A Study on the Major Causes of Labour Unrest and Its Effect on the RMG Sector of Bangladesh

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Abstract— Labour unrest is one of the important issues in RMG sector of Bangladesh. Letting this issue unsolved could lead Bangladesh RMG sector to a place, where other competing countries become a threat in the international market of RMG. To find out the causes behind labour unrest, data collection has been carried out by questionnaire and interview methods. 20 workers & 20 staff from different garment factory of Dhaka, Savar, Gazipur and Narayanganj have been brought under the questionnaire method. The major causes of labor unrest or turbulence have been explored from the responses of the respondents. These are- irregularities in payment, low wage, mistreatment of the workers by managers/ officers, rumor, absence of trade union, conspiracy, non-execution of labor laws, unruly nature of the workers and political intervention. In key issues regarding labor unrest such as investigating the incidents of labor unrest, bridging the gap between the factory owners and workers, improving law and order situation, majority of the respondents want the involvement of 'tripartite committee' (a committee formed by the representatives of Government, factory owners and workers) which indicates a bright prospect of public-private cooperation in addressing labor unrest in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. If private sectors with their first-hand knowledge and experience cooperate with public agencies having power and authority, labor unrest in the RMG sector of Bangladesh is supposed to be solved.

Key words— Labour unrest, Turbulence, Questionnaire, Interview, Ready Made Garments (RMG), Public-Private Cooperation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Readymade garment industry has a paramount importance in the economy of Bangladesh. About 80% of the total export of Bangladesh comes from this sector. It has also been observed from the statistics that since 1983 to 2011 the total export of readymade sector has been increasing substantially. In 2010-2011 financial year 78.15% of the total export was from readymade garment industry (Table 1).

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However, this industry is heavily dependent on the international markets. After the withdrawal of quota protection in 2005, it was perceived that this industry will have severe negative impact under the new WTO arrangement. But Bangladeshi readymade garment industry faced it intellectually and the earning of this sector is steadily increasing day by day. This has been attributed by the experts as the low labor cost and the efficiency of the Bangladeshi workers [1].

Table 1: Comparative Statement on Export of RMG and Total Export of Bangladesh.

YEAR	EXPORT OF RMG (IN MILLION US$)	TOTAL EXPORT OF BANGLADESH (IN MILLION US$)	% OF RMG'S TO TOTAL EXPORT
1983-84	31.57	811.00	3.89
1984-85	116.2	934.43	12.44
1985-86	131.48	819.21	16.05
1986-87	298.67	1076.61	27.74
1987-88	433.92	1231.2	35.24
1988-89	471.09	1291.56	36.47
1989-90	624.16	1923.70	32.45
1990-91	866.82	1717.55	50.47

1991-92	1182.57	1993.90	59.31
1992-93	1445.02	2382.89	60.64
1993-94	1555.79	2533.90	61.40
1994-95	2228.35	3472.56	64.17
1995-96	2547.13	3882.42	65.61
1996-97	3001.25	4418.28	67.93
1997-98	3781.94	5161.20	73.28
1998-99	4019.98	5312.86	75.67
1999-00	4349.41	5752.20	75.61
2000-01	4859.83	6467.30	75.14
2001-02	4583.75	5986.09	76.57
2002-03	4912.09	6548.44	75.01
2003-04	5686.09	7602.99	74.79
2004-05	6417.67	8654.52	74.15
2005-06	7900.80	10526.16	75.06
2006-07	9211.23	12177.86	75.64
2007-08	10699.80	14110.80	75.83
2008-09	12347.77	15565.19	79.33
2009-10	12496.72	16204.65	77.12
2010-11	17914.46	22924.38	78.15
2011-12	19089.69	24287.66	78.60
2012-13	21515.73	27027.36	79.61
2013-14	24491.88	30186.62	81.13
2014-15	25491.40	31198.45	81.71

Source: Export Promotion Bureau Compiled by BGMEA [2]

One of the remarkable features of the Bangladeshi industry is the entry of women workers into the industrial employment system. At present, 3.60 million workers are working in the readymade garment industry of Bangladesh where 85% of them are female who are mainly from rural areas of the country. As such, readymade garment industry opened a new door for the rural unemployed and illiterate women to engage themselves in the financial activities of the economy of Bangladesh. Labor Force survey (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 1991, 1992) shows that although male employment in the manufacturing sector is more or less stagnant, female employment is increasing significantly which is attributed by the social development in Bangladesh [1].

Labor unrest has been a common phenomenon in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. Workers are being embroiled in clashes frequently; they call strikes often to make their demand home. It causes enormous loss to the owners, cripples the economy and tarnishes the image of the country aboard. It also makes foreign buyers reluctant to render future orders. In addition the industry is losing competitive edge for this. In July 2009, due to massive labor unrest, Hameem Group, a leading garment manufacturing factory incurred a loss of around 100 crore taka and two workers died with resultant loss of 2000 jobs [3,4]. The long-standing grievance of the workers is the first cause for labour unrest. The growth of RMG industry of Bangladesh much depends on hard work of the labor force. But unfortunately they are deprived of minimum facilities. They are to live a sub-standard life in city slums for years. The wage they get is low. Very often they do not get their salary, overtime bills and bonus in time. Their recruitment system is hiring and firing as they do not get any appointment letter and identity card of the factory and at any time they can be dismissed by owners for any reason. They don't know anything about their job contract. Being maltreated by owners and mid-level officers, working long hours in congested environment without sufficient rest, l ack of nutritious foods, medicine, right to legitimate protest against ruthless exploitations etc. are their daily destiny. They don't have any access to the decision making process. Factory building collapse, fire accident, stampede render many dead and injured. Nevertheless, if any worker protests against owners or management, he/she is threatened by various types of harassment such as dismissal, arrest or even physical assault by the hired hooligans of owners. Most of the labor force of this sector are uneducated, unskilled and have come from rural area simply in search of livelihood. They have to work hard in return for a very poor salary [3, 4].

