it. d. Such provision will hamper work. e. This facility is not needed as women do not bring their children along with them. f. This provision should be abolished.
7. In general, the factory workers are not required to work more than 48 hours a week, or 9 hours a day.	7. a. The garment industry is highly time-constrained for timely production. So, this law should not be practised for garment industry. b. There should not be a work-hour limit, if workers are working willingly.
8. No workers should be required to work more than 60 hours a week.	8. This provision is not suitable for the garment industry during the peak season.
9. No workers are to be made to work for 6 hours at a stretch without an hour break or two half hour break.	9. This provision needs clarifi-cation.
10. Women are only allowed to work in a factory between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m.	10. a. Not feasible for the garment industry. b. This provision is discrimi-natory. c. The provision should be extended till 11 p.m.
11. There is a provision for a weekly holiday, i.e. Friday, and no workers are to work more than 10 days consecu-tively without a holiday.	11. Workers demand two holidays per month.
12. An Employee must have been employed by the employer from whom she claims maternity benefit for a period not less than nine months immediately preceding the day of delivery.	12. a. Should work for at least 12 months to claim maternity leave and then should not get pregnant in 5 years. b. The permanent workers should get this benefit.

13. A woman is entitled to benefit for six weeks preceding and including the day of her delivery, and for the six weeks immediately following that day.	13. a. It should be two weeks prior and eight weeks after the day of delivery. b. Should be without pay.
14. Employees were entitled to enjoy the following leave every year: (i) 10 to 20 days-casual leave (ii) 14 days-annual leave (iii) Sick and medical leave	14. Should be provided to those confirmed, i.e. after one year of service.
15. Wages in a factory or other establishment' employing less than one thousand persons were to be paid within seven days after the expiry of the wage period and within 10 days employing one thousand or more persons.	15. a.It should be within 10 days for pay, and within 21 days for overtime. b.Should be implemented immediately.
16. Any employee who sustains a personal injury by an accident arising out of or in the course of his/her employment was entitled to workmen's compen-sation at the specified rates.	16. a. Usually no major accident is possible. b. Workmen compensation is to be linked to the length of service.

8.4 Factors Inhibiting Implementation of Labour Laws

The findings of our survey suggest that although the garment workers were eligible for protection, they do not benefit from the legal provisions due to the inadequate implementation of the labour laws and the absence of organisations of the workers. Some factors inhibiting implementation are the following: a large number of workers are excluded from the application of many labour laws as the coverage depends on the nature of employment contract, category of worker, and the nature of business (commercial or industrial). Sometime, it was difficult for the employers to understand the complicated regulations and comply with them. Moreover, unwillingly or deliberately, they misinterpret the legal provisions and standards which are poorly recorded.

Workers' lack of knowledge and awareness about their legal rights and entitlement have resulted in employers violating the law and depriving the workers of minimum benefits. One management personnel clearly said that maternity benefits were not given because the workers never asked for it. Usually, the workers leave the job and return two or three months after child birth. In the absence of any trade unions, it may be difficult to effectively implement the labour laws. Moreover, there was an inadequate number of inspectors, and furthermore, the quality of inspection was reported to be poor.

8.5 Measures to Improve Implementation of Labour Laws

The most effective way is a combination of enforcement approach and promotional approach. In the first approach, measures, such as strengthening the enforcement machinery, streamlining the judicial process, and imposing deterrent punishment on erring employers, could be taken. The second approach seeks to win the confidence and cooperation of the employers and the workers by tact and understanding and to increase their knowledge and awareness about the labour laws. The latter implies undertaking an information campaign to educate the employers and the workers on their obligations and rights. Both approaches must complement each other and should be pursued side by side.

8.5.1 Strengthening Labour Law Enforcement Machinery

It is well known that there is a lack of adequate manpower and facilities. The number of labour inspectors needs to be increased. It is desirable that they get transport facilities to inspect routinely. A continuous staff development training programme is also required. An incentive mechanism needs to be developed for the inspectors. The employers may be asked to report on compliance with the various labour laws, and emphasis should be given on random inspection. Moreover, coordination between the various authorities concerned with labour protection functions should be ensured.

8.5.2 Simplifying Legal Provisions

The provisions of the existing labour laws should be reviewed with a view to simplifying the multiple definitions, such as the term “worker.” Moreover, all the guidelines should be delineated in a handbook. Inspectors should give suggestions on the deficiencies and inadequacies.

8.5.3 Penalties for Non-Compliance

The complaint procedure should be made simple. The non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should be given the right to file complaints on behalf of the workers. The trade unions should educate their members. Punishments may be imposed on the employers wilfully not complying with the labour laws and standards.

8.5.4 Enhancing Educational Programmes

It is very important that the workers gain necessary knowledge about the labour regulations and standards to ascertain the extent to which the

statutory requirements applicable to them are being complied with. Educational programmes should be undertaken to motivate the employers to comply with the legal provisions. The trade unions and employers association should conduct educational programmes for their members. The international organisation, like ILO, can provide technical assistance for labour education.

8.5.5 Organising Workers into Trade Unions

In the absence of appropriate organisations, the workers were unable to prevent infringements into their rights. Ideally, the initiative should come from the workers themselves. But awareness needs to be created about the role of the trade union.

Thus, there was a need for an integrated approach for improving the working conditions of the garment workers. This would mean educating the workers and increasing their awareness about the labour laws, enacting labour laws, and ensuring their enforcement.

CHAPTER 9

Conclusion and Recommendations

9.1 Introduction

The study looked into the working conditions of the workers as well as their socioeconomic backgrounds. Both the workers and the entrepreneurs were interviewed through two sets of a structured questionnaire. A total of 671 workers from 32 garment factories were interviewed; of these, 245 workers were males and 426 were females. The workers were selected randomly and proportionately to the sex ratio of the garment workers. The male workers were included in the survey especially with an intention to measure the gender differential in wages and in other facilities provided by the garment factory to its workers. The entrepreneurs of the 32 factories were also interviewed. The summary of the main findings and conclusions of the study are highlighted below.

9.2 Summary of Findings

The findings of the study generally suggest that the conditions of the female garment workers was not as precarious as often portrayed in news media of the country. It has been found that the socioeconomic problems faced by the workers in the garment industry are the outcome of a number of reasons which are as follows:

(1) unplanned and rapid development of the garment industry;

(2) a large-scale dependence of the garment industry on the imported materials;

(3) an unorganised labour market for the workers;

(4) some demographic characteristics of the workers, such as their very young age, their (unmarried) marital status, and their migratory status which created some social problems for the female workers;

(5) low level of education of the workers and as a result low-level of their skill acquisition was also responsible to a great extent in creating some socioeconomic problems for them.

