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Gender-Based Violence in Bangladesh's Garment Industry: Analyzing the Causes and Impact Resulting in Victimizing Female Workers

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Abstract

The paper analyses the causes and consequences of GBV in Bangladesh's garment industry, focusing on how such violence disproportionately affects female workers. The study will investigate the system's ills within the sector, societal attitudes, and workplace environments that foster victimization. Data analysis on workplace harassment, exploitation, and unsafe working conditions will provide insights in this paper on the broader socio-political and economic impacts of GBV in this sector. It also discusses recommendations for policy reforms and legal protections that could be put in place to safeguard female workers.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence, Garment Industry, Bangladesh, Female Workers, Workplace Harassment, Labor Rights, Socio-Political Impact

1. Introduction

Workplace violence against women is a widespread issue that significantly threatens the health and safety of victims and witnesses globally. In Bangladesh, government bodies and employers have become increasingly concerned about the rise in workplace violence (Gibbs et al., 2019). Over the past decade, this issue has grown across various sectors, leading to increased emotional and mental distress among workers (Mayhew & Chappel, 2007; Ferdous, 2024). Understanding the full extent of workplace violence, including how it impacts comfort and the range of support options available to employees, remains a challenge (Ngum, 2022). Violence in the workplace negatively affects multiple dimensions of a person's well-being, including psychological, physiological, sex-related, and financial aspects (Islam & Ferdous, 2023). Victims of workplace violence, or even those who are merely exposed to it indirectly, often experience significant mental and emotional distress. In Bangladesh, workplace violence has long been a concern, and there is a strong correlation between poor working conditions and such violence (Phillips, 2016).

In modern times, workplace violence has been extensively documented in numerous publications. Although certain professions, such as law enforcement, have historically been associated with a higher risk of violence, there is growing awareness that any job can pose dangers, and violent incidents in workplaces are on the rise across various industries (Sun et al., 2017; Martinez, 2016). As this understanding broadens, the need for preventive measures and effective interventions to protect workers from such violence becomes increasingly urgent.

One in three women worldwide experience some form of violence, making it a significant global issue (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002; Shahriar & Ferdous, 2023). Over the past 20 years, the concept of violence has evolved across different cultures and industries, leading to the absence of a universally accepted definition of workplace violence (Ritchie et al., 2003). Workplace violence encompasses a variety of behaviors, including bullying, mobbing, harassment, psychological stress, verbal abuse, physical attacks, and even murder. It can occur internally, between employees and management, or externally, between employees and outsiders such as customers, patients, students, or the public (ILO, 2003). Over time, employer-driven pressures have modified the initial definitions of workplace violence (Mayhew & McCarthy, 2004).

More recent definitions define workplace violence to include incidents where people are attacked, threatened, or otherwise injured in conjunction with their work duties (Chappell & Di Martino, 2006). The International Labour Organization describes psychological violence definition as "emotional abuse, including bullying, verbal and non-verbal harassment, social isolation, and imposition of unrealistic expectations or deadlines"(ILO, 2016). These developments point to the multifactorial nature of workplace violence and that both physical and psychological harm need to be considered within the context of work.

Ullah and Ali (2019) argue that addressing workplace violence is vital, as it hinders global equity, progress, and stability. This is supported by the alarming statistics from the UNODC, indicating an estimated 450,000 women worldwide were killed by intimate partners or family members in 2022, while the recorded number of deaths in the Asia continent was 17,800 deaths in 2021 (Antara, 2023). A 2015 study by Action Aid, focusing on seven major cities in Bangladesh, found that 84% of women had been verbally abused, with 84% enduring gender-based insults, 57% facing sexual harassment, and 22% living in fear of sexual assault in the previous year (Antara, 2023). Workplace violence has become an increasingly pressing issue in Bangladesh, threatening the advancement of gender equality—a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for economic development and social justice (Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021). Xu et al. (2019) highlight that workplace violence affects hundreds of thousands of women and children globally, making it one of the most widespread human rights violations. The United Nations Agenda 2030 includes gender parity and women's empowerment as one of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), precisely Goal 5 (Xu et al., 2019).

