

## Original Research Article

# Quality of life of workers with disabilities in readymade garments factories in Bangladesh

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) sector has developed as a major employer for individuals with disabilities. The number of workers with disabilities in Bangladesh's RMG industry has grown over the past few years. In Bangladesh, there has no statistics about the quality of life of workers with disabilities after their employment, especially after training-based employment support. Therefore, the researcher is interested to find out the quality of life of workers with disabilities in readymade garments factories in Bangladesh that will determine satisfaction over their life in different aspects. The objectives of this paper were to find out the health-related quality of life and overall satisfaction with life among workers with disabilities in the readymade garment sector in Bangladesh.

**Methods:** This study used a cross-sectional design and recruited 102 participants with disabilities from various Bangladeshi garment factories who ranged up to 18 years by convenient sampling. The WHOQOL questionnaires were used for data collection through a combination of telephone and in-person interviews. Descriptive statistics were used for the data analysis.

**Results:** Among the total participants 63% of them were women and 37% were men. The results revealed that education and job status significantly impacted on QOL. The majority of participants did not need any assistive devices; most of the participants resided in semi-urban areas, and physical disabilities predominated among them. On the other hand, most of the participants reported their quality of life as neither poor nor good but they were satisfied with health-related QOL.

**Conclusions:** QOL is a vast aspect of every human being. This study finally concluded the overall QOL of maximum Workers with Disabilities in Readymade Garments Factories in Bangladesh was just average and most of them were satisfied with their health-related QOL.

**Keywords:** Worker with disabilities, Quality of life, WHOQOL, Bangladesh

## INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) sector has developed as a major employer for individuals with

disabilities. Notwithstanding these possibilities, Bangladeshi workers with disabilities still confront many difficulties, such as discrimination towards people with impairments and restricted access to healthcare and

education. The number of workers with disabilities in Bangladesh's RMG industry has grown over the past few years, underscoring the necessity of paying more attention to their living and working situations.<sup>1</sup> RMG sector in Bangladesh has been playing a vital role in creating employment opportunities for people with or without disabilities for the last two decades.<sup>2</sup> The industry has provided an employment rate of nearly 2.8 million workers.<sup>3</sup>

In Bangladesh, about 3.6 million employees work in more than 5,000 garment factories.<sup>4</sup> After China and Italy, it is the third-biggest exporter of clothes around the world.<sup>5</sup> The RMG has played a revolutionary role in the development of the industrial sector in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has some existing program, which focuses on the employment of persons with disabilities in the readymade garment sector. We see that Marks and Start a program that helps the employment of a person with disabilities (PWD) in the RMG sector was implemented in 2006 by Marks and Spencer, UK, and C-reactive protein (CRP).<sup>6</sup>

CRP-Marks and Start project encourages the government and employers to consider the rights of persons with disabilities so that they can enroll in the job sector at RMG.<sup>6</sup> A corporate social responsibility initiative first trailed successfully in Sri Lanka, the model offers two months of specialized training for persons with disabilities identified by CRP in Bangladesh. The program consistently achieves high retention rates and over 2500 persons with disabilities have already been successfully trained to date.<sup>6</sup> These trainees are employed by readymade garment companies across Bangladesh.

Persons with disabilities across the world face stigma in many facets of everyday life.<sup>7</sup> In developing countries particularly, disability is seen as a sign of misfortune to the family and the community. The confidence that developed with the skills learned in different types of skill development educational programs helped individuals to focus on their ability instead of their disability, however, and allowed them to realize that they could become skilled employees of a reputable industry.<sup>8</sup>

In Bangladesh, there has no statistics about the quality of life of workers with disabilities after their employment, especially after training-based employment support. So The objectives of this research were to find out the health-related quality of life and overall satisfaction with life among workers with disabilities in the readymade garment sector in Bangladesh.

## METHODS

This study used a cross-sectional design and recruited 102 participants with disabilities from various Bangladeshi garment factories by convenient sampling. The total study period was May 2019 to December 2019 including a two-month data collection period. Inclusion criteria were

workers with disabilities (male and female; permanent and temporary) were the participants of the study who were suffering from disabilities and age was more than 18 years. Exclusion criteria were the persons who were not interested to attend the program at the time of data collection. The World Health Organization QUALITY OF LIFE (WHOQOL) questionnaires were used to measure the participants' quality of life while the data collections through a combination of telephone and in-person interviews. The researcher gained permission from the ethical committee of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) and different garment factories in the Dhaka division. The researcher also gained permission from the author bodies of WHOQOL from Geneva, Switzerland. Data entry and analysis were performed by using the statistical package for social science (SPSS), Inc. version 20.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows that among 102 participants, the majority of the participants were female (63%) rather than male (37%). Workers of different ages who participated in this study were allocated into groups. The average age of all participants was 28 years whereas the highest age of the participant was 55 years and the lowest age was 18 years. All participants in this study had 5 family members on average the highest number of family members in a family was 14 and the lowest was 1. The findings showed that the maximum number of participants 65.7% resided in semi-urban areas and most of them came from Dhaka, Mymensingh, and Rajshahi. A major group of participants had a physical disability 75.5% and 15.7% had speech and hearing disabilities; the rest of the participants had SCI. A large number of participants were not using any kind of assistive device. The participants were mostly primary education pass 34.3%, 13.7% never attended any formal education, and 19.6% completed graduation and post-graduate degree. Among all the participants, 39.2% were single whereas the majority were married.