It has been found from the present study that entrepreneurs are helpless for most social problems facing the workers in the garment industry. But they are responsible for most economic problems, such as low level of wages, irregularity in wage payment–both regular and overtime wage, low level of bonuses, absence of promotion and increment, etc.

A large-scale dependence of the garment industry on the imported materials created many socioeconomic problems for the garment workers. As this industry was almost entirely dependent on imported materials, it faced the problem of delays in opening L/C with the banks, clearance at the port, etc., which shorten the time available for production. Moreover, much of the backlog was also created due to the delay in quota distribution. In fact, all these delays, which were external to the firms, were responsible for overtime work for the garment workers. It has been found that, on an average, a garment worker had to work 11-12 hours a day. If shipment was to be done on time, the entrepreneur had no other alternative but to depend on overtime work. The entrepreneur reported that production in two shifts was impossible due to the shortage of skilled labour. It has been found in the present study that overtime work was the main source of insecurity while commuting to work. Moreover, the status of the garment workers was also looked down upon by the society, namely due to this overtime work.

Most garment factories in Bangladesh had been built without any prior plan. As a result, it has been found that about 90 per cent of the factories started production in the rented buildings which were not designed for any factory work. Hence, it has been found that the factory buildings were overcrowded, ventilation was not adequate, staircases were narrow, and roofs were low. For the same reason it has been found that most factories surveyed did not have proper lunch rooms and rest rooms. In our survey, only 30 per cent of the workers reported that they ate in the lunch room and 32 per cent reported that they ate lunch at home or at the hotels. The rest 38 per cent ate lunch either on the factory roof or in the staircases or in some other open places in the factory. About 62 per cent of the workers reported half an hour lunch break, while 36 per cent reported that one hour lunch break was given.

However, the toilet facilities were found to be quite adequate in the factories surveyed, but their maintenance was inadequate. There were also inadequacies in the supply of soaps and towels. The washing facility was found to be inadequate. Management, however, complained that toiletries

are often stolen by the workers, and the workers had to be trained to use the toilets.

Most of the social insecurity, such as death by burning, also arose from unplanned buildings of the garment factory. It has been found that to protect the young workers from the *Mastans* (touts) of the locality and to prevent some pilferage which were very common among the workers who came from very poor families, the main door of the factory was always kept locked. It is true that to keep the workers locked is inhuman, but it is also true that in the existing social situation the entrepreneur had no other alternative but to keep the door locked. It has been found that the factories (about 10 per cent) which were situated in buildings especially designed for the garment industries, kept door open, had bigger floor space per worker, adequate ventilation, lunch room, rest room, adequate toilet facilities, etc.

An interesting finding of the study was that the garment factories in Dhaka city were now clustered in a number of locations. About 25 per cent of the firms were located in the residential areas. Sometimes two factories were set up in the same building. It has been found that the female workers of the garment factories, situated in the residential areas, felt themselves more secured while commuting than those who worked in the commercial areas.

One important organisational change that has been observed to have developed in the garment industry was that, over the years, the growth of firms has been stabilised and the entrepreneurs have learnt to manage the workers efficiently. Since 1985, the government has restricted the entry of firms in the garment industry. Today, we find two types of firms - “group” and “non-groups.” The firms in group have either bought sick firms and or had leased-in the management of the factory in lieu of a fixed sum of money to be paid to the chairman (actual owner) each month, irrespective of whether the firm made profit or not. The parent firm within each group was usually a firm established prior to 1985 and the take-over or leased firms were called “sister concerns.” To successfully use larger orders on time, the firms used their sister concerns. An entrepreneur may also diversify - a case of horizontal integrating the processes across firms. In two factories of our sample, we found that all the finishing of the sister concerns were done in the parent firms. In non-group firms, there was an understanding in terms of

the distribution of the work orders (both quota and non-quota) among themselves. The practice among the garment factories in distributing work-orders had helped in ensuring regular work to workers throughout the year and overtime for about half the year. It has also been observed that the clustering of firms in certain locations along with subcontracting has generally stabilizsd the wage rates and the working conditions across firms.

As a result of this organisational change, it has been found in the survey that the workers remain employed throughout the year. This also increased their horizontal mobility. During the last one year, 50 per cent of the female workers, on an average, changed at least one factory mainly in search of higher wage and better working conditions. The entrepreneur reported that the large-scale out-migration of the workers was a severe problem for them, and to prevent this migration they introduced various types of incentives which had positive effects on the workers' economic conditions. They were also bound to undertake some measures to penalise the out migrating workers. Among these, keeping of one month's overtime salary as security and making delay in overtime payment were two main ways of penalising the migration of workers. Findings of the survey shows that most economic insecurity of the garment workers arose out of these two penalty measures.

Some of the demographic characteristics of the workers were also responsible for some of the socioeconomic problems faced by the workers in the garment industry. It was found that the average age of the worker was only 21 years: 19 years for the female workers and 24 years for the male workers. About 58 per cent of them were unmarried, and 74 per cent originated from the rural areas. Due to this young age and unmarried marital status, they are frequently harassed by the mastans and touts while commuting to work. However, it has been found that within the factory they did not face any adverse situation due to their young age. Most female workers reported that behaviour of the male workers and management persons were good. We observed very cordial relations among the workers and between the workers and the management. In fact, there were kinship ties among the workers (since about 70 per cent were recruited through kinship ties). Very interestingly, it has been found that more than 42 per cent of the female workers had either mother or sister or brother or spouse in the same factory. This kinship tie, in fact, safeguarded the workers against any

adverse situation in the factory. It has been observed that this kinship tie also gave them moral support and security.

About 9 per cent of the female labour had more than 10 years of schooling. About 29 per cent of them could sign only. In fact, this group had no education. To receive salary, a signature was necessary which they learnt somehow. As opposed to this, it was found that more than 36 per cent of the male workers had more than 10 years of schooling, and only about 10 per cent of them could sign only. It has been found that there was a very high positive correlation between the level of education and the wage rate. The relation was statistically significant at one per cent level. The findings of the present study shows that because of this low level of education, the female worker needed longer time than the male workers to acquire the required skills. This gap in acquiring skills actually was the main reason for the wage difference between the male and female workers. It has been found that, on an average, a female worker earned only 66 per cent of the wage of a male worker. A large part of this difference was due to the difference in the level of education between the male and female workers, a part was due to imperfect female labour market where the supply is more than their demand, a part was due to their low level of consciousness about the labour laws, a part was due to sex segregation of the jobs and a part was due to the gender differential. However, the entrepreneurs reported that there was no gender differential either in wages or in any other facilities like increment in wages, promotion, giving various types of bonuses (Eid bonus, attendance bonus, efficiency bonus, etc.), granting of leave, etc. Contrary to this, the findings of the present study show that in each and every case there was some gender differential. Our findings shows that jobs in the garment industry were allocated on the basis of sex. Men dominated in the cutting section (82 per cent), while female dominated in the sewing section (79 per cent). The average pay of the sewing section was only 63 per cent of that of the cutting section. There also existed significant wage differentials across sex in all sections, and across all job categories. While two entrepreneurs reported that the difference between the male and female labour was mainly due to the difference in their efficiency, all other entrepreneurs (30 entrepreneurs) reported that the female workers were less efficient than the male workers. We also asked them why they employed inefficient female worker when there was an excess supply of male workers in the existing labour market of

the country. All of them responded by saying that "the female workers were employed mainly because of their docility and cheap labour." It should be noted here that docility is an important factor in garment production since the demand for this production was seasonal. Seasonality in supply can be maintained only if there is smooth running of production which, in turn, is possible only because of the docility of the garment worker. Hence, docility should have some price which should be added to the female worker's wages.

