

CAREGIVERS' PERCEPTION OF QUALITY IN DAYCARE CENTRES WITHIN
THE RMG SECTOR IN BANGLADESH

By

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A thesis submitted to Brac Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Early Childhood Development

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Brac University
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing my degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through complete and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material 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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Ethics Statement

Title of Thesis Topic: Caregivers' Perception of Quality in Daycare Centres within the RMG Sector in Bangladesh

Student name: Nabila Akter

1. Source of population

Gazipur and Savar, Bangladesh

2. Does the study involve (yes or no)

- a) Physical risk to the subjects: no
- b) Social risk: no
- c) Psychological risk to subjects: no
- d) Discomfort to subjects: no
- e) Invasion of privacy: no

3. Will subjects be clearly informed about (yes or no)

- a) Nature and purpose of the study: yes
- b) Procedures to be followed: yes
- c) Physical risk: no
- d) Sensitive questions: yes
- e) Benefits to be derived: yes
- f) Right to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study: yes
- g) Confidential handling of data: yes
- h) Compensation and/or treatment where there are risks or privacy is involved:
yes

4. Will signed verbal consent be required (yes or no)

- a) from study participants: yes
- b) from parents or guardian: no
- c) Will precautions be taken to protect the anonymity of subjects?: yes

5. Check documents being submitted herewith to the Committee:

- a) Proposal: yes
- b) Consent Form: yes
- c) Interview schedule: yes

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored how working mothers employed in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector perceive the quality of daycare centres attended by their young children. Conducted in Gazipur and Savar, the study used semi-structured in-depth interviews with 14 working mothers and key informant interviews with daycare managers and factory stakeholders. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework identified seven themes: defining quality through daily observation; safety and physical environment; hygiene and sanitation; caregiver-child interaction and emotional care; food, nutrition, and daily routines; communication, trust, and overall satisfaction; and mothers' suggestions for improvement. Findings show that mothers assess daycare quality mainly through visible and relational indicators, including cleanliness, safety, caregiver warmth, feeding practices, and regular communication, rather than formal regulatory or educational standards. Workplace realities such as long working hours, rigid shifts, and limited family support strongly shape mothers' expectations and reliance on daycare. The study highlights the gap between policy requirements and everyday daycare experiences and offers practical implications for factory management, childcare policy, and early childhood development programming in Bangladesh.

Keywords: *daycare quality; working mothers; RMG sector; Bangladesh; caregiver perceptions; early childhood*

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the thousands of Bengali mothers working in garment factories across Bangladesh who leave their young children in the care of others and return home each evening with hope in their hearts. Their resilience, sacrifice, and love for their children inspired this study.

It is also dedicated to the young children who spend their earliest years in daycare centres may each of them be held, heard, and nurtured.

Acknowledgement

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List of Acronyms

BGMEA	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
ECD	Early Childhood Development
IDI	In-Depth Interview
ILO	International Labour Organization
RMG	Ready-Made Garment
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter I: Introduction & Background

Introduction

The first years of life, especially between birth and the age of five, form a relative period of rapid brain development, during which the key cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and physical abilities are developed (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000; Britto et al., 2017). At such delicate stage of development, children need regular caregiving, emotional safety, proper food intake, good hygiene and challenging surroundings that provide their chances to learn at an early age. These are not luxuries, but these are the building blocks of lifelong health, wellbeing and potential of children. Daycare centres are the major caring unit of children, whose major care takers are fully employed in industries, and thus, the quality of daycare centres has a critical developmental concern.

The Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh is one of the biggest and most economically prominent industries in the nation that employs over four million individuals and contributes over 80 percent of the export revenue in the country (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association [BGMEA], 2023). Most of this workforce is made up of women of working age who in most cases have small children in the house (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). Many of these women leave the rural countryside and settle in urban and peri-urban industrial belts, live in nuclear families with no extended family, and have to work long hours every day which does not leave them time to care for their children during the day. Daycare centres within or close to the factory have in this regard become not only convenient but services in which working mothers and their families cannot afford to do without.

Although legally, according to the provisions of the Bangladesh Labour Act stating that a factory with 40 or more female workers is obligated to provide the latter with daycare

(Bangladesh Labour Act Amendment, 2018), the process of implementing this requirement in the RMG sector is highly lopsided. Accounts of issues with the current daycare provision have persisted such as poor hygiene, lack of caregiver training, poor child-appropriate stimulation, overcrowding, and poor caregiver-child interaction (Centre for Policy Dialogue [CPD], 2020; UNICEF, 2022; Ahsan and Akhter, 2021). The circumstances cast grave doubts on the ability of the factory-linked daycare centres to address the developmental needs of the young and most vulnerable children within the industrial workforce in Bangladesh.

It is of essential importance to know how working mothers in the RMG industry consider the quality of daycare services in this landscape. The views of mothers will determine their confidence in these facilities, their desire to constantly use them, and their readiness to stay gainfully employed. Lived experience is also projected through perceptions in a manner that cannot be comprehended through structural assessment. The perceived lack of safety, hygiene, or emotional care in daycare centers leads to increased levels of anxiety, decreased focus at the workplace, and the inability of mothers to continue working (World Bank, 2019). On the other hand, trusted and reliable childcare does not only contribute to the development of children, but also the participation of women in the workforce, their economic and general wellbeing.

In spite of these interconnections, the systematic qualitative research that places the voices and experiences of working mothers at the centre of the focus of the research is scarce in the context of the RMG sector. The majority of the literature available in Bangladesh is related to structural compliance tests or observational reviews of daycare centers, providing comparatively low information regarding the experiential and perceptual aspects of daycare quality as viewed by the consumers of these services. The following study fills that gap as it discusses how working mothers understand and

assess and react to the quality of daycare centres in the realities of the social, economic, and labour conditions of the RMG sector.

Statement of the Problem

Although there are legal provisions on the importance of providing daycare in eligible factories, there is still no consistency regarding daycare provision within the Bangladesh RMG sector, and in many cases, it is more of a compliance measure than a genuine concern towards quality childcare (Bangladesh Labour Act Amendment, 2018; ILO, 2021). Many factories do not provide an effective daycare or lack centres of the required standard in terms of cleanliness, air quality, safety, teacher training, and child-friendly conditions (CPD, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). Consequently, numerous daycare centres in the industry serve merely as custodial areas in which children are left unattended during working hours as opposed to being subjected to stimulating, responsive and emotional support that early childhood development studies have continued to cite as necessary.

These drawbacks have grave developmental repercussions. It has been proven that the cognitive, language, and socio-emotional development of young children requires warm, responsive care, predictable daily routines, and emotionally secure environments (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000; Britto et al., 2017). Children who have been admitted to daycare centres that have no trained and motivated caregivers, physically safe environment and meaningful learning experience can end up having a developmental risk when they are at the stage in their life when they are most vulnerable to environmental factors. The effects of low-quality early care may be carried over to school preparedness, social competence and future health.

The quality of daycare provided to working mothers in the RMG industry is directly related to their ability to work as well. Mothers whose perception of daycare settings is

unsafe, dirty, or lack of emotional sensitivity towards their children often have psychological stress, low productivity, and high absenteeism (World Bank, 2019). In others, the issues of quality of daycare prompt the mothers to pull children out of the facilities or make informal options to disrupt their work and their children receiving formal care. These are especially the consequences in an industry where economic roles of women are the focal point of survival of the households and the economy of the country.

Irrespective of these implications, current studies on the RMG sector daycare in Bangladesh have focused on structural audit, compliance and quality monitoring through an observational approach. Such methods will yield useful information on infrastructure and compliance with regulations but will not give us much information on how working mothers themselves define, experience, and assess the quality of daycare. The definition of quality developed by mothers is informed by their practical worlds, emotional investment, and daily observations, which cannot be developed by the formal systems of inspection. These views are crucial in the design of policies and practices in daycare that are not technically but really attentive to the needs of both children and the caregivers.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study aims at investigating the perceptions of working mothers to learn how they value the quality of daycare centres that their young children attend in Bangladesh in factory-based Ready-Made Garment (RMG) environment. It is based on the realities of industrial labour and informed by the lived experience of working mothers to develop contextually engrained and evidence-based knowledge of the quality of daycare offered by the people most at stake in it.

In particular, the study is aimed at fulfilling four objectives that are interconnected. To start with, it analyses the way working mothers characterize and measure the quality of daycare, the criteria, indicators and priorities they apply when determining the quality of care they receive by their children. Second, it explores the contextual influences on the perceptions of mothers, which include the workplace conditions, like extended working hours, strict shifts, absence of support systems in the family, and past experiences in childcare. Third, it records the issues that the mothers have with the current daycare services in the RMG sector such as structural inadequacy, relational gaps, and communicational barriers. Fourth, it captures the gains and suggestions that working mothers themselves consider to be the most significant in improving the quality of daycare.

In order to be able to bring in contextual knowledge on the provision of daycare the study will also incorporate few key informant interviews with daycare administrators and factory level stakeholders like human resources or compliance staff. These interviews give institutional insights into the functioning of daycare and are used to complement the interpretations of the mothers. Nonetheless, working mothers will continue to be the main focus of the study since they are the main caregivers and the main decision-makers when it comes to the arrangements of day-to-day care of their children.

