Breaking the Glass Ceiling: A Study on the Leadership Role of Women in the Bangladesh Garment Industry

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Economics and Social Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology

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Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. The thesis submitted is my 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 it is appropriately cited through with 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 have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

The thesis titled "Breaking the Glass Ceiling: A Study on the Leadership Role of Women in the Bangladesh Garment Industry'' that Ngawang Yonten (20217007) submitted on 5th November 2024 was accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology in 2024.

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Abstract

Bangladesh's Garment Industry (RMG) started its journey in the late 1970s in response to the worldwide demand for inexpensive garments and has come to the position it is in today. In the ensuing decades, Bangladesh, which was once called as "international bottomless basket case" has now become a "rising star or basket full of wonders" owing to rapid expansion of its industries. Globalization and neoliberal policies played a huge role in the growth of immense positive trends in the garment sectors of Bangladesh. One of the key social impacts of this garment industry is the opportunity created for women who were restricted from taking part in the social and economic activities in respect of the Purdha culture which demands seclusion of women from the public observation. As a result of women entering into the job market, remarkable changes have been observed in the lives of women with the smooth advent of garment industries in Bangladesh. The Readymade Garment Industry (from here on RMG) in Bangladesh employs around eighty five percent of female employees, making it the best or highest recruiter of women employees in Bangladesh. Despite the fact that the ready-made garment industries are dominated by women in terms of number of workers, their involvement in the leadership roles such as supervisors and manager positions in the industries has been consistently lower than men. Women comprise 80% of operators but only 10% of women serve in supervisory roles or higher. This gender gap shows a clear picture that while women dominate the lower job levels, the decision-making positions are strongly male-dominated. So, this research outlines the demographic characteristics of the respondents, uncover the factors that prevent women's upward mobility in the RMG sector, and looks at the recent upturns in female leadership. The result shows that there are internal structures and cultures such as limited training, notion of who can do what, and glass ceilings, which make it hard for women to rise up the ladder. On the contrary, increased calls for women to

take up leadership positions in recent years depict that organizational norms are shifting as a result of imploring environmental forces such as the need for different dynamics and the cardinal need for gender equity. Through shedding light on these relationships, the study extends the gender literature by providing explanations concerning the relationships between demographics, barriers to women's empowerment and changing leadership styles in the RMG industry. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for specific policies which promote equality and provide equal opportunities to all citizens which is in line with the fifth sustainable development goal (SDG 5) which is gender equality.

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Abbreviations & Acronyms

RMG   Ready-Made Garment Industry

SDG   Sustainable Development Goal

UN   United Nation

3C   Cleaning, Caring & Catering

ILO   International Labor Organization

NGO   Non-Governmental Organization

CEO   Chief Executive Officer

KIIs   Key Informant Interviews

FGD   Focus Group Discussions

F2F   Face-to-Face

n=   Total number

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background Context

Gender disparities, the biased treatment of human beings based totally on their gender identification, has been a long-lasting issue throughout our human history (Dastidar, 2018). The primary origins of gender bias can be traced back to early societies, wherein the division of labor and responsibilities had been assigned based on bodily strength and the potential of giving birth to the baby (Merton, 1934). In those eras, many primitive societies identified the bodily variations amongst women and men where man shouldered roles associated with hunting, protection, and management to bring strength in nature and at the same time women have been commonly liable for childbirth and childcare. Consequently, those variations escalated into huge societal norms, where boys were mostly assigned with outdoor activities and higher positions roles, while girls have been anticipated to emphasize childcare and own family responsibilities (Charles & Brown, 1981). As societies advanced, those ideals became deeply embedded in cultures and have been handed down to the following generations which shaped the way of their life and made it difficult for them to break free from such trends. As a result, the consistent practice of gender-based activities gives birth to gender disparity in power and opportunities in society. Additionally, religious and cultural convictions frequently enforced these disparities, depicting females as lesser or subservient to male (Jayachandran, 2015). Most of the ancient societies, religious scriptures and societal norms legitimized the oppression of girls, constraining their rights and opportunities (Woodhead, 2007). Over time, societies have frequently valued things like being strong and confident, which are normally visible as masculine traits and thus much less critical or assisting

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roles were assigned to females rather. The concept of assigning roles based on the physical strength of the gender has later grown into a big belief that males are better than females (Hook, 2010). Hence, it clearly demonstrates that gender inequality has been around for a long time, influenced by cultural, religious, and social norms which have commonly favored males over females on a global scale. Back then in the 1980s, the gender gap in the paid labor force across the world was 32 %, with the global rate of female labor force participation was at 50.2 %, while the male rate was at 82.0 % (Ospina, 2024). However, the gender disparity in the paid labor market dropped to 29.2 % in the year 2022, with masculine engagement standing at 90.6 % and feminine at 61.4 5 (International Labor Organization, 2023). So, despite the fact that the current generation is witnessing a decline in gender inequality with a higher number of women participating in labor markets across the world as compared to the past, the data still shows a higher rate of gender gap in the labor market globally which calls for the measures to be addressed.

The worldwide challenges of gender inequality resonate in Bangladesh, wherein girls face immense obstacles to equal participation in political, financial, and social domains (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004; Rahman, 1994). In Bangladesh, society's norms are in particular built in favor of patriarchal authority, mirroring practices seen in lots of communities. Gender roles are deeply ingrained in Bangladeshi society, with men dominantly holding positions of power as well as decision making authority (Kabeer, 1994). Cultural perceptions of masculinity being better suited for decision making roles hinder femininity from ascending to higher positions roles and obligations. Well, there exists numerous domains in which men and women can differ, so gender disparities are obvious in various walks of Bangladeshi lifestyles, such as inequality in educational, economic, political, and so on. (Hossain & Tisdell, 2003). However, my focus of the study is on gender inequality in the labor market of Bangladesh. The rate of gender inequality in Bangladesh

is very high owing to significantly low participation of women in the Bangladesh paid market. During the late 1990s, the rate of women's participation in the job market of Bangladesh was around 15.8% while the male rate was around 87% which makes up 71.2% of the gender gap in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the status of women in Bangladesh's labor force has been subjected to immense paramount changes over the past few decades where the LFP rate for Bangladeshi women stood at around 36.3% in 2017 compared to 80.5% for men resulting in narrowing the gender gap from 71.2% in late 1990s to 44.2% in 2017 (Hossain, 2018). In particular, one of the significant contributors to women's participation in the labor force market in Bangladesh is the RMG industry. Back then during the 1980s, around 80% of women used to work in RMG sectors whereas at present the rate of women working in the garment sector continued to decline from 54.22% in 2015 to falling slightly to 53.65% in 2021 (Raman et al., 2024; Macias et al., 2024). Although the overall rate of females in LFP is much lower than the male participation rate and the rate of women working in RMG sectors is declining with a growing year, it is still good to see that the women working in the paid labor force is still at a higher rate. However, the major problem is that the majority of women's workers were recruited in the low paid jobs such as sewing operators and security guard while only 5% of women occupy higher scale roles such as supervisor and CEO. Although the quantity of women working in the RMG sectors gives a good picture where around 60% of women work in RMG paid sectors, the problem it holds is that the scale of quality job offers to the women were not up to the satisfactory. Women who historically have made up approximately 80% of the employees in the garment sector are extensively outnumbered with regards to holding leadership positions. Recent analysis of the DBL Group (2023) shows, among 27,461 male employees and 13,515 girl employees in this garment factory, a mere 5% of women occupy supervisory roles or higher, with a hefty 95% being male in positions of power.

Furthermore, research conducted by Macchiavello & Woodruff (2014) noted the widely wide-spread issue of females' promotion rates always lag behind regardless of compelling evidence suggesting that female trainees frequently show equal or maybe better managerial effectiveness than their male employees in the same industry. Moreover, despite holding equal or higher education qualifications to men, women encounter less promotions compared to men, a situation influenced by implicit bias and a lack of supportive programs aimed at fostering women's leadership development within the garment sector. Such ideas of the "glass ceiling" results in an insignificant small number of leadership roles being run by women within the Bangladesh RMG industry. Thus, through the lens of Bangladesh RMG industry, this study will explore the issues behind the limited quality jobs offered to women.

According to article 28(2) of the Bangladesh constitution, "Females ought to entertain or enjoy the same or equal privileges as that of male in every sphere of state and public life." Similarly, article 29(2) discourages prejudice on the grounds of belief system, ethnicity, race, caste, as well as sex, for any employment in the service of the republic. Additionally, the National Women Development Policy of Bangladesh has created a window of opportunities for enhancing women's empowerment (Haque, 2021). Achieving gender equality is a shooting desire for both National Women Development Policy of Bangladesh as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The SDGs are an essential ingredient of the UN 2030 vision for the realization of sustainable development, which signifies a worldwide effort to reform our face of the planet and assures that no individuals shall be stands behind in every aspect of environmental, economic as well as social aspects of development in the coming future (UN, 2015). The different areas of SDGs are associated with different pillars and contribute to sustainability achievement and measure or examine in diverse ways (Dalampira & Nastis, 2020). Consequently, to effectively analyze how

far we are doing with the issues like gender inequality deploying SDGs as guidelines, one ought to emphasize a particular area of SDGs related to the issues that are currently examined in the research. For this reason, SDG number 5 - Gender Equality is the spotlight of this research. Although the SDG 5 approach in general pays attention to gender equality, it further bears 14 indicators and 9 targets (Roser, 2023). However, this research will particularly focus on the SDG-5's target 5.5. as well as SDG-5's indicator 5.5.2 that says "ensuring active participation as well as fair opportunities for leadership (power of decision-making) to all women in every phase of life" (SDG-5 target 5.5) and "entertaining females to take management and supervisory posts (SDG-5 indicator 5.5.2) respectively.

Therefore, through the lens of the RMG industry, this research aims to understand or explore the obstacles behind taking leadership roles by women within the garment industry of Bangladesh. It also observes and explores how the absence of women in higher posts influences the RMG's productivity and relationships among employees. Moreover, the studies will scrutinize the factors that contribute to this inequality, which may furthermore embody biases or constraints on a girl's career improvement opportunities. By spotting the boundaries and their repercussions, efforts can be made to dismantle the chain of such issues. By addressing this gender imbalance, it will assist to harness the entire capacity of its personnel and create a greater inclusive environment for all personnel in the garment sectors of Bangladesh. As a result, it'll also contribute to the realization of SDG -5, that supports equal rights for women as well as empowerment of all girls.

1.2. Research Questions

The research questions of this thesis are;

I. What are the specific hurdles and barriers that hinder or impede women's employees' progression to leadership roles inside the RMG industry?

II. What are possible measures that the RMG industry will put into practice to ensure the presence of more women in leadership positions that will result in breaking down the lasting boundaries which holds them back from advancing to higher roles.

1.3. Objectives

The Objective of this study are;

I. To uncover the underlying reasons for the unequal treatment of genders in management positions in the garment industries of Bangladesh. By pinpointing these obstacles, it is hoping to create powerful strategies so as to tackle those problems and beautify the presence of women in leadership roles within the RMG industries.

II. To formulate impactful policies and approaches by means of policymakers with a purpose to assist gender equality and empower women within the Ready-made Garment sectors after studying the general demanding situations. Additionally, coming up with impactful policies will not only help to fulfill the aim of the National Women Development Policy but also contribute to accomplishing Sustainable Development Goal-5, which aims to ensure gender equality and empower all women and girls.

1.4. Significance of the Research

The importance of this research is that;

I. Affect in Policy Formulation and Gender Equality Campaigns

At policy level, this study is indeed a guiding contributory article to the evidence-based research for gender that can project an equitable direction in RMG sector-related initiatives on achieving gender balance aspects. The research highlights the factors hindering women from achieving leadership positions, which is useful for formulating policies that advocate diversity and equitable treatment. This echoes the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This study contributes to informed policy-making at national and sectoral levels, guiding practical interventions that level the playing field on leadership between both genders.

II. Voices of Women in the RMG Sector

This study acts as a groundwork to bring up the experiences of women in the RMG sector who generally go unnoticed through which they get an opportunity to narrate their struggles and future aspirations. Amplifying these voices brings broader attention to the institutional discrimination faced by women in ascending into positions of leadership. This emphasis on the individual story helps progress society by identifying a call for change in order to combat gender biases. So, the study encourages the implementation of women inclusive workplace policies and seeks to develop the professional environment in Bangladesh.