This research, therefore, is set to understand the prevalence, dynamics, and consequences of workplace violence against women in Bangladesh, seeking to unravel causes and manifestations that describe female victimization in the employment sector. Although it is assumed that more women than men are affected by violence at workplaces, this study design recognizes that interaction effects limitation, such as the gender of both perpetrators and victims, may not explain the frequencies of the violent incidents (Polas et al., 2022). The critical question this research seeks to answer involves an exploration of the problem: "Why are women becoming victims of violence in the workplace in Bangladesh?" by shedding light on the conditions that perpetuate such victimization.

2.   Methodology

The current research uses a wide range of secondary data regarding the prevalence, causes, and impacts of workplace violence against women in Bangladesh. The literature, reports, and statistics have been collected from various reputable national and international organizations, such as government agencies, NGOs, and academic research.

2.1. Data Collection

Secondary data used in the study are published peer-reviewed journal articles and reports from organizations like the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Action Aid, and other relevant NGOs operating in Bangladesh. Quantitative information on the number of cases of workplace violence incidents, GBV, and victimization trends in Bangladesh was also collected by reviewing reports from the Bureau of Statistics in Bangladesh and other governmental bodies. Reports published in local media outlets were also reviewed with the intent of extracting contextual details surrounding specific cases of workplace violence against women. These diverse data sources empowered the research to pinpoint historical and contemporary perspectives.

3. Gender-based Violence and Harassment in the World of Work

The pervasiveness of workplace harassment and assault, in particular GBVH, exacerbates gender inequality in that it disproportionately affects women and girls. Workforce participation is undermined, and full engagement in education, public life, and other societal sectors is hindered. Whereas the scale of these issues has been well known, until recently, there have never been legally binding international treaties directly addressing workplace violence and harassment.

In June 2019, the International Labour Organization achieved landmark progress by adopting the Violence and Harassment Convention (Convention No. 190). This convention marked a global pivot in recognizing violence and harassment as severe and debilitating to the world of work. It favors a broad interpretation of "the world of work" and guides a comprehensive, gender-responsive approach to prevent and eliminate violence and harassment in all employment spaces. Additionally, Convention No. 190 spells out the intolerance of violence and harassment and its illegality, calling for ratifying countries to realize mechanisms of prevention, punishment, and redress of such offenses. It also provides that victims should be provided with resources to deal with the trauma caused by workplace violence (Karmojibi Nari, 2021).

Over the last ten years, there has been a development of more sophisticated and victim-centered points of view in discussing sexual harassment in academia. For instance, Liang (2024) points out that sexual harassment is not confined to a traditional workplace but even spills over into virtual spaces and online communities. This broader understanding already signals that harassment is no longer perceived as merely a legal issue but also with profound human repercussions. The emphasis on victim experiences has deepened the analysis, signaling how such crimes relate to the emotional, psychological, and professional consequences. This shift in focus opened up possibilities for more variegated strategies in the field of prevention of sexual harassment and the rehabilitation of its victims.

From the point of view of Convention No. 190 and the new scholarship position, it increasingly appears that workplace violence, in particular, GBVH-cannot be tackled in a merely legal framework but also in its wide-ranging impact on victims' lives about gender equality and, more generally social participation.

GBVH is one of the most common forms of violence at work and has yet to be acknowledged as such worldwide. An estimated 818 million women, 35% of all women worldwide, experienced sexual or physical violence in homes, communities, or workplaces. Even the gravest of these issues does not have comprehensive global legislation to fight the epidemic of workplace violence and harassment, especially for those that are explicitly targeting women. To fill this lacuna, a "standard-setting" procedure is underway within the ILO to create a legal framework that protects all workers from GBVH (Yasmin, 2020).