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Area of study

Most of the garment factories of Bangladesh are located in Dhaka and adjacent towns of Dhaka like Savar, Ashulia, Tongi, Gazipur and Narayangang. Some are located in Chittagong. As regard labor unrest or owners-workers relations, all garment factories share some common problems. For the convenience of primary data collection, factories of Dhaka, Savar and Gazipur have been visited. Garment workers, factory owners, managers and officers are covered from garment factories of these areas.

Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used. Primary data have been collected through interview and questionnaire methods. Secondary data have been collected from different relevant publications, dissertations, books, journals, newspaper articles and reports, government publications, rules, acts, websites etc.

2.2 Composition of Respondents

For questionnaire: For doing the survey or field work several factories and garment industries have been visited (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents for questionnaire

Location	No. of Factories	Respondents (Garment workers)	Female	Male
Narayanganj	01	10	09	01
Savar	01	10	08	02
Gazipur	02	20	05	15
Total	4	40	22	18

2.3 Personal Profile of the Respondents

To get an effective result through the survey, personal profile has been selected of different categories. The Distribution of respondents were selected by age, gender, education and working experience.

2.3.1 Distribution of garment workers by age

Table 3: Distribution of garment workers by age

Age group	frequency	percentage
18-25	3	15%
26-35	8	40%
36-45	5	25%
46-55	4	20%
55+	00	00%

Table 3 reveals that a major percentage (55%) of them are between 18-35 years old and 45% of them are between 36-55 years old.

2.3.2 Distribution of interviewees by age

Table 4: Distribution of interviewees by age

Age group	frequency	percentage
18-25	00	00%
26-35	04	20%
36-45	04	20%
46-55	08	40%
55+	04	20%

Table 4 shows that only 20% of them are aged between 26 -35 and 80% of them are above 36.

2.3.3 Distribution of garment workers by gender

Table 5: Distribution of garment workers by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	7	35%
Female	13	65%
Total	20	100%

Table 5 shows that the no. of female is almost double of that of male workers.

2.3.4 Distribution of interviewees by gender

Table 6: Distribution of interviewees by gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	11	55%
Female	9	45%
Total	20	100%

Table 6 shows the gender percentage of the interviewees. It is done on random basis. Here, no. of male (55%) dominates over that of female (45%).

2.3.5 Distribution of garment workers by education

Table 7: Distribution of garment workers by education

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	00	00%
Primary level	02	10%
Below SSC	10	50%
SSC	6	30%
HSC	2	10%
Graduate	00	00%
Others	00	00%

Table 7 reveals that most of the garment workers are low educated and unskilled. Their physical ability is their main capital.

2.3.6 Distribution of interviewees by education

Table 8: Distribution of interviewees by education

Education	Frequency	Percentage
Masters	4	20%
Graduate	16	80%

Table 8 shows the education status of the interviewees. 80% of them are graduates and 20% of them have masters' degree. It reveals that most of them are educated.

2.3.7 Distribution of garment workers by working-experience

Table 9: Distribution of garment workers by working experience

Experience(years)	Frequency	Percentage
1-5	3	15%
6-10	7	35%
11-15	6	30%
16-20	3	15%

21-25	1	5%

Table 9 demonstrates the working experience of the garment workers. It reveals that 80% of them have experience less than 15 years. Only 20% have experience above 15 years.

2.3.8 Distribution of interviewees by working-experience

Table 10: Distribution of interviewees by working experience

Experience (years)	Frequency	Percentage
5-10	02	10%
11-15	03	15%
16-20	05	25%
21-25	06	30%
25 +	04	20%

Table 10 demonstrates 25% of the interviewees have 5-15 years of experience, 55% of them have 16-25 years of experience and 20% have experience of more than 25 years.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 analysis of collected data

A semi-structured questionnaire carrying 10 questions has been developed for the garment workers& staffs. The questions are grouped in some clusters such as causes of labor unrest, Wage, eve-teasing, Hygienic water and ;sanitation problem, Communication gap, environment and safety problem, Discrimination problem, Medicine and medical care, Force, Political Violence, Emergency exit etc.

3.1.1 Analytical data for the industry where labor unrest happened (Apparel Village Ltd.)

Table 11: Response of Labor at Apparel Village Ltd.

Responder	Wage problem (Y/N)	Eve-teasing problem (Y/N)	Hygienic water & sanitation problem (Y/N)	Communication gap (Y/N)	Environment & safety problem (Y/N)	Discrimination problem (Y/N)	Medicine & medical care problem (Y/N)	Force to worker (Y/N)	Political violence effect (Y/N)	Emergency exit problem (Y/N)
01	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
02	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
03	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
04	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
05	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Total marks	1	4	1	4	2	1	3	4	2	2

Note: Every (yes) answer obtained as "1" mark &every (no) answer obtained as"0" mark.

Table 12: Response of Staff at Apparel Village Ltd.

