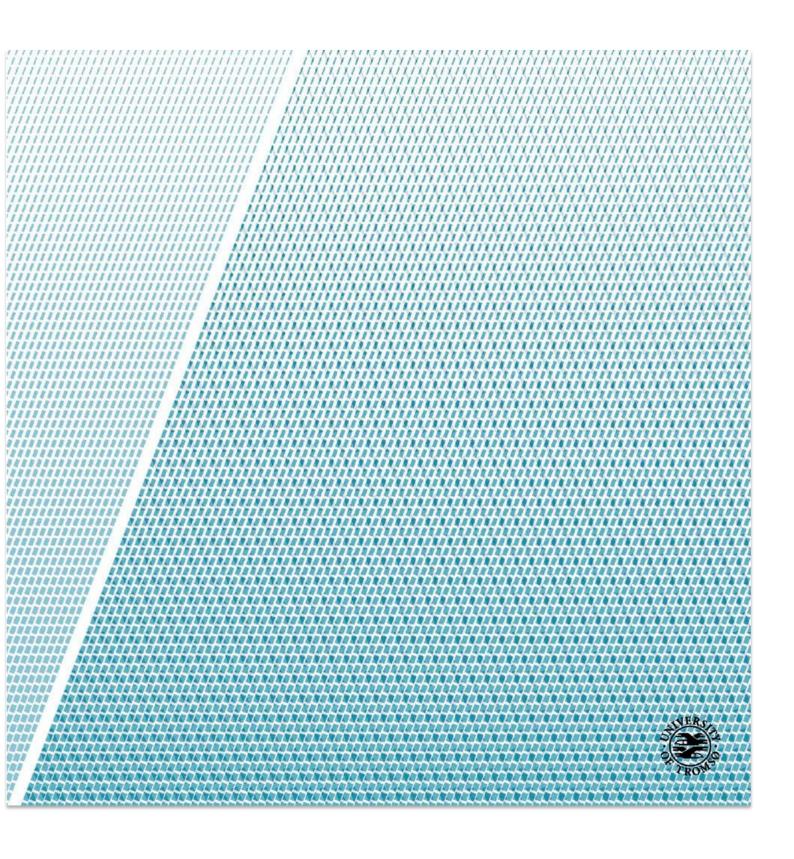# WOMEN IN THE GARMENT INDUSTRY OF BANGLADESH; A PARADOX OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND TRANSFORMATION OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE.

**Md. Ahsun Habib**
Master's thesis in Peace and Conflict Transformation – SVF-3901, December, 2014

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Last but not least, I would like to thank all the employees at the Peace Center, my class fellows and those who shared their knowledge about this research.

Md. Ahsun Habib
December, 2014

## Dedicated to:

Masuma Akter (Departed), my university colleague. She was Injured in a bombing during the political violence in Dhaka in December, 2013, and died on 11.12.13. She introduced me to the female garment workers.

# Abstract:

This thesis examines whether the presence of women in the garment industry of Bangladesh is a means of empowerment or just a continuation of structural violence. Due to the patriarchal system in Bangladesh, structural violence against women has been an ongoing problem throughout the country's history. The focus of this research is that structural violence is still present in the society and in the garment sector, which halt the social and economic empowerment of women. Using a gender lens along with the concepts of structural violence and empowerment, this study largely focuses on the socio-economic empowerment of female garment workers in Bangladesh. Qualitative method has been applied in this study, which includes fifteen in-depth interviews, one focus group discussion, and observations, though quantitative surveys have been used from secondary sources.

The findings show that women workers are seemingly empowered socially and economically through their involvement in the garment sector. But female workers face restrictions from their male family members when they intend to join the garment sector, which is similar to structural violence within the household. Additionally, female workers face structural violence from the very beginning of their joining the garment industry. Women workers do not receive any contract papers while being recruited in the textile industry. Consequently, their employers can easily exploit them by giving them a low salary, not ensuring their proper working environment, not allowing them holidays, and harassing them physically and mentally.

Due to their joining the garment industry and due to extremely long working hours, female workers feel that their social status is decreased. Though women are getting benefits from the garment sector in terms of their income, the negative sides outweigh the positive sides of women workers' involvement in the garment sector. As a result, it impedes the transformation of structural violence in society and thus, social and economic empowerment of women through their enrolment in the garment industry of Bangladesh is paradoxical.

**Key words:** Empowerment, women empowerment, structural violence, gender and gender inequality.

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **ASK** | Ain O Salish Kendro |
| **BGMEA** | Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association |
| **BIDS** | Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies |
| **BWF** | Bonded Warehouse Facility |
| **CIF** | Chief Inspector of Factories |
| **FGD** | Focus Group Discussion |
| **GSP** | Generalized System of Preferences |
| **IRDP** | Integrated Rural Development Programme |
| **MFA** | Multi-Fiber Arrangement |
| **RMG** | Readymade Garment |
| **WHO** | World Health Organization |
| **UNIFEM** | United Nations Development Fund for Women |
| **XPL** | Export Performance Licence |

# Table of Contents:

# Chapter 1. Introduction

Until recently women, as part of Bangladeshi traditional patriarchal social structure [1], were not allowed to work outside their homes. Today women have come out from their households and have entered the wage market. They have started contributing to the overall economy of Bangladesh. From the mid-1980s to the end of the last century "[...] the size of the total labor force increased 1.6 times, averaging a growth rate of 3.6 percent per annum. During this period the female labor force increased from 2.54 million to 10.02 million, implying an average growth rate of 16.7 percent per annum, more than four times faster than total labor force and more than six times faster than the male labor force" (Mahmud, 2003: 1).

*Structural violence* is a concept coined by peace researcher Johan Galtung (1990). It describes the kind of violence that comes with societal structures characterized by inequality, discrimination and injustice. Applying this concept to the Bangladeshi women's situation, it would at glance suggest the socio-economic empowerment of female workers through their involvement in the garment industry. But has the garment industry empowered women by giving them jobs? Empowerment is closely related to voice, and has the garment industry created possibilities of voice for female workers at home and at the work place? (Ahmed, 2004). Here voice indicates greater decision making power within the household and that female workers can protest if there are problems in the garment sector (Ahmed, 2004). In addition to voice, women's socio-economic empowerment is related to gender equality, the decrease of all kinds of violence against women (Abdin, 2008:1), their access to adequate income as a way to achieve long term bargaining capacity at home, in community and at the work place (Mosedale, 2005: 247).

The Bangladeshi women garment workers show their voices against the traditional cultural and religious norms when they make the decisions to join the garment sector. This ensures their social empowerment within the family. Nevertheless, these women sometimes face violence within the family by their husbands and their husbands control their incomes. Moreover, they are exploited and discriminated by the factory owners in terms of getting low wages. Furthermore, they face physical and sexual harassment at their work place and in

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[1] Patriarchal social structure: In such social structure, there remains systematic domination of women by men. (Stanistreet et al., 2005). http://jech.bmj.com/content/59/10/873.full.pdf+html (accessed on 20.12.14).

public place. This altogether shows that structural violence is still present in society and at the work place. Consequently, female garment workers have limited social and economic empowerment.

## 1.1 Issues in earlier research and its linkage with the current research:

The problems such as child labor, bad working conditions, accidents related to the garment industry of Bangladesh have been widely discussed in medias all around the world. Moreover, academic researchers mostly from Bangladesh have written many scholarly articles in different national and international journals in regard to the female garment workers' problems while working in the garment sector. These articles examine a long list of issues related to female garment workers such as wages, gender discrimination, unfavorable working conditions, security at the work place, violence against the workers, how these female garment workers can exercise their voices at home and work place and their health and living conditions. These issues are examined in this thesis through the lens of Galtung's (1990) theory of structural violence and through gender perspective along with Naila Kabeer's (1999, 2001 and 2005) empowerment concept based on her three interrelated dimensions ; resources, agency and achievements.

I hope to offer a different perspective on female garment factory workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh through my research. Because, my research has revealed that no one seems to have applied using Galtung's (1990) theory of structural violence in connection with the women empowerment in the garment industry of Bangladesh.

Primary data alone is not sufficient for research. Therefore, I have used secondary literature to support my findings. The works by Naila Kabeer (1997 and 2005), Nazli Kibria (1998), Syeda Sharmin Absar (2001 and 2002), Pratima Paul-Majumder and Anwara Begum (2000), Jasmin Uddin Ahmed and Tamima Hossain (2009) , and Fauzia Erfan Ahmed (2004) helped me to gather information about the structure of the garment sector and the female garment workers' socio-economic conditions. Their works suggest that structural violence is present in the garment sector and in society. Therefore, their works can be compared through the lens of Galtung's (1990) concept of structural violence. Moreover, their works can also be

used to measure women garment workers' social and economic empowerment through Kabeer's (1999, 2001 and 2005) three dimensions; agency, resources and achievements.

Kabeer (1997) in her article entitled *Women, Wages and Intra-household Power Relations in Urban Bangladesh* discussed the relation between female garment workers' income and its effect on the intra-household power relationship (Kabeer, 1997). She found that "Male management of household income was perceived as giving men information on, and control over, women's wages and it was precisely this aspect of surrendering information and control over their wages […]"(Kabeer, 1997: 277-278). In her another article named *Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal 1,* Kabeer (2005: 20) argued that women mostly work in exploitative conditions. She also found that women workers complain against long working hours. There are also health hazards (Kabeer, 2005: 20).

Kibria (1998), in her article entitled *Becoming a Garments worker: The Mobilization of Women into the Garments Factories of Bangladesh* discussed how women become involved in the garment sector. Kibria (1998) states that "[…] while for some the job is a matter of basic survival, for others it is a way of improving their standard of living […]" (Kibria, 1998: 2). She showed that women workers join the garment industry because of various 'pull' and 'push' factors (Kibria, 1998: 1). The push factors include financial hardship or poverty, household crises of different types like economic losses in the business, unemployment, illness or death of the male head of family and most often the chief source of the family income (Kibria, 1998: 1-2). The pull factors are the attractive forces for those women who wanted to improve their standard of living (Kibria, 1998: 2).

Absar (2002), in her article titled *Women Garment workers in Bangladesh*, showed that female workers do not receive job contract papers during their recruitment process. Moreover, she also revealed from her study that most of the female garment workers face problems in finding accommodation when they migrate from rural to urban areas in order to find jobs in the garment industry (Absar, 2002). Furthermore, she found that the amount of money female workers earn is not sufficient for housing and food cost. In her article *Problems surrounding wages: the ready made garment sector in Bangladesh,* Absar (2001), further argued that women are discriminated against in comparison with male workers in getting their wages earned and access to higher ranking positions within the factory.

Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000) in their studies used data from the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies' (BIDS)[2] surveys of 1990, 1993 and 1997 (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 2). In 1990, BIDS carried out a survey using samples of 32 garment factories and 426 female and 245 male garment workers from these factories (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 2). In 1993, BIDS carried out another survey taking samples of 50 garment factories and 376 female and 140 male workers from these factories. Again, in 1997, BIDS continued its survey of 34 garment factories involving 589 female and 219 male workers from these factories (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 2-3). These surveys by BIDS followed up with structured interviews showed that most of the garment factories did not maintain a satisfactory working environment. Moreover, Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000) also found that most of the factories violated the Factory Rules mandated by the government. This affected the health status of the garment workers. Furthermore, their research also mentioned that female workers are the victims of physical, sexual and verbal harassment at the work place and in public space (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 10-16).

In their recent research Ahmed and Hossain (2009), argued that safety measures are not adequate in the garment sector in Bangladesh. They also found that owners of the garment factories are careless concerning the safety of the workers. Consequently, accidents like fires or building collapse often take place. Their work also indicates that:

> *Though the Bangladesh government has three ministries and laws to safeguard the rights of the workers, unfortunately none of the ministries carries out their duties […]and takes steps to prevent the recurrence of such tragic incidents* (The Independent,2006 cited in Ahmed and Hossain, 2009: 3).

Ahmed and Hossain (2009) have further found that The Office of the Chief Inspector of Factories (CIF) under the Ministry of Industry is the prime organization which is supposed to visit factories in order to ensure the health and safety issues of the workers. But this organization does not have sufficient man power and equipment (Ahmed and Hossain, 2009: 3)

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[2] BIDS: "A multi-disciplinary public research organization which carries out policy related research on development issues faced by Bangladesh and other developing countries. It is situated in Dhaka, Bangladesh." http://www.bids.org.bd/AboutInstitute.php?FM=2&SM=61&Page=About%20Us (accessed on 21.12.14)

Voice is important to ensure empowerment. And the researcher Ahmed (2004) in her article *The Rise of the Bangladesh Garment Industry: Globalization, Women Workers, and Voice*, shows to what extent female garment workers have been able to express their voices at home and at work. Her study found that women workers have very limited voices at home because of patriarchy. Female workers have limited voices at the work place because they are not unionized through labor organizations (Ahmed, 2004: 38-41). Women workers' inability to raise voice actually keeps women away from empowerment in terms of making their choices over their activities inside and outside the home.

## 1.2 Problem Statement:

Bangladesh is a male dominated society in which women are treated unequally. It starts from the family and goes up in different sectors like the garment sector in the outside world. Their family members sometimes forbid them to go outside the home. Consequently, they face challenges to join outside workforce like the garment sector (Cain et al, 1979). This is at the family level, where women's voice is not heard, and thus, it shows the disempowerment of women in the family. To shed light on women workers' absence of voice at home, this research aims to show that social and cultural construction is responsible for this unequal treatment.

In the outside world, exploitation of garment women workers starts from the very beginning of their recruitment process in the garment sector. During the recruitment process, most of the women workers are not given formal job contract papers (Absar, 2002:3012). They face gender discrimination in terms of wages and access to higher ranking positions (Absar, 2001: 5). Sometimes they are victims of sexual and verbal abuse by their male managers and supervisors (Hossain and Al-Amin: 2012). In addition, their working conditions in the garment factories are not congenial for them. The factory's air quality is contaminated, very hot and dusty as sewing, cutting and ironing are done on the same floor. Moreover, the work place is overcrowded (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 15). There are not sufficient toilets for women workers in most of the garment factories. Because of this uncongenial working environment, workers in the garment factories suffer from various diseases like fever, headache, back pain, eye infection, jaundice, typhoid, weakness or anemia, skin diseases, diarrhea and so on (Ahamed, 2013: 12-13). Furthermore, garment workers believe

that their social status has decreased because of working in the garment sector (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000).

## 1.3 Objectives of the study:

In connection with the problems stated above, this thesis has the following objectives: Firstly, it explains how traditional patriarchy in Bangladesh creates structural violence both in the family and outside family matters. Secondly, it assesses how the presence of structural violence in society and in the garment sector hinders the social and economic empowerment of women garment workers. This research tries to explore Bangladeshi garment workers' lives from a gender perspective.

## 1.4 Research hypothesis:

This study's position is that because of the presence of structural violence in society as well as in the garment sector, the socio-economic empowerment of women is obstructed.

## 1.5 Research questions:

How is the involvement of women in the garment industry of Bangladesh a continuation of structural violence?

In order to discuss the research question, I have formulated the following supplementary questions:

1) Do the garment women workers work by necessity or by choice?

2) How do women in the garment industry perceive their own situation in terms of empowerment?

3) What are the benefits of working and what are the downsides?

## 1.6 Motivation for the thesis:

After my graduation in 2011, I left my university's hostel and rented a house in Azimpur, Dhaka, where many female garment workers were living in a nearby slum area. I observed in every morning and evening that lots of female garment workers go to and come from garment factories. At that time, I thought that the women's presence in the public space is really praiseworthy in a country where there remains religious and cultural barriers for

women's free movement. But their poor living conditions touched me. Apart from this, I knew through different newspapers and TV channels that one of the major causes of street violence created by the garment workers in Bangladesh is the low payment and deprivation of payment of the workers by the owners of the garment factories. Thus, when I look at the Bangladeshi garment workers' poor living and working conditions, their low salary and frequent accidents in the factories through different electronic and print media, a general view of structural violence appears to me. Moreover, the recent garment factory building collapse in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 24th April, 2013, with more than 1000 peoples' death and injuries [3](Yardley, 2013), has also shocked me. The death of huge numbers of people due to the garment building collapse and other issues such as workers' salary, their working and living conditions motivated me to write about this vulnerable sector for the workers. As a majority of the workers in the garment sector are female, and as this group of people face lots of challenges from their family life to their working life, I decided to write my master's thesis on the socio-economic empowerment of women in the garment sector using Galtung's (1990) theory of structural violence. I hope that this project can be used by other scholars in order to enhance women factory workers' social and economic empowerment.

This thesis is focusing on women's empowerment in a development context. Consequently, this thesis is very much related with Peace Studies, because development and peace "[...] in a sense the same thing" (Galtung, 1980: 145). Development means, in a broad sense, securing well-being and the satisfaction of human needs (Galtung, 1980: 145). Therefore, in order to ensure development, it is necessary to remove all kinds of gender inequalities, because gender inequalities negatively affect the well-being (Klasen, 2000), and satisfaction of human needs. And all kinds of inequalities are regarded as structural violence (Ho, 2007:4). On the same line, peace is the absence of both direct and structural violence (Galtung, 1980: 145). This thesis largely focuses on the presence of structural violence in society in general and in the garment industry of Bangladesh in particular. It is necessary to transform structural violence in the garment sector and in society at large in order to ensure social and economic empowerment of women, and thereby- contribute to peace and development in society.