The ILO's Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No.190), covers all workers, regardless of occupation or sector. It hence includes workers in rural areas, migrant laborers, factory workers, public sector employees, sex workers, and those providing unpaid care or domestic services. The convention recognizes that GBVH is an occupational hazard in all workplaces, formal or informal. This makes the situation all the more severe in countries like Bangladesh, where violence in the workplace is already a serious issue. While there is plenty of anecdotal evidence indicating that women are often victims of workplace violence, concrete data on the prevalence of GBVH

in workplaces remains scanty. However, according to an official survey in 2015 alone, intimate partner violence was reported by as many as 72.6% of married or ever-married women in Bangladesh (Karmojibi Nari, 2021).

Governmental policies to prevent workplace violence have received mixed success. Akter et al. (2024), in their study of the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, discussed how some factory managers have made efforts toward ensuring a safer and more supportive environment for their women workers. Some improvement was recorded, but the study showed there are still no severe protections put in place for workers who have fallen victim to gender-based violence. The high court directives aimed at preventing workplace harassment have been poorly implemented, thus making women victims of continued abuse at work. This growing exodus of female workers from the RMG industry reflects a general impunity at workplace levels of negligence related to women's health, safety, and well-being, underlining the acute need for more excellent protection and enforcement mechanisms.

4. Faces of Violence at the Workplace in Bangladesh

A study that researched women in several countries finds that women are more prone to new forms of violence, such as workplace violence (Tijdens et al., 2015). It hence risks physical and mental health and is a barrier to the personal growth of women (Ellsberg et al., 2015). Domestic and societal forms of violence are understudied in Bangladesh. Workplace violence against women needs a detailed analysis of the various variables which, more often than not, interact with each other to form this issue. These include deep-rooted gender stereotyping, unethical behavior on the part of professionals, inherent risks associated with the job, and hostile work environments (Ganguly, 2015). For example, in Bangladesh, for women, entering the workforce is quite cumbersome, particularly in areas considered the domain of males only.

Men comprise 80% of Bangladesh's workforce, while women account for only 40%. Women in the workforce also face wage inequality; in fact, women in metropolitan areas earn more than thirty percent less than men. The gender gap in the workforce is a contributing factor, as women are more likely to work in agricultural and industrial production roles. At the same time, men are more likely to work in service industries (Buchmann et al., 2024).

Eighty percent of Bangladeshi garment workers have been victims of sexual harassment or assault in the workplace, and ninety percent worry that their occupation harms their condition (Action Aid, 2019). Eight times as many women as men engage in unpaid care work; 42% of women of working age work, and they typically earn less than males; 13% of women own land; these statistics are cited from the UNDP (2023). Our survey found that 66.7% of people were employed in the apparel industry (Plan International, 2021). The results showed that 55.7% of harassed employees were sexually harassed, and 77.2% were verbally abused on the job. Half of those who took the survey reported that experiencing such aggression and harassment had led to a collapse in mental health, depression, and antisocial and withdrawn conduct.

Nonetheless, 54 percent sought solace by informing their parents or guardians, and 41.7 percent protested workplace violence. Even though the High Court ruling protects women in the workplace, only 27.4% of girls and young women know this fact. While 16.8% of harassment claims were filed, almost none were investigated or addressed.

These days, more and more machinery is being used in factories. To maximize output through the use of technology, trained laborers are required. Upskilling training opportunities are not provided to female workers at the same rate as to male workers. According to a joint study by the International Labor Organization and the International Finance Corporation, most factory managers do not have a strategy to improve the abilities of their female employees. Even in their training programs, they prefer men over women in the garment industry (Fariha et al., 2023). It would suggest that developing nations are especially vulnerable to gender discrimination. Research conducted by Karmojibi Nari and CARE Bangladesh found that out of all the forms of harassment that female employees can face, the most common ones are verbal (84.7%), mental (71.3%), physical (20%), sexual (12.7%), and supervisor-related (52%) (Dewan, 2022). Several factors, including workplace social and gender hierarchies, the degree to which the workplace is formal or informal, the age of the harassed women, and their socioeconomic status, make young women more susceptible to sexual harassment on the job. Because of their solitary nature,

