

Social and Physical Problems of Readymade Garment Art Workers for Having Fire Accident in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The ready-made garments (RMG) industry creates an important role to widen the socio-economic expansion of Bangladesh. In this paper, the focus is on the comprehensive understanding of the factors of committing fire related accidents in Bangladesh. Specifically, this paper attempts to analyze the disability nature and psycho-social problems faced by women victims' garments sectors of Bangladesh through an integrative perspective. The study is intended to explore financial suffering of victims during any accident in RMG sectors. The research has been conducted by using qualitative data collection methods. The main mode of inquiry used participant observation along with a variety of tools and techniques, such as in-depth interviews, informal conversation, key informant interviews, and listening to stories from the garment workers, injured, survived and members of bereaved families of the deceased garment workers. It reveals that the secret of the fire could not be discovered as most of the time the garments management and authority try to avoid the causes and reasons of fire occurring issues. In most of the accidents it is observed that only staffs and workers are burnt and succumbed to death but very few officers died or burnt. In other cases it is found that the death and partially disabled burned and victim's staffs and their dependent families are neglected and some days later forgotten by the garments authority. The study also found that those victims who lost their family members, disabled members and the injured staffs receive insufficient support and financial compensation.

Keywords: Social problems; Socio-economy; Art works; Psycho-social problems; Financial sufferings

Introduction

Socio-economic development of Bangladesh is largely dependent on the readymade garment (RMG) industry nowadays. Besides, this sector includes around 4,200 factories and adds 80% of the country's total foreign earnings amounting to US \$24.49 billion in the last financial year [BGMEA, 2015]. More than 4 million people are engaged in the garment industry, of which 80% are women [1]. Besides, there are enormous number of female workers, the RMG sector also affects other industries like fabrics, packaging, banking, transportation, real estate, hotel and tourism, etc. [2]. The readymade garments industry works as a development sector of Bangladesh, has been building a central contribution upgrading the country and its financial system which is now the only principal export earner for Bangladesh. Textiles and clothing account for about 85% of total export earnings of Bangladesh. Out of which, 76% comes from the apparel sector [3-6].

Due to geo-political and territorial location, Bangladesh is widely known as one of the most disaster vulnerable countries in the world with vast population. It has experienced numerous natural and human induced disasters because of high variability of climate change and lack of consciousness of people over the decades including sea level rise, cyclones, storm, flooding, land erosion, water logging, salinity and firing in buildings. The impact include loss of life, loss of biodiversity, inundation of dwelling homes and homesteads, damage of infrastructure and economic assets and devastation of livelihood of people especially the poor, vulnerable and destitute living in environmentally fragile areas [7-10].

The major influential studies, Nasreen exposed that although a disaster touches all sphere of people life, there are sex variation to defenselessness and resilience during crisis periods. Women and girls in the catastrophe level area face new problems due to their sex identity's a result, women and girls of deprived minor households turn into more helpless and anxious due to disaster. Women experience from poverty, hunger, starvation, finances crises, ecological degradation,

health related problems, anxiety and befall victims of hostility and political crises. The sex partition of labour become important as gender roles are often armored and even intensified-due to the extra work and changes in ecological brought on by a disaster. It has been argued that desecration of women right have become more well-known due to numerous emergencies formed by environment change in Bangladesh (Figure 1).

