

# Women in Selling Profession at Barisal City, Bangladesh: Challenges and A Way Forward

Fatema-Tuz-Zohora & Dilafroze Khanam

## Abstract

Women have been performing active roles in families since ages. And at present they are furthermore acknowledged for their contribution in their workplace and they are also involved in varied array of activities. They are now performing even more challenging job like sales. And in Bangladesh there is no exception too. The study tries to find out the challenges faced by the Bangladeshi working women who are in sales profession. The study also attempts to find out the possible remedies for them so that they can be able to use their full potentials to balance their family and professional life. The current study surveyed only women employees of sales profession in Barisal city in Bangladesh. By using the mixed method approach primary data was collected from 100 working women from different sectors in sales profession. The data collection techniques included face to face interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), questionnaire and observation. And Secondary data were collected from different books, journals, documentaries, internet, etc. Data were collected through convenience sampling method. The questionnaire consisted of 16 close ended and 4 open ended questions to meet the objectives of the study. To analyze the data of the open ended questionnaires the researcher used the judgmental method. And After collecting the raw data of close ended questionnaires, the researchers convert the data and analyze the findings by using frequency distribution and simple percentage method. The women who are in sales professions are facing diverse challenges like-family restrictions, different social and security challenges, gender discriminations in case of salary, promotions and workloads, health injuries and balancing family and professional life. The findings reveals that the scenario will not be changed rapidly however, if the recommendations are followed properly then there are vast opportunities that will make them able to face and to lessen up such challenges.

**Keywords:** Sales, Women, Women in sales, Challenges, Solution, Bangladesh.



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## 1. Introduction

Sales are simply considered as the “art” of business. Sales are also called the “heart” of business. Sales are the performance of delivering a product or service in yield for payment or any other remuneration. It is an act of achievement of a commercial doings. Sales are activities related to selling or the number of goods or services sold in a given time period. (Wikipedia). Selling is an empirical application and part of marketing. It usually conducts a distinctive alliance in a business organization, hiring distinct professional workers known as salesperson. And a sales person is an individual who sells goods and services to other entities. The successfulness of a salesperson is usually measured by the amount of sales he or she is able to make during a given period and how good that person is in persuading individuals to make a purchase.(BusinessDictionary).

Women in sales are taking the world by storm. (Walton,D. 2017). In the development of human civilization both women and men have played correspondingly significant role. Any improvement can't be possible without the contribution of both. Actually women involvement in work force is also a vital indicator of a countries overall advancement. Now –a-days women are actively participate in outdoor workforce. And also in Bangladesh the women involvement in workforce has positively increased. They are now performing even more inspiring sector like sales. This is certainly a noble indication for community and also for women themselves. But unfortunately plus illogically, women personnel generally are not considering very seriously by their supervisors, coworkers, or society at large. Typically, maximum public don't have any positive attitudes towards women who work in sales. Furthermost the sales women face many problems and they don't get any support from family, society and also from their working area. Even if a huge portion of the women still faces disparity and sex partiality. There are uncountable challenges and complications faced by women both at house and workstation. Although Bangladeshi women have continue to work outdoor of their family environment but even then they have to go a long way in socially, culturally, and economically to get in favorable attitudinal alterations in the mind-set of people.

## 2. Literature Review

A literature review referring to different journals and studies conducted by different researchers has been added to this study to show relevance of the work. Hisaka, A. (2014) described the trends of employment in sales over last decade from 2004 to 2014 in her blog titled ‘Trends of Women in Sales Infographic’ and said sales industry has traditionally been male-dominated and competitive jobs function. To support her statement, she presented a statistics from ‘LinkedIn Workforce Diversity Data Report’ and pictured the women representation in LinkedIn. The report was a study finding which was conducted on 5,400 LinkedIn employees working in offices from Mountain View to Sao-Paulo to Bangalore. The study showed that women represent 41% of the active workforce on the LinkedIn Network. Moreover, the percentage of women in the workforce has increased 37% to 41% in the last ten years while the percentage of women in sales has increased from 36% to 39%. LinkedIn also stated that they wanted to better understand how the percentage of women in sales has changed in the past decade, and if the trend is consistent. They also want to use this information to bring awareness to the subject and put something in place to help transform the industry and narrow that gap.

An article published in “The Sydney Morning Herald” in 2014 by Jones, K titled ‘Are women or men better at sales?’ here the writer stated a study findings that was conducted by US psychological testing firm Arch Profile. The study revealed deeper insights into gender differences in salespeople and they conclude that women tend to possess a higher level of integrity, are more helpful, attentive to detail, and organized on the other hand men are more comfortable public speakers,

more success oriented and more competitive.

