

Social Compliance in Ready-Made Garment Industry in Bangladesh: Challenges for HR Personnel

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to explore the challenges faced by Human Resources personnel in ensuring compliance in Ready Made Garments industry in Bangladesh. This is a descriptive study based on survey. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from HR personnel responsible for looking after the compliance issues in the workplace. The study reveals that the HR personnel faces the least challenge in eliminating child labor from the workplace followed by welfare facilities, safety provision, workplace condition, health provision, etc. Freedom of Association, Occupational Health and Safety training, Harassment and abuse, longer working hours are found to be most challenging to the HR personnel to handle within the factory premises. It also reveals that the most prominent challenge for the HR people in their way to implement compliance is the lack of top management support, followed by lack of awareness of the workers about their rights, lack of government intervention and poor literacy of workers. The findings imply that the owners of the garments need to change their attitude from mere profit making to sustainable business based on fairness and efficiency. Government, NGOs and trade unions should play their role to educate the workers about their rights. The government should demonstrate strong conviction to enforce the laws through training, dialog, and fair and frequent inspection.

KEYWORDS: Human Resource Personnel, Social Compliance, Labor Standards, Code of Conduct, RMG Industry, Bangladesh, Work Environment.

1. INTRODUCTION

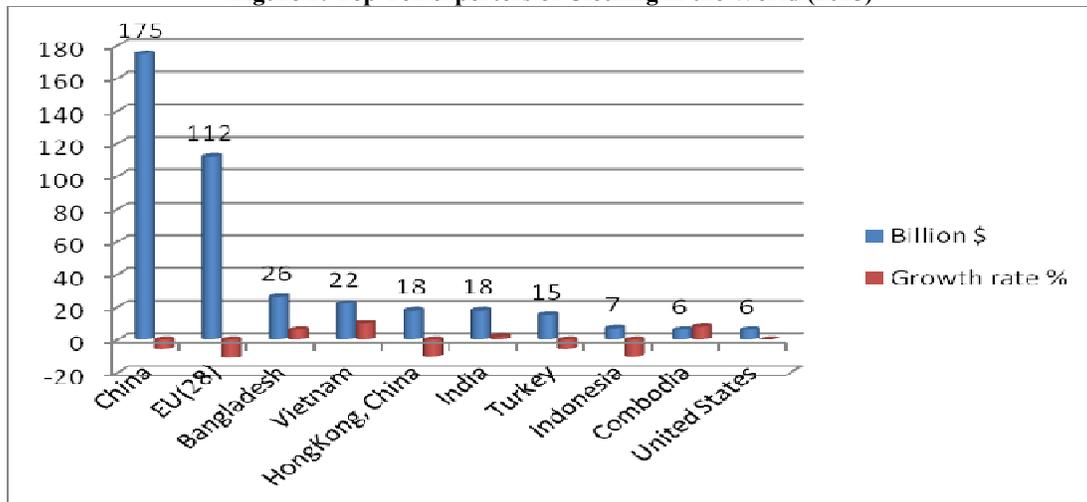
Ready Made Garments (RMG) industry is the major industrial activity of Bangladesh. With its contribution to export, employment generation, poverty alleviation and overall multiplier effect, it becomes the lifeline of the country's economy. Capitalizing on its cheap sources of labor, over the time, Bangladesh has been the formidable player in the world clothing market. As a single country, it became the second largest exporter of RMG in the world with a stunning growth rate of 6% [1]. Due to its excellent combination of cost and quality, "Made in Bangladesh" has earned the confidence of the major global players of garments.

However, the spectacular face of the industry is offset by the concern over shaky workplace safety and poor Human Resources (HR) practices. RMG sector in Bangladesh is frequently characterized by insufficient wages, labor unrest, low safety measures, sudden termination, hired and trembling factory premises, closed environment, inadequate light and ventilation, narrow staircases etc. [2, 10]. Even though the conditions have improved over the time, it was never an industry-wide practice. Only a handful of garments factories, mostly located in export processing zones (EPZs), comply with the expected level of labor and occupational safety and health standards. The poor working condition of garments in Bangladesh was evidenced by the two mammoth industrial catastrophes in two consecutive years. The fire in Tazreen Fashion in 2012 and the collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013 that jointly claimed around 1200 lives, vividly showcased the reality of working conditions in RMG sector of the country. The extensive practice of noncompliance to the workplace standards leads to negative branding and creates image crisis for the country as a global supplier [4, 11]. Moreover, Clean Cloth Campaign and other voluntary organizations are continually working to ensure better and safer workplace in apparel sector worldwide. In response, the global buyers are highly concerned about compliance issues. Although Bangladesh is considered the leading apparel sourcing destination and its apparel exports have been increasing over the years, its popularity is mainly grounded upon its competitive labor cost. According to a study of Asian Tribune (2005), a garment worker in Bangladesh received ¢6 as wages per hour compared to ¢20 in India and Pakistan, ¢30 in China, ¢40 in Sri Lanka and ¢78 in Thailand [3]. However, the sustainability of the sector largely depends on meeting the expectations of the ultimate consumers who are increasingly more