domestic workers who live in the home are more vulnerable to sexual harassment. Workers in a factory are less likely to be injured on the job since coworkers always surround them. Floors at many agro-processing factories are segregated according to gender. Supervisors vested in maintaining the factory's good name closely monitor all employees' conduct. No official organization defends domestic workers' rights, and their working conditions are informal. There is no safety net for them because of the power imbalance that exists due to poverty, hierarchy, and informality.

On the other hand, semi-formal settings are used by manufacturing employees and supervisors. While most employees do not have contracts, those who do may be able to seek redress through established channels for grievances. Factory workers are more courageous because they are many, despite the power imbalance (Sultan, 2023).

4.1. Verbal Harassment & Physical Abuse

While the tolerance for and understanding of sexual harassment may vary from one nation to another due to cultural and religious differences, no generally accepted definition of the term exists. Sexual harassment, on the other hand, is widely acknowledged as behavior that the target does not want or expect. Harassment can take the form of physical contact or any form of verbal abuse. This contentious topic has been a significant deterrent to working outside the home for women. Although sexual assault is more likely to happen in public locations, such as how you commute to work, it does happen on occasion in the office (Mahmood & Rezina, 2016). Assaults, derogatory remarks, and other forms of hostile language used in a hostile work environment constitute verbal violence (Bhusal et al., 2023). Sexually suggestive verbal harassment degrades and humiliates employees. It is common and can take many forms, including compliments, sympathy, help, or even obscene comments. Most of the time, it comes from the male relatives of the woman who employs them as a domestic servant. Although bosses or managers verbally harassed agro-firm employees rarely, it was commonplace in public places (Sultan, 2023). In Bangladesh's RMG sector, Akhter et al. (2019) investigated both the personal experiences of women victims of workplace violence and the perspectives of other stakeholders on this issue. According to our data, workplace violence against women is prevalent at this particular organization. Participants in this study reported instances of verbal and physical abuse, including yelling and slapping, as well as other types of bullying, such as the withholding of payments and the continual threat of job loss. The female employees feared retaliation from their bosses and possibly losing their jobs if they voiced their grievances. They felt unable to make changes to the culture and atmosphere at work.

Social conventions that discourage women from participating and gender gaps in the workforce contribute to and sustain this disparity (Ferdous, 2019). Perceptions restricting women's engagement in the public arena hinder their economic opportunities, even as education availability has expanded (Ferdous & Uddin, 2021). Achieving financial autonomy is impeded by the difficulty of juggling family and job responsibilities. Bangladesh severely lacks female representation in political and business positions (UNDP, 2023; Ferdous et al., 2021; Ferdous et al., 2020). Pervasive discrimination and harassment, low-skilled occupations with restricted career progression opportunities, gender-based violence, uneven remuneration, and the effort to reconcile personal and professional lives are some of the challenges that female professionals confront, according to Saha & Ong (2023). People who took part in the study said they were under a lot of stress and anxiety and that their bosses did not help them out.

4.2. The Threat of Job Loss & Discrimination

The majority of Bangladeshi society views gender discrimination as inevitable and does not actively work to eradicate it. Even in highly educated societies, women nevertheless face the dangerous reality of repulsive gender bias. Employers' hostility towards women stemmed from ingrained discriminatory attitudes, which permeated the company. From the first day on the job to the last, female employees encounter a wide range of discriminatory behaviors. In most companies, intellectual and physical labor is seen as better suited to men (Mahmood & Rezina, 2016). Among the many workplace abuses described in greater depth in this chapter, job uncertainty is a significant problem for women in Bangladesh's RMG industry. This prevents them from speaking out against these and other injustices. It is common practice to unlawfully terminate or lay off workers in the RMG sector without cause or

prior notice because of a lack of strong trade unions, inadequate legal protections, poorly enforced existing legal protections, and the absence of legally binding documents like work contracts. The following factors have contributed to the steady increase in worker protests over the years: low salaries; nonpayment or late payment of wages and benefits (including overtime and festival bonuses); departure, termination, or termination of employees; and the sudden and unexpected closure of factories. Because there are no trade unions, employers can retaliate against workers who participate in public protests by violently repressing them, including by dismissal or termination of employment (Odhikar, 2020).

