



Jahangirnagar University Journal of Management Research

Journal Homepage: <https://journals.juniv.edu/index.php/ujmr>

State of Compliance of Bangladesh's Readymade Garment Industry during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Pathway to Future Challenges

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Article Info

Received: October 19, 2023

Revised: December 03, 2023

Accepted: December 17, 2023

Published: December 20, 2023

Keywords:

Compliance, RMG, COVID-19, Workplace Safety, Labor Standards

JEL Codes: K31, M54

DOI:

<http://doi.org/10.59185/ujmr.v6i1.467>

Abstract: The readymade garment (RMG) industry is the backbone of Bangladesh's economy, accounting for over 80% of the country's export earnings, which employs over 4 million workers. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the industry's operations due to supply chain disturbances, reduced consumer demand, and factory closures. This study aims to investigate the state of compliance of the Bangladesh RMG industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on encountering future challenges. This study surveyed 100 RMG workers to evaluate the 36 compliance issues the government of Bangladesh has already termed as the most important for the industry. The study used a combination of primary and secondary data sources. The study showed that occupational health and safety issues during the COVID-19 pandemic were fantastic, where some issues, including working hours, payment of wages, and conditions of service, were identified as significant non-compliant issues that required further improvement. The findings of this research will provide insights into the challenges and opportunities for the Bangladesh RMG industry in the post-pandemic era and provide some policy guidelines as a pathway to face upcoming challenges.

Introduction:

Bangladesh is one of the most peopled countries in the world. Following its independence in 1971, the country's economy was conventionally based on primary products, including agricultural and jute products. However, within a decade, the export structure has shifted to manufacturing products. Consequently, the country is more dependent on manufacturing goods, and the export basket's share of manufacturing goods has increased. The clothing

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or apparel industry, widely known as the readymade garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh, is considered the pillar of the economy. The industry started in the early 1980s and secured the second major RMG manufacturer and exporter next to China, securing 7.9% of the world market share in 2022 (World Trade Organization [WTO], 2023). The industry has played a pivotal role in the country's socio-economic development regarding women empowerment, foreign earnings, employment generation, and macroeconomic stability (Bakht & Hossain, 2017; Ashadullah, 2020, 2021).

According to the latest available data, in the fiscal year (FY) 2022-23, the industry accounted for 85% (US\$ 46,992 million) of the country's national export earnings. It was 4% (US\$ 32 million) of the country's total national exports in FY 1983-1984 (Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association [BGMEA], 2023). The industry produces two types of products: knitwear and woven RMG. However, the contribution of both products is almost the same nowadays. For example, the amount of knitwear and woven RMG products contains 55% (US\$ 25,738) and 45% (US\$ 21,253) in FY 2022-2023, respectively, starting from 14% (US\$ 205) and 86% (US\$ 1,240) in FY 1992-1993. The industry employs around 4.1 million workers, almost 65% female (BGMEA, 2020). In 2012, the RMG industry created 55.1% of Bangladesh's total manufacturing employment (Moazzem & Reza, 2018). Bangladesh primarily exported RMG products to the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) markets. These two markets account for 68% of Bangladesh's RMG exports in FY 2022-23. For example, in FY 2022-23, the EU was the prime export destination (50%) of Bangladesh RMG products, followed by the US (18%) and the United Kingdom (UK) (11%), which was 50%, 18%, and 11% respectively in the fiscal year 2019-2020, before the pandemic hit in Bangladesh. These markets, including Canada, are termed as traditional markets of Bangladesh (BGMEA, 2023). In non-traditional markets, the RMG exports are also increasing. As in FY 2019-2020, the export share was 17%, whereas in FY 2022-2023, it increased by 1%, now 18% (BGMEA, 2023).

In addition, Bangladesh should upgrade from the least developed countries (LDC) list in 2026 and will lose some preferential market access facilities in the world market, especially in the EU market. About 50% of the foreign earnings of RMG exports came from the EU market due to its "Everything but Arms (EBA)" scheme for the least developed countries like Bangladesh. Bangladesh will not be entitled to such a benefit and must go for further trade preferences like the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) plus or other preferential benefits. Therefore, Bangladesh must improve its working environment to comply with national and international standards to get these preferences. However, it is a challenging task for the sector. For the last decade, the Bangladesh RMG industry also faced several challenges, including the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) phase-out at the end of 2004 and several accidents in the sector, including the fire at "Tazreen Fashions" in 2012 and the collapse of the "Rana Plaza" building 2013. However, the industry overcame those challenges and maintained export competitiveness and sustainability over the years (Ahmed, 2009; Mottaleb & Sonobe, 2011; Ahmed et al., 2014; Ansary & Barua, 2015;

