

COVID-19- From Crisis to Response: Empirical Evidence from Readymade Garment Manufacturing Sector in Bangladesh

Dr. Md. Zohurul Islam

Director, Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre, Savar, Dhaka-1343

Email: zohur68@gmail.com

Prof. Dr. Md. Mustafa Saroar

Department of URP, KUET, Khulna, Bangladesh

Email: saroar.mustafa@yahoo.com

Md. Mizanur Rahman

Sr. Executive HR- Admin, Mega Yarn Dyeing Mills Ltd, Dhaka

Email: mizanemon666@gmail.com

Email corresponding author: saoar.mustafa@yahoo.com

Paper prepared for presentation at the

“7th Conference of the Regulating for Decent Work Network”

Virtual Conference, International Labour Office Geneva, Switzerland

6-9 July 2021

Abstract

Several reports including the ILO’s have made a strong assertion that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented globally. However, economies have affected differently due to numerous reasons including the nature and scale of the economies. Bangladesh is one of the populous counties heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis primarily because of the massive disruption of the export-led readymade garments industry (RMG). It is the second-largest producer of readymade garments in the global market which experienced double exposure of COVID-19; internally production is discontinued as external orders of buyers were canceled due to pandemics. In Bangladesh, RMG manufacturing is

doing well in terms of women's employment generation and quality of work life. The trend of HR compliance, employee benefits, and compensation through maintaining labor law were in good shape at RMG enterprises. However, the pandemic has had a devastating blow on most enterprises so as on the work-life environment, though enterprises have shown their interest to maintain it.

Although a good account of research has been emerging globally in the broader realm of the COVID-19 crisis, the research focusing on Bangladesh is relatively very low. Most COVID-19 research is observed to focus on the psycho-social realm of people in the informal (urban) sector of Bangladesh. There is a clear lack of research linking COVID-19 and the RMG sector in Bangladesh. This research fills these knowledge gaps in three ways. First, it has reviewed the scale of impacts of the pandemic in the RMG sector which is done through a systematic review of literature; second, it has examined the readiness of RMG sectors to address the covid crisis in a holistic way; third, it has identified a host of challenges that impeded the implementation of COVID-19 readiness program in RMG sector. To attain the second and third objectives, this research heavily draws on the survey-response empirical method of research. The empirical part of the research is conducted through an online-based questionnaire survey. The survey instrument includes basically the readiness of factories to follow COVID-19 protocols and policies and procedures the enterprises adopted to maintain a safe working environment while maintaining production and productivity. The policies and procedures cover eight dimensions and measured in a five-point Likert scale and some cases on a binary scale. The readiness measures in five dimensions covering quality and availability of PPE, facilities for a health check and fast response to COVID symptom, disinfection facilities, dedicated space for dining/eating. The findings suggest there exist variability among factories in terms of their implementation of COVID-19 management policy and procedures. Similarly, readiness of factories in few dimensions of COVID-19 management including awareness building, and HR policy of COVID-19 management is well above average. On the contrary, factory readiness in the realm of modification of workplace to make safe from COVID-19 transmission, and logistical support to manage COVID-19 holistic ways is rather slow. Apart from financial and policy constraints, some governance/institutional and technological constraints need to be addressed holistically to make the MG sector responsive to COVID-19 in Bangladesh

Keywords: COVID-19 Readiness, HR compliance, Policy Procedure, RMG, Bangladesh.

Copyright 2021 by author(s). All rights reserved. Readers may make verbatim copies of this document for non-commercial purposes by any means, provided that this copyright notice appears on all such copies.

1. Introduction:

The garment industry plays a critical role in Bangladesh's economy. It is not only the largest export industry but also one of the most labor-intensive with an estimated labor force of over 4 million. The garment industry has faced a number of labor challenges including the tragic Tazreen factory fire (2012) and Rana Plaza factory collapse (2013) as well as challenges related to freedom of association, wages, and turnover. Most recently, the industry has faced great challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic with global brands and buyers canceling approximately USD 3 billion in orders affecting the livelihoods of suppliers and millions of workers.

Bangladesh is the second largest producer of readymade garment (RMG) in the world. About 80% of the country's exports earning are from the RMG sector, and the textile and apparel sector contributes around 20% to Bangladesh's GDP. Nearly about 4.11 million of workers are employed in this RMG sector most of whom are female workers. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) shows that \$3.18 billion worth of orders were cancelled from 1150 factories from mid-March till 29 April 2020, which affecting approximately 2.28 million workers being sent home without pay. Therefore, the Prime Minister initially announced an emergency stimulus package of \$600 million (equivalent to 0.2% of GDP) on 25 March, which on 4 April was enhanced significantly to \$8.5 billion (equivalent to 2.5% of GDP). (Chowdhury, et al, 2020)

The Department of Inspection for Factory and Establishment (DIFE) indicates that there are 5,115 RMG factories operating in the country. The BGMEA has 4,621 member factories. RMG factories are concentrated in 7 divisions of the country (except Barisal). Dhaka division hosts 4,538 RMG factories representing 88.7 percent of all RMG factories and Chittagong Division is home to 9.8 percent of the factories with a total of 499 factories. According to Bangladesh Bank, there were 4.5 million workers directly engaged in the RMG sector in 2019. The BGMEA indicates that there are 4.1 million workers employed in this sector prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of gender distribution, most RMG employees are female (60.8%).

Bangladesh's economy along with its labor market was profoundly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The country's RMG sector felt a devastating blow. BGMEA reported cancellation of orders worth USD 3.16 billion in 1,140 factories during the first month of the pandemic. Another estimate shows that due to order cancellations and delayed payments, the industry lost USD 4.33 billion worth of export from March to June 2020. The unexpected crisis led to factory shutdowns, lay-offs, workers' terminations, and delays in wage payments. It is evident that at least 90,000 workers lost their jobs as a result of order cancellations or delayed payment.

