

The Readymade garment workers of Bangladesh: Factors Influencing Perceptions of Workplace Abuse

Reaz Uddin

A.M.M. Shahiduzzaman Quoreshi Quoreshi¹

Martin Svensson

Department of Industrial Economics
Blekinge Institute of Technology

Abstract

Bangladesh, the second largest exporter of readymade garment (RMG) and manufacturer for almost all major European and US retail brands often attracts attention of international media, activists and academia. The purpose of the study is to understand the prevalence of abuse in RMG factories in Bangladesh. The study conducts face-to-face interviews of more than 1200 workers of different RMG factories using a questionnaire for both quantitative and qualitative information. It is found that several variables are linked with incidences of abuse. Variables such as age, education, job experience and job related negative experience are statistically significant. The marginal effect of age shows that increase in age decreases probability of being abused and probability of being abused decreases with increase years of schooling. The marginal effect also shows that those who have suffered from sickness e.g., back pain and headache have 42 percent higher probability of being abused compared to those do not suffer from similar syndrome.

¹ Corresponding author: shahidzaman.quoreshi@bth.se; +46734223619

1. Introduction

The concept of workplace abuse is complex and varies between persons depending on position, culture and place. Fitzgerald and Schullman (1993) described, harassment is degrading, frightening, and sometimes physically violent; frequently extended over a considerable period of time; and can result in profound job-related, psychological, and health-related consequences.

Workplace abuse is no recent phenomena. It has been a fixture of the workplace since women first began to work outside the home. However, literature on the issue is not as widespread and true epidemiological studies do not exist (Fitzgerald 1993). In the Bangladesh context, considerable literature is available on women workers of RMG industry, perhaps due to the attention attracted by global-local linkage of the industry, its phenomenal growth and predominantly female dependency of the sector. The body of literature concerning Bangladesh RMG industry focuses a multitude of issues including its contribution in economy and potential (Yunus, 2012; Bhattacharya et al., 2002; Bhattacharya & Rahman, 1999; Azad 1999), social compliance, industrial safety in the sector (Ahamed 2014; Ahmed & Hossain, 2009; Akhter et al., 2010), gender, globalization, feminization and development discourse (Jahan, 2014; Hossain et al., 2013; Farida, 2005; Kabeer, Simeen & Mahmud, 2004; Paul-Majumder & Begum, 2000) and evolving industrial relation in the sector (Faruque, 2009). Siddiqi (2003) eloquently expressed that the female workers of Bangladesh RMG industry have been the subject of numerous studies and expositions. These studies tend to focus on hazardous work conditions, low and irregular wages, health, housing and transportation dilemmas and, more recently, on the effects of globalization on job security. Yet, empirical studies on abuse of workers in the RMG factories are not as readily available and when present they are typically qualitative in character. The work of Siddiqi itself, while significant, is exploratory in nature and is based on a sample size of less than 100 workers. The scarcity of data is a major reason behind the lack of literature and the cultural taboos of not speaking of abuse poses further hurdles for collecting the data. Silence of the workers on abuse is also perpetuated by the somewhat 'regimented' nature of RMG industry (Ahamed 2014).

In the efforts to deploy knowledge, initiated by both producers and retailers, about sustainable and viable working conditions, there remain blind spots about the nature of workplace abuse in the RMG industry. In order to develop sound policies for improving the working conditions, a solid description on the nature of workplace abuse needs to be grounded. The lack of large scale empirical studies addressing workplace abuse in the Bangladesh RMG industry thus motivates this study. The purpose of the paper is to increase understanding of the nature of workplace abuse by investigating prevalence, victimization, factors that enhances as well as protects against perceptions of abuse in the RMG industry of Bangladesh.

The disposition of the remainder of the paper is as follows: first, we address specifics of the Bangladesh RMG industry and the theoretical underpinnings of workplace abuse. Second, we operationalize variables and provide the basis for our analysis of more than 1200 RMG workers working in and around Dhaka city in Bangladesh. Third, we account for the descriptives and results in terms of our model. Fourth, and finally, we conclude the study by providing implications for policies.