Significance of the Study

The research is relevant in more than one area, such as early childhood development research, labour policy, gender and workforce studies and childcare programming in Bangladesh. Kids of RMG employees are one of the biggest but least-researched groups within the country on the scale of early childhood development. The study will help to comprehend whether available childcare can address the underlying developmental

requirements of children pertaining to safety, emotional support, predictable schedules, and early childhood education (Britto et al., 2017; Walker et al., 2011) through the study of daycare quality through the prism of perceptions of working moms.

The research is also relevant to the role participation and economic security of the women workforce. In an industrial setting, quality and affordable childcare has been demonstrated to decrease absenteeism rates, enhance productivity and facilitate job retention in working mothers (ILO Vietnam, 2019; Better Work Cambodia, 2020). The research can offer valuable evidence to inform factory-based management, compliance and country-level childcare policies that can assist female workers by recording mothers views on the quality of daycare services in an employment setting based in factories.

Moreover, the research is added to an expanding literature on the perceptions of caregivers towards early childhood services in the low- and middle-income countries. International studies indicate that parental assessments of the quality of childcare are based on observable, relational markers as opposed to the use of technical standards (Araujo et al., 2016; Gromada et al., 2020), however, no global research has examined how context-specific information within industrial labour environments influences South Asian parents. This study contributes to the knowledge of the experience of childcare quality in a setting of economic constraint and labour vulnerability by making mothers central to the RMG industry.

The current literature on daycare provision within the RMG sector in Bangladesh focuses largely on compliance and infrastructure evaluation, and provides a highly top-down approach that gives precedence to the regulatory and technical measures as opposed to the lived experiences of caregivers (CPD, 2020; ILO, 2021). Although such methods are required to enhance accountability and monitoring, they fail to represent

the quality as perceived by the women whose lives and the development of their children are the most directly influenced by the conditions in daycare. The available evidence on the matter shows that the parents determine the quality of daycare based on observable experience-based indicators of hygiene, safety, caregiver behaviour, and communication instead of formal standards (Araujo et al., 2016; Gromada et al., 2020). The particular context of the RMG industry presents working mothers with a unique set of limitations such as the high working hours, financial burden, lack of childcare options, and family support. These realities essentially influence the perceptions, priorities and values of daycare quality. A qualitative research methodology involving working mothers is hence warranted and needed to provide the rich and experience-based aspects of the quality of daycare that neither quantitative research nor compliance-based research can cover. The positioning of mothers as the centre of inquiry directly addresses one of the gaps in the existing literature and offers a more concrete and contextually viable point of departure in comprehending and enhancing the daycare services provided in an industrial sector of Bangladesh.

Research Questions

1. How do working mothers employed in factory-based Ready-Made Garment (RMG) environments in Bangladesh perceive and evaluate the quality of daycare centres attended by their young children?
2. How do working mothers perceive quality in daycare services based on the workplace conditions, lack of family support, past experiences in childcare services?
3. What are the issues that working mothers have with the available daycare services in the RMG industry?
4. What can working mothers recommend to improve the quality of daycare?

Operational Definition

Caregivers Perception: The Perception of caregivers in this study would be how working mothers perceive, assess and evaluate the quality of daycare centres based on their daily experiences, communication with staff, reaction of their children and experience as a caregiver.

Daycare Quality: Daycare quality is the nature of the daycare environment and interactions with child caregivers that can reinforce safety, health, emotional wellbeing and developmental needs of children. It is both physical environment (structural dimension) and hygiene (structural dimension) and caregiver-child interactions (process dimension) and routines (process dimension) and responsiveness (process dimension).

Working Mothers: Women who have full time employment in factory-based RMG environments in Bangladesh who have children aged between one and five years old and who are currently attending a daycare centre.

RMG Sector: Ready-Made Garment industry in Bangladesh that covers the factories manufacturing and exporting of garments which is the largest industrial source of employment in the country.

Daycare Centre: This is a facility within the factory premises or in the immediate and surrounding area where children of working mothers in the RMG sector are taken care of in a full day basis under supervision.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The theoretical concepts of early childhood care and development form a fundamental basis on the impact of the daycare setting on the development of children and how caregivers measure the quality of services offered in daycare. Nevertheless, in the industrial labour situation, particularly the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh, working mothers live and evaluate quality of daycare with observable, daily practices and not based on abstract theoretical entities. Mothers who take their jobs to the factory floor and spend twelve or more hours per day there do not assess daycare in terms of curriculum frames and pedagogical standards. They judge it based on the child that they pick on the end of the day, whether their child is considered to be healthy, settled, and content. The work hence selectively draws on applicable theories in order to interpret but to base on the realities and perceptual capacity of working mothers.

Theoretical Perspectives

The Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (2.1.1) is based on the principles that the environment surrounding the child shapes their personality, behavior, and culture. The Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (2.1.1) is informed by the fact that the environment in which the child is exposed to contributes to their personality, behavior and culture.

The Ecological Systems Theory formulates the conceptualization of child development as the result of the interactions between the developing person and various, nesting environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Microsystem takes the form of immediate environments of the child in terms of home and daycare settings. The mesosystem explains the relationship between these immediate environments like the relationship between mothers and daycare workers.

The exosystem consists of the environment that has an indirect influence on the child like the workplace of the mother and its policies. The macrosystem includes larger cultural, economic and legal systems including national labour laws and current trends toward childcare. Chronosystem defines the aspect of time and developmental changes. When applied in the context of the RMG industry, this framework explains why the quality of daycare is such a significant issue. Young children of RMG workers spend most of

their time in daycare centres as opposed to being at home. The daycare centre is used as the main microsystem of these children in the course of working day. In the meantime, the exosystem of the mother the factory, the shift organization, its culture of compliance and its management practices directly influence the appearance of the microsystem of the child. A factory which requires twelve-hour shifts and has little in the way of daycare support, is, via exosystem, creating conditions of developmental risk within the immediate environment of the child.

In this study, the Ecological Systems Theory is applied to place the views of mothers regarding the quality of daycare into the larger frameworks of the industrial labour and not to consider the views of mothers as personal preferences in a vacuum. The theory facilitates the contextual and relational interpretation of daycare quality as one that is defined by the merge of workplace demands, social support networks, and institutional supports of early childhood care.

Process and Structural Quality Frameworks

The quality of the daycare is traditionally perceived with regard to two interconnected yet different aspects: structural quality and process quality (Burchinal et al., 2015; Slot, 2018). Structural quality is a set of conditions of the input and regulatory characteristics of care, which include the physical infrastructure, accessibility of the space, ventilation,

hygiene, the number of caregivers to children, the qualifications and training levels of the caregivers, and access to age-specific materials. These are the quantifiable and externally testable aspects of quality that are most frequently mentioned in the policy guidelines and regulatory compliance models.

Process quality on the other hand means how smooth the daily experiences of children in the care setup are. It includes the quality and attentiveness of caregiver-child relationships, emotional atmosphere of the environment, the organization and predictability of everyday activities, availability of communication and play, and the level of caregiver sensitivity to the signs of individual children (Hamre and Pianta, 2007; Melhuish et al., 2015). The studies always show that the higher the quality of processes used by a child in caring, the warmer, responsive, and predictable it is, the greater the positive child developmental outcomes (Burchinal et al., 2016; Mashburn et al., 2008). A facility can meet physical infrastructure eligibility and offer developmentally impoverished care when interactions between caregivers are remote, punitive or unresponsive.

In the case of working moms in the industrial environment, the perceptions of the quality of daycare are prone to be conditioned by both structural and process dimensions, which are, in particular, observable and relational dimensions of the care environment. Mothers usually evaluate cleanliness, physical safety, the behaviour of the caregiver towards children, and emotional conditions of children at a higher rate than such technical aspects as the staff levels, the curriculum design, or the scores of regulatory compliance. The definition of this difference is central to understanding how working mothers in the RMG sector judge and discuss about the quality of daycare.

Nurturing Care Framework

The Nurturing Care Framework, the collaboration between the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and the World Bank (2018) finds five key building blocks that children need to achieve optimal early development: good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, security and safety, and early learning opportunities. The framework notes that these aspects are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, where lack in one aspect can undermine the overall developmental-related results. The Nurturing Care Framework is specifically applicable to a situation where children are at compounded risk, including the risks posed by poverty, inadequate healthcare, unstable or poor-quality caregiving situations.

When applied to RMG daycare centres, Nurturing Care Framework can be a helpful tool to understand the perception of mothers since the five components are quite close to the quality indicators that can be easily observed when mothers assess the quality of daycare services. The physical safety and cleanliness are in line with the security and safety aspect. The component of adequate nutrition is associated with feeding practices and meal provision. The responsive element of care giving is expressed through caregiver warmth and responsiveness. The early learning aspect is associated with availability of play materials and stimulation activities. This research adopts the framework as an interpretive device to explore the relation between the expressed priorities of mothers and the developmental needs identified by the framework that the mothers satisfy or fail to satisfy.