The COVID-19 crisis in Bangladesh's apparel sector brought the government, employers, and workers together in promoting measures to protect enterprises/businesses and workers. In response to the crisis, the social dialogue partners (i.e. trade unions, employers' associations, and government) have had discussions on work arrangements and various other work-related issues. The meetings were both bipartite and tripartite in nature and focused on issues related to factory closure and lay-off, workers' termination, wage payment, work-related benefits, and health safety measures. The BGMEA, ILO, in line with the MOLE's OSH guidelines, developed a set of guidelines for members that cover workers' health and safety, medical facilities, the establishment of a COVID-19 task force, physical distancing in the workplace, and the setting up of suitable quarantine and self-isolation facilities. Yet, as noted above, health and safety measures in factories have not been sufficient. Though a large number of factories arranged hand wash facilities in the factory entrance, the number is not adequate against the number of workers and safe distancing was not maintained in most of the factories on the working floor and factory entrances, increasing the risks of coronavirus infections. Trade union leaders report that health and safety measures like hand wash, personal protective equipment, and temperature checks have not been followed in many factories, and most factories have not maintained social distancing. However, there is a dearth of dependable information about the COVID-19 readiness of the RMG sector in Bangladesh. This study would fill this knowledge gap in three ways. First, it has reviewed the scale of impacts of the pandemic in the RMG sector which is done through a systematic review of literature; second, it has examined the readiness of RMG sectors to address the COVID crisis in a holistic way; third, it has identified a host of challenges that impeded the implementation of COVID-19 readiness program in RMG sector.

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Study design and sampling

This research employed a mixed method of research, yet heavily draws on quantitative inquiry. In line with the objective of the research, first rigorous literature review was conducted to advance our understanding of the impacts of COVID-19 in RMG sector in Bangladesh and measures employed by government, industry and other stakeholders to address it. Some data and information were collected from published report of various organization. The primary data and information were collected through a self-administered structured online questionnaire survey.

The study was confined among readymade garments industry located in Dhaka and Gazipur District in Bangladesh. A significant number of factories are located in these two district of Bangladesh. An online based structured questionnaire was distributed among four levels of employees/staff of 78 factories selected randomly. The four levels of staff include staff performing high-level managerial function, performing mid-levels supervising responsibility of various department of factory and floor in-charge. Initial response in terms of returning of filled-in questionnaire was very poor. After several rounds of gentle reminder a total of 112 valid responses were obtained. Therefore, our sample size is 112.

2.2 Research instrument design and measurement scale

In line with the research objective the research protocol was designed. While designing the survey instruments the COVID 19 protocols developed by World Health Organization, Better Work and Bangladesh government were rigorously consulted. Apart from respondents demographic and personal profile, the major construct of the survey instruments include (i) COVID-19 management policy procedure parameters, (ii) COVID-19 responsive HR compliance parameters and (iii) factory's readiness in several dimension of preventive and curative management of COVID 19.

Respondent's responses about their self-rated knowledge on various questions were measured using a modified 5-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932): where 1= Strongly Disagree (SDA), 2= Disagree (DA), 3=Not sure, may be, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree (SA). We treat 'not sure, may be' response as a kind of agreement having less confidence. A critic may consider this response as a risk averse response.

Apart from the above, other data and information concerning the respondent's demographic profile (e.g. age, sex,), education, occupation/job etc are collected through the questionnaire survey. For analyzing the data, basically descriptive statistics, graphs/charts and tabular format were used.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Respondent's profile

The total number of respondents of the survey was 112. Among these respondents 78.6% are male and 21.4% respondents are female. In Bangladesh RMG sector although nearly two-third employees are female but in the managerial positions which often require tertiary level of education the proportion of female is rather low. Marginally over half (51.8%) of the respondents poses postgraduate level qualification followed by graduate (43.8%), and higher secondary qualification (4.5%). About one third (33%) of the respondents are senior executive followed executive (23%) and office/assistant manager (22%). Only one-fifth of the respondents are top level manager of the surveyed factories. Among the respondents only marginally half are holding senior executive or higher managerial position, yet about three-fourth (74%) have the experience of attending meeting related to COVID-19 management in their respective factory. This gives a signal that factories have rather a kind of participatory process in CIVID-19 related decision making than usual management related decision making.

Table 1: Respondents' personal and occupational profile

Particulars	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	88	78.6
	Female	24	21.4
Education	Higher secondary	5	4.5
	Graduate	49	43.8
	Post graduate	58	51.8
Position in the factory as a staff	Manager	24	21.4
	Senior Executive	37	33.0
	Executive	26	23.2
	Asst. Manager/Officer	25	22.3

Participation in COVID-19 elated meeting	Yes	83	74.1
	No	29	25.9
Total		112	100.0

3.2 Organizational policy to address COVID-19

To address the COVID-19 issues in a holistic way, the factory needs to develop and adhere to relevant policy and procedure. It is important because based on the policy and procedure, fund could be allocated, human resources could be deployed and various practical measures could be employed to address the COVID-19 issues while maintaining both production and productivity. The respondents were asked to rate their responses against eight aspects of policy and procedures related to COVID-19 management at the top level. The findings are presented in Figue1 and Table 2.

