STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND ITS EFFECT ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN
THE CASE OF BANGLADESH GARMENT WORKERS DURING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

This thesis delves into the complex relationship between women's participation in Bangladesh's garment industry, their empowerment, and structural violence against them. Although Bangladesh's patriarchal society perpetuates structural violence against women, the garment sector has also facilitated social and economic empowerment for many. By adopting a gender-focused lens and examining the interplay between structural violence and empowerment, this research aims to explore the socio-economic status of female garment workers in Bangladesh during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020-2022. The study employs a qualitative content analysis, analyzing two national newspapers—The Daily Star and The Financial Express (Bangladesh)—as primary sources.

The findings show that female workers experience social and economic empowerment through their involvement in the garment industry. However, they often encounter resistance from male family members when attempting to enter the workforce, reflecting the structural violence within households. Furthermore, female workers face structural violence from the beginning of their employment in the garment sector. They typically do not receive contract papers upon being hired, leaving them susceptible to exploitation through low wages, poor working conditions, denied holidays, and physical and mental abuse.

Although these women dedicate long hours to garment industry work, many feel their
social standing has declined. While they do experience some benefits, such as increased income. The negative aspects of their participation in the sector often overshadow the positives.
DEDICATION

To my loving family, who has been my constant support and source of inspiration throughout my academic journey. Thank you for always believing in me, encouraging me to pursue my dreams, and providing me with love and emotional support. Your unwavering commitment to my success has been the driving force behind my achievements, and I am grateful for your presence in my life.

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# Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I (Introduction)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II (Literature Review)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III (Methodology)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV (Findings)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter V (Discussion)</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter VI (Conclusion)</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: List of deductive measures for structural violence.</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2: List of deductive measures for women's empowerment.</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1: Flow Chart of the source of structural violence.</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The augmentation of women's wage labor in Bangladesh contrasts with the dominant social order of purdah, which confines women in the domestic sphere and allows men to occupy the outside world, limiting women's ability to work outside the home (Kandiyoti 1988). Women are dominated in patriarchal societies like Bangladesh because of their economic dependence and powerlessness (Zahan 2015). Because of the Bangladeshi traditional patriarchal social structure, women were not allowed to work outside their homes, although there has been some change. Today, women have made more progress than ever and have gradually come out of their households by entering the labor market. Bangladeshi women contribute a large portion of the overall economy in the 21st century. Women make up over 80% of the estimated four million-person workforce in Bangladesh’s ready-made garment industry (Huq 2022). In 2018, it was estimated that the garments industry employed some 40 million workers – the overwhelming majority of them poor, rural women (Ovi 2018). This continues the trend that began in the mid-1980s, which saw the Bangladeshi labor force expand by roughly 16 percent yearly (Ovi 2018). In addition, during this period, the female labor force increased from 2.54 million to 10.02 million, implying an average growth rate of 16.7
percent per annum, more than four times faster than the total labor growth and more than six times faster than the male labor force growth (Mahmud 2003).

In this thesis, I will examine the continuing effects of structural violence on women's empowerment in the context of the Bangladeshi garment industry during the COVID-19 period, 2020-2022. The concept of structural violence was proposed by peace researcher Johan Galtung (Galtung 1990). It refers to the exploitation created by societal structures characterized by inequality, discrimination, and injustice (Galtung 1990). The existence of structural violence ensures the suffering of the disadvantaged because social or economic privileges are oriented toward the advantaged population. Applying this concept to the Bangladeshi women’s situation would vividly highlight the socio-economic disempowerment of female garment workers. However, the garment industry may also empower women by providing them with jobs. Working in a garment factory may give women a voice in the workplace and at home (Ahmed 2004). By having a voice, women may have improved their rights. Empowerment language in development discourse suggests that the garment industry has emancipated Bangladeshi women from the patriarchy of home life and culture, and it may hide the reality that women’s socio-economic position has not improved (Huq 2022). The empowerment rhetoric may have contributed to bringing women into the garment industry for cheap labor (Huq 2022). It is, therefore, essential to examine how access to the labor market may contribute to women's empowerment and disempowerment.

The Bangladeshi women garment workers have raised their voices against traditional cultural norms by joining the garment sector. This shows that women can also make decisions, an example of social empowerment within the family. It cannot
be denied that these women sometimes have to deal with patriarchal families and social structures. In addition, factory owners exploit women workers by paying them less (Ahamed 2013).

Moreover, sometimes women workers deal with physical and sexual harassment at their workplace and in public places. This phenomenon suggests that gender-based structural violence still exists in society and the workplace. Social and economic empowerment may be limited in the lives of female garment workers. My research questions for this project are:

1. How does structural violence affect women in the garment industry in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. How does participation in the labor market affect women garment workers? Has their situation improved? At the same time, are they victims of the continuation of structural violence?
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1: Definition of structural violence

Structural violence is centered on exploitation (Galtung 1990). Different types of structural violence are based on fundamental inequality and disclose themselves as economic and social inequalities (Kathleen 2007). There are some excellent definitions of structural violence. According to one definition, structural violence is a human rights violation that manifests in unequal power and unequal life chances (Kathleen 2007). These inequalities occur because of an unequal distribution of resources. The significant thing is that structural violence is not a result of an accident but a consequence of human agency (Kathleen 2007). According to Johan Galtung's concept, when it is observed in society that a particular group of people is discriminated against and exploited by other groups of people, it is considered structural violence (Galtung 1990). This indicates that “Some top dogs get much more out of the interaction in the structure than the others, the underdogs” (Galtung 1990). Consequently, underdogs are deprived of facilities for basic needs. They face permanent and unwanted conditions of misery, including malnutrition, illness, starvation, and diseases, which cause them to have a shorter life expectancy (Galtung 1990). Galtung argues that structural violence begins with discriminatory cultural practices, which are considered cultural violence.
(Galtung 1990). Consequently, the culture considers exploitation and inequality normal in any particular society (Galtung 1990). I propose that structural violence is an appropriate framework for my research as there is systematic exploitation and discrimination against women in the garment factories of Bangladesh’s industry.

2.2: The emergence and growth of the Bangladesh garment industry

The majority of garment factories are located in Dhaka, as the city serves as the country's financial center, leading to a significant concentration of development in the area. Furthermore, Dhaka is the primary base for international communication in Bangladesh. The availability of affordable Bangladeshi natural gas has also supported the growth of the garment industry in the city. Dhaka encompasses the Dhaka City Corporation as well as five other municipal regions: Savar, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Kadamrasul, and Tongi. Numerous garment factories are located in Gazipur (Begum et al. 2016).

In Bangladesh, garment industries opened opportunities for the vulnerable and poor, mainly women, to lead a better life during the 1980s. Bangladesh has successfully gained fame in garment exporting (Rhee 1990). The country has attained a good ranking and is considered one of the largest clothing-exporting countries overall in the world. The total contribution of the ready-made garment (RMG) sector to export is more than 76% of total export earnings in the country (Uddin and Hossain 2009).

The rapid growth of garment factories was made possible by the availability of low labor costs and easy access to foreign markets via the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA). Two factors that facilitate the development of the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh are 1) the MFA quota system that creates a positive environment for the export process and 2) cheap labor (Huq 2022). The main motive of the MFA was to secure the domestic textile
industry of developed countries like the USA and EU countries. For this reason, the MFA imposed quota restrictions on large garment exporters like Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore in the 1970s (Huq 2022). However, the MFA did not put such export restrictions on Bangladesh at the initial stage of the MFA system. Moreover, the labor cost was cheap (Huq 2022). As a result, the low labor cost and quota-free access of Bangladesh made other foreign countries interested in investing in Bangladesh. Thus foreign producers motivate Bangladeshi entrepreneurs by joining ventures with Bangladeshi entrepreneurs in exporting garments from Bangladesh to North America, the EU, and other places (Huq 2022). This is how Bangladesh’s garment industries expanded. These garment industries have a socio-economic impact on women, discussed in the following sections.