Human Capability Theory

Human Capability Theory, expressed by Sen (1999) and elaborated by Nussbaum (2011) is concerned with the increasing freedoms, capabilities, as well as possibilities of humans in order to live the life they ought to appreciate. In early childhood settings,

the approach focuses on the significance of physical wellbeing, emotional safety, social integration and cognitive development environments as core competences with long-term potential in the perspective of the approach. The theory is specifically applicable to the situation of structural inequality whereby the ability of people is not limited by their disabilities but by the circumstances of the system.

The structural barriers to working mothers giving nurturing home-based care in the RMG sector include the shift periods, financial pressures, as well as having alternative childcare options. Daycare centres consequently hold the prospects of acting as compensatory spaces that allow the children to acquire the basic competencies as home-based care becomes an unavoidable constraint. But the degree to which the available daycare facilities are fulfilling this potential is largely determined by the dimensions of quality that this research will attempt to comprehend by understanding the perceptions of mothers. Human Capability Theory applies with caution in the study in order to guide the analysis of the perceptions of mothers regarding the adequacy of daycare environments in allowing or limiting the developmental potential of their children.

Conclusion to the Theoretical Background

In sum, the combination of these theoretical approaches gives one a multi-layered and contextually sensitive approach to the understanding of the quality of daycare as a phenomenon which is at once structural, relational, experiential and framed within a larger social and economic reality. The Ecological Systems Theory puts the Perception of mothers in the confines and affordance of industrial labour. The structure and process quality paradigm identifies the difference between observable conditions and a texture of care giving relationships. The Nurturing Care Framework bridges the everyday assessment of mothers to the basic developmental assessments of children. Human Capability Theory presents an interpretive backdrop to thinking over whether daycare

setting is expanding or limiting the development opportunities of a child. Such frameworks do not subject the data to a comprehensive or ideal model of daycare quality; instead, they inform the interpretation of how working mothers in the RMG sector think about, value, and assess daycare services in the context of their lived realities.

International Research on Quality of Daycare

International studies continue to determine the paramount role of early childhood care and education on the developmental patterns of children. Current longitudinal and cross-national studies indicate that good quality daycare settings have a significant positive contribution to cognitive, language and socio-emotional development in children especially where care is marked by responsive and individualized interactions between care-givers and children (Barnett, 2011; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Research in the various national settings proves that the quality of early care experiences does not just have an enduring impact in the school preparedness and academic performance of children but also on self-regulation, peer relationships, and mental conditions of children (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Melhuish et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, in the literature on the topic, there is also a common finding that there is a vast mismatch between professional or regulatory conceptualizations of quality in daycare and the aspects of quality that parents themselves value. Research in North America, Europe, Latin America and Asia shows that parents, regardless of their socioeconomic and cultural background, are likely to value safety, hygiene, staff warmth and reliability, and communication more than formal educational content or curriculum alignment (Araujo et al., 2016; Langford et al., 2017). These parental priorities are not blind but they are based on the practical interests and emotional investments of caregivers that rely on the daycare services to provide their children with

the basic needs of day time care during the working day. These issues are also compounded by the structural constraints of accessible daycare centres in the contexts of the low- and middle-income countries (UNESCO, 2019).

Overcrowding, inadequate ventilation, and sanitation, lack of stimulation and caregiver turnover and their insufficient training of caregiving staff have been recorded as challenges in quality services in daycare settings in low- and middle-income countries (UNESCO, 2019; Walker et al., 2011). Such situations may lead to the lack of use of formal daycare services by parents or their dependence on informal ones despite the fact that formal daycare centres are technically accessible (Walker et al., 2011). These trends have significant implications on the RMG industry in Bangladesh, whereby unexploitation of the available daycare is not a rare and where the perceived quality of services is a key factor in determining whether mothers decide to utilize them.

Daycare in Industrial Labour Conditions

The provision of daycare groups in the industrial labour context has been receiving growing attention as a workforce support tool with consequences not only on child welfare but on the economic contribution of women and productivity among employers. Evidence based on international data about garment and manufacturing sector in Vietnam, Cambodia, and India suggests that the provision of reliable, quality childcare can significantly decrease the amount of absenteeism amongst workers, enhance productivity as well as increase job retention among female workers (ILO Vietnam, 2019; Better Work Cambodia, 2020; SEWA, 2016). Research in these settings involving garment workers shows that confidence of maternal quality of childcare is a stronger predictor of employed stability when compared to physical access to the facility. Mothers who had confidence in their daycare centres had a higher probability

of continuing to attend regularly and to be more productive when compared to mothers whose childcare arrangement created anxiety or uncertainty.

In these industrial settings, the satisfaction of mothers with daycare service is strongly related to the quality indicators of relationship and observable quality of the daycare service and not to the formal educational programming or regulatory certification. The following factors are always linked to maternal satisfaction, such as responsiveness of caregivers, upholding cleanliness and hygiene, physical security, frequent feeding, and regular communication between daycare employees and mothers (ILO Vietnam, 2019; Better Work Cambodia, 2020). These results indicate that daycare quality has to be perceived in industrial environments, not through the prism of inspecting checklists or policy adherence measures, but rather with the help of the experience of the caregivers who practice it.

The gendered reality of labour also contributes to the dependence of working mothers on daycare services and their interest in them. Huge working hours, strict shifts, and insufficient support networks in the family restrict the caregiving choices of mothers and increase the stress of safety and emotional wellbeing of the children during working days

(Kabeer, Mahmud, 2004; Siddique, 2017). In Bangladesh, the choice of getting back to work following childbirth cannot be made without the aspect of day care provision and the perceived quality thereof by many of the RMG workers. A day care perceived as unsafe, inattentive, or uncommunicative does not merely do nothing, it becomes an active stressor that adds to the existing multiple vulnerabilities that working mothers encounter.

Daycare Services in Bangladesh

The Labour Act of Bangladesh requires the provision of daycare services at factories with at least 40 female employees (Bangladesh Labour act Amendment, 2018). In spite of such a legal framework, its application throughout the RMG sector is much-lopsided. Most factories have daycare centers, but these centers are created not to offer developmentally oriented care but to show the regulatory compliance, and the discrepancy between the policy and actual working conditions is still significant (CPD, 2020; ILO, 2021). There are weak enforcement mechanisms, the visits to monitor occur intermittently and there are weak remedies to non-compliance in order to induce a continuous quality improvement. The consequence of this is that the Bangladesh Labour Act requirement has created a mass creation of daycare facilities at the expense of providing quality care of any worth to the facilities.

The daycare services that are available to the industrial workers have been exhibiting quality deficiencies over time as evidenced through empirical studies carried out in urban and peri-urban Bangladesh. Among them are poor hygiene and sanitation, low-quality training and supervision of caregivers, scarcity of age-centered play resources and learning stimuli, congestion of physical areas, and poor relationship between caregivers and children that is characterized by custodial orientation, instead of developmental (Haque, 2020; Ahsan and Akhter, 2021; UNICEF, 2022). According to a research carried out by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD, 2020), most surveyed daycare centres that received the RMG label failed to reach basic safety, hygiene, and educational programming standards and that in most centres, caregiver training was insufficient or absent.

There is also available qualitative data that working mothers at the RMG sector in Bangladesh are more focused on safety, cleanliness, caregiver behaviour, and

communication regarding the quality of the daycare (Haque, 2020; UNICEF, 2022). Mothers are not only concerned about the physical security of the daycare settings, but also the emotional quality of service they get in the daycare setting by the caregiving staff, especially their warmth, attention, and responsiveness. According to many mothers, the daycare workers do not communicate with them much, and they cannot easily follow what their children do every day and address any emerging issues. These testimonies indicate that there is quite a gap between the quality of care that working mothers care about and the services most current RMG daycare centres offer.

Summary of Research Gap

The analyzed literature confirms that the quality of daycare is considered to be imperative to both the development of children and maternal wellbeing on the global level, and that the perceptions of quality held by the caregivers are determined by experiential, relational and contextual quality determinants that cannot be adequately reflected in the assessments tools. To date, the research on the issue in Bangladesh, in particular, has focused on structural levels and compliance measures to a large extent, providing little understanding of how working mothers in the RMG segment define, experience, and measure the quality of daycare services they rely on in this sector.

This paper is the direct answer to that gap. Through a qualitative-based research design that focuses on the voices and experiences of working mothers, the research questions the nature of daycare quality perceptions, priorities, and communication in the selected social and labour environment of RMG industry. It not only examines what mothers see and judge in daycare contexts, but how the conditions of industrial labour: long hours, lack of flexibility and family support influence what they demand and want in their childcare practices. The research therefore adds to a more down-to-earth

responsive approach to daycare quality in an industrial context, which has research and practice implications.

Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design, participants, research site, sampling procedure, data collection tools and procedures, data management and analysis, trustworthiness, ethical issues, and study limitations. It explains how the study was designed to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of working mothers regarding daycare quality in factory-based RMG settings in Bangladesh.