Alam & Natsuda, 2016; Barua & Ansary, 2017; Alam et al., 2017; Ashadullah, 2020, 2021; Ashadullah & Oda, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh's clothing exports sharply decreased in 2020, like other clothing exporters (Boudreau & Naeem, 2021). However, Bangladesh again increased its exports in the world market in FY 2021-22 (BGMEA, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted the industry's operations, leading to supply chain disruptions, factory closures, and decreased consumer demand. Consequently, employers retrenched many workers from the RMG factories without following the rules in the complaint with the legal framework existing in Bangladesh. In addition, the Bangladesh RMG industry has faced numerous challenges related to worker safety and labor rights, including the 2013 Rana Plaza tragedy, which highlighted the need for reforms. Since then, various initiatives have been launched by the government, industry stakeholders, and international organizations to address these challenges. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges to the industry, exacerbating existing issues and requiring new measures to ensure compliance.

Additionally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Bangladesh RMG industry has been severe, leading to significant losses in export earnings, factory closures, and job losses. According to the BGMEA, the industry lost \$3.18 billion in export earnings between March and June 2020. Many orders were canceled or delayed, leading to decreased production and factory closures. The BGMEA reported that over 1,100 factories were closed during the pandemic, leading to the loss of thousands of jobs.

Several studies, including Kabir et al. (2021), highlighted the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) workers, focusing on long-lasting effects. Another researcher, including BGMEA (2021), also pointed out the possible impacts of the COVID-19 disease. Several studies, including Ashadullah and Oda (2021), also identified that a lack of compliance with labor standards intensified the vulnerability of the industry. In addition, workers' welfare and ethical practices became a sharper focus during the pandemic due to challenges faced by providing protective equipment, sick leave, and fair wages during lockdowns, thereby highlighting gaps in compliance with ethical standards. Worker protests and concerns regarding layoffs and unpaid wages became more prominent. However, regulatory enforcement remained a concern as the government's capacity to enforce compliance in the industry was limited, and the pandemic's economic impact further worsened this. As a consequence, labor rights violations, including forced labor, child labor, and discrimination, continue to be reported in the industry.

Despite the issue's importance during COVID-19, more literature should be needed, especially on compliance. Several studies focused on environmental sustainability, supply chain disruption, and economic sustainability. However, studies related to essential compliance issues still need to be included. Against this backdrop, this study was designed to examine the state of compliance within the Bangladesh readymade garment industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. Compliance in this context refers to adherence to labor

standards, safety regulations, and ethical practices. Therefore, the objective of the study is to analyze the state of compliance of the Bangladesh RMG industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is identified as the most important by the government of Bangladesh. This study will focus on the following research questions in line with the objective.

- i. What is the compliance situation of Bangladesh's RMG sector during the COVID-19 pandemic,
- ii. How might the RMG industry prepare for future challenges?

Bangladesh's RMG industry is known for its labor-intensive production, making it vulnerable to disruptions during the pandemic. Labor standards in the industry have been a long-standing concern, and COVID-19 exposed several challenges. Therefore, this study could significantly contribute to the RMG compliance literature.

This study starts by providing an overview of the RMG industry in Bangladesh, the concept of compliance, and its relevance to the RMG industry. Then, the following section highlights the growth and significance of RMG exports in the world export business. The 3rd section will discuss the literature review. The 4th section represents the methodology and data. Section 5 represents the results and relevant discussion of the study and section 6 concludes the study with some policy recommendations.

RMG Industry of Bangladesh and its Global Markets:

Bangladesh's RMG industry is the backbone of the country. According to the latest available data shown in Figures 1 & 3, in the fiscal year (FY) 2022-23, the industry-primarily five RMG products, including T-shirts and knitted shirts, Trousers, Sweaters, Shirts and blouses, and Underwear—accounted for 85% (US\$ 46,992 million) of the national export earnings of the country increased from 4% (US\$ 32 million) of the total national export of the country in FY 1983-1984 (BGMEA, 2023).