III. Contribution to Academic Knowledge and Suggestions for Further Research

From an academic perspective, this research provides an academic contribution by narrowing the gap in the gender equality literature within the RMG sector by providing evidence on the complexities of gender, culture and industry practices. Since the study focused on leadership in strategic areas with regard to work and employment, it is a new resource for gender equality and labor rights researchers related RMG sectors. So, it functions as a base platform for future academic exploration into workplace policies and leadership development programs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Overview of Women in the Labor Market in Bangladesh

Within the last three decades, Bangladesh has witnessed positive trends towards women's empowerment (Hossain, 2012; Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). Although Bangladesh enjoys the successful journey of women's advances, their rate of women's participation in the labor force still remains very low. In the past, most women often worked on family farms or in family enterprises and they hardly entered the paid labor force (Kabeer, 1994; Hossain & Tisdell, 2003). However, productive employment (working in a paid market) becomes crucial for them as it aids to boost their economy and reduce the risks of swimming in the pool of poverty (Charles & Brown, 1981). In this regard, women's participation in the labor force has become paramount in reducing female dependency rate as well as making use of the available optimum human resources (potential labor force). Additionally, study conducted by Rahman et al. (2023) also argued that the "man force is the essential ingredient of production", nonetheless labor has never been homogeneous where the disparities in gender categories as well as the art of skills in which individuals wear are few notable indicators of labor heterogeneity. So, it is vital to emphasize particularly in regards to disparities between gender because the factors of women's demand and supply of labor may be triggered by distinct motives than demands made for labor among men. Since the country's independence in 1971, the rate of women's participation in the paid labor force has witnessed a significant shift. During the 1990s, the rate of women working in the paid job market was as low as 26.64%. However, the rate of participation increased to a high of 36.21 percent in the year 2019 and slightly decreased in 2020 (Rahman et al., 2023). It is evident that there is still a higher trend of women's

participation in the paid labor force which gives a positive picture. This increase was due to growing urbanization, the need for a double income household, and the decline in male-dominated job opportunities (Hossain & Tisdell, 2003). Although Bangladesh is witnessing the positive trends of women's participation in the job market, an increase in women's participation has not been even (unequal) in all sectors. Women in rural areas heavily depend on agriculture activities for their bread and butter but women living in urban areas heavily rely on readymade garment sectors of Bangladesh. This is mainly due to the fact that the garment industry offers a variety of opportunities for employment and has a relatively higher wage for female employment compared to other sectors (Hossin, 2012; Kabeer & Mahmud 2004).

2.2. Gender Inequality in RMG

The Bangladesh RMG industry is a major contributor to its country's economy and it is being hailed as a mother of opportunity for women dwelling in Bangladesh (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). This expansion of the RMG industry aids to breed higher women's employment opportunities, pushing the rate of women's participation in the job market up to 36.5% by the year 2017 (Matsuura & Teng, 2020). The RMG industry has been a great source of help to the country's economy as well as to individuals, however those opportunities are often overshadowed by persistent and deep segregation of labor in terms of gender which affect various spheres of their work life (Raihan et al., 2019; Woodruff et al., 2020). The RMG industry is one of the most lucrative industries for ladies but if we look at the ownership of the industry, we see a completely different scenario. There are very few women who own RMG units. The factories owned by women often tend to be of a smaller scale than the medium and larger-sized firms owned by men. As per his study of 111 RMG factories and the available ownership information of 68 factories,

Raihan et al. (2019) discovered that only 6% (4 out of 68) were female owned and 4% (3 out of 68) had shared ownership. All these instances are actually the reflection of a society that has been predominantly male-dominated. Additionally, one of the common glaring issues is the wage gap between male and female labor where men are commonly paid higher wages compared to women despite performing the same tasks as well as jobs of equal value (Hossain, 2012). Men are more likely to be employed in the higher earning positions while women are automatically channeled towards the "3C" jobs, namely cleaning and sweeping, caring and catering (lower paid / low status jobs), mostly in the form of assembly line work and machining in the garments and textiles sector (Matsuura & Teng). Paying low salary was said to be one of the significant factors for women's decision to leave the garment industry resulting in declining the number of women working in the garment sector (Rahman et al., 2023). Furthermore, even in terms of workers' associations, women representatives were lower in number than their men counterparts in most cases. There have been cases where women attempted to form their own unions and organizations but met with relatively little success (Hossin & Tisdell, 2003). The author further argued that "Male unionists have rarely been supportive of women forming their own interest groups or female unions to address the special concerns of women workers". This article also touches upon another significant point which says that male union leaders and activists have little understanding of the problems and needs of women workers. With it being very difficult for women to voice their problems to the male union leaders, it makes it even more challenging for them to form their own unions. This itself is a prime example of representation of gender inequality.

Similarly, DBL Group (2023) reveals that women in the RMG sector lack representatives in labor unions as well as other bodies where they could raise voice for their fundamental rights and favorable working environment. Women were especially at risk since they were perceived as being

more submissive and less inclined to ask for better pay and working conditions. Importantly, experienced researchers in this domain like Islam and Jantan, (2019) argued that women's representation in managerial and leadership positions in RMG industry has shown no improvement where around 95% of line supervisor tasks are held by men, compared to 5% of women. So, lower representation of women in such bodies further exacerbated the risk of perceiving women as more submissive and thus creating higher gender disparities. The author further reveals that around 83.8% of women employees are in lower positions while only 67.5% of men work in lower grades. So, in the male-dominant society of Bangladesh, women face a number of direct and indirect barriers in trying to move up the ladder in representative leaders.

2.3. Factors Contributing to Gender Inequality in RMG

Based on both qualitative and quantitative techniques, numerous studies have been conducted to uncover the factors behind the persistence of gender disparities in RMG sectors. In Bangladesh, deep rooted gender stereotypes and societal norms immensely shape the working environment and garment sector is not an exception (Kabeer, 1994). A study conducted by Hossin (2012) found out that social cultural factors like ingrained cultural belief and gender norms are primary factors which holds women from reaching to higher or the same level of men. The author further reveals that societal norms often dictate about male being inherently superior to females and these social construct norms result in limiting women's roles both within internal (family) as well as outdoor (work place). Women are commonly said to be suitable for basic tasks and are alienated from higher positions roles which are dominantly run by male counterparts. Strictly holding onto such biased norms and social expectations results in women having unequal access to education as well as vocational opportunities compared to men. Similarly, a study conducted by Matsuura and Teng

(2020) found out that women's opportunity to acquire education and upskilling training which may reward them with upward mobility and superior positions has been hindered by excessive time they devote to domestic duties. This distinction of task based on sex or gender clearly reflects the profound effect that both social and cultural expectations play on the livelihood of Bangladesh's women.

The study by Brown (1970); Charls and Brown (1981); Nanda, Nath & Macias (2024) also agrees that the distribution of labor by sex (social construct) results in perpetuating gender inequality. Brown argued that the distribution of labor by sex cannot be fully explained by biological, psychological, or physiological understanding. The author further discusses Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, and sociologist Emile Durkheim's earliest explanations of the division of labor by sex and criticized them for favoring biological or psychological elements of humans. The fundamental thrust of Browns' thesis is that, rather than biological or psychological differences, we should pay greater attention to how childcare responsibilities affect women's economic or subsistence employment. So, in order to boost the number of women working in the economy, either the childcare burden should be lessened or work should be flexible enough to accommodate nurturing children (Brown, 1970; Nanda et al., 2024).

In addition, holding different aspects of preferring male over female employees by factory owners also gives birth to gender inequality in the RMG sector. A study conducted by Anker et al., (2003) found out that women labor is mostly preferred in the garment sector owing to negative aspects such as being docile in nature, working at lower wages than men, and having scarcity of alternative employment opportunities for them. The idea that women were more docile than men has endured for thousands of years in many civilizations and it is as well prevalent in countries like Bangladesh, where gender inequity and patriarchal traditions were deeply rooted. The author further said that

factory owners were able to take advantage of female workers by giving them less compensation and exposing them to hazardous working conditions on the grounds that they were more compliant and easier to control than males. Similar results were found out by Matsuura and Teng (2020) where it was reflected that a major root of this attitude is due to ingrained economic principles that firms will seek to hire different types of workers as long as the wage rate differs between them. The other reason highlighted was the belief of "Male can work at faster pace as compared to female", as well as male's "output is higher" than that of female employees. So, these factors are true in the instance of gender gap in Bangladesh's garment industry due to the fact the firms prefer to hire women as it is perceived that they will work for lower pay than men.

2.4. Management's Approach on Gender Disparities

In response to the identified challenges, numerous measures have been adopted within the RMG factory focusing on both direct interventions as well as changes in broader policy. The significant investment has been made by government entities, national and international organizations to improve the working environment in the RMG sector, particularly after the incidents of Rana Plaza in the year 2013. Such effort results in creating fair working conditions for both genders in the RMG industry. Most of the RMG industry in Bangladesh are projected to follow the international labor guidelines which calls for fair wages to both genders for works of equal value (Hossain, 2012). It was found out that the Bangladesh RMG sectors witnessed decline in women's workers compared to the past and persistent gender inequality policy in RMG sectors are said to be one of the factors for such issues (Matsuura, 2020; Rahman et al., 2023). In response, RMG sectors started to practice gender neutral policies with the aim to meet the demands of the women's workers and also to encourage them to take part in the job market. For instance, the policies ensure that the

daily wages are transparent and set fair and equally according to the nature and the degree of the work instead of the employee's gender. Furthermore, efforts have been made by RMG sectors to upgrade education as well as vocational training (skilling & upskilling programs) in the areas which are relevant to RMG industry (Lee, 2019). These measures were possible with the help of ILO and other NGOs where they have collaborated with RMG industry to provide training intended to promote women employees as well as furnish them to succeed in higher positions (supervisor or managerial roles), which are normally controlled by men (Nanda, Nath, & Macias, 2024). The aforementioned measures are key to bridging disparities in gender in the RMG industry as it assures fairness in women's wages while also providing them fair opportunities for career growth and promotion.

2.5. Unexplored Research Area

All the aforementioned researchers centered on the inequality faced by women in RMG factories as well as the percentage or the quantity of women working in Bangladesh's job market. For instance, inequality in the ownership of the factory, wage gap, disparities in the working environments of RMG, and unfair distributions of work between genders received focus from all the researchers. Hossin (2012); Kabeer (1994) found out that deep rooted gender stereotypes and societal norms immensely shape the working environment and the causes of gender inequality in the Bangladesh RMG industry is not an exception. Additionally, the study conducted by Woodruff et al., (2020) found out that recruiting a higher number of women supervisors yields multiple rewards including deeper understanding of what is needed as well as the challenges of women workers. It is also reported that female supervisors are indeed capable in guiding workers, interacting with one another's as well as fixing the loopholes that occur within RMG industry. Moreover, promoting women to managerial roles reaps better output, superior quality product, as

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well as improves general well-being of women employees. However, the problem is that the research on the reason or factors for having a handful of women in upper scale jobs like supervisor, CEO, and managerial post, (Quality Job) in the RMG industry is missing. Thus, given the gender disparities in leadership roles persist in the RMG sector, this research will explore reasons for various barriers to upward mobility of women in their career which was not explored by Hossain (2012); Kabeer (1994); Rahman et al. (2023); Woodruff et al. (2020). Additionally, this research will not just focus on the general view of the gender inequality in the RMG sectors, but it will particularly focus on the inequality of women's leadership in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. By understanding the boundaries and the impact that they have, this research will undoubtedly help to close the research gap. Furthermore, it will assist the government in drafting regulations to prevent and mitigate gender discriminatory behaviors in the RMG and it will ensure a fair and equal working environment for all genders. Addressing gender imbalance issues will also help to harness optimum potential of human resources and contribute to economic development of the country. Most importantly, it will assist in achieving SDG-5's target 5.5. as well as SDG-5's indicator 5.5.2 that says "ensuring active participation as well as fair opportunities for leadership (power of decision-making) to all women in every phase of life" (SDG-5 target 5.5) and "entertaining females to take management and supervisory posts (SDG-5 indicator 5.5.2) respectively (Roser, 2023; Dalampira & Nastis, 2020).

2.6. Conceptual Framework

This research was based on the Dual System Theory, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding gender inequality, particularly focusing on the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism. The given model (figure 1) sheds light on how the structural nature of gender inequality is embedded and sustained through social and economic practices. It also examines how society's

beliefs and economic systems nurture and sustain that inequality. By examining the relationship between patriarchal norms and capitalist impositions, The Dual System Theory helps to clarify the following aspects;

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Interplay of Patriarchy and Capitalism in RMG  │
│              (Dual System Theory)                │
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Patriarchal Norms (Gender Roles and Biases)