Responder	Wage problem (Y/N)	Eve-teasing problem (Y/N)	Hygienic water & sanitation Problem (Y/N)	Communication gap (Y/N)	Environment & safety problem (Y/N)	Discrimination problem (Y/N)	Medicine & medical care problem (Y/N)	Force To worker (Y/N)	Political violence effect (Y/N)	Emergency exit problem (Y/N)
01	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
02	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
03	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
04	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
05	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Total marks	2	2	2	1	2	1	3	3	1	3

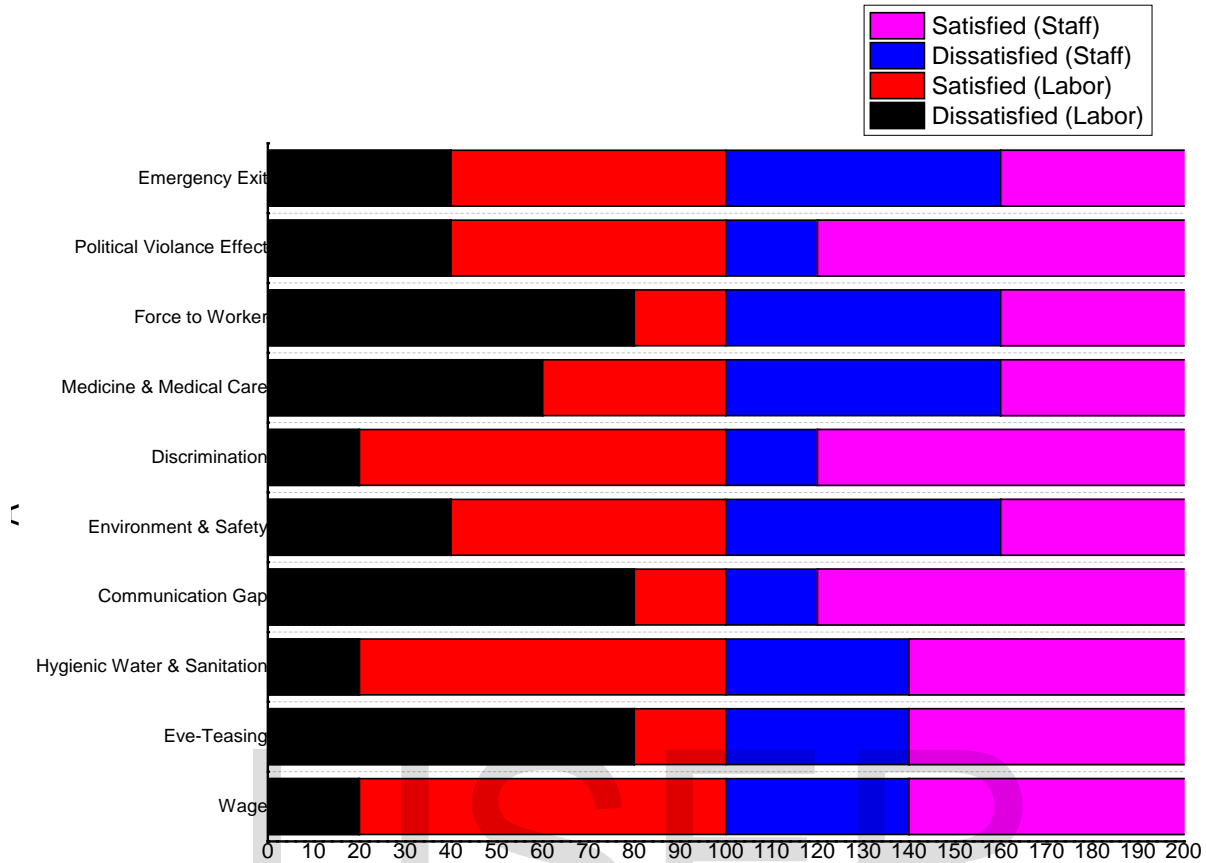Note: Every (yes) answer obtained as"1" mark &every (no) answer obtained as"0" mark.
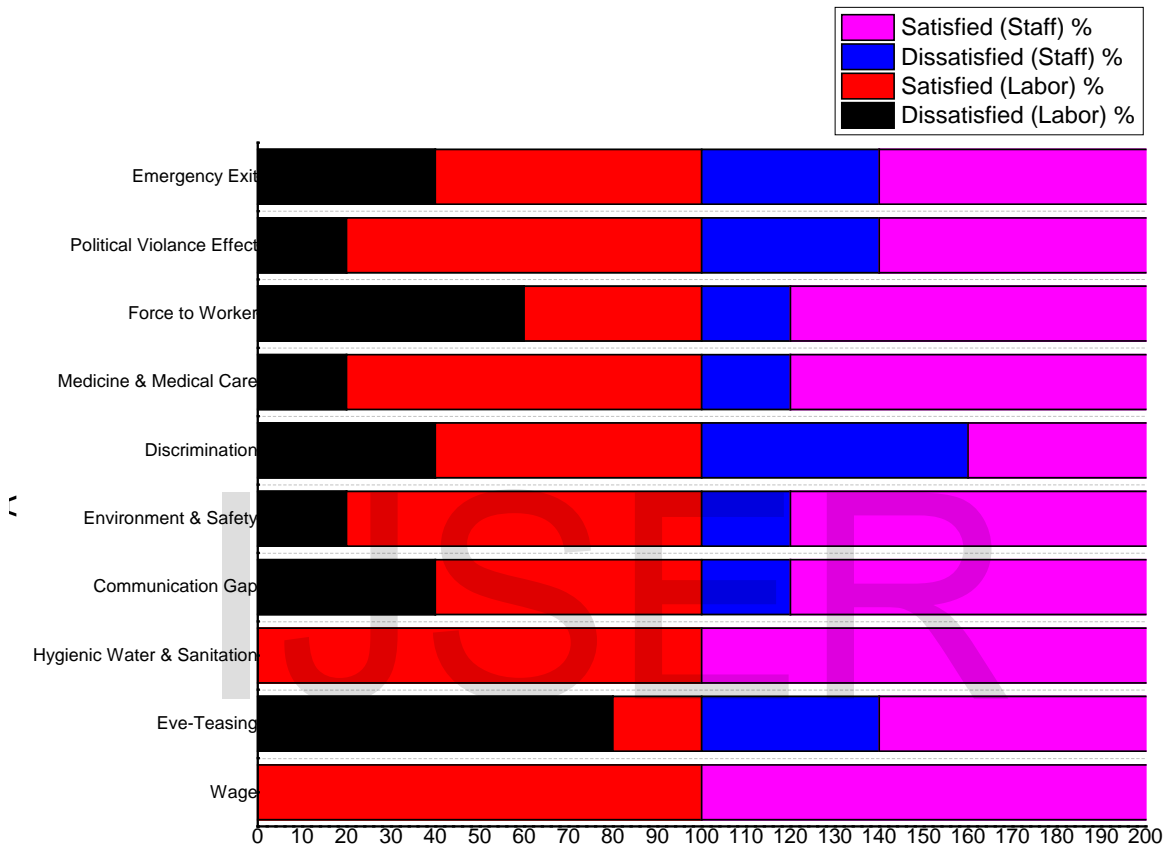
Figure 1: Comparison between labor and staff Responses at Apparel Village Ltd.