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[3] Yardley (2013). Report on Deadly Factory Collapse in Bangladesh Finds Widespread Blame. *Nytimes. com*. http://scholar.google.no/scholar?q=Report+on+Deadly+Factory+Collapse+in+Bangladesh+Finds+Widespread+Blame.+Nytimes.+com.&btnG=&hl=no&as_sdt=0%2C5 accessed on 20.12.14

## 1.7 Challenges of the study:

Because of my status as an insider, one may raise question about the subjectivity of my arguments and my biasness. Firstly, I am a male researcher and the key informants of this research are women. Thus, I am an outsider to the female informants. Also being male, might have caused my informants not to give me complete answers to my questions. They might have also felt that their answers should please me. If a female researcher as an insider would do the same research, she would probably find something new which I have not looked at. Furthermore, general cultural blind spots might have affected my research work.

Moreover, though I was conducting my research on those women who belong to patriarchal social structures, I have not grown up in a patriarchal family. My father gave equal opportunity to me, my younger brother and my only sister with equal advantages in terms of education, access to other advantages and expressing opinion within the family. In addition, my family members are also well educated. Furthermore, I belong to middle class[4] family but the key informants of this thesis belong to the lower class. Thus, my family background and the background of the key research informants are different in terms of social class, education and patriarchal practice. Being an insider as a Bangladeshi, the challenge I faced was a possible bias during interviewing, interpretation and data analysis of a sector of women of Bangladesh society who have been denied education. This section has been discussed in details in the methodology chapter.

## 1.8 Objectivity and ethics of the research:

In order to avoid probable bias, attempts have been made to maintain a level of objectivity at all stages of the research. I was well aware of potential bias before conducting my fieldwork. As I was conducting research on gender sensitive issues, I was aware of the ethics of research. I maintained my own safety during my fieldwork in a politically violent setting. To avoid possible data distortion, all the interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the interviewees. To follow the research ethics, permission was granted before taking pictures as part of the observation method.

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[4] There are three classes of people in Bangladesh; the rich, the middle class and the lower class in terms of their earnings, property, education and occupation.

## 1.9 Structure of the thesis:

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The next chapter discusses the background of the thesis, which includes background of the study area, the growth of the garment industry in Bangladesh, traditional life of women in Bangladesh and women's involvement in the garment sector of Bangladesh. Chapter 3 deals with methodological issues that include the causes of choosing qualitative method for this research, data collection methods: interviewing, focus group discussion and observation method, insider and outsider approach, challenges and ethical issues. Chapter 4 focuses on the conceptual framework which includes concepts of empowerment, women empowerment, structuralism, structural violence and concepts of gender and gender inequality. Chapter 5 is about the data presentation and analysis, where research questions have been addressed with both primary and secondary data. Finally, concluding remarks will be presented in the Chapter 6.

# Chapter 2. Background

This chapter discusses the factors that contributed to the development of the garment industry in Bangladesh. Furthermore, this chapter acknowledges that international favorable market and available cheap labor force played a significant role for the growth of the garment industry in Bangladesh. Moreover, government policies also played an important role for the development of this sector.

This chapter discusses a brief background of the study area. It further analyses the traditional role of women in the Bangladeshi male dominated society. It also examines how they have become involved in the garment sector.

## 2.1 Background of the study area:

Dhaka, the Capital of Bangladesh, has been selected for data collection for the current research. The main reason behind this is that most of the garment factories of Bangladesh are in Dhaka. The reason behind the establishment of most of the garment factories in Dhaka is that the city is a financial hub of the country. Consequently most of the development has been Dhaka-centric (Hossain, 2008: 1). Moreover, all the international communications in Bangladesh are mostly based on Dhaka. In addition, the source of cheap Bangladeshi natural gas has also facilitated for the growth of garment industry in Dhaka.

This city consists of the Dhaka city corporation and five other municipal areas; Savar, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Kadamrasul and Tongi (Alam and Rabbani, 2007: 81). The Buriganga River runs through the city to the South, the Balu and Shitalakhya rivers to the east, the Tongi canal to the North and the Turag River to the west (Alam and Rabbani, 2007: 81). Now, Dhaka is one of the largest megacities[5] in the world with more than 13.1 million people in its 1353 square kilometer area. According to the latest survey by UN, its population will be 16.8 million by 2015 (Alam and Rabbani, 2007: 81). According to the 2001 census, in Dhaka there are 5978482 males and 4733724 females showing more males than females, though the unbalanced sex ratio of Dhaka city has been reduced because of the reunion of the women with their husbands living in the city and due to the migration of single females seeking jobs (Hossain, 2008: 2).

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[5] Megacity: Megacity is a city that has ten million people (World Bank 1993 cited in Hossain, 2008: 1).

The development of Dhaka city took place over a long period of time. The city was under different kings and rulers (Hossain, 2008: 9). The city became a capital of Bengal province under the rule of *Subader* (Bengal ruler) Islam Khan Chisti for the political and military purpose in 1608 (Hossain, 2008: 9). Human settlement and infrastructural development of the city began in the 16th century. In last 400 years, the city has seen historic political and demographic changes. Historically, the area of Dhaka has been enlarged to almost 40 kilometers from North to South, and 14 kilometers from east to west (Alam and Rabbani, 2007: 82). Since its independence in 1971 from Pakistan , "[...] the rapid development of human settlements, the growth of national and international business, the opening of new trades and the expansion of private and public establishments, industry and infrastructure have made Dhaka one of the most unplanned urban centers" (Alam and Rabbani, 2007: 82). Utility services had been increased in the city for the city dwellers but it is not much in comparison with the growing population in the city (Alam and Rabbani, 2007: 82). The rapid population growth of Dhaka city because of the rural-urban migration is one of the major problems of the city. Such migration is just expanding the number of slums in the city and creating hazards (Alam and Rabbani, 2007: 82). It is also visible in Dhaka that there is huge contrast between rich and poor people. It is noticeable that there are many slums just near the high-rise buildings in Dhaka showing the disparity between rich and poor.

Other problems in Dhaka city are polluted air, surface water contamination, poor sewage management, water logging and traffic jam in connection with growing industrialization and increasing population (Alam and Rabbani, 2007: 82).

Figure 1: Map of Dhaka, Bangladesh, where I carried out my fieldwork.



Source: Google map.[6]

## 2.2 Growth of the garment industry in Bangladesh:

The Readymade Garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh started just after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, when the country's economy was very weak (Rashid, 2006). Recently

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[6] http://www.pragmaticmom.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/bangladesh_map12.gif (accessed 21.12.14)

Bangladesh has gained tremendous success in garment exporting (Rhee, 1990). The country has good ranking and is one of the largest cloth exporting countries in the world. This sector earns about 76 percent of the country's export earnings (Ahmed and Hossain, 2009: 1).

The garment sector, however, developed in Bangladesh initially for domestic need. But at the very beginning, there was very limited investment in this sector because of the limited size of the domestic market (Rashid, 2006). "It was the global trend of relocation of production of garments from high-wage to low-wage countries, together with the bilateral MFA (Multi-Fibre Arrangement) Quota system, that acted as the main driving force for the emergence and subsequent growth of the RMG (Readymade Garment) industry in Bangladesh. Supportive government policies also played an important contributory role in this regard" (Rashid, 2006: 7-8).

Two factors contributed significantly at the initial stage behind the development of the garment industry in Bangladesh: a) positive exporting environment created by the MFA quota system and b) cheap labor (Rashid, 2006: 11).

The initial purpose of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) was to protect the domestic textile industry of the developed countries like the USA and EU countries by imposing quota restrictions on the large garment exporters like Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore in the 1970s (Rashid, 2006: 12). From 1974 to 31st December, 2004, the global textile and clothing trade was controlled by the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) Quota system (Rashid, 2006: 12).

The Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA), however, did not have export restrictions on Bangladesh at the beginning of MFA system. Moreover, wages were also low (Rashid, 2006). Thus, the cheap labor and quota free access of Bangladesh attracted other countries to invest in Bangladesh (Mottaleb and Sonobe, 2011). These foreign producers had joint ventures with Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to export garments from Bangladesh to North America, the EU and other places (Rashid, 2006).

Bangladesh's quota free access to the developed countries and the low labor cost caught the attention of South Korean emerging garment manufacturer Daewoo Corporation, which was suffering massively because of the quota restrictions (Mottaleb and Sonobe, 2011). Therefore, this company wanted to base their production in Bangladesh, and collaborated

with a new Bangladeshi garment firm named Desh Ltd in the late 1970s. In 1979, "Desh sent 130 new employees to Daewoo's factory in South Korea" for receiving training (Mottaleb and Sonobe, 2011: 67). Under Daewoo's training Bangladeshis received some training including sewing skills to factory management and international marketing (Rhee, 1990). These trained employees, however, left their employer Desh Ltd. After few years, they established their own garment factories gradually (Rhee, 1990 cited in Mottaleb and Sonobe, 2011: 67).

In examining the emergence of the garment industry in Bangladesh, Rashid (2006: 12) found another vital factor, which was the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP). Under the EU's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), Bangladesh got both quota free and duty free access, whereas in North America Bangladesh got only quota free access under the Multi-Fibre Arrangement(MFA) (Rashid, 2006: 12).

In addition to the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA), the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), and cheap labor facilities, Yunus and Yamagata (2012) found in their study that the Bangladesh government also played significant role for the growth of the garment industry in connection to the industrial policies: the New Industrial Policy of 1982, the Revised Industrial Policy of 1986, the Industrial Policy of 1999 and the latest Industrial Policy of 2010. (Yunus and Yamagata, 2012: 2).

In the early 1980s, the government provided licenses to new entrepreneurs in order to facilitate duty-free import of machinery to manufacture clothes for the purpose of export. (Yunus and Yamagata, 2012: 5). As a result, the number of garment factories increased dramatically and reached 632 in 1984-85 (Yunus and Yamagata, 2012: 5). Export enhanced from US $ 1.3 million in 1980-81 to US $ 116.2 million in 1984-85 and the industry started flourishing rapidly in the country. (Yunus and Yamagata, 2012: 5).

Table 1: Growth of the garment industry in Bangladesh:

| Fiscal year | Number of garment factories | Employment (Million workers) | Export value (Billion US $) | % of garments in the country's export earnings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1983-84 | 134 | .04 | .03 | 3.9 |

| 1987-88 | 685 | .28 | .43 | 35.2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1991-92 | 1163 | .58 | 1.18 | 59.3 |
| 1995-96 | 2353 | 1.29 | 2.55 | 65.6 |
| 1999-2000 | 3200 | 1.6 | 4.35 | 75.6 |
| 2004-05 | 4107 | 2.1 | 5.17 | 74.2 |
| 2007-08 | 4740 | 2.5 | 10.7 | 75.8 |

Source: Bangladesh Export promotion Bureau, 2005 and BGMEA, 2008. N.B. In Bangladesh the fiscal year begins in July and finishes in June (Mottaleb and Sonobe, 2011: 70).[7]

The New Industrial Policy (NIP) declared by the Government in June 1982, was a milestone for the development of the garment sector. The purpose of the New Industrial Policy (NIP) was to promote industrial development through privatization and it made tremendous changes in the industrial policy environment (Rashid, 2006:19). Moreover, in the 1980s, some incentives like the Bonded Warehouse Facility (BWF)[8] and the Export Performance Licence (XPL) scheme were introduced in order to promote export activities (Rashid, 2006:20).

In 1982, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) was established to secure the interests of the manufacturers and exporters of the Readymade Garment (RMG). Since its establishment, BGMEA has been working to ensure the collective needs of the factory owners nationally and internationally (Yunus and Yamagata, 2012: 18-19).

## 2.3 Traditional life of women in Bangladesh:

The economic contribution of women in the development of Bangladesh has changed dramatically since the country's creation in 1971. It can honestly be said that from the 1990's until present the industrialization of Bangladesh has been dependent upon women (Wright, 2000: 231). This pattern of change, in which women are contributing directly, and

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[7] http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/661218 (accessed on 21.12.14.)

[8] Bonded Warehouse Facility (BWF): "As per Customs Act, 1969 and Value Added Tax Act, 1991, almost all the exports are tax free. It is also used for the tax free import of raw materials to be used for the production of exporting goods" (Customs Bond Commissionerate, Bangladesh).
http://www.cbc.gov.bd/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46:bonded-warehouse-facilities&catid=25:the-project
(accessed on 21.12.14)

the degree of women empowerment as a result of this contribution is significant issue. (Wright, 2000). There are over 1.8 million workers employed in the garment industry of Bangladesh and 80 % of them are female workers (Ahmed and Hossain, 2009: 1-2).

Before the growth of the garment sector, the traditional life of Bangladeshi women was different. An understanding of the social matters that determine women's status in society, and how they join the working sector, depends on historical and cultural issues that are both sub- continental and local (Wright, 2000: 231). South Asian history shows that women have always been treated unequally. Women have always been confined within the family (Wright, 2000: 231). Early marriage and childbearing have dominated the life of women in Bangladeshi society (Amin et al. 1998: 185). The bride's family has to give money or gifts to the groom or groom's family, which is known as *dowry*[9]. After getting married at young age, these women remain dependent on men throughout their life (Kibria, 1995).

Because of the religious values of Hinduism and Islam, women were not traditionally allowed to get involved in paid work in the Indian-subcontinent including Bangladesh. In traditional Hindu society, class and caste system have restricted the role of women (Roy, 1975, cited in Wright, 2000: 231-232). Even the Hindu epics such as *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* also show the role of women as being subordinate to males, faithful and obedient to their husbands, respecting the wishes and interests of their husbands (Roy, 1975, cited in Wright, 2000: 231-232). And according to Islam, men are the earners and women are there to serve men, and therefore, women do not need to go outside the home. (Cain et al., 1979: 407-408). In addition, Islam allows for "purdah" of women. Purdah is the system which imposes strict restrictions on women's movements outside their homes (Cain et al., 1979: 408). Even if they do go outside, they have to maintain a standard dress code which covers up their faces and bodies from males (Cain et al., 1979: 408). Thus, purdah obstructs women from accessing many opportunities inside and outside their homes (Cain et al., 1979: 408). Even if a girl or woman would take paid job, family could be regarded as being dishonored unless it was a prestigious job. They could face extreme disapproval or even exclusion from the extended family (Wright, 2000). Thus, such religious and cultural values have upheld the

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[9] *Dowry*: is kind of financial demand made by the husband's side to the bride's side during marriage. *Dowry* system is common among Bangladeshi rural poor people (Huda, 2006).
http://sar.sagepub.com/content/26/3/249.full.pdf+html
 (accessed on 21.12.14)

growth of patriarchy in Bangladesh (Cain et al., 1979: 408). Cain et al. (1979) note that "In Bangladesh patriarchy describes a distribution of power and control of resources within families such that men maintain power and control of resources, and women are powerless and dependent on men " (Cain et al., 1979: 406). Thus, men have control over property, income and labor of women in Bangladesh (Cain et al., 1979: 406). But with the changing nature of time, there are some educated families in the cities where both men and women have control over their income and labor. Such trend is common among the young educated generations in the cities of Bangladesh.

## 2.4 Women workers' involvement in the garment sector:

In 1970s, with the initiation and growth of the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Women's Program in Population Planning and Rural Women's Cooperatives, and the dramatic increase in donor support for population control initiatives, middle class women from pastoral areas were able to get a job in governmental and semi-governmental organizations (Feldman, 2001: 1107). At the same time, because of the poverty and landlessness, international donors along with the Bangladesh government started a "food-for- work" program for poor rural women who were engaged in road repair work, brick breaking and construction work (Feldman, 2001: 1107). In those days, women started to come out of their houses (Feldman, 2001: 1107). At the same time, the growth of the garment sector attracted these women to seek low paid jobs in the garment sector Kibria (1998) found in her study that women's involvement in the garment industry is a global trend. In fact, "In export production factories around the world, women have emerged as preferred workers; employers often cite the lower costs, and the docility and nimbleness of women in comparison to men" (Elson and Pearson, 1981, Lim, 1990 cited in Kibria, 1998: 1). In their studies Rhee (1990) and Mahmud (2003) found similar data as regard women's involvement in the garment sector. Rhee (1990) argued that South Korean women's successful insolvent in the garment sector was a lesson for Bangladesh, when the South Korean garment company Daewooo Corporation came to Bangladesh in late 1970s (Mottaleb and Sonobe, 2011: 67).

Currently, women, who are engaged in the industrialization process of the garment sector of Bangladesh, mostly come from the poorer class of people from rural areas (Jamaly and

Wickramanayake, 1996). These groups of women actually join the garment sector because of various "pull" and "push" factors (Absar, 2001: 7). These "pull" and "push" factors have been discussed in details in the analysis chapter of this research paper.