Hunter, M. (2014), in his study titled 'Who Makes the Better Salesperson? A Man or a Woman?' evaluates among man and women who makes the better salesperson and explain "If there is one thing I've found interesting is how many times the best solution is to have the salesperson be the opposite of the customer. When a male salesperson deals with a female customer or a female salesperson deals with a male customer, the outcome tends to be successful. And If i could only hire one salesperson, I would hire the female because Thus in a business world that is still comprised of more males than females I will go with the opposite, thus hiring the female" Walton, D (2014) in her article "Women in Sales: Common Challenges and Common Sense Solutions" published in 'Huffington Post' tries to identify women challenges in sales profession and describe some possible solutions that is Removing unconscious bias, Leveraging external networks and Building client relationships by breaking the stereotype and Boosting Confidence. By considering the latest data published in U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Burdett, E (2015) in his study titled 'The State of Women in Sales' identified the state of women in sales and describe that the increasing number of women in sales matters from a business and financial perspective. So the steps companies can take to attract and retain women in sales then help them succeed Johnstone, K. (2017), in his writing titled 'Remember the Ladies: 5 Reasons Your Sales Team Needs (More) Women' emphasizes five reasons for hiring more female in sales. The reasons are- Female representatives are outperforming men; Women have proven themselves as leaders ;Female sales leaders today are driving success; More women are becoming B2B buyers; &Women's presence improves company culture and productivity, for which sales team needs more women.

Orlob, C. (2017), in his blog titled 'Who's Better at Selling: Men or Women?' by using the data from 'Gong.io: Conversation Intelligence Technology for Sales Teams' and concluded that "Our data science team at Gong sat down 30,469 B2B sales calls to analyze how men and women sell differently and conclude that women also close deals at a higher and faster rate than men. In our data set, men had a 49% likelihood of moving opportunities to the next stage; while women boasted 54%.And women's win rates were 11% higher than men's (on average)." Leroux, J. (2018) in his article titled 'Why more women should take on sales roles' using the Statistics Canada by "Statistics show that women perform great in sales. Many believe women are great listeners, relationship builders and even better hunters, not letting their ego get in the way. Regardless of gender, sales offer a career path with a level playing field where anyone can demonstrate their strengths and provide value to an organization; it's not limited by anything beyond the expectations you put on yourself." Phelps,T (2018) in his writing titled 'Ms. Sales Professional: Do Women Have a Sales Advantage Over Men?' tries to identify "Are women better at sales? Is there any substantial evidence that points to this conclusion?" And give the opinion that "As with success in any industry, it comes down to the individual. If it is true that women are more attentive, better listeners, more inclined to prospect, and have more opportunities for advancement that do men, then women should have an advantage over men in the sales industry." According to Professor Joel Le Bon of the University of Houston's Bauer College of Business Sales Excellence Institute performed an analysis of his 989 students' sales performance across 7 years. The results showed that there were 62.5% more female top performers than male top performers. Moreover, the female top performers outperformed the male top performers by 73.9%. A study from the University of Illinois at Chicago shows that companies with higher gender diversity, in general, are 15% more likely to have higher profit. Additionally, companies with higher numbers of female board directors have a 42% higher return on sales compared to companies with lower numbers of female board directors. Voriay, R. (2018) Forbes council of Forbes Community Voice tries to identify "Why We Need More Women In Sales?" And give the opinion that "Getting more

women into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) has become a hot topic over the years, as these fields have historically had a low representation of females. But equally important is getting more women into sales professions, yet we don't hear about this as much. First and foremost, women are good at sales. Not only will having women on your sales teams be better for your bottom line, but it will also help you better connect with your customers. So instead of focusing only on getting women into STEM, let's add an "S" and start focusing on getting them into STEMS --Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Sales".

### 3. Justification of the Study:

The above discussions reveal that the most research conducted to identify that women or man, who is better at sales profession. But no studies have found identifying the challenges that women face in sales profession especially in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, there is no specific work done in this field. So considering the importance of the fact research on this topic deserves special attention. This study will try to explore in Bangladesh the actual scenario and obstacles of women in sales profession and suggest some possible solutions of these challenges.

### 4. Objectives of the Study

The prime purpose of this study has focused on the matters related to the challenges and problems women who are in sales profession in Bangladesh. So the authors have decided the subsequent objectives for this study:

- 1) To show the present scenario of women in sales profession in Barisal city, Bangladesh.
- 2) To identify the major challenges faced by women in sales profession in Barisal city, Bangladesh
- 3) To suggest measures for overcoming the challenges.