It was estimated from the findings of the present study that the average take-home wage for a worker was Tk.1,450 a month: for the female workers it was Tk.1,210.50, but for the male workers it was Tk.1830. The monthly pay was 73 per cent of the take-home income, while the overtime earnings were 25 per cent and other benefits accounted for only two per cent. About 42 per cent of the female workers, as opposed to only 17 per cent of the male workers, earned as pay below the minimum wage of Tk.627 prescribed for the unskilled workers by the Minimum Wage Board of Bangladesh in 1984. About 33 per cent of the total workers earned below the minimum wage. Of the total sewing and finishing helpers, about 84 per cent earned less than the minimum wage of Tk.627. These workers accounted for 32 per cent of the total work force. Hence, the sewing and finishing helpers were the most exploited group of workers. Their average take-home earning were Tk.603 and Tk.850 per month respectively. In fact, they were considered secondary workers.

The proportion of labour not getting minimum wage would be even higher if the different minimum wage rates prescribed for different skill level was taken into consideration. If we consider sewing operators as moderately skilled labourers (skill-2 as the listed in the declaration of the minimum wage), the proportion of the female operators not getting the minimum wage prescribed for that skill level (Tk.808) reach 18 per cent.

The most important economic problems reported by the garment workers were the delay and irregularity in the payment of their wages. It has been found in the present study that only 22 per cent of the firms paid salary by the first week of a month, while another 68 per cent paid by the second week. In about 10 per cent of the firms there was no fixed timing for wage payment. It was, however, observed that most irregularity in payment was with regard to the payment of the overtime earnings. The average overtime per worker was 81 hours a month. The overtime work was monitored by the

"time-keeper," and the "time cards" were used for monitoring the overtime work. It was an usual practice that the firms kept one month payment of overtime as security money to deter the worker from leaving the firm. The workers got the security money back if they gave one month notice prior to leaving. Findings of the present study shows that in more than 35 per cent cases of this kind, the workers did not get their security money back. Findings also shows that about 28 per cent of the sampled firms paid overtime salary between one and a half month and three months, and another 25 per cent paid after about four months. About 24 per cent of the workers reported that they received overtime payment after two to four months, another eight per cent reported that there was no regularity in overtime payment.

However, there was not only the problem of delay in overtime payment but also the problem of low rate of overtime payment. According to the Factory Act 1965, work in excess of eight hours a day should be paid for at overtime rates, which was twice the basic salary. Usually, the basic salary was considered to be 60 per cent of the monthly pay. Interestingly, none of the workers in our sample knew what was his/her basic salary. On the other hand, firms reported that they paid overtime according to the rules. It is quite possible that the worker's lack of knowledge and awareness about their legal rights and entitlements have made it possible for the employer to violate the law and deprive the workers of their overtime payment. It has been found in the present study that only 20 per cent of the workers got the overtime payment as per the rule, i.e., twice the basic salary. It has been calculated that a female worker earned on average 106 per cent of her wage rate as overtime earning as opposed to 108 per cent earned by the male worker.

The promotion prospects were slim for both the male and female workers. About 75 per cent of the female workers as opposed to 70 per cent of the male workers (who had served in the present firm for more than one year) did not get any promotion. More than 60 per cent of the workers felt that their jobs were of temporary nature. This was mainly because the garment workers were not given any appointment letter. There was a provision for a yearly increment. But only 55 per cent of the workers who had more than one year's service received an increment. On an average, a female worker received a yearly increment of Tk.71 as opposed to Tk.110 received by the male workers.

About 23 per cent of the workers enjoyed the paid leave and another 26 per cent enjoyed the unpaid leave. Granting of leave, both paid and unpaid,

was a serious problem for the garment workers. Only 35 per cent of the workers reported that they were granted leave when they asked for it. Paid maternity leave was usually not granted. Only in few cases it has been observed that maternity leave for four weeks at half pay was granted. Some firms reported that paid maternity benefits were not given because the workers never asked for it. There was no medical or sick leave. The sewing and finishing helpers got very little paid leave. Long hours of work, coupled with no rest period and little leave, was exhausting the garment workers and deteriorating their position in the labour market.

The average length of stay of a worker in a firm was 23 months, but the sewing and finishing helpers stayed for only 14 months. Relative to the males, the average length of stay for the female workers was longer (24 months for females as against 21 months for males). The findings generally suggest either of the two scenarios: (a) more males move out of the garment industry than do females (b) relatively more male workers have been joining the garment industry during the recent past. The latter appears to be more plausible as knitwear factories demanded male workers.

Out-migration of labour was a severe problem for the firms. As there is no written contract, the worker changed job very frequently usually in search of a higher wage. It has been found that about 47 per cent of the workers changed at least one firm –50 per cent of the female workers and 42 per cent of males. Among them, about 40 per cent worked in more than two factories. The firms introduced various types of bonus to stop this migration. Some firms had introduced target setting for each day. They were achieved through payment by result, close supervision by supervisors, and penalties if certain output levels were not reached. An efficiency bonus was received by 14 per cent of the sampled workers. Of those who had perfect attendance, 13 per cent had received attendance bonus. An Eid bonus was received by 45 per cent of the workers. The concentration of factories in certain locations were compelling firms to introduce these schemes as workers had knowledge about benefits offered elsewhere. Hence, new firms should introduce these bonuses to keep efficient workers.