## 2.5 Summary of the chapter:

This chapter has discussed the background of the growth of the garment sector in Bangladesh. In the discussion of the historical development of the garment sector in Bangladesh, this section has emphasized the cheap labor force, the positive international market and various government policies.

This chapter has further discussed the traditional life style of women in Bangladesh, how women have come out from their houses and eventually how they joined the garment sector. This chapter also acknowledges women garment workers' significant role for the industrial and economic development of Bangladesh.

# Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodological issues; especially the choice of data collection technique, informant selection, insider and outsider approach based on my own field work experience, challenges of data collection and the ethics of data collection .

Whether a research should be based on qualitative or quantitative research method depends upon the research questions and it's linkage with the research issue (Marshall, 1996). Because, "Quantitative research frequently involves the study of meanings in the form of attitude scales […]. Qualitative researchers may feel that the tendency for attitude scales to be pre-formulated and imposed on research participants means that they do not really gain access to meanings" (Bryman, 2012: 620). If a researcher intends to explore people's life histories or what people do in their everyday life, whether at households, offices or other public and private places, then qualitative research may be the best suitable approach (Silverman, 2005 : 6). Because, "Qualitative researchers often want to interpret people's behavior in terms of the norms, values, and culture of the group or community in question" (Bryman, 2012: 620). On the other hand, quantitative research is connected to social survey research, which does not interpret peoples' actual behavior (Bryman, 2012: 620). In this sense, qualitative data is more appropriate than quantitative data for this thesis as it is related to female garment workers' everyday life experiences at home, on the street, in their work places and in society. Consequently, this thesis applies a qualitative research method, though quantitative surveys have been used in this thesis as secondary sources, to support the primary data.

This thesis investigates whether there is structural violence in the garment industry and in society in connection with female garment workers' social and economic empowerment in the garment sector.  In order to discuss this issue, I have used interviews, focus group discussion and non-participant observation method in order to collect data. In addition, both qualitative and quantitative data (surveys) have been collected from secondary sources like books, internet articles and newspapers.

I have used in-depth interviews as a method of data collection. In-depth interviews based on semi-structured interview guide helped me explore the personal and social experiences, opinions and feelings of the interviewees. The data collected through in-depth interviews

can be cross-checked to check its validity. To do this, one focus group discussion was arranged to explore more information that would not have been possible during individual interviews. For non-participant observation, photos of the women workers and their livelihood conditions were taken with the permission of the respondents.

## 3.1 Informant selection:

The way data is gathered and from whom is an important research issue. Both purposive and snowball sampling have been used in this research project. Purposive sampling "[...] is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience" (Bernard 2002, Lewis and Shepard 2006 cited in Tongco,2007 : 147). From this definition, it can be said that people who are knowledgeable and have experience about the research issue can be selected through purposive sampling for data collection without setting the size of sample population beforehand. On the other hand, snowball sampling is a way of choosing informants through social networking on sensitive issues such as research on women (Browne, 2005: 47). This sampling method is also called chain-referral sampling. This method is used when a researcher finds that it is difficult to get access to the research population (Cohen and Arieli, 2011: 426-427).

For the current project, the informants are female garment workers (key informants), female human rights workers of Ain-O-Salish-Kendro (ASK)[10] and male members of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer and Exporters Association (BGMEA)[11].

To gain access to the female garment workers, I used snowball sampling through networking. After reaching the field, I contacted one of my former Dhaka University

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[10] ASK: "Ain-O-Salish-Kendro is a national legal aid and human rights organization. It provides legal and social support to disempowered women, working children and workers. Its mission is to establish a society based on equality, justice and rule of law."
http://www.askbd.org/ask/about-us/ (accessed on 20.12.14)

[11] BGMEA: "Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association is one of the largest trade associations in the country representing the garment industry. It works with a vision to develop the RMG industry and economy of the country by protecting and promoting the interests of the industry. Moreover, BGMEA is committed to ensure all legitimate rights and privileges of the garment workers."
http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/about (accessed on 20.12.14)

colleagues, who used to live in a garment factory area with his wife. His wife helped me to get introduced with some female garment workers who used to live nearby. Thus, social networking worked for me very well by connecting me to possible informants. After talking with the garment workers, eleven of them agreed to give interviews. For selecting the human rights workers and members of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), I have used purposive sampling. Two female human rights workers of Ain-o -Salish-Kendro (ASK) and two members of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) agreed to give interviews. To get access and interviews with the informants of these two organizations, I had to make separate applications for the purpose of the interviews. The reason behind choosing the female human rights workers from Ain-O-Salish- Kendro is that firstly, this is a famous human rights organization in Bangladesh , and secondly, the human rights workers of this organization deal with problematic female issues including the issues of female garment workers in Bangladesh. So, it was important to take the views of the human rights workers about the socio-economic conditions of the female garment workers. The cause of choosing the members of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) is that these members are the owners of garment factories and they are responsible to formulate and maintain policies related to wages, working hours, overtime and working environment of the garment workers in the garment sector.

Thus, in total, I had fifteen informants. Among the total informants eleven are female garment workers, two are female human rights workers from Ain-O-Salish-Kendro and two are male members of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer and Exporters Association (BGMEA). Among the eleven female garment workers, seven women also took part in the Focus Group Discussion.

## 3.2 Interview as qualitative data collection method:

The interview is one of the most well-known strategies for collecting qualitative data (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 314). There are different interview formats but qualitative research needs in-depth interviews, so that the researcher gets as much detail information as possible (Fitzpatrick and Boulton, 1994: 107). Indeed, personal in-depth interview may reveal the interviewees' personal and social situation which provides valuable data for the interviewer (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 314). In qualitative research,

unstructured interview and semi-structured interview are mainly used for data collection (Bryman, 2012: 469). In unstructured interview, the interviewer does not have any particular set of questions and this method is used when the research issue is very complex. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has a fixed set of questions (Fitzpatrick and Boulton, 1994: 107). Semi-structured interview is usually carried out based on pre-scheduled time and location with a set of open ended questions, with other questions developing from the conversations between interviewer and interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 315). Semi-structured in-depth interview can take place with an individual or a group, and continue for a minimum of 30 minutes with a maximum of several hours (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006: 315).

## 3.2.1 Conducting interview:

All the interviews were conducted in Dhaka, Bangladesh between June, 2013 and August, 2013. All the fifteen interviewees were interviewed once. All of them were tape-recorded. The interviews were forty-five minutes on average, the longest being one hour and the shortest half an hour. Eleven women garment workers were interviewed in their houses, two female feminists were interviewed at their work place Ain-o-Salish-Kendro, and two BGMEA members and owners of the garment factories were interviewed in the BGMEA complex.

The interview sessions were based on a semi-structured interview guide. (See appendix). But different sets of questions were used for female garment workers, human rights workers and members of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), though most of the questions of the interview guide are similar and related to each other.

 All the female interviewees were encouraged to add information during the discussion if they had information they thought was relevant for the topic.  Thus, many new issues came up after every interview. After each interview, I modified the interview guides by adding new questions. Thus, the rules of in-depth interview were maintained during the interviews and the interview process was flexible with each interviewee (Bryman, 2012).

For the female garment workers, I had to conduct interviews during evenings; mostly after 18:00 hours, because of their tight working schedule. It happened several times that I went to their houses to take their interviews but they were not in their residents as they had gone back to work again to do extra shifts. Because the factory management forced them to go to

work, although they had given me their schedule previously over phone. So, I had to go to their resident places several times to take their interviews without being certain of their availability. Nevertheless, fieldwork without considering the compromise can not be possible all the time.

While conducting interviews with two female human rights workers at their work places in Ain-O-Salish Kendro in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the interview environment was quite favorable for personal interviews. However, arranging interviews with the members of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) was not easy, because of their busy schedule. One of the interviews was with the Director of the BGMEA. The interview session was often interrupted because journalists from different medias were frequently coming to meet him in order to know the latest information on the garment sector. In addition, other BGMEA members were often entering the rooms where the two interviews of the BGMEA members were taken. So, I had to pause my recorder several times and wait while they were talking. Consequently, the informants may have lost their concentration. Something else I could have gotten, if the concentration was not interrupted.

## 3.3 Focus Group Discussion:

Focus group Discussion method is a group interview technique to explore something in depth on a particular issue (Bryman, 2012: 501). The typical group size for focus group discussion is considered six to ten participants excluding the moderator or researcher (Morgan, 1998a cited in Bryman, 2012: 507). The number can be from minimum six to over fifty, depending upon the purpose of the project and available resources (Kitzinger, 1995: 300). This method is helpful in exploring people's knowledge and experience about any particular issue in detail. In focus group discussion, the participants can ask questions and comment to each other (Kitzinger, 1995: 299). "The idea behind the focus group discussion is that group process can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview" (Kitzinger, 1995: 299). Sometimes, however, group interviews impede to obtain sensitive and personal information of the informants in a group setting, because things may not come forward when in group.

This method is more applicable when a researcher has a series of open ended questions. I produced a semi-structured interview guide for individual interviews of the female garment

workers. The same interview guide for individual interviews and for the focus group discussion was used for the female garment workers (See appendix).

## 3.3.1 Conducting Focus Group Discussion:

One focus group discussion with female garment workers was conducted in the house of a female garment worker. There were seven participants. These seven participants were among the previous eleven participants who already took part in the in-depth individual interviews. All the eleven female garment workers were asked to take part in the focus group discussion but only seven agreed. The other key informants (female garment workers) did not have time for the FGD. The main reason, however, for selecting the same informants was to cross-check the information from the original eleven key informants.

The focus group session started with an introductory session where I gave a brief speech about the purpose of the session and expressed my gratitude to them for attending the session. Every informant was asked to introduce themselves and give their demographic information, though their demographic information was already taken before while interviewing separately (Bryman, 2012). They were asked permission for recording the whole session with the assurance that their data would be used confidentially only for research purpose. The focus group session was much more open and they were encouraged to comment and discuss with one another, so that some new information could come out (Bryman, 2012). I found that they were discussing more frankly about their real situation in the garment sector and about their everyday life. It is because they are all homogenous, i.e. female garment workers, when in a group. May be being interviewed individually by a male researcher had an impending effect, while being with fellow female workers felt more similar. The focus group discussion continued over one hour. After finishing the group discussion, all the participants were thanked by me again.

## 3.4 Non-participant observation:

Observation method is a useful research method (Caldwell and Atwal, 2005: 42), because it adds to researcher's understanding of the informants' context and environment. Observation method can be defined as a way to observe something or someone and record it in a way that is relevant to the research project (Gray and Malins, 2004). There are two types of observation methods in social science; non-participant observation and participant

observation. In non-participant observation, the researcher tries to be neutral/ objective and keeps himself/herself away from the person or situation being observed (Gray and Malins, 2004). On the other hand, in participant observation, the researcher is present full-time with the research participants to observe things naturally (Caldwell and Atwal, 2005: 43). Different techniques such as analytical and expressive drawing, mapping or making diagrams, video recording, photography, taking notes, using checklists or schedules can be used for observation (Gray and Malins, 2004). The advantage of video recording or taking pictures in observation is that it increases the reliability of the data (Caldwell and Atwal, 2005). As part of the ethical consideration, it is necessary to ask the informants for permission whether the data collected through observational techniques can be used for research or any other purposes (Gray and Malins, 2004). I had taken some photos of the female garment workers' housing conditions, living conditions and their group photos on the way to or from working places. The photos added valuable information in regard to the women garment workers' real life situation. I wanted to observe and show the female garment workers' housing and living conditions, as an attempt to illustrate Galtung's (1990) concept of structural violence. Moreover, I also wanted to observe and visualize the female garment workers presence in the public place, which was not imaginable some decades ago due to religious and cultural restrictions. I took the photos only after getting the permission of the people involved.

## 3.5 Insider and outsider approach and positioning myself:

It is a debatable issue in qualitative research whether or not the researchers should belong to the population they are researching (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 54). A good definition of insider research can be given by following way:

*Insider research refers to when researchers conduct research with populations of which they are also members [...] so that the researcher shares an identity, language, and experimental base with the study participants* (Kanuha, 2000 and Asselin, 2003 cited in Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 58).

Insider researchers have good methodological advantages in a research process (Chavez, 2008). The greatest advantage of being an insider researcher is acceptance (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 58). Because being an insider, it gives a researcher quick and full acceptance by

the respondents, as the respondents feel "You are one of us and it is us versus them (those on the outside who don't understand)" (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 58). Thus, respondents are more open to the researchers and there remains better possibility to gather in-depth data (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 58). But there are dilemmas for insider researchers and they have to be aware of these (Labaree, 2002 cited in Chavez, 2008: 476). The advantage of acceptance can be weakened or strengthened depending on the researchers' social identities, which may change while interacting with various respondents based on race, gender and age (Chavez, 2008: 476). Thus, it appears that being an insider has both advantages and disadvantages. The most serious disadvantage of being an insider is that "[…] greater familiarity can lead to a loss of objectivity" (Breen, 2007: 163). Moreover, some other scholars have argued that the insider's familiarity can give false similarity resulting in potentially distorted outcomes (Breen, 2007: 164). Furthermore, insider researchers very often struggle to maintain their roles as insiders and as researchers (Breen, 2007: 164), due to cultural blind spots.

On the other hand, outsider researchers belong to different social groups; ethnicity, class, gender etc. As such, men are viewed as outsiders to women. In another way, outsider research is where the researcher has no previous knowledge about the people he/she is intending to research. In this case, the researcher gathers experience from previous literature and the experiences of other researchers (Hellawell, 2006). The supporters of outsider research argue that insider researchers can not get all the information they need, because of their insider status (Rabe, 2003: 156). This is mainly because of cultural norms and patterns that may hinder the insider researcher in asking certain questions, but in such a case the outsider researcher can easily ask those questions and collect necessary data (Rabe, 2003: 157). Moreover, outsider researchers can look at things with new eyes and find out something new, which an insider researcher may miss (Rabe, 2003: 157), possibly because of cultural blindness or being biased.

There are some scholars, however, who argue that the construction of insider and outsider creates a false division between the two since "Outsiderness and insiderness are not fixed or static positions, rather they are ever-shifting and permeable social locations that are differently experienced and expressed by community members" (Naples, 1996: 84). The insider or outsider is a fluid status which may change over time. As a researcher, one may

be an outsider to a specific group but eventually he/she may turn into an insider by spending more time with them (Rabe, 2003: 150). In fact, researchers' relationship with the community is never shown in general terms but is always negotiated and renegotiated in particular through everyday interactions, which may alter the relationships between the researchers and researched (Naples, 1996: 84). Based on this debate, it has been found that the outsider perspective is more objective and accurate in the field, whereas insiders, who have deeper knowledge about the local people, place and events, are thought to be biased (Chavez, 2008). But, "scholars[...] have argued that the outsider-insider distinction is a false dichotomy since outsiders and insiders have to contend with similar methodological issues around positionality, a researcher's sense of self, and the situated knowledge she/he possesses as a result of her /his location in the social order[12]" (Chavez, 2008: 474).

Based on this ongoing debate, there is still no exclusive rules that a researcher necessarily has to follow regarding insider or outsider status. Rather, it mostly depends upon what kind of research a researcher is going to do and what kind of problems he/she is going to deal with, the reality on the ground, the skills of the researcher to utilize the advantages and the challenges faced in the field (Breen, 2007: 164).

For the current research, I consider myself an insider researcher because of my familiarity with the culture, language, study population and easy access to Bangladesh. But as a researcher of the University of Tromsø, Norway, I am an outsider researcher in Bangladesh. Moreover, as a male researcher, I am an outsider to the female informants. Furthermore, I am an outsider to the key informants (female garment workers) in terms of social class. But I was an insider researcher to the male participants. In this sense, I position myself as an insider-outsider researcher.

As an insider researcher, I had advantages when gathering the required data. Being native, I did not need any research assistant during my fieldwork. During the interviews and Focus Group Discussion, I used my own language *Bengali*. So, it was easy for me to establish trust and rapport with female garment workers, female human rights workers as well as the members of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). All

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[12] "[...] other dimensions of insider and outsider discussion like ethical concerns, boundaries between self and other, feminist scholars' contribution [...]"(Chavez, 2008: 474).

the quotes by informants have been translated by me. I am also aware that certain meanings may have lost in translations.

It did not create much problem for me being a male researcher and conducting interviews with the female informants, firstly because of the commonality of language, and secondly because I was native. Moreover, I was able to conduct long interviews with all of my research informants because of good communication with them after being introduced to them. One reason behind this is that the female garment workers became friendly with me after communicating regularly with them. Nevertheless, the body language of the female garment workers during their individual interviews indicated to me that they were uncomfortable. This was probably because the interviews were taking place during the evening period and because they were alone with me when they gave the interviews. I was not sensitive about their feelings regarding them giving interviews alone with a man, i.e. me. The situation was different in the Focus Group Discussion. The women felt comfortable because there were seven women who knew each other and they were laughing and chit-chatting among themselves. And they also became very friendly with me.

The other two female informants ; the human rights workers were very willing to give interviews after hearing from me that I was doing field work on women empowerment. These women informants were comfortable during their individual interviews. Thus, my outsider status being a male researcher had both advantages and disadvantages.