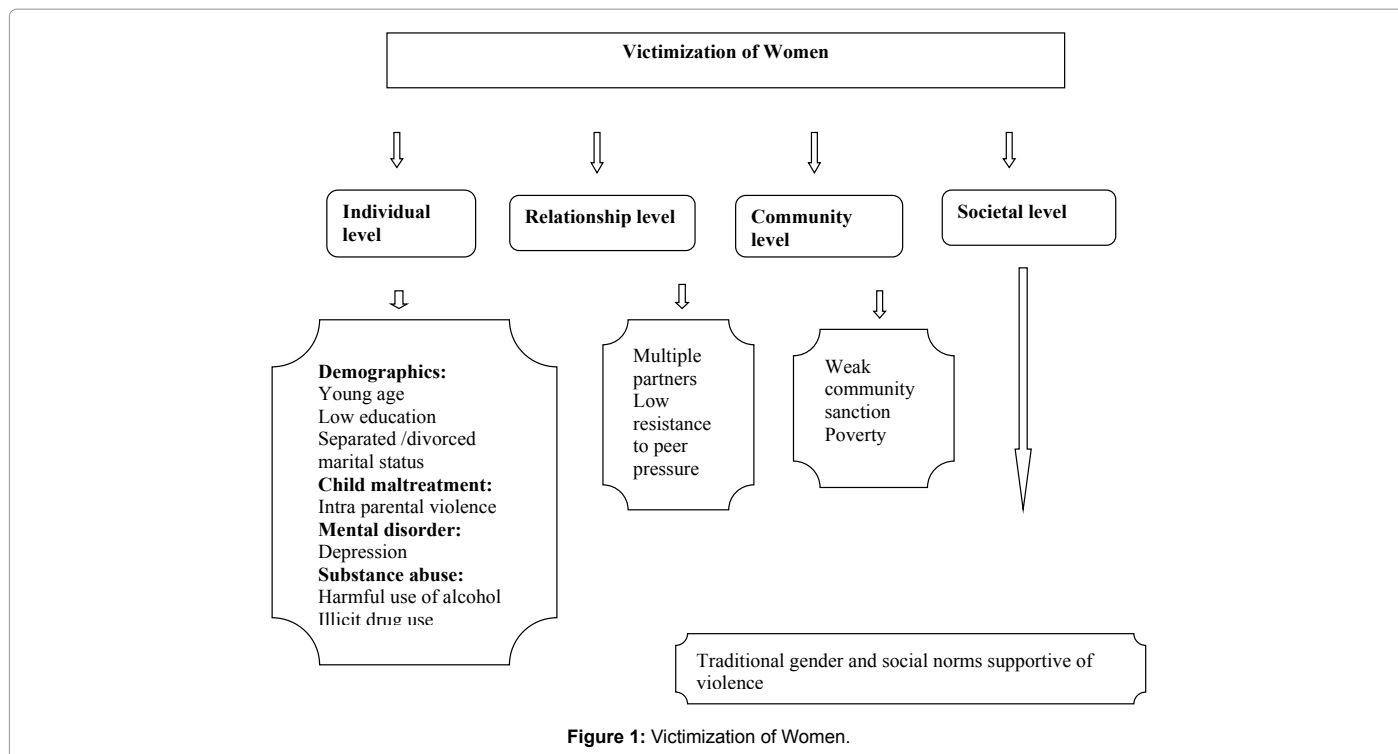
In 1978 there were only 12 industries, the garment industry now includes 5,600 factories of a range of sizes and about 4.4 million people, mostly women, employees in this sector. Around 20 million people are honestly and ultimately relying on RMG sector for their urgent occupation [4,11-15]. Despite numerous difficulties faced by the sector over the past few years, it has impressed a suitable position in the world market and reserved displaying wonderful performance. Despite the impressive development of the RMG industry and its brilliant expectations, there are prosperous challenges that have to be surpassed. One of the largest challenges presently faced by the RMG industry is to make sure better work-related wellbeing and security situation for the millions of garment workers. RMG industry is to guarantee healthier working strength and safety condition for the millions of garment workers. In Bangladesh, advanced manufacture and better financial profits are considered as the key target rather than other most important considerations in industries. The even short consequence is determined on the common price in terms of influences on workers,

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workplaces, society, and environment. The impersonations are infected by the unsuited appeal of life decisions, pain, and suffering, chance expenses and questions of fairness [4,16,17].

The estimates of direct economic costs and benefits are usually made keeping aside from the ethical liabilities to the society as a whole. Industrialists often consider the regulatory compliances and related administrative costs deterrent to productivity. As such occupational health and safety considerations remains ignored. As the issue of workplace safety has been ushered to the onwards due to the two egregious mishaps, the Tazreen fire and the Rana Plaza collapse of recent time, all stakeholders and investors are driven to act appropriately. Several institutions such as the Bangladesh Accord on fire and building safety, the Alliance for Bangladesh worker safety and national plan of action have been designed to ameliorate building and fire safety of Bangladesh’s garment industry w saddening occurrences. Maximum workers in these garment factories are almost illiterate and they have very limited knowledge of human rights, working conditions and labor standards [4,18,19].

In this paper, the focus is on the comprehensive understanding of the factors of committing fire relted accidents in Bangladesh. Specifically, this paper attempts analyze the disability nature and pshy-social problems faced by women victim’s garments sectors of Bangladesh through an integrative perspective. The study is intended to explore financial suffering victims during any accident in RMG sectors. The following section of the article deals with the methodology of the study. Final section explains the result and discussion of the study. Last section concludes the article.

Research Method

The research was conducted by using qualitative data collection methods. The main mode of inquiry will be used participant observation along with a variety of tools and techniques, such as in-

depth interviews, informal conversation, key informant interviews, and listening to stories from the garment workers. Information was gathered about way of life, livelihoods and some aspects of daily life of the study population. It is important to mention here that family was considered as unit of analysis in this study.