The result shows that in response to the question, if the factory has any infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19) preparedness plan, about half of the respondents claimed that their factory has one; however, another 40% mentioned that they are not sure, but may have. It means only half of the respondents claimed with confidence that their factory have adopted a plan to employ preventive measure to address the infectious diseases including COVID-19. The respondents were asked if there is any COVID 19 taskforce or committee at their workplace. Only 51% mentioned with high confidence that their factory has one. Regarding the participation of all levels of employees, only 44% mentioned with high confidence that COVID-19 management committee ensures participation of all levels of employees. Regarding the availability of any written policy of the COVID-19 taskforce/committee, only 44% mentioned with high confidence that there is written policy. About 48% respondents claimed with high confidence that their COVID-19 committee/taskforce has the capacity to prevent COVID-19 transmission in their factory. Only half of the respondents claimed with high confidence that awareness campaign program is fully function in their factories. However only 36% respondents claimed with high confidence that their COVID-19 team are fully aware about the dangerous mutating capacity of COVID-19. Finally respondents were asked- If the COVID-19 committee has enforced any SOP to prevent COVID-19. Only 43% of the respondents mentioned with high confidence that their respective COVID-19 committee has enforced SOP to prevent COVID-19. In general, the mean scores against all the eight indicators/dimensions of policy and procedures to address COVID-19 are low (3.18 – 3.53) (Table 2), which implies that a great majority of the respondents are not very confident about the functioning of the COVID-19 taskforce/committee to address the COVID-19 in a pragmatic way.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of policy and procedures of COVID-19 management in readymade garments factory in Bangladesh

Component	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Company have infectious disease preparedness plan (P 1)	112	3.46	.848
COVID 19 taskforce or committee at workplace (P 2)	112	3.53	.735
COVID 19 committee is marked by participation and safety committee member (P 3)	112	3.26	.867
COVID 19 Taskforce has written policy (P 4)	112	3.34	.812
Taskforce has right to prevent COVID 19 (P 5)	112	3.40	.729
COVID 19 awareness training at workplace (P 6)	112	3.33	.864
Committee are aware of COVID 19 virus (P 7)	112	3.18	.893
Committee has SOP to prevent COVID-19 (P 8)	112	3.38	.807

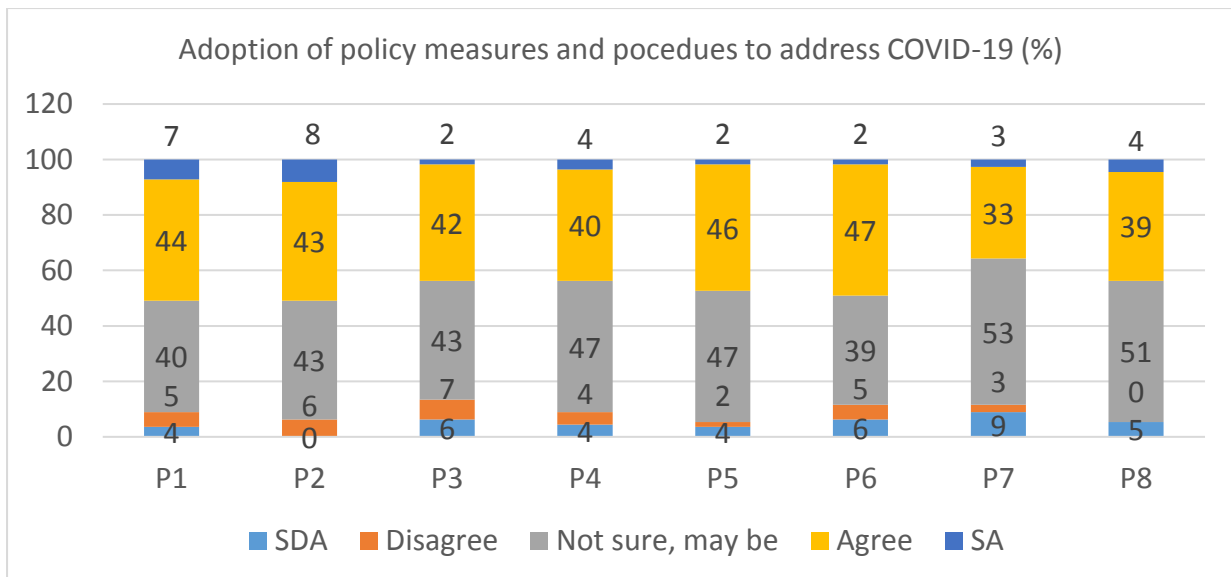


Figure 1: Adoption of effective policy and procedures of COVID-19 management in readymade garments factory in Bangladesh

3.3 HR Compliance Measurement to address COVID-19

For both preventive as well as curative management of COVID-19, measures related to HR play a significant role. These measures not only help preventing the transmission of COVID-19 among employees/workers, but also help the factories to continue production and productivity. Thus COVID-19 supportive HR measures could offer win-win situation for both the workers/employees and the company managements. Therefore, compliance of HR policy measures are integral part of better COVID-19 management. The respondents were asked to rate their responses against ten aspects of HR compliance related to COVID-19 management at factory. The findings are presented in Figure 2 and Table 3.

The result shows that in response to the question, if the company's leave policy flexible with public health guideline, only 44% respondents claimed with high certainty that their companies leave policy is flexible and supportive to COVID-19 pandemic. However, another 53% responded that they are not very sure if the leave policy is flexible and supportive to COVID-19. The respondents were asked if the floor level staff, supervisor, production manager etc receive training about COVID-19 awareness. Only 44% mentioned with high confidence that the various levels of staff/employees have received the COVID-19 awareness training. However, a large majority of 54% respondents are not so confident if the employees and workers got awareness training. As regards the working of pregnant workers during COVID-19 pandemic, only 40% cases they were asked to work. About 47% cases pregnant women workers/staff were allowed to stay home with paid leave. Similarly, in 43% cases compliance & welfare team has ensured paid leave for workers having symptoms of covid-19. However, respondents mentioned that only in 39% cases the medical team & medical officer are well trained to support the welfare of the workers. About 43% respondents give credit to the knowledge and skill of human resource department to practice successfully the flexible leave policy during COVID-19 pandemic. About 44% respondents claimed with high certainty that HR & Compliance team encourage employees/ workers to stay at home if any member of their family are affected by Covid-19. Similarly respondents claimed with high certainty that in 38% cases HR and compliance team encourages persons exhibiting symptoms of covid-19 (cough, fever, and difficulty breathing) to stay home. Considering the responses of the respondents against the ten dimensions of HR policy and practice related to COVID-19 management, it could be argued that HR policy are flexible and supportive to COVID-19 pandemic. In general, the mean scores against all the 10 indicators/dimensions of HR compliance components are low (3.23 – 3.43) (Table 3), which implies that a great majority of the respondents

are not very confident about the functioning of the COVID-19 taskforce/committee to address the COVID-19 in a pragmatic way.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of HR compliance policy to address COVID-19 in readymade garments factory in Bangladesh