To the male informants; the members of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), I was an insider. These male informants were willing after knowing that I was researching the garment sector of Bangladesh. For an outsider researcher (a foreigner) it would be difficult to have contact with BGMEA members if they would do the same field work, because they would be regarded as full outsiders in terms of language, culture and nationality. Consequently, the BGMEA members would not be so comfortable with an outsider researcher as much as they were with me. Thus, it is obvious that being an insider was beneficial for my fieldwork. I would not have been able to collect as much data as I needed if I had not been an insider researcher.

Even though I had some advantages being an insider researcher, I was worried about the objectivity of data because of possible data distortion. It was also a concern for me that

female garment workers might have concealed some sensitive issues like sexual harassment against them by their male colleagues or superior male bosses. In this case, a female researcher could have had advantages. Thus, being an outsider researcher to the female garment workers, I had some disadvantages as well.

## 3.6 Challenges:

Where there is fieldwork, there is challenge for the researchers. Even though I was an insider researcher, the most important challenge for me during the fieldwork was the political instability just before the national election in Bangladesh in January, 2014. There were strikes and *hartal*[13] . During *hartal* and strikes everything including all government and private organizations, transportation and all other things remain closed. Because of this situation, I had to change my plans several times due to the fact that *hartal* and strikes were suddenly organized by the opposition party very often lasted from one to three days. Thus, fixing schedules for interviews was difficult for all the interviewees. Managing time with the female garment workers was even more difficult because the garment workers were so busy with their normal and extra shifts of working.

## 3.7 Ethical issues during and after fieldwork:

The basic rule in any research field is causing no harm to any of the research participants including the principal researcher, informants and other field assistants (Bøås et al., 2006). Field work in politically violent areas is very risky in terms of both methodological and ethical issues (Wood, 2006: 373). Politically violent conflicts are featured by militarized violence with massive human rights abuses. In order to carry out field work in such settings, ethical issues of personal security should be considered from the very beginning when developing research design and methods because "[...] the ethical imperative of research (do no harm) is intensified in conflict zones by political polarization, the presence of armed actors, the precarious security of most residents, the general unpredictability of events, and the traumatization through violence of combatants and civilians alike" (Wood, 2006: 373).

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[13] *Hartal*: It is a Bangladeshi term that means closed. During *hartal*, everything including all the government and non-government offices, all kinds of transportations and shops remain closed in Bangladesh. This term is used by the political parties and *hartal* is usually called upon by the opposition parties to fulfill their demands.

The most important ethical issue that I had to consider for me was to secure my own life during the field work in a politically violent situation in Bangladesh. Many civilians were being killed during the time when I was in Dhaka for my field work. Specifically, during the time of *hartal* and strikes, people's lives in general were at risk.[14] As the garment factories were closed during the *hartal* and strikes, the female garment workers were also at home without any work, and I could make appointment with them for interviews but I did not considering the ethics of research. Moreover, I also had to cancel interviews with my informants during the *hartal* and strikes, because I had to consider my own safety in politically violent field work. In fact, during hartal and strikes, I decided not to go outside and remained in my hotel as I noticed rioting outside my hotel.

Another safety issue that was important to consider was the safety of the interviewees, specifically the safety of the female garment workers. Many of them told me before the interview session that if I reveal their names in any newspaper or in any other media, they would lose their jobs in the garment factories. I assured them that I would not reveal their names neither in any newspaper nor in my research paper. I also told them that their symbolic names would be used for research purpose. For other interviewees; two female human rights workers and two male BGMEA members, there was no such restriction about using their names in my research. But for research ethics, I preferred not to mention any names of the research participants while writing my thesis.

## 3.8 Summary of the chapter:

This chapter has attempted to show the methodological approach for this thesis. In order to collect primary data related to the women empowerment in the garment industry and whether there remains structural violence or not, I used qualitative methods; in-depth interviews, one focus group discussion and non-participant observation method. In addition, qualitative and quantitative data have been collected from secondary sources such as articles, newspapers and books. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling through social networking were used for selecting informants. Being an insider as a Bangladeshi, I had

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[14] During field work there were *hartals* and at that time people's lives in general were very risky because of bombing or other kind of political violence (The Daily Star, July 4, 2013).

http://archive.thedailystar.net/beta2/news/pre-hartal-terror/
accessed on 20.12.14

tremendous advantage. Because before going to the field, I was worried about the female informants as I have never talked with such female workers before. But after going out in the field, my tension was removed due to the positive attitudes of all the research informants, though some female garment workers were reluctant to give their interviews because of the fear of losing their jobs and if I would publish their names in newspapers or in other medias. But considering the ethical issues, I assured them that I would not publish their names and the data collected from them would only be used for research purpose. Overall, being an insider-outsider researcher, I had more advantages than disadvantages.

# Chapter 4. Conceptual framework

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework of this thesis. The concepts of empowerment and women's empowerment are important to this thesis, because women's empowerment is hindered due to their absence of voices in their family and at the workplace. The concepts of structuralism and structural violence also relate to my thesis. Social and economic structures within the garment sector reinforce structural violence. The structure of labor within the factories and their poor living conditions contribute to structural violence against women. These practices are further reinforced by concepts of gender and gender inequalities. Women garment workers face discrimination by the structure of factory management that honors men. Women have a low profile in the hierarchy of the factory itself. They also earn discriminatory wages. Their voices are not heard when they try to protest their working conditions. They can also be threatened with dismissal and even beaten if they protest. Women garment workers are often the sole source of income for their families and therefore can not put their families in harm's way. All kinds of gender inequalities relate to structural violence and a concept that I will come back to throughout my thesis.

From the very beginning of this project, it has been clear to me that though women are being empowered socially and economically to some extent, their actual empowerment is hindered due to a number of obstacles : women's lack of capability to raise their voice in the family and at the work place, exploitation of women workers by the garment factory owners who do not provide their deserved salaries, gender discrimination in terms of lower wages for women, forced labor in the factories, inadequate measures by the factory management to safeguard their lives, and physical and verbal harassment at the work place . All these factors support the presence of structural violence in society and in the garment sector, and because of structural violence female garment workers are disempowered.

## 4.1 Concepts of empowerment and women empowerment:

The reason for selecting Naila Kabeer (1997, 1999, 2001 and 2005) for this project is that she is a renowned gender scholar. Moreover, she has particularly carried out research on women empowerment in South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, and showed the causes of women's powerlessness in society. I have also used Joynal Abdin (2008) as he has

carried out research on women empowerment in Bangladesh. I have taken the definitions of empowerment by Mosedale (2005), Muni (2006) and World Bank (2002).

## 4.1.1 Defining empowerment:

Recently the concept of empowerment has become a much talked issue in the context of development for disadvantaged women in society (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010: 144). In the development context, the main obstacles for empowering women as follows: violence against women and gender discrimination (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). This study seeks to show women's empowerment in the development context by exploring Naila Kabeer's (1999, 2001 and 2005) three interrelated dimensions; resources, agency and achievements.

The term empowerment is connected with the word power. Generally speaking "[…] empowerment is derived from the word 'empower' meaning to give or to acquire power or to increase power […]" (Muni, 2006: 25). Similarly, Abdin (2008: 1) argues that empowerment symbolizes giving power and authority. Empowerment can be at the individual and collective level (World Bank, 2002: 10). It can be economic, social and political, all of which are interrelated (World Bank, 2002: 10). A good definition of empowerment can be given by the following way:

> […] empowerment refers to the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability (Kabeer, 2005: 13).

From this definition, it is obvious that empowerment involves a process of change (Kabeer, 1999: 437). Through this change, the powerless people gain power in making choices in their life. For example, the choice to marry, to have kids and to work or not to work.

Empowerment can be defined in connection with the condition of disempowerment, because these two opposing terms are connected with each other (Kabeer, 2001:18-19). Alternatively, empowerment means overcoming the situation of disempowerment (Kabeer, 2005: 13-14). This means that to be empowered one has to be disempowered first. (Kabeer, 2005: 14). In broader sense, "[…] empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice and action. It means increasing one's authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect one's life" (World Bank, 2002: 11).

Kabeer (2001) argues that each choice has to have alternatives. But there are some groups of people who have limited choice/choices. As such, people who are poor have limited choice/choices. That is why Kabeer (1999: 437) notes that " There is logical association between poverty and disempowerment because an insufficiency of the means for meeting one's basic needs often rules out the ability to exercise meaningful choice." However, exercising choice can be explained in three interrelated dimensions resources (preconditions), agency (process) and achievements (outcomes) (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005).

Resources are needed to exercise choice. These are material, human and social resources, which increase the capacity to exercise choice. (Kabeer, 1999: 437).These resources are distributed through different institutions; family, market and community for examples, which form society (Kabeer, 1999: 437). In these institutions, some actors are more powerful than others depending upon the social rules, norms and values; how they are interpreted and how they are made effective (Kabeer, 2005:15). As such, in traditional patriarchal social structures in Bangladesh, there are hierarchies in terms of decision making within the family and in the community. Women generally   play the role of wives, mothers and daughters, whereas men as the heads of the families, make decisions concerning the financial issues, children's education and marriage.

The central component of empowerment is agency (Kabeer, 2005:14). It is about the capacity to determine one's goal, motivation and work accordingly (Kabeer, 1999:438). It is directly related with an individual's self-esteem, autonomy and self-efficacy (Fournillier, 2012).  Agency refers to a process through which "[…] choices are made and put into effect" (Kabeer, 2005:14). It also means the power of people to prefer their own life choices and work on it even if they face challenges (Kabeer, 2005:14), because "[…] empowerment is rooted in how people see themselves- their sense of self-worth" (Kabeer, 2005:15).  Kabeer (1999: 438) argued that agency can be exercised individually or collectively. When individual actions fail, goal/goals can be achieved through collective actions.  For instance in societies where cultural values create gender inequalities, individual action may not work effectively to establish gender equality, and therefore, collective actions is necessary in order to transform the society (Kabeer, 1999: 457).

The final stage of empowerment is achievement. This means to what extent people's efforts have been successful or failed through agency and resources (Kabeer, 2005:15). Agency and resources together create the possibilities to bring positive results (empowerment) or negative results (disempowerment).

## 4.1.2 Defining women empowerment:

In connection with the definitions of empowerment discussed above, women empowerment means giving power and authority to women (Abdin, 2008:1). But women empowerment is a multidimensional concept (Muni, 2006). The dimensions of women empowerment are related to the rules and regulations in society to legitimize the voice of women in society (Mosedale, 2005:250). Power also indicates to a collective action of women assuming that something more can be gained as a group through working together (Mosedale, 2005:250). This is also about creating opportunities for women to have time together along with other women in order to discuss their current situation, finding out the strengths they have and formulating strategies to achieve positive changes. (Mosedale, 2005:250). Therefore, Mosedale (2005:252) states that "Women's empowerment as the process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing." To enhance women's possibilities to redefine gender roles, it is necessary to transform the structures of society through the reduction of gender inequality. (Abdin, 2008:1). This means that women must recognize their strategic needs and their social position (Abdin, 2008:1). Women's strategic needs are defined as a way to enhance the women's bargaining capacity, reduce violence against women and giving them the opportunity to have more influence on decision making (Abdin, 2008:1). In this way, "[…] empowerment is a socio-political concept that includes cognitive, psychological, economic and political components" (Stromquist, 1995 cited in Mosedale, 2005:248). In this definition, cognitive component means the understanding of women about the causes of their powerlessness in society and it also involves their knowledge about their legal rights in society (Mosedale, 2005:248). Psychological element indicates women's belief in a way that they can act at personal and social structure to improve their conditions. It includes improvement of women's confidence and self-esteem (Stromquist, 1995 cited in Mosedale, 2005: 248). Economic element includes the involvement of women in the productive sector, which gives women economic independence (Stromquist, 1995 cited in

Mosedale, 2005:248). In addition, a good definition of women's economic empowerment has been given by the UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) in Mosedale (2005):

> *[...] having access to and control over the means to make a living on a sustainable and long term goals of increasing women's access to income and looks for longer terms sustainable benefits, not only in terms of changes to laws and policies that constrain women's participation in and benefits from development, but also in terms of power relationships at the household, community and market levels* (Carr, 2000 cited in Mosedale, 2005: 247).

This definition clearly indicates that economic empowerment of women involves a sustainable source of income through which they can lead a standard life. And this economic empowerment must ensure their bargaining capacity within the family, in community and at work place.

Overall, the concepts of empowerment and women empowerment are closely related to my thesis. Because Kabeer's (1999) analysis in measuring agency or decision making capability of women in terms of " women's mobility in the public domain, their participation in public action, the incidence of male violence [...]" (Kabeer,1999: 445) are similar with my argument in this thesis. Similarly, Kabeer's (1999: 449) argument about women's powerlessness in society because of the reports of domestic violence, *dowry* paid during marriage, disbeliefs in daughters' education, freedom of movement, and control of earnings before and after marriage are specifically relevant for my thesis.

Moreover, these concepts are important when looking at how the Bangladeshi garment women workers have access to their resources through social institutions; family, community and garment factories in order to exercise choices (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005). Furthermore, the concepts of Mosedale (2005) and Abdin (2008) are significant for this thesis to analyze how these women have been able to look at their strategic needs and social position, their perception as to their powerlessness in society, their level of economic independence and sustainable benefits. The concepts of Mosedale (2005) and Abdin (2008) are also important to look at women garment workers' positive achievements like their

bargaining capacity to upgrade their positions and their advancement in the decision making process in the family, at the work place and in society.

It reveals that women who leave their households for the sake of work, making decisions against the adverse cultural and religious values. To some extent, these women are showing their voice but many of them face challenges while making decisions about going to work and about how their salaries will be spent. This is at the micro level, within the household.

At the macro level, their salaries are low, they face gender inequalities, their voices are not heard and they can not protest against the bad working conditions in the garment factories in fear of losing their jobs. It appears that both at the micro and macro levels, the women garment workers' resources are limited. This is why their agency or power to exercise choices are impeded (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005). Consequently, their achievements are negative, which means that they are disempowered. (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005).

## 4.2 Concepts of structuralism and structural violence:

To elaborate the concept of structuralism and structural violence, I have used Johan Galtung (1990) and Kathleen Ho (2007). The reason for choosing Galtung (1990) is that he is central for shaping the concept of structural violence. Moreover, I have used the concepts of structuralism and structural violence by Ho (2007), because after doing literature search I found Ho's (2007) argument relevant for this thesis. She talks about structural violence. Her way of arguing is useful for my analysis.

### 4.2.1 Defining structuralism:

The idea of structuralism is very important for the discussion of structural violence (Ho, 2007). In structuralism, structures and institutions remain at the center of the analysis. Structuralism "[…] focuses on the holistic aspects of society, including independent relationships among individuals, collectives, institutions, and/or organizations" (Landman, cited in Ho, 2007:2). Structuralist analysis discusses about the social, political and economic networks which are formed between and among individuals showing themselves in different forms both at domestic and international level (Ho, 2007). Social structures consist of sexism, racism and class-based structures (Ho, 2007:2). Economic structure consists of domestic financial institutions like business organizations, for example (Ho, 2007:2).

Individuals are connected through relational structures that shape their identities, interests and interactions. (Ho, 2007:2).

## 4.2.2 Defining structural violence:

"Structural violence theorists characterize the world system as vastly unequal, exemplified by a growing disparity between those who are rich and getting richer and those who are poor and getting poorer" (Ho, 2007:5). In structural violence, exploitation remains at the center stage (Galtung, 1990:293). The multidimensional forms of structural violence are built upon the fundamental inequality and disclose themselves in the forms of economic and social inequalities (Ho, 2007: 4). A good definition of structural violence has been given by the World Bank in Ho (2007):

> *People with incomes at less than about $ 1 per day will be considered as a manifestation of economic inequality resulting from structural violence* (Ho, 2007:5).

According to Johan Galtung (1990), when a particular group of people in society is discriminated and exploited by another group of people, then it is regarded as structural violence (Galtung, 1990). "This simply means that some, the topdogs, get much more out of the interaction in the structure than the others, the underdogs" (Galtung, 1978 cited in Galtung, 1990: 293). So, there remains unequal exchange between the top dogs and the underdogs (Galtung, 1990:293). Because of the exploitation and marginalization, under dogs are placed in such a disadvantageous situations that they face permanent and unwanted conditions of misery like malnutrition, illness, starvation and diseases, which cause them to have shorter life expectancy (Galtung, 1990). In this way, structural violence reveals unequal power and unequal life chances (Ho, 2007:4). The inequalities prevail in the form of unequal chances in life, straightforwardly caused by an unequal distribution of resources. But the hidden problem is that the power to decide the distribution of resources is unequally distributed (Ho, 2007). In this way it can be said that,

> *[...] structural violence is not a result of accident [...], they are the consequence [...] of human agency. Specifically, this human agency is implicated through structures that reflect an unequal distribution of power* (Farmer, 2005 cited in Ho, 2007: 4).

According to Galtung (1990), structural violence originates from discriminatory cultural practices in society, which is regarded as cultural violence (Galtung, 1990:294). Thus, the culture supports the exploitation and discrimination as normal or natural in any specific society (Galtung, 1990:295).