Study Design and Study Area

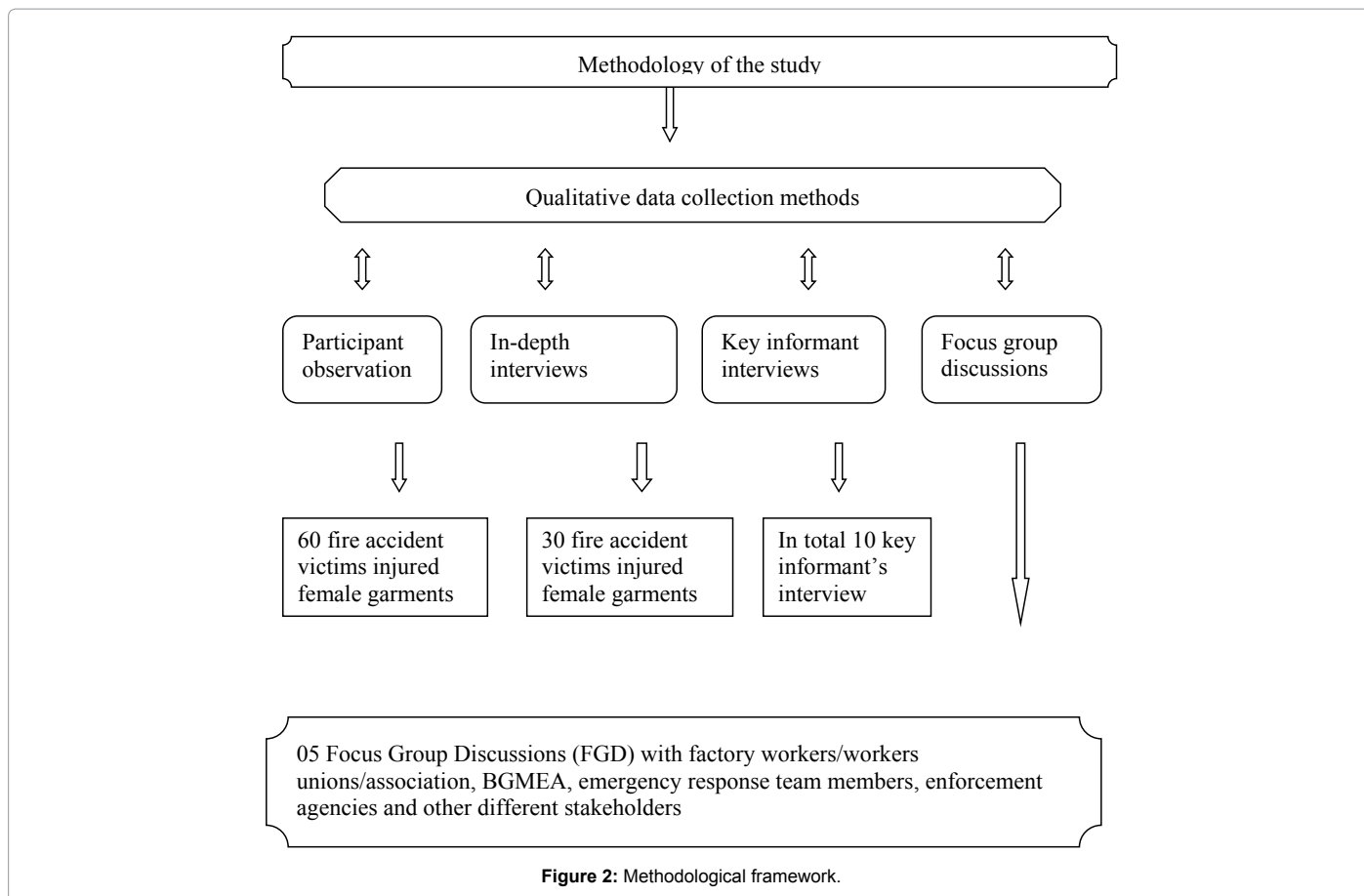
The study was designed to find out the various anthropological determinants which were associated with suffering and vulnerability of the garment workers and their health risks. With a view to address the issue, a descriptive study design was used, mainly involving with the participation of victim’s women and their families. In addition, to collect information from the victim’s women and household members of the affected disabled, spot witness, emergency rescue team/units to engage in incident and healthcare service provider’s information from the study area. The study was covered to target the fire accident victim disabled poor women and their families (Figure 2).

Study Population, Sampling Procedure and Size

Three garment industries were selected for this study. The study populations were the poor fire victims disabled persons and their household members living with him/her in the selected slum community location. Medical doctor, emergency rescue team members, NGO workers were also included as the study population. The samples were selected randomly. In total about 60 fire accident victims injured female garments workers and other different stakeholders were selected as a study population [20,21].

Data analysis

Discussion in the FGD and In-depth interview, KIIs, tape recorded cassettes – all were carefully examined, edited and transcribed. The data computations were done by specified classificatory and categorized format for qualitative analysis.



Results and Discussion

This section illustrates the major information of the person's socio-economic and demographic characteristics. It also focuses the health care seeking behavior, wounded and disability and socio demographic consequences, victims and their families socio-psychological changes, change in intra-house hold and inter house hold relationship, dependencies and disassociation of fire accident disability and its consequences on livelihood status of the accident victims, and their families. The following tables and figures have been prepared on the basis of field study as well as primary sources of data collection [22,23].