Research Approach and Design

The research will take the qualitative research approach within the framework of understanding the perceptions of working mothers regarding the quality of day care in factory-based Ready- Made Garment (RMG) employment in Bangladesh. Qualitative design is suitable as the study aims to know the subjective meanings, lived experiences, and context-related meanings and interpretations instead of quantifying and generalizing variables (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The perceptions of the quality of daycare of the working mothers are influenced by daily experiences, emotional issues, workplace demands and the caregiving demands. These dimensions are most comprehensively contacted by conversational inquiry which is in-depth and enables participants to relate their experiences in their language and with their emphases.

The research is oriented on the interpretive one, where knowledge is regarded as socially situated, and meaning as co-constructed in the definite relational and contextual circumstances (Schwandt, 2015). Instead of trying to arrive at a universal set of truths about the quality of daycare, the research project proposed will produce thick and context-based descriptions of how quality is perceived and conceived among a particular group of caregivers in a given industrial context. This interpretive position is aligned to the dedication of the study to centre the voices of mothers, as well as the

focus of the qualitative tradition on the richness of contextualisation, rather than statistical generalizability.

The main method of collecting primary data is semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs), with several key informant interviews with daycare managers and stakeholders at the factory level. The semi-structured format ensures consistency when comparing interviews without restricting the participants to descriptive elements of issues that they feel are most important (Kallio et al., 2016). This is especially the case with research where the subjects are in an industrial labour environment, where long-term ethical engagement is not easily achievable due to time constraints and workplace surveillance anxieties. The interviews were done individually and not in groups to make sure that the participants could talk freely without fear of social desirability pressure or possibilities of being discriminated against in the workplace.

Research Site

The research was done in some of the RMG-focused areas in industrial settings in the Gazipur and Savar districts, which are highly populated in garment manufacturing activities in Bangladesh. These are sites which were chosen purposely because of various reasons. To begin with, they contain a great proportion of women garment workers, a significant number of working mothers with young children. Second, the locations comprise factory-based daycare services and community based daycare services or self operated daycare services that cater to the industrial workers offering contextual diversity to the area of interest of the study. Third, the research networks and contacts in the community made it easier to access the potential participants and this lowered barriers to recruitment and helped the establishment of trust between themselves and the participants.

Gazipur and Savar are used as representative industrial labour settings of Bangladesh, where there is a high concentration of factories, rural mobilisation of workers into a factory, very little support by extended family, and nuclear homes are pervasive. Such characteristics render the sites reflective of the general circumstances within which a considerable part of the Bangladesh female garment workers get childcare. Although the research does not purport to be statistically representative, the site selection confirms the derivation of contextually applicable results with significant extrapolation to the entire RMG industry.

Research Participants

The main respondents in this research were working moms who work in the RMG industry and have children between the age of one and five years old and are already using daycare centres that are offered either at or close to their factory. The narrow consideration of mothers as caregiver-participants is indicative of the fact that in the RMG sector and the society of Bangladeshi in general, mothers are the major caregivers of young children and decision-makers when it comes to childcare arrangements (Naved, 2016). Although they may be part of the decision-making process of care giving, fathers, grandparents and other members of the household are usually not directly involved in the day to day monitoring and assessment of daycare services. The fact that they are not included in the list of participants does not exclude their interest to the family processes but is a deliberate choice of the research that focuses on the personalities of the people who are regularly interested in using services of daycare centers.

The study involved a total of nineteen participants. Fourteen working mothers participated in individual semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted using the IDI guide described above. The sample size of fourteen was determined by thematic

saturation, consistent with established guidelines for qualitative research of this depth (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Participants ranged in age from 20 to 34 years, with the majority aged between 23 and 30 years. Their children enrolled in daycare were aged between 12 months and 4.5 years. All participants were employed full-time in RMG factories in Gazipur or Savar, with daily shifts ranging from 8 to 12 hours. Duration of daycare use ranged from two months to approximately two years. The majority of participants resided in nuclear family households with limited or no extended family support.

In addition to the fourteen IDI participants, five key informants were interviewed using a separate researcher-designed Key Informant Interview (KII) guide comprising six open-ended questions tailored to institutional roles. The five key informants included three daycare centre managers or supervisors and two factory-level stakeholders — one human resources manager and one compliance officer. These interviews provided contextual and institutional perspectives on daycare provision, staffing, operational challenges, and management practices, which served to complement and contextualise the accounts of the working mothers.

Participants Selection Procedure

All of the participants were selected by means of purposive sampling, making sure that the recruited individuals possessed first-hand, retrospective experience of the phenomena being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Among working mothers, the selection criteria were that the participant has to be working full time in an RMG factory, that he/she has one to five year old kids who are currently studying in a factory-linked or nearby daycare centre as well as that the person should have at least two months of continuous daycare use. These requirements were to make sure the

participants had considerable experience using the daycare services to make substantive and reflective quality reports.

Potential participants were contacted initially in the offices of the human resources departments in the factories, staff of the daycare centres, and community health workers working in the Gazipur and Savar locations. Interested mothers were invited to participate in the study and were given an overview of what the participation would be like after receiving a brief explanation of the purpose of the study. Informally, screening was done to ensure that the participants met the eligibility criteria were met before formal consent was obtained. The process of sampling was continued until thematic saturation and at this point no substantively new themes or perspectives were emerging through further interviews (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The saturation point was achieved after fourteen interviews with working mothers and this saturation is in line with what is expected of qualitative research of the same level and depth.

Data Collection Tool

The primary data collection tool for this study was a researcher-designed semi-structured In-Depth Interview (IDI) guide. The IDI guide comprised fourteen open-ended questions organised around key thematic areas: mothers' definition of daycare quality; assessment of physical safety and hygiene; observation of caregiver–child interaction; feeding and nutrition practices; communication with daycare staff; overall trust and satisfaction; and recommendations for improvement. The guide was piloted with two working mothers who were not part of the final sample, and minor revisions were made to improve clarity and flow prior to the main data collection phase. Interviews were conducted individually on a one-on-one basis, at times and locations convenient to participants, including quiet spaces near factory premises, community

health facilities, and participants' homes. All interviews were conducted in Bengali, the participants' first language, to facilitate natural expression and accurate interpretation.

Data Collection Method and Procedure

Every interview was conducted on the basis of semi-structured interview guide, which had been designed to take part in this investigation. The guide has been structured based on some of the major areas such as the definition of daycare quality by mothers, assessment of safety and hygiene, observation of the interaction between caregivers and children, the experience of communication with daycare workers, the challenges and recommendations on how to improve the situation. Semi-structured form made the researcher reasonably cover the research questions and remain open to the specific concerns, emphases, and experiences that foregrounded individual respondents (Kallio et al., 2016). Significant themes were encouraged to be elaborated, clarified and explored by probing questions.

Interviews were of 35 to 55 minutes in length with the average being about 45 minutes. All the interviews were audio-recorded in the presence of informed consent of the participants and the field notes were kept during and right after every session to record the contextual observations, the demeanour of the participants as well as the first thoughts of the researcher. The interview guide was piloted and reviewed and tested on two mothers, who were not part of the final sample, before the actual phase of data collection started, and small revisions were done to enhance the clarity and flow.

Daycare managers, supervisor and factory stakeholders were used as key informants and a few semi-structured interviews were carried out. These interviews were meant to draw some contextual information regarding the provision of daycare services, operational limits, staffing, and institutional dispositions towards childcare provision. The key informant interviews took between 25-40 minutes, and were in either Bengali

or mixture of Bengali and English depending on the participants preference. These interviews were also kept by audio recordings and field notes.

Data Management and Analysis

Data from the fourteen IDIs and five KIIs were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. This well-established approach was selected because it provides a systematic yet flexible method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns across qualitative datasets while remaining close to participants' own language and meanings. To manage and analyse data across the multiple interview responses, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim in Bengali and subsequently translated into English by the researcher, who is fluent in both languages. Translated transcripts were cross-checked against the original Bengali recordings to ensure accuracy. Each of the nineteen transcripts was treated as an individual data source. Initial codes were generated inductively from each transcript, after which codes generated across all participants' responses were compared and clustered. Candidate themes were developed by grouping codes that reflected shared patterns of meaning present across multiple participants, rather than from the account of any single respondent. The analytical process moved iteratively between individual transcripts and the full dataset to enable systematic comparison, refinement, and verification of emerging themes. This process of cross-transcript analysis ensured that each final theme represented a robust, data-grounded pattern evident across the research participants as a whole.

During the initial stage, the researcher transcribed all audio recordings word-to-word in Bengali and then translated them into English following which she is fluent in both languages. Transcripts provided in the translation were also checked in comparison with the original Bengali records in order to confirm the accuracy and to maintain the

register and emotional tone of the language of participants in some cases. Several readings of transcripts were completed to build up a deep familiarity with the data and some preliminary reflective memos were created in which to capture early impressions and initial analytical directions.

In phase two, significant units of data such as phrases, sentences and passages were found and given initial codes which best described the content of the said meaning to the closest possible to that which was used by the participants. Codes were inductively constructed using the data, with the priority of the data analysis being placed on what participants themselves saw occurring in their own conceptual categories and expressions as opposed to them being forced into existent analytical categories. The third step was the examination and categorization of preliminary codes into preliminary themes reflecting larger trends in the answers of several participants.