HR compliance components	Mean	Std. Deviation
Company leave policy flexible with public health guideline (HR 1)	3.41	.623
Floor level staff, supervisor, production manager are aware of the COVID-19 policy of the company (HR 2)	3.38	.738
Floor level staff, supervisor, production manager received training about COVID-19 management (HR 3)	3.43	.707
During the covid-19 situation pregnant women are required to work (HR 4)	3.30	.837
During Covid -19 situation women (pregnant) are having paid leave (HR 5)	3.42	.653
Compliance & welfare team ensure paid leave for covid-19 symptoms worker (HR 6)	3.30	.792
Medical team/medical officer and welfare staffs are well trained to support worker (HR 7)	3.23	.969
Human resource department staff are well educated to ensure flexible leave practiced (HR 8)	3.26	.846
HR & Compliance team encourage employees & workers to stay home (in case of family member affected by Covid-19) (HR 9)	3.31	.839
Employee & worker exhibiting symptoms of covid-19 (cough, fever ,difficulty breathing) are actively encourage to stay at home (HR 10)	3.27	.849

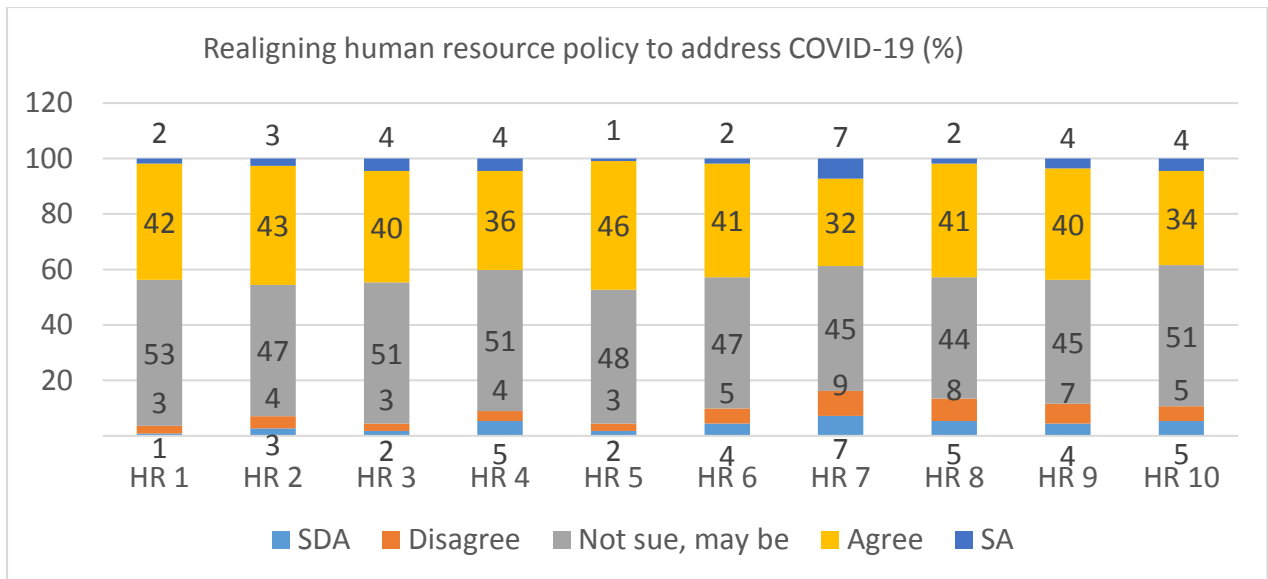


Figure 2: Adoption of policy and procedures of COVID-19 management in readymade garments factory in Bangladesh

3.4 Organizational readiness to address COVID-19

Organizational readiness to implement specific tangible and physical measures in factory environment is very crucial to address the COVID-19 issues. The organizational readiness to implement specific tangible and physical measures were assessed by using 10 indicators. These measures not only help preventing the transmission of COVID-19 among employees/workers, but also help the factories to continue production and productivity. Therefore, organizational readiness to implement specific tangible and physical measures in work environment is integral part of better COVID-19 management. The respondents were asked to rate their responses against ten aspects of organizational readiness to implements tangible and physical measures at factory environment. The findings are presented in Figure 3 and Table 4.

The result shows that in response to the question, if the production floor sewing machine layout was set to maintain 2 meters (6 feet) distance, only 46% respondents claimed with high certainty that this measure is implemented in their factory to prevent transmission of COVID-19. However, half of the respondents (50%) are not very sue if this measure is implemented in their factory. The respondents were asked if the workers and employees maintain social distance in the work place. About half of them (49%) mentioned with high confidence that the workers maintain the social distancing norms in

the factory environment/workplace. As regards the maintenance of social distancing in the dining place inside the factory premises only 47% respondents claimed with high certainty that they maintain social distancing in the dining room/space. However, almost same proportion (47%) of the respondents mentioned that they are not sure if employees maintain social distancing during dining time. The reason is mainly attributed to the availability of/allocation of small room/space for dining/eating purposes for a large number of employees.

