Women's Empowerment: Impact of RMG; Case from BISIC, Fatullah, Narayanganj District, Bangladesh

Sarmin Akter

Abstract

The multifaceted concept of women's empowerment has gained prominence, particularly in the context of the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry. This paper investigates the impact of the RMG sector on women's empowerment, centering on ten garment companies located in BISIC, Fatullah, Narayanganj District, Bangladesh. Employing a sample of 150 women workers (with a response rate of 90%), this study examines the contribution of employment in this industry to economic, social, and political empowerment. Through a comprehensive review of literature and empirical studies, the research explores the complex relationship between women's participation in the RMG industry and the outcomes of their empowerment. The findings underscore that, while the RMG sector has created employment opportunities for a substantial number of women in developing countries like Bangladesh, the nature and extent of their empowerment experiences are shaped by factors such as workplace conditions, education, and societal norms. Recognizing these nuances is crucial for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and advocates of women's rights to formulate effective strategies that optimize the positive impact of the RMG sector on women's empowerment in BISIC, Fatullah, Narayanganj District.
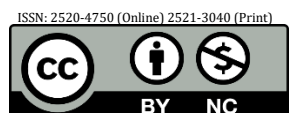
About Author (s)

Sarmin Akter, Lecturer, Department of Economics, Narayanganj College, Narayanganj, Bangladesh.

Introduction

The empowerment of women has emerged as a multifaceted and imperative concept, garnering increased attention, particularly within the realms of the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry (Njuki et al., 2022; Shoma, 2017). This sector, a cornerstone of economic development in countries like Bangladesh, plays a pivotal role in shaping the empowerment experiences of women. In this context, the present study delves into the intricate dynamics of women's empowerment within the RMG sector, with a specific focus on ten garment companies situated in the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BISIC) complex in Fatullah, Narayanganj District.

The RMG industry in Bangladesh has undergone significant growth, providing a substantial source of employment for women, thereby influencing their economic, social, and political dimensions of empowerment (Ahmed, 2017; Rahman, 2018). As the global demand for fast fashion continues to propel the expansion of the RMG sector, it becomes imperative to comprehend the nuanced interplay between women's participation in this industry and the outcomes of their empowerment. Drawing on a sample of 150 women workers from the BISIC complex, with an impressive response rate of 90%, this study seeks to unravel the complexities surrounding the impact of employment in the RMG sector on women's lives. A synthesis of existing literature and empirical studies lays the foundation for a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted relationship between women's involvement in the RMG industry and the various dimensions of their empowerment. The findings of this research underscore the pivotal role played by the RMG sector in creating employment opportunities for women, particularly in the context of developing countries like Bangladesh. However, the nature and extent of their empowerment experiences are revealed to be contingent upon several factors, including workplace conditions, educational attainment, and deeply ingrained societal norms. Recognizing these nuances is imperative for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and advocates of women's rights alike. Effectively leveraging the positive impact of the RMG sector on women's empowerment requires a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities unique to the BISIC complex in Fatullah, Narayanganj District. By undertaking this investigation, the study aims to contribute valuable insights that can inform the formulation of targeted and effective strategies to enhance women's empowerment in the specific context of the RMG industry in this region.

Literature Review

The Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, a formidable force in the global economy, holds particular significance in countries like Bangladesh, contributing substantially to economic growth (Ahmed, 2017; Rahman, 2018). A central aspect of this industry's dynamics is the pivotal role played by women, making it imperative to comprehend the various dimensions of their empowerment within this context. Women's empowerment, a complex and multifaceted concept, encompasses economic, social, and political dimensions (Njuki et al., 2022). The economic empowerment of women within the RMG sector is closely associated with enhanced financial independence and increased contributions to household income (Mekonnen et al., 2021). Furthermore, this sector serves as a platform for skill development and employment, thereby fostering economic autonomy among women (Shoma, 2017). Studies underscore the critical importance of women's financial contributions to family income as a key facet of their empowerment (Mekonnen et al., 2021). The RMG sector significantly contributes to enhancing the financial capabilities of female workers, offering economic freedom and proximity to resources and facilities in urban areas (Shoma, 2017). This financial autonomy is vital for transforming the socio-economic status of women within their families and communities (Quisumbing et al., 2023). Empowerment is intricately linked to women's access to resources

and participation in decision-making processes. Women working in the RMG sector often experience limitations in decision-making power and resource access before employment (Shoma, 2017). However, employment in the RMG industry creates opportunities for women to overcome these barriers, fostering access to resources and involvement in decision-making within and beyond the household (Moushumy et al., 2023).