### 5. Methodology

'A sales professional is someone who sells products or services to potential customers. They seek to solve prospects' challenges through the products they sell. Great sales professionals will have strong selling and communication skills' Sobczak, A (2017). The nature of the study is exploratory and the study tries to find out the challenges faced by the Bangladeshi working women who are in sales profession. The study also attempts to find out the possible remedies for them so that they can be able to use their full potentials to balance their family and professional life. The current study surveyed only women employees of sales profession in Barisal city in Bangladesh. By using the mixed method approach primary data was collected from 100 working women from different sectors in sales profession. The data collection techniques included face to face interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), questionnaire and observation. And Secondary data were collected from different books, journals, documentaries, census data, internet, etc. Data were collected through convenience sampling method. The questionnaire consisted of 16 close ended and 4 open ended questions to meet the objectives of the study. To analyze the data of the open ended questionnaires the researcher used the judgmental method. And After collecting the raw data of close ended questionnaires, the researchers convert the data and analyze the findings by using frequency distribution and simple percentage method.

### 6. Findings of the Study:

#### 6.1. Demographic information of the respondents:

Here the respondents were asked about their demographic background including age, education level, income, years of job experience, marital status etc. This Table represents the data that were collected from the questionnaire which was circulated amongst the women sellers of different shops, different sales professionals of National and Multinational organization in

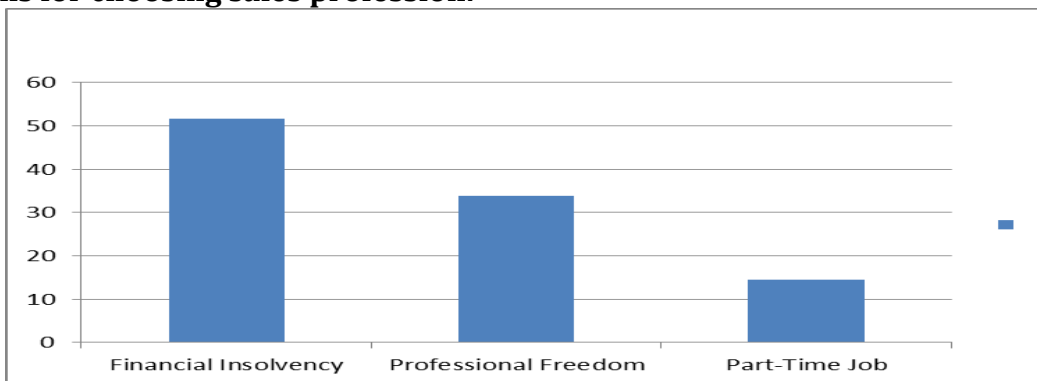
Barisal city, Bangladesh.

**Table 6.1 represents the demographic information of the respondents.**

<b>Age of the respondents:</b>	
<b>Age ranges</b>	<b>Percentages of the respondents</b>
21-25	38.71
26-30	32.23
31-35	23.45
35+	5.61
Total	100
<b>Educational qualification of the respondents:</b>	
<b>Level of studies</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
SSC	12.44
HSC	20.11
Hons'/ Degree level	35.85
Masters'	31.60
Total	100
<b>How long the respondents have been working in Sales Profession</b>	
<b>Ranges (In year)</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
03-05	23.84
06-08	35.48
09-11	30.45
11+	10.23
Total	100
<b>Monthly Income of the Respondents</b>	
<b>Ranges (Taka)</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
5,000-10,000	28.78
11,000-15,000	36.65
16,000-20,000	25.22
20,000+	09.35
Total	100
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Married	59%
Unmarried	41%

The majority of the respondents 38.71% belonged to the age group of 21-25 years, 32.23% of the respondents belonged to the age group of 26-30 years, 23.45% belonged to the age group of 31-35 years, and 5.61% belonged to the age group above 35 years. The educational qualification of the respondent shows that 12.44% of the respondent have passed SSC, 20.11% passed HSC, 35.85% passed Hons'/ Degree level and 31.60% passed Masters' level. The work experiences of the respondents shows that 23.84% respondents work experiences is 3 to 5 years, 35.48% respondents work experiences is 06-08 years 30.45% respondents work experiences is 09-11 years and 10.23% respondents work experiences is above 11 years in sales profession. Monthly income of the respondents are found that 28.78% respondents monthly income is 5,000- 10,000 taka, 36.65% respondents monthly income is 11,000- 15,000 taka, 25.22% respondents monthly income is 16,000- 20,000 taka and 9.35% respondents monthly income is above 20,000 taka. Marital status of the respondent shows that 59% respondents are married and 41% respondent are unmarried.