As regards to implementation of physical measures in working environment to address COVID-19, about 47% claimed that factory management has arranged extra ventilation in the work environment. Similarly about 40 respondents claimed that factory management has arranged hand wash facilities at the entrance of production floor. However, only 48% respondents claimed with certainty that handwashing facilities are arranged in a way that can ensue social distancing norm. It means handwashing facilities need more attention to ensue social distancing. One way to do it is to increase the number of place of hand washing. Apart from the above measures, the factory management have provided hand washing towel, disinfectant spay, and hand sanitizes to ensue personal health of the employees inside the factory premises. Considering the responses of the respondents against the ten dimensions of implementation of tangible physical measures to address COVID-19, it could be argued that there is still room for intervention to improve the situation. In general, the mean scores against all the 10 indicators/dimensions of implementation of tangible physical measures to address COVID-19 are low (3.29 – 3.43) (Table 4), which implies that a great majority of the respondents are not very confident about the implementation of tangible and physical measures at the working environment to address the COVID-19 in a participatory way.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of organizational readiness and preventive measurement to address COVID- 19 in readymade garments factory in Bangladesh

Readiness to make COVID-19 responsive workplace	Mean	Std. Deviation
Production floor sewing machine layout set maintain 2 meters (6 feet) distance (WP 1)	3.40	.607
Workers & employees maintain social distance in the work place (WP 2)	3.41	.766
Workers & employees maintain social distance in dining area (WP 3)	3.43	.768

Organization arranged extra ventilation in the work environment (WP 4)	3.43	.779
Company or organization arranged hand wash facilities at the entrance of production floor? (WP 5)	3.29	.767
Hand wash tap distance maintain minimum 2meters (WP 6)	3.38	.774
After washing hand the organization provide dry cloth, single use towel or hand drier (WP 7)	3.41	.906
Hand sanitizer is provided for all visitors who visit factory (WP 8)	3.37	.805
Company or organization check workers & visitors temperature by thermal scanning machine (WP 9)	3.42	.580
Workers with Covid-19 symptoms are properly addressed by the factory medical team (WP 10)	3.39	.809

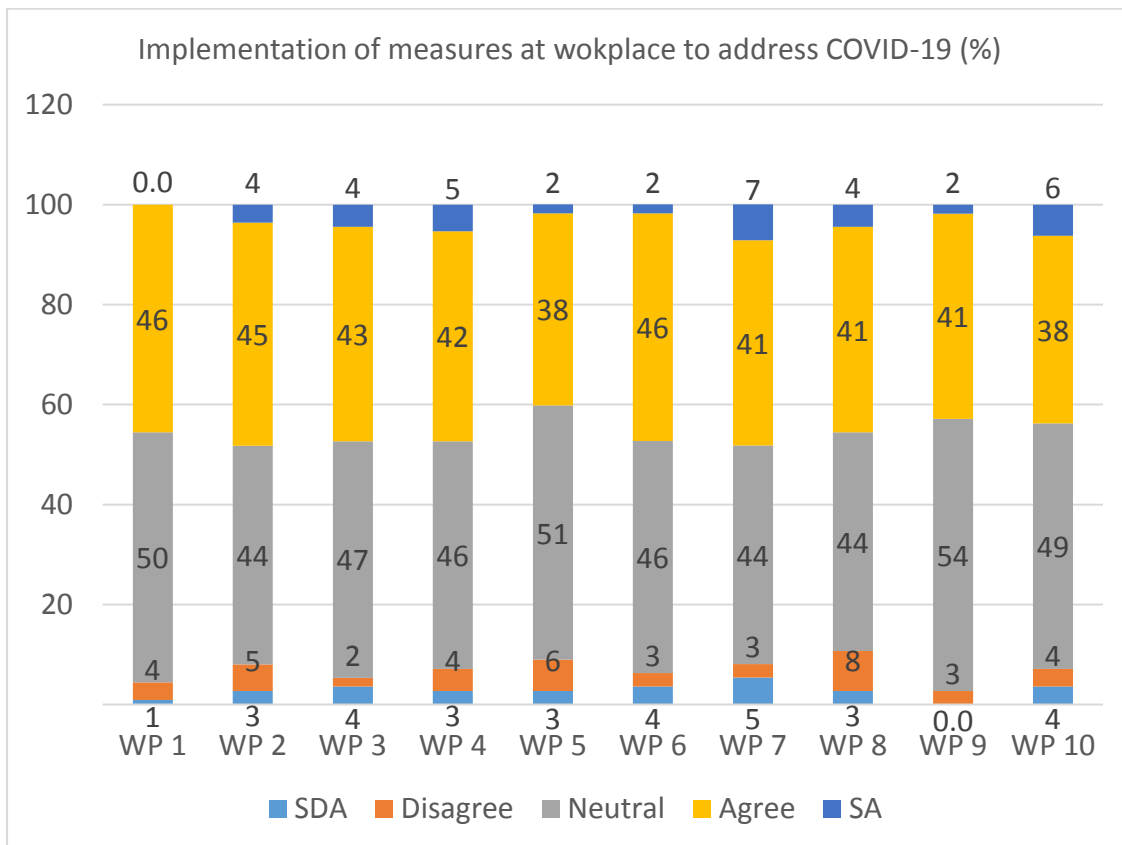


Figure 3: Implementation of measures at workplace to address COVID-19 in readymade garments factory in Bangladesh

3.5 Organizational readiness to enhance employee awareness about COVID-19

COVID 19 pandemic has a devastating effect on Bangladesh ready-made garment factory and its revenue. RMG sector it-self brought 80% export earning in Bangladesh economy. A lion share of employment and women empowerment through RMG sector is also a remarkable contribution in employment generation and poverty reduction source. Thus, at any cost, government and factory owners are trying to re-open the factories and continue production process. Therefore, factory staff are required to have knowledge about preventive measures against COVID 19 to make them safe.

As per direction from the government of Bangladesh factory authorities are required to arrange training and awareness program for the employee and staff. Study reveals that about 40% respondents claimed that their employer had arranged awareness and training program on Covid-19 Symptoms and prevention. About 47% respondents claimed that .their employers provide daily awareness announcement about covid-19 symptoms and prevention. Similarly, about 40% respondents mentioned that .factory management arrange awareness campaign by using poster and similar channel on factory premises. About 43% respondents claimed that factory management had motivation program for employees to maintain personal hygiene in their home as well. Finally, about 41% respondents acknowledge that their factory management encouraging them to report (self-reporting) any state of illness at any time. Awareness training items mean values range from 3.29-3.43 which is not a very high performance indicator. It means more innovative awareness campaign program need to launched to manage the COVID-19 in a holistic and participatory way.