The role of education in empowering women within the RMG sector is a recurrent theme. Studies indicate that education equips women with the skills necessary for meaningful participation in the workforce (Ahmed, 2017). The RMG industry, through training and skill development programs, acts as a vehicle for enhancing women's knowledge and capabilities (Njuki et al., 2022). Women's empowerment in the RMG sector is not only influenced by workplace dynamics but also shaped by societal norms. A prevailing perception of women as burdens within the family in traditional social systems poses challenges to their empowerment (Shoma, 2017). Overcoming these societal norms becomes crucial for fostering a conducive environment for women's empowerment in the RMG sector (Njuki et al., 2022). Intersectionality plays a crucial role in understanding the complexities of women's empowerment within the RMG sector. The intersection of factors such as education, social independence, and decision-making influences the empowerment trajectories of women (Moushumy et al., 2023). Recognizing these interconnections is essential for developing targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by women in the RMG industry. Despite strides in understanding women's empowerment in the RMG sector, gaps persist. Limited evidence exists on issues such as gender considerations in food systems for women in urban areas, best practices for engaging men in the empowerment process, and the long-term sustainability of empowerment impacts (Quisumbing et al., 2022). Moreover, the literature indicates the multifaceted nature of women's empowerment in the RMG sector, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and nuanced approach. The upcoming sections of this paper will delve into an empirical investigation centered on ten garment companies in the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BISIC) complex in Fatullah, Narayanganj District, shedding light on the specific dynamics of women's empowerment within this context.

Research Methodology
This study employs a mixed-methods research design to delve into the intricate relationships among women's empowerment, gender equality, job satisfaction, and performance in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector of Bangladesh. Specifically concentrating on 10 garment companies situated in BISIC, Fatullah, Narayanganj District, our research framework integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches for a comprehensive exploration of these dynamic variables. The conceptual foundation seeks to discern whether the emphasis on women's empowerment or gender equality is more conducive to enhancing the job satisfaction and subsequent performance of female employees within the RMG sector. Our target population consists of female employees in the specified region, with a sample size of 150 individuals selected using a convenience random sampling method. Data collection involves primary and secondary sources. Structured questionnaires serve as the primary instrument, incorporating two segments to gather demographic information and perceptions related to women's empowerment, gender equality, job satisfaction, and performance. The collected data undergoes analysis using SPSS software, employing Partial Least Square Analysis and Sobel Test to test assumptions and hypotheses. Additionally, qualitative insights extracted from relevant publications contribute a contextual layer to our findings.

The demographic profile analysis further enriches our understanding, encompassing variables such as age, marital status, education, and job position. This nuanced exploration of participant

characteristics allows us to consider potential contextual factors influencing our study variables. Ethical considerations underscore the research process, ensuring participant confidentiality, informed consent, and responsible data handling. Acknowledging potential limitations, including sample size and geographic scope, we strive to uphold the study's validity and contribute meaningful insights to the discourse on women's empowerment in the RMG sector.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

	Variables		Frequencies	Percentages (percent)
Gender	Male		0	0.00
	Female		150	100
	Total		150	100
Age (in years)	Below 20		42	28.00
	20-29		80	53.33
	30-39		18	12.00
	40-49		07	4.67
	50 and above		03	2.00
	Total		150	100
Marital Status	Single		76	50.67
	Married		62	41.33
	Separated		07	4.67
	Divorced		03	2.00
	Widow		02	1.33
	Total		150	100
Area of Origin	Urban		27	18.00
	Rural		123	82.00
	Total		150	100
Level of Education	Level	Class		
	Primary	1-5	30	20.00
	Secondary	6-10	110	73.34
	Higher Secondary	11-12	08	5.33
	Graduate	Bachelor or Master degree	02	1.33
	Total		150	100
Respondent'sPosition	Top level		0	0.00
	Mid level		2	1.33
	First level		7	4.67
	Operator Level		141	94.00
	Total		150	100