**6.2 Reasons for choosing sales profession:**

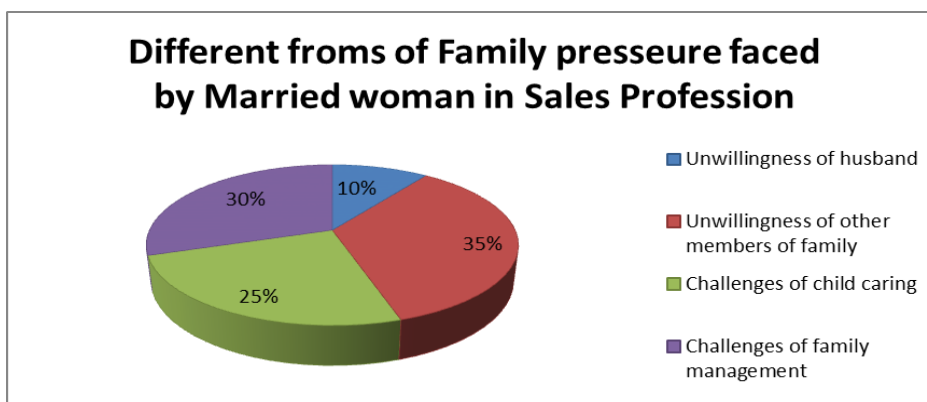


Most of the women that is 51.61% chose sales profession to meet up their financial insolvency, 33.87% says that it is their professional freedom to choose this profession and 14.52% choose it as their part time job.

**6.3. Respondents facing family pressure for doing sales job:**

Responses	percentages
No	67.74
Yes	32.26

Here we try to identify those women who are doing sales job faces problems that is created by the family members and found that 67.74% respondents don't face any family pressure. And remaining 32.26% face family pressure.



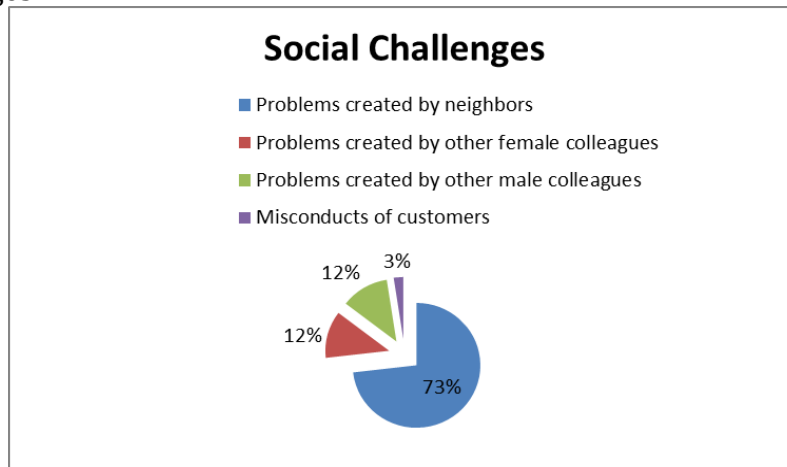
The respondents who said that they face family pressure mostly are married. here we try to find out what type of family pressure they face and the response shows that the majority that means 35% faces unwillingness of the members of the family, 25% faces the challenges of child caring, 30% faces family management challenges and 10% faces the unwillingness of husband.

**6.4. Respondents having 'Social Challenges' as sales women:**

(Here social challenges refers the obstacles created by the society)

Responses	Percentages
Yes	54.84
No	45.16

Here we try to identify that women who are doing sales job faces social challenges or not and found that 45.16% respondents don't face any social challenges. And majority that is 54.84% face social challenges.