For the current project, the theory of structural violence is significant. There remains exploitation and discrimination in the empowerment process of women in the garment industry of Bangladesh. As such, during the recruitment process, women workers are not given legal contract papers, which is also part of structural violence. Furthermore, women are paid less salary by their employers for which the women lead miserable lives with malnutrition, hunger and diseases, which are again symbols of structural violence (Galtung, 1990).

## 4.3 Concepts of gender and gender inequalities:

To elaborate this section, I have used Sandra Harding (1986), Amartya Sen (2001) and Judith Lorber (2010). Harding (1986) was the one coining the concept of symbolic and structural gender. The reason for choosing Sen (2001) was that he is famous for receiving the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences and he has written about gender inequality. I have chosen Lorber (2010), because she is a renowned gender scholar and I have found her explanations of gender inequality useful for this thesis. I have used the definitions of gender and gender inequality from Lorber (2010) and Sen (2001). These definitions are necessary to show the linkage between structural violence and gender inequality. All kinds of gender inequality or gender discrimination are the symbols of structural violence. Gender inequality also impedes women's empowerment.

Gender formulates the procedure and practices of a society's vital sectors like work, family and culture (Lorber, 2010:9). Lorber (2010: 9) states "Gendering divides the social world into two complementary but unequal sets of people- women and men." Gender provides individuals status, identities and forms their everyday behavior in face-to-face relationships within families and at work places (Lorber, 2010:9). "Gender is a of system of power in that it privileges some groups of people and disadvantages others in conjunction with other system of power [Racial categories, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation]" (Lorber, 2010: 9).

Feminist theories have been developed to clarify the causes of prevalent gender inequality (Lorber, 2010). Feminists are reluctant to accept the explanation that inequality is natural or God given (Lorber, 2010:7). The central issues of feminism are; discriminatory gender division of labor at home and at the work place, the underestimation of women's work and the unequal presence of women in higher ranking positions (Lorber, 2010). Feminists integrate their theories of gender inequality with men and women's social statuses, individual identities and their life chances which are closely related with their social class and family background (Lorber, 2010).

According to Sen (2001), the world where we live is characterized by a deep-rooted inequality between men and women (Sen, 2001: 466). Gender inequality is prevalent in almost every part of the world (Sen, 2001:466). Gender inequality is of different types based on economic structure, social organization and culture within any particular society (Lorber, 2010). Even though it is about gender inequality, it is generally women who are discriminated in comparison with similarly situated men (Lorber, 2010:4). Sen (2001) argues that women face inequality in different aspects of life like basic facility inequality, special opportunity inequality, professional inequality and household inequality (Sen, 2001: 466-468). Sexual exploitation and violence against women are also part of gender inequality. Women are often paid less than men for the same or comparable work, and their chances for advancement are often halted by men (Lorber, 2010). Thus,

> *Gender inequality is not one homogenous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and inter-linked problems* (Sen, 2001: 466).

According to the gender reform feminists, gender inequality is structural and not the result of personal aspects and choices (Lorber, 2010 : 10). Lorber (2010) notes that "[…] Gender inequality is built into the structure of the gendered social order because the two statuses – women and men- are treated differently and have significantly different life chances" (Lorber, 2010:7). The structural factors originate from the low-paid work for women, underestimation of the work of women, discriminatory access to education, health care and political power (Lorber, 2010:10).

For the current project, the concepts of inequalities by Lorber (2010) and Sen (2001) are very much connected, because gender inequality creates structural violence in society and

obstructs women's empowerment. Inequality towards women starts within the family in Bangladesh. Some girls and women are not permitted by their families to work outside home, even though their lives are marked by economic hardships. Abdin (2008: 2) cites that "In Bangladesh the family is the breeding grounds for some of the most persistent discrimination against women, such as sexual subordination of women, restriction of the mobility of women and different access to resources within the family." Culture itself supports the confinement of women in the households (Wright, 2000). Furthermore, the proportion of women in the higher ranking positions in the garment industry is lower than that of men. Likewise, violence against female garment workers at home and at the work place is also common in Bangladesh.

In her book titled *Science Question in Feminism*, Harding (1986) has discussed symbolic and structural gender. As the current project is related to structural violence, Sandra Harding's (1986) idea of structural and symbolic gender is helpful in order to gain theoretical knowledge.

According to Harding (1986), structural gender is connected with societal structures like wages, laws and regulations, which create women opportunities and career possibilities in society. She also compares the idea with the actual opportunities to get access to education, work and other facilities in society (Harding, 1986). She argues that women are discriminated within the social structure (Harding, 1986). Harding's (1986) idea of structural gender is closely related to the current project. Because the actual opportunities for female garment workers to receive their wage and salary, and their recruitment process in the garment industry without any contract papers are usually practiced in the garment sector in Bangladesh. So, the ways through which women garment workers are exploited and discriminated in the social structure of Bangladesh directly supports Harding's (1986) argument of gender discrimination in society.

On the other hand, symbolic gender is connected to cultural patterns and behavior of society. This relates to how women are supposed to be perceived and behave in society. For example, if women are subject to physical or verbal abuse in any society then it symbolizes symbolic gender relationships in a specific society. (Harding, 1986). As such, traditionally women in Bangladesh are confined within the home because of cultural norms and values. Moreover, they are perceived as the servers of males because of religious values (Wright,

2000). In addition, women garment workers are often abused verbally and sexually by the male managers and other male workers like supervisors.

Thus, it appears that symbolic and structural gender theory is particularly useful for my thesis because Bangladeshi cultural patterns and behavior put women in subordinate positions in a traditional patriarchal social structure (Kibria, 1995).

## 4.4 Summary of the chapter:

This chapter has attempted to discuss the theoretical issues related to women empowerment and structural violence in the garment industry of Bangladesh. All the concepts discussed in this chapter are interrelated.

It has been shown that structural violence originates in the social structure of the society and is further supported by the culture of the society. Because of structural violence in society, women lag behind on their way to empowerment in society. Consequently, the concept of empowerment in regard to the garment workers in Bangladesh is paradoxical. Thus, all the concepts discussed in this chapter support my argument that women garment workers' social and economic empowerment is being halted because of the presence of structural violence in the garment sector.

# Chapter 5. Data Presentation and Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to show through the research findings in both primary and secondary data that structural violence is present in the garment sector and in society. This structural violence is an obstacle for the social and economic empowerment of female garment workers in Bangladesh.

## 5.1 Background of informants:

Table 2: Demographic information of the informants.

| Informant no. | Age | Sex | Education | Occupation | Marital status | No. of children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | 35 | Female | Primary | Garment worker | Married | 4 |
| A2 | 25 | Female | Primary | Garment worker | Married | 2 |
| A3 | 18 | Female | Primary | Garment worker | Unmarried | - |
| A4 | 20 | Female | Secondary | Garment worker | Unmarried | - |
| A5 | 18 | Female | Primary | Garment worker | Unmarried | - |
| A6 | 28 | Female | Primary | Garment worker | Married | 3 |
| A7 | 18 | Female | Primary | Garment worker | Married | - |
| A8 | 24 | Female | Primary | Garment worker | Married | 2 |
| A9 | 38 | Female | Secondary | Garment worker | Divorced | 3 |
| A10 | 18 | Female | Primary | Garment worker | Unmarried | - |
| A11 | 19 | Female | Primary | Garment worker | Married | - |
| A12 | 35 | Female | Graduate | Human | N/A | N/A |

| | | | | rights worker, Ain-O-Salish Kendro | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A13 | 45 | Female | Graduate | Human rights worker, Ain-O-Salish Kendro | N/A | N/A |
| A14 | 60 | Male | Graduate | BGMEA member and owner of a garment factory | N/A | N/A |
| A15 | 45 | Male | Graduate | BGMEA member and owner of a garment factory | N/A | N/A |

The Informants A1, A2, A3, A4, A6, A8 and A9 as shown in the table 2 participated in the Focus Group Discussion.

## 5.2 Education and occupation:

For the study, a total of fifteen interviews were conducted. These include eleven female garment workers, two female human rights workers of Ain-O-Salish Kendro (ASK) and two members of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Associations (BGMEA). Table 2 shows all the interviewees with their educational and occupational backgrounds. As the table depicts, among eleven women garment workers, only two completed secondary education and the remaining nine went to primary school. The two female human rights workers are graduates and they work as human rights workers for the organization Ain-O-Salish Kendro (ASK). This organization's focus is to establish justice for the disempowered people in Bangladesh. The two BGMEA members are also graduates. These men are the owners of garment factories located in Dhaka.

To understand the table 2, containing the demographic information of informants, it is important to know the Bangladeshi distinctions of education levels:

Table 3: Bangladeshi distinctions of education levels.

| Level of education | Class |
|---|---|
| Primary level | 1-5 |
| Secondary level | 6-10 |
| Higher Secondary level | 11-12 |
| Graduate | Bachelor or master degree |

## 5.2.1 Age and marital status:

The eleven female workers who were interviewed are between the ages of 18-38. Among these eleven workers, six were married and five of them have two or more children. One is divorced with three children. Four of the eleven are unmarried. All these informants live in one of the slums of Mirpur, Dhaka, situated close to a garment factories area.

The female human rights workers are between 35 and 45 years of age. They live in Dhaka. Their marital status and number of children have no relevance for this research. Moreover, the research questions are not relevant with the marital status and number of children of the female human rights workers. Therefore, they were not asked about their marital status and number of children. But it was important to their opinion regarding the Bangladeshi garment sector and the women garment workers.

The BGMEA members are between 45-60 years of age. Like the female human rights workers, the BGMEA members were not asked about their marital status and number of children as these have no relevance for this research, though it was important for this research to know the opinion of the BGMEA members about the garment sector and women garment workers in Bangladesh

## 5.3 Do women work by necessity or choice?

Available studies on female garment workers in Bangladesh suggest that there remains complexity and diversity in the financial motivations of this sector of workers. This job is a means of basic survival for some of them, whereas for others it is for upgrading their

standard of living, "or of earning money for personal accumulation or expenditure" (Kibria, 1998: 2). There are "pull" and "push" factors which have created the trend for women to join the garment industry (Kibria, 1998: 1). The newly created labor market in the garment sector is regarded as the Pull factor for women to join in the garment industry (Absar, 2001: 7). In fact, the Pull factor worked as a motivation of the female garment workers to improve their social and economic position (Khosla, 2009: 292). As Informant A7 said:

*I came to Dhaka just for visiting and eventually I went to see how the garment sector is. After visiting some garment factories, I have joined one factory.*

From this statement it appears that Informant A7 joined the garment sector because of the pull factor. She was attracted by the garment sector and eventually she joined the garment sector in order to upgrade her socio-economic position.

There are many push factors. These include financial hardship or poverty, household crises of different types like economic losses in business, unemployment, illness or death of the male head of family and most often the chief source of the family income (Kibria, 1998). Additionally, push factors such as divorce or abandonment have similar consequences (Kibria, 1998). The informant A9, for example, expressed this in the following way:

*My husband works in Dubai (United Arab Emirates) .We have three children. Nevertheless he got married another woman and I got divorced. It was difficult for me to run the family with three children. Then I decided to join the garment sector.*

Informant A9 was dependent on her husband financially. But after getting divorce, she became helpless and joined the garment sector for family maintenance. In regard to the push factor, Informant A4 stated:

*I came to Dhaka in 2003, when I was in class 6. I asked my older sister, who lives in Dhaka, to buy books for me to continue my studies. But my sister told me to come to Dhaka to visit her. When I visited her, instead of studying my sister suggested that I would join the garment sector because of the economic crisis in the family. Then I*

*visited some of the factories just to know about the work. Afterwards I joined one factory as a helper with a monthly salary of 800 TK[15].*

Another similar story can be seen in the following statement:

*I joined the garment industry because of family need. My father is an old farmer and I have six sisters. It was difficult for my father to provide for the whole family. And it was difficult for me to continue my studies. That is why I have joined the garment industry. I joined the garment industry in 2010 as a helper and my monthly salary was 2500* (Informant A2).

In regard to the push factor, it can be said that women go to work in the garment industry because of financial hardship and economic need. From the informants A1 and A2, it was found that sometimes the situation is that the husband works in the city and the wife stays at home in the village to look after her husband's parents. Even if the husband wants his wife to come to the city, the conditions are such that she has to join the garment industry in order to earn money to maintain family costs as the husband alone is not able to rent a house and maintain the family. All the narratives of the informants suggest that poverty compelled them to join the garment sector.

Thus, because of poverty women garment workers were powerless or disempowered. Consequently, women garment workers did not have alternative choices other than joining the garment sector. Women garment workers' condition supports Kabeer's (1999) argument that poverty compels poor people to have limited choice , and that there is a logical link between poverty and disempowerment because the absence of adequate resources to meet basic needs limit the poor people to have meaningful choice (Kabeer, 1999: 437).

It is common in Bangladesh that if married women are unable to pay *dowry*, they are sometimes divorced from their husbands. For example, Informant A9 was divorced because she was unable to pay the *dowry* money. She stated: "My husband demanded *dowry* money from my parents, before he went to UAE for work. But my parents were unable to pay. My husband managed money somehow and gave me divorce" (Informant A9). This *dowry* system supports Kabeer's (1999) argument about women's powerlessness in society.

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[15] The name of the Bangladeshi currency is Taka (TK). One Norwegian Kroner is equivalent to almost fourteen taka or one US dollar is equivalent to almost eighty taka, though the money exchanging fluctuates from time to time depending on the market valuation.

Because of the *dowry* system in Bangladesh, female garment workers are disempowered in society.

My research indicates that women workers when asked if they had a choice, would they prefer staying at home; the majority answered that they had no choice. They had to work outside the home to bring money into the home. But the female garment workers are exploited while they work in the garment industries. This is the reason why most of the key informants said household work is better than working in the garment industry. In fact, poverty compelled them to go to the garment sector, though they would prefer to stay at home. Because owners behave very badly with them, and whatever the owners say, they are expected to follow orders. In connection to this, two informants said:

> *Staying at home is better. When I am at home, I can move wherever I want. But no one gives me money. So, sometimes garment work seems good but when they use mean language, I feel like I want to quit though I can not* (Informant A10).
>
> *Garment factories are like jail. Once I am in, there is no way to get out. I can not even go out to bring snacks* (Informant A8).

Similar findings were found in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD). All the informants in FGD said that staying at home and doing household work is more preferable. But they can not leave the garment work because of poverty. Informant A8 said during the FGD:

> *Garment work is better in a sense that I can earn something. But housework is better for me, because I do not feel good anymore about the garment work. Garment work is hard. I even have to work on holidays. There remains only pain. I have to be there in order to survive.*

The statements above from both interviews and FGD mention that though most of the women prefer to stay at home, they are compelled to go to work for their survival. Because if they do not go to work, nobody will give them money. So, they believe that something is better for them than nothing. In fact, they are the victims of the circumstances and this forces them to work in the garment sector.

## 5.4 Women's perception about their own situation in terms of empowerment:

This section will discuss the women garment workers' perception of empowerment in terms of their independence, decision making power in the household and work place, and their satisfaction in terms of earning and their social status.

Several decades ago it was difficult for a woman to decide herself to go outside the home and look for a work. Even today in many families it is very difficult to decide to go to the city and get a job in the garment sector. It often involves conflict and tension with family members, specifically with male members of the family. So, for girls or women who have strict social and cultural rules, joining the garment sector is a painful choice for them (Hossain, 2012: 22). Informant A5 said:

> *I have heard a lot about the garment sector. Many friends of mine have become self-reliant by working in the garment industry. My father was unable to continue my studies. Considering my family situation, I also wanted to become independent and continue my studies. When I wanted to come to Dhaka, my father and older brother resisted. Rather they suggested that I would stay at home. But after six months, I left home and came to Dhaka to start job in the garment sector.*

This statement can be compared with Kabeer's (2005) concept of empowerment through agency or the capacity to determine one's goal, motivation and work accordingly (Kabeer, 1999: 438). Because Informant A5 has made a decision herself against the family and against the male dominant culture in order to join the garment sector. Her father and older brother were reluctant to let her go alone to the city for work. But she wanted to be independent, which forced her to come to the city from the village and join the garment industry.

Available data shows that married female garment workers sometimes have no control over their wages because of traditional patriarchal social structures, where women garment workers must hand over their wages to their husbands (Absar, 2001). The main reason behind this is a tradition in Bangladeshi society that male protection of the family is required and that married women remain in fear of losing their husbands. "It is well known that without male protectors, particularly fathers or husbands, women are extremely vulnerable in Bangladesh, as the state affords little protection. This ensures a form of male power that

to some extent overshadows the empowerment potential of a mere wage" (Hossain, 2012: 23). The significant message drawn from this is that women's empowerment based on their earning and their powers to spend that earning are set in the structures of patriarchal society (Hossain, 2012: 23). As Informant A 13, a female human rights worker said:

> The only thing which is obvious is that women garment workers are earning money. But most women have no control over their earning. Women are used as earning machines only. Sometimes the husband stays outside the gate of the garment industry to take the money from his wife, so that he can spend the money according to his own choice, not the choice of his wife, which is not empowerment. If the women could spend money according to their own choice, it could be their empowerment at least to some extent both socially and economically.

