

Rights and Benefits of Female Workers under the Labor Law 2006: A Case Study in Dhaka City

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Abstract: This study investigates the Rights and Benefits of the Bangladesh Labor Law 2006 in safeguarding the rights and benefits of female garment workers in Dhaka City. Using a sample of 230 respondents across five industrial zones, the research was conducted from January to December 2024. Findings indicate considerable disparities between legal provisions and real-world practices, particularly in areas such as maternity leave, overtime compensation, rest facilities, and awareness of legal rights. While basic health and food facilities are widely available, only 72.5% of workers reported receiving maternity benefits, and over 60% worked beyond standard hours without proper compensation. The study emphasizes the urgent need for enhanced legal enforcement, improved factory-level compliance, and targeted awareness campaigns to ensure that female workers can fully realize their entitled rights. These insights offer practical implications for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and labor rights organizations aiming to foster gender-equitable working conditions in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

Introduction

The participation of women in Bangladesh's formal workforce has increased substantially over the past decades, particularly in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, which employs approximately 4 million workers, 80% of whom are women (BGMEA, 2023). This significant female workforce participation necessitates robust legal protections to ensure their rights and benefits.

The Bangladesh Labor Law 2006 (amended in 2013, 2018, and 2023) provides a comprehensive framework for workers' rights, with specific provisions for female workers. These include maternity benefits, restrictions on working hours, prohibition of discrimination, and provisions for workplace safety and health. The law mandates 16 weeks of paid maternity leave, prohibits night work without consent, requires separate toilets and childcare facilities, and forbids gender-based discrimination in wages and promotion opportunities.

Despite these legal provisions, numerous studies have documented the gap between law and practice. Rahman and Langford (2022) found that only 43% of female workers received full maternity benefits as stipulated by law. Khan (2023) reported that 67% of female workers in the RMG sector worked overtime without proper compensation. Similarly, Ahmed (2022) documented inadequate safety measures and sanitation facilities for female workers across various industries in Dhaka.

This research is particularly timely as Bangladesh continues to position itself as a competitive player in the global manufacturing industry while facing international scrutiny regarding labor practices and workers' rights. The country's graduation from least developed country (LDC) status, expected by 2026, may also affect trade preferences, potentially influencing labor standards and practices (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA], 2023).

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated many vulnerabilities faced by female workers, including job insecurity, reduced income, and inadequate social protection (ILO, 2023). As the nation recovers from the pandemic's economic impacts, understanding the current state of female workers' rights becomes even more crucial.

This study aims to assess the implementation of the Labor Law 2006 regarding the rights and benefits of female workers in Dhaka City, with a specific focus on maternity benefits, working hours and breaks, workplace safety and health, and protection against discrimination and harassment. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in protecting female workers' rights.

The findings of this study will contribute to the existing literature on labor rights in Bangladesh and provide valuable insights for policymakers, employers, labor unions, and international organizations working to improve the working conditions of female workers. By identifying specific gaps between legal provisions and actual implementation, this research aims to inform targeted interventions and policy reforms to enhance the protection of female workers' rights in Bangladesh.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to assess the implementation and effectiveness of the Bangladesh Labor Law 2006 in protecting the rights and benefits of female workers in Dhaka City.

METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the rights and benefits of female workers under the Labor Law 2006. The quantitative component involved a structured survey questionnaire, while the qualitative component included in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in Dhaka City to explore the role of garment industry authorities in protecting the rights of female workers in Dhaka City. The research was conducted from January 2024 to December 2024 and focused on five key industrial areas Tejgaon, Mirpur-Shewrapara, Gulshan-Badda, Uttara, and Mohammadpur selected for their high concentration of garment factories and accessibility.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 230 female workers participated in the study.

