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FOOD SECURITY STATUS OF WOMEN GARMENTS' WORKERS IN SELECTED GARMENTS UNDER GAZIPUR DISTRICT OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of the study was to determine the extent of food security of the women garments worker in Gazipur district. The study was conducted in Gazipur Sadar Upazila of Gazipur district. Data were collected by the researcher during November to December 2013 by using a pre-tested interview schedule a total of 90 women workers (10%) were selected as sample of the present study through proportionate random sampling from two selected garments of Gazipur district. Eleven socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were considered as independent variables, while food security of women garments workers was the dependent variable of the study. Finding of this study reveals that all of the family members of the respondents take three meals after joining in garments but earlier only 50 percent respondents could be able to afford three meals per day. Most of the women garments' workers (60.0%) get below standard calories (up to 2122 kcal/day) against the optimum requirements of 2200kcal/day. The mean difference between meal and calorie intake by per person per day during before and after joining in the garments was significant. Wage, working load and wage adequacy had significant relationship with their food security status.

KEYWORDS

Food security, Garments workers, Women.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is one of the densely populated countries in the world. She is bearing 142.3 million of people in her 1, 47,570 sq km of areas (Wikipedia, 2011). Out of them, about fifty percent (105:100) are female. No society can progress unless women become a partner in almost all of national activities (Zia *et al.*, 2002). Working women are probably the most important for natural and national development. There is growing willingness among the developing countries to integrate women in various development programs and services at both national and international levels. Ensuring food security for all is one of the major challenges that Bangladesh face today. This is almost synonymous to agricultural development in Bangladesh, as income and livelihood of the vast majority population directly or indirectly depends on agriculture. Bangladesh ranked 129th out of 169 countries in the 2012 Human Development Index (HDI) (Shahiduzzaman *et al.*, 2013). About 40 percent of the population consumes less than the minimum daily recommended amount of food (Shaheen and Islam, 2012). About 4.0 million people are employed in the garment sector. The growth rate of RMG export was over 20% per over the last two decades. Out of 4.0 million manpower employed in Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters (BGMEA) member factories, 3.20 million are women (80%), majorities of them are disadvantaged and economically poverty stricken women folk. The country's RMG sector, to a creditable level has relieved Bangladesh from over populous unemployment burden through providing the largest employment next to agriculture, transport, trade and industry sector. This sector has uplifted the neglected section of the population, thus radically transforming the socio-economic condition of the country. Such empowerment and employment raised awareness regarding children education, health safety, population control disaster management only so far. It is an epoch making event in the history of Bangladesh (BGMEA, 2014). It is fair to say that this sector has created enormous economic opportunities for the country's women, who until the late 1970's were almost nonexistent in the labor force. Despite the great effort which these brave women working hard day and night are showing, are not getting the due recognition from their employers which they very rightly deserve. Not only that, they are even denied of their basic rights. When it comes to their reproductive health and other related issues, very less importance are given. Although the scenario is changing for good day by day, nevertheless they are constantly being ignored from many basic facilities which are essential for their day to day living (Mridula and Khan, 2009). Food security can only be achieved when all people specially women can fulfill their nutrition. In case of working women the concern should be more. Women working in garments industry mostly suffer from sufficient food and nutrition. Although this sector is so important for our economy little is known about the working conditions in which predominantly women workers perform their duties. Under what circumstances they are working and where from they come is mostly a notional issue which needs empirical vouching (Haque *et al.*, 2008).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Bangladesh is a developing country. Most of the people are still occupied in agriculture sector but the successful export oriented Readymade Garments (RMG) industry of Bangladesh has observed remarkable growth since its beginning late 1970s. There has been an increasing trend of rural women and working mother's involvement in the RMG sector which contributed to a greater extent for increasing family income and sustaining their livelihood. Some structural problems along with policy induced constraint had obstructed industrial growth in Bangladesh. But RMG shows an impressive growth. Bangladesh already has various commitments to maintain labor standard such as minimum wage, maternity leave discourage child labor and so on. But in practice most of these are not implemented by the respective authorities (Bhuiyan, 2012). Very little is known about the socioeconomic condition of the garments workers because specific study on food security status of the garments workers was very limited. The availability of a large number of unskilled or semi-skilled female workers for