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concerned about the workplace safety and human rights. It is evidenced by several incidents of order cancellations and subsequent lower orders from the retailers due to non-compliance. According to a newspaper report, order cancellation of around \$110 million from 37 factories took place after the Rana Plaza mishap [12]. With the recent incidents of Tazreen Fashion and Rana Plaza, the compliance issue in garments sector received renewed attention from the consumers, Trade unions, human and labor rights organizations and, most importantly, from the buyers. In fact, most of the international buyers of RMG take their sourcing decisions based on four criteria, viz. quality, price, lead time, and social compliance with labor standard. Therefore, the garments exporters of Bangladesh are under pressure to implement workplace safety and international standards of labor. The compliance is expected to have a significant impact on increased productivity and competitiveness of the industry [4, 11].

Figure 1: Top Ten exporters of Clothing in the World (2015)



Source: World Trade Organization

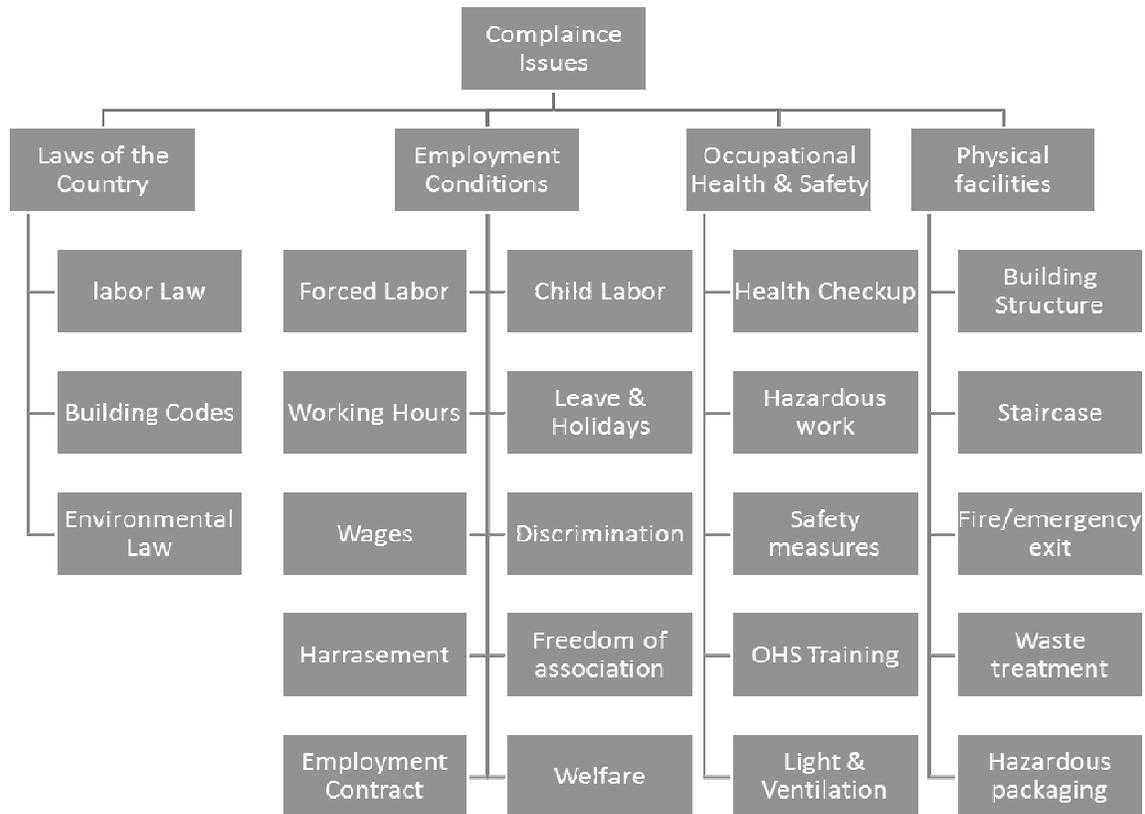
The implementation of the code of conducts expected from the international bodies and the buyers does not go without challenge. A number of issues contribute to the non-compliance in RMG sector of Bangladesh including the non-entrepreneurial background of the owners of the factories, low level of literacy of the workers, heavily skewed distribution of workforce in favor of female workers, owners' tie with the political power base, non-existence of trade union, historical practice of sub contract and quota business during the MFA era, lack of professionalism in management, absence of proper HR activities etc. [2, 3, 11, 13, 14]. However, Farideh and Hamid (2014) observed that the participative management system could have a significant impact on the performance on the company's staff but this type of practices are ignored by the management of RMG industry [30]. HR personnel of RMG factory is the ultimate authority to execute, monitor, supervise, and maintain compliance within the workplace. In fact, they are at the crossroad. In one hand, they are officially responsible for ensuring the expected labor standard and workplace safety in the factory so that the buyers find it as a compliant plant. On the other hand, they have to undergo the difficulty in implementing the standards due to the reluctance of the owners in investing on compliance. A number of studies have so far been conducted on the compliance practices of garments in Bangladesh. [2, 4, 10]. However, most of them mainly focus on the condition of workplace safety or labor practices. Some studies also highlight the benefits of compliance profitability, efficiency or employee satisfaction [4, 15]. No study is observed to consider the challenges faced by the Human resources managers, who are primarily responsible for ensuring as well as maintaining workplace safety and good practices of labor standard within the factory premises. Keeping this research gap in mind, the present study is designed to identify the key challenges faced by HR personnel to implement compliance issues in RMG industry in Bangladesh.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Compliance implies conformity to standards. In the case of garments Industry, the standards comprise of the relevant law of the respective country, ILO conventions regarding labor standards and labor rights, fair labor practices, working conditions, building standards, worker's safety and health measures, environmental protection issues and buyers' Code of Conduct (COC). Broader issues of compliance are sometimes categorized into social compliance, Environmental compliance, occupational compliance, physical compliance, etc. [4, 14]. Social compliance includes wages and benefits, hazards and safety, health and sanitations, human rights, etc.