Capitalist Norms (Profit Maximization and Labor Exploitation

Disparities in Bangladesh's RMG

Wage Disparities

Job Segregation

Glass Ceiling

Disparities in leadership Position
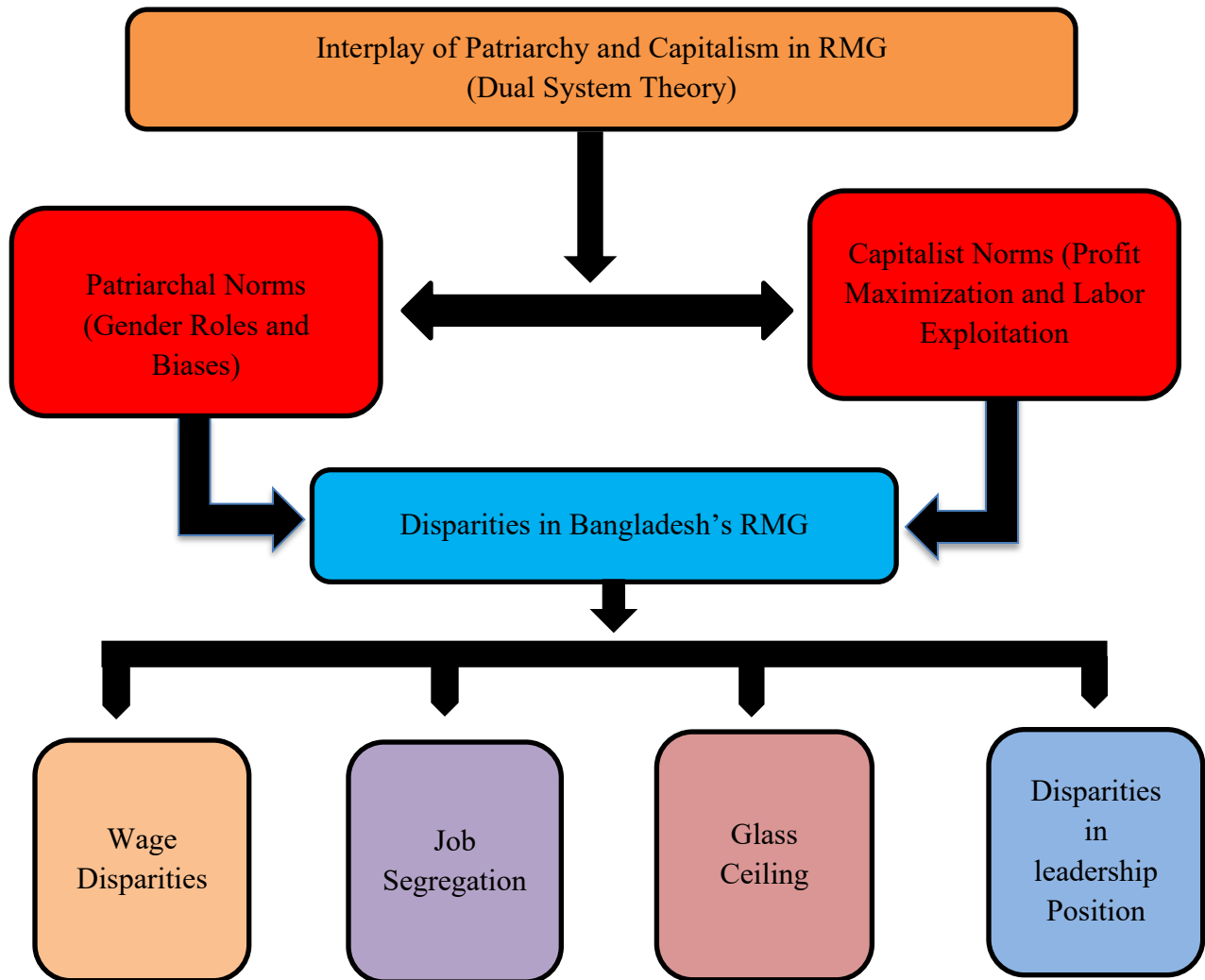
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (Source: Prepared by an Author)

Heidi Hartmann, a postmodern feminist, developed the concept of "Dual System Theory". At its core, the theory states that patriarchy and capitalism are two distinct systems that work in tandem to sustain the existing gender hierarchy (Hartmann, 1979). Moreover, it assists in exploring how the two oppression systems of patriarchy and capitalism, reinforce gendered divisions in the labor

market. Dual-systems theory garnered ideas from Marxist and radical feminist theories, arguing that both patriarchy as well as capitalism shape contemporary gender relations (Islam, 2016).

Despite differing analytical approaches, feminists agree that both systems are fundamental to understanding labor market inequality. Patriarchy limits women's rights through cultural traditions and gender stereotypes, such as religious barriers to women's labor market participation (Raihan et al. 2019). However, Hartmann (1979) maintains that capitalism on the other hand creates material differences between male and female workers, like job segregation and wage gaps. The author further pointed that economic inequalities are maintained by capitalism, while patriarchy perpetuates gender differences through societal norms. Although capitalism has tangible impacts, patriarchy operates on an ideological level, appearing to lack a material basis in modern society.

Additionally, it is also said that men exploit women both at work and at home. Men benefit from job segregation, while women do more household labor even when they are also employed. These forms of exploitation reinforce each other, making women vulnerable in both the labor market and marital life. Even if capitalism changes employment practices somewhat, patriarchy predates capitalism, and the exploitation of women's labor is not unique to capitalist societies. Thus, both patriarchy and capitalism affect women's equal participation and rights in the labor market.

Since Dual System Theory helps to elucidate disparities, it is also relevant for examining the limited number of women in leadership roles within Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector. Thus, Hartmann (1979) concept of Dual System Theory was used in this research to understand why there are so few women in leadership roles in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, even though most workers are women.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

The research employed a qualitative approach consisting of in-depth interviews, key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD) as data collection strategies. Fieldwork for the study was carried out from June 24, 2024 to July 11, 2024.

3.2. The Reasoning Behind the Qualitative Method Approach

Results: Qualitative research allowed us to explore the complexity of empowerment as experienced by women in the RMG sector. It enabled researchers to unearth the subtleties and complexities possibly missed by quantitative methods (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). This approach aided in contextually understanding how and at what level the empowerment of women is experienced in the context of Bangladesh where such RMG activities occur. Moreover, it facilitated the collection of rich data by methods (like in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant observation) so as to provide a holistic account of women's lived experiences. And even, as in many cases the most profound insights arise from stories either unexpected or unseen. Thus, qualitative research is very useful when it comes to reveal such stories which usually remain hidden in quantitative studies (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024). Therefore, when assessing other methods to promote women's empowerment in the RMG sector, it is found that qualitative research has much more advantages than others and thus, this method can be considered as better one owing to all the benefits offered by them.

3.2. Development of the Questionnaire

To complete qualitative research, in-depth interviews as well as KII, and FGD were conducted with workers, supervisors, management, unions and organizations. For every group, specific questionnaires were designed since their knowledge areas differ. The questions to be asked were first selected by referring to the research questions (RQ) and study goals. The designing of the questions was geared towards the main objectives of the research which included, for example the questions on work hindrances, management, and gender. Themes were selected in view of both the purpose of the study and what was found in the literature review which provided guidance on areas that required further investigation. Each questionnaire was detailed enough to address the participant's role. For example, women were questioned on their engagement on daily tasks and management was probed on how they made decisions. It was aimed to ensure that the questions fitted well within the research scope of the study. All the questionnaires were presented to the supervisor who approved the contents as relevant to the study.

3.4. Study Sites

The selection of study sites was based on the density of the participants in each area. Thus, interviews were carried out in two main regions: Gazipur, which is the industrial center of Bangladesh and hosts most of the RMG employees and their supervisors, and Dhaka, where I strategized on interviewing management staff given that most of the RMG head offices were based there.

3. 5. Sampling Procedure and Study Sample for Qualitative Study

In this study, Purposive sampling technique was applied which is also known as judgmental or selective sampling. A purposive sampling technique selects participants based on particular characteristics and criteria that comply with the purpose of the study. The focus, however, is on particular demographic features of a population that will best enable the researcher to address their research aims.

Rationale for Following Purposive Sampling Methods;

Relatedness and Grasp of Insights: There is no second doubt that purposive sampling technique is very useful in exploring the insights of women's empowerment in Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector. This is because it allows for the inclusion of women who are directly relevant to the sector. It also allows for capturing empowerment in various levels; workers, supervisors, management, and union members all of whom contribute in different ways. In addition to this, purposive sampling ensures that age factors, years of experience, organizational roles as well as whether those individuals have been participants in empowerment drives or not. This helps in exploring the aspects of social status, economic independence and decision-making power.

II. *Saving Resources and Time:* Purposive sampling is also useful given the possible limitations in time, budget, and accessibility. This is because it helps in maximizing the use of available resources through targeting the most relevant participants. The importance of this method is that it helps in including key informants that are aloof to the general participants enabling the capturing of essential information while minimizing resources into the study.

3.6. Methods of Data Collection

3.6.1. Secondary Data

Data for this research on the study of women's leadership in Bangladesh RMG sector was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The secondary data was collected from relevant literature such as published academic journal articles, annual reports of local and international organizations, similar research studies, and mass media articles. This evidence is further supported by the reviews of in-depth and key informant interviews as well as focus group discussions. Sources were cited when required to substantiate particular analyses.

3.6.2. Primary Data Collection

The primary data collection process for this study consisted of three methods: 7 in-depth interviews, 3 Key Informant interviews (KIIs), and 3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), employing different questionnaires for each method. In-depth interviews gave out richer information from individual respondents while KIIs targeted specific respondents on the basis of the knowledge and information they possess that is pertinent to the study. FGDs, however, were aimed at general discussions to elicit different views on empowerment issues within the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector. And the details were shown in the given table 2.1, 2.2, & 2.3.

I. In-depth Interview.

The given table (table 1.1) demonstrates the in-depth participants for this study. In total, 7 in-depth interviews were carried out consisting of 2 RMG workers (1 male and 1 female) 3 supervisors (1 male and 2 female respondents) and 2 management staff (2 male). The in-depth interviews were done outside the factory premises, in the vicinity of the respondents. The nature of the interview

was a face-to-face interview. In the process of participant recruitment, efforts were made not to interrupt the production process of the respective RMG. All the interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the interviewees before the transcription process commenced, and results were generated both from the audio recordings and from the notes taken during the interviews. Each interview took on the average about 30 to 40 minutes.

Interviews	Number of Interviews	Total	Men	Women
Interview for RMG Workers	2	2	1	1
Interviews for RMG Supervisors	3	3	1	2
Interview of RMG Management	2	2	2	0
Total	7 In-depth Interview	7	4	3
Table 1.1. Sample Size of In-depth Interview				

II. Key Informant Interview (KII)

The table below (table 1.2) illustrates how and who participated in every KII conducted. Each of the KIIs comprised three individuals, one of whom represented an organization (female), one researcher (male), and one staff of the Union (female) hence the total number of KII participants were 2 females and 1 male. The interviewer (with permission) audio taped and took notes during the interview and afterwards transcribed the tape and her notes. Among the three KII respondents, two chose to conduct a virtual (online) interview and one opted for the F2F interview which was held at their respective office as preferred by each participant. Interviews took about 30 min to an hour and were conducted in English because all participants are fluent enough at reading, writing and speaking the language.

Interviews	Number of Interviews	Total	Men	Women
Organization (Who are working with Women Advancement)	1	1	0	1
Researcher (Who are Actively Doing Research on RMG)	1	1	1	0
Union Leaders (Who Supports Women Empowerment)	1	1	0	1
Total	3 Key Informant Interviews	3	2	2
Table 1.2. Sample Size of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)				

III. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

The table 1.3 illustrates the profile of Focused Group Discussion (FGD) participants. For this study, the researcher has used 3 FDGs in total comprising (i). 1 FGD with RMG Workers (n=5: 1M, 4F), (ii). 1 FGD with RMG Supervisors (n=3: 1M, 2F), and (iii). 1 FGD with RMG Management (n=4: 2M, 2F). Each FGD was conducted as a face-to-face interview in the locations preferred by the participants for their convenience. The FDG with the workers and supervisors was conducted at their homes in Gazipur on 5th July, 2024 with the help of a language translator. However, the FGD with the management team was held at the managing office in Gulshan Dhaka on 6th July 2024. This was possible because the management participants were all graduates and spoke good English, thus I had no language barrier while conducting this FGD.

FGD	Number of FGDs	Total Participants	Men	Women
FGD for RMG Management	1	4	2	2
FGD for RMG Supervisors	1	3	1	2
FGD for RMG Workers	1	5	1	4
Total	3 FGDs	12	4	8
Table 1.3. Sample Size of Focus Group Discussion (FGD)				

As for the FGDs, a number of steps were taken to ensure that the participants were at ease and comfortable enough to speak out their mind or to express their views. Each discussion ranged from 30 minutes and went up to one hour depending on the level of interaction within the issue raised. All FGDs were recorded with permission of the participants and notes were taken during the FGDs. These recordings were necessary to reproduce the discussion verbatim during the analysis. Therefore, the information and data derived from In-depth Interview, KIIs and FGDs were integrated in the data analysis in each respective chapter of this report.

3.7. Analysis of Data

Stage I: Data Collection and Initial Cleaning

Having received the data from the field, I proceeded to the next phase of the study, which is the data cleaning process. This activity entailed assessment of the data that has been gathered for any possible issues, and also ensuring that all interviews and field notes have been conducted and filed accordingly.

Stage II: Transcription of Interviews

In the wake of cleaning the data, interviews that had been recorded orally in the form of audio discs were turned into written scripts. This was a crucial step of qualitative analysis as it enabled every response from the participants to be captured in transcripts, including significant quotations and other verbal indicators. Furthermore, to protect the identities of individuals who took part in this study, their real names have not been used in the report, rather reflected in code number 1, 2, and 3 as their identification.

Stage III: Coding, Categorization, and Thematic Analysis.

After transcribing the interviews, I started the coding stage in which I focused on them, patterns and concepts that are significant in the study. The data was processed systematically, arranging responses together in order to answer the research questions and aims. This aspect made the analysis more manageable as it organized the overwhelming amount of data into more relevant sections of the study. After the coding and other categorization, I went ahead and did a thematic analysis to explore the patterns that had surfaced further. It was during this analysis that I found out that there were four main themes and several sub themes to each of them. Thematic approaches were adopted as a result of the data collected appeals i.e. frequencies across interviews, KII, FGD and their relevance to the overall study focus to purpose analysis.