2. The Readymade Garment Industry of Bangladesh

Bangladesh, at independence, had very little industrial base. Most of the industries developed in the last 40 years. The RMG industry set off in 1979 in a small way with a few manufacturing units. However, since its experimental and tentative beginning the industry demonstrated phenomenal growth in the succeeding years and continued to expand through the decades. In 1984-85, within 5-year of inception, RMG export accounted for more than 10% of national export value, a stellar growth from less than one percent share. In next two years it more than doubled its share in export value to 28%. Steadily deepening its foot-print in global apparel market Bangladesh RMG industry now ranks 2nd only to China and provides an overwhelming 82% of total national export value. Bangladesh RMG industry is the largest formal private sector employer with around 4 million workers. Total export value of industry in FY2016 stands at USD 28bn. The European Union is the top destination of export followed by USA (BGMEA 2017). Thus, given its connection to the global economy, the working conditions of the RMG workers are therefore of concern for both the (national) producers as well as the (international) retailers.

The evolution of Bangladesh RMG industry in the global market place both has influenced and has been influenced by transitions and transformations in the national sphere. The RMG sector has previously been plagued by poor working conditions. However, the progresses of the industry have brought significant improvements for the workers and a number of initiatives have been taken towards improving working conditions for the employees. Structurally the RGM factories of the 1980s have largely become a distant memory. The make-shift type of factories established in rented and shared buildings not designed for manufacturing purpose is no more the common site of production. Large numbers of factories now operate in factory premise designed for RMG production and owned by manufacturers. The progress in structural development also led to relocation of units. In contrast to city-center of the capital, RMG factories are now concentrated in the industrial hubs at the fringe of the city and away from densely populated residential areas. The transformation is more than minimalist and reactive, in many cases it demonstrate forward looking proactive efforts. Consequently, often blamed for 'sweatshop's, Bangladesh RMG manufacturing factories now dominate US Green Building Council (USGBC) list of environment friendly Green Buildings. In a recently released list by USGBC 25 factories from 10 counties (including USA, Germany China Italy) qualified for LEED Platinum certification. Out these 25 factories 7, including the top two scorers are Bangladesh RMG factories (Prothom Alo 2016).

Despite the initiatives facilitating functional and viable working conditions, there still prevails unresolved issues regarding practices, standard and corporate rules that elevate psychologically grounded conditions of for instance workplace abuse. These matters are important to address, as alongside improving the physical working conditions, it is recognized that violence/stress in workplace has serious cost implications at individual, organizational and collective level (Hoel & Cooper, 2001, 2001).

3. Theoretical Background

The notion of workplace abuse is a multifaceted concept with its roots in organizational psychology. More recently, research on abuse have come to engage interest from a range of disciplines, such as sociology, communication theory, law and industrial

relations (Ahamed, 2014; Blumer 2015). We follow this interdisciplinary trend by focusing on behaviors which on the one side bolster and other side prevent workplace abuse. Prior to outlining the parameters for a model we outline and define the concept of workplace abuse.

Although what is considered abusive may differ between cultures as well as in different company contexts some general criteria stand out of when reviewing literature on the topic. These criteria are outlined below and then operationalized within the text of the method section. Abuse is a multifaceted phenomenon and enclose several facets. While previous studies have identified concepts in isolation (Niedl, 1995), other studies oppose, claiming that when being abused it often involves a number different abusive behaviors.

Subjectivity, objectivity and duration of abusive behaviors:

The social-cultural aspect of abuse presents several challenges. One of the most common challenges is to define 'abuse' because perception of abuse differs across cultures, classes and gender. Another major impediment is approaching the issue of abuse. Thus, there might be a difference between what somebody perceive as abusive and the objectively identifiable acts of other. However, as Niedl (1995) expressed it, a minimum requirement of abuse is that it "rests of the subjective perception made by the victim that these repeated acts are hostile, humiliating and intimidating and that they are directed at herself/himself". However, given the processual character of abuse, these acts of negative and repeated behavior should also be likely to be recognized as abusive if an observer was present when directed at the target. Thus, a perception of abuse is a primary feature of that abusive behavior might have taken place. In particular since signs may be subtle and an observer might have difficulties to be neutral in their assessments considering social and economical attachments to the workplace.

Research on abuse may be further compromised by that it is often taboo to talk about abuse and individuals might be reluctant to disclose information about it. Abusiveness may be conducted interpersonally, between at least two parties, but also more structurally (Neuberger, 1999) or in a depersonalized organizational form (Hoel & Beale, 2006).