2.3: The patriarchal society that constructs the traditional life of women in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, patriarchal social norms have determined the role of women for centuries. According to these norms, women are subordinate to men. This is visible in the construction of families where the majority of property belongs to sons, a practice termed “inheritance.” Families are also “patrilocal,” where the daughters leave their paternal homes after marriage and move to their husband's, or in-laws' houses. Bangladesh belongs to countries considered “classic patriarchy.” Kandiyoti identifies a patriarchal bargain in developing countries, which involves “women strategizing within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint” (Kandiyoti 1988:275). The patriarchal bargain may vary according to class, caste, and ethnicity. The primary sources of classic patriarchy are the operations of the patrilocally extended household (Kandiyoti 1988). In the case of Bangladesh, Kandiyoti finds that women do not want to be restricted within patriarchal norms; they want liberation for their daughters, yet they
often exploit their daughters-in-law. Thus, they maintain patriarchal social structures.

However, the growth of the ready-made garments industry in Bangladesh since the 1970s has created opportunities for rural women to work outside the home for wages. Before the rise of the garment sector, the traditional life of Bangladeshi women was more restricted. According to Wright (2000), “An understanding of the societal basis which determines women's status in Bangladesh and how they enter the workforce depends upon historical and cultural factors that are subcontinental as well as local” (Wright 2000:231).

South Asian cultural history reveals that women have always been dealing with discrimination. Women have always been bound to be confined within four walls (Wright 2000). The life of women in Bangladeshi society is dominated by early marriage and childbearing (Amin et al. 1998). Dowry has to be given to the groom or groom’s family from the bride’s family and this dowry is known as gifts or money (Council and Review 2018). Women remain dependent on men for the entirety of their life because of getting married at a very young age (Absar 2001).

In addition, the religious values of Hinduism and Islam prevented women from taking part in paid work in the Indian Subcontinent, including Bangladesh. In traditional Hindu society, class and caste (varna and jati) have further restricted the roles that women may play in the world beyond the home (Wright 2000). In the case of Islam, Cain argues that “Purdah is a system of excluding women and enforcing high standards of female modesty” (Council and Review 2018). Its manifestation in Bangladesh exposes the severe restrictions that are imposed on women’s movement outside their homes. Thus, such religious and cultural
values have sustained the existence of patriarchy in Bangladesh. Times, however, are changing. Especially in cities, some educated families accept both men’s and women’s control over their income and labor.

2.4: The causes of women’s involvement in the garments sector

Kabeer and Mahmud (Kabeer et al. 2004) examine women garment workers’ socioeconomic backgrounds, earnings, and working environments, as well as their contributions to the household income and their services in the global market, including the domestic market of Export Processing Zones. They find that most of the young women who work in the ready-made garment and Export Processing Zones belong to low-income families from remote areas of the country. These groups of women are involved in the garment sector because of various “pull” and “push” factors (Absar 2001). Push factors include poverty, financial crisis, unemployment, illness, and death of the household head, and pull factors are the desire to develop their standard of living through social and economic advancement and savings for the dowry (Amin et al. 1998; Kibria 1998).

In 1970, international donors and the Bangladesh government started a “food for work” program to help underprivileged and poor rural women who were engaged in road repair work, brick breaking, and construction work because of poverty and landlessness factors (Feldman 2001). At that time, women started to come out of their confined homes (Feldman 2001). At the same time, the growth of the garment industries attracted these women to seek low-paid work in garment factories. Women’s involvement in the garment sector is a global trend (Kibria 1998). Garment factories preferred hiring women because employers often cited the lower costs and the docility of women in comparison
to men. In Hossains’ study, it is argued that the helpless women from the most underprivileged parts of society were particular beneficiaries of involvement in the ready-made garment industry as they got the opportunity to increase their earning power and their participation in decision-making at home as well as in the public sphere (Hossain and Hossain 2012). Moreover, the involvement of women in the ready-made garment sector, including Export Processing Zones, has increased due to impoverishment, cheap labor, family’s economic status, fewer employment opportunities, and less education and skill.

2.5: Types of structural violence that impedes women’s empowerment in the context of garment workers

Structural violence in the garment industry starts with the recruitment process. Though the garment industry is subject to the Bangladesh Labor Act of 2006, the owners of garment factories do the recruitment process informally. Usually, garment workers are not provided with a formal job contract (Ahamed 2013; Absar 2002). Thus, “they are easily hired and fired” (Absar 2002). The Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act 2006 states that “Every worker should be given a letter of appointment and an identity card with the photograph” (International Labour Organization 2009). Because of the absence of legal contract papers, it can be assumed that there is a high chance of female garment workers losing their jobs without any prior notice. Also, female garment workers are deprived of their weekly holidays due to extra work and overtime (Naved 2018). A weekly holiday is very important for the workers’ rest and recreation but,
unfortunately, due to overtime work, they cannot enjoy the holiday. Finally, they become fed up with their daily working schedule. This is a kind of physical and mental torture for them. In the case of maternity leave, women get fewer opportunities. One study notes that “the General Secretary of the National Garment Worker’s Federation alleged that most women were compelled to leave their jobs after the birth of their babies, and if they wanted to start work again in the same factory, they would have to start as new workers with lower salaries instead of being re-instated to their former positions; some factory owners did provide leave to their workers but did not pay them as per the provisions of the law” (Anam 2008:96). There is a rule of maternity leave in the Handbook of the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006 and the rule states that every woman employed in an establishment shall be entitled to, and her employer shall be liable for the payment of maternity benefit in respect of the period of eight weeks preceding the expected day of her delivery and eight weeks immediately following the day of her delivery.

Female workers are usually bound to work extra hours without payment. The length of the working day has a significant influence on the health and mental condition of workers. However, most garment factories do not maintain the rules of standard working hours (Ahamed 2013). Yet the law of the Bangladesh labor act 2006 states that adult workers are allowed to work in an establishment for not more than eight hours on any day. Sometimes workers are unable to finish their work on time, and then they are forced to do extra hours without any payment. If any worker refuses to do an extra hour of work, then he/she is fired, or sometimes their payment is cut down from regular
wages (Ahamed 2013). Also, in some factories, the manager or supervisor forces female workers to do night shifts by locking the main gates (Ahamed 2013). From these discussions, one can conclude that women are deprived even of their rights to regular wages, and they become a victim of getting low wages. Low wages are one of the reasons behind workers’ dissatisfaction (Ahamed 2013). Thus, women's exploitation through low wages is an example of structural violence, where the underdogs [female garment workers] get low wages because they are exploited by the top dogs [the owners of garment factories] (Galtung 1990).

A study focusing on the working environment finds that workers remain in very unhygienic conditions as the air quality is poor and the workplace is congested and overcrowded (Paul – Majumder and Begum 2000). As a result, garment workers are exposed to toxic substances and dust (Paul-Majumder and Begum 2000). Thus, garment workers are affected by various diseases, such as fever, headache, back pain, eye infection, jaundice, typhoid, weakness or anemia, skin diseases, diarrhea, and so on (Ahamed 2013). A Handbook on the Bangladesh Labor Act, 2006, states that “In every establishment sufficient latrines and urinals of prescribed types should be provided for workers at all times while they work in the establishment” as it is necessary for their wellbeing and health. The health and working conditions of women can be supported by Galtungs idea of structural violence in a way that because of the exploitation and marginalization, the female garments workers are positioned in such a disadvantageous condition that they deal with permanent sufferings like malnutrition, illness, starvation, and diseases, which in turn results in shorter life expectancy (Galtung 1990).
Violence in factories is also enabled by their human resource structure, which positions men in supervisory positions and women at the bottom of the hierarchy, justified through an understanding of women's passivity and ‘nimble-fingers’ (Elson and Pearson 1981). In workplace violence studies, women are found to report high levels of economic violence by managers as well as women are considered puppets of male bosses who use sexualized imagery and threats to harness their power in controlling women’s productivity at work (Naved et al. 2018). This highlights a broader patriarchal structure of Bangladeshi society and internal gender hierarchy, which is justified by the logic of production and control in achieving production results.

Over the period 1990-97, an average male worker’s pay increased by about eight percent, whereas the nominal rate of increase in female workers’ pay was estimated at only 5 percent (Paul-Majumder and Begum 2000). Thus, women earn less than men even though they are doing the same job. This kind of gender discrimination does not happen naturally. It happens due to discriminatory cultural practices in society (Galtung 1990). In addition, female garment workers are facing sexual and physical harassment in every aspect of their lives. Surveys from 1990 and 1997 find that female garment workers face sexual violence that includes “demeaning remarks, unwelcome touching, and grabbing and other physical assaults, including raping” (Paul-Majumder and Begum 2000). Other data shows that about 70 percent of female garment workers who commute by bus experience bad behavior from the conductor and driver (Paul-Majumder and Begum 2000). Consequently, violence against female garment workers is not confined to home or workplace only. Rather, males on the street, on public
transport, as well as the garment industries, make female garment workers victims of violence. All types of sexual oppression against women indicate women's vulnerable position and men’s power of domination. Gender inequalities thus represent structural violence in society (Galtung 1990). The phenomena described above constitute different forms of structural violence. Now, I turn to sources of structural violence.