There were different positions of job among the participants. The highest numbers of participants were operators. Participants get their salary according to their position in the job. Work experiences were different among the workers. The majority of participants 52% had 2-4 years of experience and 8.8% had been working for 8 years despite having disabilities. Here 81.4% of the workers were working in the same factory after their joining and 18.6% came to the current factory after moving from another one. The maximum number of workers worked for 08 hours daily. 75.5% of participants received vocational training whereas 24.5% were not received the training opportunity.

Maximum workers with disabilities in readymade garments factories' overall quality of life was just average, 11.8% also reported that their quality of life was very good, and a large number of the worker said that they were satisfied (57.8%) with their health condition.

**Table 1: Demographic information of the participants.**

Variables	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	37
Female	63
<b>Age</b>	
18-27	46
28-37	49
More than 37	05
<b>Family member</b>	
1 to 5	66
6 to 10	32
11 to above	2
<b>Residential area</b>	
Urban	4.9
Semi-urban	65.7
Rural	29.4
<b>Divisional area (home district)</b>	
Dhaka	32.4
Khulna	5.9
Rajshahi	19.6
Barisal	6.9
Chittagong	5.9
Rangpur	9.8
Sylhet	2.0
Mymensingh	17.6
<b>Types of disability</b>	
Physical disability	75.5
Speech and hearing disability	15.7
SCI	8.8
<b>Assistive device for mobility</b>	
Crutch	25.5
Walking stick/frame	02
Prosthesis	14.7
N/A or without device	57.8
<b>Educational status</b>	
Illiterate/not at all	13.7
Primary education	34.3
Secondary education	11.8
High secondary education	20.6
Bachelor or above	19.6
<b>Marital status</b>	
Single	39.2
Married	57.8
Others (divorced/widowed)	2.9

**Table 2: Job-related information of the participants.**

Variables	Percentage (%)
<b>Current position at job</b>	
Helper	24.5
Receptionist	2.0
Packager	3.9
Operator	49.0
Quality inspector	9.8

Continued.

Variables	Percentage (%)
Mid-level staff	10.8
<b>Current salary at job</b>	
8000-9000	55.9
9001-10000	21.6
More than 10000	22.5
<b>Work experience (years)</b>	
Less than 1	28.4
2-4	52.0
5-7	10.8
More than 8	8.8
<b>Working in the same factory (after joining)</b>	
Yes	81.4
No	18.6
<b>Duration of daily work (hours)</b>	
8	43.1
10	44.1
12	12.7
<b>Vocational training received</b>	
Yes	75.5
No	24.5

**Table 3: Quality of life and health satisfaction of the participants.**

Variables	Percentage (%)
<b>Quality of life of workers</b>	
Very poor	01
Poor	2.9
Neither poor nor good	43.1
Good	41.2
Very good	11.8
<b>Health satisfaction</b>	
Very satisfied	10.8
Satisfied	57.8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	24.5
Dissatisfied	5.9
Very dissatisfied	01

## DISCUSSION

Quality of life (QOL) assessment is a key indicator of the success of a person, and it works as a monitor for measuring the effectiveness of job participation, social policies, welfare programs, health care, and community participation. Measuring the QOL of workers with disabilities in readymade garments factories in Bangladesh is an important part of our country. In this study, the researcher has included about 102 participants who have a disability and also still working in readymade garments factories. Total participants of the study, about 63% were female and 37% were male which reflects that females are more active in their working area and trying to improve their quality of life. Another Bangladeshi study found that only 11% were male, while 89% were female workers working in garment factories.<sup>9</sup> A reverse ratio of gender was found in the study done by Tadesse and Kumie found

that 78.4% of males and 22% of females with a sex ratio of 3.7:1 respectively.<sup>10</sup>