Environmental compliance comprises pollution control, wastage management, complying with the environmental laws, etc. Occupational compliance includes reliability regarding product quality, design, and other specifications, ensuring delivery lead time, etc. Physical compliance incorporates building-structure, factory get-up, etc. Compliance represents a useful and relevant set of guidelines for ensuring that the business ventures play an ethical and vital role in business. For the attainment of these standards, buyers, sometimes, put pressure on their suppliers to implement their COC standards as a prerequisite for their current and future purchase. Compliance is the key requirement in the RMG industry for almost all international garment buyers [5].

Figure 2: Illustrative list of Compliance Issues for RMG Industry



In fact, most codes adopted by the global buyers tend to cluster around some international recognized standards, such as the SA8000, SAI, ETI, FLA, FWF, BSCI, WRAP, and JO-IN.

The RMG industry of Bangladesh registered tremendous growth in last three decades. However, the condition of physical and social compliance, specifically issues related to workplace safety and security, could not match the growth of the sector [4, 11]. Although it is a fact that Bangladesh has made real progress on a number of compliance issues, particularly the elimination of child labor, the RMG sector has a long way to go to ensure a safe environment for its workers. A large number of factories are still operating under poor physical and social compliance. Over the past 10 years, numerous incidents claimed lives of more than 2,000 workers in the RMG sector of the country [11]. International clothing retailers that source products in Bangladesh, as well as the European Union, are paying attention to ensure safety compliance and improve supply chain transparency. The Accord on Fire and Building Safety consists of more than 180 global apparel brands (mostly European) has agreed on a legally binding plan to inspect all Bangladeshi garments factories that supply the companies and publicly disclose the names of these factories as well as inspection reports and agreed remediation measures. A group of 26 American retailers formed Alliance for Bangladesh workers safety and announced a nonbinding five-year initiative. The initiative seeks to improve factory safety in Bangladesh garment industry by inspecting 100% of Alliance member factories, developing common safety standards, sharing inspection results transparently and ensuring that all alliance factories actively support the democratic election and successful operation of workers participation committees in each factory [16].

Rahman and Hossain (2010) stated that RMG industry in Bangladesh plays a vigorous role in the economy in terms of foreign currency earnings, poverty alleviation, woman empowerment, and employment generation [10]. However, it needs to improve on social issues, factory working conditions, labor relations and social compliance. Morshed (2007) reports that although employment in garments ensures a good source of income for the employees, the adverse working conditions and informal nature of job often threaten the living standard of workers [17]. He reported that employment could be dismissed over the refusal of overtime. Lengthy working hours without break or leave and enforcement for overtime work are common problems in RMG industry in Bangladesh. The employers are not concerned about improving working conditions, wages, and benefits. The low wages are the key source of workers dissatisfaction in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. Late payment of wages and overtime caused anxiety among the workers, which ultimately results in low productivity and high job dissatisfaction. Quddus and Uddin (1993) remark that working environment in the RMG industry in Bangladesh is substandard and does not meet the Codes of Conducts (COC) of the international buyers [18]. Dasgupta (2002) observed that the recruitment system in RMG sector is not formal as compared to western standards and in most cases, employers do not provide appointment letters or written formal contracts to the workers [19].

Kumar (2006) found that workers are always worried about losing their jobs without prior notice. Workers are demeaned with gender discrimination, long working hours or two consecutive shifts, poor working conditions, and hazardous work environment [20]. Ahamed (2014) observed that promotion prospect for workers in the RMG industry of Bangladesh is almost non-existent [21]. Mariani and Valenti (2014) acknowledged that wages of the workers cannot meet a decent standard of living and the workers are forced to work in a delicate working condition to meet production quota with meager social security. Due to the weak bargaining power of trade union and their limited activities, they cannot ensure enough protection of workers' rights. They also found that workers are exploited, and the conditions are far to comply with the International Labor Standards. They studied the impact of compliance and social dialogue on the working conditions. The result shows that there is a little practice of dialogue among business associations, workers, and government. The law enforcement level is also observed to be very low [14].