Our survey results show that the hiring of workers on a piece rate (contract) basis was gradually gaining importance. This was especially true for the production of knitwear. Moreover, the male workers were preferred in knitwear as they had experiences in hosiery. The jobs for which earnings were higher if employed on a contract basis were all male-dominated jobs. There existed significant differences between sex in earnings for both

salaried and contract jobs. The production of knitwear reduced the demand for the female labour and deteriorated the position of the female labour in the labour market. In our sample, the female labour constituted 62 per cent of the total work force. This was much lower than what was normally expected. It is possible that the relative share of women in work force (garment industry) may have declined due to the increase in piece rate contracts and the increased knitwear production. Although knitwear generally deteriorates the position of women, there were positive linkage effects as well. For woven, the raw materials were mostly imported. But the raw materials for knitwear could be procured locally if proper yarn and technology were imported. Moreover, knitwear production would also create demand for the dyeing and printing industries. Since the demand for garments is fashion-oriented, and there were uncertainties too, the firms had to diversify their production. Thus, we found that most factories produced both knitwear and woven products.

Our study also found that the married workers stayed for a longer-period in a firm (24 months) and, therefore, the entrepreneurs preferred to keep the married workers for such positions as operators and supervisors. Of those workers who had changed jobs, 70 per cent had left voluntarily in search for higher wages, and 13 per cent were laid off or dismissed. Moreover, 65 per cent of those who changed jobs had received full payment from their previous employers. In contrast, only 50 per cent of the sewing helpers and finishing helpers received full payment. The latter again appeared to be the most deprived group.

Employment of child labour was often an issue of debate. None of the workers surveyed were found to be aged less than 10 years. Only 13 per cent of the workers were found to be aged between 10 and 14 years. About 45 per cent of the child workers were concentrated in only 19 per cent of the factories surveyed. In rest of the factories, only 10 per cent of the work force were child labour. The child worker usually performed light work as sewing and finishing helpers.

Although child labour was prohibited under the ILO convention, such practices were quite natural in the socioeconomic and cultural context of Bangladesh. It has been observed that acute poverty compelled the parents to send their children to work. In our survey it was found that only 32 per cent of the total child workers were school dropouts. The poor parents could not afford to send their children to school. Sending them to work not only

enhanced family income but also reduced one mouth to feed. Moreover, the children could acquire skills in garment making from their childhood and, thus, in adult age they could be efficient workers. It has been observed that the entrepreneurs were generally reluctant to employ child labour. But to stop the out migration of the efficient adult workers, they had to employ child workers. Thus, we found that in 90 per cent cases either daughter, son, sister, brother of an adult worker was employed, and hence, the child labour got the care and attention of the adult labour. It was also observed that the adult labour taught them garment making with great care. Here, the functions of child care and providing of vocational training were served efficiently.

Insecurity of health was a severe problem for the garment workers. Almost all workers said that they had healthy life before entering the garment industry. It was reported by a number of firms that the women workers fainted in summer. This usually happened for those who were new on the job. The evidence of illness was found to be higher for the female workers than the male workers. The most frequent illness reported by the workers was cough and fever followed by general weakness. Workers usually came to work, even when they were sick, due to fear of losing their jobs. About 54 per cent of the women workers reported having an eye trouble after joining the garment industry. Operators, finishing helpers and quality controllers suffered most from an eye trouble. The frequency of headache and weakness increased with the length of job, while an eye trouble and urinary problems were more frequent among those whose job lengths were 7-12 months or more than 4 years. This was because it took about a year to get used to the factory norms. The incidence of illness was highest in the medium-sized firms and lowest in the larger firms. This was because most of the larger firms had their own buildings with proper ventilation, better lighting facilities, and were less congested.

On an average, a worker spent Tk.95 a month for medical expenses. Only 30 per cent of the workers were willing to pay 2.5 per cent of their pay as premium for health insurance. But practically, none of the employers were willing to introduce health insurance on their own. Every factory had fire extinguishers and sand buckets. But there were no trained persons to use them.

It was often said that a lot of mishappenings occurred within and outside the garment factories. The incidence could take place at the factory, or on the street, or at the residence of the workers. It was very likely that the workers would underreport such incidence. We found that, of the total workers, five per cent reported that they were beaten in the factory: about 6 per cent of the female workers and three per cent of the male workers were beaten in the factory. About six per cent of the respondents reported that their colleagues were beaten too. These workers are mostly helpers. About 15 per cent of the workers reported that they suffered from the fear of dismissal. It was more among the female workers (18 per cent) than the male workers (9 per cent). Operators (male and female) were relatively more afraid of being dimmissed. The incidence of rape in the factory was reported by only one worker. But about two per cent of the workers reported that rape in the factory took place in the case of their colleagues.

Many incidents, such as attack by mastans, harrassment by police and harrassment by boys in the street, have been reported by the workers. Mastan harrassments have been reported by six per cent of the workers, and more male workers (10 per cent) than the female workers (5 per cent) have reportedly been attacked by mastans. About 10 per cent of the female workers reported that their colleagues were attacked by mastans in the street.

The female workers were generally more afraid of mishappenings in the street (14 per cent) than the male workers (7 per cent). Mostly unmarried female workers, especially those engaged as sewing operators or sewing helpers, were scared while commuting to work. The female workers were also harrassed in the street (19 per cent). Most of them belonged to the age group between 15 and 19 years. Rape incidents in the street in the case of colleagues were reported by 4 per cent of the workers. Harrassment by police was reported by about two per cent of the workers. The workers (5 per cent) also expressed fear of theft while working in the factory. Some factory owners had started giving them lockers to keep their belongings. At home too, the workers sometime were afraid of theft or mishappenings; about two per cent of the workers expressed such fear. There was also the fear of evacuation from home as expressed by three per cent of the workers.

It was observed that the behaviour of the management with the workers was congenial. About 59 per cent of the workers surveyed were found to be satisfied with their present job. The most popular reason for job satisfaction

was that the alternative to working at the garment was to be unemployed. This was expressed by 20 per cent for the workers. The second reason for job satisfaction was good behaviour of the management as expressed by 19 per cent of the workers. The third reason was that wages in the respective firms were higher than elsewhere. This was expressed by 18 per cent of the workers. There was a gender difference in the response. The women workers were more satisfied with their present job because of good behaviour of the management (23 per cent), the alternative was to be unemployed (18 per cent), and better wage at the present factory (14 per cent). The order of preference was different for men; the responses were: higher wage (25 per cent), the alternative was to be unemployed (23 per cent), and timely payment (14 per cent). Another factor, namely nearness from residence, was relatively more important for the female workers (11 per cent) than the male workers (8 per cent). About 41 per cent of the workers were dissatisfied with their jobs. The most popular reason given was low wage as reported by 57 per cent of those workers who were dissatisfied with their present job. This was followed by more work as reported by 22 per cent of the workers. There was not much difference in response across sex or job categories. Distance from residence was important for the female supervisors and the quality controllers. The female supervisors/quality controllers also reported that the behaviour of the management was bad, while none of the male workers in this group expressed that to be a reason for dissatisfaction. It was important to note that delay in payment was identified by only 3 per cent of the dissatisfied workers, although there was large-scale irregularities in overtime payment.

