

# **BRAC UNIVERSITY**

## **Maternity Leave:**

(A Study of its impact on Female Employees in Organisations in Dhaka  
Bangladesh)

**Submitted By:**

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**A Thesis submitted to the Department of BRAC Business School in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Business Administration  
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**2022**

## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing my degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

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## Approval

The thesis/project titled “[Thesis/Project Title]” submitted by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Maternity Leave and its impact on female employees in organisations is an ongoing research that should not see or face controversy however that is seemingly not the case. With varied treatments being reported in various levels within numerous organisations, this study aims to look at some of the more established organisations who are more often than not responsible for setting the standards for all other companies within the industry and country and how they are treating their female employees at different levels within. The research required an extensive understanding of the workplace environment and culture which helped to authenticate and substantiate the report. A survey was conducted among 5 female employees ranging from the executive level or a relative position to participant(s) in managerial positions to conduct and strengthen the research. While references have been consulted, the study was intended to take on a relatively fresh outlook to better understand the changes and progress since the previously mentioned research papers. For a third world country like Bangladesh, regardless of organisations being well reputed, expectations regarding Maternity Leave or treatment of female employees in general were reserved to put it mildly. However, what the survey and study found out, albeit with a small sample size due to restraints in availability and approachability is inspiring. And with a few adjustments and accommodations with the combined help of the Government and the respective organisations, Maternity Leave and its impact on female employees within the organisation can be a topic that can fuel the lead to the nullification of further workplace inequalities.

## INTRODUCTION

Women's rights in the workplace is an issue that the world has consistently failed on, at least, in the way I have perceived it over the course of the last decade or so, despite the so-called progress we have made as a globalized nation thanks to most recent waves of feminism. But oftentimes, by looking at it from such a globalised perspective, we oftentimes forget that people across the world, be they in different nations, cities, or classes, each group is oftentimes having significantly different experiences, these experiences further separated by issues of gender, age, and a host of other factors.

One of the more contentious issues with regards to women's rights in the workplace is undoubtedly the issue of maternity leave. Due to the very way society functions differently in the developed world, and the way women are viewed, research into maternity leave and the level of satisfaction enjoyed by women in the corporate structure in that realm, while varied, would do a poor job of representing the female citizens of Bangladesh, who are fighting entirely different battles altogether. It is from this understanding that I wished to focus on female Bangladeshi employees in mid-level positions who could provide me with a better understanding of how they experienced their workplaces and, more specifically, with regards to the maternity leave afforded to them by their respective organisations.

Despite legal advancements in this regard – “Bangladesh's 2006 Labour Act increased the ML length to 16 weeks” (Ahmed, 2017) – I felt that these have done little to ensure that the real-world experience for women is affected positively. Despite being a much larger economy with a more varied population base, the Indian experience I felt provided some understanding of why increasing consideration for women legally was either bringing about no change or, as

Nikore (2017) found out, extended maternity leave was leading to (inevitably) increased cost of women workers which was, unfortunately, decreasing demand for them in workforce. This was not surprising, and considering the current state of affairs when it comes to perceptions of women both at home and in the workplace, I expected to find that Bangladeshi women would suffer the same fate.

This is despite the fact that increased duration of maternity leave leads to benefits for the men, women, and country. Considering Bangladesh's goals with regards to the Sustainable Development Goals, it is doubly unfortunate. In low- and middle-income countries like Bangladesh, the data continuously suggests that an increased duration of maternity leave leads to lower infant mortality rates (Nandi et al., 2016), a key issue in the SDGs. And with overwhelming support from both men and women with their desire for additional benefits (Mamun, Hossain, & Islam, 2016), it is about time that both government and employers paid heed to the voices of the women who continue to contribute every day to the Bangladesh economy's continued growth. It is this I wished to highlight with my research.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of Bangladesh, a society so divided by the invisible lines of class and gender, it would not be surprising to see not only see dissatisfaction amongst women in the workplace due to a lack of understanding of their experiences as mothers (future or otherwise), but also see the differences in experience based on their role within an organisation. Rahman, Rashid, and Nargis (2010), for example, finds that their satisfaction level is tied to their factors such as the obvious salary, job security, potential for promotion, among others. But found little to suggest that other benefits were a factor, based on a study carried out on 225 female office clerks from both private and government organisations. In contrast, Mamun, Hossain, and Islam (2005), whose paper looked into the satisfaction levels amongst 80 senior male and female executives (40 male, 40 female), while they found that, surprisingly, promotional prospects were found to be more frustrating amongst males than females, but fail to address the issue of maternity leave. Both these papers are limited by their age, considering the fact that the job market, demographic outlook, and awareness of social issues within the workplace have changed to such an extent in the last 10-15 years, one could potentially argue that the current corporate climate is virtually unrecognisable. Additionally, since neither paper directly addresses the issue of maternity leave, that too perhaps hints at an outdated viewpoint whereby this was seen as a luxury that one would not even dream of addressing in a research paper related to job satisfaction amongst women. Ahmed's (2017) study which focused on the impact of extended maternity leave (emphasis on extended) perhaps is more complementary to this paper as its focus on impact over satisfaction provide useful factual data on the issue proves to be limited by the fact that it, as a result of its lack of qualitative information, fails to establish any sort of causal relationship between