The definition of abusive behavior encloses two more features; the repetition and duration of abusive behaviors. Abusive behaviors are not single events, but rather repeated actions towards individuals or group of individuals at least on a weekly basis (Leymann, 1996). However, the temporal frame for abuse is difficult to comply with as different abusive behaviors may be distributed across time, meaning that a single abusive behavior may not be considered abusive in isolation, but when viewed in aggregation together with other behaviors it would meet the criteria for abusiveness over time. Thus, research on abusive behaviors also needs to account for the temporal frame where the behaviors occur. In previous studies, the temporal frame have spanned up to 3.4 years (O'Moore, 2000), but typically six months (Leymann, 1996; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001) have been used in order to differentiate between social stressors and the victimization point of view in relation to abusiveness. Although, the timeframe for abuse is somewhat arbitrary researchers converge on that abusiveness are not single instances of negative acts occurring randomly, but rather distributed repetitively across time, such a wider timeframe help distinguish abuse from other social stressors, such as time pressures.

The nature of behaviors involved in abuse:

A plethora of workplace behaviors have been identified as abusive behaviors. For instance persistent comments, remarks and criticism, but also physical behaviors have been identified as abusive (Einarsen, 2000b). Social exclusion and silent treatment (Williams, 1997), with the intent to persistently humiliate, intimidate, frighten or punish a victim are also examples of abusive behaviors. Moreover, other workplace behavior such as negatively manipulating workplace events, assigning overly complex tasks without reasonable deadlines or even not assigning tasks at all has also been considered abusive. Abusive behaviors may also range from passive indirect behaviors, such as gossiping and spreading rumours (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2007), to active direct behaviors such as verbal abuse (Zapf et al., 1996), yelling and use of derogatory names (Keashley, 1997), with belittling and making jokes in between these two ends of the scale (Moreno-Jiménez, 2007). Abusive behaviors are thus mostly concerned with psychological behaviors, rather than physical behaviors, but there might also be cultural aspects that explain the inclusion of physical behaviors into abusiveness (Escartín, et al., 2009).

Target orientation and power structures of abuse:

Minor hassles may arise on a continuous basis and be a source of discomfort at work. However, a problematic issue with such definition is that both minor and major hassles of work may arise and consequently affect everybody in the workplace to experience abuse. In contrast to stress-related hassles, abuse is better referred to when an individual is singled out for some reason. This treatment of individuals will eventually lead to declining health whereas neutral perpetrators or observers will remain unaffected. Thus a cornerstone in the concept of abuse is the stigmatization of the victim (Zapf, 1999) causing the victim to lose social support and control where regular coping strategies for dealing with stressors are insufficient means for dealing with abuse (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). The reason for stigmatization may reside in particularities of the target. For instance, there may be gender inequalities, certain age groups (those who are in-experienced about both social norms and working regulations) those with disabilities or illness or may be particularly likely to be targeted. On the contrary, there may also be factors that prevent (or reduce) abuse in terms of having a socially safe situation (such as being married) or education (which facilitate the possibilities of informing oneself about rights).

As abusive behavior is at least a two-party interaction, outlining characteristics of the target, must not exclude the aggressor. The aggressor(s) could be different people in the working context or single individuals singling out the victim. The treatment often leaves the victim with few possibilities to retaliate. Regardless of whether it is peers, superiors or managers who are abusive there is a concern of power relations. The power relation may be informal as regards differences in experience, knowledge or access to influential individuals (Hoel & Cooper, 2000) or formally established within the organizational hierarchy.

Based on the literature review we suggest the following definition of abuse (cf. Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Leymann, 1996; Olweus, 1994; Zapf, 1999): “Bullying at work means harassing, offending, or socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction, or process, the bullying behavior has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if the two parties of approximately equal strength are in conflict. Although, primarily psychological in

nature, we also extend the definition of bullying and mobbing to encompass physical abuse, and from here onwards, the term abuse thus encompass bullying and mobbing of both psychological and physical nature in the work place”.

Research Questions

Given the special circumstances of setting; being a highly sensitive topic to disclose, difficulties in providing survey based measures (due to a high degree of analphabetism) as well as the general lack of epidemiological studies of workplace abuse our research questions are broad. Informed by the introduction of the RMG industry in Bangladesh and the theoretical background describing characteristics of workplace abuse we outline the following research questions:

RQ1: Despite various initiatives, such improving facilities for production, and to prevent the image of Bangladesh “sweatshops” the degree of workplace abuse is still considered high within the Bangladesh RMG-industry.