3.1.2 Analytical data for the industry where labor unrest did not happened yet

Table 13: Response of Labor at Niagara textiles Ltd.

Responder	Wage problem (Y/N)	Eve-teasing problem (Y/N)	Hygienic water & sanitation problem (Y/N)	Commu nication gap (Y/N)	Environme nt & safety problem (Y/N)	Discrimina tion problem (Y/N)	Medicine & medical care problem (Y/N)	Force To worker (Y/N)	Political violence effect (Y/N)	Emergen cy exit problem (Y/N)
01	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
02	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
03	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
04	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
05	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Total marks	0	4	0	2	1	2	1	3	1	2

Note: Every (yes) answer obtained as "1" mark &every (no) answer obtained as"0" mark.

Table 14: Response of Staff at Niagara textiles Ltd.

Responder	Wage problem (Y/N)	Eve-teasing problem (Y/N)	Hygienic water & sanitation problem (Y/N)	Communi cation gap (Y/N)	Environm ent & safety problem (Y/N)	Discrimin ation problem (Y/N)	Medicine & medical care problem (Y/N)	Force To worker (Y/N)	Political violence effect (Y/N)	Emergenc y exit problem (Y/N)

01	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
02	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
03	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
04	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
05	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Total marks	0	2	0	1	1	3	1	1	2	4

Note: Every (yes) answer obtained as"1" mark &every (no) answer obtained as"0" mark.

Figure 2: Comparison between labor and staff Responses at Niagara textiles Ltd.

3.1.3 Analytical data for the industry where labor unrest did not happened yet.

Table 15: Response of Staff at Antim Group Ltd.

Responder	Wage problem (Y/N)	Eve-teasing problem (Y/N)	Hygienic water & sanitation problem (Y/N)	Communication gap (Y/N)	Environment & safety problem (Y/N)	Discrimination problem (Y/N)	Medicine & medical Care problem (Y/N)	Force To worker (Y/N)	Political violence effect (Y/N)	Emergency exit problem (Y/N)
01	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
02	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
03	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
04	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
05	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

| Total marks | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Note: Every (yes) answer obtained as"1" mark &every (no) answer obtained as"0" mark.

Table 16: Response of Labor at Antim Group Ltd.

Responder	Wage Problem (Y/N)	Eve-teasing problem (Y/N)	Hygienic water & sanitation problem (Y/N)	Communication gap (Y/N)	Environment & safety problem (Y/N)	Discrimination problem (Y/N)	Medicine & medical care problem (Y/N)	Force to worker (Y/N)	Political violence effect (Y/N)	Emergency exit Problem (Y/N)
01	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
02	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
03	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
04	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
05	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Total marks	1	2	1	1	2	3	0	3	1	1