Themes were selected based on relevance to the research questions. I analyzed the coded data, and noted down where there were common threads between different concepts so that I could group them into 3 broad themes. Themes were subdivided into two or three sub-themes to further explore each of them. Their thematic arrangement allowed me to establish relations among the different

themes and offered a broader perspective of the scope of issues covered in this paper that enriched our understanding on the investigation theme.

Stage IV: Interpretation and Synthesis

In the final stage of the research process, I elucidated the developed themes and integrated my findings in respect to the objectives of the research. This entailed making inferences regarding the trends that had been discovered in the course of thematic analysis and placing them within the context of the research problem. For the purpose of the perspective that I had above, I undertook a comparative analysis of the themes that emerged from the data due to some similarities and differences. This enabled a detailed analysis of how certain barriers to the advancement of women leadership in the RMG sector are different compared to other sectors and how cultural factors and organizational factors are dissimilar.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions

4.1. Demographic Profile of the RMG Respondents

4.1.1 Age Disaggregation of Workers

Table given table (table 1.1) underlines the gender inequality in the workforce in the case of the RMG industry concerning the age groups of male and female workers. It can be noted that for the younger age group (19-25), 100 percent of the workers are male while only 11.12 percent of the worker population in this range is female. This indicates that it is more common for the male gender to join the workforce at a relatively young age than females who might face societal bottlenecks if they enter the job market at a young age than their male counterparts. Aging Women are also depicted vividly in the 26-35 age group. In the case of women within the 26-30 age and the 31-35 categories, the composition of the workforce stands at 44.44 percent while no represented male workforce is found in these groups. This scenario might infer that females work or resume working later in their lives after perhaps taking care of children or family responsibilities which could postpone their upward mobility in their careers.

Age Groups	Total % of Workers	% of Men	% of Women
Below 18	0.00	0.00	0.00
19 - 25	38.4	100	11.12
26 – 30	30.8	0.00	44.44
31 – 35	30.8	0.00	44.44
36 – 40	0.00	0.00	0.00
41 and above	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	100	100	100
Table 1.1. Age Disaggregation of Workers			

Surprisingly, neither men nor women have any workers over the age of 35. This might imply that there is a lot of worker turnover in the RMG industry or that perhaps most women, in particular, do not stay in the job long enough to climb up the ranks. In addition, the lack of older women workers would also mean that employment on a long-term basis is no easy task, considering internal factors such as non-favorable career growth opportunities, gender biases or poor policies addressing the issue of work and family.

4.1.2. Marital Status of RMG Workers

Table 1.2 illustrates the marital status of employees in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry (based on the total respondents of this research). Findings revealed that only 7.7% of the overall population is single, zero being male and 11.11% female. This finding indicates that women in the RMG sector are more likely to join the workforce after getting married, and for this reason there may be a challenge for them to be in the upper hierarchy of the organization since they will have its responsibilities. On marriage, it is worth noting that a great majority of the workforce in the RMG sector, 84.6%, are married. This category is largely male in composition (considering that 100% of men are married) while 77.78% of the women are married. Such a high percentage of employed people who are married means that, particularly women who face such issues as work and house chores, are discouraging women from progressing professionally.

Additionally, around 7.7% of the total participants consisted of divorced persons who are all found to be women and no men were found to be under this category. A woman who goes through a divorce might have added responsibilities on her such as caring for her children which makes it hard for her to focus on pursuing a higher position in her career. Furthermore, the data points out

how the workforce composition by gender also affects how marital status is distributed among the workforce. All the men in the RMG sector are married but the women have different categories where some are married while some are not and others are divorced. This implies that there are no career-related disadvantages in men based on their marital status like those who are found in women. Women who are divorced or single with dependents may also experience cultural and financial barriers that inhibit them from taking up leadership positions.

Marital Status	Total % of Workers	% of Men	% of Women
Unmarried	7.7	0.00	11.11
Married	84.6	100	77.78
Widowed	0.00	0.00	0.00
Divorced	7.7	0.00	11.11
Single Parent	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	100	100	100

Table 1.2. Marital Status of RMG Workers

One in all, the marital status data reveals that one of the factors affecting career development in the RMG industry is the presence of traditional gender roles and expectations in society. Often women's careers depend on whether they are married or single, as married and divorced women might be limited in their career growth in comparison to men. To counteract these challenges, it requires more policies that are conducive to women raising families while working like flexible work hours and provision of day care facilities to ensure these women can balance work and home endeavors and seek further growth within the hierarchy of the industry.

4.1.3. Educational Background by Gender (Workers & Supervisors)

The given table (Table 1.3.) shows the levels of education of workers and supervisors in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry and demonstrates the gender imbalance as regards education within the respondents. Most of the employees are illiterate with 57.14% of the workers not having any formal education. This group of uneducated workers consists mostly of women who are 75% of the uneducated labor force and men consists of only 33.3%. It shows that women in the RMG sector have very little education and thus, their chances of rising up to a higher rank are limited. Secondary education is completed by 14.28% of the respondents with women again having a higher share (25%) compared to their male counterparts (0%). It shows that while a number of women receive some education at the basic level, it does help them little to get them to the upper ranks in the industry. In terms of secondary education, 28.57% of the workers achieved this level of education but the category was dominated by men at 66.7% with no woman in the workforce having attained secondary education. This stark difference illustrates the level of educational inequality being experienced by women and makes it even more difficult for them to climb up the ladder to higher positions that may require a minimum of secondary education.

It is interesting to note that a high number of unqualified workers do exist, but not a single unqualified supervisor. This implies that education is fundamental in the hierarchy of the RMG industry. Nonetheless, it is interesting to observe that only women with a Primary and Secondary level of education have been able to take up supervisory roles. In regards to primary education, 50% of female supervisors belong to this category. It clearly depicts that even a woman who has basic education has the chance of being promoted to the ranks of a supervisor, but the chances are few. The majority of the supervisors are secondary-educated, making 66.7% of the total supervisors, and 100% of the male supervisors were shown to have achieved at least secondary

education. At the same time, 50 percent of women supervisors also possess secondary education, which suggests that women do require higher levels of education to achieve similar supervisory positions as men do in the RMG sectors.

Education Level	Total % of Workers	% of Men Workers	% of Women Workers	Total % of Supervisors	% of Men Supervisors	% of Women Supervisors
Un-educated	57.14	33.3	75.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Primary Education	14.28	0.00	25.00	33.3	0.00	50.00
Secondary Education	28.57	66.7	0.00	66.7	100	50.00
Higher Education	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Degree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 1.3. Educational Background by Gender (Workers & Supervisors)

4.2: Challenges Encountered by Women in Climbing up the Leadership Ladder of the RMG Sector

The challenges that prevent women from attaining leadership positions in the RMG sector are metaphorically represented in a pyramidical structure, which, in this case, suits the explanation of these challenges because of their layered nature. This hierarchy of obstacles personal, institutional, and cultural illustrates barriers at the individual level, the workplace setting, and at the level of society in general. Each of the layers serves as the base for the subsequent layer, demonstrating how individual struggles lead to challenges in the workplace and how those issues are linked to societal norms.

The ensuing figure represents a pyramid, depicting how the wider contexts of women's leadership are increasingly influential, from the individual to the workplace, and then to the society.
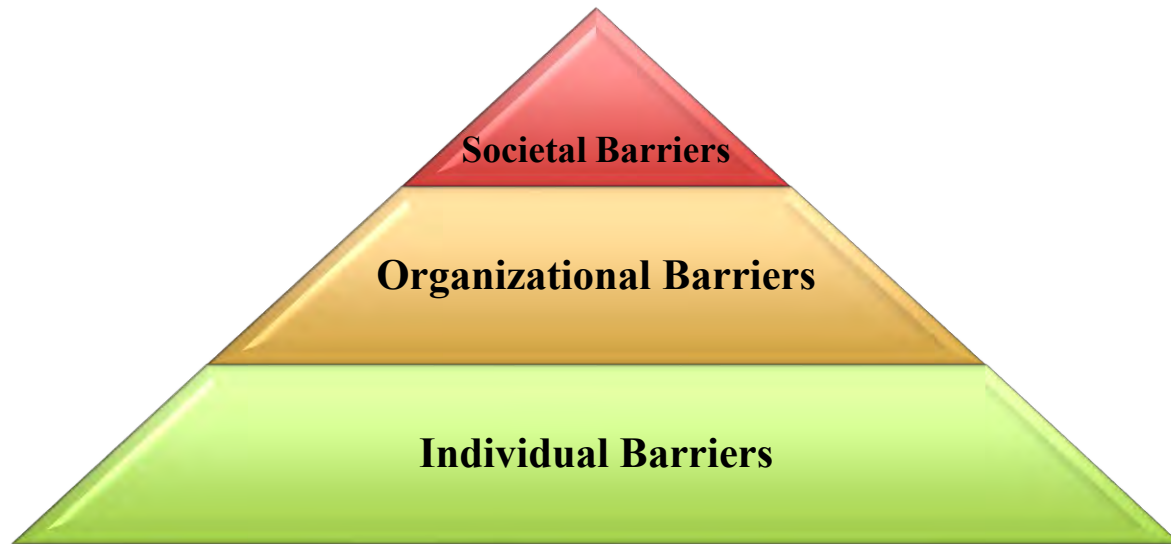

Figure 1. Pyramid Showing Barriers Faced by Women in Achieving Leadership Roles in RMG Sectors.

4.2.1. Individual Barriers (Base/bottom of the Pyramid)

Individual barriers sit within the basal portion of the pyramid. These are limitations at a personal level among females which prevent them from attaining higher leadership positions in RMG. This first layer is important because each personal obstacle such as (low education and domestic) problems are the main reasons as to why other challenges are constructed or create the base that fuels other hurdles.

I. Lack of Education

The deficit in educational attainment is also one of the most individualistic barriers for many. The majority of women in the RMG industry come from economically backward families where

education goes beyond reach. This concern has often been raised by the respondents where one of the respondents explained, *"I couldn't finish my education because my parents wanted me to work. I worked in a textile factory for the last 7 years. And now, growing into a management position seems impossible as I lack the necessary education".* This statement is indicative of a larger social ill: the unequal distribution of education among the populace, which hinders progression to management roles. In the RMG industry, most female workforce in the unskilled category remain seemingly unfit for management due to their educational qualifications. This educational shortage impairs their self-esteem and ambition as a result, they tend not to go for promotion opportunities.

II. Self-Reflection and Confidence

One of the more prominent barriers alongside lack of education is the self evaluation and self assurance barrier. The reason many women can not consider themselves capable of leadership positions is because of the culture that they have grown in. This is more pronounced in the RMG sector, where leadership positions are occupied by men. One of the respondents in the research study confessed, *"I work in the industry, but I hardly ever see women in management or senior roles, so at times I don't feel up to the task though I have been in this job for many years."* This 'impostor' phenomenon which is also fueled by perception of leadership as a masculine trait discourages many women to dream of climbing the career ladder.

III. Family Related Issues

Family duties and aspirations also significantly contribute towards individual level barriers. The majority of women do house chores and pursue careers at the same time which makes it difficult for them to save time and energy so that they can be in any leadership position. As one participant

noted, "*I even wish I could do more in the office but I have kids and a family to look after. It's not easy to do best in both worlds.*" This double-edged sword puts a 'brake' on females thus making them stagnate in their careers. The need to fulfill family commitments within the broader, work-related, performance expectations often results in women having little or no time to engage in leadership ambitions. So, it clearly depicts that family responsibilities cripple their capacity to socialize, pursue further education, or participate in training for leaders, therefore keeping them at the bottom social class.

4.2.2. Organizational Barriers (Middle Layer)

In the pyramid hierarchy, the organizational barriers are the ones that come above the individual barriers. These are hindrances encountered in the office that they shade women from being able to climb the leadership hierarchy. In the organizational context, the barriers are dependent on the system of beliefs held by the company, its procedures and the lack of assistance from peers and subordinates.

I. Unsupportive Management and Colleagues

Top management and colleagues' support is another important barrier. In the RMG sector, women elaborately expressed the absence of motivational or mentorship encouragement as compared to their male counterparts. For instance, one of the participants quoted, *"I have worked here for more than ten years, but none has ever told me there is a possibility of me taking new roles. It is always the men who are trained and promoted"*. Such lack of sponsoring and mentoring offers challenges particularly to women leaders as in most cases leadership development relies on social channels and structures inside the organization. With lack of coworkers and even top management's support,

it becomes hard for women to be viewed in leadership positions. This barrier is also worsened by the unbalanced gender presentation in the leadership structures where many men run the leadership pipelines.

II. Gender Disparity

In the RMG industry, gender discrimination continues to be a challenge. Career advancement is undermined by both overt and covert biases against women. As one woman noted in an interview: *"They will choose a man over me even if I'm the most qualified for the job because they feel that's an authoritative position and only a man can handle it."* This illustrates male-female inequality in the workplace and society as a whole, as to some, women would be seen unfit for leadership positions. Prejudice takes various shapes and forms, ranging from pay inequalities to lack of promotion opportunities. Even women who attain a leadership position risk being evaluated harshly by men or even their male counterparts working below them, which discourages them from seeking such opportunities.