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of the study participants, comprising 150 respondents in total. The first section delineates the gender distribution, with a notable absence of male respondents (0%, 0.00%) and a complete representation of female participants (100%, 150 individuals). The subsequent sections break down the age distribution, revealing a diverse range: 28% of respondents are below 20 years old, 53.33% fall within the 20-29 age bracket, 12% are aged 30-39, 4.67% are aged 40-49, and 2% are 50 years old and above. The marital status distribution reflects a varied respondent profile, with 50.67% being single, 41.33% married, 4.67% separated, 2% divorced, and 1.33% widowed. Regarding the area of origin, 18% of respondents hail from urban areas, while the majority, comprising 82%, originate from rural regions. Additionally, the education level distribution illustrates a spectrum of qualifications, with 20% having a primary education

(grades 1-5), 73.34% having a secondary education (grades 6-10), 5.33% having a higher secondary education (grades 11-12), and 1.33% holding graduate (bachelor or master's degree) qualifications. Also, the final section outlines the distribution of respondents across different job positions in the RMG sector. Notably, 94% are in the Operator Level, 4.67% in the First Level, 1.33% in the Mid Level, and none in the Top Level. This demographic profile provides valuable insights into the varied backgrounds and positions of the female respondents in the study, laying the groundwork for a nuanced analysis of the research variables.

Findings

The degree of women's empowerment within a family is intricately linked to their financial contributions. However, the extent of this empowerment exhibits considerable variation, shaped by the diverse dynamics of each family unit, encompassing different attitudes and personalities among its members. Among the participants, 32 respondents contributed between seventy to sixty-five percent of their total family expenditure, while 45 respondents covered fifty to forty percent of the family's financial needs. Additionally, 25 respondents allocated half of the family expenditure, and a noteworthy proportion, one-sixth of the respondents, contributed thirty to forty percent of their family's financial requirements. Notably, 13 respondents shouldered the significant responsibility of covering 90 to 80 percent of their family's expenditure, and 10 respondents contributed the entirety of the financial requirements. This diversity underscores the nuanced nature of women's empowerment in the familial context, intricately woven with their financial roles and responsibilities. In the traditional context of Bangladesh, household decision-making has historically been dominated by men. However, the evolving financial independence of women has become a catalyst for their increased involvement in these decision-making processes. Within the scope of this survey, a notable portion, one-fifth of the women, actively participated in 20 to 10 percent of their family decisions. Subsequently, another one-sixth of the respondents engaged in the decision-making process at a higher level, contributing in the range of 45 to 35 percent of household decisions. A significant number, comprising thirty-seven respondents, indicated their involvement in half of their family decisions. Furthermore, a substantial forty-three women expressed their opinions in the realm of 60 to 50 percent of their household decisions. Noteworthy is the participation of one-tenth of the respondents in a substantial 90 to 60 percent of their family decisions. However, a minority, less than ten percent of the participants, were involved in 5 percent of household decisions, leaving only 2 respondents participating in the range of 30 to 20 percent of family decisions. This evolving landscape underscores the shifting dynamics of women's roles in household decision-making processes in Bangladesh. Women's empowerment is intricately tied to resource management, encompassing both household and social resources. The survey findings revealed a spectrum of resource access among respondents, with the majority (80) indicating access within the range of 40 to 70 percent, while 50 respondents reported a higher access level of 70 to 100 percent. In contrast, 20 garment workers conveyed having only 1 to 40 percent access to resources. The study underscores the need for heightened awareness among women regarding their rights, opportunities, and issues of gender inequality. Surprisingly, the findings revealed that the majority of respondents (almost all) displayed less than 50 percent awareness about gender-related matters. Specifically, 48 respondents exhibited less than 10 percent awareness, while 52 respondents fell within the range of 10 to 20 percent awareness. Additionally, 28 garment workers demonstrated 20 to 30 percent awareness, and 14 respondents displayed awareness levels of 30 to 40 percent. Only a minority of eight respondents exhibited a relatively higher awareness, ranging from 50 to 70 percent about their rights.

Considering the socio-economic context, respondents expressed their perceptions of empowerment in their lives. A mere 16 respondents felt empowered to a significant extent, ranging from 70 to 80 percent, while 10 participants claimed 60 to 70 percent empowerment. A larger group of 40 respondents identified with a moderate empowerment level of 50 to 60 percent, and 45 respondents reported enjoying 40 to 50 percent empowerment. Thirty respondents believed they could exercise only 30 to 20 percent of empowerment, and the remaining nine garment employees perceived their empowerment level to be limited to 0 to 20 percent.