Note: Every (yes) answer obtained as"1" mark &every (no) answer obtained as"0" mark.
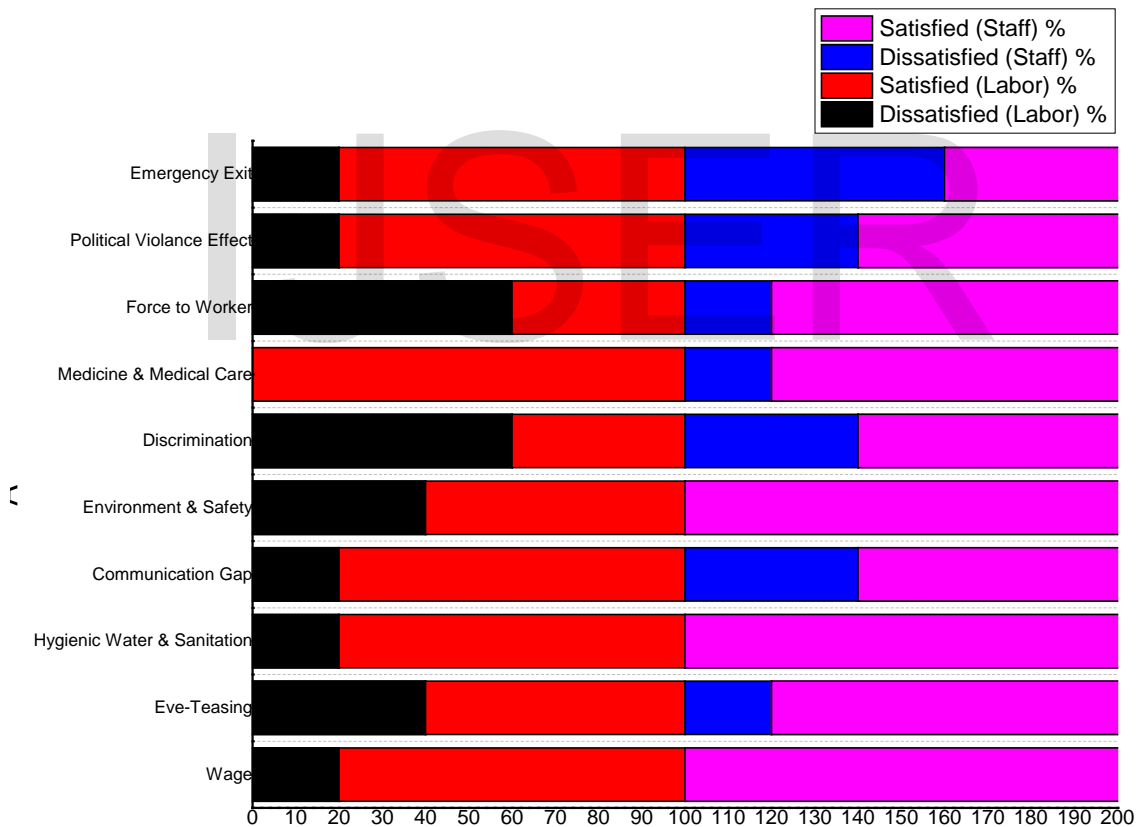

Figure 3: Comparison between labor and staff Responses at Antim Group Ltd.

3.1.4 Analytical data for the industry where labor unrest happened

Table 17: Response of Labor at Cotton Club Ltd.

Responder	Wage problem (Y/N)	Eve-teasing problem (Y/N)	Hygienic water & sanitation problem (Y/N)	Communication gap (Y/N)	Environment & safety problem (Y/N)	Discrimination problem (Y/N)	Medicine & medical care problem (Y/N)	Force to worker (Y/N)	Political violence effect (Y/N)	Emergency exit problem (Y/N)
01	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
02	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
03	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
04	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
05	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Total marks	0	2	4	3	3	3	2	3	2	4

Note: Every (yes) answer obtained as"1" mark & every (no) answer obtained as "0" mark.

Table 18: Response of Staff at Cotton Club Ltd.

Responder	Wage Problem (Y/N)	Eve-teasing Problem (Y/N)	Hygienic water & sanitation Problem (Y/N)	Communication gap (Y/N)	Environment & safety Problem (Y/N)	Discrimination problem (Y/N)	Medicine & medical care problem (Y/N)	Force to worker (Y/N)	Political violence effect (Y/N)	Emergency exit problem (Y/N)
01	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
02	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
03	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
04	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
05	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Total marks	1	3	3	2	1	3	3	2	2	4

Note: Every (yes) answer obtained as "1" mark & every (no) answer obtained as "0" mark.
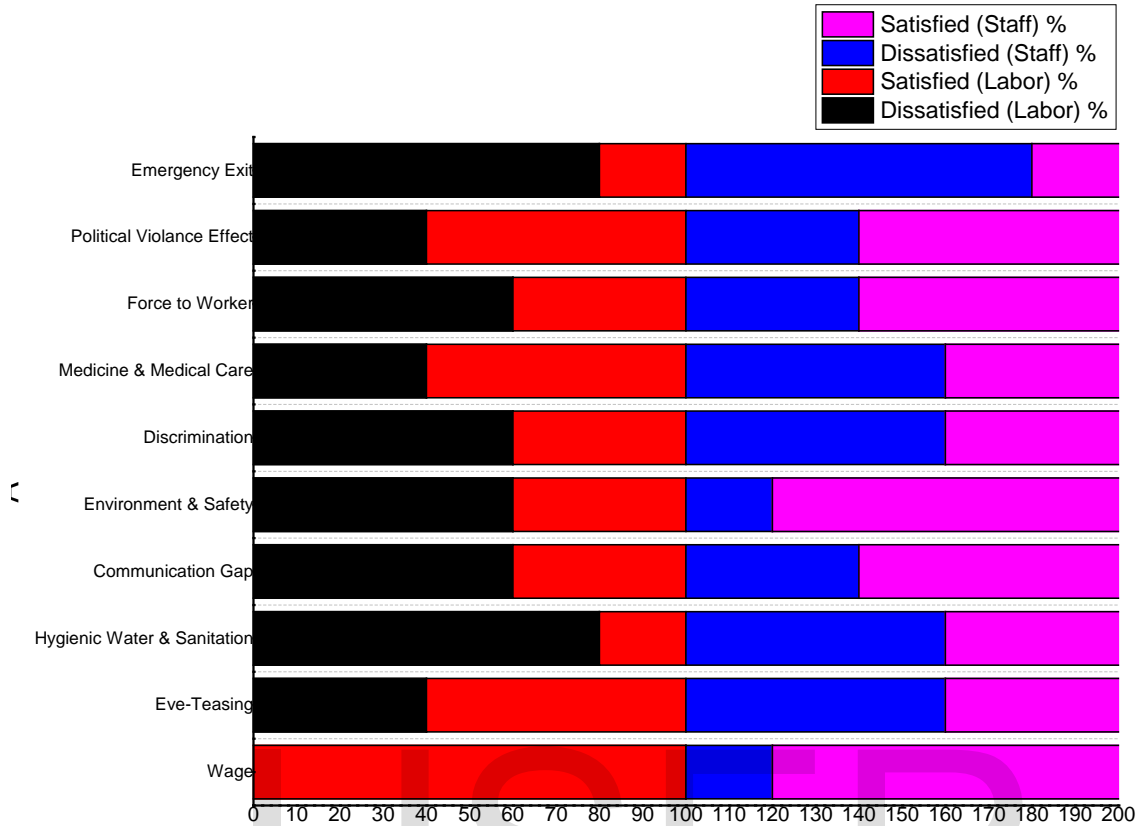
Figure 4: Comparison between labor and staff Responses at Cotton Club Ltd.