Baral (2010) in his comparative study of compliant and non-compliant garments factories found that the average annual turnover of compliant factories is approximately two times higher than the average annual turnover of the non-compliant factories. He suggested that in order to sustain its competitiveness in global clothing market, Bangladesh RMG industry needs to deal with issues like, wage discrimination, irregular payment, informal recruitment, rented factory premises, low roofs, unavailability of pure drinking water, absence of lunch room, lack of sufficient number of separate toilets for male and female, closed working environment, etc. [22]. Muku (2013) studied the effect of job characteristics on employee motivation and found that the workers are satisfied by the task significance, task identity and feedback of their performance while they are discontented with the state of freedom of work, and skills varieties. Autocratic management in this sector negatively influences job satisfaction, commitment to goal achievement, loyalty, productivity and mental health. Freedom of work scheduling, training for new skills, and job rotation are absent in RMG industry, which affects skill development and optimum use of workers' potentials. The poor state of HR practices diminishes the chance of career growth that leads to boredom and monotony in the job, which eventually affect motivation, morale, and productivity of workers [23]. Morshed (2007) studied the labor rights implementation in the RMG industry in Bangladesh and found that labor rights boost job satisfaction, labor productivity and reduce the deviant behavior [17]. Das (2008) reported that most of the garment owners are reluctant to implement compliance standards and labor laws of the country to improve workplace environment, which leads to frequent labor conflict in the sector [24]. Chowdhury *et. al.* (2013) in their qualitative study observed a mutual correlation between social compliance and economic sustainability. 14 out of fifteen respondents interviewed in their study supported the relationship between social compliance and economic sustainability. It implies that if the RMG manufacturers and suppliers do not comply with social sustainability factors, they will not get sales orders from the buyers and eventually they will be economically loser. On the other hand, one-third of the respondents feel that economic sustainability, in turn, helps them to maintain social compliance within the workplace. Regarding the relationship between social compliance and operational compliance, the participants feel that through taking care of workers, they may retain good people with them which help them to reduce operational disruption (labor turnover, quality problem) and ensure smooth production and timely delivery of quality products [4]. Samaddar (2016) in his in-depth study identified the relationship among the occupational health and safety factors with regards to efficiency of 36 sample factories. He observed a strong positive correlation between standard working space (10 m³per worker) and efficiency. In addition, standard working time which is maximum 10 hours including 2 hours overtime per day, appropriate lighting at the workplace, allowable vibration level, cleanliness of workplace, dust control system, and use of needle guard, face mask and hand gloves have shown a moderate correlation. He also found some strong evidence that the BKMEA member factories performed better than the non-members [15].

Thus a survey of existing literature indicates that studies on compliance practices at RMG industry in Bangladesh are not few. However, most of the studies focused either on the existing working conditions and state of the compliance of garments industry or the benefits of compliance. There is an obvious shortage of studies on challenges or hurdles the managers in general and Human resources managers, in particular, face to implement the compliance standards in the workplace. The present study is an effort to bridge the gap.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a descriptive study based on survey. Data were collected from HR personnel working in Garments factories who were mainly responsible for looking after the compliance issues in the workplace. A structured questionnaire was developed to collect responses. In addition to demographic and organizational profile related queries, the questionnaire included 16 compliance issues mostly related to social compliance issues like labor standards, welfare, safety and occupational health, etc. Table 1 briefly describes each factor listed in the survey.

Table 1: Brief description of issues included in the Survey

| Issues | Description |
|---|---|
| Wage and benefits | Workers receive wages and other financial and non-financial benefits according to the contract. |
| Longer working hours | Regular working hours do not exceed the standard 8 hours/day. |
| Leave & Holiday | Workers enjoy at least one weekly holiday and other festival holidays. Also, there is standard provision for leave for workers. |
| Women's right | Female workers enjoy their rights to safeguard their privacy, have the benefit of maternity leave and other areas of concern related to women. |
| Harassment & Abuse | Workers are not sexually harassed or abused in any other form by the supervisors or co-workers. |
| Non-discrimination practice | Workers are not discriminated based on gender, religion, etc. in terms of pay, working hours, workloads, dealings and in other areas of concern. |
| Elimination of forced labor | Workers are not forced to work extra hours. |
| Freedom of association | Workers are free to form, join and participate in activities of workers association |
| Elimination of child labor | Ensure that all the workers are above 14 years of age. |
| Comply with the health provision | The organization provides the essential health benefits as per the law and contract, regular health check-ups, treatment for on-the-job accidents, etc. |
| Workplace condition | The organization offers a safe and sound workplace in terms of dust, noise, temperature, ventilation, etc. |
| Welfare facilities | The organization arranges for different welfare facilities for workers like baby care center, pure drinking water, arrangement for lunch, etc. |
| Safety provision | There is enough arrangement for safety for workers like dust control, use of safety equipment, fire alarm, emergency exit, etc. |
| OHS Training | All workers are provided with occupational health and safety training periodically. |
| Professional Mgt. System | The organization follows professional management system where decisions are taken objectively based on rules, policies, and procedures. |
| Grievance handling procedure | The organization follows proper grievance handling procedure in the face of conflict and disciplinary actions. |