During the fourth phase, preliminary themes were evaluated systematically in the face of the entire dataset in an attempt to determine their integrity, uniqueness, and representativeness of the data. This review merged, refined, or disaggregated some themes. The fifth stage included the process of defining and labeling each of the final themes made, what each theme represents and how it will help answer the research questions. The sixth and final phase involved the combination of the themes into a logical analytical storyline with the support of the well- chosen quotations of the participants describing the main findings and preserving the authenticity of the voice of the participants.

Validity & Reliability

To ascertain the credibility of the study, a number of strategies that align with the criteria of the quality of the rigour of qualitative research as proposed by Lincoln and Guba, (1985) were used throughout the research. The plausibility was reached by using

various sources; namely, working mothers in-depth interviews and key informant interviews, which enabled triangulating the points of view to a rather limited extent. Member checking was also done by sharing initial interpretations with a few individuals in order to establish whether the analytical summaries were accurate representations of their experiences and intentions. Member checking helped in refining and in some cases revising interpretations based on the responses given by the respondents.

Reliability was ensured with the help of precise and methodical documentation of all data collection and analysis steps with the maintenance of a detail audit trail of the interview guides, field notes, transcripts, and coded data archive. The thematic analysis process was performed in different steps and the analytical decisions made by the researcher at every stage were recorded to achieve transparency. The practice of reflexivity was applied during the research and the researcher kept a reflective journal to take note of the possible sources of bias, record methodological choices, and analyze how the position, assumptions, and experiences of the researcher may have contributed to the data collection and interpretation. The concern on transferability is met by providing thick, contextually rich descriptions of participants, sites of research and social and labour conditions that influence the phenomenon of the study and allow the readers to determine the applicability of the results to other settings.

Ethical Issues

The research followed the accepted ethical standards of research involving human subjects and was carried out in line with the BRAC University and BRAC Institute of Educational Development established guidelines of ethics of research and the global set of ethics of research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects, 1979). The BRAC University Research Ethics Committee gave institutional ethical approval, before any data collection activities were started.

Everything was done on a voluntary basis. Each participant was informed and told about the purpose of the study before the interview was conducted, the nature of participation, the use of the data, and the right of the participants to withdraw without any repercussions and reasons at any point in time. Since the really low formal literacy rates of RMG worker participants were dominant, the consent procedure was performed orally and in Bengali, and the participants signed the consent form or thumbprinted it after ensuring that they understand what they are signing.

The level of confidentiality was strictly observed during the research. All the participants received pseudonyms, and any identifying information was taken out of all the transcripts, field notes, and analytic products. The audio recordings will be kept in a secure place, and they will be permanently erased at the end of the research study. The possibility of workplace vulnerability was also paid special attention to because, at the time the study was performed, the participants were employees of factories where the research was carried out. Specifically, participants were assured in the fact that their answers could not be revealed to the management of the factory and daycare providers, and the venue of the interviews needed to be picked so that to guarantee privacy and the least chance of being spotted or identified.

Limitations of the Study

Because it is qualitative research, its results cannot be statistically generalized to all working women in the RMG industry as well as all daycare environments in Bangladesh. The research focuses on descriptive richness and depth more than depth of representation. Social desirability might affect the responses of participating individuals and especially when touching on sensitive issues that are related to workplace policies, quality of daycare or the outcome of children being enrolled in daycare programs by their mothers on their wellbeing. Although the researcher

intentionally created a non-judgmental and comfy environment during the interview, there is no way the social desirability may be completely avoided.

The research is based on self-reported data and lacks first-hand observation of daycare practices and everyday experiences of the children and interactions between caregivers and children in settings that are described. Direct observation would have been a valuable source of triangulation and more contextual foundation of the accounts of mothers. Nevertheless, the possibilities of access due to the security measures of the factory and the fear of possible disturbance of the daycare schedules restricted the viability of the extended observational fieldwork in the study timeframe. One should take into account these constraints in the process of reading the findings and evaluating their implications.

Chapter IV: Results/Findings & Discussion

Demographic Profile of Participants

This study used fourteen working mothers in the in-depth interviews. The age of the sample was between 20 and 34 years, and most of the sample was aged 23 to 30 years. All the respondents worked full-time in RMG factories in Gazipur or Savar. Daycare children were between 12 months and 4.5 years old. The vast majority of the participants worked 8 to 12 hours a day and were in nuclear families with little or no external family assistance. The time spent at daycare was between two months and about two years. The following table presents the major demographic data.

Table 1: Demographic Information of IDI Participants

ID	Age	Child Age	Daycare Duration	Shift Hours	Household	Factory Location
M01	24	18 months	6 months	10 hrs	Nuclear	Gazipur
M02	28	3 yrs	1 year	8 hrs	Nuclear	Savar
M03	22	2 yrs	8 months	10 hrs	Nuclear	Gazipur
M04	31	4 yrs	2 years	12 hrs	Nuclear	Gazipur
M05	26	14 months	4 months	8 hrs	Nuclear	Savar
M06	29	3.5 yrs	18 months	10 hrs	Nuclear	Savar
M07	20	12 months	2 months	8 hrs	Nuclear	Gazipur
M08	33	4.5 yrs	2 years	12 hrs	Nuclear	Savar
M09	25	2.5 yrs	1 year	10 hrs	Nuclear	Gazipur
M10	27	3 yrs	14 months	8 hrs	Nuclear	Gazipur
M11	34	4 yrs	2 years	12 hrs	Nuclear	Savar
M12	23	20 months	5 months	10 hrs	Nuclear	Savar
M13	30	3 yrs	16 months	8 hrs	Nuclear	Gazipur
M14	21	14 months	3 months	10 hrs	Nuclear	Savar

Results and Findings

Thematic analysis of the fourteen in-depth interviews and five key informant interviews produced seven broad themes that when combined in totality reveal the perceptions, judgment and response of working mothers in the RMG sector to the quality of daycare service availed to their young children. Themes have been tabulated below following with quotes of the participating participants to support the same. The quotations are translated from Bengali into English. On top of that, participant identifiers (M01-M14) are also used to preserve confidentiality.

Theme 1: Defining the Quality of Daycare through Day-to-Day Observation

Every one of the fourteen interviewees defined the daycare quality basically in terms of what they could see directly at the drop-off and pick-up each workday, in the physical appearance and emotional state of their children, and during unofficial communication with the daycare employees. No one mentioned a formal inspection report, regulatory standards or educational curriculum in defining quality. To these mothers, quality was more an experience, a relationship phenomenon - something sensed and observed and not quantified.

To most of the respondents, a good daycare was one where the child looked happy, well-groomed and settled upon picking him. Some of the mothers indicated that they look at the face of their children at the pick-up as their main quality checking tool. The daycare was good in case the child ran smilingly. When the child seemed to be withdrawn, hungry or distraught, something was wrong.

A good daycare implies that my son will be clean by the time I arrive home, that he will have eaten, and he will not be scared. These are the three things which I never overlook. When the three are okay, I start to think that I could

go to work tomorrow without any significant concerns. (M02, IDI, February 2026)

Prior to this factory having a daycare, I left my daughter with a neighbour who had her own children as well. Here at least there are good rooms, and someone to take care of children. However, I also watch on television what the daycare is supposed to be like sometimes: with toys and learning, and that is not what we have at all. (M09, IDI, February 2026)

This informal method to assessment was supported by key informants, who observed that the overall evaluation that mothers had in the facility was more related to daily experiences with the facility than regular feedback systems. In one daycare supervisor report, the most prevalent feedback method by mothers was not curriculum or programming but feeding, cleanliness and whether their child had cried in the daycare.

Theme 2: Safety and Physical Environment

The most versatile and pressing dimension of quality of daycare of all fourteen interviews was safety. The participants defined safety both physically and emotionally which includes the lack of physical hazards within the physical environment, being supervised and keeping children safe against any harm by older children, violent peers, or careless staff members. Safety was an entrance issue to a lot of mothers: a daycare that was not able to offer basic security could not be replaced by any other good attributes.

Closely related physical safety issues were frequently mentioned by the participants as unsafe electrical fittings, defective furniture, hard concrete floors, with no mats or padding on them, inadequate gating to keep kids out of industry, and cramped rooms without enough supervision of small children in them with older toddlers.

My child is a girl, and she is just eighteen months old. She cannot protect herself. When I leave her, I must be sure that the room is safe- no wires she can get hold of, no sharp edges and that somebody is on the alert. Once I arrived early and she was close to a broken chair. That scared me badly.
(M01, IDI, February 2026)

The flooring of that room is hard concrete. When little kids trip and they trip, there is nothing to cushion it. I have requested them to put some mat or foam, but they claim that there is no budget. My son is home with a bruise two or three times. (M05, IDI, February 2026)

I heard an account of another mother that one of the attendants at times yells at the children when they cry too late. I did not observe it at all, but thereafter I would be questioning my son every night whether the didi [female caregiver] was nice to him. He is little, and is unable to justify all, though I look at his face when I question it. (M10, IDI, February 2026)

Some of the concerns raised by the participants were emotional safety, especially the mothers of children aged below two years. These mothers were concerned by the fact that

caregivers would react to crying of children in a timely and sensitive manner as well as that children would be subjected to harsh physical handling. Two of the participants said they either saw or heard about rough handling of kids by the staff in the daycare which left a great impression on their faith in that daycare.