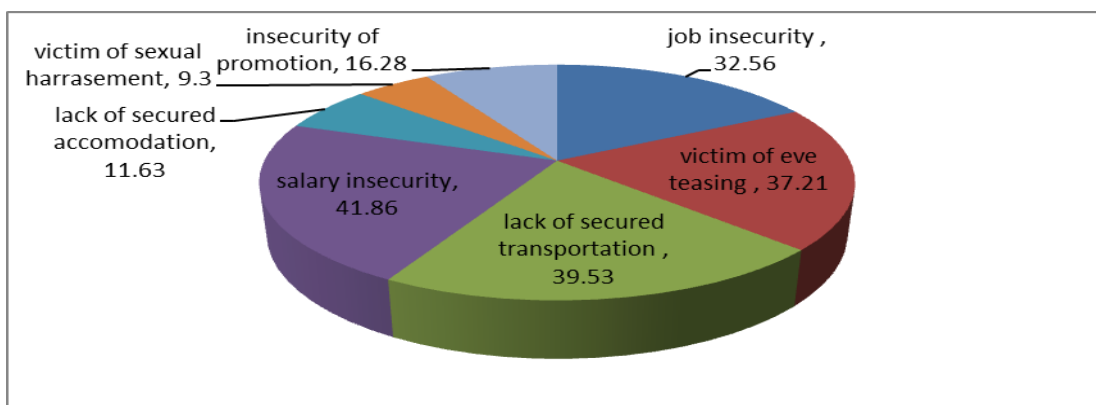


The respondent who said that they face social challenges here we try to find out what type of social challenges they face and the 12% respondents said that problems created by other male colleagues, and again 12% thinks that problems created by other female colleagues, only 3% faces problem from customers. But the majority that is 73% respondent face problem from their neighbors. And the respondents said that neighbors create different problems like teasing, Passing bad comment if they came late at home, underestimating the job, Saying that it is unnecessary as a women to do job.

**6.5. Respondents having 'Security Related Challenges' as sales women:**

Responses	Percentages
Yes	69.35
No	30.65

Here we try to identify that whether women seller have security related challenges as sales women or not and found that 30.65% respondents don't face any security related challenges. And majority that is 69.35% face security related challenges.

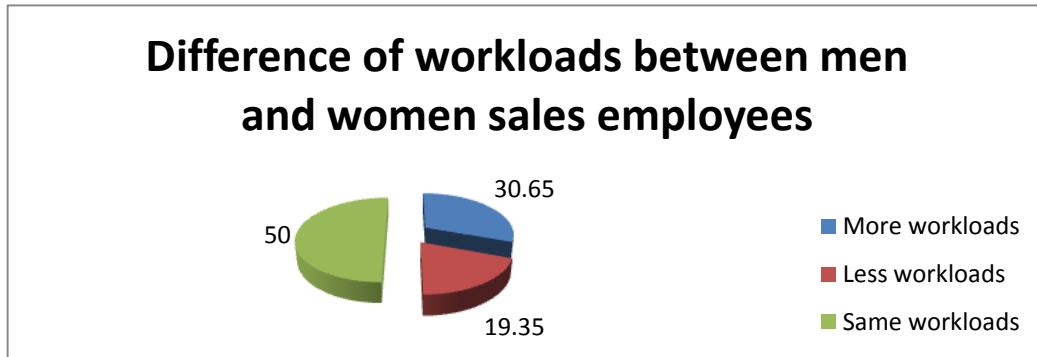


**Security related challenges**

According to data the women sellers face different types of security challenges. The majority respondents that are 41.86% face salary insecurity, and part with they don't get full salary.

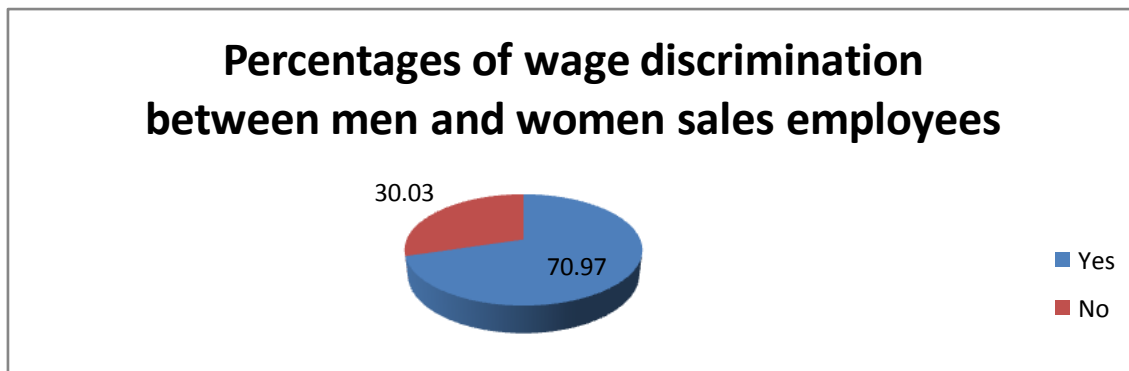
39.53% said that there is a lacking of secured transportations, 37.21% said that they are the victim of eve teasing, 32.56% faces the insecurity of the job. They think that if they don't meet up the sales target there is a possibility to lose their job. 16.28% think they have the insecurity of promotion, 11.63% have the lack of secured accommodation, and remaining 9.30% are the victim of sexual harassments