Interestingly enough, it has been found that in spite of all these problems, work in the garment industry empowered the female garment workers, both socially and economically. Status of the garment workers in the family has increased as the female workers contributed 46 per cent, and the male workers contributed 65 per cent of their respective family income. Women are now spending their own income. About 37 per cent of the female workers were primary earners of the family. Working in the garment industry also empowered them to improve their consumption level and housing condition. Work in the garment industry also empowered the unmarried workers as they were now able to decide who to get married to. Some were also saving to pay their own dowry. For the married women

workers, the incidence of divorce increased with the length of service at the garment industry and was highest for those serving for 4-6 years. After that, such incidence, however, decreased. Some married workers were able to empower themselves by sharing household work with their husbands.

9.3 Some Policy Recommendations

(i) With a time limit of 120 days for the delivery of finished goods, even seven days' delay can be disastrous. To improve the situation, the government should make all-out efforts to reduce procedural delays by simplifying procedures and opening separate counters. Moreover, cash incentives should be given for using local raw materials. Much of the backlog was also created due to delay in quota distribution. Committees should be set up to look into the problem of quota distribution. Delays by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) in distributing quota were alleged to be responsible for much of the overtime work during October-January. Distributing the work order throughout the year would provide regular work to the workers.

(ii) Conducive polices should be taken for the production of knitwear and woven textile as the large-scale dependence of the garment industry on the imported materials created many socioeconomic problems for the garment workers. The backward linkage in knitwear has already been established. The knit weaving, dying and printing have benefited from the various incentives from the government. Such initiatives need to be encouraged further.

(iii) The insecurity of overtime payment can be overcome by enacting a legislation. It is desirable that overtime pay for a month be paid by the fourth week of the following month. Moreover, each worker should be given one copy of his/her time-card along with an identity card.

(iv) Banning the operation of all existing commercial establishments from Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, and Uttara model town may affect the garment industry badly. It will affect both the performance of the factories and the socioeconomic conditions of the workers. Since these locations were market-determined, the government should let the market operate and need not intervene. If interventions were sought, mini-industrial zones may be established where the factories

will be clustered. Subsidised credit may be made available for the construction of buildings appropriate for the garment factories with adequate toilet facilities, ventilation, lighting, canteens, and rest rooms. Thus, with the passage of time when all factories can have their own buildings then most health and social problems of the workers will be solved automatically. Housing arrangements may also be undertaken in each zone. The government can make hostels for the teen-age working girls in the zone. Each zone needs to have a medical centre, school and day care facilities for the garment workers.

(v) Low level of education among the female workers was responsible for most of the socioeconomic problems facing the female workers in the garment industry. Hence, measures need to be adopted to encourage enrolment of girls, especially in secondary education and above, in order to improve their efficiency and reduce gender differential in wages. Moreover, Bangladesh was now producing mainly basic garments. There is a need to diversify and move to upmarket high-quality and designers garments. But this will probably demand educated female labourers. Hence, policy needs to be directed toward education and training.

(vi) It has been found that the women workers prefer to go home for lunch. But half an hour lunch break was inadequate. It is, therefore, recommended that a one-hour lunch break should be made mandatory. Moreover, there should be two fifteen-minute tea breaks; one in the morning and one in the evening before the start of overtime work. The employers should provide tiffin during the second tea break. One of the firms surveyed was found to provide two tea- breaks along with tiffin. Free lunch was also provided by one firm. The owner felt that free food ensured proper diet for the workers and also brought commitment to work for the factory. Moreover, the turnover rate had drastically reduced in that firm after the introduction of free lunch. Hence, if tax rebates on such expenses are introduced, others will be encouraged to such practices.

(vii) It is important to note that the cutting, sewing, and finishing helpers were not included in the minimum wage legislation. It is recommended that they be included in the legislation. The minimum

wage for the garment workers was much lower than the national minimum wage. This is discriminatory as it implied that low minimum wages are set as the industry was more female-intensive. It is recommended that it should be set equal to or higher than the national average given the importance of an industry in export earnings.

(viii) It was observed that knitwear workers were paid piece rate and woven workers were paid monthly salary. It is recommended that as piece rate reflects the productivity of a worker, all workers should be paid on a piece rate basis. Moreover, the female workers are being marginalised to work only in woven and not in knitwear which is a higher value and higher value-added product. Hence, conscious efforts need to be made to integrate women in knitwear production, by giving them the appropriate training.

(ix) Women need to be trained to be fit for supervisor and quality controller positions. These were now male-dominated, but the entrepreneurs would prefer to have trained female workers in these positions. The owners complained that the female workers lacked basic cleanliness training. Some of them suggested that NGOs could help by providing such training to the garment workers.

(x) The entrepreneurs' organisation, BGMEA, had so far been concerned only with the problems of the entrepreneurs and not with those of the workers. BGMEA could do the following for the well-being of the workers: health insurance for the workers, education of the workers, provident fund, pension, medical facilities, child-care facilities and education for under-aged children. It could also arrange training of the workers. It was observed that due to the lack of training the workers made mistakes in their work. BGMEA could also make efforts to implement the labour laws and monitor them.

(xi) It was observed that work at the garment industry was exhausting the health of the work force. This problem must be taken seriously. Moreover, it as observed that granting of leave was minimal in the garment industry. Hence, efforts should be made to implement the labour laws regarding leave. It is recommended that hours of overtime should be reduced. Shift work may be introduced. The introduction of shift work would (a) reduce overtime hours of work,

(b) create more employ-ment opportunities, and (c) would give women workers more time for household work and look after their children.

(xii) The incidence of mishappening was quite minimal compared to the number of workers engaged in the garment industry. Most mishappenings occurred in the street which was due to poor law and order situation. Even the law-enforcing agencies like the police harassed women in the street. The workers were in general quite secured inside the garment factories. Hence, efforts should be made to improve the law and order situation in general.

(xiii) Measures to improve implementation of labour laws should be taken through a combination of enforcement approach and promotional approach. Moreover, most entrepreneurs opined that the laws were outdated and need to be changed according to the needs of the country. It is recommended that a tripatriate committee be formed with representation from workers, entrepreneurs and the government to formulate labour laws that may be suitably implemented for the garment industry, and such a committee may monitor implementation of the laws. Providing appointment letters to the workers should be made mandatory. There was also a need to have an adequate number of trained inspectors. Moreover, regulations should be made for proper wiring of the buildings. Locking of gates should be made punishable. The factories should keep guards at the gate, instead of locking it.