RQ2: Individuals that display vulnerability characteristics (relatively younger, newly employed, unmarried, signs of illness) increase the probability of perceiving workplace abuse.

RQ3: Protective factors (relatively higher education, being a more experienced RMG-worker, being married) decrease the probability of perceiving workplace abuse.

4. Method

Data Generation

The study generated primary data through individual face-to-face interviews with (>1200) Bangladeshi garment workers from different factories. The interview used a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was formulated to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. It provided scope to capture responses in several different ways. Some of the questions could be answered directly with numeric information, while others included provisions for recording narrative. Ranking scales and visual symbols were also used in order to facilitate responses to specific questions.

The interviews were conducted inside the premises of an NGO with garment workers visiting the organization for different purposes, e.g. to visit the doctor or to take part in training sessions, than answering the survey. The location was purposely chosen in order to ensure an environment free from the influence of employers or by-standers. Since the respondents visited the NGO for reasons other than the survey, the participants represent a randomized sample of the RMG workforce.

The interviewers: The interviews were conducted by staff of the NGO with substantial experience in the RMG industry and knowledge in interviewing. 17 staff of the NGO took the interviews at 6 different centers of the NGO. The majority of the interviewers (11) were women while six of them were men. All of them are former RMG workers and familiar with working and living condition of the RMG workers, their way of life, language, culture and perceptions. RMG workers feel comfortable and assured with them and consider the interviewers as one of their community. The interviewers have been working with the NGO for 3-4 years. The leader of the group, also a former RMG worker, is with the NGO for about 10 years and has carried out several similar interviews /surveys before. The interviewers had education between grade 8 to 10, able to read and understand common *Bangla* and write in simple language. All the interviewers were given comprehensive hands-on training on the questionnaire and how to conduct interview. Dummy

interviews were conducted with the interviewers both as respondent and interviewer. They were also trained on checking consistency of answers by going back and forth in the questionnaire and cross-referencing with related questions (number of year in present factory, number of year in RMG industry, number of factory worked in and whether present employment is first employment).

The data from the interviews: The completed questionnaires (N = 1229) underwent a quality and consistency check that resulted in the acceptance of 1,215 cases for further analysis. Once a certain number of interviews (20-25) were completed, interviewers were asked to check them before submitting for data entry. They checked for omissions (sex) and over writing /corrections etc. Questionnaires were then fed into a database. The data were then visually checked comparing relevant variables. For instance, names against sex (in *Bangla* language names can be readily identified with sex), years of experience in RMG with that of in present factory (the later can be only equal or smaller than the former), number of factories worked in against whether present is the first employment and the like. Discrepancies were removed together by the interviewer and data entry operator as much could be ascertained from the information available. It also corrected typing error of correct information.

Finally information of the data base was checked against each questionnaire. Questionnaire which had major omission or inconsistency were dropped from the data base. Descriptive answers were categorized and coded in order to be entered into the database. Narrative answers were examined and used to corroborate findings that were generated from quantitative information. Qualitative information was also used to understand and explain exceptional/unusual patterns of quantitative information, lack of information and apparently contradictory information.

The general level of education among the participants is low and RMG factories are their first experience of urban environment and formal employment. Their exposure to the external world - beyond their work place and home village - is limited. Comprehension problems in respect to some questions made it sometimes necessary to reformulate the question text and elaborate on the content. Yet-to-be urbanized in their perceptions / mental world, when it comes to quantification their information often become a range rather than a specific value. The working class spoken language has local variants and in some cases differs from the formal language. To deal with that some questions needed elaborating. For instance While investigating management/supervision culture/style, respondents were asked 'how do supervisors behave? Initial answer usually would be 'they behave normally'. This was then probed what type of normal – do they discipline you? Again mostly the reply would be of course, often adding: won't you be disciplined if you don't do things properly. At this stage it was asked how they are being disciplined: tell you what you did wrong and showing you the right way or Now it may be mentioned that the supervisor shouted, got aggressive, called name and the like. Thus managements' manner of interaction was obtained and examples were asked to understand specific meaning of general / vague terms used by the respondents (for example: the supervisor reprimand if one is late – turns out that the supervisor uses sexually loaded expletives).