Each question was designed as category question with forced choice. The respondents were asked to mention the most important challenge for them related to each specific compliance issue. The last option for each question was, "I find no challenge". A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to the relevant HR personnel of garments factories located in Dhaka city, Ashulia, Gazipur and Chittagong city. The convenient sampling procedure was followed to select the respondents. All the factories were deliberately chosen from outside EPZ to discover the spontaneous practices within the industry. The factories within the EPZs are located in a regimented area and susceptible to frequent surveillance. Therefore, they are more likely to maintain better working environment than the factories located outside EPZs [14]. Outside factories have more flexibility to escape strict vigilance. 80 filled and completed questionnaire was returned indicating a response rate of 53.33%. The collected data were entered, processed and analyzed through MS Excel and were presented in the form of tables and charts.

4. RESULTS

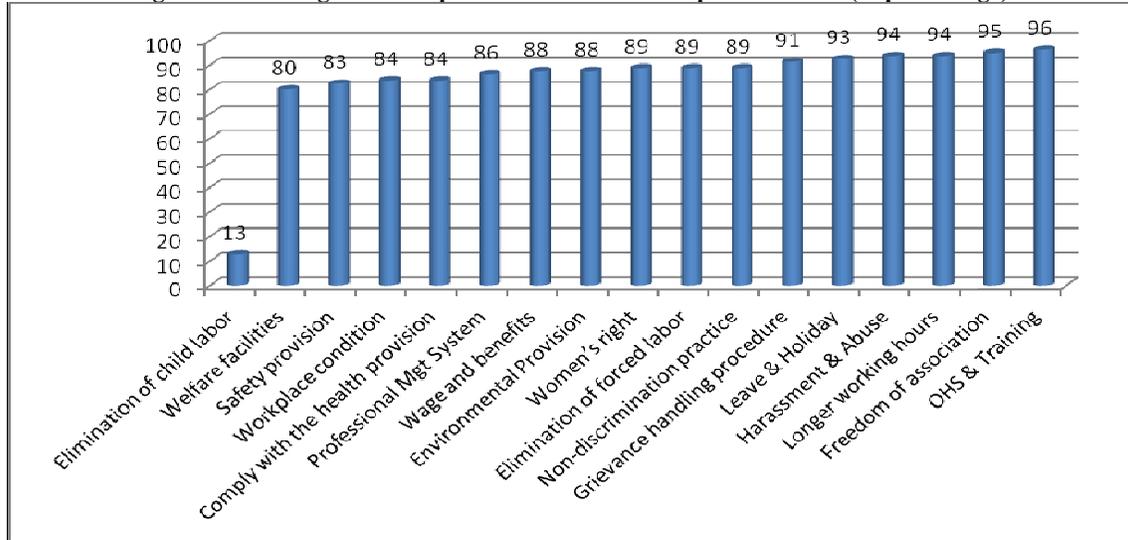
The result shows that 49% of the sample is small, employing less than or equal to 5000 workers while the rest 51% are large factories employing more than 5000 workers (Table 2). 49% sample factories experience less than or equal to 10% employee turnover while 51% face more than 10%.

Table 2: Organizational Profile

| Size in terms of no. of employee | F | % | Employee turnover | F | % |
|----------------------------------|----|----|-------------------|----|----|
| Small (≤5000) | 39 | 49 | Less than 10% | 39 | 49 |
| Large (≥5000) | 41 | 51 | More than 10% | 41 | 51 |

As regard challenges in implementing compliance issues within the workplace, it is observed that the HR personnel face the least challenge for eliminating child labor from the workplace followed by welfare facilities, safety provision, workplace condition, health provision etc. Freedom of association, OHS & training, Harassment and abuse, longer working hours are found to be most challenging to the HR personnel to handle within the factory premises (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Challenges for HR personnel to ensure compliance Issues (in percentage)



In a comparison between the small and large factories, it is revealed that HR personnel in large factories face less challenges than their counterparts in child labor, workplace condition, welfare facilities, professional management system, wages and benefits, women’s right, and freedom of association while the small factories are better off in safety provision, forced labor, longer working hours, grievance handling, harassment and abuse, and OHS training issues (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Challenges for HR personnel to ensure compliance Issues along the size of the Factory (in percentage)