Socio-economic characteristics

This section has defined the age distribution of fire related accidents victim's education, occupation and as well as the living standard of the study households. The socio-economic parameters have been used to disabled person's livelihood status. (Table 1)

Age distribution and Religion status of the accident victims

The total study sample was 60 (victims who suffered from fire related accident) of different age groups. Figure 3 shows that out of 60 victims, 28 (46.6%) belongs to age range from 25-29, 10 (16.6%) from 30-34 age category, and 7 (11.6%) and 3(5%) from the age of 35-39 and 40-44 years respectively. The key observation of the chart is that 63.6% of the samples are belongs to 20-24 and 25-29 age groups together which almost two-thirds of the total sample.

The largest percentage of the working force was young and energetic who lost their working abilities and became vulnerable due to

fire related accident. The individual family as well as country both lost a countable working resource and they became burden of the families as well as country. Figure 3 shows that 60% of the respondents belong to Muslim community, 21% from Hindu, 16% from the Buddhist and 3% of the respondents were Christian. The biggest percentage of the working staffs were Muslims and second religious staffs were Hindu. However, it was observed that all types of religious groups are working in garments sector. It represents good communal harmony among them.

Marital status and educational status of the respondents

The Figure 4 shows that 70% of the victims were married and they had families. About 30% victims were unmarried, of them who lived with their parents in the working area. The data indicated that 70% women and man had family members who become vulnerable and burden of the families. The age ranges of those women revealed that they are tender aged children and parents were vulnerable.

The Figure 4 reveals that a significant portion of the total respondents (the 11.33 percent) could not enroll in academic institution but they could only write their name. The significant number of respondents 60% passed primary level. In secondary level 16% respondents enrolled and only 2% victims obtained SSC. There was no graduate victim among the respondents. The study shows that only lower staff level victims were found but no officers suffered or victimized by fire related accidents. The study also remarked that lower level staffs were affected or burnt, but higher level educated staffs were not burnt.

Income status of respondents

Figure 5 indicates that out of 60 victims 20 staffs received income

Main characteristics	Variables	Highest	Lowest
Age distribution	20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39 and 40-44 years old	25-29 years	40-44 years
Religion status	Muslim, Hindu, Buddha, Christian	Muslim	Christian
Marital status	Married, Unmarried	Married	Unmarried
Educational status	Literate, Primary, Secondary, Higher secondary, Graduation	Primary	Graduation
Income status	1000-5000, 6000-10000, 11000-15000, 16000-20000 TK	6000-10000	16000-20000
Factors of committing fire related accidents and injuries	Jumping from room, getting down stair, getting down bamboos	Jumping from room	Getting down stair
Nature of accident victims	Spot death, hospital death, critical stage high injury, severe injury, minor injury	Spot death	Critical stage high injury
Location of injuries during fire related accident	Wrist and neck, eyes and hand, hand and legs, wrist-legs and head, wrist-head and hand, wrist and head, backbone and leg, head and hand	wrist-head and hand	Wrist-legs and head
Disability nature of the victims	Physical, mental, sight, sexual disability	Physical	Mental
Psycho-social problems faced by victims	Sexual disability partial, sexual disability not face, unmarried, socially discouraged and divorced due to disable	Sexual disability partial	Divorced due to disable
Different types sufferings	Financial, physiological disturbance, social declass and dependent others	Financial	Dependent others

Table 1: Major finding of the study.

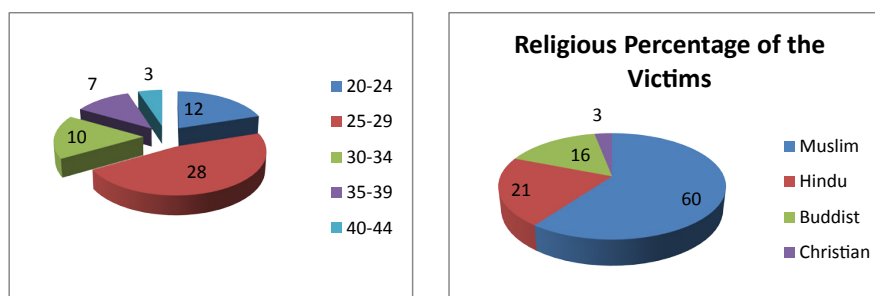


Figure 3: Age distribution and Religion status of the victims.

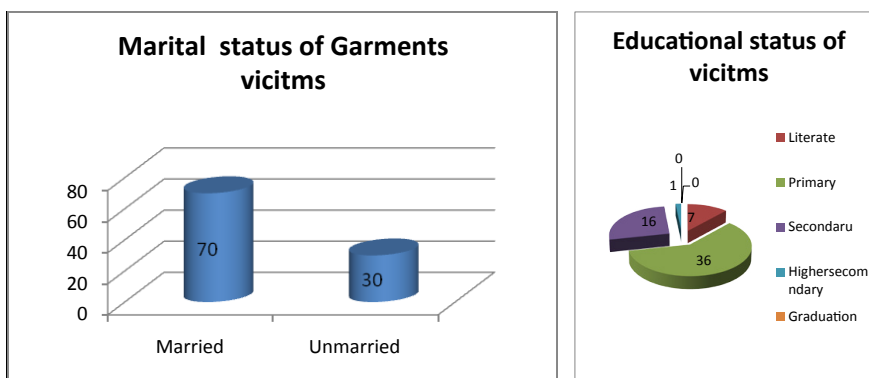


Figure 4 Marital status and Educational status of the respondents.