In her research, Kabeer (1997) found both optimistic and pessimistic findings, because some female garment workers hand over their wages to their husbands and some do not (Kabeer, 1997: 277). The unmarried key informants of this study stated that they can spend their earned money according to their own wishes, though they spend their earnings for their parents and siblings. On the other hand, married key informants A 1, A2, A 6, A 7, A 8 and A 11 stated that they hand over their wages to their husbands.

Bangladesh is a male dominated society even though the prime minister and other ministers are women. Families are male dominated, where there remain complex relationships and attitudes that obstruct women from empowerment. It reflects Harding's (1986) symbolic gender concept, which is connected to cultural patterns and behavior of society. This relates to how women are supposed to be perceived and behave in society. (Harding, 1986).

Though domestic violence in Bangladesh is viewed as a private matter; it is basically a structural matter (Islam, 2010:60). Because of the complexity and domestic violence, female garment workers remain under psychological pressure and some lose their interest in working outside home (Absar, 2001: 7). It appears from arguments of Absar (2001) and Islam (2010) that due to the presence of structural violence within the family, women garment workers' resources to exercise choice/choices are limited (Kabeer, 2005). As a result, their agency or motivation to work outside home is decreased, which is a symbol of negative

achievement (Kabeer, 2005) for the female garment workers on the way to their social and economic empowerment.

Studies show that only very few women workers say that their social status increased because of working in the garment industry (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 23). A number of studies have documented that women who work until late at night in the garment industry, they have a negative image in society (Paul-Majumder and Mahmud, 1994, Paul-Majumder and Zohir, 1994 cited in Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 23). Their lower social class provides the fuel for society's impression of them (Hossain and Al-Amin 2012). As informant A3 said:

> *Though I wanted to join the garment sector, my parents and relatives suggested not to join the garment sector because it may create a problem in the future for my marriage. After some years of working, now I understand why they told me not to join this sector. Now it is tough for me to get married as people have negative concepts about female garment workers who work until late night.*

This statement indicates that the late hours mandated by garment factory management causes a woman's social position to be degraded. Socially she is devalued. Thus, socially she is not empowered. But sometimes they avoid this kind of embarrassing situation by marrying their co-workers, though the majority of them do not like their co-workers because of their bad characters as they change wives frequently.

The women, who participated in the Focus Group Discussion, were asked how the garment sector is contributing to their development economically. Both positive and negative answers have been found from the informants. All the informants, however, were dissatisfied with the salary they get from their work places:

> *We are from poor family. The money we get is not sufficient for our living.  This is like living from hand to mouth* (Informant A 8)

> *Of course there is something good. Children can be educated. My two children are going to school now. I am hoping to educate them very well. But it would be good if the owners would increase our salary* (Informant A9)

> *After house rent and food costs, no surplus remains there.* (Informant A1)

It is obvious from these statements that these women are from poor families. Through working in the garment sector, they have been able to remove their poverty at least to some extent. They don't have to starve anymore. But considering their salary, it can be said that there remains salary exploitation (Galtung, 1990), by the owners of the garment factories. By depriving someone economically, it is not feasible to ensure economic empowerment. As informant A 12, a human rights worker said:

*Because of the gap between owners and workers, the economic empowerment of women is not ensured. If the owners would consider the betterment of the workers and pay their deserved money, the scenario could be different. The poor women could be in different position.*

However, when I asked the informant A15, an owner of a garment factory and member of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) about the increase of the salary of garment workers, he said:

*I agree that their salary should be increased. But we have to consider what their market valuation is. Many of them get 5000 Taka each month. This is sufficient for them. Is there any other sector that gives them 5000 Taka with the kind of quality and education they have? If we increase salary, our buyers will go away (Informant A15).*

The BGMEA member's argument is that if they increase the salary of the garment workers, the international buyers will go away from the country and the whole section would collapse. But countering this argument, informant A13, a human rights worker stated:

*Workers are also human beings like the owners. But in terms of minimum wage and opportunities of the workers, the owners do not care. They make huge money through exploitation. They become rich overnight and buy pazeros, multi-storied houses and luxury products depriving the workers.*

Thus, by comparing the statements of the female garment workers, the member of BGMEA and human rights worker, it can be said that owners are exploiting the female garment workers. So it appears that there exists structural violence in the garment sector and thus, economically women have limited income or economic resources in this sector.

According to statistics, garment tasks are higherarchically divided based on gender (Absar, 2001: 4). Almost all the workers in the sewing section are women. The cutting, ironing and finishing sections also consists of only women (Paul – Majumder and Begum 1997 cited in Absar, 2001). Duties and responsibilities differ based on the types of work. Women work mainly as helpers and less frequently as line supervisors and quality controllers (Absar, 2001). There are no women cutting masters. The proportion of men is high in the administrative and management level jobs (Kabeer, 1991, cited in Absar, 2001). Women are discriminated in gaining access to higher-paid management and administrative positions. In regard to this, informant A12, a human rights worker said:

*Women are working in the garment sector, which is a kind of empowerment. But this is not total empowerment. Because they are not in the decision making process of the garment sector.*

On the other hand, in regard to the female workers' involvement in the management and higher section of the garment sector, informant A14, a member of BGMEA said:

*Most of the female garment workers are not highly educated. Some of them have completed primary schooling whereas some have completed secondary schooling, and with this kind of education, they can only have the kind of job they are doing now.*

From the BGMEA member's statement, it appears that women empowerment is related to education and women garment workers lag behind in terms of empowerment because of their lack of higher education. Thus, it matches Harding's (1986) concept of structural, because it shows the actual opportunities of female garment workers to get access to education and work (Harding, 1986).

## 5.5 Benefits and downsides of working in the garment sector:

The effect of women's working in the garment sector has two aspects: benefits and downsides. Though there remains exploitation and domination over the women workers' working forces, it has brought changes in the life styles of the female garment workers (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012). Social and economic power of the female garment workers has been increased at least to some extent.

## 5.5.1 Benefits of working:

Generally girls are treated as a family burden among poor class families in Bangladesh, because they are dependent on their parents. It reflects Harding's (1986) concept of symbolic gender that how women are supposed to be perceived in society. But the garment industry offers female workers independence and releases their parents from the burden of their dependent daughters (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012). However, the only advantage these female workers get from the garment sector is that they earn money. When they earn money, their family becomes the beneficiary. Most of the unmarried women workers in the export-oriented garment industry send their earnings to their families in the rural areas. Sometimes they sacrifice their own need for the sake of their family members. "According to at least two studies parents often depend on their daughter's income […]" (Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1994 cited in Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 23). This was confirmed in my interviews with Informants A3, A4, A5 and A10. But before parents were dependent on their sons' income. Consequently, sons' decisions were given more priority than daughters' decisions by their parents in Bangladesh (Khosla, 2009: 294). But after joining the garment sector and by helping their parents economically, female garment workers have showed that "This can change the expectation of the support that an adult daughter, married or unmarried is capable of providing and may contribute to equalizing sons and daughters in the eyes of their parents" (Ahmed and Bould, 2004 cited in Khosla, 2009: 294-295).

Khosla (2009) found some positive social changes in terms of women garment workers' social capabilities. The study of Khosla (2009) shows that women's social capabilities have increased. Because they have now social identities as earning members of society. (Amin et al., 1998; Kabeer, 2004 cited in Khosla, 2009: 294). As a result, "Many women garment workers now report being bolder, more confident and knowing of the ways of the world as they negotiate their work spaces, salaries etc. in an often harsh environment " (Amin et al., 1998 cited in Khosla, 2009: 294). Women garment workers' "occupational mobility" is also regarded as a significant social change (Khosla, 2009: 294). After gaining experience in the garment sector, female garment workers can aspire to be promoted within the factory. This "[…] creates an upward aspiration for women which is something new and not available in other occupations such as domestic work" (Rashid, 2006 cited in Khosla, 2009: 294). Data shows that experienced female garment workers change factories in order to have higher

wages (Khosla, 2009: 294). Another important social change found by (Khosla, 2009) is the women workers' dress up. Before they were wearing formal dress *saree,* but after joining the garment sector, they have started using informal dress *salwar kameez,* which is the symbol of modernity. This helps female garment workers to be confident regarding themselves (Khosla, 2009: 294).

A study by Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000) has shown that female garment workers get married at later ages than their counterparts who remain at home. They are very conscious about this situation (Zohir and Paul-Majumder, 1996, BUP, 1990, Naved et al., 1997 and Afsar, 1995 cited in Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 17). According to a survey carried out in 1997 " […] female garment workers, who got married before joining garment work marry at about age 16, compared with female workers, who got married after joining the garment work, who marry at age 20. Women's age at first childbirth is also significantly affected by employment in the garment industry. It is 21 for garment workers who gave birth to their first child after joining garment work, compared with age 17 for workers who gave birth to their first child after joining garment work" (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 17). This has positive impact on society. Because Bangladesh is already an overpopulated country. Late marriage and having kid/kids at later age by the female garment workers can help reduce the over population growth (Khosla, 2009).

For years, socially and culturally, domestic activities were the main activities of women. According to a survey of 1997, almost 52 percent women workers in the garment sector have husbands, who assist them in domestic activities but previously domestic activities were gender specific; only women did them (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 18). The survey also reveals that husbands spend 1.9 hours every day in household activities. Women workers in the non-export sector could not share their household activities with their husbands in the same way. Women garment workers work almost 4 hours more everyday than their counterparts in non-export sectors, and husbands' involvement in the household work enhanced with the growing participation of women in the garment sector (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 18).

An important effect of female workers' working in the garment sector is the "[…] feminization of urban public space" (Hossain, 2012: 27). Because of working in the garment sector, there is rapid change in society in terms of women's mobility on the street. "Every

morning, between six and eight, hundreds and thousands of female garment workers in Dhaka walk through the streets- a scene not even imagined 20 years ago" (Zaman, 2001 cited in Hossain, 2012: 27). The researcher also observed during his fieldwork that in the morning and afternoon thousands of women workers go to and come from garment factories by walking while discussing their joys and sorrows. The positive aspect is that they are on the street which was beyond imagination several decades ago before the garment sector was established. In this sense, the garment sector has brought the women workers out of their households. And the positive aspect of feminization of public space is that "[...] it helps to create a more gender equitable cultural norm by normalizing women's public mobility and access to public institutions. [...] there is clear change: women and girls have wider menu of options and more room for manoeuvre around appropriate female behavior than in the past" (Hossain, 2012: 27-28).



Figure 2: It shows the presence of female garment workers in the public space, which was not imaginable a few decades earlier in Bangladesh.

Is there anything feasible to achieve today without education? The answer is no. Someone even needs basic education in order to get a job in the garment sector (Hossain, 2012). The employment of the female garment workers in the garment sector has created the demand for and supply of education for girls (Hossain, 2012: 25-26). It was found that the job opportunities in the garment sector can be regarded as a significant reason for the spread of basic education like primary and secondary schooling among the rural poor female children (Hossain, 2012: 25-27). The demographic information of the female garment workers who participated in the current research also reveals that all of them have either primary or secondary education. This is a positive social change (Kabeer, 1999) for the women garment workers. Data reveals that "[...] now more families are investing in girls' education with a view to engage them in the garments industry" (Amin et al., 1998, Rashid, 2006 cited in Khosla, 2009: 294). It changes discriminatory social attitudes towards girls' education (Khosla, 2009: 294), which helps to transform the structural violence from society.

## 5.5.2 Downsides of working in the garment industry:

The negative sides of working in the garment industry can be measured based on several factors. These factors hinder the social and economic empowerment of the female garment workers in Bangladesh.

### 5.5.2.1 Violation of the terms of employment:

Even though textile industry belongs to the formal sector, most of the time recruitment in the garment factories is done informally. Generally, workers are not given formal job contract (Ahamed, 2013: 6, and Absar, 2002: 3012). Consequently, "[...] they are easily hired and fired" (Absar, 2002: 3012). According to A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006,[16] "No employer shall employ any worker without giving such worker a letter of appointment and every such employed worker shall be provided with an identity card with photograph" (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 26). But all the key research informants who participated in the interviews and FGD for the current research have stated that they had received no contract paper or letter of appointment while they joined the

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[16] A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: It defines everything about labor laws in all categories of industries including the garment sector in Bangladesh.
http://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/352/A%20Handbook%20on%20the%20Bangladesh%20Labour%20Act%20 2006.pdf  (accessed on 20.12.14).
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garment factories. Because of the absence of formal contract paper during the employment, many female garment workers lose their jobs without any prior notice and benefit (Ahamed, 2013: 6).

There is a rule for weekly holidays. As such, A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006 states that "An adult worker employed in an establishment, [...] commercial establishment, or industrial establishment, shall be allowed in each week one and half days holiday and in factory and establishment one day in a week [...]"(A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 56). But female garment workers do not get their weekly holidays due to extra work and over time. (Khatun et al., 2008). Informant A11 said:

> *Though Friday should be holiday, I have to work on Fridays. I am working like a machine. Garment work is very hard. I feel like I should quit garment industry.*

The weekly holiday is necessary for the workers' recreation and rest. But due to consecutive work schedule and force from the management, the workers can not enjoy their weekly holiday. Consequently, they sometimes feel overworked and eventually lose interest about their job in the garment industry. During the field work, the researcher observed that all the female garment workers, who are the participants of the current research, were working on Fridays. Because when the researcher asked them to give time for interviewees on Friday considering that it would be a holiday, they could not give much time because of their work on Fridays.

There is a rule that there should be paid maternity leave. As such, A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006 states that "Every women employed in an establishment shall be entitled to, and her employer shall be liable for the payment of maternity benefit in respect of the period of eight weeks preceding the expected day of her delivery and eight weeks immediately following the day of her delivery" (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 39). But very few women workers are allowed the maternity leave and in many cases young mothers start working again just immediately after giving birth for the sake of keeping their jobs (Paul- Majumder, 2003 cited in Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012), because most of the employers run their garments on the basis of 'no work, no payment.' (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012: 10).

The pregnant garment workers are vulnerable to lose their jobs because they have no job contract papers (Ahamed, 2013). Because of the fear of losing their jobs, some women keep themselves away from having children. As such, one interviewee cited in Hossain and Al-Amin (2012: 10) that "After three years of marriage I still have no child. I desire to give birth to a child but I'm afraid of losing my job. There is greater possibility to get fired during pregnancy […]." This statement of a female worker challenges the traditional role of women to give birth and raising children, which creates psychological pressure on their everyday life (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012). Informants A1, A2, A6, A8 and A9 also stated during their interviews that pregnant women lose their jobs, and that apart from A9, the rest of them lost their old jobs while they were pregnant. They also gave similar statements during the FGD.

It is very tough for the female garment workers to get sick leave when they are sick while working in the garment factory. Even when they are too sick to go to work or whenever they find that their relative is dead or very sick, they just do not go to work. Because they already know that if they ask for leave, it will never be granted. So, they sometimes don't go to work and become the victims of structural violence (Galtung 1990 and Ho, 2007) by having their salaries reduced or by the threat of losing their jobs. As informant A1 stated:

> *If we are absent for one day, they show three days absence. They also say that you can take one month's leave and the company will hire someone else. Moreover, if a relative is dead, they do not grant absence. Instead they say that if you have come for work, you have to work.*

All the informants who participated in the FGD, also agreed that management does not allow any leave of absence, though there is a provision that workers should be given leave on certain grounds like during times of sickness (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 59).

Another problem is the issues of childcare while the women workers are at work. Workers are afraid to bring their children to the work place because the air is so polluted. Working women look for alternative places for their children. Sometimes, they keep their children in the village for their grandparents to look after them while they work in the cities. The main problem for not keeping their children with them is insufficient income. In addition, they are

unable to bear the cost of someone who could come to their house to look after their kids. So, childcare is a major problem for the women garment workers (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012). According to A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006, where there are more than 40 female workers, there should be a suitable room for children under 6 years of age to have day care (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 54). Informants A1, A2, A6 and A8 said that there are no childcare rooms in their respective workplaces, whereas A9 said that her 3 sons live in the village and study there.

Thus, the violation of the terms of employment of the female garment workers by the owners of the garment factories shows that there is structural violence in the garment sector. It reflects Harding's ( 1986) concept of structural gender that to what extent female garment workers are getting actual opportunities at their work places (garment sector).

## 5.5.2.2 Not abiding the rules of working hours, overtime and payment of the workers:

Workers' wellbeing is greatly influenced by the length of the working hours during a given day. A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006, states "No adult worker shall ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than eight hours in any day: provided that, subject to the provisions of section 108, any such worker may work in an establishment not exceeding ten hours in any day" (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 56). But studies show that most of the garment factories do not follow any standard working hours (Ahamed, 2013: 8). Forced labor is also common in the garment sector. Workers are scheduled to fulfill the target given by the management in each day and if the workers can not finish it on time, they are forced to do it in extra shifts without any extra payment. In addition, two hours over time is a must every day. If a worker refuses to do extra shifts he/she is fired or sometimes gets low wages. (Ahamed, 2013).