Data Collection Methods

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire covering demographics, labor law awareness, maternity benefits, working conditions, and discrimination experiences, which was pretested with 15 non-sample workers. Qualitative data collection involved 20 in-depth interviews with female workers, 5 focus group discussions with 8-10 participants each, and 15 key informant interviews with employers, labor inspectors, union representatives, and NGO officials working on labor rights. This methodological triangulation enhanced data validity and provided comprehensive insights into labor law implementation from multiple stakeholder perspectives.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, identifying key patterns and themes related to the implementation of labor laws and the experiences of female workers.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted following ethical guidelines, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1. This profile of female garment workers in Dhaka City reveals important patterns in age, marital status, education, and work roles. A significant majority (97%) of respondents are married, indicating major family responsibilities. Most workers (87.5%) fall within the 20–29 age range, reflecting the industry's preference for younger labor. In terms of education, the vast majority (97.5%) have completed Secondary School Certificate (SSC), with very few having higher education. Regarding job roles, the majority work as operators (63%), followed by helpers (23.5%) and ironers (10%). Very few women hold supervisory or managerial positions, showing limited upward mobility within the garment industry.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=230)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Marital Status		
Unmarried	6	2.5
Married	223	97.0
Divorced/Widowed	1	0.5
Age Group		
20-29 years	201	87.5
30-39 years	26	11.5
40-49 years	3	1.0
Education Level		
SSC	224	97.5
HSC	5	2.0
Degree or equivalent	1	0.5

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Position		
Operator	145	63.0
Helper	54	23.5
Ironman	23	10.0
Supervisor	6	2.5
Cutter Master	1	0.5
Manager	1	0.5

Working Conditions and Rights Awareness

The research findings reveal interesting patterns regarding working conditions experienced by female garment workers in Dhaka City. As presented in Table 2, a majority of workers report their working conditions as "very good" across various dimensions. Contrary to expectations based on previous literature, an overwhelming majority of respondents rated their working environment as "very good" (97%), with similar positive ratings for infrastructure facilities (92.5%) and leave benefits (92.5%). For overtime facilities, while most workers (90.5%) rated them as "good," only 3.5% considered them "very good," and a small but notable 5.5% rated them as "poor."

Table 2: Working Conditions Reported by Female Workers (N=230)

Working Condition Factor	Very Good (%)	Good (%)	Neutral (%)	Poor (%)	Very Poor (%)
Working environment	97.0	1.0	2.0	0	0
Infrastructure facilities	92.5	2.5	4.5	0.5	0
Leave benefits	92.5	5.0	2.5	0	0
Overtime facilities	3.5	90.5	0.5	5.5	0

Implementation of Labor Law 2006

Adherence to Labor Law

When asked about their employers' adherence to the Labor Law 2006, the vast majority of workers expressed positive opinions, as shown in Table 3. A strong majority of respondents (89%) strongly agreed that their establishments strictly follow labor laws, with an additional 8.5% agreeing with this statement. Only 2.5%

remained neutral, and notably, no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Table 3: Perception of Labor Law Implementation (N=230)

Statement	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
My establishment strictly follows labor laws	89.0	8.5	2.5	0	0

Benefits and Facilities Provided

The data indicates in Figure 1 that the majority of workers receive essential facilities. Health facilities were reported by all respondents (100%), followed by proper food and water facilities (80.4%), healthcare services (58.7%), other facilities (34.8%), and rest facilities (32.6%). These findings suggest that while basic health and sustenance needs are being met for most workers, other facilities, such as rest areas, could be improved.