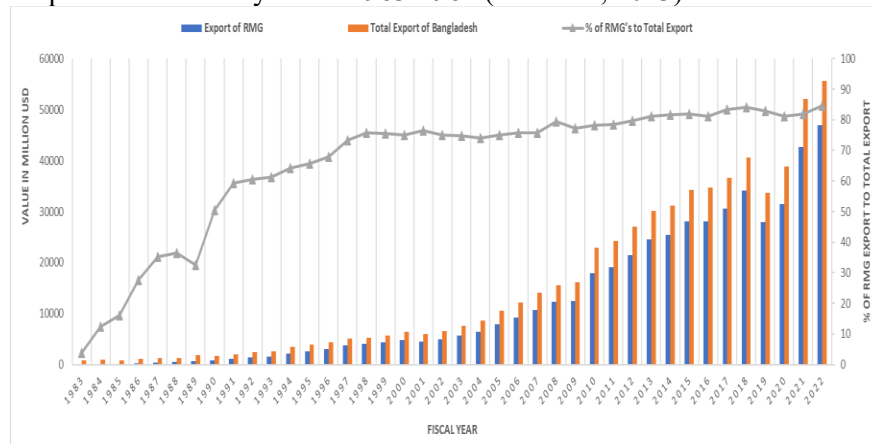


Figure 1: Export of RMG products & Total Export of Bangladesh (FY 1983-2022)

Source: Author's creation based on Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) data, 2023.

Similarly, Figure 2 shows that the amounts of knitwear and woven RMG products containing 55% (US\$ 25,738) and 45% (US\$ 21,253) in FY 2022-2023, respectively were starting from 14% (US\$ 205) and 86% (US\$ 1,240) in FY 1992-1993. It shows that at the beginning of the RMG industry, woven RMG products dominated the RMG export baskets compared to knitwear. However, the share of knitwear RMG exports is increasing than woven RMG. It also shows the increasing competitiveness of Bangladesh's RMG industry.

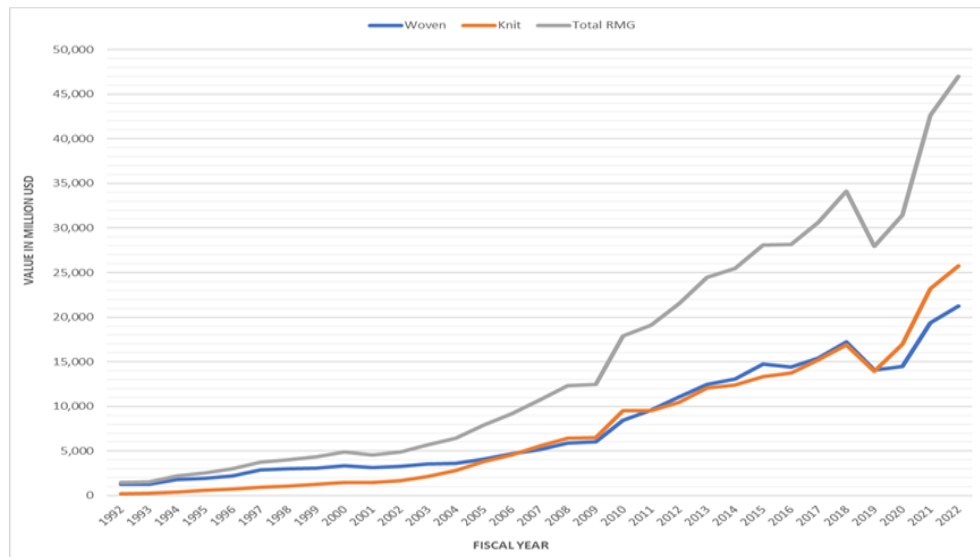


Figure 2: Export of RMG (Both Woven & Knit) to the world (FY 1992-2022)

Source: Author's estimation based on Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) data, 2023.

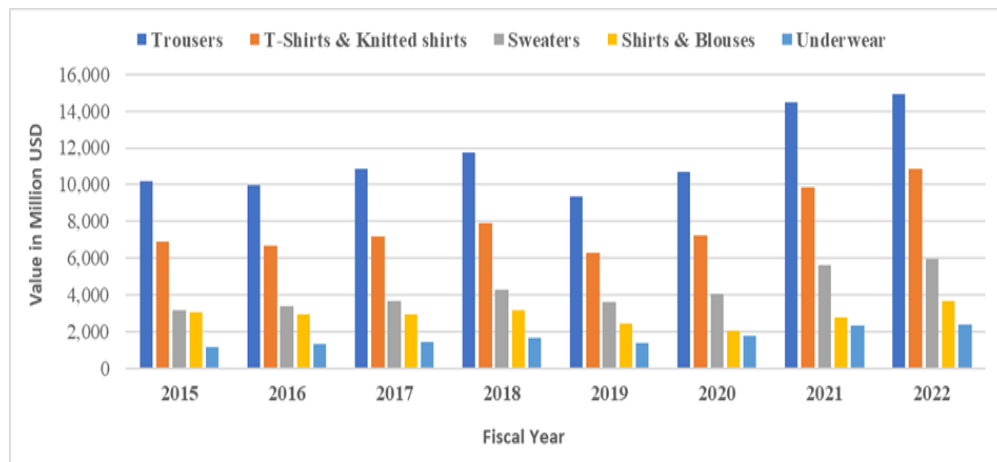


Figure 3: Export of major (top five) RMG products to the world (FY 2015-2022)

Source: Author's presentation based on Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) data, 2023.