2.6: Sources of structural violence

According to Galtung’s wage theory that I previously discussed, structural violence comes with societal structures and is characterized by injustice, discrimination, and inequality. The norms, beliefs, and values that regulate social action are considered the basic elements of social structure (Bryant 2007). “A complete, influential sociological tradition understands social structure to be an institutional structure—namely, a set of cultural and normative models that define actors’ expectations about behavior” (Bryant 2007). Also, according to Kandiyoti, Bangladesh belongs to classic patriarchy in which women are subordinate to men. Thus, gender inequality or gender hierarchy is an obvious element that is responsible for men's domination of women. The forms of structural violence, for example, male-female wage discrimination, men having higher positions, and deprivation of the weekly holidays due to extra work, emerge from social structure. There is a flow chart below that would make it easy to understand how social structure becomes a source of structural violence.

Human agency can be considered another source of structural violence. According to Kathleen, human agency is implicated through structures that reflect an unequal distribution of power. This unequal distribution of power among actors can further trace
its origins to human agency (Kathleen 2007). Also, this unequal distribution of power, then limiting their possibilities of action systematically disadvantages those who do not hold as much, if any, power at all (Kathleen 2007).

To sum up, these two sources (societal structure and human agency) have been discussed in previous studies. In the case of societal structure, I identify other factors like cultural norms, including social class and gender inequality, to show how the source of structural violence works for garment factory workers.

![Flow Chart of the source of structural violence.](image)

**Figure 1:** Flow Chart of the source of structural violence.
2.7: Consequence of structural violence

Next, I will highlight the consequences of structural violence. Garments workers are provided with unhygienic conditions. As most of the workers are female, they suffer from various diseases such as fever, headache, and pain. Besides, they are not given legal contract papers, so they fear losing their jobs, too, which affects their family life as well as their career. Most of them come from rural areas, and the reasons are “push and pull factors.” This creates hindrances in their way of life. As a result, they are unable to lead a solvent life. Most of the high positions are allocated to men in the garment industry. Therefore, women are limited in what opportunities are made available to them, and they are limited in what skills they can develop. Sexual harassment by bosses brings trauma to them (Naved et al. 2018). These consequences lead female garment workers to a vulnerable position.

In the last three sections, I have examined types, sources, and consequences of structural violence for female Bangladeshi garment workers. In my study, I want to explore these three areas in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I will look for additional evidence regarding these aspects of structural violence. I am interested in finding out whether women’s situations are the same as depicted by previous studies or if I may find any new themes. The COVID-19 pandemic is the core situation to think about that may have brought global economic changes. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on the economy because malls and factories had to remain closed, and still today, workers continue to face uncertain futures. According to the report of the Institute for Human rights and Business (IHRB), “With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, every stakeholder in the RMG supply chain has been affected. Worse, the impact fell disproportionately on the weakest link in the RMG global supply chain – the workers who often lack social security and safety nets – most
of whom are women” (IHRB 2021: 5). After exploring the sources, forms and consequences of structural violence, I want to unpack what structural violence means for women in the garment industry.

2.8: Definition of women empowerment

The concept of women's empowerment involves granting women the ability and right to exercise power and authority (Abdin 2008). The idea of empowering women is multi-faceted and encompasses various dimensions. The multiple dimensions of empowering women are linked to societal norms and laws that acknowledge and validate women's voices in society (Mosedale 2005). Power also implies the ability of women to engage in collective action, recognizing that by working together, they can achieve more than they could as individuals (Mosedale). Another aspect of women's empowerment involves providing opportunities for women to come together with other women, allowing them to discuss their current situation, identify their strengths, and develop strategies for positive change (Mosedale 2005). According to Mosedale (2005), women's empowerment involves a process where women redefine and expand the scope of what they can be and achieve, particularly in situations where they have been limited in comparison to men. Transforming the societal structures through the reduction of gender inequality is crucial to increase women's ability to redefine gender roles (Abdin 2008). The implication of this is that women need to acknowledge their strategic necessities and their place in society (Abdin 2008). The term “women's strategic needs” refers to a means of increasing women's ability to negotiate effectively, decreasing instances of violence against women, and affording them greater influence in decision-making processes (Abdin 2008).

Mosedale defines empowerment as a concept with socio-political implications that consists of various components such as cognitive, psychological, economic, and political
elements (Mosedale 2005). The cognitive part in this context refers to women's comprehension of the reasons behind their lack of power in society, as well as their awareness of their legal rights within that society (Mosedale 2005). The psychological component refers to women's belief that they can take action to improve their personal and social circumstances, which includes boosting their confidence and self-esteem (Mosedale 2005). The economic element pertains to the participation of women in the workforce or other productive activities, which enables them to achieve economic self-reliance (Mosedale 2005). Women's economic empowerment involves having access to a reliable source of income that allows them to maintain a decent standard of living. This financial independence also needs to enable them to negotiate effectively within their families, communities, and workplaces.

The concepts presented by Mosedale (2005) and Abdin (2008) hold importance in this thesis for examining how women have assessed their strategic needs and social status, their perception of powerlessness in society, and their level of economic independence and sustainable benefits. Also, these proposed concepts by Mosedale (2005) and Abdin (2008) are relevant in examining the notable accomplishments of women garment workers, such as their increased ability to negotiate for better positions and their greater involvement in decision-making processes within their families, workplaces, and communities.

2.9: Women's empowerment in the garment industry

In Bangladesh, women are assigned gender roles that require them to contribute to both the productive economy (income-generating activities) and the reproductive economy (unpaid activities that sustain the labor force on a daily and intergenerational basis) (Rai et al., 2013). The assumption that women are only secondary earners and, therefore, should be paid at a
minimum wage level has led to the neglect of the additional expenses borne by women as a result of their gender roles in the RMG industry. Before 2013, female garment workers were only paid wages that accounted for 12% of the national living wage, even though inflation rates ranged from 8 to 10% (Campaign 2013). Since the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programs by the state in 1974, the absence of welfare safety nets and general household reproduction costs provided by the government is noteworthy (Feldman 2009). Even though the minimum wage increased in 2013, it remains insufficient to meet the estimated monthly living wage rate of $359, a cause for concern (“Living Wage,” 2014). Hence, women's empowerment is limited when they do not receive sufficient wages to cover their living expenses. The limited earning capacity of women due to low salaries restricts their ability to depend solely on their income, despite earning enough to live independently. Empowerment encompasses economic factors and the interplay of social, political, and cultural factors.

2.10: Source of women’s empowerment in the garment industry

The garment industry has the potential to empower women by offering them avenues for economic independence and enhancing their social status. Some ways in which the garment industry can facilitate women's empowerment include the following. The garment industry has emerged as a significant employer of women globally, particularly in developing nations where women have limited prospects for employment. This industry can provide them with gainful employment, offering benefits such as health insurance and paid leave while ensuring a decent wage. In addition, women can achieve financial independence and more outstanding agency by earning their income in the garment industry. They can utilize their earnings to sustain themselves and their families, invest in education or entrepreneurial endeavors, and exercise autonomy in making decisions that align with their interests. Also, the garment industry offers
training that enables women to develop valuable skills and become competent workers. For instance, garment factories frequently provide training and education programs to their workforce. These programs catalyze women's growth, allowing them to acquire new skills, amass valuable work experience, and enhance their career prospects. Begum and Sarmin argue in their study, “At present, the RMG industry is the largest employer of women; it has changed the socio-economic status of many women. Many women became financially independent by the blessing of the RMG industry” (Begum et al. 2016, p: 26).

Moreover, the expansion of the RMG industry has also spurred the growth of complementary sectors and infrastructure, generating more employment opportunities for women directly and indirectly. This, in turn, has contributed to the overall economic progress of the nation, leading to an enhancement in the quality of life for its people.