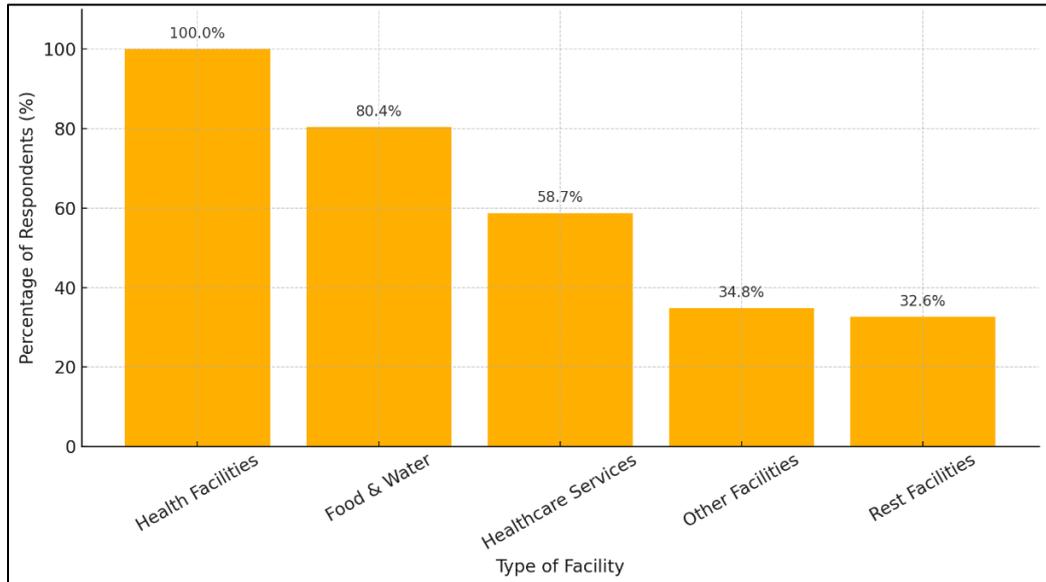


Figure 1: Benefits Provided by Factory Management

Fairness in Wage Determination and Overtime Payment

Tables 4 and 5 present workers' perceptions of wage fairness and overtime compensation. An overwhelming majority of workers (90%) perceived their wage determination as completely fair, and an even higher percentage (96%) considered their overtime compensation completely sufficient. This suggests that most employers are meeting or exceeding the workers' expectations regarding compensation.

Table 4: Fairness in Wage Determination (N=230)

Perception of Wage Fairness	Frequency	Percentage
Completely fair	207	90.0
Somewhat low but tolerable	22	9.5
Minimum wage law not followed	0	0
No proper rules for wages	1	0.5
Others	0	0

Table 5: Fairness in Overtime Compensation (N=230)

Perception of Overtime Compensation	Frequency	Percentage
Completely sufficient	221	96.0
Somewhat low	8	3.5
Not paid according to the minimum wage law	0	0
No proper rules for payment	1	0.5
Others	0	0

Training and Education Facilities

Most workers (90.5%) reported that regular training is provided in their workplaces, indicating a strong commitment to skill development among employers shown in Table 6. However, a small percentage (1%) noted a lack of training, suggesting room for improvement in some establishments.

Table 6: Provision of Training and Education Facilities (N=230)

Training and Education Facilities	Frequency	Percentage
Regular training provided	208	90.5
Some training provided	12	5.0
Lack of training	2	1.0
Don't know	8	3.5
Others	0	0

Benefits and Rights Provided to Female Workers Under the Labor Law 2006

The study examined the specific benefits provided to female workers under the Labor Law 2006, as illustrated in Figure 2. The results show that all workers (100%) receive health service benefits, while 80% receive safety measures. Training and skill development facilities are provided to 79% of workers, and maternity leave is available to 72.5% of respondents. These findings indicate that while many benefits are widely available, implementation is not uniform across all establishments, particularly regarding maternity leave.