(xiv) As significant difference existed between the male and female wages. Bangladesh should ratify the ILO convention No.100: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951. Also, the ILO convention on maternity leave needs to be ratified to improve the conditions of the female workers in the garment industry. Tax rebate needs to be given to those firms which provide paid maternity leave. Since Bangladesh has ratified the ILO convention on Non-Discrimination, so the ILO Convention which states that women cannot work at night should be withdrawn as it discriminates against women. All these observations suggest that an effective implementation of the labour laws would themselve change the conditions of women's work favourably.

(xv) It may be noted that, in the absence of day-care facilities, the mother had to bring her young daughter along with her as there was social

risk in leaving her behind at home. Any serious efforts to reduce the extent of child labour in the garment industry should address the latter problem and provide for engaging the children (especially daughters) in secured and meaningful ways. One may also find comfort with the practises of child labour if provisions were made for their education for half day or on alternate days. Some entrepreneurs were already thinking along these lines.

(xvi) At present, another serious problem being faced by the garment industries of Bangladesh was regarding employment of child labour. A bill entitled "The Child Labour Deterrence Act of 1993" was placed in the U.S Senate by Senator Tom Harkin. The stated intention of the bill was to "prohibit the importation of goods produced abroad with child labour." This bill would lead to the enforcement of the existing universally accepted laws that prohibit child labour and, hence, would lead to the elimination of child labour in export-oriented manufacturing and mining industries. With employment opportunity being scarce in Bangladesh, passing of the bill in its current form may force many children to work in exploitative working conditions. Hence, there is a need to develop strategy toward the progressive elimination of child labour. Bangladesh also needs to ratify some important ILO conventions, such as No. 138, on minimum age of child labour.

Findings from our study generally suggest that the condition of garment workers was not as precarious as often portrayed in newspapers. Some of the labour market characteristics were outcomes of current practices in product market, and where possible appropriate measures need to be taken. In the case of work and social environment pertaining to the garment workers, a number of problem areas have been identified and recommendations have been suggested to solve these problems.

CHAPTER 10

POSTSCRIPT

The study looked into the conditions of the garment workers in Bangladesh in 1990. Since then, a number of changes have taken place. These included, among others, globalisation of the economy, market diversification of the garment products, NGO initiatives, BGMEA initiatives, and social labelling of imports in the North. All these changes may have affected the conditions of the workers, detail analysis of the which cannot be made here in the absence of more recent studies. This postscript, therefore, briefly presents the developments that have taken place during 1990-95 in the garment industry and indicate their possible effects on the conditions of the garment workers during the period.

Effects of the afore-mentioned development on the conditions of garment workers were mixed. The developments which had positive effects were: expansion of the garment sector; market diversification to knitwear; refixation of the minimum wages; NGO initiatives in providing housing; establishment of health care service and training centre; and backward linkages. On the other hand, an important development that had adversely affected the condition of employment was the issue of child labour. A bill entitled “The Child Labour Deterrence Act of 1993” was placed in the U.S. Senate by Senator Tom Harkin. The stated intention of the bill was to “prohibit the importation of goods (to USA) produced abroad with child labour.” Moreover, the garment sector was likely to face another round of pressure as an international consumer group launched a “clean Cloth Campaign” aimed against the garments produced in the developing countries where wages and working conditions were poor. This was likely to pose a threat to export of readymade garment (RMG) to the European countries. The expansion of the garment industry may have also adversely affected some segments of the workers as a number of industries were getting “sick” due to such factors as price undercutting, increasing input costs of fabric, bank, insurance, transportation, and C&F heads, and due to prolonged political impasse that prevailed in the country.

Positive effect on the working condition

(i) Expansion of the garment sector

We had noted in our study that the government had restricted entry into RMG sector in 1984/1985. Until 1990, the number of firms increased to only 750. The entry restriction was, however, withdrawn in 1991. By 1995, the number of firms increased to 1806.[1] The opening up of the sector has led to increased demand for the skilled workers and, hence, a likely rise in their wage level. This has also resulted in a rise in production cost by about seven to eight per cent. The expansion of the sector is, therefore, likely to benefit the workers.

(ii) Diversification to knitwear

We had noted, based on our survey findings, that knitwear was coming up as a new product, and it demanded more of the male labour. The export of knitwear increased tremendously between 1990 and 1995. We had observed that the firms had to depend on the male workers in the initial phase and had to pay them on a piece rate basis. This was because these skills were available from the existing domestic hosiery production. With time, the female workers had been trained, but gender discrimination persists. The female workers who are engaged in the production of knitwear are not paid by piece rate but by time rate. The entrepreneurs are now employing female labour for knitwear since women accept the low salary, while men are less likely to work at that salary. Thus, diversification to knitwear had mixed effects; widening the opportunities for the female workers in areas that were once dominated by males; and simultaneously, depressing the wages. This was likely due to the existence of surplus female labour.

(iii) Refixation of minimum wage

The minimum wage was revised in July 1994 for the garment industry. The minimum wage was fixed at Tk. 930 per month. One of our findings was that there was no wage fixed for apprentice in the previous Minimum Wage Fixation and the entrepreneurs suggested a minimum wage of Tk.500. In the revised Minimum Wage Fixation, the wage for apprentice/trainee was fixed at Tk.500 per month. The training period was three months following which the workers would get Tk.930 per month. It, therefore, seems that the

[1] This was noted in the BGMEA directory, 1994.

representatives of the owners had more bargaining power, and the unions may not have represented adequately the interest of the garment workers. This is more apparent when one notes that during the same year, the revision for other industries, such as for aluminium and enamel industries, hosieries industries, re-rolling industries, soap and chemical industries, and tannery industries; the minimum wages had been fixed at Tk. 1320 or more. The minimum wage of the garment workers had increased by only 48.3 per cent in nominal terms during the 1984-1994 period, while, for example, it had increased by 75.7 per cent for the hosiery workers during the 1986-1994 period. In real terms (adjusted by the consumer price index), the minimum wage of the garment workers had declined by almost 15 per cent during 1984-1994. This, however, does not reflect the trend in actual wages. Casual observation suggests that the minimum wage legislation may now be more effectively implemented in the garment sector as opposed to the time when our survey was conducted. Our findings showed that 17 per cent of the male workers and 42 per cent of the female workers received wages below the minimum wage fixed for the unskilled workers. In contrast, wage of Tk.500 for apprentice/trainee in the garment industry appears to be the going rate. It was not clear how much was due to effective implementation and how much due to the market demand and supply condition.