2.11: Types of women’s empowerment

To assess the level of women’s empowerment, empirical research has recognized several variables that can be employed as measures. After reviewing existing literature on women's empowerment, it was found that the most effective way to measure it is by considering five significant dimensions: economic, social and cultural, legal, political, and psychological (Begum et al. 2016). Empowering women in the garment industry involves multiple strategies, such as providing fair wages and career development opportunities for economic empowerment, offering training programs for skill development, encouraging participation in decision-making for leadership empowerment, promoting gender equality and safety for social empowerment, raising awareness of legal rights and preventing discrimination for legal empowerment, and nurturing self-esteem and confidence for psychological empowerment. These different forms of empowerment work together to
create a supportive and inclusive work environment for women, fostering their growth and development (Begum et al. 2016).

In summary, empowering women in the garment industry is crucial in promoting their well-being, financial independence, and gender equality. Therefore, it is essential to implement policies and programs that support women's empowerment across all dimensions.

2.12: Consequence of women empowerment

The RMG industry is currently the primary source of employment for women, and it has had a significant impact on their socio-economic status, resulting in the financial independence of many women. Before the emergence of the RMG industry, women in Bangladesh were often marginalized and deprived of fundamental rights. However, the industry has brought about significant changes, providing women with previously unavailable opportunities. As a result, women are now actively engaged in economic activities. They have gained decision-making power, a voice, and the ability to own assets through their income generation for their families (Begum et al. 2016). As a result, women now have greater participation in family affairs. Women have a voice in the family now because they can contribute financially. To attain social and cultural empowerment, women require control over their bodies, availability of family planning services, protection from sexual and domestic violence, and increased representation in social environments. To attain social and cultural empowerment, women require control over their bodies, availability of family planning services, protection from sexual and domestic violence, and increased representation in social environments (Begum et al. 2016). Political empowerment of women is crucial as it enables their model in the political system and provides them with the right to vote (Begum et al. 2016). One study also found that women workers in the RMG
industry have higher social recognition than those in rural areas (Begum et al. 2016). The literature review suggests that the ready-made garment industry offers women access to income, resources, asset ownership, employment opportunities, and a voice in economic decision-making. The RMG industry's accomplishments in providing women with freedom from sexual violence, reduced discrimination, increased visibility in society, and opportunities for economic empowerment contribute to women's overall social and cultural empowerment (Begum et al. 2016). Moreover, the psychological empowerment of women is achieved through promoting self-worth and fostering psychological well-being (Begum et al. 2016).

2.13: Structural violence versus empowerment

The patriarchal social structures of Bangladesh are based on gender inequality that creates structural violence and inhibits the empowerment of women. This discrimination starts within the family and radiates outwards through the society of some biased social norms about a woman’s place in society. While women are seen doing physical work in public places for supplementary earnings, still women do not gain true empowerment in everything they do in the context of the household (Acker 1990). This shows the paradox of empowerment. As women seek opportunities outside of the home, their efforts are more tied to the house. In Bangladesh, the paradox of empowerment suggests that it is not simply enough to only have a choice. Instead, this choice requires resources that should be exercised too. It indicates that women want to come out of the home and be independent economically, but the more they try to move outside the house, the more they are tied back to the home as a result of the limits of a patriarchal society. In Bangladesh, women’s resources are controlled by the household as well as male members. According to the
interviews with women workers, “Almost all women described being forced to hand over their earnings to their husband or mother-in-law at some point” (Naved et al. 2018:152). If the woman refuses to give the paycheck, then she might become the victim of violence. Even though women, especially vulnerable poor rural women, have attained certain salient social benefits from the ready-made garment industry, the paradox of empowerment reveals how structural violence cut out most of these positive effects, significantly the economic aspects. To sum up, in Bangladesh society women are kept tied to the household economically, even as they have the opportunity for greater physical and social mobility.

2.14: Summary

I think these articles are excellent in addressing the social and economic situation of female garment workers. Most of the articles focus on the accurate picture of Bangladesh’s patriarchal society highlighting its social norms and how these norms are responsible for structural violence. There were different patterns regarding structural violence that garment workers face, such as low wages, health issues, poor working environments, and others. Reference to some statistical analysis in a few articles (Ovi 2018, Mahmud 2003, Huq 2022) makes it easier to detect why garment workers are more prone to structural violence and how the impact of violence impedes women's socio-economic empowerment. Also, the background of the growth of garments industries and why women get involved in garments industries is an important topic that has been highlighted and shows the connection between women’s economic empowerment and the history of garments industries. In addition, the studies have done meticulous research that helps people to understand the predicament of female garment workers' conditions in the workplace. Besides, some articles depict the positive and negative sides of garments industries concerning women’s employment.
Though the garment industries provide an opportunity for poor rural women to be economically stable majority of the articles, suggest that women are facing structural violence that cuts out the positive side and economic empowerment is being hampered. Based on my secondary literature review, my hypothesis follows Galtung's theory of structural violence, suggesting that structural violence impedes women's empowerment in the context of female garment workers in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 period, 2020-2022.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1: Data sources

My thesis involved gathering data from Bangladeshi national newspapers on instances of structural violence against women and women empowerment in the garment sector. I selected *The Financial Express* (The Financial Express, 2022) and *The Daily Star* (The Daily Star, 2022) as my sources, as both have garnered positive feedback on social media (The Financial Express Bangladesh Facebook Page and The Daily Star Facebook Page). Through my research, I examined and contrasted the distinct aspects of these newspapers, such as their coverage, emphasis, content, tone, and perspectives. While both newspapers have access to local issues, their approaches have discernable differences. My research focused on examining the reporting approaches of *The Financial Express* and *The Daily Star* concerning instances of structural violence against women in the garment sector, which encompasses diverse forms of exploitation, abuse, and discrimination experienced by women workers in the industry. By analyzing news articles published by these two newspapers, I aimed to identify similarities and differences in their reporting styles and the underlying factors influencing their coverage. My research findings showed that *The Daily Star* prioritized reporting on workers' rights, including those of female garment workers, whereas *The Financial Express* provided more comprehensive coverage of the garment industry, specifically emphasizing women's
roles within it. Overall, my thesis has contributed to enhancing my comprehension of how *The Financial Express* and *The Daily Star* cover instances of structural violence against women in the garment sector, as well as how their reporting approaches and viewpoints can impact the public discussion and efforts towards safeguarding women's rights in the industry.

*The Financial Express* is the first financial daily newspaper in Bangladesh in English (The Financial Express, 2022) that covers the most authentic news on the economy, politics, and finance in Bangladesh. It started on November 10, 1993, under the ownership of International Publications Limited. As I looked for the popularity of this newspaper, I explored the ratings, comments, followers, and like. The rating is 4.8 out of 5 based on 108 people’s opinions, 224,449 likes, and 229,988 followers. Most of the comments were good. This paper aims to teach society about how global developments shape their lives and how they should make themselves ready to have a voice free of prejudice (The Financial Express Bangladesh Facebook Page). This paper follows the strategy by delivering news and in-depth reviews on worldwide events (The Financial Express Bangladesh Facebook Page). I choose this paper to get some personal experiences of female garment workers. As they cover news on economics, the garments sector is a significant part of the economy in Bangladesh. Therefore I have chosen this paper for my data collection. My initial findings are that the newspaper has covered violence against women in a way that seems not biased to me. The newspaper focuses on the female garment personal experiences of violence in garment industries. It appears that these personal experiences are presented in a way that does not hide the reality of female garment workers.

Though *The Daily Star* newspaper is not only based on financial news, they have
prioritized women's violence in the garments sector. Moreover, *The Daily Star* newspaper is more popular in Bangladesh as it is an old newspaper, and so people are relying on this newspaper. It is considered the Bangladeshi *New York Times* to the Bangladeshi people ([The Daily Star, 2022](The Daily Star (Bangladesh) Wikipedia Page)). This paper was established on January 14, 1991. It has 3,573,445 likes and 4,162,055 followers. The strength of this paper is that it strives to be free from any influence of political parties, maintaining neutrality in conflicts between good and evil, justice and injustice, and right and wrong, regardless of positions held by any group or alliance ([The Daily Star Facebook Page](The Daily Star Facebook Page)). The publications are based on the rule of law, human rights, gender issues, and accountability of people in the administration and the world of trade and industry ([The Daily Star Facebook Page](The Daily Star Facebook Page)). For me, the content is significant. So, I tried to look for a paper that is unbiased and highlights people’s voices. While choosing the newspaper articles from *The Daily Star*, I found that the publications focused on the problems of women garment workers elaborately. I thought I could rely on this paper as this paper is emphasizing a topic that is relevant to my work. So, the publications of this paper might not avoid the gender discrimination that female garment workers are dealing with. I collected image data, statistics, and written phrases from those national newspapers, which helped me analyze the problem.