Nowadays, women in our country are just as active as males in areas considered constructive or productive. Women still do not earn as much as men, no matter how hard they work. There are instances where women's contributions outweigh those of men. However, society fails to recognize their contributions adequately. Women are less likely to receive encouragement and advancement opportunities than men (Mia & Ali, 2023). The fear of losing one's job is something that all women report experiencing daily. They continually try to find a middle ground with their managers because losing their jobs would put them in a precarious financial position. When asked what they can do if they are victims of verbal or physical assault, the women said there is a report box. Nonetheless, they fear voicing their problems, fearing their managers may retaliate. When asked what they do when their bosses get furious with them, women said they attempt to keep quiet and not dispute (Akhter et al., 2019).

4.3. Lack of access to needed medicine and its Impact on Health

In addition to exhaustion, the ladies reported experiencing headaches, body aches, eye pain, and stomach issues. Stitching punctures and ironing burns are the most common types of sewing-related injuries. Several women have complained that the first aid kits meant to be stationed on each manufacturing floor are, in fact, frequently missing essential medications (Akhter et al., 2019). Because cotton dust can irritate the respiratory and pulmonary systems, it poses a health concern to those who work in the textile sector. When employees breathe in the lint from cotton, it can trigger various respiratory issues, such as asthma, coughing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. Diseases such as dermatitis, back pain, eye strain, pruritus, malnutrition, respiratory problems, hepatitis (jaundice), gastric pain, exhaustion, fever, abdomen pain, common cold, and problems with bones are pretty joint among women who work in the garment industry, according to the study (Mia & Ali, 2023). Because their bosses verbally and physically harassed them, all of the ladies said they felt depressed and sobbed when they got home from work. They also mentioned that they were having trouble sleeping and eating properly. They were expected to remain silent while they were abused. Therefore, they did not speak out even when they were "agitated," "angry," or "upset." (Akhter et al., 2019).

A significant worry is the quality of healthcare for RMG employees. Medical attendants often need more training or expertise to handle workplace injuries and illnesses. Most factories' healthcare facilities are cosmetic, with no access to regular physicians and limited first aid supplies. The proprietors of any factory do not give healthcare providers, and no reimbursement for expenses is offered either. Staff members have expressed a desire for easier access to healthcare. A single nurse in many factories often provides regular nursing services. The problem is that only large factories can access primary healthcare and a handful of life-saving medications. All of the RMG factories where we spoke with employees had problems obtaining clean water, which exacerbated the already severe shortage of healthcare services. Employees have voiced concerns that the water supplied for consumption is frequently unsafe. Most firms only have health and hygiene facilities set up right before customers visit; however, a few factories do. The Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA) is violated due to a lack of clean water for drinking, inadequate ventilation and sanitation, and poorly maintained firefighting gear and escape routes (Odhikar, 2020).

5. Reasons behind Gender-based Violence at Workplace in Bangladesh

Through its gender-sensitive laws and allocations of funds, Bangladesh has proven its unwavering dedication to promoting gender equality and empowering women. Gender equality is written right into Bangladesh's constitution. Nevertheless, differences remain (UNDP, 2023). According to this study, the patriarchal mindset that

permeates Bangladeshi culture and perpetuates the subordination of women in the workplace persists even now (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). As a result of historical biases and power imbalances, gender-based violence happens when men and women interact violently against each other. Workplace violence, sexual harassment, mental distress, and financial losses are just some of how women experience violence in today's culture. This is often a result of entrenched gender stereotypes and other social and cultural factors (Cruz & Klinger, 2016).