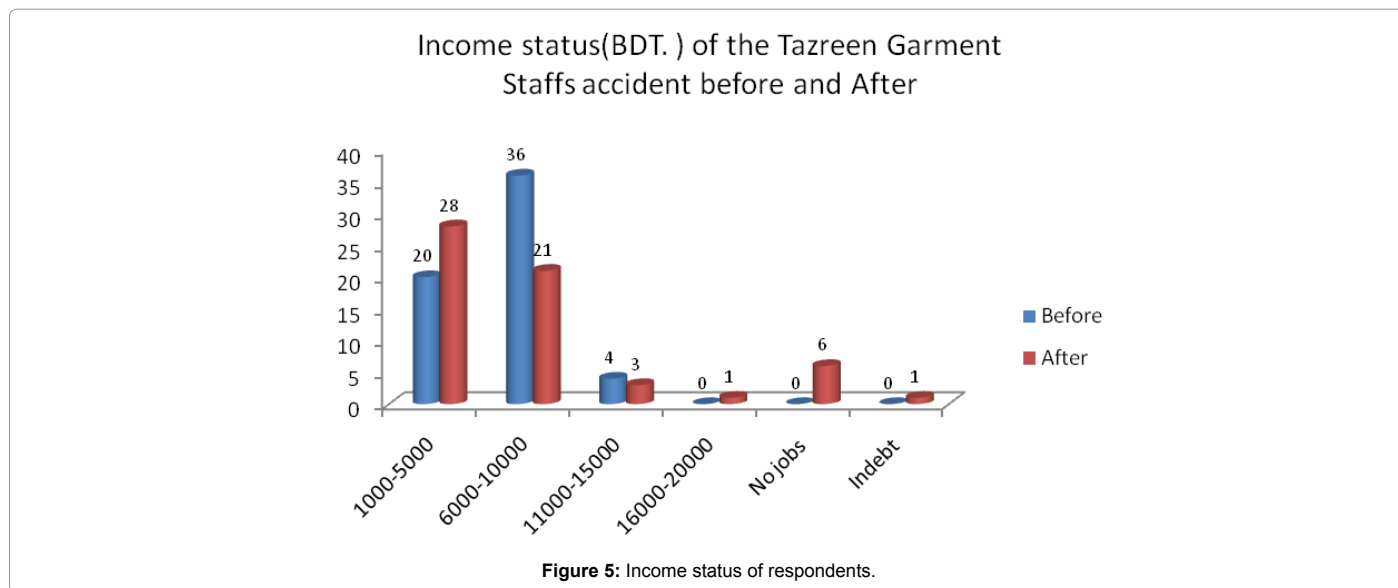
Tk.1000-5000 per month before accident, but after accident it is now 28 staffs received such income which means 8 more staff lost their income.

It was also found that 36 staff received Tk. 6000-10000 per month but after accident, it was 21 that mean 15 staffs lost their income from 6000-10000 slabs. Before accident it was only 4 staffs who received Tk. 11000-15000 but now 3 are receiving salary. There was also found that after accident, one staff salary/month has increased from Tk.16000-20000 slab but before accident none of the victims received the 16000-

20000 slabs. This is a bit exceptional. One of the victims is now living on other's support.

Factors of committing fire related accidents and injuries

The study shows that the victims were injured due to coming down from the spot of firing. They tried to get down and escape out from their own working room specially the women and girls were stumbled due to hurry and shocks of fire flames, they lost their sense and ways of



getting out from the terrible flame (scared of blaze). Figure 6 indicated that, three major ways they tried to escape themselves and it was found that a significant number (68%) of victims came out by jumping from the rooms. Another 18% victims came out by using the narrow stairs where they received injury and hurt. It was also reported that 11% victims used bamboo as an aid of escaping fire or getting down quickly as means of saving lives from the burning spot of the multi storied buildings.

The above data give a message that the blaze building had narrow stairs. Compared to staff capacity the building had occupied over crowded employees who work in the congested buildings. Perhaps, the buildings do not have any alarming bell or provision which the staff could use to escape from the devastating combustion. May be there was alternative exit ways where the staff could use [24]. To guess the nature of escape and getting down from the blaze point, it can be commented that the garment had no fire fighting safe plan or the other arrangement to escape emergently. Every garment should arrange or set up fire fighting appliances or well equipped of each working rooms and alternative stairs or exit plan must be included/designed. There should have minimum excess of fire fighting appliances, safe design for emergency exit, due to fire or other natural and artificial devastation.