I have conducted a literature review to validate the reliability of these two national newspapers. A study highlights the contrast between *The Financial Express* and *Prothom Alo* to emphasize the significance of covering Bangladesh’s economic news comprehensively ([Talukder et al. 2021](Talukder et al. 2021)). The study finds that *The Financial Express* covers a
wide range of economic issues, including imports, exports, stock market, commodities, and employment, with an average of 16.6 news items printed daily in the newspaper. Prothom Alo has an average of 6.9 news items on economic issues daily (Talukder et al. 2021). Overall, according to the study, these variations underscore the significance of scrutinizing and contrasting numerous news sources to attain a more holistic comprehension of the economic climate in Bangladesh.

In the case of The Daily Star newspaper, another study notes that, The Daily Star, the most widely circulated English newspaper in Bangladesh, boasts a highly skilled editor, a committed team, authenticated news, high advertising revenue, broad readership, various marketing campaigns, and a lack of significant competition (Ali 2004). In summary, with a highly user-friendly website and active social media accounts, The Daily Star has established a robust online presence, making news and information readily available to readers worldwide, not just in Bangladesh. This has undoubtedly contributed to its continued success as the leading English newspaper in the country, along with its talented editor, dedicated employees, authenticated news, and substantial advertising revenue. The Daily Star's ability to serve a wide range of readers in Bangladesh can be attributed to its various marketing campaigns and minimal competition in the market.

Moreover, I found it convenient to use two national newspapers as a data source for my research on structural violence and its impact on women's empowerment. These newspapers have been beneficial in providing up-to-date information on current events related to the garment industry and offering diverse perspectives and opinions on my topic. My research benefitted significantly from the use of newspapers as a source of data, as they
provided valuable insights into local events and public opinion that may have been difficult to obtain through other means. By incorporating newspaper articles into my research, I was able to gather timely and relevant information that enhanced the comprehensiveness of my findings.

3.2: Sample

My unit of analysis is the newspaper article. The unit of analysis in research is the primary object, entity, or phenomenon being studied, defined by the research question or hypothesis. It could be a person, group, organization, community, text, event, or another phenomenon. It's crucial to define it clearly at the study's outset to guide the selection of appropriate research methods and data collection techniques.

I have based my search duration on three years (2020-2022) to verify if my literature review aligns with the current trends or if any new themes have emerged in my collected data. The rationale behind selecting the years (2020-2022) is to ensure that my research findings accurately reflect the most recent incidents in the garment industry, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, by focusing on this period, I aim to provide an accurate and timely analysis of the reporting styles, emphasis, and coverage of The Financial Express and The Daily Star regarding structural violence against women in the garment sector. During the Covid-19 period, girls and women have been heavily impacted in the family, social and working environment. Millions of women working in the garments sector face the increased burden of unpaid care work (What is the impact of COVID-19 on the global garment industry, 2022).

To gather data for my research, I conducted searches for newspaper articles on Google and the University of Mississippi Library website. For The Financial Express, I first
searched the A to Z database and selected Nexis Uni, where I narrowed my searches by period, location by publication, and sources from 2020 to 2022. I specifically searched for topics and titles related to “women garment worker” and “Bangladesh” and confined my search to women only. To filter out relevant articles, I employed a method that involved choosing the location of publication by clicking on “international,” followed by “Asia,” and finally selecting the “People's Republic of Bangladesh.” On Nexis Uni, I found 30 results in total for *The Financial Express*. I clicked on the full text of each newspaper article to review the classification section at the bottom, including publication type, subjects, industry, and geographic information. This helped me to understand the article's content and relevance to my research.

For *The Daily Star*, I searched the website directly via Google, using *The Financial Express*’s key search phrases. I limited my search to the 2020-2022 period and read through article texts to find relevant keywords for my data collection. I searched for up to 10 pages of results and used the relevance option on *The Daily Star* website. *The Daily Star* yielded a total of 40 newspaper articles.

A sample is a subset of the studied population to support a research study. The sample represents the large population by drawing inferences about the population. In my research, I choose the non-probability sampling technique. Nonprobability sampling is a method where not all individuals in the population are selected, resulting in a sample that may not fully represent the population. I am collecting newspaper data in my analysis where my data is not in a format to measure probability, so my study is suited for non-probability sampling techniques.

More specifically, my newspaper collection is related to purposive sampling, a
subcategory of nonprobability sampling. It is purposive because I chose papers over the years from 2020-2022 for the Covid reason that I mentioned earlier, the popularity and acceptance in media, the values of these papers, and the articles that raised voices supporting Bangladeshi female garment workers. The participant selection strategy in a study must be part of the overall logic and aligned with the ontological, epistemological, and axiological principles that support the study's objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). In my case, I have chosen newspaper data collection, which fits with the study's purpose. Moreover, researchers can use purposive sampling to select participants based on predetermined criteria, resulting in research outcomes that are more efficient and effective due to the careful selection process.

My sampling method is convenience sampling, as I can easily access the data required for my study. Convenience or haphazard, or accidental sampling is a non-probability sampling method. Participants are selected based on practical criteria such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability, and willingness to participate. This method is frequently used when time, budget, or other resources are limited, and it is often the most practical and feasible option (Etikan et al. 2016). It's important to note that convenience sampling may not generate a sample representative of the target population. As a result, the findings may not apply to other people or settings. Therefore, researchers should exercise caution when utilizing this method and be mindful of its limitations when interpreting the results.

In summary, to ensure reliable and valid research results, researchers must choose an appropriate sampling method that aligns with their research objectives and questions,
considering each method's advantages and disadvantages.

3.3: Measurement

The theory of structural violence I have examined suggests that structural violence manifests in different forms, sources, and consequences. Thus, I have developed a list of deductive measures for forms, sources, and consequences of structural violence. The lists are the following:

Table 1: List of deductive measures for structural violence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Violence</th>
<th>Forms</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Structure</td>
<td>Wage discrimination</td>
<td>Health issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Agency</td>
<td>Harassment (sexual, verbal, physical)</td>
<td>Insolvency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor working condition</td>
<td>Mental trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtime working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have also developed a list of deductive measures for women’s empowerment based on my literature review. I find the ready-made garment industry a source for women’s empowerment as the ready-made garment (RMG) industry empowers women in various ways, especially in developing countries, by providing employment opportunities, skill development, economic independence, and promoting gender equality. The garment industry in Bangladesh is considered the largest formal manufacturing sector that employs
women (Huq 2022). The industry offers women the chance to earn an income, boosting their well-being and self-esteem. As women work in the RMG sector, they acquire new skills and knowledge, enhancing their personal and professional growth. Gaining financial independence allows women to have more control over their lives, potentially shifting traditional gender roles within families. The RMG industry promotes gender equality by offering equal opportunities for women in employment, training, and career growth, leading to societal attitude changes. Furthermore, the industry's growth can drive improvements in education, healthcare, and other social services for women and girls. Women's increased income and financial independence contribute to community development and progress. The RMG industry can also raise awareness about women's rights, fair wages, and working conditions, leading to the establishment of women-led labor unions and organizations advocating for better standards and gender equality. Addressing industry challenges, such as exploitation, poor working conditions, and gender discrimination, is crucial to maximizing the RMG industry's potential as a source of women's empowerment, which can be achieved through ethical practices, stakeholder collaboration, and adherence to international labor standards.

**Table 2**: List of deductive measures for women's empowerment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women Empowerment</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ready-made Garments</td>
<td>Economic Empowerment</td>
<td>Ownership of Asset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social &amp; Culture Empowerment</td>
<td>Decision-Making Power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These measures are based on my review of the literature, and it is expanded further through data analysis. There are also inductive measures too based on my further analysis of the data.

In conducting my analysis, I utilized a taxonomy - a classification system that organizes objects into categories - to code my data. Given that my research focuses on both women's empowerment and structural violence, I separated these concepts into distinct categories. For instance, regarding structural violence, I created categories for sources, forms, and consequences, with each type containing subcategories for individual measures. As an example, harassment is a measure within the category of structural violence, and it has subcategories such as sexual, verbal, and physical.