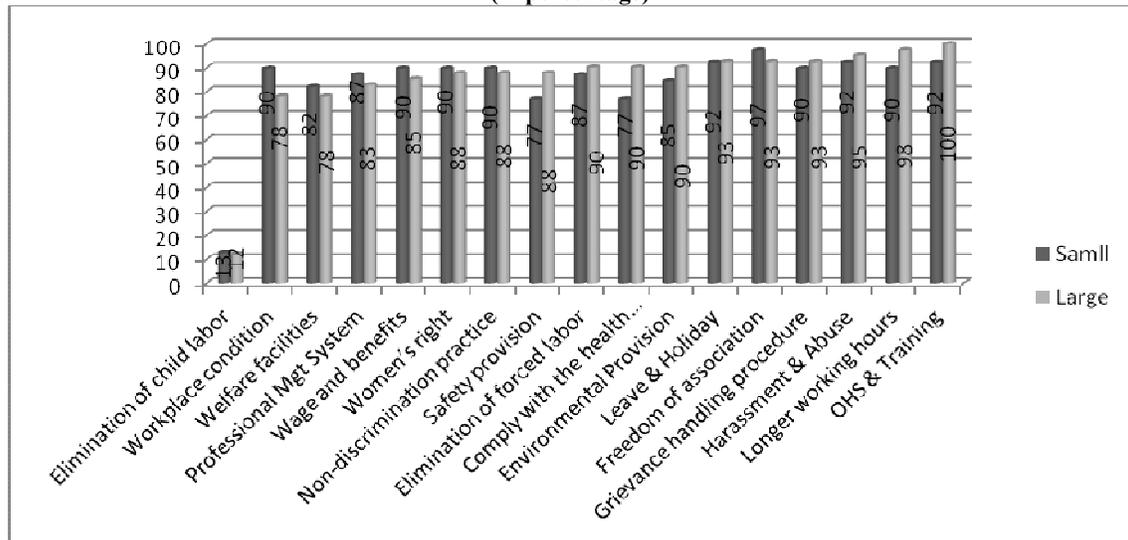


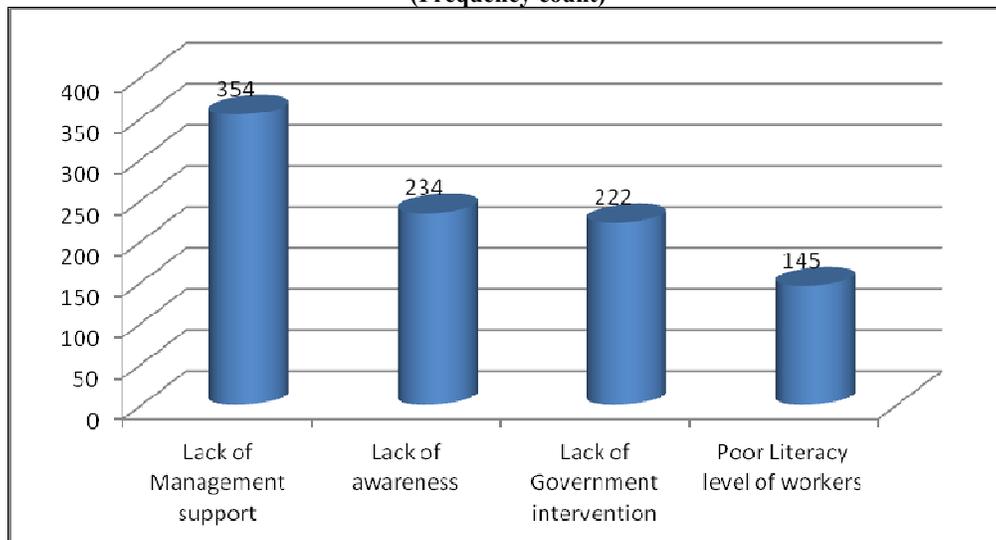
Table 3 lists the top three challenges faced by HR personnel in implementing different compliance issues in their respective workplaces.

Table 3: Top three challenges for each compliance issue in RMG sector in Bangladesh

| Issues | Top three factors/challenges | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| | 1 st | 2 nd | 3 rd |
| Wage and benefits | Lack of Mgt. Support | Financial incapability of the organization | Lack of workers' bargaining power |
| Longer working hours | Inefficient planning and controlling | Lack of mgt. support | Poor skills of workers |
| Leave & Holiday | Weak govt. intervention | Lack of Mgt. support | Lack of supervisor's support |
| Women's right | Weak govt. intervention | Lack of Mgt. support | Lack of proper awareness |
| Harassment & Abuse | Poor literacy level of workers | Lack of Mgt support | Lack of disciplinary action |
| Nondiscrimination practice | Lack of workers aware of their rights | Lack of govt. intervention | Lack of Mgt support |
| Elimination of forced labor | Lack of Mgt support | Lack of workers awareness of their rights | Lack of govt. intervention |
| Freedom of association | Lack of Mgt support | Poor literacy level of workers | Lack of workers awareness of their rights |
| Elimination of child labor | Lack of govt. intervention | Lack of Mgt support | Poor literacy level of workers |
| Comply with the health provision | Lack of govt. intervention | Poor literacy level of workers | Lack of Mgt support |
| Workplace condition | Lack of Mgt support | Lack of workers awareness of their rights | Lack of govt. intervention |
| Welfare facilities | Lack of workers awareness of their rights | Lack of Mgt support | Lack of govt. intervention |
| Safety provision | Poor literacy level of workers | Lack of Mgt support | Lack of govt. intervention |
| OHS & Training | Lack of workers awareness of their rights | Lack of Mgt support | Lack of govt. intervention |
| Professional Mgt System | Lack of Mgt support | Lack of workers awareness of their rights | Lack of govt. intervention |
| Grievance handling procedure | Lack of workers awareness of their rights | Lack of Mgt support | Poor literacy level of workers |