**6.6. Difference of workloads between men and women sales employees:**



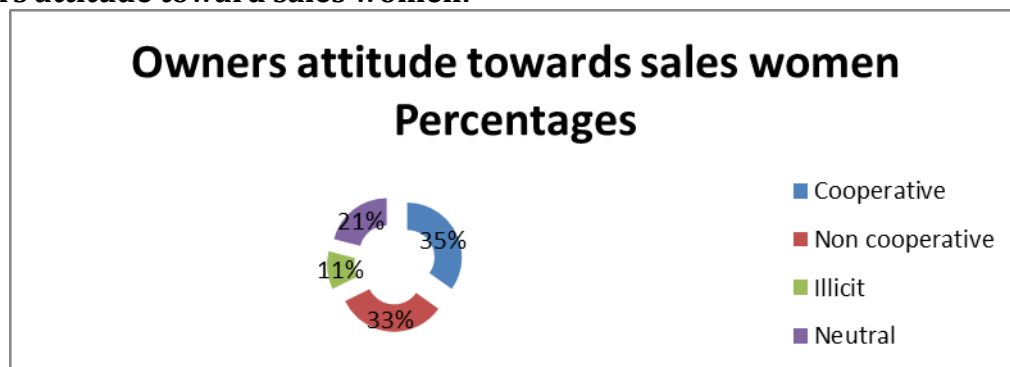
According to the above information 50% women agreed they were working as much as male colleagues, 30.65% women were agreed that they have more workload than male colleagues and 19.35% women agreed they were not working as much as their male colleagues.

**6.7. Facing Wage discriminations compared to men sales employees:**



Here is alarming findings reveal that around 71% female sales employee faces wages discrimination. And nearly 30% said that they do not face any salary discrimination.

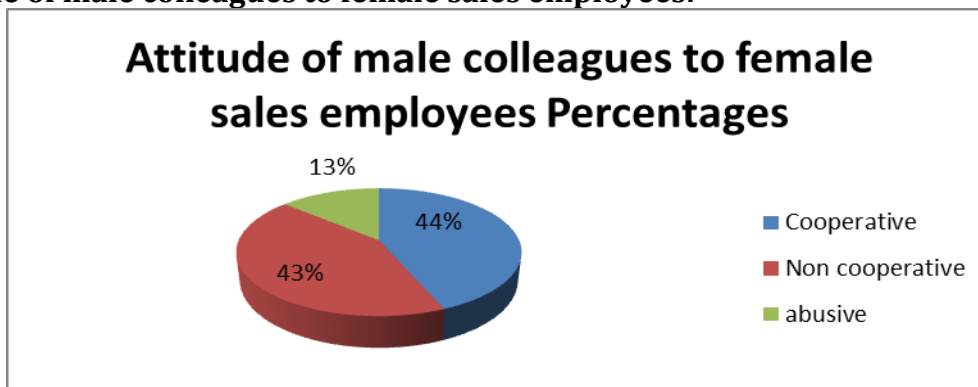
**6.8. Owners attitude toward sales women:**



According to the above information 35% female agreed that their boss attitude towards them are co-operative, 33% women said that their boss is non-cooperative with them and 21% were neutral and 11% women said their boss attitude towards them were abusive.