maternity leave and job satisfaction. A good comparison can be found in Mikore's (2017) focuses on the same issue of extended maternity leave, but in India, and relates the positive and negative impacts that the decision had on the nation as a whole. However, as the author notes, it does not take into account impact on single-parent households, which is an issue with this current paper as well. A more interesting take can be found in the "quasi-experimental" study carried out by Nandi et al. which sees its effects on child mortality rates in low and middle-income nations but perhaps is too removed from this study on account of it being too removed by the aforementioned issue of class. However, all of these contribute to providing much-needed context for this paper, and further illustrates the varied experiences prevalent within Bangladeshi society as a whole and in multinational corporations in particular.

## METHODOLOGY

The first step to getting a sense of my research topic and to go towards proving (or disproving) my hypothesis was to first take stock of what had already been established in terms of research regarding women in the workplace in general before reading into more specific literature about women working in Bangladesh. Though my focus would be honed further down to the specific issue of maternity leave, it was important for me to get a clear understanding of the various ways in which women interacted with their workplace and vice versa, first on a more international level, then more locally, and then more specifically to this particular issue. This was done through reading various kinds of literature, both academic and informal, from magazine articles to journals and books, some of which I found to be pertinent enough to have been referenced in this very thesis.

While my initial research plan had been more ambitious, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, my access to professional working women was limited by the hard lockdown imposed by the Bangladeshi government soon after the first case was confirmed in the country. Regardless, I was able to conduct a survey of 5 women – 1 from Grameenphone, 1 from Standard Chartered Bank, 2 from BRAC University, and 1 from Stamford University. Undoubtedly, this small sample size is not enough to establish any sort of representative data regarding Bangladeshi working women and their experience with regards to maternity leave, I do believe that it does have the potential to at least lead the way towards a nuanced understanding of a wider mindset.

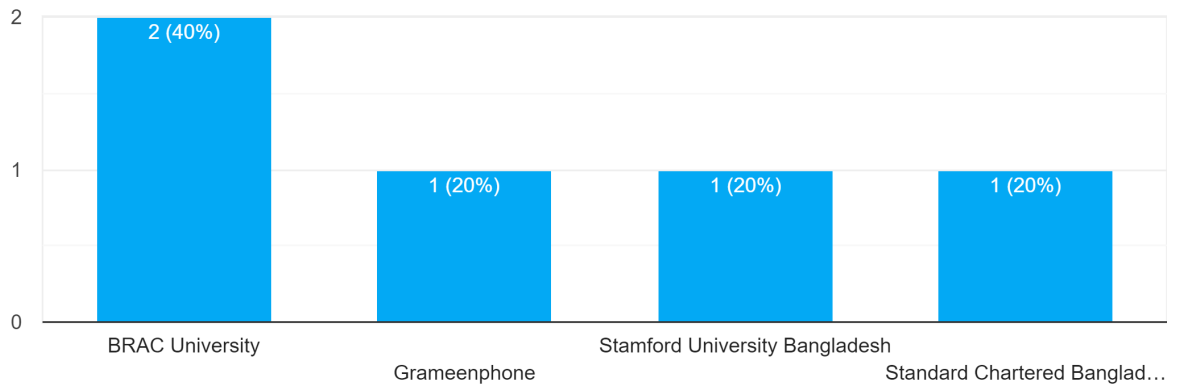
The secondary research cited in this thesis is varied in terms of when data was collected and from whom and, as such, I hope provides a wide perspective into the issue at hand. Understanding the ways in which women's role in the workplace is constantly at flux is crucial to

understanding much of Bangladesh's most recent developmental successes and failures, and I felt it called for various viewpoints from a host of different researchers to provide a satisfying understanding of the topic.

# FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Name of organization:

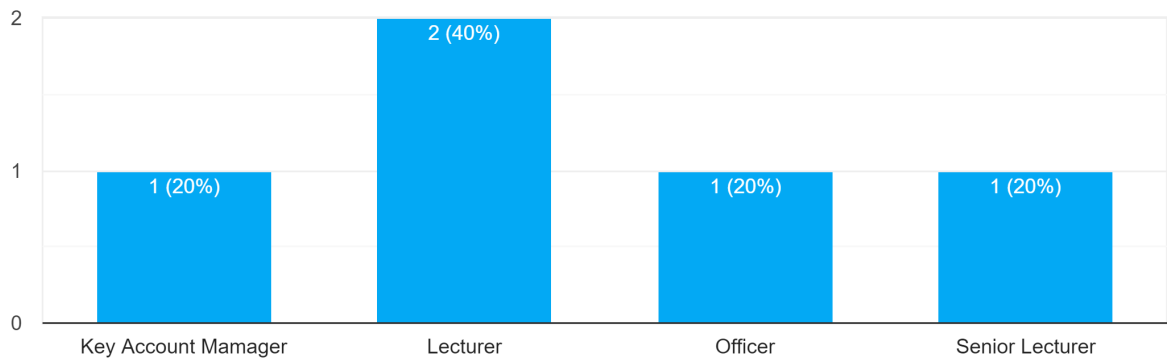
5 responses



(Fig: 1.0)

What is your current position at this organization?

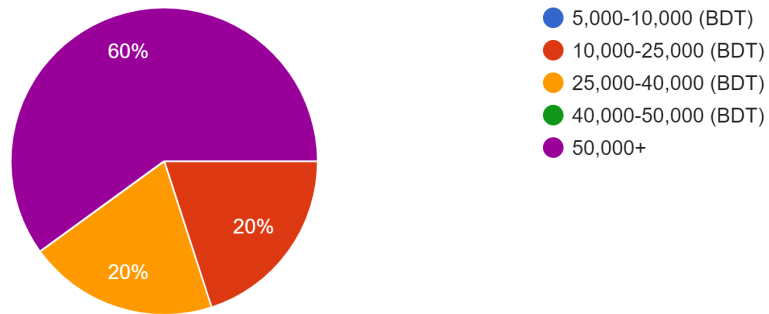
5 responses



(Fig: 1.1)

What is your salary?

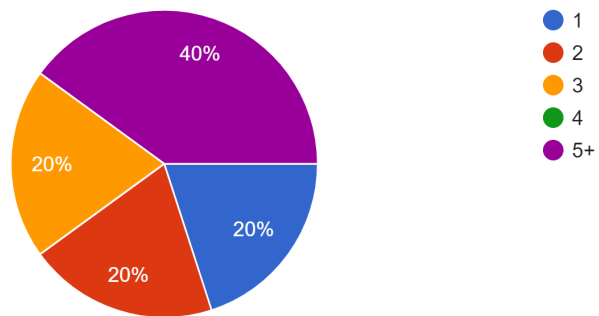
5 responses



(Fig: 1.2)

How long have you been working at your current organization (in years)?

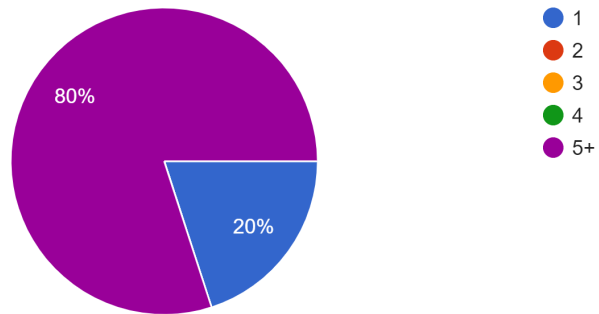
5 responses



(Fig: 1.3)

How long have you been in employment (in years)?

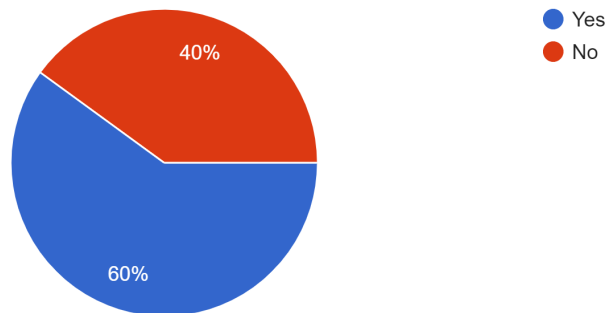
5 responses



(Fig: 1.4)

Have you ever worked at a local organization before?