(iv) NGO initiatives in providing housing

Our study has shown that the social status of the workers depended to a large extent on safe and secured housing. The study found that about 9 per cent of the workers were staying in mess during 1990. This new phenomena was likely to have increased during the last five years. Initiatives have recently been undertaken by the NGO groups in this area, such as that by Nari Uddog Kendro (NUK) since 1993. There now exists two hostels accommodating about 200 women garment workers and a third one was under construction. Women could overcome one of their genuine practical needs if such innovative initiatives were replicated by the government, entrepreneurs in the industry and NGOs.

(v) Establishment of health care service and training centre[2]

Another notable initiative taken during 1990-1995 had been the establishment of the training centre and health care centre. The training project started in July 1991, organised by the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (the Ministry of Labour and Manpower), and BGMEA, financed by UNDP and ILO. It offered different skill-upgrading courses in such areas as, (i) production supervision and sewing technology, (ii) machine maintenance and repair, (iii) industrial pattern construction and design, and (iv) marker planning and cutting. BGMEA claimed that 1,654 workers were trained by 1995. The training project ended in February 1995, and it was strongly felt that such training needed to be continued and expanded further. The government initiatives were needed, and garment manufacturing should be one of the trades in the vocational training centres. The training of quality controllers could be conducted jointly with the Textile Institute of Bangladesh.

Finally, BGMEA had taken a note of the fact that the health of the workers had been deteriorating. Since July 1994, BGMEA started a hospital-cum-school for the garment workers at Malibagh Chowdhury Para. Health care services were available during two shifts a day: 9 am to 2 pm and 2 pm to 6 pm. Such initiatives need to be undertaken in other areas where there were concentrations of firms. It would be useful to include child care programme, so that more married female workers could work in the garment industry.

Negative Effects on Workers Condition

(i) International pressure to improve working condition

Linking of labour standards to international trade policy had led the developed countries to social labelling of their imports, and such initiatives threaten the existence of our RMG industry. Among these initiatives, legislations to eliminate the use of child labour and clean cloth campaign are important.

(a) Issue of child labour - Harkin Bill

The Harkin Bill had significant impetus in promoting the case for prohibiting child labour, which in the long-term may lead to the elimination of child labour in the export-oriented manufacturing and mining industries.

[2] For details see BGMEA newsletter, June 15, 1995.

With employment opportunities being scarce in Bangladesh, passing of the bill in its current form may, however, force many children to work in exploitative working conditions. Many garment factories had already retrenched child workers from their factories. These retrenched children ended up in more strenuous and less-remunerative jobs, or turned to begging in the streets and/or selling flowers. Findings of a recent survey on 500 slum households, conducted by ILO/ACPR, showed that the bulk of the female children who lost their jobs at the RMG industry turned into street urchins, and were neither working elsewhere nor were they going to school. Thus, the main objective of the Harkin Bill to ensure that the children were not deprived of schooling, does not appear to be realised for developing countries like Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh RMG sector has set a unique example by resolving the early misgivings centreing around the practice of child labour through collective efforts that eventually led to the development of a safety net programme for them. A group of NGOs representing the interest of the North launched a campaign for prohibition of the imports of goods manufactured using child labour.[3] Initially, UNICEF had taken interest and brought together the government officials, NGOs, BGMEA, and international agencies to look for a solution to the problem in September 1993. In the beginning, the BGMEA representatives had hesitated to accept the existence of child labour in the RMG sector. But the participating researchers and activists accepted that child labour existed. The latter were, however, critical about the real intention of the Bill. This was because the AAFLI representative had sometimes openly stated that they would report the use of child labour in Bangladesh. In July 1994, BGMEA decided to eliminate all child labour from the RMG sector by October 31, 1994. NGOs and the international agencies became concerned about the fate of the children who were to be retrenched, and therefore, requested BGMEA not to dismiss them before any phased elimination programme was launched. After several discussions, a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was to be signed in early 1995. On a later date (May 17, 1995), BGMEA, however, rejected the MOU since it mentioned of NGO participation in the inspection

[3] Among them Child Labour Coalition, Asian American Free Labour Institute (AAFLI) and South Asian coalition on Child Servitude played a major role.

of factories.[4] Following this, AAFLI threatened that it would, along with Child Labour Coalition, go ahead with its boycott campaign of Bangladeshi RMG in the USA. While BGMEA took stand for not letting inspection to be done by any NGOs, they agreed to revise MOU (on May 29, 1995) provided it was signed by the officials of US embassy, UNICEF, and ILO. After several meetings, the revised MOU was finally signed by BGMEA, UNICEF, and ILO on August 4, 1995, the provisions included were:

– Initially a census would be conducted by 25 survey teams established by BGMEA. No child worker would be terminated before the census was completed.

– To remove children aged less than 14 years from the garments factories by October 31, 1995; but none could be terminated without placing of the child worker in an educational programme and no new child worker will be hired.

– UNICEF would contribute US $175,000 in 1995 and BGMEA was expected to contribute to the UNICEF-sponsored school programme US $ 50,000 per year. The ILO-IPEC funds would also be available.

– The ILO would provide technical assistance and financial support initially of about US $ 250,000 towards monitoring the phased elimination of child labour. The system of monitoring would be devised in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh and would continue for two years.

– The terminated child workers attending school programme would receive Tk. 300 per month as stipends. The BGMEA would contribute 50 per cent of the cost of stipends upto a maximum of US $250,000 per year for three years. There was provision for generating more funds from other sources if needed.

– BGMEA would offer employment to the qualified family members of the under-aged workers.

– Explore the possibilities to arrange for food supplementation programmes for the terminated workers attending school.

[4] These NGOs were AAFLI, Center for Development Research Bangladesh (CDRB), and the American-Bangladesh Economic Forum (ABEF).

– Provision was also made for providing other income generating programme after school to occupy children's time productively as well as to prevent an income loss.

– Local informal steering committee would coordinate the programmes of the BGMEA, UNICEF and ILO.

– There was also a provision to amend the MOU due to changes in labour law/code in future.

The Bangladesh experience has shown that cooperation can lead to a fruitful solution. This was possible because a collective action by BGMEA, NGOs and the international agencies was undertaken. Moreover, both BGMEA and international agencies shared the cost of the programme. Unfortunately, not all children who worked in RMG would benefit from it. The average size of employment, as found in our survey, was 330 workers per enterprise. With around 1,200 firms (assuming that two-thirds of all enterprises provide regular employment in the industry), this implied a regular employment of about 400,000 workers. Our study estimate of 13.2 per cent child labour would suggest that at least 50,000-55,000 child workers existed prior to retrenchment of child labour. BGMEA claims that about 42,000 had been retrenched.[5] The survey, carried out in 1995 under MOU, indicated that only 12,305 under aged workers exist in the garment industry. It is, thus, evident that only the fortunate ones would benefit from the programme, while the rest remained outside the safety net. The left-out ones and those coming of age will miss the opportunity.