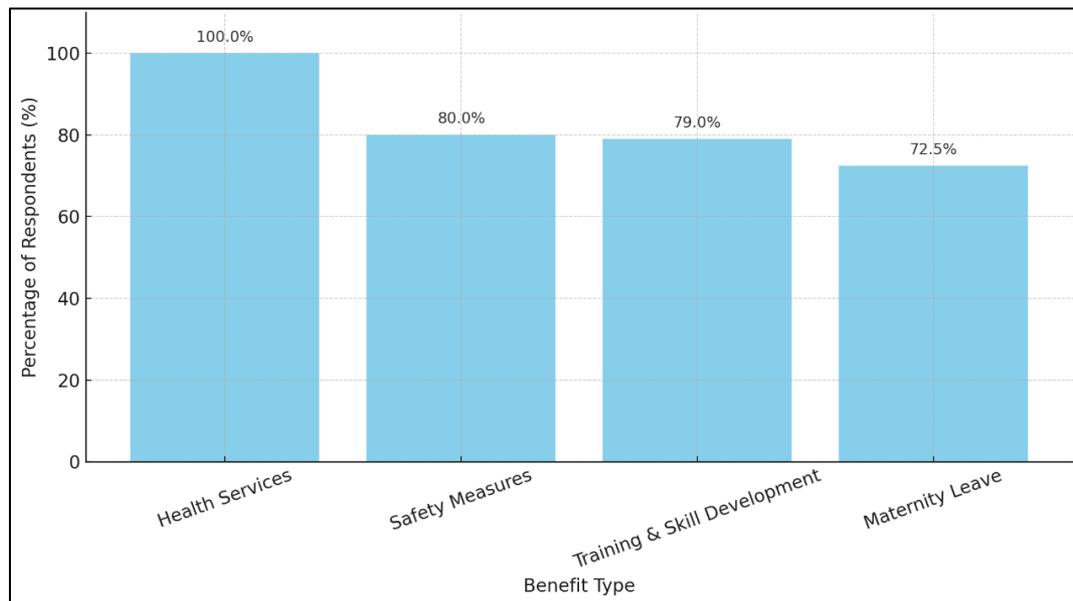


Figure 2: Benefits Provided to Female Workers

Hiring Criteria in the Garment Industry

The study also investigated the criteria used for hiring workers in the garment industry, as shown in Figure 3. Experience was identified as the most important criterion (87.5%), followed by skills (72.5%), physical strength (67.5%), and gender (65%). This suggests that while professional qualifications like experience and skills are paramount, physical attributes and gender still play significant roles in hiring decisions.

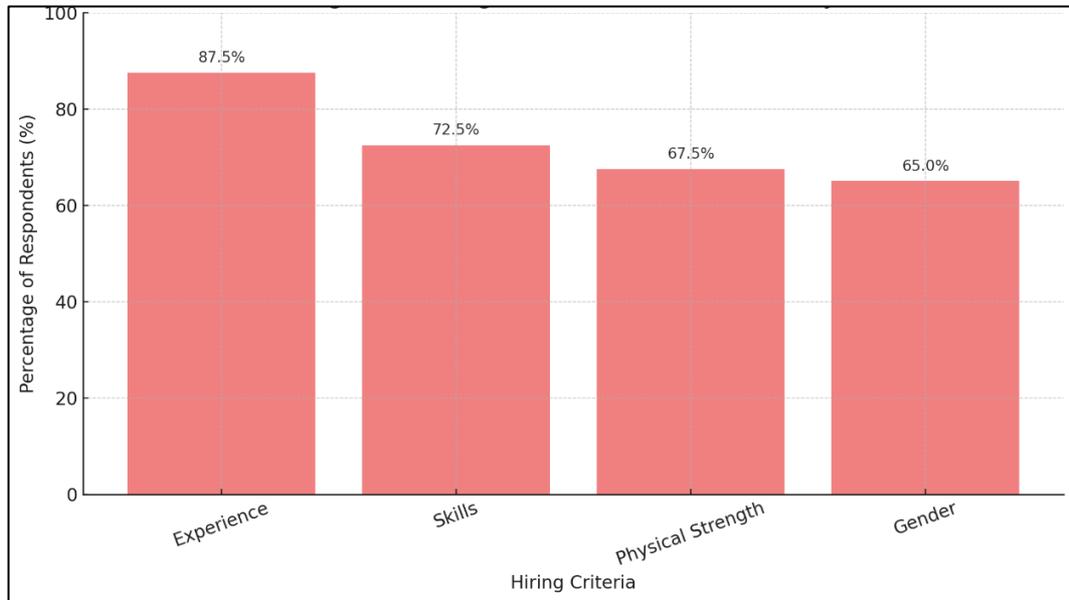


Figure 3: Hiring Criteria in the Garment Industry

DISCUSSION

This study sheds light on the practical enforcement of the Bangladesh Labor Law 2006, especially in the context of female garment workers in Dhaka City. Despite the existence of robust legal provisions for maternity leave, workplace safety, and fair compensation, implementation remains uneven across factories (Rahman, 2021; Islam & Hossain, 2022).

Most workers reported satisfaction with workplace infrastructure, leave benefits, and wage fairness. This suggests that external pressures, particularly from global buyers and post-Rana Plaza reforms, have led to improvements in compliance among more visible factories (Barrett et al., 2022; Kabeer et al., 2022). However, selective adherence remains a key concern. For instance, while 100% of respondents

received health benefits, only 72.5% confirmed access to paid maternity leave, revealing a persistent implementation gap (Chowdhury & Abrar, 2021).