Bangladesh primarily exported its RMG products to the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) markets (see Figure 4). These two markets are considered major

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markets for Bangladesh's RMG products from their journey to foreign markets, which account for 68% of Bangladesh's RMG exports. In FY 2022-23, the EU was the prime export destination (50%) of Bangladesh RMG products, followed by the US (18%), and the United Kingdom (UK) (11%), which was 50%, 18%, and 11% respectively in the fiscal year 2019-2020, before the pandemic hit in Bangladesh. These markets, including Canada, are traditional markets in Bangladesh (BGMEA, 2023). The traditional market is also considered the critical export destination for RMG products in Bangladesh since the RMG industry's exports started to grow in the early 1980s.

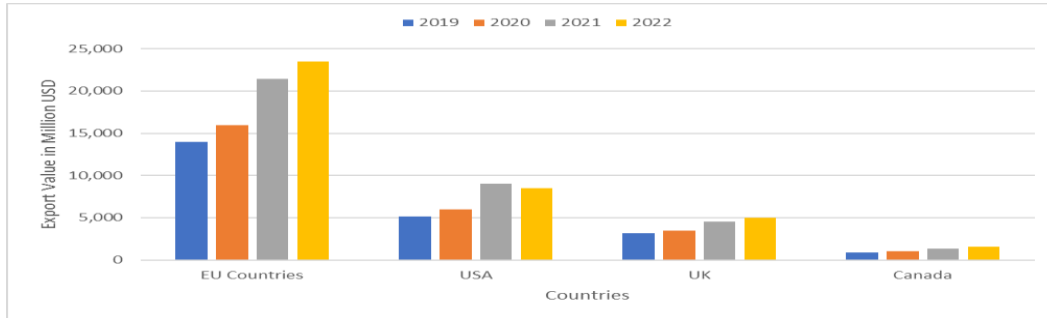


Figure 4: Export of RMG products to the Traditional markets (FY 2019-2022)

Source: Author's compilation based on data from Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), 2023

As shown in Figure 5, RMG exports also increased in non-traditional markets. As in FY 2019-2020, the export percentage was 17%, whereas in FY 2022-2023, it is now 18%. Japan is the top destination among the traditional countries, followed by Australia and India. So, it is clear that non-traditional markets are still unexplored, and there is a huge opportunity to export products there. To diversify the export markets for RMG products, the Government of Bangladesh declared incentives to the RMG exporters to motivate them to export more in non-traditional markets. Figure 5 also denotes the upward trend of export of RMG to the countries, namely South Korea, China, Mexico, Malaysia, Turkey, and Brazil.

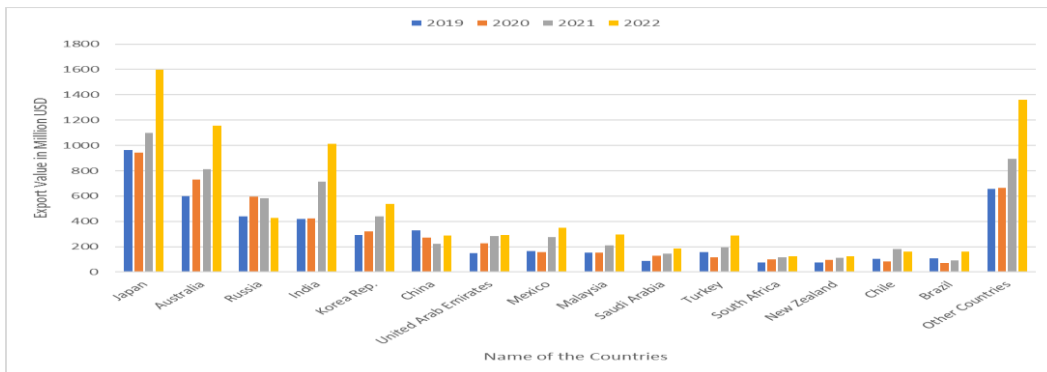


Figure 5: Export of RMG products to the Non-Traditional markets (FY 2019-2021)

Source: Author's work based on Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) data, 2023.