Figure 5 summarizes the finding with regard to the key factors/ challenges for the HR personnel. It reveals that the most prominent factor is the lack of top management support, followed by lack of awareness of the workers about their rights, lack of government intervention and poor literacy of workers. Other factors include lack of workers' bargaining power, financial incapability of the organization, lack of disciplinary actions, and huge establishment and maintenance cost.

Figure 5: Challenges for HR Personnel in implementing social compliance in RMG Sector in Bangladesh (Frequency count)



5. DISCUSSION

The study reveals that the HR personnel in garments factories in Bangladesh face the least challenge in eliminating child labor from the workplace. It implies that child labor-free employment has become a norm in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Due to years of the campaign from ILO and other voluntary organizations at the global end and BGMEA, BKMEA and government at the local end, child labor has been removed almost successfully from the industry [11, 21]. About other areas of compliance, still, there are formidable challenges for the HR personnel. This finding corresponds with most of the studies conducted on the state of the working environment in garment factories in Bangladesh [2, 10, 15]. It means a congenial working environment with ensured labor rights, occupational safety, welfare measures and non-discrimination is yet to be a corporate culture of most of the garments factories operating in Bangladesh, particularly outside EPZ. Perhaps, they comply simply for the sake of compliance. The most prominent factor affecting the compliance in garments industry is observed to be the lack of top management support followed by lack of awareness of the workers about their rights, lack of government intervention and poor level of literacy of the garments workers.

Lack of Management support has a connection with the historical root of entrepreneurship in garments industry in Bangladesh. Due to the dominance of Non -Bengali industrialists and traders during the British and Pakistani rule, historically the Bengali Muslims were not involved in entrepreneurship. Even after the liberation from Pakistan, then the pro -socialist government opted for public sector led economic policy and nationalized almost 92% of the industrial assets leaving narrow scope for indigenous entrepreneurs to pursue their economic activities independently. Later on, the subsequent governments liberalized the regime. State patronization through license, permits and bank loan created a shaky base of entrepreneurs who are sometimes sarcastically dubbed as "test tube" entrepreneurs [25]. Faruk (1983) identified three groups of entrepreneurs who are now engaged in the private industrial sector in Bangladesh: (1) those families who have been in business or industry by tradition and their children are now involved in entrepreneurial activities. Their number at present is small. (2) The retired (or dismissed) government servants, defense officials, or former politicians and their family members. This is a new group who acquired money and power with which they procured the necessary permission, license, and loans to start industries during the last four decades. (3) Those who began small, but achieved considerable success by their efforts, within their lifetime [26]. In fact, entrepreneurship in garments is largely contributed by the second group of entrepreneurs who are lured by the competition -free market opportunity due to quota system under Multi -fiber Agreement in one hand and the domestic supply of cheap labor on the other. Due to the absence of real entrepreneurial zeal, they were mainly attracted by money making and undermined the sustainable development of the sector which is evidenced by their rent seeking characteristics through quota business during the MFA period and lack of commitment to developing safe and congenial working environment in the post MFA period. It is obvious that non-compliance leads to a short -term competitive advantage for the owners in terms of reduced cost of production. Many entrepreneurs are attracted to this short-lived gain and expect the HR personnel to serve this end on behalf of them by "managing" inspectors, buyers and auditors. Ahmed *et. al.* (2013) provides an interesting insight regarding the paradoxical growth of RMG industry in Bangladesh amid weak governance where they explain how the predictable corruption along with the stability of industrial policies over the successive political regimes as well as non-intervention from the government help the RMG industry to boost in Bangladesh [13]. Due to the absence of professional management in most of the garments factories, instead of acting as a buffer between employer and employees, the HR personnel act rather as an extended arm of the employers. They have to implement the desire of the employers or risk losing their job. This observation is supported by the findings of Singh and Vohra (2009) in the context of India where they observed that the owner-managers play a central role in the HR functions of the Small and Medium enterprises and they (owners) deliberately maintain a low level of formalization of HRM systems in their enterprises [27]. However, over the time, a new generation of progressive entrepreneurs emerged in the RMG sector of the country, who demonstrated their realistic approach to business and established world -class factories, particularly in EPZs.