Table 5: Employee awareness program for preventive management of COVID-19

Awareness for preventive management of COVID-19	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organization arranged awareness & training program on Covid-19 symptoms (A1)	112	3.30	.858
Daily awareness announcement by management about covid-19 symptoms & prevention (A2)	112	3.40	.729
Awareness poster posting on factory premises (A3)	112	3.30	.708
Management distribute any kind of awareness leaflet on Covid-19 (A4)	112	3.32	.819
Management motivating employees and staff to maintain personal hygiene in their home as well (A5)	112	3.43	.694
Management encourage all employee and staff to self-repot any state of illness at any time (A6)	112	3.29	.767

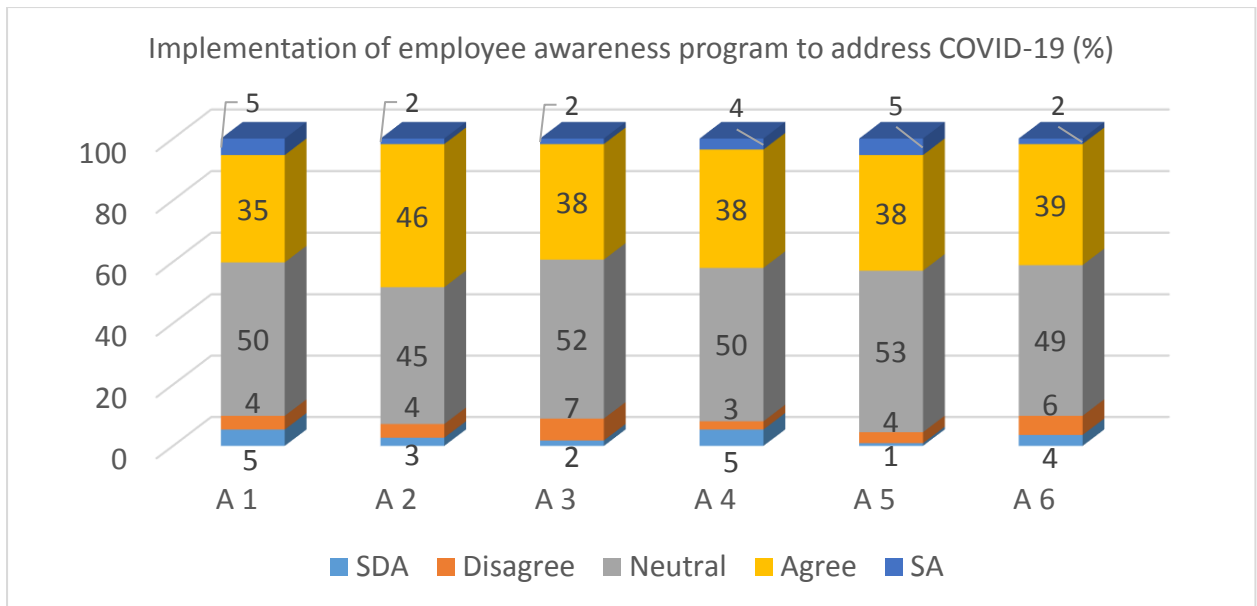


Figure 4: Implementation of employee awareness program for preventive management of COVID-19

3.6 Organizational readiness in other logistical matters to address COVID-19

Organizational readiness in providing adequate quantity and quality of logistical support to employees, and staff are very crucial to address the COVID-19 issues. The organizational readiness in terms of provisioning of quality and quantity logistics are measures in three dimensions. First dimension is the availability of personal protective equipment. The second dimension is the supply/provisioning of personal health/hygiene related logistics and finally the logical support to ensure social distancing in critical hotspots in the factory compound.

Personal protective equipment

As regards the questions, if management provides/ensure wearing of face mask at the entrance in the factory only 42% respondents claimed with high certainty that this measure is ensured while they enter the factory. However, a large majority of the respondents are not sure if they always get this logistical support (Figure 5 and Table 6). Similarly, only 38% respondents claimed with high certainty that the management through .compliance committee and medical team ensure the regular wearing of mask by all employees supplied by the factory. However, half of the respondents (51%) claimed with certainty that the management ensure the PPE of cleaning department on a regular basis.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of organizational readiness and preventive measurement to address COVID 19 in readymade garments factory in Bangladesh

Readiness to provide PPE	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Management provides & ensures wearing of face mask to enter the factory (PPE 1).	112	3.27	.816
Management and medical team ensure full use of mask by all employees (PPE 2)	112	3.33	.764
Management ensure PPE for cleaning department staff. (PPE 3)	112	3.42	.887

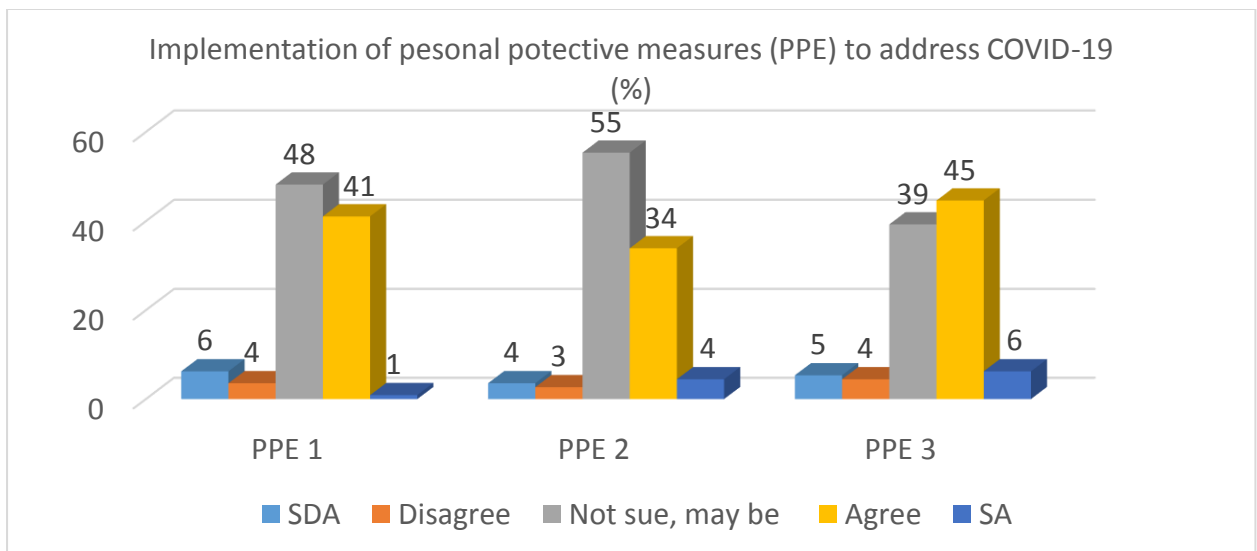


Figure 5 : Readiness to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to address COVID-19