III. Work Pressure

The RMG sector is characterized by a great deal of work pressure as the concentration is usually aimed at production targets. Such a workload imbalance makes it hard for women to advance into leadership positions which are always accompanied by different sets of responsibilities and long hours. One of the participants explains, *"I work so many hours already, and if I were to take on a leadership position, I do not feel that I would cope with the additional stress. The more salary they give, the more work pressure we have to endure—the salary is in proportion to the pressure of work."* This work pressure is even worse for women who, as discussed in the individual barriers

section, have a heavier family care obligation. Many women, as a result, consider the leadership requirements so high that it negatively impacts their private lives.

4.2.3. Societal Barriers (Top Layer)

Finally, it can be ascertained that the societal barriers are at the apex of the pyramid and give influence to both individual and organizational barriers. Women's opportunities in leadership are greatly impacted by global and local surroundings expectations and cultural pressure.

I. Social Pressure

The social setting of Bangladesh where the majority of the RMG industry is located presents challenges to women's leadership aspirations. It is culturally expected that Women prioritize the family and household and not career ambitions. This contributes to orienting the society that women do not have to work beyond a certain period. Another participant concurs, *"In my community, people still believe a woman's place is in the home and if she works too much in other fields, then she is considered to have neglected her family".* This societal pressure makes it hard for a woman to hold leadership positions because of the judgmental society and its expectations which are very hard to defy.

II. Gender-Related Challenges

It is certainly not debatable that gender is a critical factor when it comes to leadership positions. In most areas of Bangladesh, decision making and leading are often regarded as men's domain, with women considered as secondary. One of the participants shared that, *"There are a lot of people who think that women can't withstand the pressure of running factories. They don't take us*

strongly". This social construct of gender expectation is very prevalent in society and thus it is difficult for women to ascend into ranks which have traditionally been occupied by men. Even when women do get the top positions, they are still often watched and expected to deliver more than their male colleagues.

III. Cultural Norms and Expectations

In Bangladesh, cultural norms have a significant impact on the construction of expectations about what type(s) of women then should be at home versus in the workplace. Those norms and habits (which continue to serve as reminders that only men are truly leader-like) build structures of invisible resistance which women have yet had to subvert in order to claim their rightful positions of power. As one participant said, *"Leadership has always been perceived to be a male activity and although some changes are being witnessed, there is still a long journey ahead. They thought women could not lead, and everything else is so much harder".* Expectations imposed by the society are also rooted in the policies and practices of the organization. For example, in recruitment and promotion processes, women are not seen as potential leaders because they do not fit the traditional image of a leader in contrast to men who work with them.

All in all, at the very bottom level, individual barriers stand, which refers to all personal challenges which serve as stepping stones in the career advancement of any woman. In such a scenario, without overcoming social issues such as low educational standards, poor self-esteem, and the various other challenges faced by women, it's even unrealistic to expect them to have a desire to take up leadership positions, hence their position at the bottom. Moving up the hierarchy, organizational barriers sit on top of individual barriers because the overarching culture and policies of an organization tend to either promote or inhibit the individual barriers. For instance, the

absence of managerial support can heighten one's self-depreciating tendencies. In contrast, an encouraging environment where women work can help them combat their negative traits. The topmost layers hold societal constraints which act at the broadest level hence the lowest in the pyramidal structure. Society provides the gender expectations and cultures that influence the individual as well as the organizational barriers. For example, men's perception of a woman's place in the house affects how confident the woman is in her leadership capabilities and also how she is seen at her work. These top-down influences mean that societal barriers are felt throughout the structure, making them widespread and hard to address. This is due to the fact that every layer of the pyramid serves to justify and perpetuate the others, erecting a multi-tiered hierarchy that women must forcefully ascend if they are ever able to achieve leadership. In the end, overcoming these barriers necessitates an approach that addresses individual empowerment, organizational culture change and societal reform.

4.3. Trajectory of Women in Leadership: An Upward Movement During An Overall Downturn

The figure below (figure 2) highlights the reasons behind the rising trend of women taking leadership positions in the RMG sector amidst the declining women workforce in general.
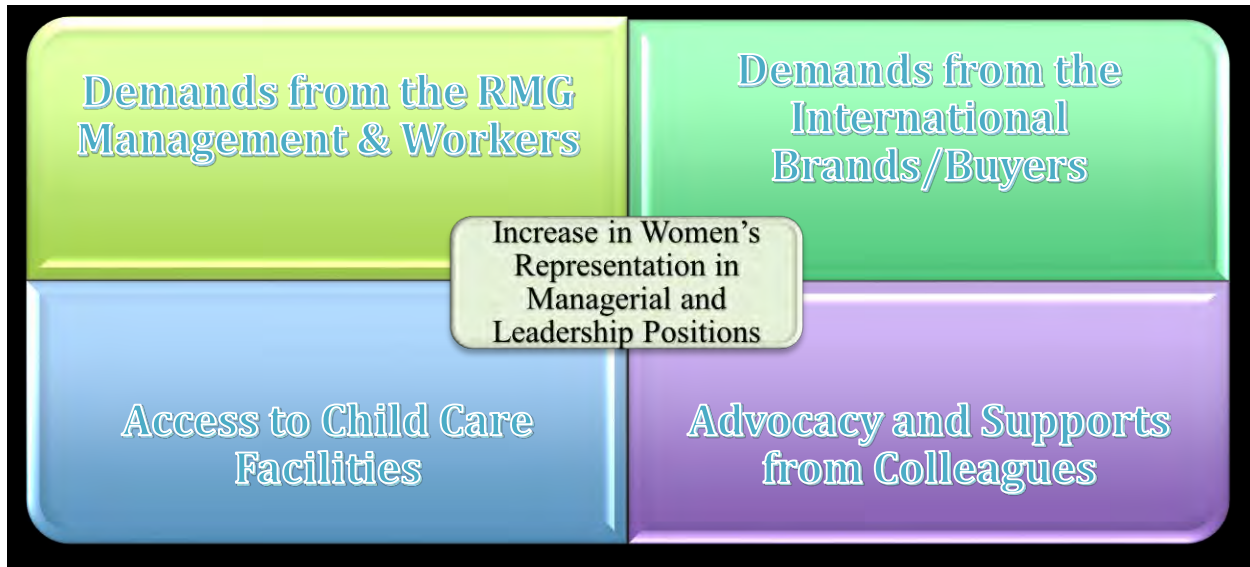
Figure 2. Showing Reasons for Increasing Women's Representation in Managerial and Leadership Positions in the RMG in Recent Years

4.3.1. Demanded by RMG's Management and Workers

The increasing trend towards women taking up supervisory roles especially in the RMG management is attributable to a direct demand by RMG management. During the FGD with RMG managements, one of the respondents said that, *"Female supervisors tend to be more proficient than their male counterparts by 2.98%. This efficiency gap, which has been reported to improve production by approximately 45 numbers, has prompted management to focus on the hiring of more women supervisors".* Such an approach pertaining to efficiency shows that there is an understanding of the worth of women in leadership positions. Furthermore, it is reported that many female workers prefer a manager or supervisors of the same gender, believing that their concerns and challenges will be better understood by them compared to male leaders. This in turn promotes teamwork and enhances workplace happiness resulting in greater productivity. Hence, this leads

to the structural changes in RMG feminization for the top management positions, as such women's leadership potential is perceived as beneficial by the RMG companies management.

4.3.2. Demand from International Buyers and Brands

The external pressure arising from international buyers and brands also significantly contributes to the mass movement and increase of women in leadership roles. Some of these brands have developed an internal policy with respect to gender equality and seeking to fill higher management posts with more women. Like one of the focus group discussion participants stated, *"We have found that the products produced under the supervision of women were of higher quality as compared to those produced under the supervision of men"*. This is what made it more justifiable to elevate women into managerial positions in the RMG sectors. Additionally, quite a few worldwide brands also embrace gender diversity, and call for it as part of their business policies. Since RMG factories serve these brands, they also make necessary changes in their management and organizational structure in accordance with the demands of their foreign clients. In this manner it becomes necessary to enhance the presence of women in leadership roles. It is this external stimulus that has played the most significant role in uplifting women in the sector, enabling the factories to comply with the global standards and to upgrade the internal processes of the factories at the same time.

4.3.3. Availability of Child Care Services

Moreover, improved access to childcare facilities within the factories is another essential aspect. In the course of the FGD, the participants pointed out that the introduction of childcare and breastfeeding breaks has motivated most women to resume work after the end of maternity leave. This has partially helped eliminate one of the major setbacks in career growth for women: working

mothers are often unable to juggle between work and the family, which creates conflict. Providing such supporting infrastructure to the women is one of the leading reasons behind women continuing their work in the RMG sectors and start taking up managerial and supervisors positions. The ability to juggle work and family activities without one taking priority over the other serves as a positive incentive for women to obtain and retain management positions. In addition, the existence of such policies demonstrates that RMG management is making efforts to keep its female workers and nurture their growth in the company.

4.3.4. Advocacy and Support from Coworkers in a Leadership Positioning

International and local support networks for female colleagues in leadership positions have played a pivotal role in increasing the number of women in positions of power. Since gender equality has become a highly regarded agenda and there are many stories of female supervisors who have garnered positions at higher levels i.e. line chief and assistant production manager. This acts as a reinforcer to other women in the industry and they become more inspired or motivated to take up certain positions as they increasingly see the women in their sectors grow careers. Through such examples, a cycle of positive reinforcement is established making it a conducive atmosphere where women are motivated to aspire for top positions. Availability of mentorship, encouragement and clear career progression is what motivates the women to take more challenges and seek for higher positions than they currently occupy. Furthermore, the efforts made by RMG management to promote women empowerment is a clear indication of changing patterns within the sector. More and more female leadership is being embraced and it is considered as a necessary step in addressing disparities in the field of working positions.

To put it all together, it can be said that there may be a general reduction in women employees in the RMG sector owing to several reasons including starting their own businesses and societal

changes, however those who remain are progressively empowered to take up leadership roles. The factors include the need for women supervisors by the management as well as international buyers, provision of childcare facilities, implementing women friendly policies, and women empowerment activism. Therefore it can be concluded that, even if the overall total of female workers is declining, those that are left in the workforce are in a healthier and more appreciative environment that encourages them to work at the top without undermining their roles and inputs. Gradually, but certainly, the RMG sector is changing its leadership sphere by turning the table and utilizing the efficacy, compassion and managerial capabilities that come with women.

Data Interpretation

I.Effect or Family Responsibility on Women Advancement in the RMG Sector

The insights presented in the given figure (figure 1) shed more light on this issue; do household chores limit women's participation in supervisory roles in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry? The results illustrated in the graph, unanimously depict the views of 13 participants, all of whom, without exception, concurred that family responsibilities hinder women from such leadership positions.
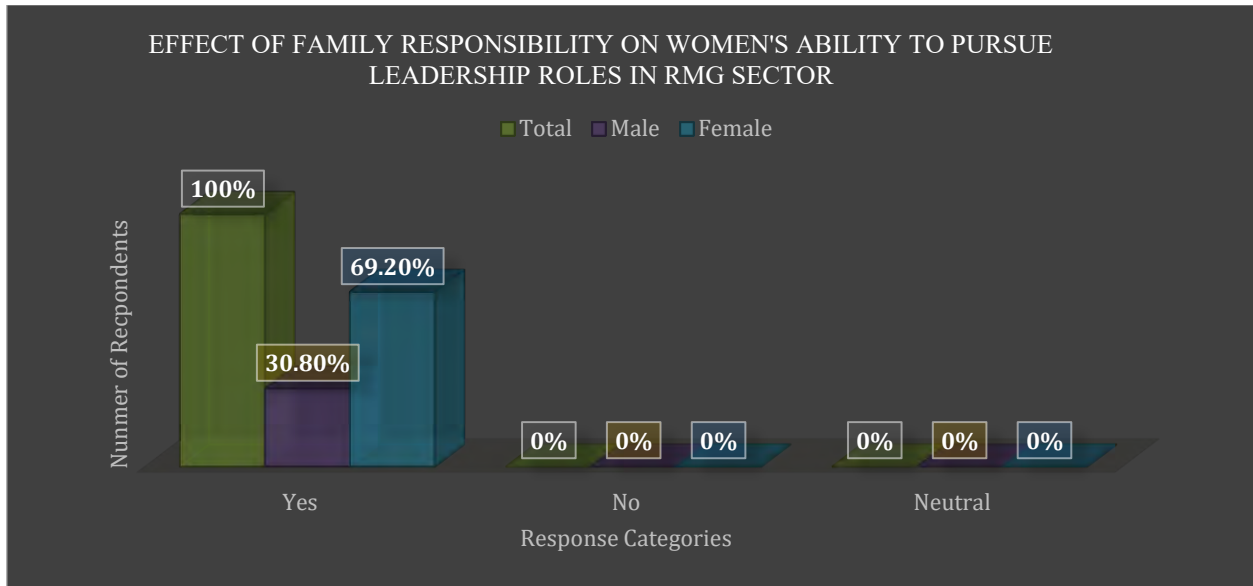
Figure 1. Showing the effect of family responsibility in women's advancement in RMG.