The multidimensional nature of women's empowerment, encompassing financial contribution, resource access, participation in household decision-making, gender awareness, ownership of assets, and coping capacity, highlights the complex interplay of factors influencing the empowerment experiences of female employees. The study suggests that financial contribution (10% to 100%), access to resources (5% to 100%), and participation in household decision-making (5% to 80%) are particularly significant contributors to women's empowerment, while factors such as gender awareness (0% to 80%), ownership of assets, and coping capacity display comparatively less pronounced relationships with employees' empowerment. Understanding and addressing these nuanced dynamics are pivotal for fostering effective strategies to enhance women's empowerment in the Ready-Made Garments sector. Table 2 provides a comprehensive overview of female employees' responses within the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry, delving into key dimensions of their empowerment. The minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation values are outlined for distinct variables, shedding light on the following aspects: Firstly, in terms of Financial Contribution to Family in Percentage, the respondents' contributions ranged from a minimum of 0.05 to a maximum of 0.90, with a mean of 0.4751 and a standard deviation of 0.22047. Secondly, the variable Access to Resources showcased a variation from a minimum of 0.01 to a maximum of 1.00. The mean and standard deviation were calculated at 0.5127 and 0.23051, respectively. Ownership of Assets, the third variable, demonstrated a range from 0.00 to 0.90, with a mean of 0.2823 and a standard deviation of 0.19279. Examining Participation in Household Decision Making, respondents indicated a minimum of 0.01 and a maximum of 0.80. The mean and standard deviation for this variable were 0.3154 and 0.18612, respectively. The variable Perception of Gender Awareness revealed values from 0.01 to 0.80, with a mean of 0.2010 and a standard deviation of 0.15297. Lastly, in terms of Coping Capacity to Household Shocks, respondents reported values between 0.05 and 0.70, with a mean of 0.1413 and a standard deviation of 0.11290. This table offers a nuanced understanding of the empowerment dimensions among female employees, emphasizing the diverse range of experiences within the RMG sector.

Table 2: Examining the Empowerment of Female Employees in Relation to Contributions from the Ready-Made Garments Industry

Garments employees' responses on	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Percentage-based financial support to the family	.05	.90	.4751	.22047
Perception of gender awareness	.01	.80	.2010	.15297
Ownership of Assets	.00	.90	.2823	.19279
Involvement in household decision-making	.01	.80	.3154	.18612
Access to Resources	.01	1.00	.5127	.23051
Coping capacity to household shocks	.05	.70	.1413	.11290

Source: Field Survey, June 2023

Model Summary

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.895a	0.765	0.765	.05616

Source: Field Survey, June 2023

Table 3 presents the results of the regression analysis conducted for the model. The key metrics include the coefficient of determination (R), the coefficient of determination adjusted for the number of predictors (Adjusted R Square), and the standard error of the estimate. The regression model demonstrates a significant correlation between the dependent variable and the independent variables, with an R value of 0.895. The coefficient of determination (R Square) is 0.765, indicating that approximately 76.5% of the variation in the dependent variable is accounted for by the independent variables included in the model. The adjusted R Square, which considers the number of predictors in the model, remains at 0.765. The standard error of the estimate, reflecting the accuracy of the regression model, is calculated at 0.05616. In conclusion, the findings suggest a robust correlation between the empowerment dimensions (dependent variable) and the specified independent variables, namely financial contribution to family, access to resources, ownership of assets, participation in household decision making, perception of gender awareness, and coping capacity to household shocks. The calculated correlation of 88.6% at a 5% level of significance further emphasizes the strength of these relationships. These results provide valuable insights into the factors influencing women's empowerment within the context of the Ready-Made Garments industry. The data source for this analysis is the Field Survey conducted in June 2023.

Table 4: ANOVA Test

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	31.462	6	5.500	1315.897	.000
	Residual	7.177	1983	.006		
	Total	44.785	1989			

Source: Field Survey, June 2023.

Table 4 presents the findings of the ANOVA test conducted to assess the statistical significance of the regression model. The analysis includes the sum of squares, degrees of freedom, mean square, F-statistic, and significance level. In the model statistics section, the sum of squares for regression, degrees of freedom (6 predictors), and mean square for regression are outlined. The residual statistics encompass the sum of squares for residuals, degrees of freedom (1983 observations), and mean square for residuals. Additionally, total statistics provide the sum of squares for the total model, degrees of freedom (1988 total observations), and mean square for the total model. The F-statistic, which tests the overall significance of the regression model, is notable. In this case, the calculated significance value (Sig.) of 0.000 is considerably lower than the conventional 0.05 threshold, indicating a robust statistical significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected at both the 5% and 1% levels of significance, implying a substantial relationship between female employees' empowerment and the examined independent variables. The conclusion drawn from the ANOVA test suggests that various factors, including financial contribution to the family, access to resources, ownership of assets, participation in household decision-making, perception of gender awareness, and coping capacity to household shocks, collectively contribute significantly to female employees' empowerment. However, the specific impact of each aspect of the ready-made garments industry's contribution necessitates further exploration, prompting the authors to conduct a coefficient analysis for more nuanced insights.