Although the interviews were taken outside of factories, anxiety was noted regarding the risk of getting into conflict with the employer. The latter may be sound, especially since the RMG industry is a regimented coercive environment which can extend beyond the workplace. Besides,

the respondents mostly can't read/ write and so were not sure what is being written down. This also made them cautious in responding questions. However, the anxiousness of the employees may also be considered as a sign of them being truthful about their employers' disclosing about actual conditions that perhaps should have been unspoken.

Variables

Perception of abuse: In the present study, respondents came to the NGO center for purposes other than the study and the center does not provide counseling to victims of abuse nor, the respondents came to the center to report abuse. Given the disconnect between employers, the NGO and the individuals visiting it facilitates the approach is viable to approach disclosure about abuse. Moreover, the NGO staffs conducting the interviews were not counselors. So, the issue of abuse in workplace could not be approached directly. Instead the study used more general phrasing such as 'being subject to bad behavior' which was assisted by providing cues 'like being shouted at, being called names' etc. Depending on responses the issue was further investigated gradually raising questions about the perpetrator, nature and frequency of abuse, response of the victim and so on. Considering the delicacy of the issue and cultural practice of the society, the study avoided using the term 'abuse' and approaching the issue directly. On the contrary, to understand the extent of workplace abuse despite the culture of silence wrapping around the issue, the study approached the issue multiple times and from different perspectives, but focused primarily on the perception of abuse rather than objectively identifying abuse. Given, that the workers all came from the RMG-industry, obtaining perceptions of abuse of a large number of people would thus still be able to unravel characteristics of the industry as a whole.

Age: Age of the respondents was recorded as a continuous variable and measured in number of years. The responses were then clustered in under-aged (below 18 years), 18-22 years, 23-27 years, 28-32 years, 33-37 years and older workers (>38 years).

Education: The level of education was measured as the number of year they have attended school. Responses range from 0 to 15 year indicating no schooling at all at the minimum and graduate study at the maximum level.

Entry / Stability (present job first job): The study examined the employment pattern in the RMG sector through level of stability of workers and labor mobility. Respondents were asked whether the present employment was their first employment. Workers' response to choice of alternate employment in the industry was further investigated by investigating the number of factories they have worked in and the duration of employment in the present factory.

Experience: The respondents were also assessed in terms of experience of the RMG-sector. The extent of experience of respondents in the RMG industry was assessed in terms of the number of years they have been working in the industry since their first employment in RMG. The total of years worked at different factories has been recorded as the length of experience of respective respondents. It is a continuous variable and responses were later arranged under four categorical groups.

Marital status: The study also took into account the respondents civil status by asking for marital status. This variable was assessed as either married or single, with reservation for that individuals could have been divorced or widowed. The latter was included in the marriage category as being married would indicate a possibility to have built a social network to rely on.

Sickness (at workplace) treated: In an attempt to understand the working condition in RMG beyond abusive behavior, workers were investigated about situations when they faced adverse health condition in the work place. They were asked about the specific ways they respond to when

falling sick during working hours. Different responses provided by the workers are categorized under ‘Yes’ referring to responses which are directed towards treating the sickness (take leave, go to doctor etc) and ‘No’ to include actions which deny treatment of ailments (continue to work, work slowly etc).

Suffering work related sickness: The study investigated workers’ health also at household environment. To examine the effect of working condition on workers’ health outside of work environment workers were asked about symptoms of sickness likely to be associated with work conditions. For instance they were asked if they suffered from back pain, shoulder pain, blurred vision, leg pain etc which are often linked with working extended hours in fixed hunched position or in standing position. While they were given examples of symptoms to clarify the question they were not asked about any specific symptom as the question was an open-ended one. The answers were then categorized in to ‘Yes’ if a respondents suffered any such symptom and ‘No’ if none.

The Regression Model

The dependent variable of this study contains dichotomous outcomes, so a binomial choice model is useful, the most common of which is the logit model (Greene, 2003) that uses a vector of covariates x to predict the probability of a specific outcome for any group y . However, to examine how the characteristics of the categories affect an individual’s likelihood of inclusion in them, then a conditional logit model is appropriate. A multilevel logistic regression is another approach for nested data, while there are numerous binary choice models (Abbasian&Yazdanfar, 2013; Ai & Norton, 2003; McFadden, Train &Tye, 1977; So &Kuhfeld, 1995). Another alternative is the probit model (Bliss, 1935). The parameters in both Logit and Probit models are interpreted in terms of probability. The one advantage of a logit model over the probit model is that the parameters in a logit can also be interpreted as an odds ratio, though probit models have a normal underlying distribution, which may have some advantage in the estimation procedure.