To code my data, I used the Atlas.ti software and employed both inductive and deductive processes. Firstly, I added all the newspaper documents into one project and used the software's code group function. I created a code group and made several categories under it, then applied them to the relevant newspaper texts. Occasionally, I created new inductive codes while reading the text and placed them into the appropriate code group. For instance, gender discrimination is a code group, and the categories are wage gap, firing, male leadership, and unpaid. Once I assigned codes to the relevant sections of the newspaper texts, I proceeded to refine and organize them. This involved reviewing and comparing the codes within each code group to ensure consistency and clarity, as well as consolidating or eliminating redundant codes to streamline the process. I also wrote memos to document my thought processes and reflections on the codes, which aided in conducting a thorough analysis and interpretation of the data. In summary, the Atlas.ti software proved to be an invaluable asset in simplifying the coding process.
and structuring the data for analysis.

To collect my data, I used purposive and convenience sampling methods and selected two national newspapers, namely *The Financial Express Bangladesh* and *The Daily Star*. I have identified and listed the measures for the source, forms, and consequences of structural violence and aim to uncover novel insights from the newspaper data.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present a research study on the prevalence of structural violence and empowerment among women garment workers in Bangladesh, with a focus on identifying the sources, types, and consequences of these phenomena. Utilizing the Atlas.ti software, I conducted a content analysis of newspaper articles published between 2020 and 2022, in order to gain insights into the experiences of the garment worker population. The overarching goal of this study was to contribute to the existing literature on structural violence and empowerment, by examining whether these issues persist in the contemporary garment industry and to identify any emerging themes within recent years. Through this research, I aimed to deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics of power and inequality within the garment industry, as experienced by women workers.

Structural Violence

I have addressed the problems of structural violence, as presented in two newspapers, including the responsible parties for the exploitation of female garment workers, the various forms of exploitation they endure, and the resulting repercussions of such exploitation. In the following sections, I have illustrated how these issues are discussed in the newspapers by dividing them into three categories - sources, types, and consequences - to shed light on the responsible parties for the exploitation of female garment workers, the various forms of
exploitation they experience, and the resulting outcomes.

4.1: Sources of structural violence

The origins of structural violence are typically intricate and varied and pertain to the societal structures and systems that generate and sustain inequality and unfairness. These structures may encompass economic, political, and cultural factors, such as poverty, bias, and uneven distribution of resources and authority. In the article "Violence, Peace and Peace Research", Galtung describes institutionalized violence as a form of structural violence deeply embedded within a society's social, economic, and political structures. Institutionalized violence can be perpetuated through legal and regulatory frameworks, cultural norms and practices, and economic systems that uphold unequal power relations and oppress marginalized groups (Galtung 1969). According to the previous literature for women working in the garment industry, sources of structural violence can manifest as inadequate compensation, absence of employment stability, hazardous work environments, restricted opportunities for education and healthcare, gender-based prejudice, and mistreatment by employers.

I have discovered through the newspaper analysis that UK brands' procurement practices are another source of structural violence affecting garment workers. The buying practices of UK brands could potentially contribute to institutionalized structural violence against female garment workers in Bangladesh. This can result in the systematic exploitation and oppression of these workers, such as enduring low wages, extended working hours, and hazardous working conditions, due to the demands and regulations set by the brands that purchase from the factories where these workers are employed. These practices are institutionalized because they are deeply ingrained within the economic and political systems that control the garment industry and the relationships between buyers and suppliers.
The fashion industry in Bangladesh is disreputable for its poor labor practices. Unfortunately, many UK fashion brands’ purchasing practices have been linked to the exploitation and hardship faced by garment workers. The following newspaper quote makes this point clearly: “Fiona Gooch, the senior private-sector policy adviser with Traidcraft Exchange, UK, makes some swinging observations cutting across the trade chain, saying that UK fashion brands' purchasing practices are among the most abusive and least regulated in the world” (“Apparel workers” 2022:2). “During the pandemic time, workers could not afford to be sacked. These devastating impacts were heightened and, in some cases, directly caused by retailers and brands selling into the UK and other markets in the Global North.” (“Apparel workers” 2022, sec. A). “Regrettably though, women working in the Bangladesh garment industry are still seen suffering under the devastating impacts of the Covid health crisis, according to new findings. A study by researchers at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and trade justice charity Traidcraft Exchange, United Kingdom (UK), unearths the truth around who are being hit hardest by the pandemic. The study report, circulated by Euronews, reveals the repercussions of Covid-19 and consequent actions taken by Western retailers- such as cancelling orders, refusal to pay for work in progress and demands for discounted prices” (“Apparel workers” 2022, sec. A).

4.2: Types of structural violence

The newspaper articles I analyzed catalogued a long list of types of structural violence garment workers experience. I have grouped these under the following categories: harassment, lack of health facilities, maternity, work conditions, family matters, and gender discrimination. Each type of structural violence includes several sub-types. I discuss each in turn.

4.2.1: Harassment
The existence of harassment in the garment industry can contribute to the perpetuation of structural violence as it intensifies the marginalization and oppression of already vulnerable workers. In this section, I have outlined the many types of harassment prevalent in the garment industry, including abuse, physical violence, production pressure, and others. Additionally, I have specified some types of harassment that were previously vague in the literature review. For example, while the literature review discusses threats against women garment workers, my data reveals that they are also verbally abused through acts such as humiliation, yelling, screaming, threats, and slurs. Furthermore, my findings indicate that many workers remain silent about their harassment experiences out of fear of retaliation. My objective was to investigate whether these harassment issues align with the theory of structural violence, and in doing so, I also sought to identify any new themes that could support this theory and contribute to a deeper understanding of the various forms of harassment in the garment industry.

**Type 1 - Sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment refers to unwelcome sexual acts. It includes sexist behavior, flirting, unwanted touching, and requests for sexual favors. Women garment workers are often victims of sexual harassment, as illustrated by an article investigating the problem. “Around 75 percent of the 642 interviewed workers (484 female, 158 male) reported that they regularly experience gender-based violence (GBV) in the factories, and around 75 percent of them regularly become victims of sexual harassment, the report reads” (“Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A). “The majority or 75 percent of the surveyed garment workers in Bangladesh have faced gender-based violence and sexual harassment regularly, according to a recent study” (“Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A). Other articles provide personal stories illustrating the issue. “Two women garment workers, who shared their experiences, said the superintendents often touched them inappropriately”
(“Sexual Abuse at Workplace” 2020, sec C). Also, “the protesting workers alleged that the admin manager of Chinese-owned Risingtex Fashion Limited in Ashulia of Savar often sexually harasses the factory's female workers, reports UNB. When the workers demanded punishment of the official, the factory authorities did not take any steps, and that officer sexually harassed the female workers again on November 13” (“RMG workers stage demo” 2022, sec A). “Last year, the Asia Floor Wage Alliance found that RMG workers in six Asian countries, including Bangladesh, faced more violence and harassment during the pandemic and that Bangladesh was one of the countries where the increased intensity of work was used by managers to get sexual favors” (Tasneem 2022, sec D).

**Type 2 - Coercion**

Coercion is a wrongful act that usually violates the freedom of others, especially the target ones. Garment industries coerce women workers, deprive them of their fundamental rights, and subject them to intense bullying. Power dynamics play a significant role in such cases. For example, “however, due to the power dynamics between the various actors in the industry and the difficult nature of the work itself, garment workers (female garment workers in particular) continue to face sexual harm and suffering, gendered industrial discipline practices (including physical violence, verbal abuse, coercion, and threats), severe health consequences, barriers to freedom of association and collective bargaining, low wages, long working hours, and retaliation for reporting abuses” (“Beyond the Accord” 2021, sec.C).

**Type 3 - Physical violence**

Physical violence refers to physical injuries, including hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, etc. Women garment workers are also victims of physical violence. The quote noted above suggests this: “There are many things I dislike about the factory. The one I most dislike is
the rude scolding and shouting of the supervisors. They physically abuse us by hitting or slapping us. They slap us to force us to work," says one female RMG factory worker” ("Apparel workers” 2022, sec. A). Also, “About 64 percent of the respondents report that they are under enormous production pressure, and a third have been threatened or beaten by superiors due to production pressure” ("Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A).