Provisioning/supply of personal health/hygiene related logistics

The organizational readiness in terms of provisioning/supply of personal health/hygiene related logistics are measured through six indicators. As regards the questions, if the factory reception regularly checks temperature when the employees/staffs enter the factory, about half of them (48%) respondents claimed with high certainty that the temperature is measured on a regular basis while entering the factory. Similarly almost half (49%) respondents claimed with high certainty that their company has an isolation center which is properly maintained. About 48% of respondents affirm with high confidence that the factory management encourages frequent handwashing with soap and supplies soap accordingly. About 46% of respondents acknowledge with high confidence that the factory management provides liquid hand sanitizer for workers' use inside the factory. However, well above half (54%) of the respondents claimed with high confidence that their working machines are disinfected by using spray to keep working safe from the transmission of COVID-19. They acknowledge it has a huge support to ensure a safe working environment. Similarly almost half of the respondents (48%) claimed with high certainty that they pass through a disinfectant spray tunnel/gate while entering the factory (Figure 6 and Table 7).

Table 7 : Readiness to provide health related logistics to address COVID-19

Health related logistic support	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Factory reception performs temperature check of employees/staff (TC)	112	3.40	.776
Organization has COVID-19 isolation centre (IC)	112	3.50	.849
Management encourages frequent hand washing with soap (MC)	112	3.39	.649
Employees are provided with sanitizer and disinfectant spray at workplace (HS)	112	3.39	.740
Working machines disinfected by spray (MD)	112	3.50	.759
At the entrance of factory disinfectant spray machine operates (ED)	112	3.40	.822

