

# Washrooms for the Workers in Apparel Factories in Bangladesh



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## 1. Introduction

The apparel industry in Bangladesh is considered as the powerhouse of the nation's economy (Swazan and Das 2022). The industry plays a pivotal role in employment creation by employing 4 million workers but it has employment aspects which are insecure, and lack legal and social protection for workers (Islam and Stringer 2018). One such aspect is access to washrooms (Toilet) for workers as part of maintaining hygiene and health of the workers in the workplace.

## 2. Facts

Washrooms and toilets should be separate for male and female with proper screening along with ensuring adequate lighting, ventilation and water supply (Bangladesh Labour Act 2006).

One toilet for every 25 female workers up to first 100 workers and one toilet for every subsequent 50 workers. One toilet for every 40 male workers up to first 100 workers and one toilet for every subsequent 60 workers (Bangladesh Labour Rules 2015)

The arrangement for toilets or washrooms shall be mentioned clearly in the layout plan of the factory/establishment while receiving approval thereof from the Inspector General.

## 4. Objectives & RQs

**Objective:** To use firm-level data for providing insights on washroom facilities of apparel workers which can be leveraged to design relevant health interventions for apparel workers in Bangladesh

**RQ1:** To what extent apparel factories in Bangladesh provide separate washroom facilities to the workers as provisioned in Bangladesh Labor Law

**RQ2:** What are the labor dimensions of providing washroom facilities to the workers of Bangladesh apparel industry.

## 5. Methodology

Reality of the toilet presence in the factories

Deductive reasoning to check the RQ

Census conduction in the export orient RMG factories

Analyze using descriptive statistics to understand the real scenario

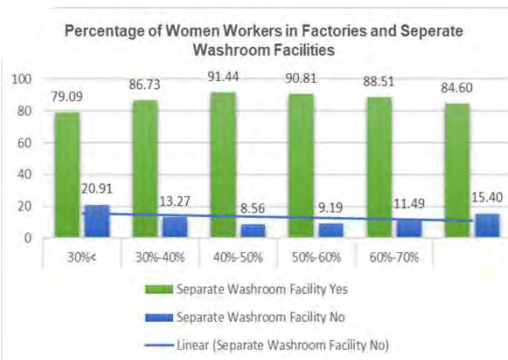
The study relied on the secondary analysis of MiB data for the following reasons:

- MiB database includes member of BGMEA, BKMEA factories, and factories not member of BGMEA and BKMEA
- The dataset includes number of workers along with gender ratio
- MiB data get verified and validated with a set of established protocols, software, and regular communication with factories.

## 3. Literature review

- A survey of 90 workers from knit garments units in Dhaka and Gazipur revealed that although 80% of workers have access to sanitation, sharing toilet remains a main problem as about 20-30 persons use one toilet while maximum workers want a toilet for every 10 persons (Farhana et al. 2015)
- According to a survey of 100 garment workers from slum areas in Dhaka city who have worked in the garments industries as worker for at least one year, 87%, had separate toilet system, but the number of toilets were few as a single toilet is used by 36-40 workers in most cases (Bhuiyan and Dash 2019)
- An ethnographic study on women workers of apparel factories in Gazipur found that women get an hour's break for lunch when they queue for the toilets or access drinking water, both of which they avoid during work hours because of the risks of not meeting production targets (Joshi et al., 2021).
- A pilot research project of Water Aid on improving WASH services and behaviours in the workplace and employees' communities found that there were no sex-segregated toilets available across the low-income communities near industrial hubs at Narayanganj.

## 6. Results and discussion



- Factories having lower percentages of female workers (below 30%) also have comparatively lower percentages of gender-separated washroom facilities

- Percentages of factories with gender-specific washrooms increase if percentages of female workers remain within the ranges of 40% to 50% and 50% to 60%

- Percentages of factories with gender specific washrooms drop again for factories with higher percentages of female workers within the range of 60% to 70% or more than 70%

- The apparel factories follow the categorization of micro, small, medium and large enterprises in terms of workers' numbers as per Bangladesh Industrial Policy 2022
- The micro factories, has less tendencies to provide separate washroom facilities.
- The tendencies of washroom facilities increase as the worker number and size of the factories increased

## 7. Conclusions

Qualitative data can be collected from factory management and workers and can be connected with gender and health issues of female workers of apparel factories to understand what are the factory level dimensions of and reasons for providing or not providing washroom facilities to the workers

Further analysis is needed to show gender-separated washrooms can vary in terms of factory types, factory size, and factory locations.

Data-driven advocacy can be recommended with the participation of stakeholders to establish robust regulations for ensuring gender-separated washroom facilities.

Further evidence can be generated on how order deadlines and excessive production targets can deny workers enough washroom breaks

## 8. References

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