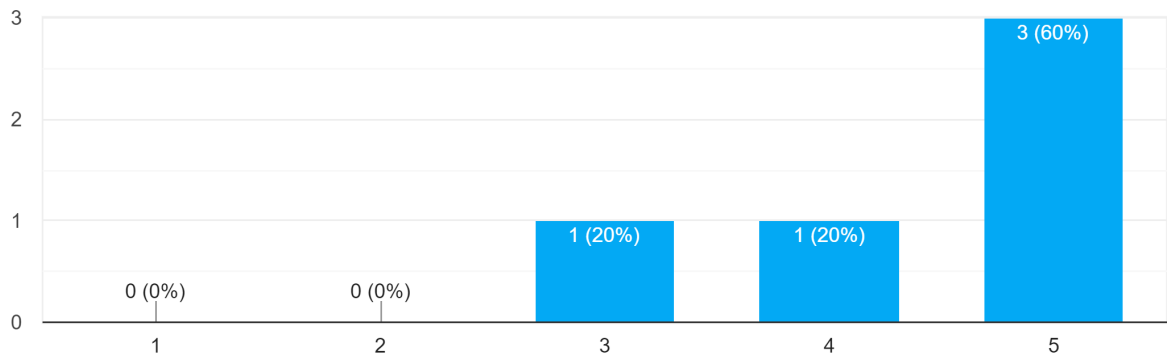
5 responses



(Fuig: 1.5)

If yes, on a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied were you at this organization?

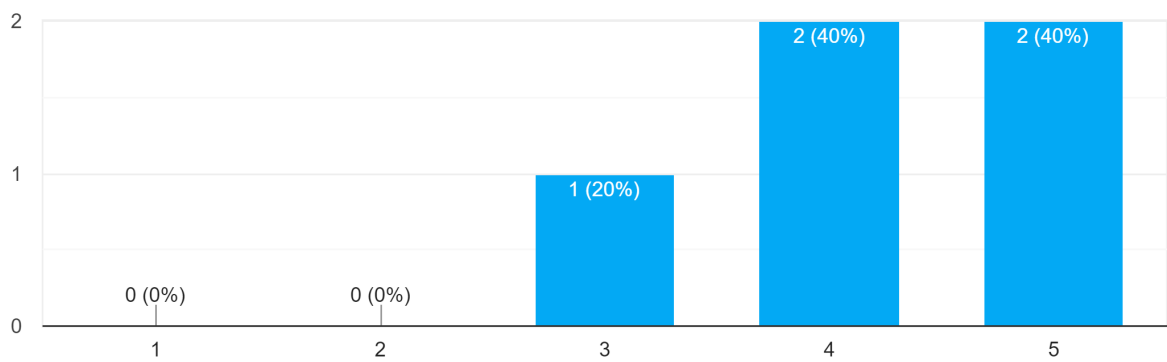
5 responses



(Fig: 1.6)

On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you at your current organization?

5 responses

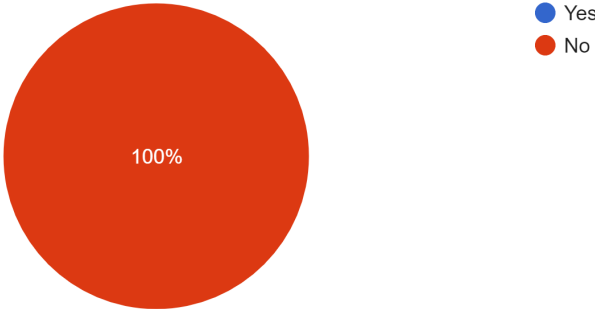


(Fig: 1.7)



Have you faced any sort of gender discrimination?

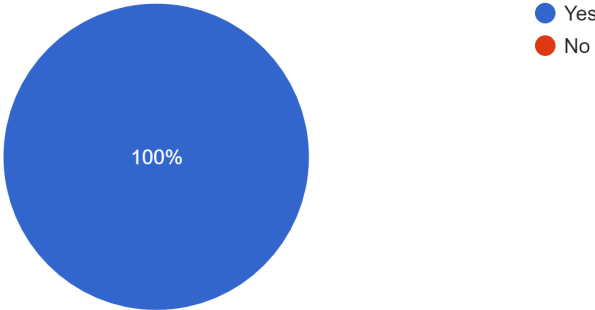
5 responses



(Fig: 1.8)

Does your organization offer maternity leave?