**Type 4 - Production pressure**

Production pressure occurs when there is an imbalance in the production process accomplishment. Garment production includes laying, marking, cutting, sewing, packaging, etc. Sometimes women garment workers face many uncomfortable situations due to production pressures. For example, “About 64 percent of the respondents report that they are under enormous production pressure, and a third have been threatened or beaten by superiors due to production pressure” ("Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A). A personal story further illustrates the point. Due to the lack of facilities for washing and drying unsanitary rags at the office lavatories, Shirina is forced to reuse them when needed. Additionally, disposing of the used rags poses a significant challenge for her. She added, “Since we work under huge production pressures, often, we find no time to use the toilets, except for the lunch breaks. So, I need to keep wearing the damp rags for a long time, and it causes itching and irritation" (Jahan 2021, sec. B). “Shocking findings also show an increase in sexual and verbal abuse and symbolic violence mainly from line supervisors pushing women to work faster to meet unrealistic production targets” ("Apparel workers” 2022, sec. A). “Although RMG export orders bounced back once the corona situation improved, the workers' lives did not improve. The working hours in the factories increased, as did the production pressure” (Akhter 2022, sec C).
Type 5 - Abuse

Abuse occurs when any person harms or injures another person purposely. In the garment industry, mostly men who are in leading position exercise control over women garment workers through abuse. For instance, “Sometimes women workers are not even allowed to go to the toilets, they said, adding that the women workers didn’t complain fearing further abuse” (“Sexual Abuse at Workplace” 2020, sec.C). In this case, the abuse consists of women enduring hazardous conditions in the garment industries. Thus, women garment workers are at a high risk of being unsafe at their workplace. This quote indicates that women garment workers are deprived of their fundamental health rights, and they feel afraid and numb to complain because of further abuse.

Type 6 - Threats

Managers or owners of the garment industries usually threaten women garment workers if a particular order or action is not followed. As noted above, “about 64 percent of the respondents report that they are under enormous production pressure, and a third have been threatened or beaten by superiors due to production pressure” (“Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A). Also, “women workers are silenced, through violence or threats. In the factories, we are subjected to sexual harassment by superiors and if we resist, we are threatened or dismissed. That’s why only a few dare to talk about their experiences,” the report quoted BCWS executive director Kalpona Akter” (“Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A).

Type 7 - Verbal harassment

Verbal harassment usually causes psychological or emotional harm to the victim. It includes humiliation, yelling, screaming, threats, and slurs. Women garment workers are generally seen to be victims of verbal harassment. “The report found that sixty percent of both
men and women workers surveyed experienced repeated insults and shouting from their supervisors or line managers” (“Violence, harassment key reasons” 2020 sec. A). The female garment worker stated that for many women, dealing with menstrual hygiene while working is a significant mental challenge, often resulting in them having to quit their jobs due to the verbal harassment they receive from male colleagues. "I can still remember, one woman said that she felt like she will die by the suicide of the intolerable bullying she had to face from her male counterparts," said Monjun (Jahan 2021, sec. D).

**Type 8 - Loss of benefits**

Loss of benefits refers to the deprivation from benefits of women garment workers. One article states: “The in-depth research saw face-to-face interviews carried out with female and male garment workers, factory managers, industry leaders, and trade unions over the course of eight months between November 2020 and July 2021. The interviews were conducted alongside discussions with a number of development agencies and international advocacy NGOs. It found that some employers refused to let workers return after the lockdown. Most who did return said they had been forced to sign new contracts, losing access to benefits and protection they had previously accrued” (“Apparel workers” 2022 sec. A). “The elderly female workers who had served more than five years were also sacked because they were entitled to service benefits,' adds one trade union leader in narrating the flipside realities of their jobs in stitching world-class wear” (“Apparel workers” 2022 sec. A).

**Type 9 - Silence**

Female garment workers suffer in silence. Silence is another form of mental torture for them. Sometimes they are bound to keep silent and don’t have the courage to express their oppression. This article makes this evident: “The study also found that hardly any woman worker
would talk to external investigators sent by the employer about sexual assaults in the workplace, which in turn, is one of the central factors preventing the issue from showing up in factory audits. It identified the pressure caused by fast fashion and exploitative purchasing practices of the buying fashion companies as the main reason for violence in textile factories” (“Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A). A personal account supports the point: “Women workers are silenced through violence or threats. In the factories, we are subjected to sexual harassment by superiors, and if we resist, we are threatened or dismissed. That's why only a few dare to talk about their experiences,” the report quoted BCWS executive director Kalpona Akter” (“Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A) “Female workers also often do not report on payment delays or issues relating to maternity leave, fearing that they may lose their jobs if they seek to remedy.” (“Women’s workplace safety” sec. A).

4.2.2: Lack of health facility

The inadequate provision of healthcare facilities for women in the garment industry is indicative of the manifestation of structural violence, which is a form of indirect violence that arises from social and economic structures. The pervasive presence of structural inequalities and power asymmetries in the industry creates an environment in which women encounter such violence. This not only negatively impacts their physical health and well-being but also has implications for their mental and emotional states, as they are compelled to operate within a system that disregards their health and safety. In this section, I identify a variety of challenges confronted by women in the garment industry, including issues related to childbirth, limited access to healthcare, inadequate availability of sanitary pads leading to discomfort and harmful infections, and restricted use of toilet facilities. These challenges reinforce the disadvantaged position of women in the industry, as they struggle to meet their fundamental health and hygiene
needs within a system that does not prioritize their well-being.

**Type 1 - Childbirth**

Women in the garment industry have a high chance of being laid off from their jobs after giving birth, as I discuss in the next section. “a few months ago, Mita (not her real name), a pregnant garments worker, while giving an interview to a well-known newspaper, mentioned that she was sacked by her production manager when she was on her authorized maternity leave. According to her, the basis for her termination was a refusal to provide maternity benefits” (Afrose 2022, sec. A). Women suffer from a scarcity of health facilities during pregnancy too, as suggested by the following article excerpt. “Female workers in our area are highly disadvantaged in the sense that there are no proper medical facilities available to them. During this lockdown, around 23 of our female workers were scheduled to give birth. Although most of these deliveries went well, there were still a few who were refused treatment by doctors. There is a lack of vaccination and proper healthcare; a child died after birth due to pneumonia” (“Access to general and reproductive health” 2020, sec. E). Also, “if we cannot bring back the healthcare situation to normal, many pregnant workers will not receive ANC and other services. We need to ensure that skilled birth attendants are present when deliveries are taking place inside homes – which is a big challenge now. This problem can be solved if the private sector ensures all their medical professionals (full-time employees) are employed. Besides, nutritional deficiency has also increased, causing health hazards” (“Access to general and reproductive health” 2020, sec. C).

**Type 2 – Sanitary pads**

Females use sanitary pads during periods to absorb blood. Menstrual health issues are much more important for female workers as the profitability and productivity of the garment
industry depend on them. Most female workers are deprived of this resource, as noted by one article. “A September 2020 survey conducted by the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM) and Microfinance Opportunities (MFO) on family planning and menstrual health of garment factory workers in Bangladesh found that only 34 percent of female workers use sanitary napkins during menstruation, while 44 percent still use clothes instead” (Jahan 2021, sec. B). The article further notes that the report “also found that three percent of them use no measures of the sort during their periods, while two percent use toilet tissues on days they have a heavy flow. Apart from toilet tissues, several women use cotton and garment waste clothes to maintain their menstrual hygiene, compromising their health, productivity, and dignity with the risk of embarrassing leaks and harmful infections” (Jahan 2021, sec. C).

**Type 3- Toilet restrictions**

This code focuses on the ill-treatment that occurs with female garment workers during toilet access. Female garment workers are treated in such a way that a fear of threat or abuse exists in their minds while in need of toilets. As noted above, “sometimes women workers are not even allowed to go to the toilets, they said, adding that the women workers didn’t complain fearing further abuse” (“Sexual Abuse” 2020, sec. C).

**4.2.3: Maternity**

Female garment workers in Bangladesh face a multitude of challenges concerning their reproductive health and maternity, leaving them at a significant disadvantage. The discrimination and harassment they face during pregnancy can lead to loss of income and job security, exacerbating their already precarious economic circumstances. The lack of access to adequate healthcare services places them at a higher risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth, which can result in long-term health problems for both mother and child. Moreover,
the absence of maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks force women to return to work before they have fully recovered, leading to further stress and health issues. All these factors highlight the significant disadvantage that female garment workers face regarding their reproductive health and well-being, calling for urgent action to address this critical issue. The subsequent section highlights the issue of female garment workers having their contracts terminated and being pressured to resign without receiving proper maternity benefits, as identified through my coding of newspaper articles. This practice exacerbates the challenges faced by women in the garment industry, including inadequate healthcare access and poor working conditions. The prevalence of this discriminatory practice underscores the structural inequalities and power imbalances that continue to affect the industry, with women disproportionately impacted.