Another issue associated with supervision ratios was also found to be a long-lasting safety concern. Some of the participants said that the number of caregivers to the

children was inadequate especially during peak times when several infants and toddlers demanded the attention of caregivers at once.

Theme 3: Hygiene and Sanitation

The second dimension of daycare quality that was most frequently discussed was daycare hygiene and cleanliness. Respondents always indicated hygiene as a health necessity, and as an observable sign of institutional caring and attention. The clean environment meant to the mothers that the staff was responsible, and the facility was being taken care of with the best interest of the children. On the other hand, low quality of hygiene was witnessed as a firsthand point of institutional negligence.

When the room is stinky when I enter, I already have an idea that I have not managed the day well. The first thing that you see when you go in is cleanliness. It informs you whether the people who work there are really interested in the children or they are sitting and collecting their pay. (M04, IDI, March 2026)

The largest grievance I have is the toilet and handwashing. It has a single small toilet that is frequently dirty by afternoon and serves all the children. Small children are not able to take proper care of themselves and there is not necessarily somebody to assist. I worry a lot about infection. (M08, IDI, March 2026)

Since her younger daughter started attending the daycare, she has become ill three times. The doctor replied it must be because of the food or because of the other sick children who are staying in the same room. Now I always include a bottle and something to eat, but that does not stop me being concerned about washing hands. (M12, IDI, March 2026)

Some of the participants also recounted effective hygiene failures that had had direct health effects on their children such as cases of gastroenteritis due to poor practices of food

handling, skin infections as a result of poor diaper changing habits, and respiratory diseases as a result of overcrowding and poor ventilation. Parents in such instances

indicated that the hygienic standards of the daycare caused them low-level anxiety on a regular basis as opposed to reassurance.

The participants observed that hygienic standards differed in shifts and among different workers, and hygienic level maintenance was not consistent, and individual motivation of different caregivers was not regulated by institutional guidelines. Other mothers stated that the facility appeared to be cleaner in the morning and became dirty towards afternoon, which was the time when staff levels were less.

Theme 4: Caregiver-Child Interaction and Emotional Care

All fourteen participants identified the quality of caregiver-child interaction as a key important dimension of daycare quality and highly valued one. The respondents always separated warm, attentive, and responsive caregivers to their children as opposed to those who were seen as being disengaged, inattentive, or simply custodial. Mothers described the emotional aspect of care, holding, talking to, comforting, and loving a child, as being just as crucial as the physical safety and hygiene aspect of child-rearing. Many parents expressed a notion of care that is very similar to that which developmental studies call responsive caregiving: the ability of a caregiver to be sensitive to both the emotional and physical expressions of a child. They conveyed this using everyday language, meaning that it can be regarded as a caregiver who not only looks into a child but just takes a glance in a room with children.

I have one Apa [older woman caregiver] that I love. She never forgets to mention the name of my daughter and addresses her by a name. This Apa bends down to her whenever I take her out in the morning and whispers to her. My daughter visits her without shedding tears. That means everything to me. That means she is safe. (M06, IDI, February 2026)

The issue is that the majority of the caregivers are not trained. They are good natured individuals and yet they do not know how to play to the children or how to communicate with them in a manner that makes them learn. Mostly they sit and watch. The children are simply sitting or sleeping. Nothing is on that is good to their development. (M11, IDI, March 2026)

When I am sure that my son is being taken care of by a person who is nice, I will be able to work. My mind is here at the factory. However, when I realize that the person taking care of her is merely sitting on her phone and is unable to listen to her, I can not get myself to stop thinking about him. On such days, my production reduces. (M03, IDI, February 2026)

Respondents who rated warm and responsive interactions with the caregivers also had lower work-related anxiety and better general satisfaction with the daycare. Mothers who felt that the caregivers were absent or uninvolved, on the contrary, reported increased stress during the workday, inability to focus attention on the work, and constant thoughts of the emotional situation with children.

The value of continuity of caregiving was also realized by a number of participants. Those mothers who reported that daycare personnel kept changing mentioned the disturbance in the emotional stability of their children and their own confidence in the center. Children who had developed attachments with specific caregivers were distressed whenever the caregivers moved out and the mothers said it took weeks before they were able to settle the children once again when a staff change occurred.

Theme 5: Food, Nutrition, and Everyday Life

Twelve out of the fourteen participants addressed feeding habits and adequate nutrition of children attending a daycare. Mothers were concerned with the quality and adequacy of served food, the time food was served and snacks, as to whether food was served at the right time in relation to children and their hunger and developmental needs and the level of hygiene at which food was prepared. Some of the respondents opted to bring homemade food instead of using food provided by the day care center, as they were concerned with nutrition, as well as wanted to have certain continuity of maternal care across the division of the workday.

I never leave my son without his food at home. Their meals are rice and dal which are okay, but the portions are small and I do not feel confident with the

hygiene of the preparation. It is one thing less to send his own food. (M02, IDI, February 2026)

Only fourteen months old is my daughter. She must be eaten very attentively, with mushy food, and patiently. The parents in this case are in charge of ten or twelve children at a time. They are unable to provide her with the time she is required during the meals. She goes home sometimes when she is still hungry and that is very painful to me. (M07, IDI, February 2026)

Children need routine. They should be aware that during this time they take food, during this time they sleep and during this time they play. The small children are disturbed the rest of the day without routine. The day care where my daughter studies lack an appropriate schedule. It all lies in who went to work that day and his or her level of busyness. (M09, IDI, February 2026)

Some of the participants also remarked on how inconsistent the feeding schedules were, as they found that the lack of regular mealtimes contributed to the inconsistency in the feeding patterns of their children and the working shifts. Breastfeeding mothers had special challenges since the factory was not close to the daycare center, and the need to work in shifts often meant that mothers could not have time to nurse during working days.

The ability to predict the day schedule including not just meal times but also nap times, outdoor or play time, and hygiene routines were also pointed out by some participants as a key but frequently overlooked aspect of quality daycare. Mothers mentioned that young children like predictability and consistency, and said that they were frustrated that many of the facilities worked on an improvised and not a structured daily schedule.

Theme 6: Communication, Trust, and Overall Satisfaction

Communication between daycare staff and mothers, the development of trust, and mothers' overall satisfaction are presented here as an integrated theme, as these dimensions were deeply interconnected in the accounts of the participants. Mothers consistently identified regular, honest, and informative communication as a quality indicator, while trust was found to emerge gradually from the accumulation of positive

daily experiences across all other quality dimensions. General satisfaction with the daycare facility was thus inseparable from both the quality of communication and the level of trust that mothers had developed over time.

they never call me out, except when there is something really wrong, that is, when she is unwell, or in case something has happened. Otherwise I do not hear anything the whole day. I am not aware whether she has taken her meal, whether she has slept, whether she has long cried. When I arrive to fetch her off, unless I inquire point-blank, they respond nothing. (M01, IDI, February 2026)

A good daycare would inform me on what my child did during the day when I come back. One sentence, even 'today he ate well', or 'today he was unsettled' would give me a conception of how he is. But they are usually in a hurry and simply give him to me and retire in (M13, IDI, March 2026)

I would like to complain about the hygiene and about the caregivers, yet the daycare is operated by the factory. I fear that I will be caught in a snare of making too much noise that would be the case with my job. So I hush and can do as well as I may. (M08, IDI, March 2026)

It does not take long to build trust. At the onset, I used to be distracted in the workplace every day. I kept on thinking: has something happened? every hour. Is she crying? Month after month, I began to believe slowly when I noticed that she was never ill when I entered. Now I can work properly. But that trust was hard to come and would be easily ruined. (M06, IDI, February 2026)

I do not have complete faith in this daycare. I attend because I have no choice my mother is in the village, my husband is also working long hours and there is nobody around who could leave my children under my supervision. I would have it were I had a better alternative. But I have been taught to contain my anxiety since I have no other option. (M04, IDI, March 2026)

Some respondents told about how they tried to stick to more frequent communication with daycare employees, such as asking them to provide updates on a daily basis, leave written notes with instructions about their children, preferences, or health requirements, and talk to them upon drop-off. These attempts did not receive equal reactions. Some of the participants had positive associations with individual caregivers who were

proactive and reliable in their communication. Most of them referred to impersonal or transactional relationships with the workers in the facility.

Only a few interviewees noted that due to language barriers or power distance in the factory environment, communication was harder. Other mothers indicated that they were hesitant to raise their concerns to the daycare management since they would fear that raising the concerns would have an effect on their jobs or contact with factory supervisors.

The theme of trust was found to be integrative and significantly combined the experiences of the participants in all the other dimensions of quality. Mothers explained trust in a day care facility as a state of mind that enabled them to work without the need to eat anxiety - a state of cognitive and emotional freedom that was perceived to be crucial to their operation as workers and caregivers. The growth of trust has been explained as experience

based and a gradual process, which is developed once there have been positive observations which is developed over time as opposed to being created once by a reassurance or visit to the inspection.