Table 5: outcomes of multivariate Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) analysis, illustrating the relationship between Ready Made Garments' Contributions (independent variables) and Female Employees' Empowerment (dependent variable)

Readymade garments' contributions to women empowerment	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Percentage-based financial support to the family	.337	.016	.637	27.381	.000
Perception of gender awareness	.042	.013	.064	3.155	.000
Ownership of Assets	-.031	.01	-.027	-2.529	.075
Access to Resources	.132	.012	.165	8.717	.000
Involvement in household decision-making	.225	.013	.178	9.502	.000
Coping capacity to household shocks	-.033	.017	-.034	-1.802	.046

Source: Field Survey, June 2023

Table 5 illustrates the findings from a multivariate Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) analysis, delving into the interplay between Ready Made Garments' Contributions (independent variables) and Female Employees' Empowerment (dependent variable). The table encompasses unstandardized coefficients, standardized coefficients, t-values, and significance levels associated with different facets of ready-made garments' impact on women's empowerment. Each row corresponds to a specific dimension, such as financial contribution to the family, access to resources, ownership of assets, participation in household decision-making, perception of gender awareness, and coping capacity to household shocks. Notably, financial contributions, access to resources, participation in decision-making, and gender awareness perception emerge as statistically significant influencers on empowerment, as indicated by their low p-values. Conversely, ownership of assets and coping capacity to household shocks lack statistical significance. The final model, guided by a predefined t-value threshold, highlights the significance of four key variables in shaping female employees' empowerment—financial contribution to the family, access to resources, participation in household decision-making, and perception of gender awareness. Beta coefficients provide nuanced insights, revealing the percentage change in empowerment associated with a 100% change in each independent variable. This comprehensive analysis aids in understanding the nuanced dynamics influencing female empowerment within the context of ready-made garments contributions.

Conclusion

The current research has delved into the complex and multifaceted landscape of women's empowerment within the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, focusing on ten garment companies in the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BISIC) complex in Fatullah, Narayanganj District. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis, qualitative insights, and a comprehensive field survey, the study has provided valuable insights into the various dimensions of women's empowerment in this specific context. The findings underscore the intricate relationship between women's participation in the RMG industry and their empowerment experiences. Financial contributions, access to resources, participation in household decision-making, and perceptions of gender awareness emerged as pivotal influencers on women's empowerment. The diversity observed in these dimensions highlights the nuanced nature of empowerment, shaped by individual circumstances, societal norms, and workplace conditions. The shifting dynamics in household decision-making and the evolving financial independence of women signal positive transformations. However, the study also reveals knowledge gaps in gender-related matters,

indicating a need for targeted awareness campaigns and educational programs to empower women with information about their rights and opportunities. The regression analysis and Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) analysis further confirm the significance of specific factors in shaping female employees' empowerment. Financial contribution to the family, access to resources, participation in household decision-making, and perception of gender awareness collectively contribute significantly to women's empowerment within the RMG sector.

As we conclude, it is imperative for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and advocates of women's rights to consider the nuanced findings of this research. Tailored interventions and strategies should be designed to address the identified influencers and challenges. Initiatives that enhance financial literacy, promote gender-inclusive decision-making, and bridge knowledge gaps can contribute to a more empowering environment for women in the RMG industry. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by offering a nuanced understanding of women's empowerment within a specific industrial context. However, it also recognizes the limitations inherent in the study, including the sample size and geographic scope. Future research endeavors should explore additional dimensions, such as the impact of workplace policies, the role of mentorship programs, and the intersectionality of factors influencing women's empowerment. In essence, fostering women's empowerment in the RMG sector requires a holistic and collaborative approach. By leveraging the insights gained from this research, stakeholders can work towards creating a more equitable, inclusive, and empowering environment for female employees in the Ready-Made Garment industry, not only in BISIC, Fatullah, Narayanganj District but also as a blueprint for progress in similar contexts globally.

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