employment has been an important contributing factor in the growth of the garments industry in Bangladesh. The current study is perceived to be a valuable addition in the existing literature relating to the food security of the garments workers from the legal, equitable and social aspect.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Today, the number of people in the world suffering from hunger and poverty has risen to more than one billion and Bangladesh is not immune to this reality. Overcoming challenges to food security has played and continues to play a significant role in the development agenda of Bangladesh. Bangladesh's food security is still fragile and major challenges remain (Noman, 2013). In Bangladesh readymade garment is the main sector for the earning of foreign currency. Bangladesh has a good reputation worldwide in a RMG sector. Bangladesh export wears in more than 20 countries. US is the main buyer of Bangladeshi wears. Second largest buyer is EU (Bhuiyan, 2012). In our country Gazipur is an industrial area where RMG get the main emphasis. Most of the garments of the country run in this region. So this area has a great emphasis in RMG sector. Most of the garments worker works here are women. So their food security has great importance for the social, economic and nutritional change of the country.

In order to obtain women garments worker' responses as per objectives of the study, keeping all these in view, the present study was designed to answer the following questions.

1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of the women garments' workers?
2. What is the level of food security of the women garments' worker?
3. Is there any relationship between women garment workers and their selected socio-demographic characteristics?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives guided the present study are as follows:

1. To evaluate the selected socio-demographic characteristics of the women garment workers;
2. To determine the food security level of the women garments worker; and
3. To explore the relationship between the food security status of the women garment workers and their selected socio-demographic characteristics.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

In studying relationship between the dependent and independent variables, a hypothesis is formulated which stated the anticipated relationship between the variables. The null hypothesis is framed as follows:

H₀: "There is no significant difference on the change in meal intake and calorie intake status of the respondents between before and after joining in garments".

METHODOLOGY

Two garments situated in Salna, Gazipur Sadar namely Pretty Group and Cutting Edge was selected as the locale of the study. All women workers of the selected two garments (Pretty Group and Cutting Edge) were the population of the study. There were 900 women workers in these two garments where in Pretty Group possessed of 420 women workers and Cutting Edge contained 480 women workers. The lists of women workers were collected from the respective garments. A total of 90 women workers (10%) were selected as sample of the present study through proportionate simple random sampling. Thus from Pretty Group 42 and from Cutting Edge 48 constituted the total sample. Data were collected through face to face interview using interview schedules. Diagnostic research design was applied in the present study. The dependent variable in this study was food security status of selected women garments' workers. Food security was measured under two dimensions, namely access to meal and calorie intake. Respondent's total meal intake was measured in number of meal/day. The change of food intake was determined by computing meal intake after and before involvement with the jobs in garments. Calorie intake was measured based on average monthly calorie intake by her family members including her. For this purpose the household food consumption was converted into calorie intake per person per day. The food items considered were cereal, vegetable, meat, egg, fish, milk, fruits, pulses and edible oil. Calorie uptake was measured by following the formula which was used by Imai (2003) which are shown in Table1. Statistical measures like number, range, percent, mean, standard deviation and Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) analysis were utilized both for data evaluation and hypotheses testing by using SPSS program.

TABLE 1: CONVERSION FACTOR OF CONSUMED FOOD ITEM ENERGY (KCAL)

Dietary diversity	Calorific value (CV) (kcal per kg of food item)
Cereal	3490
Vegetable	430
Meat	1090
Egg	80
Fish	1360
Milk	670
Fruit	200
Pulse	3430
Oil	9000

Source: Imai (2003)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Characteristics profile of the women garments workers were determined and presented in Table2. The findings indicated that majority of the respondents were found young aged (95.56%) having secondary level of education (50%), small family size (80%), low farm size (80%), medium term service experience (72.22%) and higher training utilization (70%). It was also found that majority of the respondents had medium working load(74.44%), medium wage(57.78%), high monthly family income(43.33%), medium wage adequacy (57.78%) and medium (66.67%) financial contribution to the family (Table2).