Literature Review:

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the Bangladesh RMG industry, reducing consumer demand, supply chain interruptions, and factory closures. This section reviews the literature on the state of compliance of the Bangladesh RMG industry during the pandemic, including the measures taken by the government, industry stakeholders, and international organizations to ensure worker safety and labor rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to ensure worker safety in the Bangladesh RMG industry. The Bangladesh government issued guidelines for workplace safety during the pandemic, including using personal protective equipment (PPE), social distancing measures, and providing hand-washing facilities (BGMEA, 2021). The BGMEA established a hotline for workers to report safety violations and set up a COVID-19 safety committee to monitor compliance with safety guidelines (BGMEA, 2021). The ILO provided technical assistance to government and industry stakeholders to ensure worker safety during the pandemic.

However, some studies suggest that compliance with safety guidelines has been challenging in the Bangladesh RMG industry. However, some studies suggest that labor rights violations have persisted in the Bangladesh RMG industry during the pandemic. It includes terminating workers' contracts without notice or compensation, and some workers were forced to work without adequate PPE. Similarly, a study found that some factories had violated labor laws by not paying workers their full wages during the pandemic. These findings suggest that while measures have been taken to protect labor rights, compliance with labor laws has not been universal.

ILO (2020) initiates a brief guideline to raise the consciousness of the gendered reality of COVID-19 and to sketch some of how the pandemic impacts RMG workers in the short, medium, and long terms.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the need for protecting labor rights in the Bangladesh RMG industry. The Bangladesh government issued directives to ensure workers' wages were paid during the pandemic, even if factories were closed (BGMEA, 2021). The government also extended the timeframe to renew labor contracts to provide job security. The BGMEA established a COVID-19 relief fund to support workers who had lost their jobs due to factory closures (BGMEA, 2021).

Fair Wear Foundation (2020) identified that Bangladesh's RMG workers were highly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact was felt in all four areas of workers' security: employment, income, work, and representation. Islam et al. (2022) demonstrated that "the disturbances from Covid-19 worsened interconnected vulnerabilities in different securities like economic, job, food, housing and health and wellbeing, causing female workers to struggle to support themselves and their families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also impacted environmental sustainability in the Bangladesh RMG industry. Hence, the BGMEA also launched a sustainability program to promote environmental sustainability in the industry (BGMEA, 2020). However, some

studies suggest that environmental sustainability has not been prioritized during the pandemic.

Hence, this paper aims to analyze the state of compliance of the Bangladesh RMG industry during the COVID-19 pandemic in a comprehensive and detailed manner.

Methodology & Data:

This study aims to assess the state of compliance of the Bangladesh RMG industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used a combination of primary and secondary data sources, including interviews with factory workers, government policies and regulations, and industry reports. In line with this objective, this study interviewed the operating-level workers connected to the production in the RMG factories. Convenience sampling is used for data collection, and measurement tools were adapted from the RMG factory checklist developed by the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), the Government of Bangladesh, with the support of the International Labor Organization (ILO)'s RMG program (ILO, 2017). The checklist is used as a critical tool to gather comprehensive factory information. Under the integrated checklist, 125 questions have reportedly been included under 12 heads in line with the provisions of the Bangladesh Labor Act-2006, Labor Rules-2015, and ILO core labor standards (RMgnet.bd. 2023). However, this study used only 36 issues, which is termed as the most important, of 8 heads, namely

- i. Issues related to the conditions of employment and service
- ii. Issues related to maternity benefits
- iii. Issues related to occupational health and safety
- iv. Issues related to the occupational hazard, compensation, and safety committee
- v. Issues related to the welfare measures
- vi. Issues related to working hours and leave
- vii. Issues related to the wages and payment thereof
- viii. Issues related to social safety (Group insurance, workers' participation in the company's profit, Provident fund)

Three responses were counted for the assessment: (a) “0” (if there is least or no implementation of the particular compliance issue), (b) “1” (if there is a partial implementation of a particular issue), and (c) “2” (if there is a full implementation of a particular compliance issue). This study assesses compliance in Bangladesh's RMG industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. The population of the study is represented by workers in the RMG factories of the Dhaka district of Bangladesh, especially in the Savar, Ashulia region of Dhaka District. A questionnaire was distributed to the workers to get the responses. Finally, this study uses responses from 100 workers in the above region, collected through convenience sampling. Several previous kinds of literature used non-probability sampling, and they used 80-100 workers' responses for their study. As this study is about to assess the compliance scenario of the RMG sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, 100 questionnaires of RMG workers were enough to evaluate compliance issues. For details of the general profile of the workers, see Figure 6