Table 19: Comparison table for the good quality industry and poor quality industry (average data for labor)

Factory type	Wage Problem	Eve-teasing Problem	Hygienic water & sanitation Problem	Communi cation gap	Environme nt & safety Problem	Discrimi nation problem	Medicine & medical care problem	Force to worker	Political violence effect	Emergenc y exit problem
Good	90	40	70	50	60	60	70	35	70	55
Poor	10	60	30	50	40	40	30	65	30	45
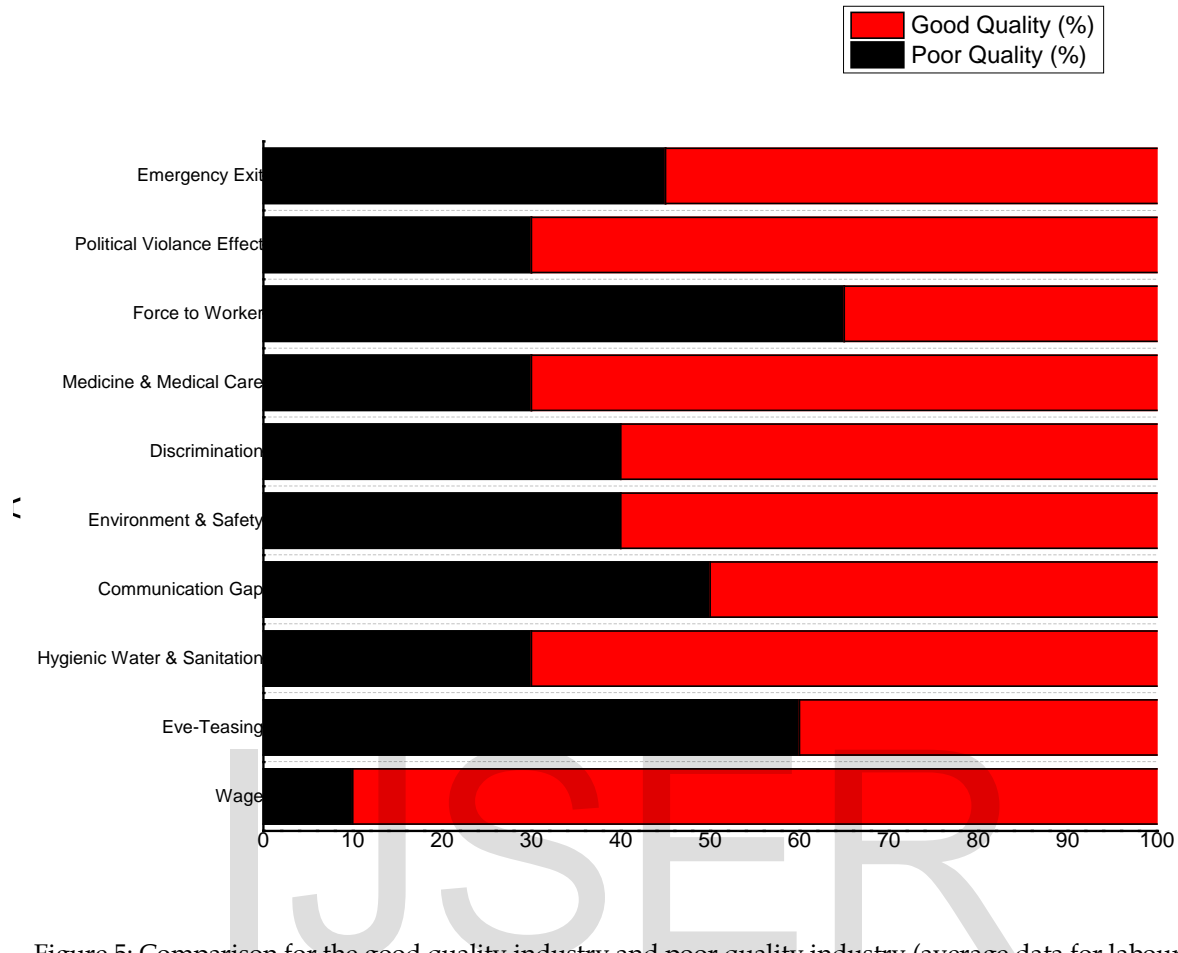
Figure 5: Comparison for the good quality industry and poor quality industry (average data for labour)

Horizontal Bar chart -1(Figure 5), for labour

Formula used for average data:

Average Data = (Obtained mark of a problem) / (Total Responders) X 100%

$$= \frac{Obtained\ Marks}{20}\ X\ 100\%$$

Table 20: Comparison table for the good quality industry and poor quality industry (average data for staff)