TABLE 2: DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO THEIR PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristics	Categories	Number	Percent	Mean	SD
Age	Young (18 to 35)	86	95.56	24.46	4.64
	Middle (36 to 45)	04	4.44		
	Old (>45)	00	0		
Education	Illiterate	09	10	5.93	2.65
	Primary education	36	40		
	Secondary education	45	50		
Family size	Small (up to 4 members)	72	80	3.38	1.62
	Medium (5-7 members)	14	15.56		
	Large ((above 7 members)	04	4.44		
Farm size	Landless (<0.02 hectare)	72	80	0.02	.07
	Marginal (.02 to 0.20 hectare)	14	15.56		
	Small (0.21 to 1.00)	04	4.44		
Service experience	Low experience	19	21.11	3.57	1.39
	Medium experience	65	72.22		
	High experience	06	6.67		
Training utilization	No training	17	18.89	-	-
	Partially used	10	11.11		
	Fully used	63	70		
Working load	Medium (10 to 11)	67	74.44	10.7	0.85
	High (above 11)	23	25.56		
Wage	Low (up to 5 thousand)	17	18.89	6.40	1.25
	Medium (5.1 to 7 thousand)	52	57.78		
	High (above 7 thousand)	21	23.33		
Monthly income	Low (up to 9 thousand)	15	16.67	15.22	6.25
	Medium (9.1 to 15 thousand)	36	40		
	High (above 15 thousand)	39	43.33		
Wage adequacy	Adequate	82	91.11	1.08	0.28
	Not adequate	08	8.89		
Financial contribution to family	Low (up to 7)	27	11.11	11.38	5.02
	Medium (7.1 to 14 thousand)	39	66.67		
	High (above 14 thousand)	24	22.22		

FOOD SECURITY STATUS OF THE WOMEN GARMENTS' WORKERS

Food security was measured in terms of two dimensions i.e. access to food and calorie intake.

ACCESS TO FOOD (MEALS PER DAY)

Usually in Bangladesh a food secured individual receives three round meals per day, but it varies in case of food insecure individual. Number of full meals taken by the family members/day is shown in Table 3. Findings presented in Table 3 reveals that on an average, cent percent of the family members of the respondents take three meals after joining at garments. But before joining at garments 50 percent of the family members of the respondents took three meals and 50 percent of the family members of the respondents took two meals. Reason behind the insecure food condition might be due to their income from the garments which was somewhat absent before their joining in the garments.

TABLE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS BASED ON NUMBER OF MEALS TAKEN PER DAY DURING BEFORE AND AFTER JOINING GARMENTS

Status of access to food	Before working at garments			After working at garments			t-value (df=89)
	No. of respondents	Percent	Mean	No. of respondents	Percent	Mean	
Three meals/day	45	50	2.5	90	100	3.0	9.43**
Two meals/day	45	50		00	00		

**= Significant at 0.01 level of probability

The differences between means of access to food (meals/ day) of women worker during before and after working in garments were tested by computing t-value which was 9.43 and it was significant at 0.01 level of probability. Therefore, it might be concluded that meal uptake was increased significantly by the women worker due to joining in the garments.

CALORIE INTAKE BY THE RESPONDENTS

An individual has wide range of options for intake his/ her calorie from varieties of food items. A garments worker having low wage always tries to get food especially cereal in cheap rate. However, findings displayed in Table 4 regarding intake of food items during before and after joining in garments.

TABLE 4: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEANS OF CALORIE INTAKE FROM DIFFERENT FOOD ITEMS BY RESPONDENT WOMEN WORKERS DURING BEFORE AND AFTER JOINING IN THE GARMENTS

Dietary diversity	Meals taken (person/kcal/day)				t-value (df=89)	Probability
	Before working in garments		After working in garments			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Cereal	1.08	364.29	1.26	375.29	10.987**	0.000
Vegetable	43.90	21.90	55.40	21.38	8.722**	0.000
Meat	44.28	33.39	74.16	38.16	10.740**	0.000
Egg	22.29	13.36	37.16	17.95	11.295**	0.000
Fish	96.83	96.60	102.12	62.74	2.190*	0.031
Milk	19.61	28.89	57.35	50.18	7.682**	0.000
Fruit	3.88	4.83	10.16	6.88	11.189**	0.000
Pulse	75.43	64.27	103.05	104.39	3.464**	0.001
Oil	2.15	98.91	3.29	128.94	9.582**	0.000
Total	1.56	432.66	2.02	436.40	19.970**	0.000

**= Significant at 0.01 level of probability, *= Significant at 0.05 level of probability

As shown in Table 4, mean calorie intake from cereal, vegetable, meat, egg, fish, milk, fruit, pulse, oil during before and after joining in the garments. Differences between means of calorie intake from different food items by the women workers during before and after their joining in garments were tested by computing t-value. Paired t-test value as shown in Table 4 clearly demonstrated that garments work exerted significant positive impact on all dietary items. Therefore, it might be concluded that calorie intake increased significantly due to working in garments for all food items.