In this study, the responses of being subject to bad behavior are coded to 1 and 0 otherwise. The independent variables are both dichotomous and continuous. The model can be written as

$$y = f(x_i, x_{i,j}) \quad i, j = 1, \dots, n \quad (1)$$

where y is dependent variable Abuse and x_i are independent variables Age, Education, Entry, Job Experience, Marital Status, Measure for Sickness and Job Related Negative Experience. The interaction variable $x_{i,j}$, where $i \neq j$, is the product of two independent variables, $x_i * x_j$. The probit model of the study can be written

$$\Pr(y = 1 | x_i, x_{i,j}) = \Phi(\beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_{12} x_{1,2} + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4 + \beta_{34} x_{3,4} + \dots) \quad (2)$$

or

$$\Pr(y = 1 | X) = \Phi(X\beta) \quad (3)$$

where $y = 1$ if the is subject for abuse, and $y = 0$ otherwise. X is a vector of explanatory variables and β is a vector of unknown parameters to estimate, and Φ represents the cumulative distribution function of the standard normal distribution. The estimation from the model can predict the probability of being abused.

5. Results

Descriptive results on the previously outlined variables provided interesting findings. First, 34.7% reported being abused (n=1215) and 82% of them answered that they have been abused more than once (21.4% reports very often). Second, concerning the source of abuse, more than 27% (most common) mentioned ‘behavior of supervisor’ as the most disliked work-place element. About 23% claimed to change behavior of management which is perceived as abuse in the work place. Issues surrounding abuse was also approached from health and safety perspectives. Workers were asked about the response from management in the event of falling ill in the work place. Nearly 46% respondents said management reacts negatively to workers reporting illness including getting annoyed with the sick worker and forcing to work. As regards the age distribution of the workers, some of the respondents are under-aged (below 18 years) while relatively few are at the end of working age. Segregating respondents within age-groups reveals that RMG industry is dominated by young workers. Workers aged 18 to 27 year constitute 75% of the respondents. Female workers tend to have even stronger concentration of young workers, 46.6% of them being 18-22 year old. Male respondents aged 23-27 year on the other hand constitute the largest group with more than 40% of the respondents. Composition of national labor force shows that 10, 21 and 19% of the labor force are in 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 year age group respectively.

Table 01. *Distribution respondents by Age (n=1215)*

	< 18	18-22	23-27	28-32	33-37	> 38	Total
Female	2.0%	46.6%	27.4%	12.7%	6.1%	5.2%	100
Male	.3%	37.5%	40.2%	14.1%	4.0%	4.0%	100
Total	1.5	43.8	31.3	13.2	5.5	4.8	100

Generally, the level of education, irrespective of sex, is low. More than 30% of the respondents have been to school for 1 to 5 years and 17% respondents have never been to school at all. In contrast, altogether 6.1% respondents have education beyond the secondary level. The low level of education is more acute among the females than males. More than one-fifth of them are illiterate and one-third has maximum education of up to 5th grade. This may not be entirely unexpected when considered in conjunction with national literacy status of the women. At the national scale, 48.8% women are without education, and of the literate, 49.39% has schooling up to 5th grade and 2.3% has graduate education (BBS, 2016).

Table 02. *Distribution of respondents by Years of Education (n=1212)*

Year	0	1-5	6-8	9-10	11-12	12+	Total
Male	5.1	23.4	31.1	27.4	9.6	3.5	100
Female	22.4	33.4	26.2	15.1	2.0	1.0	100
Total	17.0	30.3	27.7	18.9	4.4	1.7	100

Overall, 38.4% workers have remained in their first job. This corresponds with the findings from the question concerning the number of factories respondents worked in which shows that 38.4% respondents worked in one factory until the time of survey.

Table 03. *Distribution respondents by employment status (n=1215)*

Present job first job		
Yes	No	Total

Female	39.9	61.1	100.00
Male	35.5	65.0	100.00
Total	38.4	61.6	100.00

Almost 60% of all survey participants are married. Among the female respondents the rate is 65.1% while 48.3% of the male respondents are married. In Bangladesh it is normal to get married at a young age, both for male and female. However, females tend to be married at an earlier age than males. Among the respondents aged 18-22 year, more than 38% female are married compared to the 14% male of the same age group who are married.