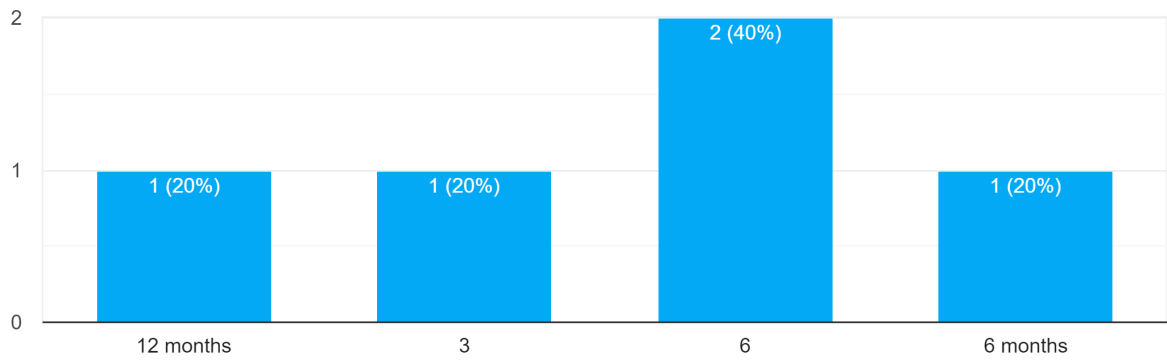
5 responses



(Fig: 1.9)

How long does it provide it for (in months)?

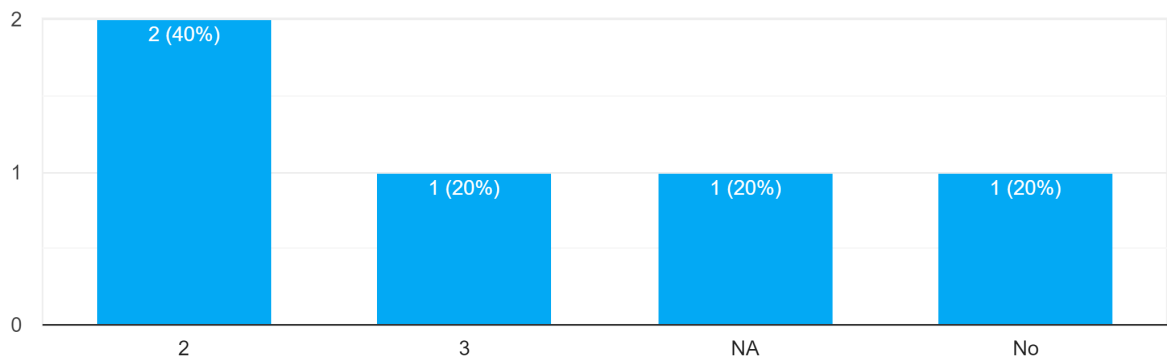
5 responses



(Fig: 2.0)

Is there a limit to the number of the maternity leaves you are allowed to take (specify max allowance in numbers)?

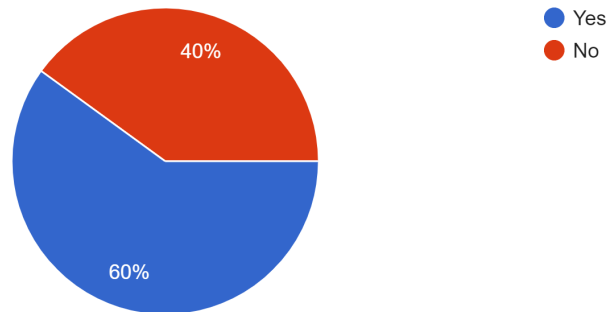
5 responses



(Fig: 2.1)

Have you ever taken maternity leave?