**6.9. Attitude of male colleagues to female sales employees:**

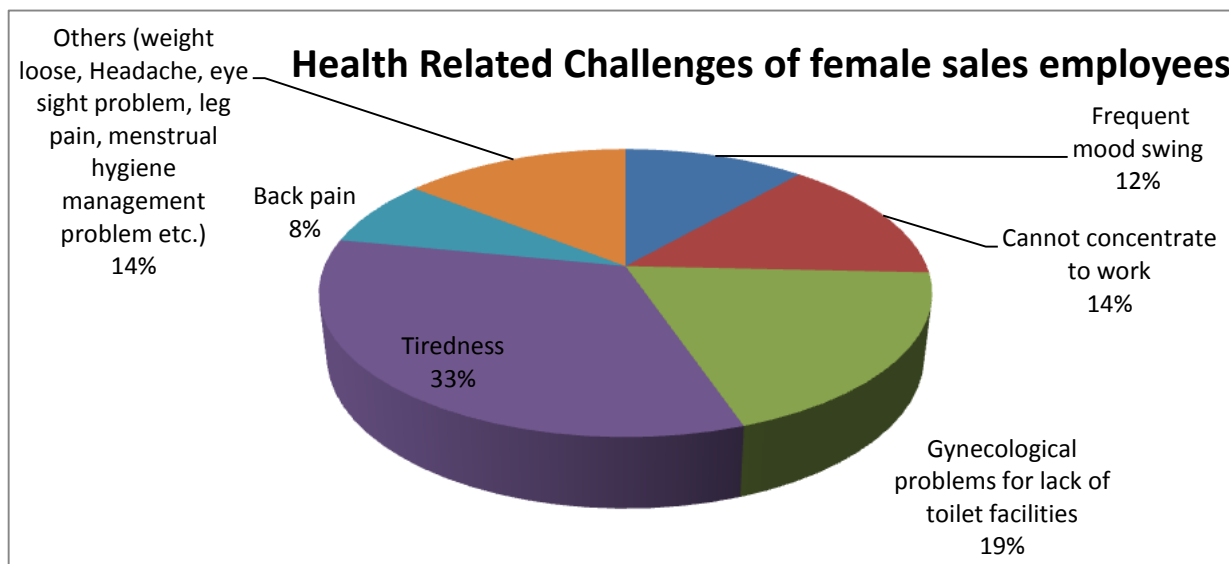


According to the above information 44% female agreed that their male colleagues attitude towards them are co-operative, 43% women said that their attitudes are non-cooperative with them and 13% women said their attitude towards them were abusive.

**6.10. Health related challenges as a sales employee:**

Responses	percentages
Yes	87.1
No	12.9

Here we try to identify that whether women face physical and mental pressure as sales women or not and found that 12.9% respondents don't face any physical and mental pressure. And majority that is 87.1% face different health injuries.



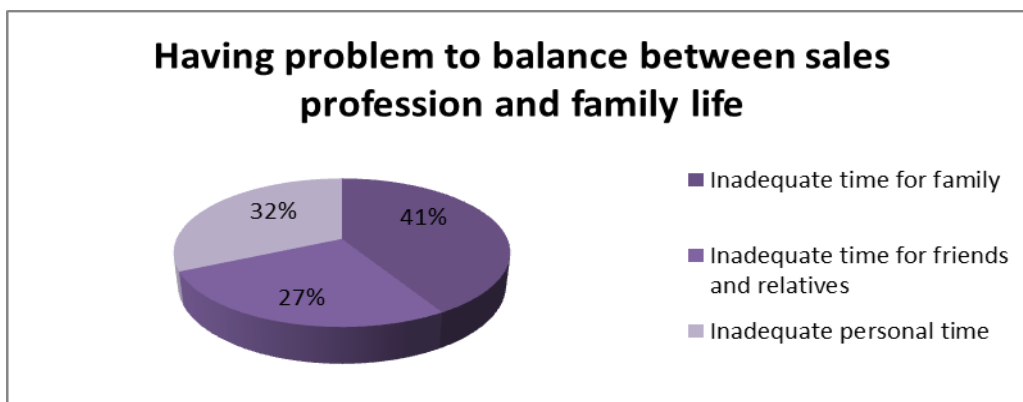
According to data the women seller faces different types of physical and mental pressure. The majority response that is 33% they suffer from tiredness, 19% said that they suffer from gynecological problems for lack of toilet facilities, 14% said that they cannot concentrate to work

for long time. another 14% faces others problems such as weight loose, headache, eye sight problem, leg pain, menstrual hygiene management problem, 12% faces frequent mood swing problem and remaining 8% are suffer from back pain.

**6.11. Having problem to balance between sales profession and family life:**

Responses	Percentages
Yes	29.03
No	70.97

Here we try to identify that whether women can balance between sales profession and family life and found that 29.03% respondents don't face any problem to balance between sales profession and family life. But majority that is 70.97% face problem to balance between sales profession and family life.

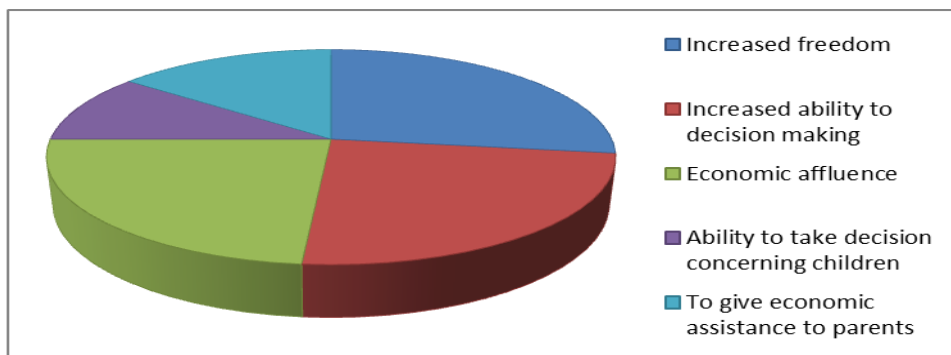


Here we try to identify the major problems to balance between their family life and professional life. 41% don't give enough time for their family, 32% don't have enough time for their family and relatives and 27% said that they don't have adequate time for personal life.