Lack of awareness of workers about their rights and low level of education are observed to be a barrier for HR personnel in implementing compliance issues in garments industry. In fact, almost 80% of workers in garments are women. They mostly migrate from rural areas where they used to lead a very miserable life characterized by malnutrition, extreme poverty, and heaps of household chores. The employment in garments not only provides them a means of livelihood, but it also offers independence and power. In comparison to their lives in the village, they find a significant improvement in terms of income and living standard. Besides, being socialized in a patriarchal society, women in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas, learn to conform to the norm and are accustomed to living with odds. Therefore, the workers are not much concerned about the add-on facilities in the workplace. Moreover, in the face of the absence of social security provisions from the government in Bangladesh, job security is the prime concern of the workers. Therefore, they don't want to risk losing their job by asking for more or protesting the existing negligence in the workplace. In contrary, Hasnain *et. al.* (2015) found that employee empowerment helps organizations to get employees more motivational towards their work

and gain the benefit of their performance and satisfaction towards the organization [29]. The absence of proper trade unionism also facilitates the process. It was also observed that workers, in general, are apathetic towards unionism [14]. These, perhaps provide a leeway for the owners to continue their business without much attention to the workplace conditions.

Finally, the lack of government intervention is viewed as one of the major challenges by the HR personnel. It can be attributed to a couple of reasons. First, it is related to the inspection. As Mariani and Valenti (2014) observed, the number of inspectors under the Ministry of Labor responsible for ensuring the enforcement of government laws are extremely insufficient to the needs of the industry. Also, the inspectors lack industry-specific training, and they are not provided transportation to conduct the inspection of the factories. Moreover, the inspectors have high mobility due to poor salary [14]. Consequently, the intervention from the government is sporadic and does not play any substantial role in ensuring the labor standard and occupational safety in the workplace. Secondly, due to close tie with the political power base and government officials, the owners find it "not difficult" to escape harsh measures against the cases of noncompliances, should it be required [12]. Given the circumstances, the HR personnel does not feel the compulsion to ensure compliance in the workplace. However, to address compliance issues with due international rigor, two alliances of international buyers mentioned earlier - Accord on Fire and Building Safety and Alliance for Bangladesh Workers Safety have undertaken a worthy effort to assess Bangladesh RMG factory buildings in terms of structural integrity, fire and electrical safety. Their effort includes a thorough inspection of all member factories, identify Corrective Action Plans (CAPs), offer fire safety training to the workers and arrange low-cost financing for factory owners to support them in implementing remedial actions. Up to September 2015, Alliance inspected 661 factories and approved corrective action plans (CAPs) for 591 factories. A total 22 factories (8 fully closed, 12 partially closed, and 2 load reduction) were sent to the review panel. The total number of workers in Alliance factories is estimated to be 1.2 million of which, 93% were trained for fire safety [11]. With the completion of inspection as well as regular follow-up by the Accord and Alliance, it can be expected that the situation will improve significantly and the member factories will serve as the benchmark for others.

6. CONCLUSION

This is a pioneering study to explore the challenges faced by HR personnel in ensuring compliance in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. Due to a number of accidents related to physical infrastructure of the factories and labor unrest emanating from unfair labor practices including poor or non-payment of wages in RMG sector of Bangladesh, the concern of labor standard and workplace safety have received prime attention from the government, ILO, international NGOs, trade unions, global buyers and consumers. Garment factories are now under strict surveillance so as to ensure compliance with the international labor standard and occupational safety in their premises. Future prospect of this sector largely depends on the successful implementation of the compliance issues. The present study shows that so far Bangladesh could achieve conclusive success in eliminating child labor only. As regards other areas of compliance, the HR personnel are still struggling to bring it to the usual practice of the industry. The most prominent challenge for the HR people is the lack of top management support, followed by lack of awareness of the workers about their rights, lack of government intervention and poor literacy of workers. The findings imply that the owners of the garments need to change their mind-sets. They should shift their view of short term gain through reduced cost of production to a sustainable business based on fairness, and efficiency. They should feel an urge from inside that ensuring better working environment including labor standard, occupational health and safety and other issues of concern they will harvest the economic benefits in the long run. Government, NGOs and trade unions should play their role to educate the workers about their rights. The initiatives undertaken by the Accord and Alliance of the International buyers should be sustained with sincere commitment. Finally, it is the government that has to enforce the laws through training, dialog, and fair and frequent inspection.

7. Limitations of the Study and Direction for Future Research

The focus of the study is to identify the challenges faced by the HR personnel responsible for ensuring compliance within the workplace in Garment factories of Bangladesh. Therefore, the study does not make any effort to trace the existing state of workplace practices in the industry. Consequently, the challenges mentioned in the study do not necessarily indicate the non-practice of the issues. It also does not attempt to conduct any causal relationship between variables. The limitations of the study suggest future research in a number of dimensions. An in-depth qualitative and/or quantitative study can be conducted to explore the state of professionalism of management and/or the role of HR in garments factories in Bangladesh. Also, there is scope for causal research to investigate the relationship between HR practices and different attitudinal and behavioural outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, job engagement, employee motivation, etc. in the context of the industry. Comparative studies of compliance practices and/or HR activities performed in factories located inside and outside EPZs also warrant attention.

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