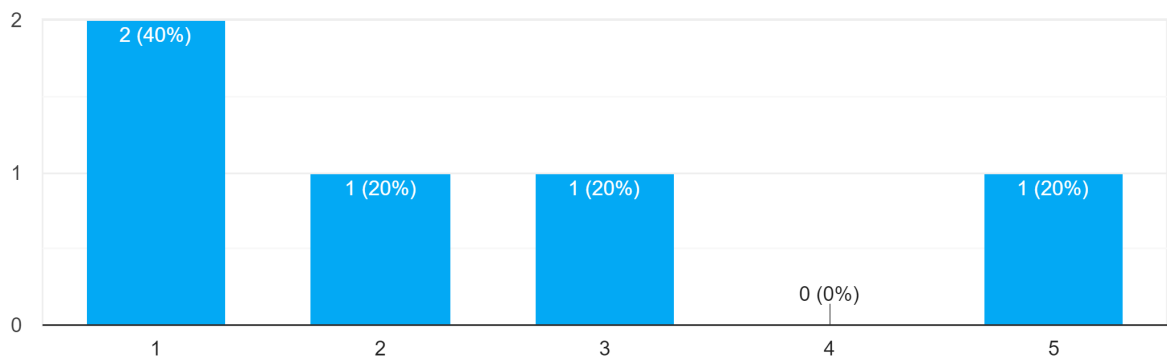
5 responses



(Fig: 2.2)

"I believe that my chances of an increment/promotion are affected by taking maternity leave."

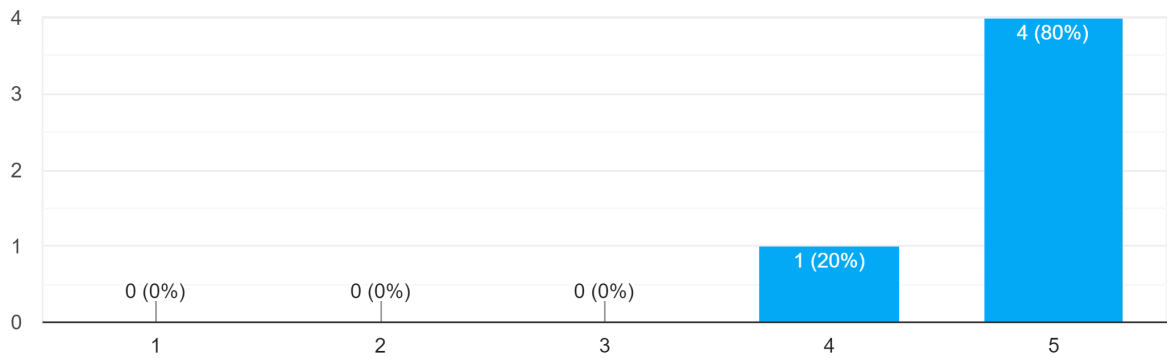
5 responses



(Fig: 2.3)

“My organization is very accommodating of women who wish to take maternity leave.”

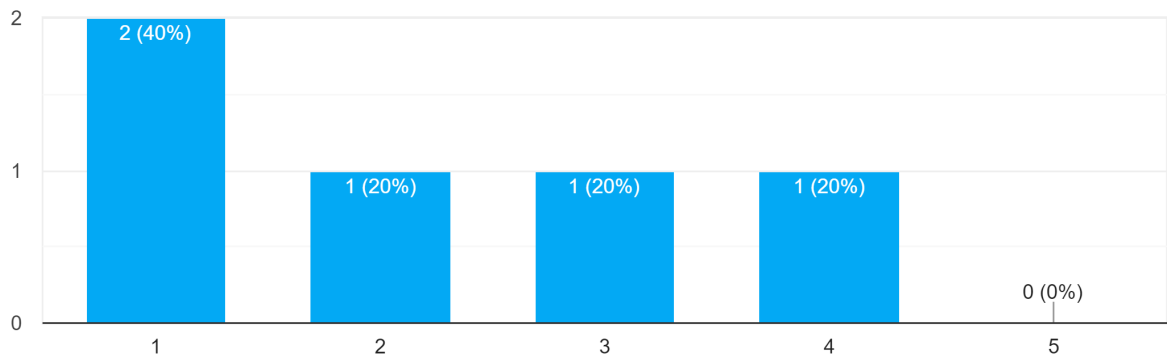
5 responses



(Fig: 2.4)

“I have faced lost career opportunities as a result of being pregnant.”

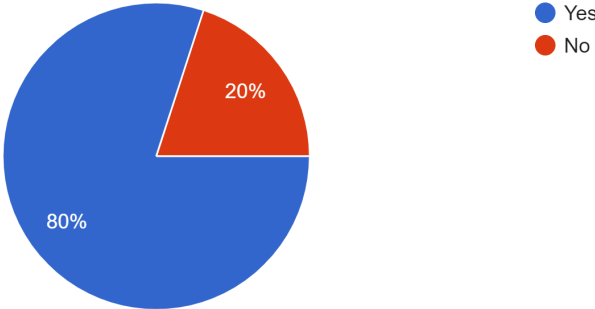
5 responses



(Fig: 2.5)

Do you have children?