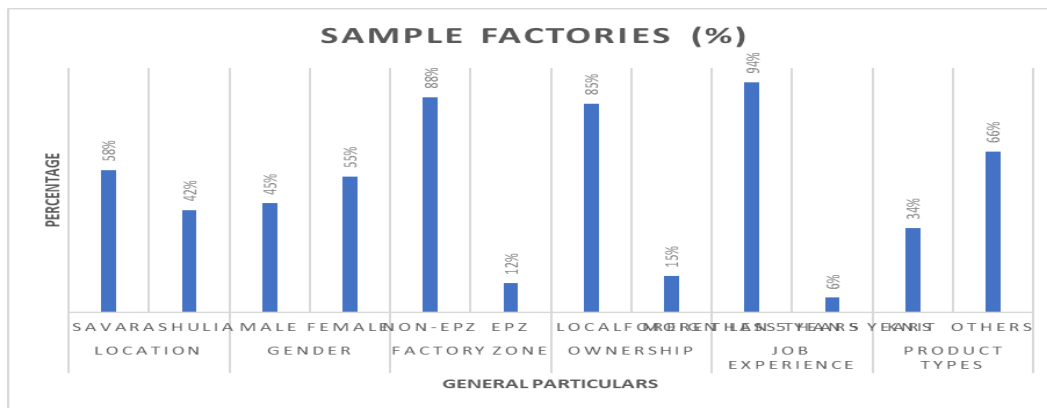


Figure 6: General Profile of the surveyed workers

Source: Author's presentation based on a survey in 2022-2023

Results & Discussions:

This section represents the results and discussion of the study. Table 1 summarizes the responses to the workers' survey. A total of 36 issues under 8 clusters or heads are shown. As shown in the study, significant non-compliance was found in issues related to conditions of employment service, maternity benefits, working hours and leave, and wages and payment thereof. In the case of conditions of employment service, whether employees get legal payments from the organization at the time of separation from the organization was measured. During the pandemic, as export earnings were reduced, employers could not pay the workers properly. In the case of maternity benefits, most employers did not follow the rules and regulations regarding maternity benefits.

Similarly, as shown in Table 1, there is some non-compliance in the case of working hours and leave and the payment of wages. However, significant compliance was found in the case of occupational health and safety issues and welfare measures. Most non-compliance was also found in working hours and leave, payment of wages, and social security issues.

Based on the survey, this part also discusses the compliance issues in the previous section. Figure 7 summarizes the highest non-compliance rate of the eight broad compliance clusters spanning 36 issues. It includes conditions of employment and service, maternity benefits, occupational health and safety, occupational hazard, compensation and safety committee, welfare measures, working hours and leave, wages and payment thereof, social safety concerning group insurance, workers' participation in the company's profit, and provident fund.

Table 1. State of Compliance of Bangladesh RMG industry during COVI 19 Pandemic

SI	Cluster	Compliance issues	% of Compliance	% of Non-Compliance
1	Conditions of Employment and Service	Workers get payment legally for death, retrenchment, discharge, termination, retirement including voluntary	29	71
2	Maternity Benefits	Employer follow the rules regarding the employment of pregnant woman workers	36	64
		Nominee gets maternity benefits in case of death of pregnant female worker	32	68
3	Occupational Health & Safety (OHS)	Availability of adequate and effective air circulation system with comfortable environment in the factory	55	45
		Adequate washroom and toilet facilities for the male and female workers	76	24
		Staircases and common space are fully cleaned	80	20
		Emergency exit and fire alarm is displayed on the factory floor	65	35
		Safe drinking water is available in the factory	85	15
		When more than 50 workers, Regular fire drill were held in the factory	67	33
		Employer ensure the safety of hoist and lift in the factory	56	44
		Arrangement for safe pressure plant in a factory	82	18
		Employers provide protective measurement for the eyes of the workers during mechanical process of work	67	33
		Employer ensure protective measurement in a confined place of a factory	56	44
		Availability of protective measurement for the explosive use of materials	68	32
		Availability of protective measurement to prepare welding or cutting in a factory	68	32
		Adequate supply and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) to the workers	74	26
		As per the law, hazardous work are conducted in the factory	54	46
		Sound limit (80 decible) controlled by the company	54	46
		The company gave visible precautionary notice (MSDS) regarding harmful chemical substance used in the factory	76	24
		The health checkup was done before the appointment of workers in a dangerous process	68	32
4	Occupational Hazard, Compensation and Safety Committee	Existence of safety committee and well performed as per the law	76	24
		The owner paid the proper compensation to the workers as per the law in case of occupational accident and professional disease	56	44
5	Welfare Measures	Availability of first aid boxes and the proper maintenance of that box by a trained person in a factory	76	24
		In case of 50 or more workers, separate rest room is available	65	35
6	Working Hour and Leave	Total working hour is 10 hours with overtime period	35	65
		Workers get proper rest or rest for meal properly	45	55
		Workers get compensatory weekly holiday in case of working in a holiday	35	65
		Workers get overtime accounts and allowance properly	45	55
		Workers (both adolescent and adult) may work as per the law	40	60
		Workers get persona leave (casual, sick, and annual leave) as per the law	40	60
		Workers get leave encashment facilities as per the law	39	61
		Employer gave alternative leave to the workers if working on the festival holiday	54	46
7	Wages and Payment Thereof	Workers get minimum wages as per the law	45	55
		Workers get regular monthly wages and payment for separation within the specified time set by the law	35	65
		Workers get two festival bonuses after one-year of continuous service.	59	41
8	Social Safety	If 100 or more permanent workers are in a factory, compulsory group insurance is available as per the law	67	33