Women workers often work extra shifts for two reasons. The first one is they work willingly to earn more money as their income is not sufficient. The second one is that they are forced by the management. Sometimes the workers can not leave willingly before the end of the working hours, which is the mandatory rule for all the garment workers (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012). Moreover, the factory management hardly informs them in advance that they have overtime. It is only declared after finishing the working day. In some factories, female

workers are forced to do night shifts and gates remain locked to do over time (Ahamed, 2013: 8). As informant A5 said:

*It is very hard to work in the garment factory. It is harder during the Ramadan period (month of fasting for Muslims). I have to work from 8 to 17.30, and sometimes until 20. Whereas sometimes after finishing at 17.30, they call again to start from 20 to 3 in the morning. And again I have to start working from 8 in the morning. I can not say no to them, because if I say no I will lose my job. It is very tough to maintain schedule and do the family work.*

Sufficient and regular payment is one of the most important aspects to ensure workers' wellbeing. To fulfill the basic human needs of the workers and their family members, their payment should be sufficient (Flanagan, 2006 cited in Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012: 8). According to findings, it has been found that the payment in the garment sector is not sufficient and also not regular. Often workers receive their wages in the middle of the month, sometimes one or two months later (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012: 8). Informant A5 stated:

*I get 4000 TK every month as a beginner, which is not sufficient. But my house rent is 2500 TK. Then I have to send money to my family as my father is unable to run the family of 7 members. Sometimes I get my salary in the middle of the month, but it would be better if I could get the salary in the beginning of the month.*

From this statement it is obvious that A 5 informant's daily income is less than US $ 1[17] a day, which is the symbol of structural violence according to the World Bank (Ho, 2007:5).

Informant A4 said:

*As a line chief my working hours are from 8 am- 22pm, and salary is fixed 10000. I believe, the normal working hours are from 8 am to 17 pm. But I have to work until 22 and they don't give extra payment. If they would pay extra payment, my salary would be 18000.*

From this statement it is clear that though informant A4 works long extra hours in addition to her fixed hours, she gets a fixed salary in each month and her extra hours are not

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[17] US $ 1 is equivalent to 80 Bangladeshi Taka, though it fluctuates with market valuation.

counted, which can be regarded as structural violence through exploitation (Galtung, 1990). And this exploitation is an obstacle towards economic empowerment of female garment workers.

None of the key informants of this research are satisfied with their current jobs in the garment sector. Low wage is one of the reasons behind this (Ahamed, 2013). Even all the informants who participated in the FGD said that they were not satisfied with the wages they are paid for their work. Thus the low wage of the female workers support the idea of structural violence in a way that the underdogs [female garment workers] get less wage because of the exploitation of the topdogs [the owners of the garment factory] (Galtung, 1990). And these female workers can not raise their voice against the low wages as the majority of them are not unionized through labor organization (Yunus and Yamagata, 2012: 15). Sometimes, "Women are reluctant to unionize, having been excluded from the exclusively male trade union movement" (Ahmed, 2004: 38-39). Moreover, the owners have created different classes of workers, which impede the workers in becoming unionized and raise their voices (Ahmed, 2004). Thus, female garment workers' collective actions or collective agency are halted (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005). Consequently, they are not empowered.

## 5.5.2.3 Poor health and living conditions:

The working environment in the garment factories is not hygienic and usually below standard. As mentioned earlier, the air quality is poor and the work place is generally overcrowded (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 15). But according to A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006, "No work room in any establishment shall be overcrowded to an extent injurious to health of the workers employed therein" (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 42). Furthermore, the work place is very hot and dusty as sewing, cutting and ironing are done on the same floor. And in many garment factories there remains no safe drinking water facility. Consequently, workers in the garment factories suffer from various diseases like fever, headache, back pain, eye infection, jaundice, typhoid, weakness or anemia, skin diseases, diarrhea and so on (Ahamed, 2013: 12-13).

Figure 3: Garment factories in different floors of the building. The research informants work in these garment factories. I wanted to take pictures of the working environment but I was not allowed to go inside.

A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006, states that "In every establishment […] sufficient latrines and urinals of prescribed types shall be provided conveniently situated and accessible to workers at all times while they are in the establishment […]" (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 43). But almost none of the garment factories have sufficient toilets for women workers.

> *There are about 600 female workers where I work but there are only 6 toilets. So, we have to stay in long queues* (Informant A4).

> *One of 3 toilets is always stuck with dirt. The remaining 2 toilets are not sufficient for us. We always have to queue for the toilet* (Informant A6).

From the FGD it was found that there was supposed to be one toilet for every four women. But due to the lack of sufficient toilets, women workers have to wait for long periods of time. This is problematic for women garment workers physically.

It was found that though export-oriented garment industry has provided jobs to a large number of rural migrated women, but it has not provided them a decent shelter in Dhaka (Paul-Majumder, 2000:15).



Figure 4: Slum area where some of the key informants live. It is also visible that a multi-storied building is being built just near the slum, which shows the social class distinctions in Bangladesh.

The female garment workers mostly live in the slum areas where the living environment is unhygienic. During the field work the researcher has observed that all the informants live in the slum areas where the living environment is dirty, overcrowded, dark, and shabby. Moreover, their walking path remains watery all the time because of the absence of a proper drainage system. Furthermore, it was found that informant A6 used to live with her husband and 3 children in one room because of economic hardship. Such living conditions of the female garment workers and their involvement with the export-based garment industry are contradictory to each other. Because the economic empowerment of women involves a sustainable source of income through which they can lead a standard life (Mosedale, 2005:247)
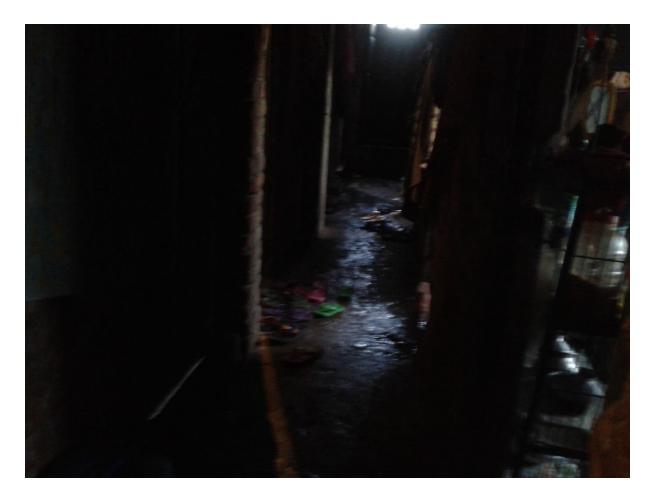
Figure 5: Living conditions of some of the key informants showing the living environment is dirty, dark, and shabby.

The health and living conditions of women can be compared with Galtung's (1990) idea of structural violence in a way that because of the exploitation and marginalization, the female garment workers are placed in such a disadvantageous situation that they face permanent and unwanted conditions of misery like malnutrition, illness, starvation and diseases, which in turn results in shorter life expectancy (Galtung, 1990).

## 5.5.2.4 Workers' safety in the garment sector:

"With the collapse of the Savar Specturm Sweater factory, the Phoenix Fabrics Mill Ltd, the fire at KTS Fabrics Mills and Chowdhury Knitwear Garments, industrial health and safety issues have been identified as a burning issue in the RMG sector" (Ahmed and Hossain, 2009: 1).

According to A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006, Chapter VI, section 61.2, "If it appears to the Inspector that the use of any building or part of a building or any part of the ways, machinery or plant in the establishment involves imminent danger to human life or

safety, he may serve on the employer of the establishment an order in writing prohibiting its use until it has been properly repaired or altered" (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 44). But most of the garment factories do not follow the proper building code. Consequently, accidents like building collapse and fire often takes place resulting in the deaths of many workers (Ahamed, 2013: 13).

The work place in these factories is notorious for the incidents of fire (Ahamed, 2013: 13). Workers face the insecurity of insufficient fire prevention measures. Every year many workers die due to fire incidents in the garment factories. Usually more female workers than male workers become victims of fire accidents. According to the past statistics, 90 percent of the garment workers who died in the fire accidents were female workers (Begum, 2004 cited in Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012). Almost half of them died while escaping through a narrow staircase or jumping from the roof or escaping from a locked room during the fire incident. It is obligatory to keep an alternative door open for the workers' emergency exit during accidents, it is hardly practiced in the garment factories (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012). But according to A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006 , section 62 (3) ,"In every establishment the doors affording exit from any room shall not be locked or fastened so that they can be easily and immediately opened from inside while any person is within the room [...]"(A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act,2006 :44 ). But in the last 10 years there were more than 100 accidents of fire in the garment factories in Bangladesh (The Independent, 2006 cited in Ahmed and Hossain, 2009: 3).

> *The place where I work has emergency exit but all the time it remains locked*. (Informant A1)

> *There is no regular training for facing accidents like fire accident. There are not sufficient emergency gates for emergency exits.* (Informant A6)

It appears from the above statements and available data that many of the garment factories in Bangladesh do not have sufficient safety measures in order to save the garment workers from the outbreak of fire. The cause of this is mainly because of the carelessness of the factory management, which can be compared to structural violence (Galtung, 1990 and Ho, 2007).

Table 4: Numbers of deaths in year 2000-2006 in the RMG sector, Bangladesh.

| Year | Garment | Died |
|------|---------|------|
| 2000 | Choudhury Knitwear | 53 |
| 2001 | Maico Sweater | 24 |
| 2002 | Globe Knitting | 12 |
| 2004 | Misco Supermarket | 9 |
| 2005 | Shan Knitting | 23 |
|      | Spectrum | 64 |
| 2006 | KTS Fabrics | 54 |
|      | Phoenix Fabrics | 21 |
|      | System Fashion | 3 |

Source: (Ahmed and Hossain, 2009: 5)[18].

Table no. 4 clearly shows how vulnerable the garment workers are while working in various garment factories. Recently, one garment building namely Rana Plaza, near Dhaka, collapsed on 24th April, 2013, with deaths of almost 1127 people. The day before it collapsed, it was found that the building had cracks and there were warnings not to use the building. Nevertheless, workers were forced to work in that building (Yardley, 2013). As the majority of the workers are women, they become the victims during such kind of accident. In relation to the collapse of the Rana Plaza, informant A14, a BGMEA member and owner of a garment factory stated:

> The main reason of the collapse of Rana Plaza was that its feasibility test was not good. Moreover, low raw materials were used. Consequently there was crack in the building. Experts advised against the use of the building, but the management forced the workers to work. Another problem was there were 5 generators which were started at the same time, which shaked the building and it collapsed.

This statement reveals that forced labor is quite common in the garment sector and though the workers in the Rana Plaza were reluctant to work in an unsafe building, the authorities forced them to work. Many workers including many female workers died or were injured.

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[18] http://sljm.pim.lk/admin/uploads/industrial_safety_in_the_readymade_garment_sector-a_developing_country_perspective.pdf (accessed on 21.12.14)

Such a working environment only reflects the structural violence in the sector (Galtung, 1990).

## 5.5.2.5 Discrimination between male and female garment workers:

Women workers were asked during the FGD whether there remains any discrimination between male and female garment workers. All the participants said there remain gaps between male and female garment workers. Most of the garment factories hire women because they can't protest as these women fear to lose their jobs. Sometimes superior male workers like supervisors beat them as female workers are physically weak, but they can not beat male workers as they are male and physically strong.

> *When they talk to men, they calculate and talk carefully. But they don't care about women. (*Informant B3)

> *Women can't say anything. They can't protest. They threaten if any woman protests, she will lose her job*. (Informant B4)

In addition, there remains a gender gap in terms of wages between male and female workers.

Table 5: Gender differentials in wages in the garment industry, 1998.

| Category of workers | Male wages ( Taka/month) | Female wages(Taka/month) |
|---|---|---|
| Supervisor | 4234 | 3082 |
| Quality controller | 4038 | 1724 |
| Cutting master | 3935 | - |
| Operator | 2254 | 1536 |
| Ironer | 1894 | 1106 |
| Sewing helper | 1200 | 762 |
| Cutting helper | 1512 | 837 |
| Finishing helper | 1209 | 1023 |
| Folder | 1528 | 1157 |

Source: (Paul- Majumder and Begum 2000 cited in Absar, 2001: 5)[19].

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[19] https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/41832/4/2-7-ssharmin.pdf
(accessed on 20.12.14)

From the table 5 and the statements of the informants, it appears that gender discrimination is prevalent in the garment sector in terms of wages and conducting behavior between male and female garment workers by the superior colleagues. It also shows unequal gendered division of labor at the work place and unequal presence of women in higher-ranking positions (Lorber, 2010 and Sen, 2001). These kinds of gender discrimination are not natural or God given (Lorber, 2010). But these are created by human agency (Farmer, 2005 cited in Ho, 2007), because of discriminatory cultural practices in society (Galtung, 1990). These social and economic discriminations between male and female garment workers are regarded as structural violence (Galtung, 1990 and Ho, 2007). And this structural violence is impeding women's social and economic empowerment.

## 5.5.2.6 Violence against female garment workers:

Based on the United Nations Declaration, violence against women includes "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (United Nations, 1993, cited in WHO: Putting Women First, 2001: 5)[20]. Violence against women has increased in connection to their employment in the garment industry (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 18). And "The characteristics of export manufacturing employment in Bangladesh- late working hours, inadequate transport and insecurity between work and home create the conditions under which sexual harassment and sexual violence thrive"(Hossain, 2012: 20). Women garment workers belong to high risk group because women working in the garment industry are mostly young, unmarried, rural migrants and work late hours (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000). The sexual harassment against the female garment workers is both verbal and physical. According to statistics of 1990 and 1997, the sexual violence against the garment workers include "[…] demeaning remarks, to unwelcome touching, and grabbing and other physical assaults, including raping" (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 18). Studies show that sexual harassment of female garment workers at the work place often take place. Female workers are harassed sexually both by male colleagues and managers (Hossain and

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[20] http://www.who.int/gender/violence/womenfirtseng.pdf (accessed on 20.12.14).

Al-Amin 2012). Male supervisors in positions of power within the factory very often use mean words or touch the women's bodies to harass them. Sometimes senior bosses force them to have sexual intercourse with them, which has negative social effects (Hossain and Al-Amin 2012). Informant A5 said:

*When I make mistakes, supervisors use mean language about my parents.*

Beating of female garment workers by the superior male colleagues is also quite common in the garment industries of Bangladesh. Informant A3 expressed:

*Supervisor asked me to bring scissor but I said I was working. So, I did not go. Then supervisor came and grabbed my throat. My throat was squeezed.*

Women can not raise their voice against such kind of violence because they remain in fear of losing their jobs. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the majority of female garment workers are non-unionized. Consequently, women can not even raise their voices against such violence through the workers' union (Yunus and Yamagata, 2012: 15).

Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000:18) found in their studies that about 161 incidents of rape cases were filed in the Department of Metropolitan police, Dhaka in 1998. Among these cases, 17 cases were female garment workers. Women garment workers constitute about 2-3 % of the total women in the metropolitan area of Dhaka but they are the victims of 11% rape cases (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 18). "The survey of 1997 shows that 20 percent of the surveyed female garment workers lived in slums and squatter settlements. For female garment workers, the possibility of being raped by the local rent collectors is very high because […] there is no law imposing authority." (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 19). Violence against women garment workers is not confined within the household or the workplace. Rather, they also become the victims of violence on the street on their way to and from the garment factories. Regardless of the age of the garment workers, they face harassment on the street by local gangsters (Islam, 2010). Data shows that 70 % of the women garment workers who use public bus had faced rough behavior from the conductor and driver (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 19).

Table 6: Workers' reports of incidents that contribute to insecurity (% of workers)

| Incident | Experienced by self | | Experienced by colleagues | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Men | Women | Men | Women |
| Beating in factory | 3.3 | 5.9 | 6.5 | 5.6 |
| Rape in factory | - | 0.2 | - | 2.1 |
| Attacked by gangster | 9.8 | 4.5 | | 10 |
| Got afraid in the street | 7.3 | 14.3 | 5.7 | 7.7 |
| Harassed in the street | 6.1 | 19 | - | 21.5 |
| Harassed by police | 2 | 1.4 | 2 | 1.9 |
| Raped in street | - | - | 3.3 | 4 |
| Fear of theft | 2.9 | 4.9 | - | - |
| Got afraid at home | 1.6 | 4 | - | - |

Source: (Zohir and Paul-Majumder 1996, cited in Hossain, 2012: 20)[21].

Working life and work efficiency of the female workers are badly influenced by the violence against women either at the work place or on the street. It has been found that because of the fear of violence, the women garment workers can not concentrate on their work properly (Paul-Majumder, 2000).

In some cases, sexual harassment against female workers destroys their working life by sacking. Sometimes, the sexually harassed women do not get jobs in other factories because of bad reputation attached to their names. Another sexually victimized garment worker stated to Paul-Majumder (2000: 23) that:

*Now I am desperately looking for a job since my parents are very poor. But no garment factory is ready to give me a job when they come to know that I have a police case. I like to withdraw the police case. But it is very difficult since police asked*

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[21] http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2012.00389.x/pdf (accessed on 21.12.14).