**6.12. Positively Changes social status due to sales job:**

Responses	Percentages
Yes	83.87
No	16.12

Here we try to identify that due to sales job their social status positively changed or not and found that 16.12% respondents social status does not changed. And majority that is 83.87% social status positively changed.



**Positively Changes social status due to sales job**

Due to the sales job the positive social changes of women in sales are that their freedom is

increased, now their authority to take part in family decision making and also decision regarding children is increased, they are now economically affluent, and they have the ability to financially support their family and parents.

### **6.13. Interpretation of Qualitative Data: (face to face interviews and FGDs):**

Most of the women sales executives emphasizes that sales itself a challenging task. They sometimes become the victims of corporate politics. Sometimes they face pressure to meet the sales target. Sometimes they experiences unhealthy competition among colleagues. Some states that they face discrimination in case of promotion. Some says that sometimes they have to work more than their office hours and it creates problems to balances between family and professional life. On the other hand most of the women seller said that as working women they have suffer forms different problems. The authority don't allow taking personal phone calls, they have to stand up around 8 to 10 hours even if there is no customer they don't have the permission to sit. They have frightened of product missing and if the product got damaged or lost the authority cut the salary. They don't get enough vacation. If they take a day off the authority cut their salary. In their menstrual time they face different problem. They don't get proper toilet as well as hygiene facilities. They always have the tension of meeting the sales target and losing their job. They don't get proper lunch time. Even though they work equally as men but they get less salary than men. Another interesting, but bitter facts that were revealed were the female colleagues also given mental stress, like treating in jealous behavior, pointless gossip and conflict. Several women also commented that their female colleagues spread negative rumors about one's character and upbringing and simply continue with their comments, and any objection to that is met with arguments and unreasonable behavior. They try to harass by creating confusion and misunderstanding with seniors and complain about other females. Male members also try to excerpt sexual favors. If one is a single/divorcee/separated from husband, then other male members try to get close and if they do not get a favorable response then they start spreading rumors about woman's character and family and efficiency. If working women work and get a higher post then people usually think that the woman has got the higher post because of favoritism and draw conclusions on her character rather than accepting her capability of achieving this kind of a position.

### **8. Recommendations:**

In this study we asked the responded for their recommendation to solve these problems and improving the existing conditions of sales women. Here is the possible solution that was recommended by the respondent. And the recommendation is as follows:

60.32% respondent especially sales girls emphasize to ensure toilet facilities. 53.54% respondent recommend for having specific rules and regulations related to salary structure. 27.42% respondent said to ensure work friendly environment. 24.19 % respondent emphasizes to ensure facilities for rest and recreation. 24.19% respondent said to increase leave facilities. 22.58% respondent emphasizes for changing social attitude towards sales women. 20.97% respondent recommend for having specific working hours. 19.35 % respondent prioritizing women security. 14.52% respondent recommend for having specific rules and regulations for sales employees. 11.29% respondent said to ensure facilities for pure drinking water. 10.84% respondent suggest to ensure transportation facilities. And besides these based on the findings of the study and the researcher's experience, the following recommendations can be put forwarded as follows:

Positive image for this profession should be increased. Unhealthy competition should be reduced by proper monitoring by respective authority. Enough facilities and recreation should be

provided. Proper training and motivational programs should be arranged for the women seller. Both Government and private sector should step forward for having specific rules and regulations related to salary structure. Organization should establish child care facilities for working mom. Finally we should increase our awareness and respect towards women.

### 9. Conclusion:

Societal, cultural, financial, and civil freedom of women is vital for the development of every civilization. Working women are requisite for the improvement of civilization. So women liberty is imperative to the elevate Societal, cultural, financial, and civil position of women. Bangladesh probably has still a long way to go to make our workplaces free from any prejudices, abuses and harassments. Though there are some challenges which create problem for working women who are in sales sector but if they consider some dealing mechanism and reliable resolution that can assist them to change the situation. Even then we can still try at solving some of the related issues and problems with some possible solutions that have been recommended above so that women seller become stronger and are able to handle any adverse situations where they can show their full potentiality without any sort of suppression and obstacles.

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