Source: Author's estimation based on survey 2022-23

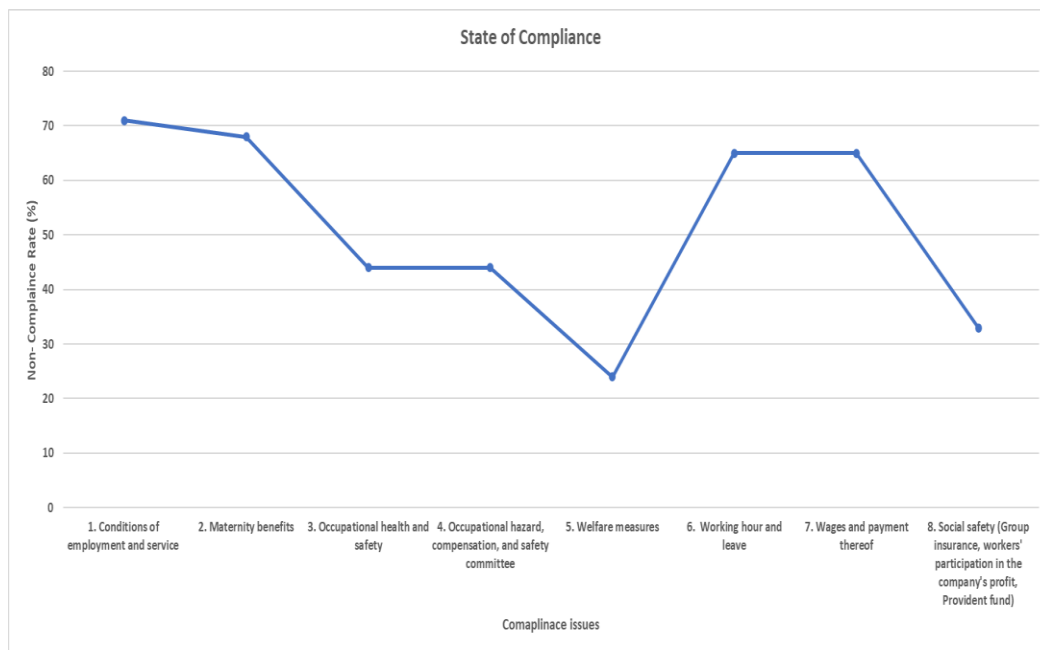


Figure 7: State of compliance of Bangladesh RMG factories during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Source: Author's presentation based on survey 2022-23

As shown in the study, significant non-compliance (more than 50%) was found to issues related to conditions of employment service, maternity benefits, working hours and leave, and wages and payment thereof. It includes whether employees get legal payments from the organization during separation. During the pandemic, as export earnings were reduced, employers could not pay the workers properly. In the case of maternity benefits, most employers did not follow the rules and regulations regarding maternity benefits as per the laws. Working hours and leave issues need to be more compliant. Payment of wages also falls in the highest category of non-compliance. As a result, the non-compliance rate is relatively high in these segments.