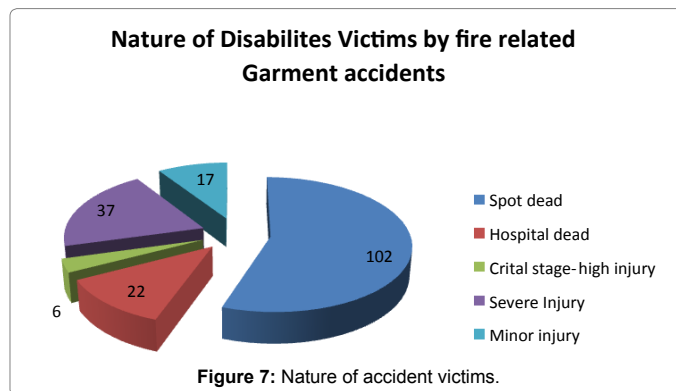
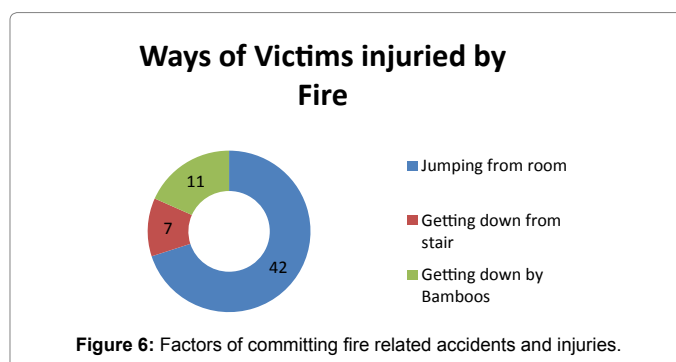
Nature of accident victims

Figure 6 expresses the disability nature and fatalities of the garment staff during the day and the following periods of fire related accident occurred in the garment. When the fire and fire related accident occurred in garments, all staffs were working in their respective room and station. Inside the room together 102 staffs were burned and spot dead. The rest who were close to the stair, tried to left the room running away but a number of them jumped through the window and fallen in the ground which also increased the critical injuries and wounded become many of them had succumbed to death (Figure 7).

A large quantity of the wounded staffs were admitted to hospital but 22 of them died, 37 staffs were severely injured and sent to hospital and 17 received injury minor and they were given first aid in the local pharmacy and health treatment center.

Location of injuries during fire related accident

The findings of the study reflected that fire related accident some



received injury in many organs of the body like hands, legs, heads and chest. Data shows that many of them received injury in hands, legs, head as well as in other limbs. Figure 8 shows that 12 victims wounded in backbone, heads and hands. Moreover, 10 victims wounded in backbone and legs, 7 victims injured in hands and legs, and 6 victims injured in eyes and hands when they jumped from the roofs. It was also reported that 6 victims injured in chest when they jumped through the windows.

What messages are being conveyed to the policy makers, the garment owners and government administration that fire related accidents or other calamities like earth quake, the garment management

should keep in mind that save and secure attempts should be taken to overcome the devastating events. The structure must be prepared by well equipments, safety exit location and safe movement of the employees. There must be a demonstration at certain interval so that staffs can remember so as to take appropriate measures when such type of disaster occurs. The early preparedness can save lives and safe life and properties (Figure 9).

Disability nature of the victims: Figure 10 shows that a significant number of victims 28 (45%) were injured and become physically disabled. 8 (14%) employees become mentally disabled and 6 (10%) of them were sight disabled. Besides above this disabled, 4 more injured employees were sexually disabled. The pie chart shows that 75% of the total victims (60) had succumbed disabilities in different ways. These disabled employees are facing high dependency on others in term of social, financial and physiological help and mental support and services.

The key message was that significant number of employees suffered for vulnerabilities and helpless which ultimately let them became permanently disabled and burden on their families for their livelihood.

Psycho-social problems faced by victims: Following Figure 10 shows that almost 55% of the total victims suffered from sexual disabilities. A small number of victims (10) were able to enjoy performing sexual activities although they were injured physically. In the study it was also found that 5 victims were divorced and their husbands had left them. Another 5 girls were unmarried and they are

now facing social problems to get marry because they are mentally and physically weak and vulnerable.

They need to look out for accompany for helping and supporting. Even on the opposite site male partners are also showing less interest to make them life partner as because of their disabilities and vulnerabilities. 8 victims felt discouraged socially and they were found frustrated. The key message of the study was that a number of victims lost their social and biological means of interest and prosperity.

Different types of suffering: Figure 11 indicated that 48 victims (80%) of the total were facing financial crisis and dependency. Another 36 of the total victims were facing physiological disturbances and 12 victims' positions were worse said the respondents during interviews. 8 victims were completely dependent on others mercy.

The data indicated that a majority of the victims were financially vulnerable and dependent on assistance for leading lives. A few of the victims were provided assistance for periodic mitigation of accident lead suffering but presently, the financial and social shocks and insolvency could not be relieved even it will not be fulfilled in near future because there is no long term rehabilitation plan [25].