Patriarchal systems place women in subordinate roles within families and communities, making them easy targets for sexual harassment and exploitation on the job (Kabeer et al., 2018). masculine coworkers, supervisors, managers, and anybody else of a masculine gender in the workplace is responsible for this assault. Because of their lower levels of education compared to men, female workers in labor-intensive textile manufacturing jobs are more vulnerable to exploitation because they are more unlikely to know about workplace regulations and their rights. This problem is even worse and impacts the workplace since management has not implemented rules and practices to address these challenges (Akter et al., 2023).

Young women in the workforce are sexually vulnerable due to societal gender standards. In most contexts, girls are expected to endure sexual harassment; in other words, males will likely attempt to exploit women and view them as potential sexual objects. Girls are expected to take charge of their safety and reputation. They should keep their heads down, not make a fuss, and never initiate a conversation with a guy. Inside the house and out in public, men are seen as "guardians" by their female relatives. The male bosses at the plant step in as "guardians" and punish the male employees who mistreat the girls (Sultan, 2023). From a religious perspective, there is much debate and criticism over women's earning potential and for good cause. Many corporate job sectors have clothing codes that contradict religious values. Women are not obligated to work for financial gain according to Islamic law. Many Islamic women are discouraged from entering the workforce due to the strict Islamic belief that only men should work to support their families (Mia & Ali, 2023). Workers' lack of cooperation was used as an excuse by employers to rationalize abusive behavior. Factory managers, for instance, saw it as appropriate for supervisors to use loud voices and physical force to control the female employees. Workers' lack of agency stems in part from the fact that their superiors view them as "uneducated" and "poor," two social categories that contribute to the prevalence of workplace violence (Akhter et al., 2019). Managers should prioritize workplace wellness by addressing physical and emotional health concerns (Akter et al., 2024). Both subjective and objective factors contribute to a healthy workplace. Workplace behaviours, employee-employer interactions, working conditions, pay, and benefits are examples of objective workplace factors; workers' attitudes and levels of job satisfaction are examples of subjective workplace factors (Campbell, 2012).

6.   Enabling and Limiting Factors for Voice and Action

Our shared resolve and hard work may pave the way for women's emancipation in Bangladesh, even if it will be a complex and lengthy journey. Gender is irrelevant; all of us must do our part to advance women's rights and gender equality (Dihan, 2024). The pervasive and long-standing practice of discrimination against women characterizes patriarchal societies. However, because of brave feminist activity, women have brought about a noticeable and dramatic shift in society's treatment of women in the modern era. Complete redress in the struggle against prejudice, especially that which affects women, is still elusive, notwithstanding the many strides taken toward gender equality. It is common knowledge that people from all walks of life face prejudice and xenophobia in many settings, including the workplace, schools, and even in high-ranking positions in politics, academia, and business (Dewan, 2022). True advancement necessitates questioning long-held assumptions and enabling women to flourish as equal collaborators in Bangladesh's path to development and advancement. A concerted effort involving the entire community is necessary to challenge these long-established conventions. We need to take the initiative to modify society's views and cultivate critical thinking skills in the next generation's minds through gender-sensitive education if we want our efforts to persist. Engaging with neighborhood groups and grassroots organizations, especially religious ones, is essential to foster more progressive views on women's rights. Online platforms can effectively combat prejudice and sexism, empower women, and demand equal rights (UNDP, 2023).

●   Workers of both sexes should benefit from an employment policy framework that prioritizes equity above equality since women may occasionally require extra support from a societal and familial standpoint. Policies that

aim to meet people's needs in their working lives—including opportunities, wages, rights, voices, and recognition—and are appropriately monitored will bring about the changes people desire.