There may be several reasons for the high level of non-compliance in specific compliance clusters. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the Bangladesh RMG industry, which faces several worker safety, labor rights, and economic sustainability challenges. Despite these challenges, the industry has shown resilience and has taken steps to ensure compliance with established standards and regulations. During the pandemic, ensuring worker safety is one of the most significant challenges facing the Bangladesh RMG industry. While various measures have been taken to protect workers, such as providing personal protective equipment (PPE) and implementing social distancing measures, occupational health and safety issues have shown a reasonable compliance rate. The measurement approaches taken by the factory authority and the Government of Bangladesh could help ensure compliance with safety standards and provide workers with the necessary resources and support to protect their health during the pandemic. Another

significant challenge facing the industry during the pandemic has been protecting labor rights. Some workers have faced job loss or reduced working hours due to factory closures or reduced demand. The factory owners have launched various initiatives and government agencies to support workers' rights. It ultimately ensures that workers' voices are heard and that the needs of vulnerable workers are prioritized.

Digital technologies enable more effective communication and collaboration among industry stakeholders, leading to more effective solutions for ensuring worker safety. To mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the industry and ensure workers' rights and safety, the Bangladesh government, industry stakeholders, and international organizations have also taken various measures. The government issued guidelines for workplace safety during the pandemic, including using PPE, social distancing measures, and providing hand-washing facilities. The government also provided factory workers with training on COVID-19 prevention and response. The BGMEA established a hotline for workers to report safety violations and set up a COVID-19 safety committee to monitor compliance with safety guidelines. The ILO provided technical assistance to the government and industry stakeholders in ensuring worker safety during the pandemic. The pandemic has also highlighted the need to address labor rights violations in the industry. The Bangladesh government issued directives to ensure workers' wages were paid during the pandemic, even if factories were closed. The government also extended the timeframe to renew labor contracts to provide job security.

Conclusion & Policy Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic had thoughtful implications for the global apparel industry, particularly in countries like Bangladesh, which has a substantial presence in garment manufacturing. This study analyzed the state of compliance in the Bangladesh RMG industry during the COVID-19 pandemic by using survey data from 100 operating-level workers from the export-oriented RMG industry located in Dhaka districts, especially in the Savar and Ashulia areas. This study evaluates the most important 36 compliance issues of RMG factories checklist developed by the DIFE, the government of Bangladesh, with the support from ILO divided into eight clusters: conditions of employment and service, maternity benefits, occupational health and safety, occupational hazard, compensation, and safety committee, welfare measures, working hour and leave, wages and payment thereof, social safety issues including group insurance, workers' participation in the company's profit, and provident fund. The study showed that occupational health and safety issues during the COVID-19 pandemic were fantastic, where some issues, including conditions of service, working hours, and payment of wages, were identified as the need for improvement. As noted earlier, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the Bangladesh RMG industry, exacerbating existing worker safety, labor rights, and economic sustainability challenges. The government of Bangladesh, industry stakeholders, and international organizations has also taken various measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and ensure compliance with safety guidelines, labor rights, and economic sustainability. However, more prompt actions need to be taken to address the systemic compliance issues in the industry to promote long-term sustainability, as organizations need to be compliant in all aspects to ensure global competitiveness. As this study unveils

noteworthy features of the compliance status of the Bangladesh RMG industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, the findings will provide inputs for policy design to improve the sector's compliance situation in the future.

Research Limitations:

The number of responses to the study could have been more extensive; the study's results must be interpreted with care. Some questions might also have been tough for laborers to respond to. This might have lessened the accuracy of the answers. Nonetheless, the study discloses significant features of compliance status in the Bangladesh RMG industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated compliance challenges within the Bangladesh readymade garment industry, particularly in labor standards, worker welfare, and ethical practices. Regulatory responses, supply chain transparency, and accountability emerged as crucial factors in mitigating these challenges. Future research should focus on assessing the long-term impacts of the pandemic on compliance and the effectiveness of measures taken to address these issues.

Future Direction:

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated compliance challenges within the Bangladesh readymade garment industry, particularly in labor standards, worker welfare, and ethical practices. Regulatory responses, supply chain transparency, and accountability emerged as crucial factors in mitigating these challenges. Future research should focus on assessing the long-term impacts of the pandemic on compliance and the effectiveness of measures taken to address these issues.

Managerial Implications:

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted the global apparel industry, particularly in countries with a significant presence in garment export, like Bangladesh. As this study reveals significant features of the compliance status of the Bangladesh RMG industry during a pandemic, managers can use the findings for policy design to enhance the sector's compliance situation in the future and for any unpleasant challenges.

Acknowledgments:

This study was conducted with generous financial support from the Jahangirnagar University Research Project Fund for FY 2022-2023. The author is thankful for the heartfelt support and cooperation from the Jahangirnagar University authority and field research assistants for their excellent work. The author is also grateful for the comments and suggestions made by the anonymous reviewers on improving the paper.

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