Education is a key factor to improve an individual's quality of life. The current study showed that about 14% were illiterate, 34.3% had primary education, about 12% had secondary education, 22.6% had higher secondary education, and 19.6% had a bachelor's degree. Another impact study on trainees with disability found that 8% were illiterate, 23% had primary education, 33% had secondary education (VI-X), 17% had SSC pass, 9% had HSC pass, and 10% had higher education.<sup>11</sup> Marital status is another factor that indicates the quality of life. The ratio of the participants about single was 39.2% and married was about 58%. Bangladeshi study shows that 55.9% were married and 42.8% were unmarried.<sup>9</sup> While, Sikder et al in his study found that, 45% were unmarried, and 55% were married.<sup>12</sup>

The assistive device ensures a better quality of life for a person with a disability. In this study, researcher gathered data from different garments factory where persons with disabilities work. Participants use different types of assistive devices such as crutches, walking frames or sticks, and prosthetics. But most of the participants did not use any assistive devices. The study indicates that 25.5% of participants use a crutch, 2% use walking sticks/frames, 14.7% use prosthetics, and most of the participants 57.8% do not use any assistive devices. The World Health Organisation (WHO) appraisals that over one billion people, the majority were people with disabilities and older people who need one or more assistive devices.<sup>13</sup> In Bangladesh, the lack of assistive devices is a major barrier to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the mainstream development process because of the unavailability of assistive devices and due to a lack of

assistive devices, many people with disabilities are not getting access to employment opportunities in the job market.<sup>14</sup>

The majority of Bangladeshi (including PWDs) live in rural areas.<sup>15</sup> These areas are considered disadvantageous due to their lack of modern facilities for citizens. This lack may affect a person's quality of life. But in this study researchers found that the maximum participant of this study was about 66% live in a semi-urban area, about 29% live in a rural area and only 5% live in an urban area which is so poor number compared with the total participants. Another study showed that in the readymade garments sector, 4.2 million workers work in this sector and more than 90% of workers are female and come from rural areas of Bangladesh.<sup>16</sup>

The researcher found that the study participant's job position is not so good at all. The job position of the worker had a great impact on their quality of life. Most of the workers are working as an operator (49%), helpers (24.5%), quality inspectors (9.8%), mid-level staff (10.8%), packagers (2.9%), and receptionists (2%). A cross-sectional study in Dhaka city found that 52.4% of respondents were machine operators, but a maximum (75%) were unskilled and 72% had a length of job between 2-7 years.<sup>9</sup> The study found that 55.9% of staff earned about 8000 to 9000 TK only, 21.6% earned 9001tk to 10000 TK, and 22.5% earned more than 10000TK. In an empirical study in Bangladesh, the income of workers in garments factories 70.86% earned 5000 TK to 7500 TK, 21.43% earned 7501 TK to 10000 TK, 4.28% earned 10001 TK to 12500 TK, 3.43% earned 12501 TK to above.<sup>17</sup> On average, Females are working 11 to 12 hours per day and receive a salary of fewer than 7,000 takas per month.<sup>12</sup>

The study indicates that most of the garments worker with a disability had little opportunity to change their job. Among all participants, 81.4% stayed in the same factory and do the same types of work after joining. 18.6% change their job or quit their job from one factory to another. Among all participants, the study indicates that 75.5% got vocational training from CRP or other organizations and 24.5% did not get any vocational training. The challenges of getting an education that mean persons with disabilities often lack the skills and the formal qualifications needed to access employment.<sup>18</sup> Many persons with disabilities lack the skills and experiences needed to compete with others in the job market.<sup>19</sup>

The overall quality of life of maximum workers with disabilities in readymade garments factories in Bangladesh was just average and 11.8% reported that their quality of life was very good. A study in Nigeria, among physically challenged disabled persons, showed a high level of QOL scores in all four domains of physical health, psychological health, social health, and environmental domains.<sup>20</sup> Another study stated that job satisfaction strongly correlates with life satisfaction.<sup>21</sup> A large number

of the worker who participated in this study said that they were satisfied with their health condition. In 2005, Poljak-Guberina et al. estimated that some factors affect the satisfaction of health such as safety, emotional conflict, sex, and social participation.<sup>22</sup> Adult participants in the population studied usually categorized their overall QOL as moderate or good in a study, and variables such as age, health, education, marital status, living place, employment, and emotional status influenced the QOL of the general population.<sup>23</sup>

### Limitations

The study was conducted on a small size of participants. The researcher took workers with disabilities from Dhaka Division. So, it is difficult to represent the whole of Bangladesh. In the context of Bangladesh, There is a limited number of resources in this area. So it was difficult to discuss the finding in the context of Bangladesh. However, researchers found literature from different international primary sources.

### CONCLUSION

This study finally concluded the overall quality of life of maximum workers with disabilities in readymade garments factories in Bangladesh was just average and most of them were satisfied with their health-related QOL. Therefore, the study recommends that social policies and welfare programs need to create to enhance the QOL of workers with disabilities in Bangladesh's factories producing RMG apparel. Future studies in this field can start with the study's findings as a benchmark.

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