Table 04. *Distribution of respondents by Civil Status (n=1215)*

	Married*	Single
Male	48.3%	51.7%
Female	65.1%	34.8%
Total	59.9%	40.1%

*Includes currently married and previously married individuals.

Majority of the respondents (55.5%) irrespective of sex, informed that they took treatment for sickness in work place. However, female workers are either averse to seek treatment or less often allowed to avail treatment if fallen sick in workplace. Resultantly, about ten percent more female reported not taking treatment in the event of falling ill during work.

Table 05. *Distribution of respondents by response to sickness*

	Took treatment for sickness during work		
	Yes	No	Total
Female	52.4	47.6	100.00
Male	62.3	37.7	100.00
Total	55.5	44.5	100.00

It was found that nearly 79% respondents suffered from one or the other symptoms which are likely associated with working conditions. Higher percentage of female workers reported to have suffered such symptoms compared to their male counterparts.

Table 06. *Distribution of respondents by Symptoms of Ailment (n=1200)*

	Suffered any symptom of work-related ailment		
	Yes	No	Total
Female	80.8	19.2	100.00
Male	74.5	25.5	100.00
Total	78.9	21.1	100.00

Respondents of the study represent the whole spectrum from new entrants to industry veterans. The single largest group (37%) of respondents has more than five year to ten year of experience in the sector. New entrants with less than two years of experience and those working in the industry for more than ten years account for almost one-fifth and one-tenth of the study participants.

Interestingly, though almost 80 percent respondents have more than two years of experience as RMG workers, majority of interviewed workers (53.3%) have been working in their present factory for less than two years. This is indicative of a high degree of workforce turnover in the industry and that the RMG workers are very mobile. The number of factories respondents have worked in till this study also support the characteristics. Only about a third of the respondents have worked in only one factory in contrast with majority of interviewees have worked in two to four factories.

Juxtaposing length of experience with number of workplaces it is found that RMG workers tend to start switching factories early in their career. For instance, nearly one-third of respondents with less than two years of experience, have already worked in more than one factory. In other words, nearly one-third of workers participating in the study had left their first factory before completing the second year of employment. In the group of workers with two to five years of experience, only 40 percent are still employed in their first factory. In the group of veterans with five to ten years of experience in the industry, 76 percent have worked in at least two factories and one-fourth in four or more different factories.

The regression results of probit estimation are presented in Table 07. The dependent variable Abuse represents the worker's subjective perception of being abused by their immediate supervisors. The variables Age, Education, Job Experience (over 5-10 years), Cross JRNESickness and Job Related Negative Experience are statistically significant at 5%-level while Entry and Cross

	coef	s,e	P> z	dy/dx	s,e	P> z
Age	-0.029	0.010	0.005	-0.009	0.003	0.005
Education	-0.101	0.047	0.032	-0.032	0.015	0.031
Entry	-0.159	0.086	0.066	-0.051	0.027	0.065
Job Experience (2-5 years)	0.017	0.116	0.886	0.005	0.037	0.886
Job experience (over 5-10 years)	0.250	0.120	0.038	0.080	0.038	0.037
Job Experience (over 10 years)	0.280	0.170	0.100	0.089	0.054	0.099
Job Related Negative Experience (JRNE)	1.312	0.128	0.000	0.420	0.036	0.000
Married	-0.001	0.095	0.992	0.000	0.030	0.992
Cross JRNESickness	-0.780	0.093	0.000	-0.250	0.027	0.000
Measure Sickness	-0.121	0.085	0.154	-0.039	0.027	0.153
Cross Education & Age	0.003	0.002	0.055	0.001	0.001	0.054
Constant	-0.256	0.311	0.409			
Number of obs	1215		LR chi2(11)	199		
Prob> chi2	0.000		Pseudo R2	0.127		

Education & Age are significant at 10%-level. The marginal effect of Age is -0.009 which implies that if the age of the workers increase by one year, the probability of being abused by an immediate supervisor decreases in average by 0.9 percent. The probability of being abused decreases by about 3 percent in average if the workers number of year schooling increases by one year. The marginal effect of Job Related Negative Experience is 0.42 which implies that those who suffer from job

related negative experience e.g., back pain, headache and depression have 42 percent higher probability of being abused by their immediate supervisor compared to those who do not suffer from similar syndrome. The variable Cross JRNESickness is a product of the variable Job Related Negative Experience and Measure for Sickness. The Measure for Sickness represents whether the workers could take any measure e.g., visiting doctor or taking leave when they fall sick at the work place. Hence, the variable Cross JRNESickness is to be interpreted as whether the worker take any measure for betterment while they are sick. The corresponding coefficient for the variable Cross JRNESickness is -0.25 which implies that the probability of being abused decreases by 25 percent in average if the works get opportunity to take any kind of measure while they feel sick compared to those who do not have possibility to take any measure.