● Factory employees in the agro-processing and domestic industries depend on preventative measures and self-defense mechanisms to counteract sexual harassment on the job and in the workplace. Such actions constitute an agency, whether alone, in a group, or in combination. Domestic workers highlighted individual tactics, while factory workers focused on collective strategies.

● Workers, especially women workers, have modern requirements that the existing labor legislation must adequately meet. As things are, the law does not specify how to deal with infringement of workers' rights. Sometimes, the law says nothing, and other times, the punishment is not enough. There is no international system in which foreign firms operating in Bangladesh may be held accountable for circumstances in their supply chains, and there needs to be more domestic law enforcement. Workers still confront terrible working conditions and frequent rights violations since the labor legislation is not effectively enforced (Odhikar, 2020).

● Homemakers do not have a system in place to formally file complaints. Factory workers have yet to utilize the management or human resources departments. It was thought that going to the local elected officials, the court, or the police would be too difficult, expensive, and impractical. They assumed that turning to a formal institution like a court or the police would necessitate financial resources, given that the wealthy had the authority and resources to influence the system. If they went to court, their social standing would also be on the line.

● Equal compensation and the advancement of women into leadership positions are critical. Legislative changes and parental leave incentives can reduce women's unpaid caregiving load and increase men's willingness to pitch in. Well-funded, creative policy solutions must be created to address the unique needs of women from all walks of life.

7. Conclusion

While Bangladesh has made significant progress in addressing fundamental human needs such as education, healthcare, and nutrition, gender equality remains an uphill battle, particularly in the workplace. Women in Bangladesh have seen advancements in opportunities and protections aimed at improving their socioeconomic standing, thanks to various government initiatives. These programs target poverty alleviation and hunger reduction while also striving to narrow the gender gap in both income and opportunity (Shahen, 2021). However, despite these efforts, pervasive societal norms limit women's full participation in economic and public life. Women in Bangladesh, especially those in the workforce, still face considerable challenges, such as transportation harassment, barriers to entrepreneurship, domestic violence, and unsafe working and living conditions (Mahmood & Rezina, 2016).

The government's initiatives, while well-intentioned, often encounter resistance from conservative factions of society who maintain deep-rooted traditional views of gender roles. These efforts also face skepticism due to the widespread nature of poverty and inequality, which often perpetuates male-dominated structures. As much as policies and programs are necessary, societal attitudes toward gender must evolve. Gender equality cannot be achieved by governmental efforts alone; it requires a collective societal shift. Family, community, and broader societal mindsets play critical roles in upholding or dismantling the systems that sustain gender inequality (Mahmood & Rezina, 2016).

For real change to occur, men must be engaged as allies in the fight for gender equality. Traditional views of masculinity often harm not only women but men as well. Therefore, challenging discriminatory norms and promoting positive masculinity benefit society. By fostering an environment where men actively support women's empowerment, society can break free from the damaging gender roles that have persisted for generations (UNDP, 2023). This includes raising awareness about the advantages of gender equality for everyone, as it ultimately leads to more just, peaceful, and prosperous societies.

Unions, non-governmental organisations, and civil society also have critical roles in this transformation. By empowering women to engage in political and civic life, helping them build self-esteem, and encouraging them to report incidents of harassment or discrimination, these organizations provide essential support in the fight for workplace equality (Sultan, 2023). Workplace policies need to be similarly robust and responsive, affording clear, accessible procedures for reporting sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination. Then, access to redress will be ensured for any employee in the formal or informal sector when their rights are violated.

Society has to reject harmful cultural norms that perpetuate the vicious circle of violence and discrimination in the workplace. Standing in support of legislative reforms and championing organisations committed to the cause of gender equality will help build more equitable workplaces. Yet, Bangladesh has strived to increase women's participation across sectors, and hope abounds that this stride shall continue. And with the same effort from everyone concerned, a gender-balanced workplace will soon become a fact and make a more just and fair society for all human beings.

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