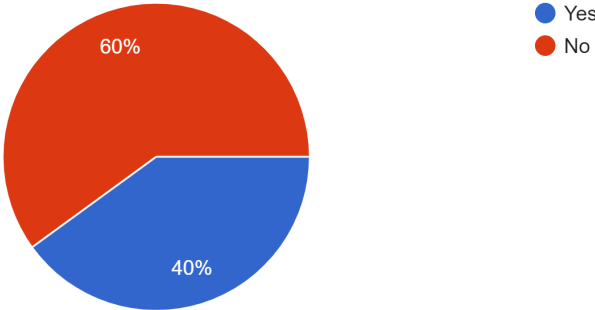
5 responses



(Fig: 2.6)

Have you ever brought your children to work?

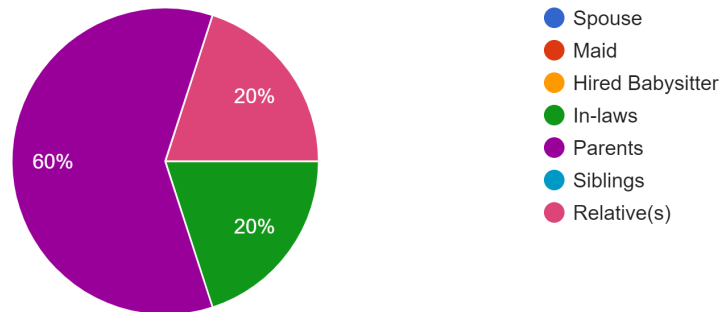
5 responses



(Fig: 2.7)

Who takes care of your children when you're at work?

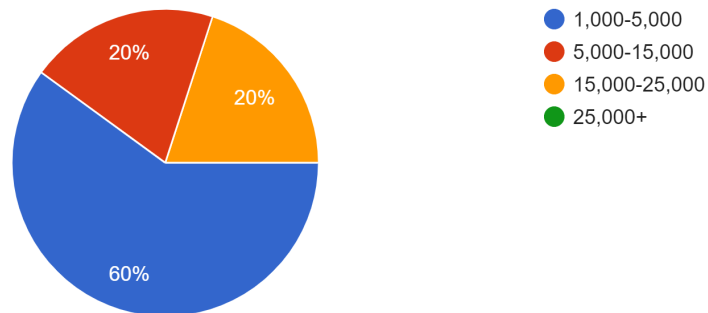
5 responses



(Fig: 2.8)

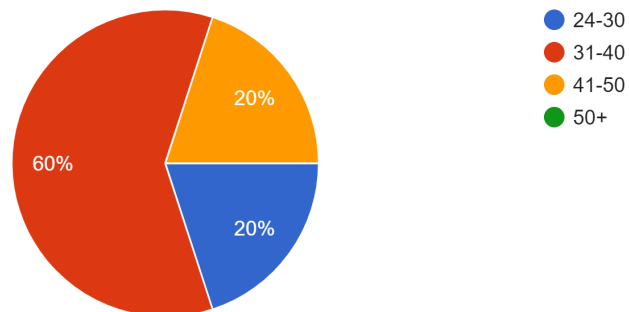
On average, how much do you spend on daycare (hired help cost inclusive)(In BDT)?

5 responses



(Fig: 2.9)

Age  
5 responses



(Fig: 3.0)

## ANALYSIS

**Fig: 1.0** highlights the name of the organisations from which the candidates were picked for the survey

**Fig: 1.1** highlights the positions of the candidates in their respective organisations

**Fig: 1.2** highlights the range of salary received by the surveyed candidates at the time of survey completion.

**Fig: 1.3** highlights the length of the candidates' tenure at their current organisation.

**Fig: 1.4** highlights the TOTAL number of years the candidates have been employed professionally.

**Fig: 1.5** showcases responses of whether the candidate has ever worked for a LOCAL before as opposed to starting off fresh.

**Fig: 1.6** highlights the satisfaction level of the candidates that were surveyed in their PREVIOUS job. The observation showcases 3 of the 5 candidates having a very high level of satisfaction in their previous job.

**Fig: 1.7** highlights the satisfaction level of the candidates that were surveyed in their CURRENT job. The observation showcases 4 of the 5 candidates having a high to a very high level of satisfaction in their current job while 1 of the 5 candidates having a “neutral” experience.

**Fig: 1.8** highlights the fact that 5 out of the 5 candidates surveyed never faced any sort of gender discrimination in their previous or current workplace.