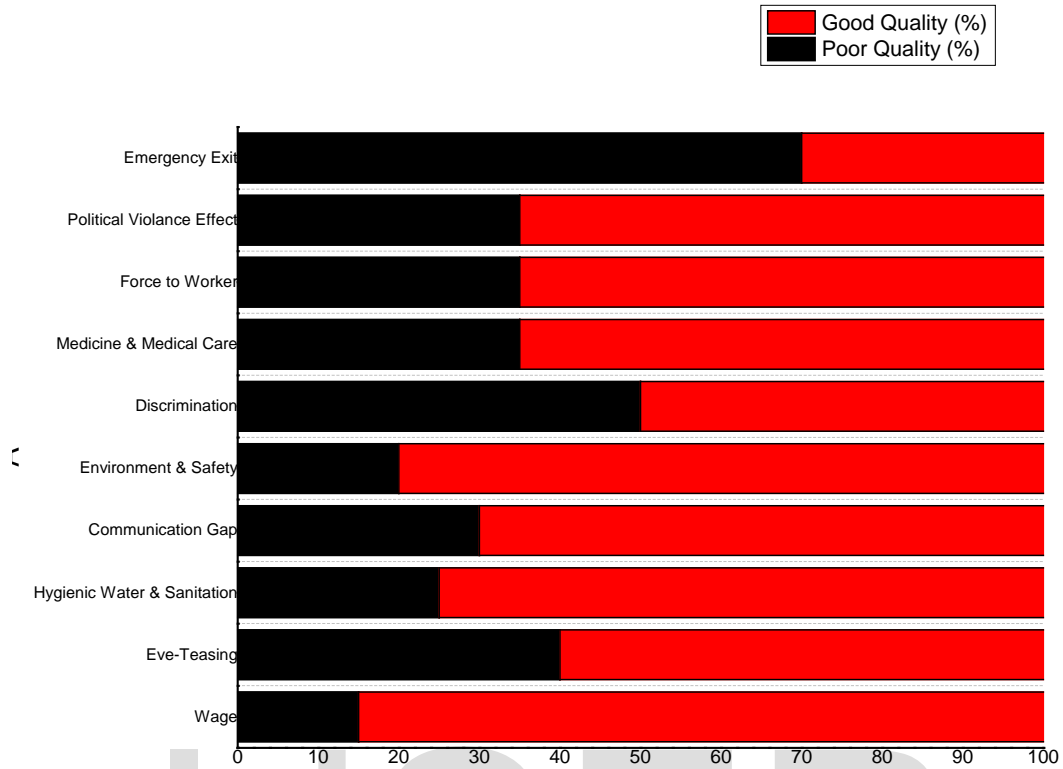| Factor y type	Wage Problem	Eve-teasing Problem	Hygienic water & sanitation Problem	Commu nication gap	Environme nt & safety Problem	Discrimin ation problem	Medicine & medical care problem	Force to worker	Political violence effect	Emergen cy exit problem
Good	85	60	75	70	80	50	65	65	65	30
Poor	15	40	25	30	20	50	35	35	35	70

Figure 6: Comparison table for the good quality industry and poor quality industry (average data for staff)

Horizontal Bar chart -2 (Figure 6), for staff

Formula for average data

Average Data = (Obtained mark of a problem) / (Total Responders) X 100%

$$= \frac{Obtained\ Marks}{20} \text{ X } 100\%$$

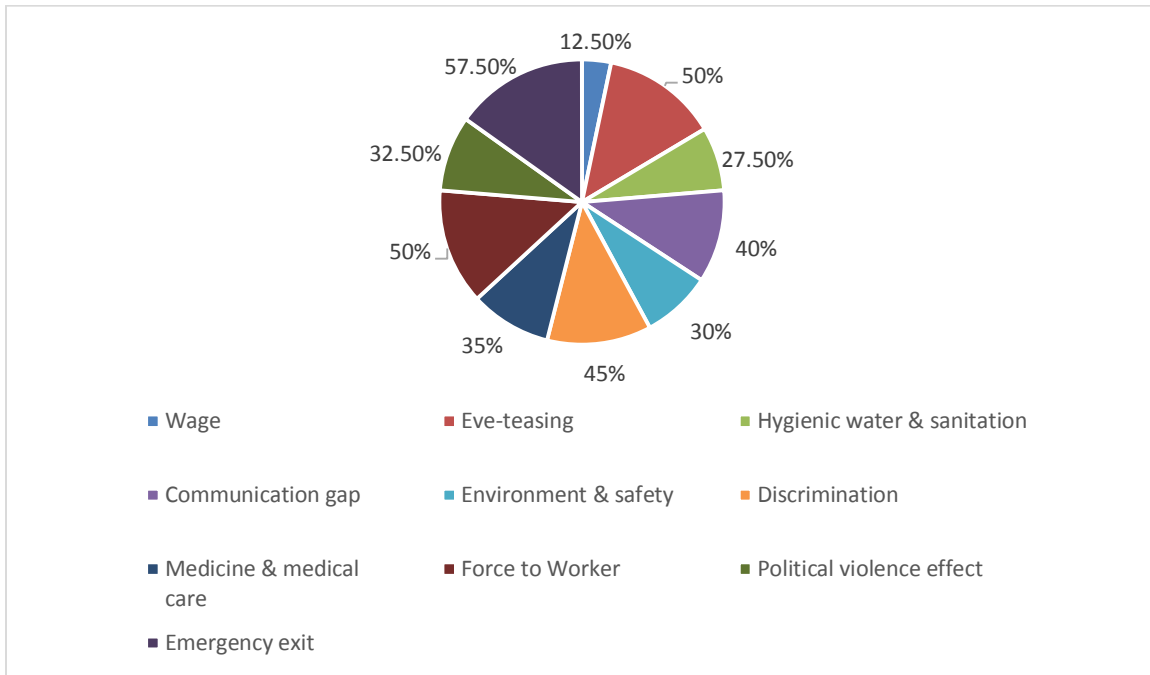## 3.2 Discussion about the Causes of Labor Unrest

Figure 7: Overall Percentage (both Labour & Stuff) of different problems for labour unrest.