From the research responses, every participant without fail answered "Yes" to the question raised. This level of agreement indicates a common belief that is held by women working in RMG programmes about the barriers that they have to overcome in order to integrate family and career aspirations. The overwhelming nature of this belief is portrayed in the graph, as 100 percent of respondents agreed to it. One respondent during an in-depth interview said: *"To engage in additional responsibilities at work is the last thing one can entertain when one is expected to play the role of 'the' homemaker. Yes, I would like to be a supervisor, but I can't afford the time because family comes first".* This quote illustrates the major challenge faced by most women involved in RMG sector economic activities. Striking a balance between work and family for women leads to an unwillingness to consider taking up supervisory positions, which would require even more time, energy, and dedication.

Additionally, during the FGD with RMG workers, one of the female participants shared that; "*In case my spouse and his parents are not available, I must stay at home to look after the kids. If I fight for more responsibilities at work, I will be labeled as a bad mother. So, it is not worth the*

sacrifice." This reinforces the fact that many women especially in traditional families face such cultural and social pressures. Over and above this, there is also the fear of societal judgment and such fears incapacitate women even when opportunities for leadership are available and they have the competence. The collective 'Yes' on the graph hence indicates how widespread the concern is with the participants. Regardless of factors such as age or marital status, or the number of children, all the women shared one sentiment family responsibilities serve as an impediment to the growth of one's career. The selected response option of 'No' and 'Unsure' not being endorsed by any participant is an indicator of the fact that they have a clear perception of the issue at hand.

II. Access to Separate Trainings for the Women in the RMG Sector

The presented bar graph (figure 2.1) illustrates the responses from participants on the availability of separate training and skill enhancement opportunities for women, in order to encourage their representation in managerial positions within the workplaces in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector. Out of a total of 19 participants, 13 responses confirmed such opportunities are not available, while 4 for "Yes" and 2 were "Neutral". Additionally, 67% of the respondents (38.5% men & 61.5% women) hold the opinion that the garment industry does not provide any special training programs for women. This serves as a clear manifestation pointing out that there are very few or no trainings likely designed for women who might need to take up supervisory positions. A mere share of two respondents 21% (50% male & 50% female) respondents claim that they have such training being provided to them by their employers but another 11% (50% male & 50% female) remained neutral about such provisions.
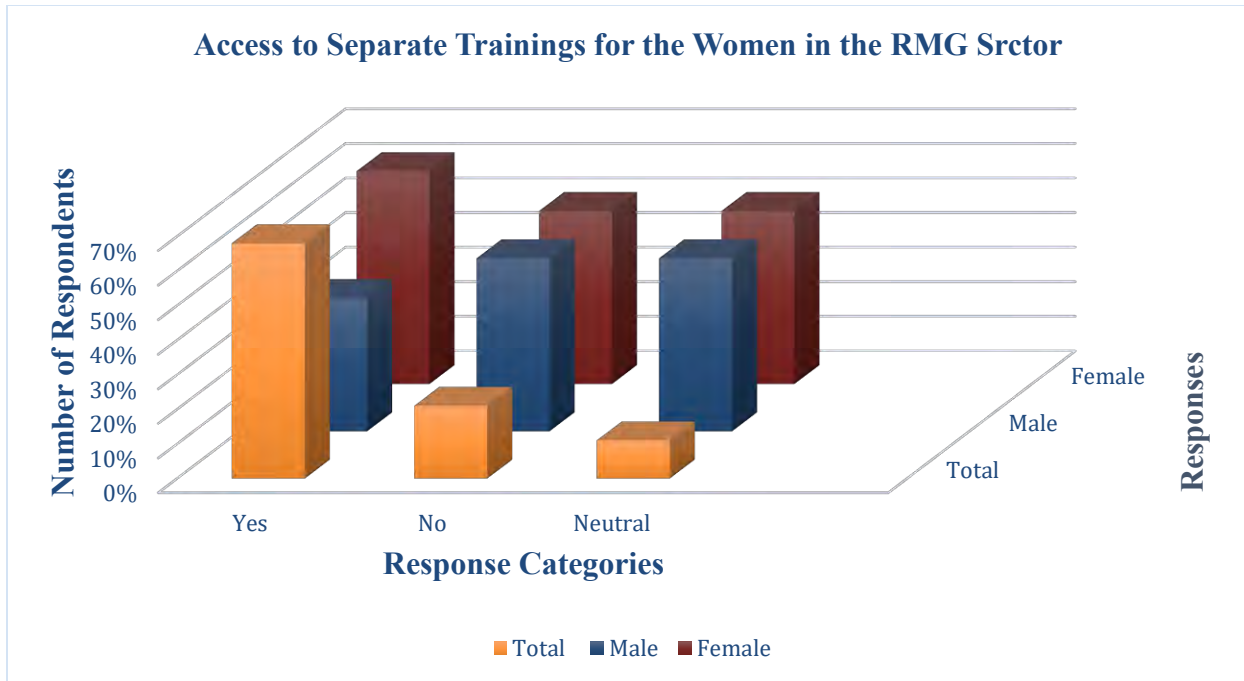
Figure 2.1. *Showing respondents stances on the availability of training facilities in the RMG for women*

The responses reveal a wide gap in perceptions between the workers and management in the RMG sector. The highest number of the respondents shared their disappointment over the absence of dedicated strategies aimed at training women at the skilled levels for leadership roles. In the course of an in-depth interview, one of the respondents, who is in a managerial role, made a significant remark:

"This industry is 45 to 50 years old. Over the past half-century, why have there been no female general managers of production? Those who work at higher levels in organizations are dealing with so many fires, glitches, last minute requests and shit that they never would have chosen. This is quite difficult for a woman-I am not underrating them. Additionally, why should we have to extend some extra benefits for females? We have made my facilities available for both men and women. If they think there are opportunities, they will come. If the males need jobs, they will come forward and the same ideology applies to females. Whoever wants the opportunities, let them have

it, 'Survival of the fittest'. Remember that this is a business project, not a charity work or social service project. For instance, if I pay 100 and get 10, I will not pay until I get 100. The meaning behind the given example is that, when comparing male and female employees, I am earning more from the existing system. So, unless I'm getting the equivalent performance from the other gender, why should I welcome it?"

This quote not only embodies the prevailing attitude of some management personnel in the industry, but also believes that women are incapable of becoming leaders. Furthermore, such a mentality which is economic in nature believes that policies that promote equal opportunities are enough, therefore women ought to be treated equally with men without any preferential treatment being extended to them. In an industry that is mainly profit-oriented, companies do not see any practical reasons as to why they should incur additional costs in developing women to take up leadership positions. The absence of specific interventions is defended with a bottom-line approach, as the companies are not prepared to risk extra investments or resources without the possibility of obtaining reasonable returns.

Thus, this perception that male employees can generate more profit in leadership or supervisory roles than women is one of the major barriers for growth within the RMG sector. The profit-focused rationale, born from capitalist principles prioritizing immediate monetary gains over prolonged investment in diversity and inclusion. Additionally, reluctance to offer further training or development opportunities for women is largely down to a cultural issue, with one respondent stating bluntly that *"I cannot make a spot for female supervisors unless I get the same amount from what I used to earn from male leaders."* Holding such capitalist ideologies results in excluding women from the resources and opportunities that would prepare them to have better supervisory roles. So, this reinforces their continued absence in top-level positions.

While the majority agreed with the statement, 4 participants expressed a more liberal view where they insisted their RMG industry do have distinct training programs for women. It shows that these agencies appreciate diversity in leadership and encourage the women to take up leadership positions. One of the respondents said: *"We have specific training about leadership for women. The intention is to make sure that they are able and willing to take roles that are normally associated with men (patriarchy)."* This is in line with the evidence from some RMG companies that female leadership is being cultivated at all levels. These organizations are well aware of the risks of investing in women and accept the short-term cost knowing the long-term benefits include the positive impacts like workplace morale in general, heightened output and gender balance.

One in all, the difference in "Yes" and "No" responses as illustrated in the chart indicates that the RMG sector as a whole is still reluctant to adopt practices that encourage women's leadership. Although a few progressive organizations are providing training meant for women, the majority consider such measures unnecessary or too expensive to implement.

III. Management's Perception on Female Supervisors of RMG Sector

The given graph demonstrates about the two groups, namely i) RMG Management & KII (figure 3.1) and ii) RMG workers & Supervisors (figure 3.1), which provided responses to the statement "Do you Agree that your RMG industry does not want female supervisors?" A glance at the findings reveals that 11% of the management and KIIs respondents supported the proposition that female supervisors are not desired by their institutions. However, the dominant 89% of the management & KII respondents had a positive attitude to the need of female supervisors which indicates a conducive environment for gender-based leadership.
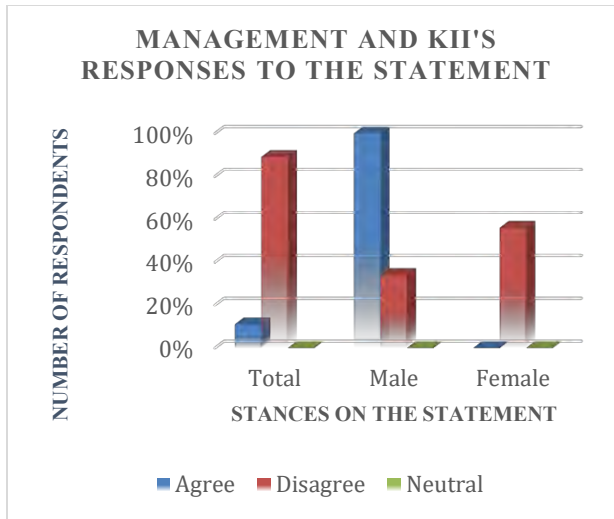
MANAGEMENT AND KII'S RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT

RMG'S WORKERS AND SUPERVISORS RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT

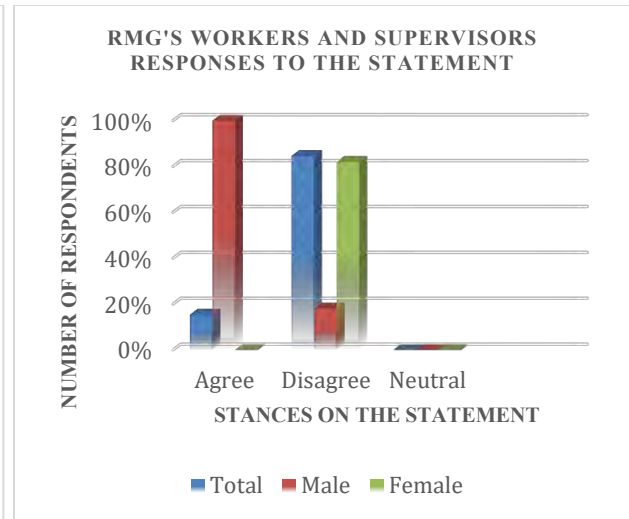*Figure 3.1. Responses of Managements and KIIs*   *Figure 3.2. Responses of RMG Workers & supervisors*

Furthermore, the benefits of having female supervisors were expressed by respondents during KII with management: *"It is advantageous to have female supervisors in the company. Once we get female supervisors, we try to retain them in our company but we are getting very few supervisors".* This indicates that female leadership is acknowledged and appreciated in the organization. Furthermore, respondent 2 pointed out that recruitment policies are not biased: *"Even in the job vacancy announcement, we don't reflect the priority of gender, saying we need a male or female. Those who are capable enough to do the work, we do hire them."* This demonstrates how a gender balance is actively sought in recruitment processes while upholding a constructive reference to merit-based recruitment. Additionally, During the Focus Discussion Group (FDG), one of the management said that *"In our factory, the number of female supervisors increased from 64 in 2020 to over 300 in 2023/2024 which is a vast positive change."* This indicates a progressive approach toward gender diversity in supervisory levels and this upsurge, is as a result of both internal strategies as well as external pressures from the brands that promote women's inclusivity.

Comparably, in the case of the worker sections of responses (figure 3.2), it has also been noted that there is a more than average response rate (11 out of 13) in disagreement with the statement, which shows that the respondents do not think that RMG management is against female supervisors. However, the existence of 2 worker's agreements to the statement infer that there may be some bias or prejudices that still exist within their institutions towards hiring women in top positions.

Impressively, the higher precent of the respondents from both groups (RMG Management and RMG workers) do not agree with the idea that management does not want female supervisors. This agreement indicates a more favorable working environment in that both managers and employees appreciate the importance of gender diversity. As there is an agreement on the support of female supervisors, the gap between the positive outlook of the management and the level of concern from the workers towards the inhibiting factors indicates that there is a gap between the policies and implementation of the policies. Management holds well founded ideas that would be appreciated by most workers, but their few sentiments indicate that there are challenges in executing those ideas as expected. So, in order to close the perceived discrepancies between management desires and the actual working experiences of the employees, the following interventions such as Enhance Recruitment Strategies, Implement Support Programs, Awareness Programs on Women Empowerment are recommended.

