

Timeline

April 2020 - July 2021

Study Type

Descriptive / Surveillance

Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

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Survey - COVID-19 and the Lives of Female Workers in the Readymade Garment Sector

Abstract

The ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh is the main source of formal wage employment for women that constitute a majority of its 4 million workers. The sector has been instrumental in increasing women's labour force participation in Bangladesh. Demand-side constraints and health concerns introduced by COVID-19 forced factory closures across Dhaka and Chittagong for much of April 2020. Even though factories reopened in May 2020 and the government established a US\$590 million loan program to support salary payments for workers, many reportedly did not receive salaries for March due to order cancellations and furloughs.

This study aims to understand the impact of the crisis on workers' employment, income, food security, and well-being in the short run, to assess whether women are differentially affected by coping strategies, e.g. through disproportionate restrictions on their bargaining power or decreases in their consumption. In the medium term, the study hopes to analyse how workers cope with the greater uncertainty in the garment sector and the effects of the uncertain recovery of the sector on workers. For women in particular, the study aims to understand the effects of the crisis on continued participation in the industry and career aspirations, and whether the decrease in garment sector employment leads women to break into other, formerly male-dominated, industries. Ultimately, this research will support the development of policy recommendations about support measures required for different workers, especially vulnerable groups of workers, during times of crisis.

Researchers collected data from 2,000 current and past workers through four rounds of telephone surveys conducted in April, June, September, and December that focused on information about income, expenditures, household decision-making, and stress. Initial results indicate that women report significantly higher levels of stress (6.5 percent of women compared to 2.5 percent of men reported moderate or severe levels of stress). Between

February and March 2021, a marketing call was conducted with a randomly selected subgroup of 559 RMG workers employed as line operators to encourage them to utilize a telephone-based counselling service. In the fifth round, completed over March and April, 2021 researchers expanded the survey to collect information about who the respondents go to with mental health or stress issues, and their attitudes toward counselling.

This project is a part of the Women's Work, Entrepreneurship, and Skilling (WWES) Initiative.

Project Data Collection Mode

- CATI (Computer-assisted telephone interviewing)

Researchers (*corresponding author)

Christopher Woodruff (Oxford University); Atonu Rabbani (University of Dhaka); Hannah Uckat (World Bank)

Questionnaire File Type

Coded form

Questionnaire Language(s)

English