*money from me to withdraw the case. Now I feel that I have done something wrong by filling a complaint. From the complaint I have got nothing except deprivation. [...].*

The victimized female garment workers did not get any legal justice against the sexual harassment as they are rural migrants and do not know where to ask for legal justice. Neither do they know how to seek legal justice as they are not educated (Paul-Majumder, 2000: 16). Moreover, because of the socio-cultural reasons their physical mobility is very low and they are also economically too weak to get legal assistance (Paul-Majumder, 2000).

From the table 6 and statements of the informants, it seems that women are sexually exploited and they face physical violence at their work places and at home. All kinds of sexual exploitation and violence against women reflect gender inequalities (Lorber, 2010), and these gender inequalities represent structural violence in society (Galtung, 1990 and Ho, 2007). This structural violence is obstructing women garment workers' social and economic empowerment.

## 5.6 Empowerment or continuation of structural violence?

Women garment workers' empowerment can be measured through their achievements because of their involvement in the garment sector (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005). The female garment workers' achievements are both positive (empowerment) and negative (disempowerment).

Women garment workers were poor before joining the garment sector. That is why they were disempowered as there is close relationship between disempowerment and poverty[22] (Kabeer, 2001). So, empowering the female garment workers means overcoming their poverty (Kabeer, 2005). Obviously, garment sector has given opportunity to female garment workers to earn money and be empowered. Both the field narratives and secondary data have showed that in terms of wages, female garment workers are exploited by the owners of the garment factories. So, they are not empowered in terms of overcoming their poverty. Moreover, violence against women and gender discrimination are regarded as the main obstacles for empowering women in the development context (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). Both primary and secondary data have showed that women garment workers face

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[22] The relationship between disempowerment and poverty has been discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis.

both physical and psychological violence at home and in the work place because of their joining the garment sector.

It is also important that women redefine their gender roles for their empowerment (Mosedale, 2005:252). To redefine gender roles, transformation of the structures of society through the reduction of gender inequality is needed (Abdin, 2008:1). But female garment workers face gender discriminations in terms of wages and job positions in the garment sector. They are also the victims of fire accidents and building collapse because of the carelessness of the garment owners. Moreover, in the community their social position is degraded because of their joining the garment sector.

It is necessary that women work collectively to increase their bargaining capacity (Mosedale, 2005). But female garment workers are not unionized through labor union. Consequently, they can not bargain with the owners of the garment factories concerning their low wages, gender discriminations and bad working conditions in the garment factories. It reflects that their voice is not legitimized at the work place (Mosedale, 2005).

Empowerment involves a process of change (Kabeer, 1999: 437). Study shows that "Women also report being able to negotiate their role within families, delay marriage, delay childbearing and have a greater say in their lives" (Amin et al., Rashid, 2006 cited in Khosla, 2009: 294). This report supports Kabeer's (1999: 437) empowerment concept that powerless women have gained power to make choices in their life about their marriage, having kids and to work or not to work. It shows that women garment workers' agency or self-esteem has been enhanced (Kabeer, 2005). Thus, it is visible that female garment workers have received power and authority to exercise their decision making capabilities through their incomes (Abdin, 2008). But the impact on the family matters because of female garment workers' working in the garment sector is mixed. Because "[…] power is derived not from the possession of economic resources […], but on whether the control of these resources can be exercised" (Blumberg, 1984, 1991 and Kibria 1995 cited in Khosla, 2009: 295). So, it raises questions whether women garment workers' earning actually enhances their power or not (Khosla, 2009: 295). Both primary and secondary data have showed that married female garment workers can not spend their earned money because of patriarchy. Consequently, the resources to exercise women's power (Kabeer, 1999) are hindered within the patriarchal family institutions. Thus, it shows that structural violence is still present in the garment

sector and in society. So, it can be said that female garment workers' presence in the garment sector is a continuation of structural violence.

## 5.7 Summary of the chapter:

After analyzing both primary and secondary data it is obvious that because of poverty women are compelled to work in the garment industry. Females used to be within their households in the village, but now many of them are working in the garment sector.

Bangladeshi women garment workers' economic empowerment is largely challenged by low wages, their lower education, control of their wages by their husbands, long working hours and unpaid household activities. Moreover, their social empowerment is obstructed due to the bad image of garment workers in the society, their low voice against the illegal management of the garment factories, their insecurity on their way to and from home. In addition, considering the working environment, disparity between male and female garment workers, low wage rate, health and living conditions of the workers and the fact that the workers die during the accidents in garment factory, it can be stated that there is structural violence in the garment sector and in the society. Because of this structural violence, their social and economic empowerment is impeded.

# Chapter 6. Summary and Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to answer the question -how is the involvement of women in the garment industry of Bangladesh a continuation of structural violence? The question has been addressed by discussing three other interrelated questions about: 1. whether women work by necessity or choice 2. Women's own perception regarding their empowerment and 3. The benefits and downsides of working in the garment sector.

I started by going back in the history of the Indian sub-continent, where women regardless of religion were not conventionally allowed to do paid work or going outside (Roy, 1975 cited in Wright, 2000: 231-232). Women in Bangladesh, as part of the Indian sub-continent, experienced the same treatment throughout history. The traditional Hindu class and caste system (Roy, 1975 cited in Wright, 2000: 231-232), and the Islamic Purdah system (Cain et al., 1979: 408), have restricted the role of women in society. Thus, historically women in Bangladesh were not empowered socially and economically. In this way, due to the patriarchal system in Bangladesh, structural violence against women has been an ongoing problem throughout the country's history.

The garment industry in Bangladesh started flourishing just after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, when the country's economic condition was vulnerable (Rashid, 2006). Two important factors; a), positive exporting environment created by the MFA (Multi-Fiber Arrangement) quota system and b), cheap labor, contributed to the flourishing of the garment sector in Bangladesh (Rashid 2006:1). The reasons behind the establishment of most of the garment factories in Dhaka are that; it is the financial center of the country and that all international communications are Dhaka-centric (Hossain, 2008: 1). Because of more opportunities for job in Dhaka, people from rural areas started moving to Dhaka. It enhanced the number of slums in Dhaka (Alam and Rabbani, 2007: 82).

Garment sector earns about 76 percent of the country's economy (Ahmed and Hossain, 2009: 1). Among a total of 1.8 million garment workers in Bangladesh, 80 percent are female workers (Ahmed and Hossain, 2009: 1-2). Nevertheless, the women workers in this sector are neglected and exploited in terms of their low wages, lack of their presence in higher ranking positions, poor working conditions, lack of freedom of choice to work, lack of freedom of expression, absence of adequate precautionary measures to avoid accidents in

the garment factories, lack of holidays, and discriminatory treatment in comparison to their male counterparts. These factors are happening within the structures of the garment sector. It altogether represents Galtung's (1990) structural violence.

While addressing the question whether women work by necessity or choice, it was found that there are various pull and push factors for women's involvement in the garment sector of Bangladesh (Absar, 2001:7). The pull factor contributed for those women who were lured by the newly created garment industry for the sake of improving their social and economic conditions (Khosla, 2009: 292). And push factors inspired those women who were marginalized because of economic hardship in the family, death of the male bread earner in the family and divorce or abandonment by their male partners (Kibria, 1998). The analysis in the project shows that the majority of the female workers stated that even if they had a choice to stay at home, they would still work in the garment factory because of the financial need. But they believe that household work is better than working in the garment sector, because they believe that working in the garment factory is like losing their freedom once they are inside the garment factory.

In discussing the benefits, this research has shown that with the emergence of the garment industry in Bangladesh followed the social and economic empowerment of women. Obviously, the garment sector has created the opportunities for women in Bangladesh to come out from their households. Moreover, by working in the garment sector, female workers' dependence on their poor parents is reduced, which is a positive side for the society. These women workers also help their parents financially. The work opportunity in the garment sector is one of the important reasons for spreading the basic education, as such primary and secondary schooling among the pastoral female children (Hossain, 2012: 25-27). Some of the informants have also stated that they are educating their children from their earnings from the garment sector. Moreover, studies show that females who work in the garment industry get married late and have children at a later age. Because they are conscious about their career (Paul-majumder and Begum, 2000: 17), which is helpful for their social and economic empowerment. Studies also show that husbands of women garment workers assist their wives in the household duties. Before domestic work was done only by the women (Paul-majumder and Begum, 2000: 17).

Another important social change which is visible in the urban public space of Bangladesh is the presence of women. Every morning and evening it is possible to see hundreds of thousands of female garment workers on the street walking to and from garment factories. This scenario could not be imagined some decades ago due to religious and cultural restrictions (Zaman, 2001 cited in Hossain, 2012:27).

While discussing the disadvantages, it has been discussed that women garment workers' voices are not heard within families and at work. Moreover, the working environment in the garment industry is very poor and overcrowded. As a result, they suffer from various diseases such as fever, headache, back pain, eye infection, jaundice, typhoid, skin diseases, diarrhea and so on (Ahamed, 2013: 12-13). In addition, building collapse and fire accidents often take place in the garment factories. Every year many workers die because of such accidents. According to statistics, 90 percent of all who have died in the fire accidents are female workers (Begum, 2004 cited in Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012:11).

Gender discrimination in the garment factories are also noticeable. There remains huge gaps between male and female workers' earnings. Gender gaps in terms of earnings are visible in all types of garment factories regardless of their size and types. (Khatun et al., 2008). The representation of women workers in the high ranking positions are also low in comparison with their male counterparts. It was also found from the key informants that the superior male workers beat female workers as they are weak physically, while they can not beat male workers. All these discriminatory treatments between male and female garment workers exemplify structural violence (Galtung, 1990 and Ho, 2007) in the garment sector.

One of the significant aspects of this thesis was social empowerment of women through their enrolment in the garment sector. Some of the key informants of this project made decisions by themselves to join the garment industry. Thus, they are making decisions within the family as to joining the garment industry, which is social empowerment. But according to all the key informants and available studies, it has been found that their social status has decreased because of joining the garment sector. One possible reason is cultural structure of the society which does not allow females to be outside home at night. As female workers work late night shifts in the garment factory due to the pressure created by the garment factory management, the female workers feel that their social status has decreased (Paul-

Majumder and Begum, 2000:23). Because of such devaluation of their social status, they feel insecure about their marriage thinking that nobody would marry them.

Economically, women are not empowered as is evidenced in the field narratives and secondary sources. Because their husbands take control over their earned money. If their wives try to take control over their earned money, then wife beating by husbands or other family members becomes an issue, which is a family structural matter (Islam, 2010). Thus, married women are not able to make decisions about how to spend their own money. The scenario for the unmarried female workers are different. They can spend their earned money themselves, though they sometimes spend their money on their parents or siblings. So, the decision making about how to spend earned money varied depending upon their marital status.

Maintaining livelihood in Dhaka is very expensive because of increasing house rent, food costs and, the education of children along with other daily expenses. But the amount of money female garment workers get from the garment sector are not sufficient for their livelihoods. All the key informants stated that their salary should be increased. To justify the question whether the salary of the garment workers' should be increased, I conducted interviews of two garment factory owners. They are against increasing the salary of the workers as they think that increasing their salary may increase the price of the clothes in the international market. Consequently, they can lose international market. But informant A 12, a female human rights worker, argued that there remains a huge gap between the owners and the workers in terms of economic disparity. She also believes that the owners are becoming richer and are leading luxurious lives by exploiting the workers. Thus, women are not sufficiently being empowered economically.

Workers are supposed to get weekly holidays (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 56), but female garment workers do not get weekly holidays due to the consecutive work schedule and force from the management. Moreover, female garment workers do not receive paid maternity leave, which is also violation of the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006 (A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006: 39). Furthermore, they are not allowed any sick leave. All these factors are structural and are created within the structure of the

garment industry. Thus, it shows Galtung's (1990) structural violence within the garment sector.

After discussing both benefits and downsides, it is arguable that the downsides outweigh the benefits of female garment workers' participation in the garment sector, because the distribution of resources (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005) between men and women within family, in community and at the work place is unequal due to patriarchal practice in Bangladesh. This unequal distribution of resources represents structural violence (Galtung, 1990 and Ho, 2007) in society and in the garment sector. Therefore, their agency or motivation (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005) to work outside home and improve their social and economic condition is hindered. Consequently, there are more negative achievements (disempowerment) than positive achievements (empowerment) (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005). Thereby, it can be said that though female garment workers are advancing in terms of their social and economic empowerment, their actual empowerment is not ensured, since structural violence is still present in society and in the garment sector. Thus, it confirms my hypothesis that because of the presence of structural violence in society and in the garment sector, social and economic empowerment of women is obstructed. Consequently, the garment sector is playing a paradoxical role in empowering the women garment workers and transforming the structural violence in Bangladesh.

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# Appendix

**Interview Guide**

**1.0 Introduction**

This research paper investigates whether there is structural violence in the garment industry and in society in connection with female garment workers' social and economic empowerment in the garment sector. I am carrying out this research as part of my master's course Peace and Conflict Transformation at the University of Tromsø, Norway. Everything I will hear and observe here will be used only for research purpose. Your name will be kept confidential and will not be published in any media. Participation in this research is voluntary. You can leave anytime you want.

**2.0 Background / Personal information of the female garment workers, BGMEA members and female human rights workers.**

2.1 Informant No.

2.2 Age

2.3 Sex

2.4 Level of education

2.5 Occupation

2.6 Marital status (only for female garment workers)

2.7 No. of children

2.8 Home town / village

**3.0 Empowerment related questions for female garment workers:**

3.1 Why and how have you come to the garment industry?

3.2. Did you join here willingly or unwillingly?

3.3 Is the salary you get from the garment industry sufficient for you?

3.4 Do you get regular payment?

3.5 Which one is better; household work or garment sector? If you had a choice to stay at home, would you still work in the garment sector?

3.6 Can you spend your earned money according to your own wish?

3.7 Can you protest against any violence in the garment sector?

   **If not:** why?

3.8 Do you think that your social status has increased because of working in the garment sector?

3.9 What are the advantages you get from the garment sector?

3.10 What are the disadvantages / negative sides?

**4.0 Structural violence related questions for female garment workers:**

4.1 Did you get any contract paper while joining the garment industry?

4.2 Did you face any family problems/ restrictions when you joined the garment industry?

4.3 Do you work extra shifts?

   **If "yes"**: are you working according to your own will or against your will? Are you paid regularly for your extra shifts?

4.4 Are there adequate toilets in your work place?

   **If "no":** what kinds of problems you face there?

4.5 Do you have sufficient emergency exits?

4.6 Do you get regular training for fire accidents or other accidents?

4.7 Do you face any kind of physical or sexual harassment in your work place?

   **If "yes"**: what are those?

4.8 Do you face any kind of violence on the way to and from the garment industry?

   **If "yes"**: what are those?

4.9. Do you face any gender discrimination at your work place?

4.10 Do you think the place where you work is congenial for health?

4.11 Did you take maternity leave and were you paid during that time?

4. 12 Did you change job because of pregnancy?

4.13 Does the factory management allow your absence due to sickness?

4.14 Do you hand over the wage to your husband? (Only for married female garment workers)

4.15 Is there anything you would like to add?

**5.0 Questions for Focus Group Discussion (FGD) for female garment workers:**

5.1 Have you received any contract paper while joining the garment sector?

5.2 Have you faced any problems while joining the garment sector?

5.3 Do you think the wages you get are sufficient for you?

 5.4 Do you think that your salary should be increased?

5.5 Does the management force you to work extra shifts?

5.6 Do you think the toilets are sufficient in your work place?

5.7 Do you face physical or sexual harassment in your work place?

5.8 Do you have sufficient emergency exits in your work place?

5.9 Do you receive regular training for fire accident or any other possible accidents?

5.10 Is the working environment favorable for your health?

 5.11 Do you get sick leave?

5.12 Can you protest against any violence in the garment sector?

   **If "no":** why?

5.13 Did you get maternity leave from the factory management when you were pregnant?

5.14 Did you change jobs because of pregnancy?

5.15 Do you think that childcare facility is available in your work place?

5.16 Is there any advantage of working in the garment sector?

   **If "yes":**  What are those?

5.17 Is there any disadvantage of working in the garment sector?

   **If "yes"**: what are those?

5.18 Can you spend money according to your own will?

5.19 Do you hand over the wage to your husband? (Only for married female garment workers)


**6.0 Questions for BGMEA members:**

6.1 What do you think about women's social and economic empowerment in the garment sector?

6.2 Do you think that the garment workers should have their wages increased?

6.3 What is the reason that female garment workers do not hold higher ranking positions in the garment sector?

6.4 What was the reason of the building collapse (Rana Plaza) on 23rd April, 2013?


**7.0 Questions for female human rights workers:**

7.1 What do you think about the social and economic empowerment of women in the garment sector?

7.2 What do you think about the female garment workers' wages?

7.3 Do you think that the garment workers should have their wages increased?

7.4 What is your opinion about the working environment for women in the garment sector?

7.5 What kind of problems do women workers face while working in the garment sector?

7.6 What is your opinion about the living conditions of women garment workers?

7.7 What are the advantages women workers get from the garment sector?

7.8 Is there anything you would like to add?