**Fig: 1.9** highlights the fact that all the organisations our surveyed candidates are currently working in, provide Maternity Leave.

**Fig: 2.0** showcases the length of the Maternity Leave that is provided to our surveyed candidates. The research provides a glaring look at the highs and lows of organisations in various industries with 1 of the 5 candidates mentioning 3 months while 1 candidate mentioning to be allowed as long as a year if need be. However, the industry standard seems to be 6 months with 3 of the 5 candidates having selected that option.

**Fig: 2.1** highlights the maximum number of leaves the surveyed candidates were allowed with responses ranging from 2 to “No Limits”.

**Fig: 2.2** showcases whether the surveyed candidates have ever taken Maternity Leave as of the completion of the survey with 3 of the 5 having done so.

**Fig: 2.3** displays the opportunity or sometimes lack thereof of receiving increments or a promotion if maternity leave is taken by the candidates. According to the survey, 3 of the 5 candidates believe that their chances of receiving increments or a promotion is NOT affected by them taking Maternity Leave and receive no barrier to being nominated for promotion if any.



However, it seems one of the candidates is experiencing the complete opposite with the organisation being extremely uncooperative and insensitive towards the concept of employees availing Maternity Leave.

**Fig: 2.4** displays the level of accommodation by the candidates' respective organisations if and when Maternity Leave is availed. According to the survey, all 5 candidates responded by exclaiming their organisations to be very accommodating and supportive of female employees taking Maternity Leave.

**Fig: 2.5** highlights the graph for responses from candidates on whether they believe they have experienced lost career opportunities as a result of being pregnant with one of the five candidates responding with agreement to the survey inquiry.

**Fig: 2.6** displays the responses of whether the candidates that were surveyed have children at the time of survey completion.

**Fig: 2.7** displays the responses of whether the candidates that were surveyed have brought their children to work. This inquiry and its responses is actually indicative of the fact whether their respective organisations (in Bangladesh) provide daycare facilities for parents to avail. With 3 of the 5 responding with "No" and the rest responding with "Yes", it can be assumed that those who have brought their children to work have a daycare facility within the premises for parents to avail however that statement cannot be taken as conclusive since other factors such as children's age also need to be taken under consideration.

**Fig: 2.8** displays the responses to the inquiry of who takes care of the candidates' children when they are at work with majority of the responses being that the candidates' parents and/or in laws take care of the children.

**Fig: 2.9** displays the investment made on hired help (if any) by the candidates that were surveyed, with the majority spending in the range of Tk. 1,000-5,000 while two of the five candidates spend from Tk. 5,000-10,000 and Tk. 10,000-25,000 range.

**Fig: 3.0** highlights the age(s) of the candidates picked for the survey.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Based on the evidence of the study presented, organisations (in various industries) in Dhaka City have seemingly progressed significantly in terms of acknowledgement and acceptance of the concept of Maternity Leave. Contrary to the aforementioned references, a safe assumption of “progress” can be concluded with regards to the various organisations’ perspective of the concept itself. The expectation coming into this research was that of scepticism and bias. The references and anecdotes from research papers prior set it up as such. However it seems that is not the case at all but rather the complete opposite in most cases, according to the study. According to the study conducted, factors like job satisfaction, job security and scope of promotion within female employees have never been more positive and their wants and needs seem to take precedence than what most previous research says otherwise. Maternity Leave, in our case, is no exception to that evident “progress”. While the references do not provide a clear picture, hopefully this study will shed some light on Maternity Leave and its impact on female employees.

That being said, our study can definitely provide some recommendations to organisations spread across not only Dhaka city but Bangladesh as a whole. Companies should definitely look into the facilitation and implementation of Daycare centres within their work premise. This will provide a significant boost in morale because of a considerable dip in stress levels within parent employees due to factors such as sense of security and favourable surveillance proximity. Seminars can be held more often to assure parent employees, especially female parent employees, that Maternity Leave is a right that to-be-parents within the organisation can exercise and should not be treated as an option. And that this right can be exerted without any negative consequences whatsoever

given the complex nature of it all. Lastly, while our research shows a varied Leave Time and companies graciously granting from a range of 3 months to a year's leave in some cases, the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh should make it a priority to specify the mandatory nature of Maternity Leave and the necessity of companies to ensure employees may avail the leave with full salary and benefits coverage and job security with no negative ramifications upon return. Ofcourse it goes without saying, employees must show proof of parenthood otherwise they are liable to legal repercussions.

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