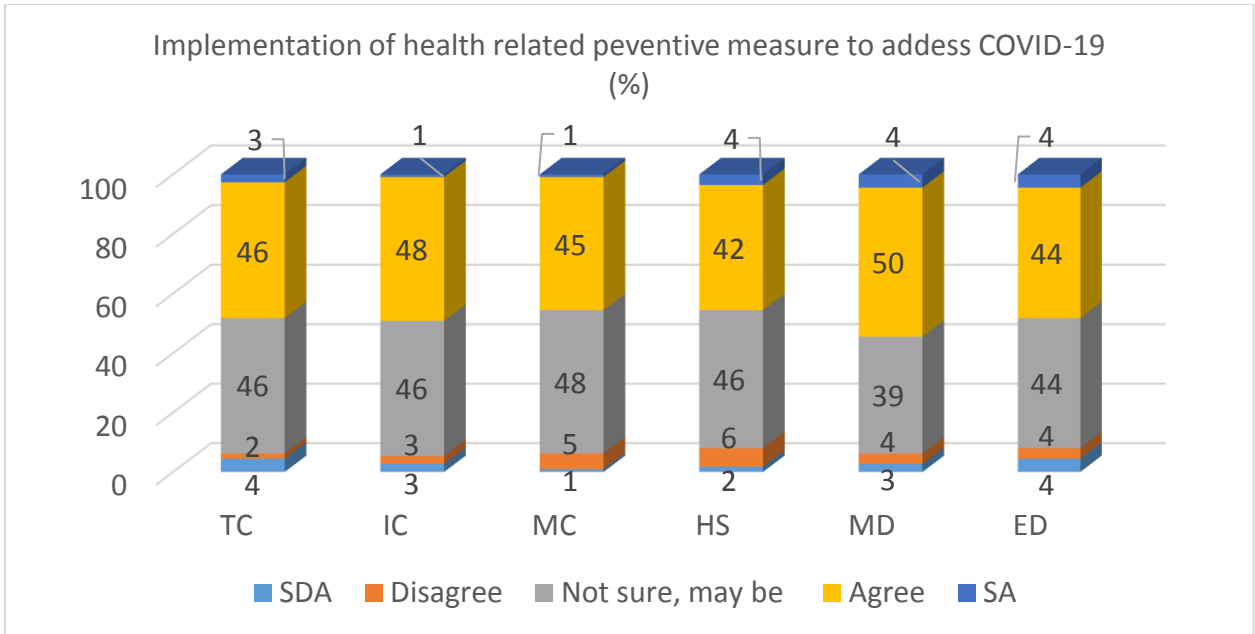


Figure 6: Readiness to provide health related logistics to address COVID-19

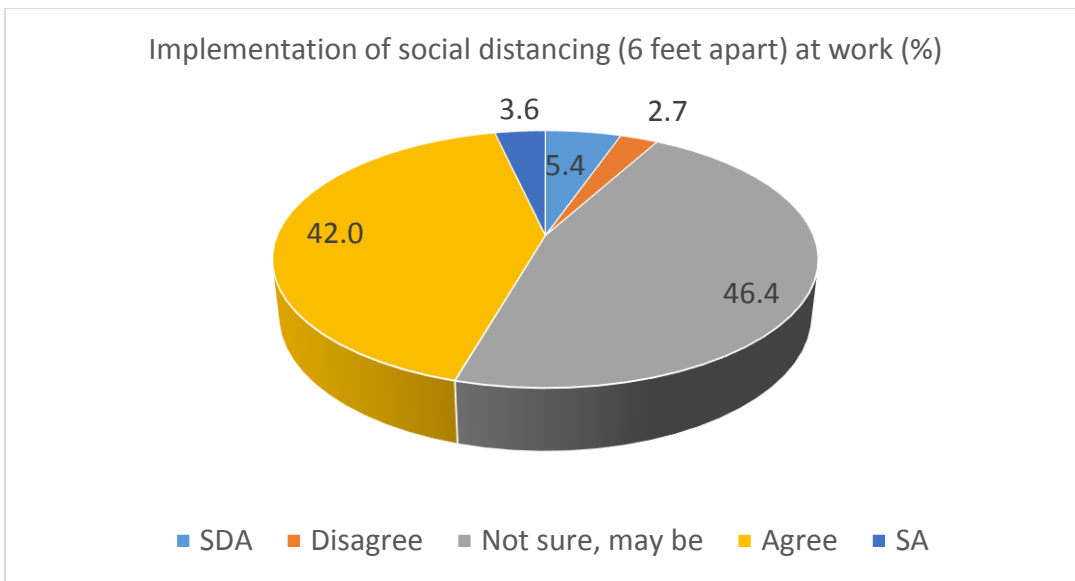


Figure 7: Implementation of social distancing (6 feet apart) at work

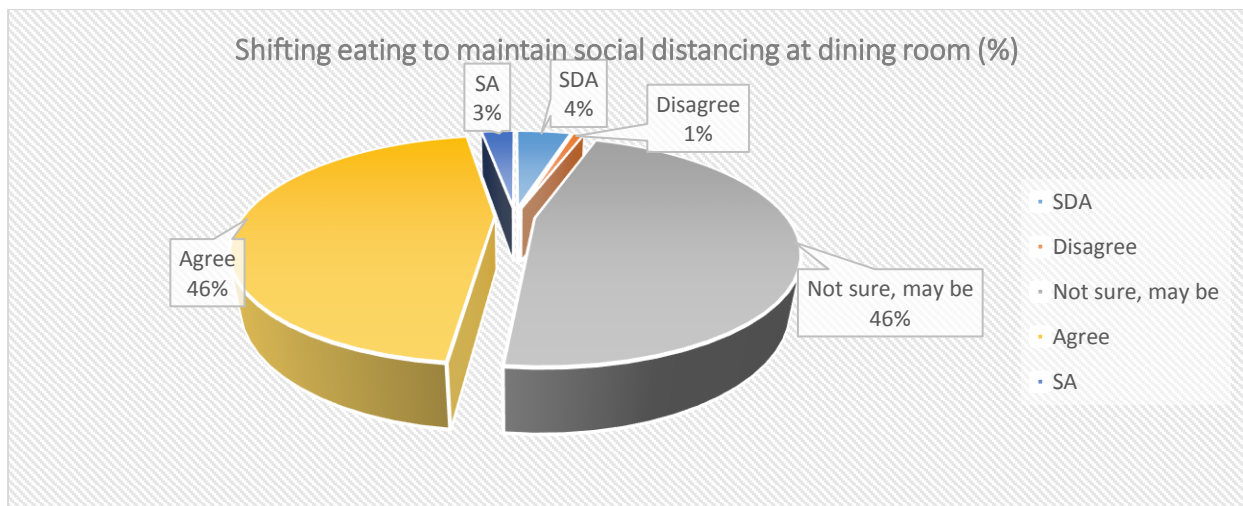


Figure 8: Batch-wise dining space/room use for implementation of social distancing (6 feet apart) at workplace

4. Conclusion

This study was conducted among 112 respondents of RMG sector in Bangladesh. The objective of the study was to review the scale of impacts of the pandemic in the RMG sector which is done through a systematic review of literature; second, it has examined the readiness of RMG sectors to address the COVID-19 crisis in a holistic way; third, it has identified a host of challenges that impeded the implementation of COVID-19 readiness program in RMG sector. The findings suggest there exist variability among factories in terms of their implementation of COVID-19 management policy and procedures. Similarly, readiness of factories in few dimensions of COVID-19 management including awareness building, and HR policy of COVID-19 management is well above average. On the contrary, factory readiness in the realm of modification of workplace to make safe from COVID-19 transmission, and logistical support to manage COVID-19 holistic ways is rather slow. Apart from financial and policy constraints, some governance/institutional and technological constraints need to be addressed holistically to make the MG sector responsive to COVID-19 in Bangladesh.

References:

Iffat Jahan Antara, "Covid 19 Crisis Impact On RMG Wages and Employment and Role of Trade Unions , Media Tracking Report", SERIES: GENDER 07, (Dhaka: BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, BRAC University, June 2020). Retrieved from <https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/new/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Phase-III-Covid-19-Crisis-Impact-On-RMG-Wages-and-Employment-and-Role-of-Trade-Unions-Media-Tracking-Report.pdf>

ILO (2020). Better Work Bangladesh, Version 3, November, 2020.

Jasim Uddin ,. et.al. (2020). Safety Guidelines Widely Flouted RMG Factories, Retrieved from The Business Standards:

<https://tbsnews.net/economy/rmg/safety-guidelines-widely-flouted-rmg-factories-74998>

Kabita Chowdhury, Naim, S.J. Hossain S., Islam, M.S, and Farah Huq, *“Covid-19 Crisis Implications for the RMG Sector: Trade Union Responses.”* 07 June 2020, BIGD.

Hossain, M.I., *Covid-19 Impacts on Employment and Livelihood Marginal People in Bangladesh: Lessons Learn and Way Forward.* South Asian Survey 28 (1) 57-71, 2021

Mottaleb, K.A., Mainuddin, M., and Sonobe, T. *Covid-19 induced economic loss and ensuring food security for vulnerable groups: Policy implications from Bangladesh.* 2020. BIGD

The Financial Express, RMG export earnings in July 1-18 total \$1.57b, (20 July 2020). Retrieved from:

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/rmg-export-earnings-in-july-1-18-total-157b-1595218398>