IV. Main Barriers that Discourage Women from Taking Leadership Roles in the RMG Sector.

The given graph (Figure 4) presents the key factors that hinder the ability of women to take up leadership positions in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector as noted by the study respondents. The respondents were asked to choose the factors that limit women's advancement

and to rank them according to their importance. Majority of the respondents (13 out of 19) argued that family responsibility is the most critical drawback followed by education which was highlighted by 10 respondents as well as cultural expectations. Lastly, although 15 respondents mentioned that gender discrimination existed, this phenomenon was ranked at the bottom of those barriers
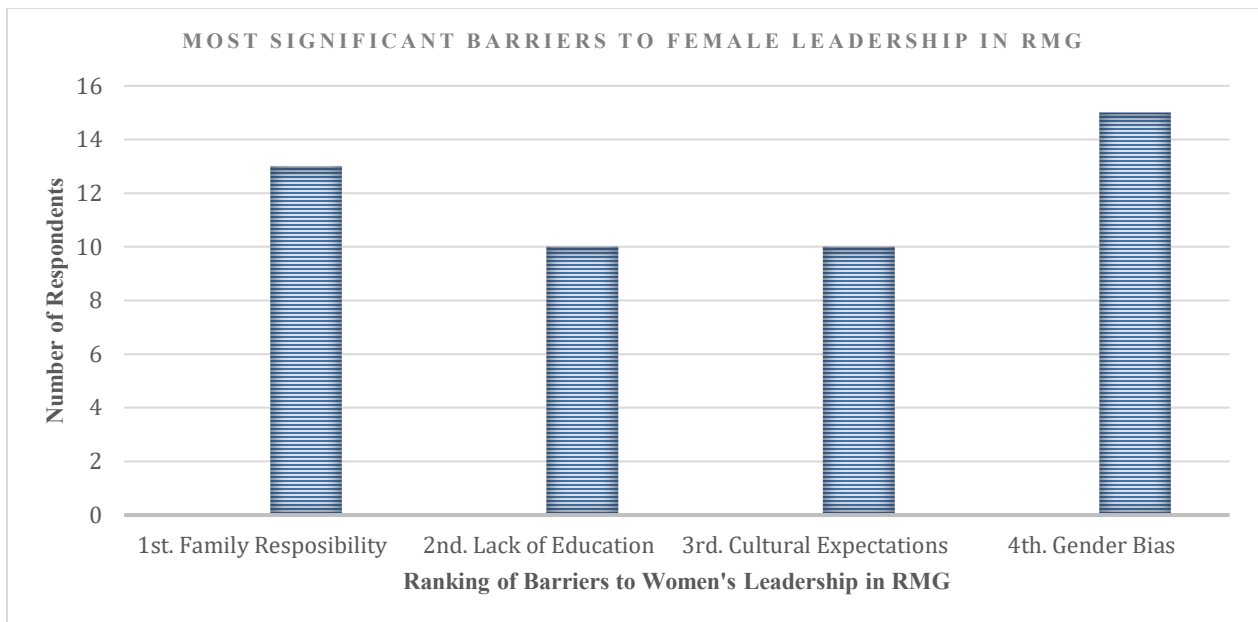

Figure 4. Primary Barriers to Women's Leadership in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) Sector

The respondents clearly indicate that family responsibility is seen as the most significant obstacle to women's advancement in leadership. This points out the traditional role of women in society which includes family care and how this affects the full concentration of women in equal employment opportunities. One respondent stated, *"Family commitments and work commitments make it impossible to develop one's career further and thus very few of them take up leadership positions."* This also supports the view that due to prevailing societal systems such as the family, more burdens are placed on women thereby limiting their career advancement potential.

The data of the research presents that family responsibility is the main barrier to the women climbing up the leadership ladder. This suggests that social concepts and the roles in the household play a significant role in creating barriers to women's full dedication to their career. As one of the respondents shared, *"The juggling of household chores to work wonders does not leave much room for continued professional advancement."* This statement reiterates the view that due to the traditional family structure, allowing women to advance their careers is much more difficult as they carry an extra burden as compared to men.

Lack of education stands as the second barrier which highlights the fact that women working within the RMG sector are still facing major challenges in terms of educational differences. Since the educational information in the previous table (table 1.3) illustrated, there were no women with higher degrees. This is an important concern because one of the respondents mentioned, *"After working in the RMG sector for a couple of years, I came to know that hard work and dedication can carry us far but not all the way to the top, if we don't have a solid foundation of education"*. Thus, education seems to be both a barrier and a means of ascending in the ladder to the leadership positions.

The graph and responses reveal a multi-pronged challenge that women face in getting into leadership positions. Due to heavy family burdens, the women who are likely to seek work may not be very committed to a career for the sociocultural reasons which expect them to fulfil their domestic responsibilities. This aspiration is closely linked with gender stereotypes, the third most rated barrier, which further supports the age-old perception of how roles should be assigned according to one's gender and encourages women to dominate other spheres like domestic tasks but not leadership.

Gender discrimination was the least ranked among all reported issues in this study. However, due to the high number of respondents' citing this issue (15 of 19 respondents), it can still be remarked how deeply entrenched this issue is within the RMG industry. And even though this factor is not considered as the most pressing threat, this is still a significant influence that impacts upon recruitment, advancement and general career development of women. These three factors – domestic burden, absence of suitable education and gender stereotypes explain the complexity of the factors that contribute to women's glass ceiling in leadership opportunities in the RMG industry.

As a whole, the deep-seated stereotype of the dominance of men is one of the major hindrances to the upward movement of women in the RMG industry. These traditional norms demarcate men as superior and thus women are confined to domestic work and discouraged from leadership. Hence society usually expects women to look after their families and thereby many ambitious women are forced to give up careers. In addition to this, the problem is exacerbated by the historical case of male education being given priority over female education, denying them skills and qualifications that would work for their upward mobility. Such distorted views do not only hinder the realization of women's potential but also the inclusivity of various forms of leadership within the sector, thus calling for a serious cultural shift to enable women to exist and flourish in such settings.

V. Initiatives to Empower Women Taking Leadership Roles in the RMG Sector

Based on the data collected from the respondents, the given figure (Figure 5) depicts the types of interventions proposed by the respondents to enhance women's leadership participation in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector. Additionally, the respondents were asked to rank these interventions to which the graph shows the ranking of the respondents from the most important to

the least. These include provision of child care services, redesigning of working hours, women leadership skill empowerment programs, and anti-discriminations regulations.
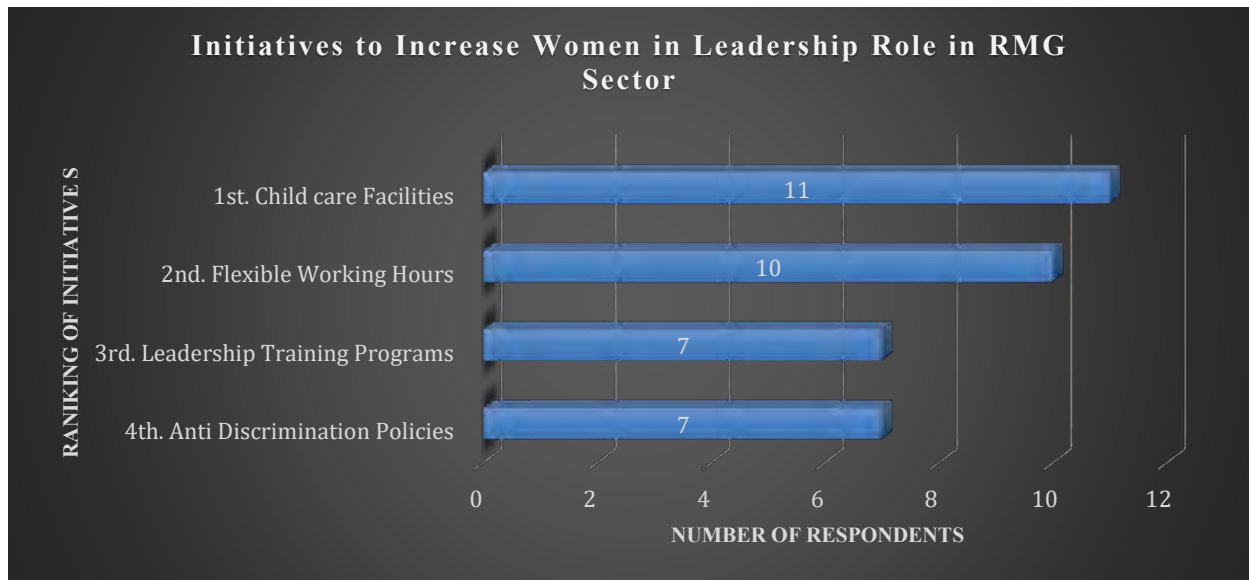

Figure 5. Prioritized Initiatives for Increasing Women's Leadership Roles in the RMG Sector

As per the obtained information, child care facilities were rated the highest by 11 out of the 19 respondents consulted. This reveals a critical aspect, that there is a need to provide assistance to mothers because this is a major obstacle to women attaining senior positions in the organizational hierarchy. One respondent revealed that: *"Without having access to child care facilities in the respective institutions, I do not think one can manage to hold a leadership position and be a mother at the same time,"* thus underscoring the importance of such facilities. The second highest rated initiative was working under flexible working hours, as 10 out of 13 respondents supported this measure. This indicates the need for work-life balance, which is a challenge to many women in the workforce. Another respondent aptly puts it this way: *"I think flexible hours would help a lot of women to work and take care of their families at the same time without having to give up either."* In addition, implementing leadership skills and Discrimination measures were also important but

got less focused by respondents as both measures received the support of 7 respondents each. One of the respondents remarked, *"In sectors dominated by men historically, leadership training will assist women in overcoming the challenges posed by biases, enhancing their resilience and raising their voices in the boardroom."* So, such programs are essential in empowering women and helping them cultivate useful skills that would enable them to acquire leadership positions, in addition to ensuring the workplace is more conducive for all.

Hence, it is clear that the emphasis placed on child care and flexible work schedules signifies a larger societal belief that women are expected to play the dual role of caregivers and working professionals. Training programs aimed at enhancing women leadership in the RMG sector as well as measures that address gender discrimination are essential but their lower ranking in the order of importance of women priorities indicates that, for now, the respondents considered logistical support as the most pressing. This suggests a social situation where even highly skilled females would find it impossible to ascend into senior positions without organizational reforms that address the issues of balancing career and family responsibilities. Up to a certain point, it could be maintained that unless such issues are resolved, other superficial measures like 'leadership training' might not have the intended impact as women would not be able to engage completely in the economy. Therefore, the graph indicates that there is an immediate need to review the structures and systems at the workplace with a view of redesigning them to allow women who wish to be leaders without having to make challenging choices between work and family responsibilities.

Theoretical Framework and its Applications to the Findings

This research "Study on the Leadership Role of Women in the Bangladesh Garment Industry" employs Dual System Theory, which accounts for the challenges of patriarchy and capitalism, as one of the key tools for evaluating these issues. According to this theory, gender inequality is maintained by the patriarchy and a capitalist system working together and keeping men in elevated power positions compared to women. Thus, this study uses this framework to explain gender related outcomes and especially inequalities in women and men's access to leadership positions, job market and the harsh effects of the glass ceiling in the RMG sectors.

This study makes a critical observation regarding the glass ceiling (lack of women in top positions in the RMG sector) despite women constituting the majority of the workforce in the RMG sectors. Men are the candidates of choice for supervisory or managerial positions in RMG sectors while women remain in subordinate positions (relegated to lower ranks). These differences are found to be perpetuated by patriarchy which provides a social foundation where women are believed to have poor decision-making capabilities compared to male counterparts and cannot stand the pressure that comes along with such high work positions. Additionally, capitalism ideologies also reinforce these disparities arguing that women serving in the top positions are seen as detrimental risks being less likely in the long term due to family considerations especially in high productivity industries. Because of the combination of these two factors, there are implicit biases and hence reducing their chances of getting promoted to the top positions resulting in maintaining the existing order.

Additionally, social patriarchal practices serve to reinforce these imbalances by perpetuating extremist views in the society, for instance, people hold a notion that men are born to be a leader and women should be subservient to men. It is the capitalist notion of profit that also sustains these practices through their corrupt system where efficiency is prioritized over equality. Therefore, women are portrayed as ineffective leaders hence reducing their chances of getting promoted. All these dynamics combine leading to unfavorable attitudes, inadequate support systems, and limited skilling resources for women to progress into leadership positions thereby maintaining the existing order (women serving in the lower rank positions).

Another major hurdle is the division of works along gender lines in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector. Women are usually expected to do low paying monotonous jobs while men do the technical and managerial jobs. This segregation is highly dictated by societal orientations that encourage females to take on manual repetitive work whereas males are perceived to be in charge of technical matters. Capitalism applies a more direct justification for the existence of such roles by arguing that the institutions are benefiting from an existing system where the majority of male run the upper positions and females serve in the low rank positions in the RMG sectors. In this regard, job segregation sustains disparity as it keeps women in the lower rank position, limiting their chances of upward movement and contributing to the gender imbalance picture within the industry.

Analyzing these results through the lens of Dual System Theory is more significant for gender equality initiatives than only for the RMG sector. This is because the coexistence of patriarchy and capitalism does not only exist in this industry, it is omnipresent in every field. Understanding this bond allows to formulate those policies that address both culture and structural barriers in gender relations and also calls for fair pay, equal opportunities and the eradication of gender stereotypes

in the work environment. Therefore, such an understanding not only contributes towards enhancing the implementation of gender equality measures within the overall labor market in Bangladesh but also to other countries beyond the scope of Bangladesh.