The participants, who had reported more trust in the daycare facility, were associated with longer terms of enrollment of their children, with certain caregiving staff, as well as with the consistent positive results in the terms of the physical health of their children, their emotional condition, and the developmental process. Lower trust mothers had higher chances to report the sense of helplessness, ambivalence regarding the further use of daycare, and direct mentions regarding their desire to withdraw their children in case alternative care was offered.

Some of the participants differentiated between the trust in the facility as an institution and the trust in particular individual caregivers. The phenomenon of mothers having

nice attitudes to specific caregivers and being suspicious of the overall running of the facility, their level of hygiene or the regularity of their staff was a common occurrence.

Theme 7: Mothers' Suggestions for Improvement

When questioned about ways of enhancing the quality of daycare, all the fourteen respondents made practical recommendations. The variety and particularity of recommendations was based on the fact that mothers are highly acquainted with the work of daycare and can make complex judgments about the quality of the services. The recommendations were grouped into five major areas, including physical environment

modifications; caregiver training and staffing; feeding and nutrition; communication and transparency; and structural and policy changes.

The most common prescribed by the participants on physical environment were the installation of soft mats and floor padding among younger children, better ventilation and natural light, separation of sleeping space with neat bedding, child-safe gating to avoid access to risky spaces, and simple play materials such as soft toys, picture books, and building blocks that can suit different ages.

The room must be covered with mats, there must be good lighting, and there must be some toys. At the moment the children have little to play with or look upon. A small child should not spend all his day in a bare room without anything to do. It is not development but merely holding them in existence until we return. (M11, IDI, March 2026)

The guardians require education. They are not unpleasant persons, they just do not know how to speak with young children, how to make them play, how to answer a child who is highly upset. Even a week of proper training would go a long way in their manner of working. (M03, IDI, February 2026)

A little scrap of paper, with three or four things in it--what she ate, whether she slept, whether something happened, that is all I want to know. It does not require much effort to write four things. But to have it in my hand when I take her in the evening, would mean everything to me. (M13, IDI, March 2026)

On training of caregivers, most of the respondents agreed that caregivers who had been trained on the basic aspects of child development, responsive care giving and first aid in case of emergencies should be provided. A number of mothers also proposed that a certification condition be implemented on the workers of daycare centers and that factories should focus on recruiting those workers who had pertinent experience or education in the field of childcare.

On communication, the participants demanded written or verbal reports on a daily basis regarding the feeding, sleep, health and behaviour of their children. Several of the mothers directly demanded to have a plain daily record card which could be given over at the pick-up time, and some of them recommended that mobile phone communication should be utilized to make the mothers aware of any important happenings in the day.

On the structural level, some players demanded more government supervision of the quality of daycare, factory-level responsibility systems, and a method to include childcare standards in the buyer codes of conduct that operate the international garment supply chains. These recommendations were based on the understanding that mothers had on the fact that it was unlikely that individual facilities would invest in quality improvement without outside pressures and responsibility.

Discussion

The results of the current research provide a highly contextualised and participant-based description of the perception, appraisal, and action of the working mothers in the RMG sector of Bangladesh based on their perception of the quality of the daycare services that they employ their small children. Combined, the six themes that have emerged due to the thematic analysis have formed an intricate image according to which the maternal attitudes towards the quality of daycare are conditioned not only by what happens in the daycare establishment but also by the limitations of the possibilities of

other options, as well as the depths of the emotional investments in leaving very young children in the care of an institution to work long hours.

The conclusion that mothers construct and assess daycare as a safe, hygienic, warm, and relational environment compared to formal educational or regulatory standards is in line with the international research that has shown that parents in various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds consider safety, hygiene, warmth of caregivers, and communication to determine the quality of childcare (Araujo et al., 2016; Langford et al., 2017). This is not a sign of lack of awareness or ambition of these mothers, but an expression of the pragmatic epistemology of caregivers that lack time to participate formally in facilities and instead depend on the accruing daily observation as the major evaluative tool. The attention the state of children at pick-up as a quality indicator is repeating the emphasis of the Nurturing Care Framework on the responsive caregiving as the key element of child wellbeing (WHO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2018).

The fact that safety is the main quality issue is in line with the results of similar research that was done with garment industry workers in Vietnam and Cambodia (ILO Vietnam, 2019; Better Work Cambodia, 2020). In the case of mothers with children aged below two years, the

issue of safety is very intense since their infants and young toddlers are physically vulnerable to the caregiver taking good care of them. The physical dangers reported by respondents in the study hard concrete floors, broken furniture, inadequate gating, and insufficient supervision ratios are in line with structural gaps reported in Bangladesh-based daycare facilities, which are attributable to RMG (CPD, 2020; Ahsan and Akhter, 2021). The results indicate that even though the Bangladesh Labour Act Amendment

has been implemented in 2018, some of the most fundamental physical safety regulations are still not properly applied in most plants.

The richness and particularity of descriptions of the participants of the quality of caregiver-child interaction highlights the crucial role of the process quality, rather than the structural conditions, in the process of daycare assessment of mothers. What developmental researchers refer to as sensitive and responsive caregiving sounded almost the same by mothers, who consistently paid careful attention to the emotional signals of children at an individual level and which research determines is the strongest predictor of positive developmental outcomes (Burchinal et al., 2016; Hamre and Pianta, 2007). The fact that the participants were able to name and define this aspect of quality in such a clear way implies that there is no lack in knowledge, but the necessity to fulfill a pressing need. This difference between the warmth and attentiveness mothers distinctly appreciate and the custodial, uninvolved caregiving many said she went through indicates a fundamental difference of care delivery.

The close relation between communication quality and maternal trust is an especially strong statement that has a direct practical implication. Mothers, who received informative updates on their children daily life regularly, were found to be less anxious and better able to focus on their job under the condition of higher workforce productivity and stability, which is corroborated by research to show that maternal confidence in the quality of childcare practices is linked to more stability and productivity in the workforce (ILO Vietnam, 2019; World Bank, 2019). On the other hand, the informational vacuum, described by the vast majority of participants as a situation where the daycare staff had so little to say that they were responding to the crises, produced a vast amount of low-level anxiety that undermined maternal

wellbeing and worsened work performance. This revelation is especially applicable to the management of factories and the planning of the working procedures of day cares. The issue of structural restraint, which includes long hours of work, inadequate childcare options, economic necessity, and factory work power hierarchy in the perception and reactions of the mothers to the quality of daycare should remain an object of persistent interest. The Ecological Systems Theory has proved to be a valuable theory in explaining how the microsystem experiences of the two mothers and children are influenced by these exosystem- level conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Mothers who are limited to childcare choices by financial necessity and lack of other options are unable to make consumer choices that quality improvement framework tends to presuppose. The fact that they are still using the facilities perceived as not satisfactory does not mean that they are satisfied; that means that there are no alternatives they can use. The difference has critical ramifications to the interpretation of data on daycare utilization by the factory management, policymakers, and advocacy organizations.

The improvement recommendations provided by the mothers, which is in the practical and specific with a direct experience grounding, has a significant evidence base to quality improvement efforts. The fact that the ideas converge on the recommendation of physical environment improvement, training of the caregivers, regular feeding schedules, and communication structure implies that these are viewed to be possible, high-priority changes that would make a significant difference in how mothers experience daycare services. This is aligned with what international comparative studies on factory-based daycare in Asia (ILO Vietnam, 2019; Better Work Cambodia, 2020) suggested, and it supports the multi-level interventions, i.e. infrastructure, human resources and operational procedures at the same time.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at investigating the perceptions of working mothers who work in Bangladesh in the factory based Ready-Made Garment facilities on the quality of daycare centres that they use by their young children. The study produced rich contextually grounded evidence on the meaning, experience, and assessment of daycare quality by the women most directly impacted through semi-structured in depth interviewing with fourteen working mothers in the industrial sectors of Gazipur and Savar with the assistance of key informant interviews with daycare managers and factory stakeholders.

The overall conclusion of this paper is that working mothers in the RMG industry possess a subtle, experience-based notion of the quality of daycare that is both useful and close- up at the same time. Mothers do not approach the daycare using formal standards of regulations or pedagogy as the main approach. They appraise it in terms of the emotional well-being of their children at the close of every working day, in the levels of cleanliness and safety of the surroundings in which they leave their children, in the levels of warmth and care of the caretakers who handle the welfare of their children and in the quality and regularity of communication with the daycare staff. These assessive dimensions are not inferior to professional quality indicators, they are based on first-hand information about the needs of their children in everyday life, and experience gained by parents who undergo childcare in the environment of high structural constraint.