Furthermore, the low percentage of women in supervisory or managerial roles (only 3.5%) reflects the gendered division of labor and restricted mobility within the industry (Hossain & Ahmed, 2020; Siddiqi, 2022). Training is widespread but often limited to operational roles, lacking upward mobility potential. This reinforces the "sticky floor" phenomenon where women remain concentrated in lower-tier positions despite years of service (Kabeer, 2019).

Notably, while 89% of respondents strongly agreed that labor laws are followed in their workplace, the concurrent need for better rest facilities and uneven training access hints at underreporting, limited legal literacy, or fear of employer retaliation (Islam & Hossain, 2022; Tanjeem, 2021).

Lastly, the hiring process still considers gender and physical strength alongside experience and skills. This indicates that informal biases remain embedded in recruitment practices despite formal labor protections (Moazzem, 2023; Rahman & Langford, 2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Recommendations for Implementing Labor Rights

Based on the study findings and workers' suggestions, several recommendations emerge for enhancing labor rights implementation:

1. **Enhanced Work Environment:** The overwhelming recommendation by workers (95.5%) for improved work environments should be prioritized, with specific attention to rest facilities, which showed lower implementation rates (32.6%). Factory management should invest in ergonomic workstations, adequate ventilation, proper lighting, and noise reduction measures to create more comfortable and sustainable working conditions (Kabeer et al., 2022).
2. **Comprehensive Maternity Benefit Implementation:** The gap in maternity leave provision (72.5% coverage) requires targeted interventions to ensure all female workers receive this legally mandated benefit. This should include awareness campaigns for both employers and workers about maternity

rights, simplified application procedures, and monitoring mechanisms to track compliance (Chowdhury & Abrar, 2021).

3. **Gender-Responsive Career Development:** Given the severe underrepresentation of women in supervisory and management positions (only 3.5%), factories should implement gender-responsive career development programs with clear progression pathways. This includes targeted leadership training for women, mentorship programs, and quota systems for promoting qualified women into supervisory roles (Tanjeem, 2021).
4. **Quality Training Programs:** While the quantity of training appears adequate (90.5% reporting regular training), emphasis should shift to quality and relevance. Training programs should expand beyond operational skills to include technical and managerial competencies, with specific attention to breaking down gender stereotypes in skill development (Ahmed et al., 2022).
5. **Strengthened Enforcement Mechanisms:** Despite limited worker emphasis on enforcement (0.5%), strengthening regulatory oversight remains essential. This includes regular unannounced inspections, meaningful penalties for non-compliance, protection for whistleblowers, and accessible grievance mechanisms that allow workers to report violations without fear of retaliation (Rahman & Langford, 2023).
6. **Participatory Monitoring Systems:** Factories should establish worker-management committees with meaningful female representation to continuously monitor working conditions, identify improvement areas, and ensure appropriate implementation of labor rights. These committees should have decision-making authority rather than merely advisory roles (Siddiqi, 2022).

LIMITATIONS

This study faces several methodological limitations that should inform the interpretation of its findings. First, potential response bias may exist where workers hesitate to express negative opinions about employers, particularly given the power imbalances in employment relationships. Second, the study's focus on formal establishments may miss conditions in smaller, less regulated workplaces where

violations may be more prevalent. Third, the reliance on self-reported perceptions rather than objective measurements of working conditions limits comparative analysis against international standards. Fourth, the broad categorization of training without assessing content, duration, or effectiveness presents an incomplete picture of skill development opportunities. Future research should employ mixed methods approaches, incorporating both qualitative interviews and quantitative measurements to provide more comprehensive insights into labor rights implementation.

CONCLUSION

This study on female workers' rights under Bangladesh's Labor Law 2006 reveals improvements alongside persistent challenges. While workers reported high satisfaction with working conditions, wages, and benefits, significant gaps remain in implementing specific provisions, particularly maternity benefits. The findings suggest that labor laws have improved conditions in formal establishments more visible to regulatory authorities and international buyers, but continued vigilance and more effective enforcement mechanisms are necessary to ensure comprehensive implementation of women's labor rights across the sector.

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