Calorie intake was calculated for per person per day in kcal. Effort has been made to measure kcal intake by the respondents' family members. Based on the calorie intake the respondents were classified into four categories as following Hossain (2009): 'much below optimum' (upto1800), 'below optimum' (>1800-2122), 'optimum' (>2122-2444) and 'above optimum' (>2444). Distributions of respondents according to their calorie intake (per capita/day) are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO THEIR CALORIE INTAKE

Categories	Respondents		Mean	SD
	Number	Percent		
Much below optimum (upto1800 kcal/capita/day)	24	26.67	2025.34	436.41
Below optimum (>1800-2122 kcal/capita/day)	30	33.33		
Optimum (>2122-2444 kcal/capita/day)	18	20		
Above optimum (>2444 kcal/capita/day)	18	20		
Total	90	100		

Result presented in Table 5 reveals that above one-third (33.33 %) of the respondents were found to take below optimum level calorie while more than one-fourth (26.67 %) of the women garments worker had taken much below optimum level calorie and equally one-fifth of the women garments worker took optimum level and above optimum level calorie. Therefore, two-fifth (40%) of the women garments worker received optimum and above optimum level but a big majority (60%) of the women garments worker receives much below optimum level to below optimum level calorie which is a very alarming situation for the nation. In our country the national poverty level is 31.51 percent which is also a matter of big concern. (World Bank, 2008).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS AND THEIR FOOD SECURITY STATUS

Co-efficient of correlation (r) was used to explore the relationship between the selected characteristics of the respondents and their food security status. The summary of the result of correlation test is presented in Table 6. Based on the correlation analysis it was found that wage, working load and wage adequacy of the respondent had positive significant relationship with their food security where the coefficient of correlations (r value) were 0.464**, 0.209* and 0.314* respectively. It indicates that if there is any increase in their wage, working load and wage adequacy there would be an increase in their food security. The reason behind this might be that in case of wage, more wages makes the individual more powerful to take any decision and capable to increase their purchase capacity and also increase food security. In case of working load, by working hard and long time women garments worker get more wages so that their purchase capacity also increase and they can secure their food. In case of wage adequacy, the women garments worker who get better wage thinks that their wage is adequate. The worker who has income from other different sources thinks that what they get from the garments is their benefit. For this reason food security comes with adequate wage.

TABLE 5: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WOMEN GARMENTS WORKERS AND THEIR LEVEL OF FOOD SECURITY AFTER JOINING TO GARMENTS

Dependable variable	Selected personal attributes	Correlation Co-efficient (r value)
Food security	Age	0.158 ^{NS}
	Education	0.087 ^{NS}
	Family size	-0.491**
	Farm size	0.071 ^{NS}
	Service experience	-0.154 ^{NS}
	Training utilization	-0.112 ^{NS}
	Working load	0.209*
	Wage	0.464**
	Monthly family income	0.022 ^{NS}
	Wage adequacy	0.314*
	Financial contribution to the family	-0.117 ^{NS}

**=significant at 0.01 level of probability, *=significant at 0.05 level of probability, NS=Non Significant

Family size of the respondent had negative significant relationship with their food security where the coefficient of correlations (r value) was -0.491** (Table 5). It indicates that larger family size and presence of high dependent members in household influence in worsening the food security status of households. This implies that food security increase with the decreasing of family member (Table 5).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Though results of this research will reflect the country's overall condition of employee food security in readymade garments factory, data were collected only from specific selected areas. In order to keep the study under manageable limit, meaningful, and considering the time, money and other necessary resources available to the researcher the following limitations were recognized.

1. There were many respondents in the study area but a few numbers of respondents were considered for this study due to time and resource constraints ;
2. The questionnaire contains some questions that, if answered properly, might damage the company's image. In this type of questions, the respondents might provide socially acceptable answers. This risk was unavoidable;
3. The researcher dependent upon the information furnished by the respondents; and
4. Since the findings were based on the ability of the respondents to recall memory expressed by them, the objectivity of the study was confined to their ability to recall, and also their sincerity and honesty in providing the needed information.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Study revealed that cent percent of the family members of the respondents take three meals after joining in garments but earlier only 50 percent respondents could be able to afford three meals per day, rest 50 percent take two meals per day. The mean difference between meal intake by per person per day during before and after joining garments was significant. Most of the women garments' workers (60.0%) get below standard calories (up to 2122 kcal/day) against the optimum requirements of 2200kcal/day. However among the variables working load, wage and wage adequacy showed positive relationship while, family size showed negative relationship with food security status. It is true that more wages is crucial for ensuring access of the workers to their basic requirements including access to adequate food. Therefore, it is recommended that wage of the respondents should be increased by the garments' authority considering market price of daily essentials and functional training should be provided to the women garments workers by the competent authority to make them more active and inspired in discharging their technical work.

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