Discussion and Implications of Results

Returning to the research questions (RQ1-3) it is important to emphasize that the study rests on perceptions of abuse rather than objective measures of abuse. However, perceptions of abuse is usually considered to be a strong indicator of that abuse actually takes place. The results points to that, despite various workplace related initiatives improving the working context, workplace abuse is at least moderately perceived within the RMG industry in Bangladesh (reported by 34.7%, RQ1). However, 82% of this one third expressed it as a more than a single instance. In turn such numbers indicate that although it is moderately often perceived it poses an organizational problems given its re-victimization character.

Moreover, addressing enhancing factors of workplace abuse (RQ2) it can be confirmed that being employed between 5-10 years as well as experiencing job related negative job experiences significantly increases the probability of perceptions of abuse. However, somewhat surprisingly the Cross Education and Age variable further borderlines significance implying that older and more educated individuals are likely to experience more abuse. A potential explanation for this finding is that older individuals with higher levels of education might be old enough and schooled enough to be able to not only inform themselves about rights, but also voice their rights in the workplace. Finally, addressing (RQ3) in terms of preventive factors of workplace abuse it is shown that increasing age, number of years in school (education) respectively affect perceptions of abuse negatively while the civil status (social network) of the respondents does not affect the perceptions of being abused.

Previous studies of abuse in the RMG-industry Bangladesh have been predominantly qualitative in character. While such studies reveal in-depth understanding, they also refer to somewhat local conditions. In order to be able to provide impetus for policy recommendations large scale quantitative studies needs to be performed. However, such studies are considerably difficult to accomplish given that individuals may not want to disclose matters of abuse nor have the possibility to participate in surveys given the difficulties of reading. The procedure of this study speaks in favor of both disclosing abuse, given that interviewees were approached outside of the factory context at the NGO as well of the interviewer's familiarization with the context and overall set-up in terms of an interview.

Implications

From a theoretical perspective the findings of this study supports the view that abuse is a problematic organizational problem. The findings indicate that the abuse occurs frequently and

subject for education and length of job experience. Importantly, those who are older and educated also borderline to being abuse, which may be a sign of trying to silence the staff.

Organizationally there are various policy related matters that can facilitate non-abusive behavior. For instance, developing stricter whistle blowing policies may not eliminate abusive behavior as such, yet it would be able to reduce perceptions of abuse if the workers who experience a problem are allowed to take actions to solve or improve the perceived levels of abuse. This is an important finding as it indicates both increased autonomy of workers and acknowledgement of problem reduces levels of abuse. The RMG industry would therefore potentially benefit from such organizational level initiatives, but at the same time address various management initiatives as this is the source that produces most abusive behavior.

An important policy implication is to take into account why workplace abuse increases only after being employed 5-10 years. This could be interpreted in the social economic context of Bangladesh. Those who are relatively newly employed are cautious about consequences of talking against management. Moreover, the perception of abuse among the younger workers are relatively unknown. Hence, educating workers on abuse and workers voices on abuse are of interest of policy implication.

Future research

The findings of this study is predominantly descriptive by nature. It also purposely generalizes across the RMG sector implying an average picture of abuse. However, although abuse seems to be present within the industry it might also be the case there are variations within the industry. This is currently unaccounted for in this study. Thus, further studies could focus more fine-grained on how abuse is distributed across space in terms of regions or factory contexts,

6. Conclusions

This paper identifies that age, education, work experience and job related negative experiences are determinants for perceived abuse among the worker in RMG of Bangladesh. It shows that older and educated persons are subject for abuse compared to older and less educated. This could be interpreted that the older and less educated are probably unknown about the perception of abuse or reluctant to talk about abuse due to eventual consequences of talking against management. A similar analogy may also be applicable for the younger workers. Hence, educating workers on abuse and workers voices on abuse are of interest of policy implication.

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