Loss of job due to fire accident: Figure 12 indicated that 60 victims

Locations of injuries of Victims

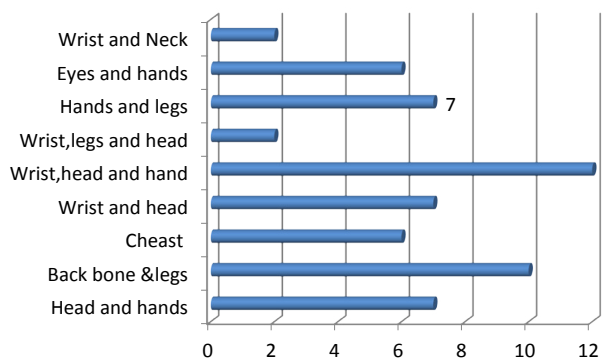


Figure 8: Location of injuries during fire related accident.

Disabilities Nature of Fire related Accident Victims

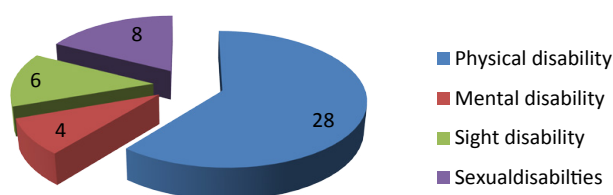


Figure 9: Disability nature of the victims.

Pshcho-social problems faced by victims

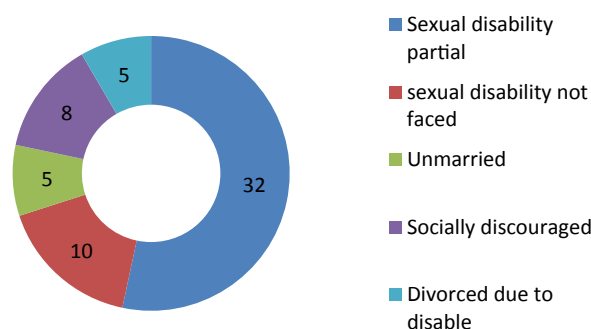


Figure 10: Psycho-social problems faced by victims.

Different type of Suffering nature

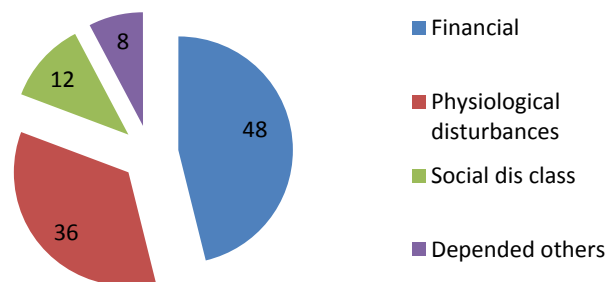


Figure 11: Suffering of financial insolvency.

Status of Job holding by victims

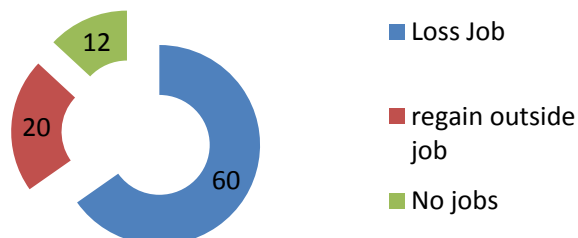


Figure 12: Loss of job due to fire accident.

(100%) of the Tazreen garment lost their regular jobs from the factory because this factory was closed. It was known that 20 victims of the total were offered new jobs from other organizations and helping charitable or philanthropic institutions.

It was also explored that 12 victims have still no jobs. They are completely vulnerable and fully dependent on other's assistance. The assistance is coming from the close relatives and husbands/wives or the kind hearted men of the societies. The key message of the data shows that after victims that 100% injured and disabled fire burned employees lost their jobs and facilities from the Tazreen garments. The policy makers and the Government should look after those victims and should have a rehabilitation programs and plan for treatment and for their rehabilitation.

Causes of fire accident - A case of Tazrin garment: It was originated from the research that there are few studies how fire accident took place. It might have diverse opinions. The existing sufferers mentioned dissimilar opinions. They said the deprivation of right and lack of caution of the responsible human being who should look the fire issues were not care of and not near at the spot after happening accidents. Some said that planned attitudes may be liable for fire accident; someone mentioned that owners had planned to create fire accident. The inadequate of bank indebtedness, someone mentioned it was a planned game. Many cases it was informed that Garment owners have carelessness to their staff when they are fallen into liability or they are in economic emergency or loss.

Fire occurring, its' fatal devastation and immediate consequences: The research team also investigated the detail fact occurring Tazreen garment fire related accident. In 24 November of 2012 mentioned the FGD respondents. One of them mentioned that "the day of 24 November in the morning, we went to attend garments early with hilarious mood that the day was 09Moharram and in the local area there was a religious congress called "Wage Mahfil" so the garment management will give early leave to all the staffs for the two main occasions but unfortunately, the event occurred completely opposite. The day of fire occurring was a panic and completely terrible memory in our lives".