Figure 7 represents the overall percentage (both labor and stuff interviewees corresponded with this study) of various problems causing labour unrest. Out of 40 respondents, 12.5% take irregularities in payment as one of the prime causes of labor unrest. Irregularities covers delay in payment of salary and bonus (a policy followed by the factory owners and managers to hold them in their factory and have control over the workers), cutting salary for causal leaves or late attendance; dilly-dally in executing of new wage scale etc. Payment of salary is a vital issue for the workers. Many things of their lifecycle depend upon it. 50% respondents think that they are facing the Eve-teasing problem. 27.5% respondents think hygienic and sanitation problem are reason for labor unrest. 40% respondents think there are communication gap between worker and owner. 30% respondents think there are safety and environment problem in country wide garments factory. 45% respondents

think worker face discrimination problem in RMG sector. 35 % respondents think Medicine and medical care problem in RMG sector. 50% respondents think Force to worker is one of the problems in RMG sector. 32.5% respondents think Political violence effect create problems in RMG sector. 57.5% respondents think emergency exit problem is another issue for labor unrest in RMG sector.

3.3 Limitations of the Study

Owing to time and distance constraint, factories of Chittagong and other distant places could not be covered. Inside the garment factory, workers are very reserve to answer the questions. They seem to be afraid of disclosing the facts in front of the managers or officers. Their responses differ outside the factory. Another problem is their low level of education and knowledge. Many of them know nothing conspiracy, industrial police, concern

authority and many other important matters. Factory owners, managers and officers are reluctant to give detail information. The situation is worse in the factories affected by labor unrest recently. Officers and managers of some of these factories either deny that there had been incident of labor unrest in their factories or inform that they are directed by the factory owners not to speak with anybody in this issue. Practice of blame game is common among various respondents. The owners and managers accuse the workers of unruly behavior and demanding over without knowing the real profit of the business. The workers accuse the owners and managers of exploitation. The private bodies blame government agencies of inefficiency and inaction whereas some government officials blame the businessmen of their too much money making motives.

4. Conclusion

The objectives of this present study are to find out the causes of labor unrest and identify areas where public and private agencies can work to address the issue. The responses of the respondents unfold that irregularities in payment, low wage, mistreatment of the workers by managers/ officers, rumor, absence of trade unionism, conspiracy, non-execution of labor laws, unruly nature of the workers and political intervention are the major causes of labor unrest in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. The causes are to be diagnosed through investigation. Findings of the study suggest that investigating the incidents of labor unrest and following up the recommendations is an important attempt to solve the problem. For investigation, most of the respondents like to assign the task with tripartite committee (a

committee formed by taking representatives of factory owners, government and garment workers) which emphasizes the need of cooperation between public and private organizations in this issue. For a flourishing industry like RMG, maintaining law and order situation in the industrial area is very important. During labor uprising, it was found that unidentified outsiders entered the factory area and participated in violence in the name of workers. To control the situation sometimes law enforcers use to rely on coercive measures and disperse the agitating workers. There is another allegation maintained by the garment workers against the law enforcers that latter work in favor of the garment owners and against the workers. To ensure sound law and order situation, co-operation between the conflicting parties is a crying need. The law enforcers, with all impartially can help trace the culprits into book and award exemplary punishment. On the hand, the factory owners, managers and garment workers have to have full support to them, provide genuine information to them and help in time of investigation. To avert further unrest, intelligence agency can work in the garment industry area.

Factory owners and garment workers are two most vital actors in RMG sector. They are complementary to each other. The strength of the factory owners is that they are rich, organized and influential in the society. On the other hand, the huge number and unity of the garment workers are their power. Good relationship between the workers and owners is essential for the production as well as boost of the industry. Majority of the respondents perceive that there exists a

communication gap between the owners and workers of garment factories. 'Tripartite committee' is preferred by respondents to bridge the gap between the owners and workers. Involving labor-force in decision-making process is important in addressing labor unrest in the readymade garment industry. While exploring the causes of labor unrest, it is found that irregularities in payment and low wage rank top among the causes of labor unrest. There was tough bargaining between the factory owners and labor-leaders for the fixation of minimum wage. The labor-leaders demanded the minimum wage to be fixed at Tk. 5000 while the factory owners started it with TK. 2000. After a series of meetings with factory owners, Minimum Wage Board and labor-leaders finally it was settled at TK. 3000. Participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making process really helped settle the dispute. Respondents are of the view that representatives of labor-force should be included in regular meetings inside the factory as well as decision making process at national level. They are also to be included in various committees with the factory owners and managers. Finally, it can be concluded that public-private cooperation in addressing labor unrest in the RMG sector of Bangladesh can be a viable and effective measure. However, level of mutual trust, communication and co-operation between workers and management of a garment factory as well as public and private sector should be uplifted.

5. References

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