While the strategy toward the progressive elimination of child labour was a worthwhile initiative, poverty-driven search for employment by under-aged population in Bangladesh is a reality. One way to accommodate this concern in the face of social labelling of Bangladesh exports could be through ratification of the ILO Convention No. 138 on minimum age of child labour. The Harkin Bill explicitly refers to the ILO Convention No. 138 and, hence, is likely to be the primary source for interpreting the Harkin Bill. The ILO Convention No. 138 is quite flexible in its definition of child labour. This is reflected in its provision which allows for lower minimum age (12 years) for light work in case of countries where economy and

[5] This was noted in BGMEA newsletter, June 15,1995.

educational facilities were insufficiently developed. Moreover, the scope of applying the provisions of the Convention could initially be limited in case of countries whose economy and administrative facilities were insufficiently developed. One of the findings of our study was that 13.2 per cent of the workers were of age between 10 and 14 years, who worked as sewing and finishing helpers. Such work at the garment industry may be regarded as light work. The Tripatriate Consultative Committee, therefore, needs to seriously consider ratification of ILO Convention No. 138 by Bangladesh. Moreover, in the social and educational programme formed, children could perform light work at the garment industry in shifts. The government programme of Food for Education could be extended to those children performing light work and those aged 12-14 years could get a stipend of at least Tk.500. Such educational programme could be located in the mini-zones as mentioned earlier in the text.

(b) Issue of Clean Cloth Campaign by a Netherlands-based non-government organisation.[6]

This was a new issue which was likely to adversely affect the future of garments in Bangladesh. In the absence of any demonstrated improvement in wages and working conditions, thousands of workers may lose jobs if the campaign in the European countries gained momentum, and this was likely to pose a threat to export of RMG from Bangladesh. In November 1995, two Dutch representatives had visited Bangladesh to review the wage structure and the working conditions of the garment workers in Bangladesh. The Clean Cloth campaign was going to initiate campaign in Belgium, France, Germany and the U.K against exports from some Asian countries who had poor working conditions. A Fair Trade Charter had already been developed based on the ILO conventions, and it included such prerequisites as reasonable wage, freedom of organisation and collective bargaining, no forced overtime, no discrimination, no child labour, and safe and healthy working conditions.

This issue must be taken seriously, like the Child Labour issue. Bangladesh can take up initiatives to ensure that it gets a better Cutting and Making Charges (CM). But even if CM increases, there has to be a

[6] This information is based on the daily newspaper, The Daily Star, dated November 18, 1995.

monitoring mechanism to ensure that the benefit goes to the workers. A workers' development fund could be established where the increased earning would be directly paid and then distributed to the workers in proportion to their monthly salary.

(ii) Garment units becoming sick

According to the unofficial reports, between 400 and 600 factories became "sick" during 1994/95. Some entrepreneurs feared that a thousand units may close down by the end of 1996 if the socio-political situation does not improve substantially. Hence, thousands of workers may have already lost their jobs, and many more may lose in future. In many firms, workers were not paid their monthly salary on time. This was due to many factors which need to be studied thoroughly. An attempt will be made here to identify some of the factors and to suggest ways of overcoming them.

As noted earlier, the garment industry expanded substantially during 1990-1995 from 750 to 1,806 firms. This expansion led to price under cutting among the enterprises due to competition. For example, items which used to previously fetch US$18 as Cutting and Making (CM) were now fetching only US$14 as CM. While this could also be due to either the increased cost of fabric or due to fall in the price of apparel, competition is more often to be blamed. To overcome the problem of sick industry, the government could restrict the entry of new firms in this sector (for a pre-specified period) as it had done in 1984/85. Under such circumstances, the factories, which were already closed down, could get sold to those who were doing well in garment business. Also, more training of managers was needed.

The unstable political situation in the country had also adversely affected the workers. Many buyers had cancelled their orders due to the prolonged political impasse, and hence, some factories currently did not have regular work order through out the year. Due to the frequent "hartals," the entrepreneurs often had to bear an additional cost of paying to the picketers for keeping their factories open during hartal hours. In addition, there were congestion surcharge (200 dollars per container) which had to be paid for both import of fabric and accessories and export of RMG. Sometimes, the manufacturers had to send their shipment by air to meet their deadlines.

(iii) Phasing out of Multifibre Arrangement (MFA)

It was noted in our study that much of the overtime work was due to the delays in the process of importation of fabrics. Local fabric accounted for around 3 to 4 per cent of the total requirement. Thus, own supply of fabrics, provided through the establishment of composite Textile mills, will immensely help in reducing costs. Such establishments to develop backward linkages were all the more necessary to maintain its competitiveness after the MFA is phased out. If this was not done, the workers of the footloose garment industry would be unemployed, and the female workers would be more severely affected since their job opportunities were limited. During 1990-1995, one important backward linkage had been established through the creation of Grameen Uddog, an initiative undertaken by the Grameen Bank. Under this venture, the Grameen Bank organised the handloom weavers in producing a new variety of handloom cloth called the "Grameen Check." This cloth was used by the export-oriented RMG where it had partially replaced the use of Madras Check (previously imported from India). It has also an export market of its own. The Grameen Bank started the "Grameen Check project" in November 1992. The Desh Garment industry, which had been a pioneer in training workers in Korea, has also been the first to order Grameen Check for two export orders of 7,038 metres each in July 1993 and that is when the commercial production of Grameen Check started. Later, it evolved as a separate entity called the Grameen Uddog since 1 March 1994. Within a year, about 3.8 million metres were indirectly exported (called deemed export). Besides the Grameen Uddog, there has also been growth in firms producing accessories and packaging materials for the RMG sector. In the recent 1995 budget import of capital machineries for textile industries has been made duty free. This policy is in the right direction, and the workers may hope to retain their RMG employment provided investors respond positively.

The phenomenon of sick industries had adverse effects on the workers as many firms failed to pay their workers on time. The entrepreneurs suggested that devaluation of taka would ease their problem as the CM charges are paid in Taka. But this may lead to cost push inflation, and hence, the garment workers would suffer. Alternatively, subsidy can be provided to the export-oriented RMG.

Much of the working conditions of the workers would improve if the Labour Law Reform was approved and enforced. An informal discussion with the relevant persons suggested that changes include: appointment letter to be made compulsory; maternity leave to be provided for two surviving children; workers need to give 60 day's notice to leave jobs; working hours for women will be from 6 am to 10 pm; provision for a one-day weekly leave; equal wage to be paid to men and women for equal work; fine imposed for not paying the minimum wage; group of establishment at the same location could form one union; unions could not be affiliated with political parties; and trade union to provide training on labour laws. These provisions would certainly help improve the wage and working conditions of the RMG sector if they were properly enforced.