They also added that "we became scare of remembering the brutal picture, the horrible movement of our colleagues/staffs that I had fallen under the victim list and the uncontrolled fire flames and devastative evacuations what we will never forget". It was regular schedule that Garment office time will be started at 8 am and till to be continued

up to 5 pm. But in the morning at 3.30pm it was declared that that day they had to do an additional 3 more hours overtime due to busy shipment of order delivery and employees had to stay at the garment. They also expressed that "at 5 pm we found our higher authority at the premises of garment working floor. Just after his visit, the fire broke out at devastating mood. At about 6.30 pm, the fire started and due to high densely smokes in the inner floor of the garment, we could not see anything. All the staffs and workers were at a loss, we were trying heart and soul to escape from fire shocks".

While getting down by stairs in the bottom, it was observed at the ground floor which was used for Store room/ware house of the garment, kept threads and readymade order shipment materials and logistics, smoke and fire flames was started to burst-out, the gate was locked. The fire flames were crippling towards upper floor and burned step by step in the first, second and third floor at the twinkle of eyes. Soon with scurry, "we came back to riding on 6 and 7 floors to escape ourselves from the burning flames but we found that the gate was also closed. Hence then we were keeping out by jumping through window, breaking grills of window and breaking adjusting fans, additional exit roots, using Bamboos, external pipes fitting with wall etc."

The victim respondents expressed with shock that it was ringing fire alarm, "we went to see the key point and asked officers to understand the fire issue. The officers mentioned that nothing has happened fire fighting related demonstration is going on and you should keep calm and quite. We witnessed that someone coming down with bamboos 11, jumping another 20 and crawling or by pipe about 7 victims. When I came down again in the bottom floor Mr. Mohsin sir shouted me to go back to 4th floor and we then came down by bamboo but seriously I was wounded as someone pushing me. We narrowly escaped ourselves but we did not like to burn and die. After jumping, I thought that there was fifty-fifty chance to life, but we got alive but if we stood on the floor than we had to die".

The workers described the wretched illustration. To escape from the devastation, the employees selected the high dangerous route to getting down. Fire starting from the bottom and it reached up to all 24 rooms and full factory burned into ashes [26,27]. Fire continuously burning, fire brigade reached and tried to stop firing but failed and at the end, all were lost. Most of the local people stayed distant and observed the vast devastation and other surrounded garment factories were also worriedly awaiting and faced the critical periods and at last the firemen provided fire escaping ladder support to get rid of.

Consequences

It was proved that every fire occurrence make hammering to huge economic assets. The garment owners bring to a close the garments after occurring fire accident. The physical assets like building and other garment machineries and equipment accessories are burnt into ashes. The most important thing is that every firing causes massive losses of death toil and untold suffering of victims. Many victims loss their working capital means their body and mind. Their ability of working force and strength is also retired too. The victims suffer when they face the fire like dangerous events [28-30]. In most cases suffer mental shock and vulnerability, a significant number of employees cannot go back to their normal lives as well as they cannot maintain their normal lives. The victims fall invulnerability including financial shock leads them to dependency and disability to perform any other suitable jobs. They become socially vulnerable and finally they loss all their dream of lives. A bad reputation exists among all corners and creates negative impression and their investors, and the concerned stakeholders including the national and international buyers and well wishers.

Conclusions

Fire related accident happens in the Garments is a shocking matter in Bangladesh's RMG sector. Every year a number of garments experiences fire or fire related accident which kills several numbers of innocent workers. During the last three decades history have reflected that fire related accidents destroyed the whole garment into ashes. The secret of the fire could not be discovered as most of the time the garments management and authority try to avoid the causes and reasons of fire occurring issues. In most of the accidents it was observed that only staffs and workers were burnt and succumbed to death but very few officers died or burnet. In many cases Fire Brigade came after fire has burnet all the war houses and store rooms. In other cases it was found that fire damages big lot of stored items for shipment. The important when fire breaks out get big coverage in the media and mass communication but after few days the message become dry. The death and partially disabled burned and victims staffs and their dependent families are neglected and some days later forgotten by the garments authority. Only in few cases they are rehabilitated properly. The study also found that those victims who lost their family members, disabled members and the injured staffs receive insufficient support and financial compensation. Most often they are overruled and overwhelmed. Many of them are deprived and divorced of their rights and commitment given by the garment through service manuals. Most often garment owner's violets workers' rights and they also try to hide the true picture of the fire occurring incidents. The insurance and loan defaulting cases of the garment owners may be a cause of occurring fire. Garment authorities do not take liabilities of the victims. Short term rehabilitation and some sorts of adhoc solution is encouraged and often practiced by the garment owners. In case of Tazreen garment, it explored that still a significant number of Victims are suffering of fire related accident disabilities and injury led mental and physical disorder. Many of the victims lost their normal lives, dependency and other grace are the daily accompany of them.

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