All in all, in the context of this study, the application of dual-system theory portrays a clearer picture of the gender gaps encountered in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. The combined force of patriarchy and capitalism helps understand the existence of a leadership vacuum, wage gap, segregation of works, phenomenon of the glass ceiling, and other barriers associated with sociocultural factors are major challenges in the industry. This outlook not only sheds light on the underlying problems but also helps in addressing them by suggesting feasible policies and interventions. Since it tackles both societal issues and economic hierarchy, this approach smartly offers ways to promote gender parity especially in leadership roles in the RMG sector as well as in the entire labor market.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

The RMG sector in Bangladesh is the backbone of the economy, employing millions of people, especially women. Although women comprise a majority of workers in the RMG sectors, they occupy disproportionately few leadership and management roles. Women's progression to higher position roles in the RMG sector is hindered by individual, cultural, and organizational barriers. While this research has brought attention to the remaining imbalance across gender equity in the industry, it has also revealed possible routes for positive change.

A pervasive 'glass ceiling' is observed in the form of industrialized social attitudes and organizational structures as hindrance to women's progression within the realms of the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry. Society's definition of women's roles and capabilities tends to override logic and reason, which, in turn, affects the process of selecting and advancing candidates. As shown in the findings, many women who were interviewed were aggrieved by these stereotypes that devalue their efforts and inhibit their upwards mobility within the organization. In order to build an organizational culture that is all embracing, companies should seek to address the gender biases in the workplace in all levels of management through training and sensitization. There should be a system of promotion that is open and fair with criteria that is gender blind. Policies that encourage work-life balance and flexibility remain very beneficial in mitigating the employment challenges that women with family encounter.

Furthermore, this study also identified limited access to education and training as another reason behind the low participation of women in the leadership roles in the RMG sector. Despite the fact that the sector has expanded in terms of job opportunities, there are a good number of women who

do not have the requisite qualifications and skills for advanced positions. The unavailability of quality education leads to a situation where people are condemned to earn low salaries, with little or no hope of advancement in their careers. Many of the study participants acknowledged that, as a result of a lack of training and education, many women feel they are "stuck" in the same positions. Improving the availability of education and training, especially vocational training is important to assist women in acquiring skills required for them to compete for management positions. By appropriately broadening the scope of educational programs designed for women workers, the RMG would be able to create a better pool of workers with leadership skills.

Networking and support systems are equally important in lifting women up the corporate ladder. The lack of such opportunities for mentorship often means young women workers are left alone without any support. The participants noted that mentorship is very powerful, stating that where there is a mentor, that person's involvement and encouragement eases the process of learning to interact in the work environment. On the other note, structured peer mentoring and other advisory support can also engender women's empowerment in the industry through the availability of such supportive circles. Organizations can enhance women's leadership aspirations by networking women with experience to those with little or no experience in a particular area within the women's domain.

Another important aspect that was highlighted is to advocate with different stakeholders to bring policy shifts to address the structural and systemic barriers for women in the leadership position in the RMG sector. As the participants themselves pointed out, the implementation of policies fostering gender equality entails working with government, non-governmental organizations, and industrial sectors. For instance, these efforts may focus on persuading appropriate authorities to introduce gender quotas in leadership positions, set equal pay for equal work, or safeguards against

discrimination. Campaigns that honor women in leadership are also important elements that can be helpful in the society and encourage women and future generations in leadership positions.

Although women are consistently faced with barriers towards gaining leadership roles in largely male-dominated cultures, some of the participants noted that a growing number of women take up leadership positions owing to social pressures from the international buyers or sectorial changes. The call for women supervisors, due to the increasing perception of their quality of supervision, serves to illustrate the possibilities for distinguishing and appreciating the contributions of women in the workplace. This change presents a window of opportunity for organizations to take the advantages of their female workforce and build a suitable atmosphere where women will not fear taking up leadership roles.

For any change to be sustained in the RMG sector, the intervention must be comprehensive and include education, mentorship, organizational culture, and policy advocacy. All stakeholders must come together to mitigate the obstacles that restrict women's ability to rise in positions of leadership. Addressing gender imbalances and encouraging the development of those sectors will enable the RMG industry to use its female human capital effectively. Understanding the advantages of increasing women's occupancy in leadership positions goes beyond empowering them as a feminine individual; it brings increased effectiveness, creativity and general functioning of the organization.

In nutshell, although women's leadership in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector is still marred with barriers, there is a ray of hope for better things to come. If the solutions to the issues identified in this research are implemented, it will be possible to create a more sustainable industry for the players. It is only through the joint efforts of such sectors including organizations and government as well as advocacy that there will be such a time when women will be leaders in the RMG

industry. Looking into the future, a point worth noting is that the aspect of women empowerment in leadership is not only a boost to the workforce but also enables a more sustainable and fair practice within the society. This is because if the leadership of women is encouraged and most importantly, practiced within the RMG sector, that particular sector will be the first of its kind in the garment industry on the global level to practice gender equity which will in turn be beneficial to all the parties concerned.

5.2. Recommendations

I. Setting Up Childcare Centers and Family-oriented Policies in the Workplace

An important hindrance recognized in this study is the absence of child care assistance which is particularly serious for women looking to attain leadership positions. Most of the women working in the RMG industry have to juggle work and family commitments, which hampers their chances of pursuing higher positions. For this reason, there is a dire need for the government and the RMG industry to implement and adhere to family-centric policies that address issues such as the need for the establishment of on-site childcare facilities. Introducing well-placed, inexpensive and convenient childcare facilities within the Remodeling Garment Manufacturing (RMG) industry will leverage the active participation of women in leadership positions. This would relieve the existing pressure that working mothers have, while still allowing women to comfortably take up leadership positions without the worry of neglecting their families.

II. Implement Flexible Work Hours in the RMG Sectors.

One of the key insights from the study is that fixed work hours are a major constraint to women involved in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry, especially those with children. Most women face difficulties in fulfilling their personal and work commitments since their work is quite demanding and has inflexible working hours. To remedy this, both the RMG industry and the government should advocate for flexible working hours and working from home wherever possible. If arrangements such as part time or rotating shifts or working from home are incorporated, women will be able to juggle domestic duties with their career ambitions. This means that women will be able to participate in more employment for a longer period of time but also will be able to seek their advancement into senior management positions. In addition, the trend of providing flexible working options is in line with the current workplace reforms across the world and is likely to improve employee retention and satisfaction.

III. Initiatives on Leadership Development and Mentoring Programs for Women

The research underscores the lack of appropriate leadership development and mentoring initiatives to address the issues women face in the RMG industry. Those women who tend to seek a leadership position seldom receive the necessary training, orientation, or assistance for them to cope with the organization. This calls for action within the RMG sector, with the aid of the government, to find resources to promote women leadership development programs. Such programs should concentrate on imparting the women with the requisite skills and the necessary assertiveness to take up positions of leadership, management training, decisional skills, and strategies of solving conflict. There should also be a senior female leader to junior female employee mentorship program so that women in a firm can uplift each other and help them shatter the glass ceiling. Such

approaches can not only provide opportunities for the development of new leaders among women but also assist in achieving equity in management levels.

IV. Advocate for Gender Equity Strategies and Evaluate their Implementation

The areas of research reveal that women are found at all levels of the RMG industry with numerous factors that discourage or even prevent them from attaining leadership positions. It is therefore recommended that the appropriate authorities adopt and implement measures to promote gender equality in the RMG industry, as well as develop policies and programs aimed at achieving gender equity in the sector. Furthermore, empowering women by appealing to communities to accept and practice the implementation of women leadership quotas in the interim could also be suggested.

The government and members of the RMG sector should join hands to ensure that proper and workable gender equality in the workplace is established. Such policies must embrace open promotion policies, offer protection through anti-discrimination policies, and include reporting and resolution policies regarding gender issues within the organization. There should also be regular gender equality performance assessments and targets should be put in place and enforced for the achievement of particular goals. Besides, gender equity awareness programs and training sessions should be encouraged in the RMG sector to change the cultural perception that is biased and prevents the growth of women.

One in all, incorporating these above-mentioned suggestions would enable both the responsibility of the RMG sector and the task of the government, to make substantial progress in eliminating the impediments to women's leadership and creating an inclusive and fair work environment. These measures will enhance the status of women in society but will also assist in the sustainable growth of the economy and society of Bangladesh over the years.

5.3. Limitation of Research

Despite this research providing a better understanding of the factors that hinder women's leadership in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry in Bangladesh, there are some limitations that should be considered pertaining to the conduct of this study. Every research has its challenges, and so did mine. The main impediments that I encountered were;

I. Limitations regarding access to the target population

A major constraint of this study was the challenge I had in getting participants from the RMG industry. Being an international student with little networking skills in Bangladesh I found it very difficult to reach out to the people who were connected directly to the RMG sector. Thankfully, with the help of my supervisor and some college mates, I managed to get enough participants who could help me in the research. Since I do not have many personal connections in the RMG sector, it was very hard for me to pass the stage; however, the kindness of people around me helped me to cross that gap. Additionally, it should be noted that the number of participants which I have covered for this research is only a small proportion of the overall population studied, which may have a potential effect on the broader applicability of the results. So, if I had had access to broader networks, I would have been able to reach a more diverse sample of respondents, such as women from across the region or from varied levels of leadership in the profession. Yet, as annoying as it may sound, this also underscored the role of networking and connections in field research in a country where the cultural and social fabric is made very important in professional settings.

II. Communication/Language Barriers

The language barrier was another major challenge for me as an interviewer. The workers in the RMG sector are predominantly Bangladeshi in origin, possess a low level of formal education, and do not understand English well. Being an international student, I know very little of the Bangla language and this caused enormous problems for me during the process of carrying out interviews. Interviews are part of social science, which try to gather as much information as possible from a few participants. Unfortunately, as I am not fluent in Bangla, I was hardly able to participate in most conversations and appreciate the intricacies behind the responses of the interviewees. I knew my weakness in speaking Bangla had a toll on me in that I was not able to bond fully with the participants and appreciate the depth of feeling about what they had gone through. To get round this hurdle, I had to depend on my language translator for help. My translator was able to render the words of the participants quite successfully but some nuances and aspects of culture might have been lost in the translation.

III. Constraints relating to Time

One of the notable limitations was the array of time constraints. Considering the amount of time I had available to complete the process of collecting field data, synthesizing the information, and preparing the research report, my expectations for the extent of my research were quite excessive. Because of time limitations, I had no option but to consider a small sample size and restrict my study to a particular area. Ideally, I would have preferred to widen my exploration to include other regions and different segments of the RMG Industry. Such inclusion would help to explore more on the obstacles that different women within the sector encounter in climbing up the ranks. Yet, given the existing circumstances, I also had to make sure that my research priority was completing

the research within the provided time which limited my exploration of the issue. The findings of this research are valuable but do not go into further detail due to the limitation of the time available. In conclusion, the constraints of time have influenced both the focus and the level of coverage of this research. Similarly, the results are useful, but not as extensive as they can be in other situations.

IV. Financial Constraints

One of the most prominent drawbacks of this study was the financial constraints I encountered during various stages of the research. Carrying out field research, particularly in a foreign environment, calls for a great deal of finances. Regrettably, it was in short supply. In particular, fieldwork pertaining to social science research tends to be expensive. Moving from one place to another, collecting data and interviewing people and even obtaining relevant documents has its economic costs. Being a student, I did not have enough financial resources to conduct more research and this lack of enough funds curtailed my ability to collect information from wider participants and harness rich data.

 Had I been provided with more financial assistance; I would have been able to include a wider variety of participants of different backgrounds and areas of the RMG sectors. The financial constraints also limited my ability to compensate participants for spending their valuable time in this research and this likely further deterred potential respondents. Nevertheless, I express my appreciation for all the support I received from close relatives and friends who were able to assist me with some funds and pay costs during the fieldwork phase. They allowed me to accomplish this research, however, the financial limitations are still one of the most crucial areas that impinged on the overall depth and width of the study.

5.4. Further Research

The constraints affecting the progress of women in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector have been examined through several lenses including patriarchal and capitalist perspectives. This research further exposited what structural issues exist to enable or disable women's upward mobility at the workplace and therefore, gives a working comprehension of issues related to gender especially in the workplace in this industry which is of strategic importance. However, there still exist a number of further research opportunities that would enhance better understanding of the subject under study and to the broader gender equality and women empowerment conversations. Although this work has examined some of the obstacles women face in the upward mobility in the RMG sector through the dual lenses of patriarchy and capitalist ideologies, future studies could investigate the intersection of class, ethnicity, education, and regional inequalities to understand their combined effects on female career trajectories.

Additionally, this room of opportunity for further research also includes qualitative research like in-depth studies that collect narratives from women of various socio-economic status, educational attainments, and locations across the geography of Bangladesh. Adapting such methods gives room for the researchers to learn how these multiple identities interact with each other and how they affect women in leadership and the factors that hinder them. For instance, women with a lower-class position may face certain barriers that those from higher class positions may not experience.

So, delving into such complexities can help achieve a better understanding of how tensions between men and women operate within the RMG sector and guide activities that respond to the specific conditions of various women. At the same time, this exploration could also feed into wider discussions about equality between the sexes by showing how policies need to respond to

the heterogeneous lives of women around the world. One in all, incorporating an intersectional lens in future research may highlight the complex intersection of barriers to women's progression in the RMG sector, which could be used to form strategies towards impactful gender equality and women empowerment across all levels of the workforce.

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