The thematic analysis yielded seven themes that were defining quality through observation; safety and physical environment; hygiene and sanitation; caregiver-child interaction and emotional care; feeding, nutrition, and daily routines; communication between staff and mothers; trust and overall satisfaction; and suggestions to make

quality improvements by mothers. In all seven themes, a common trend was found, namely, the difference between what mothers consider in daycare and what they actually experience is quite large. The majority of the participants reported about the day care setting in which there were physical safety issues, lack of hygiene practices, lack of caregiver training and interaction, lack of stimulation, unreliable feeding, and minimal communication. These circumstances cannot be merely called inconveniences, and it is a failure of the system to offer the kind of developmentally supportive care that children of working mothers in the RMG sector not only need but have a legal right to. The paper also sheds much light on the deep-seated impact of the low quality of daycare on the welfare of the mothers and on their job attendance. Unconfident mothers have increased anxiety, decreased productivity and trouble holding a job. On the other hand, reliable and trusted childcare helps mothers to work with a greater focus and stability. The connection between the quality of childcare and the maternal engagement in the workforce is not peripheral to the economic interests of the RMG sector; it is central to them. By investing in quality daycare, the factories are investing in the stability and productivity of their workforce which is predominantly female.

The study results have enormous implications to the policy of early childhood development, labour practice and childcare programming in Bangladesh. It shows that the provision of daycare as stipulated by the Bangladesh Labour Act is both needed but should not be done without a strong accountability framework, monitoring and effective quality measures. The provision of a daycare space cannot be equated to quality early childhood care. The policymakers, factory owners, and development organisations should not only be attentive to the activities within daycare spaces but also be attentive to their existence.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research results, various pieces of advice are provided to the policy makers, the administration of factories, daycare providers, programme developers and the researcher dealing with the early childhood development and labour welfare in the RMG industry in Bangladesh.

Daycare Operators and Factory Management

Daycare centres operating within or adjacent to RMG factories should establish and maintain written quality standards covering physical safety, hygiene, caregiver-child interaction, and daily routines, so that working mothers can rely on consistent and predictable care for their children. Specifically, factory management should install proper safety measures such as soft floor mats, child-safe gating, and adequate ventilation; introduce structured daily routines covering mealtimes, rest, and stimulation or play; and implement a simple daily record system — for example, a written card shared with mothers at pick-up time — documenting each child's feeding, sleep, health, and behaviour. Transparent and accessible feedback channels must be established to allow mothers to raise concerns without fear of professional consequences, recognising that mothers who feel heard are more likely to sustain engagement with the daycare and remain productive in their workplace roles.

Caregiver Training and Professional Development

Investment in formal, continuous caregiving staff training should be of interest to daycare centres operating in the RMG sector. Training material must constitute basic tenets of responsive caregiving and child formation, age-related stimulation procedures, simple nutrition and hygiene guidelines, emergency response and first aid, as well as communication abilities in interacting productively with parents. The daycare workers

should also be certified through setting and monitoring of their qualifications by the factory compliance systems and government. Caregiving personnel must be well paid and given a career development initiative to curb high rates of staff turnover that undermine the security of attachment in children.

Policy and Regulatory Reform

The ministry of labour and employment along with the ministry of women and children affairs of Bangladesh must work together to come up with the minimum quality standards of the factory-linked daycare premises beyond physical infrastructure into the process quality facets such as caregiver to child ratios, staff training needs, daily activities, and process of communicating with parents. The enforcement and monitoring mechanisms must be reinforced and inspection carried out regularly and without prior notice as well as meaningful penalty against non-compliance. International companies and companies buying clothes in Bangladesh that rely on garments sourced in Bangladesh need to integrate childcare quality provisions into their supplier codes of conduct even though the working conditions of female workers are not the only conditions of childcare.

Programme Design and Development Organisations

The non-governmental organizations and development agencies in the RMG sector must develop contextually relevant caregiver training programmes that reflect the reality of factory-related daycare arrangements, such as the restriction of shift work, availability of staff, and scarcity of resources. Parent support programmes based in the community ought to be formulated to assist working mothers in lobbying on improvement of the quality of day cares and also offer advice on how to assist their children in their development within the limited home time they have. They should be

encouraged and closely assessed to pilot programmes that test innovative ways of communication between daycare staff and working mothers such as simple daily record cards and mobile-based updates.

Future Research

Further studies ought to be based on the qualitative results of this paper by using mixed methods designs that incorporate mothers perceptual narratives and explicit observations of daycare quality and longitudinal outcome statistics of children development scale. The views of daycare caregiving staff should be studied as their experiences and training needs are not well represented in the literature nowadays. A comparative study between various forms of factory linked and community-based daycare systems, in different districts of Bangladesh, and industrial sectors would help to add to a more comprehensive and policy relevant body of evidence.

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Appendices

Appendix A: In-Depth Interview (IDI) Guide

Demographic Information (to be recorded before the interview):

Participant's age, child's age, duration of daycare use, working hours, shift type, household composition, and availability of family support.

Interview Questions

1. How long has your child been attending this daycare centre?
2. What led you to choose this daycare service? Were there other options available to you?
3. How safe do you feel the daycare environment is for your child? Can you describe the physical space?
4. How would you describe the hygiene and cleanliness of the daycare?
5. How do caregivers interact with the children? Can you describe a typical interaction you have observed?

6. What activities does your child usually engage in at the daycare? Please describe in detail.
7. Are meals or snacks provided? How would you evaluate their quality and adequacy?
8. Does the daycare provide adequate rest and comfort for your child? Can you describe the sleeping arrangements?
9. Do the caregiving staff communicate with you regularly? What types of information do they share?
10. Do you trust the daycare? Why or why not? Has anything happened that increased or decreased your trust?
11. How does leaving your child in daycare affect your ability to concentrate on your work?
12. What challenges have you faced with this daycare?
13. What improvements would you most like to see in this daycare?
14. Is there anything else about your experience of this daycare that you would like to share?

Bangla Translation — IDI Guide

- আপনার সন্তান কতদিন ধরে ডে-কেয়ারে আসছে?
- আপনি কেন এই ডে-কেয়ার সেবাটি নির্বাচিত করেছেন?
- আপনার সন্তানের জন্য এই ডে-কেয়ার কতটা নিরাপদ বলে মনে করেন?
- ডে-কেয়ারের স্বাস্থ্যবিধি আপনি কিভাবে পরিমাপ করবেন?
- কেয়ারগিভাররা শিশুদের সাথে কেমন আচরণ করেন? কিছু উদাহরণ কি দেয়া যেতে পারে এই প্রতিক্রিয়া নিয়ে?
- আপনার সন্তান সাধারণত কেমন কার্যক্রমে অংশগ্রহণ করে ডে-কেয়ারে?

- শিশুদের জন্য কি ডে-কেয়ারে খাবার সরবরাহ করা হয়? এর গুণগতমান কিভাবে মূল্যায়ন করবেন?
- ডে-কেয়ারে কি পর্যাপ্ত বিশ্রামের ব্যবস্থা করা হয় শিশুদের জন্য?
- কেয়ারগিভাররা কি আপনার সাথে নিয়মিত যোগাযোগ করেন?
- আপনি কি ডে-কেয়ারের উপর পুরোপুরি আস্থা রাখেন?
- এতে আপনার কাজের মনোযোগ কিভাবে প্রভাব ফেলে বলে আপনি মনে করেন?
- এই ডে-কেয়ার নিয়ে আপনার মতামত বা অভিযোগ আছে কোন?

Appendix B: Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide

For Daycare Managers / Supervisors

1. How long have you been working in this daycare facility?
2. How many children are currently enrolled and how many caregiving staff are on duty each day?
3. What training or qualifications do the caregiving staff have?
4. What challenges do you face in maintaining quality standards in this facility?
5. How do you communicate with working mothers about their children's daily experiences?
6. What resources or support would most help you improve the quality of care provided here?

For Factory Stakeholders (HR / Compliance)

1. What is the factory's current policy regarding daycare provision?
2. How is daycare quality monitored or assessed within your factory?
3. What resources has the factory allocated to daycare provision in the past year?
4. What are the main challenges you face in maintaining or improving daycare quality?

5. How do you receive feedback from working mothers about the daycare?

Appendix C: Consent Form — In-Depth Interview (IDI)

Title of Study: Caregivers' Perception of Quality in Daycare Centres within the RMG Sector in Bangladesh

Consent Statement

I understand that:

- My participation in this study is entirely voluntary.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence.
- My identity will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used in all reporting.
- The data collected will be used solely for academic research purposes.
- The interview will be audio-recorded with my permission.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers.

Signature / Thumbprint: _____

Date: _____

\Bangla Translation — IDI Consent

আমি বুঝেছি যে

- আমার পরিচয় সুরক্ষিত রাখা হবে।
- আমি চাইলে সাক্ষাৎকার না দিতে পারি।
- আমার অংশগ্রহণ কোন কোম্পানির সাথে যুক্ত নয়।
- সংগৃহীত তথ্য একাডেমিক রিসার্চ কাজে ব্যবহৃত হবে।

- আমার অনুমিতে সাক্ষাৎকারটা রেকর্ড করা হবে।

তারিখ : _____

Appendix D: Consent Form — Key Informant Interview (KII)

I voluntarily agree to participate in this key informant interview. I understand that:

My identity will be kept confidential and will not be linked to any specific factory or facility.

I may choose not to answer any question.

I may withdraw from the interview at any time without consequences.

Data will be used solely for academic research purposes.

Signature / Thumbprint: _____

Date: _____