**Type 1 - Contract violations**

Many garment workers become victims of structural violence through the recruitment process. Previously, I mentioned in the literature review section that garment workers are not provided with legal contract papers. Therefore, there is a high chance of easily hiring and firing workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, pregnant women were the most likely to suffer contract violations. For example, Professor Pamela Abbott, director of the Centre for Global Development, University of Aberdeen, said, “Our research has found that when the factories closed for the lockdown, the contracts of pregnant women were terminated. Owners need to respect the law and allow women to have the maternity leave they are entitled to and the Bangladesh Government should ensure that the law is enforced.” ("Drastic Covid impact" 2021:2).

**Type 2 - Leaving jobs**

Leaving a job refers to women’s willfully resigning from the garment industry’s
employment. Women deal with lots of complex issues, and they are bound to make decisions to quit their jobs. For instance, “violence and harassment are major factors in men and women workers leaving their jobs while pregnancy is a leading reason for women in the country's readymade garment industry, according to a latest ILO and UN Women joint report” (“Violence, harassment key reasons” 2020, sec. A). Also, “pregnant workers face severe challenges and are often pressured into quitting their jobs” (“Violence, harassment key reasons” 2020, sec. A).

4.2.4: Working conditions

Female garment workers, particularly in countries like Bangladesh, face significant challenges related to their working conditions. The analysis of newspaper articles revealed issues such as long working hours, stressful work environments, low wages, and unpaid work that contribute to a challenging work environment, which has serious implications for the health and well-being of these women. Long working hours can cause chronic fatigue, stress, and burnout, impacting physical and mental health. Stressful work environments with high production targets can lead to further mental health challenges, including anxiety and depression. Unpaid labor is another issue that female garment workers often face, such as working overtime without receiving proper compensation. Furthermore, many women earn poverty-level wages that do not provide them with the basic necessities of life, creating financial strain. The following material illustrates the challenges that female garment workers encounter, such as long working hours, stressful work environments, low wages, and unpaid work.

Type 1- Long hours

Long hours working is a kind of physical torture that women garment workers often face. They do overtime jobs even in an unpaid manner. An article makes this argument as follows:

“However, due to the power dynamics between the various actors in the industry and the difficult
nature of the work itself, garment workers (female garment workers in particular) continue to face sexual harm and suffering, gendered industrial discipline practices (including physical violence, verbal abuse, coercion, and threats), severe health consequences, barriers to freedom of association and collective bargaining, low wages, long working hours, and retaliation for reporting abuses” (Saxena 2021, sec.C).

**Type 2- Stress**

This code highlights the job pressure that leads female garment workers to stressful conditions. “The study's focus group discussions highlighted that work in the RMG sector is extremely physically stressful. As such, most women workers do not want to continue working in the sector until they reach the regular age of retirement” (“Violence, harassment key reasons” 2020 sec.C).

**Type 3- Low wage**

Low wage is another reason for women garment workers’ financial crisis. Female garment workers are offered low wages that make their lived experiences difficult. An already mentioned excerpt notes this too: “However, due to the power dynamics between the various actors in the industry and the difficult nature of the work itself, garment workers (female garment workers in particular) continue to face sexual harm and suffering, gendered industrial discipline practices (including physical violence, verbal abuse, coercion, and threats), severe health consequences, barriers to freedom of association and collective bargaining, low wages, long working hours, and retaliation for reporting abuses.” (Saxena 2021, sec.C).

**4.2.5: Family matters**

The next section draws attention to the predicaments encountered by women who work in the garment industry with regard to familial duties, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
These duties encompass financial and private responsibilities, such as fetching water from uncertain taps. Moreover, numerous women are engaged in unremunerated care work, which has further exacerbated their predicament. These predicaments are worsened by latent challenges such as discrimination, harassment, and wage disparities, which serve to underscore the gender-based disparities present within the garment industry.

**Type 1- Obligations**

Obligation means liability or burden. During the COVID-19 pandemic women’s garment, workers suffered the most. They faced challenges not only at the workplace but also in the home. At home, the obligations are financial or private obligations (e.g., collecting water from municipal taps open only at unpredictable times (Dreher et al. 2022). An article discusses the situation as follows: “The brief also stated that the impact of Covid-19 on women in the garment industry has worsened due to underlying challenges, including discrimination and harassment, underrepresentation of women's voices, wage gaps as well as unevenly shared unpaid care and family obligations”(Hasan 2020, sec. B). Another article makes a similar point: “Women account for approximately 80 percent of the garment sector workforce in the region, so they are heavily affected by many of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, says Joni Simpson, Senior Gender Specialist for the ILO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. However, women also experience additional impacts due to the existing challenges they face in the workplace as well as expectations regarding women's obligations in the home” (“Women bearing brunt” 2020, sec. B).

**Type 2- Unpaid care work**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women in the garment industries were involved in unpaid care work that has worsened their situation. The quote from above also argues this: “The brief also stated that the impact of Covid-19 on women in the garment industry has worsened due
to underlying challenges, including discrimination and harassment, underrepresentation of women's voice, wage gaps as well as unevenly shared unpaid care and family obligations” (Hasan 2020, sec. B).

4.2.6: Gender discrimination

The following section illuminates the pervasive gender-based discrimination that women in the garment industry encounter, such as the disproportionate susceptibility to job loss, the paucity of representation in high-ranking managerial roles, unequal pay, minimal participation in decision-making processes, economic uncertainty, and gender-stereotyped presumptions regarding their skill set and productivity. These issues have not been limited to the pandemic era, as they stem from deeply ingrained gender inequalities that afflict women and girls.

Type 1- Firing

In general, this code of firing refers to terminating an employer from the job forcefully. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women were the most likely victim of unemployment. Long-term unemployment of women has led to adverse consequences in their social and economic empowerment. Women were at a high risk of firing from their jobs by owners. A research report finds that women workers were disproportionately targeted, with pregnant and older women having their contracts terminated and often not paid the compensation they were entitled to under the 2006 Labour Law and subsequent amendments in 2013 and 2018 (Islam et. al.,2022). One article supports this argument: “As some factories retrench (and later rehire) workers, women are more likely to be directly and indirectly discriminated against, based on gender-biased selection criteria. Common criteria of such retrenchment include contractual status, years of service, performance, qualifications, and absence records, and these may perpetuate discriminatory
practices, resulting in dismissals that disproportionately impact women workers” (Hasan 2020, sec. C).

**Type 2- Male leadership**

This code refers to male workers’ dominion over female workers. In garment industries, higher positions like supervisors and managers are allocated to males mostly. An article reports on this situation as follows: “However, the ILO's research has also found that 84 percent of women workers in the RMG sector are in low grades, compared to 68 percent of men” (Uddin 2021 A1, sec. B). This indicates no improvements in enhancing women's representation in managerial and leadership positions in the RMG sector in the past decade. Other sources reaffirm that sectoral leadership roles are male-dominated. For example, “A Better Work compliance review report found that men held 95 percent of line supervisor positions in the Bangladesh RMG industry” (Uddin 2021 A1, sec. C).

**Type 3- Wage gap**

This code refers to discrimination between male and female garment workers regarding payment. Women are usually offered lower wages than men are in garment factories. A quote mentioned above makes this point as well: “The brief also stated that the impact of Covid-19 on women in the garment industry has worsened due to underlying challenges, including discrimination and harassment, underrepresentation of women's voice, wage gaps as well as unevenly shared unpaid care and family obligations.” (Hasan 2020, sec. B). Another article provided a concrete example for a gender wage gap: “For their work in December, female workers got an average salary of Tk 12,000 while it was Tk 12,500 for male workers, it said” (“54% garment workers” 2022, sec A).

**Type 4 - Voice**
During the COVID-19 pandemic, women garment workers have been marginalized as gender discrimination and harassment increased, and their rights (women’s voices) have been overlooked. The above-mentioned quote includes the lack of voice as well: “The brief also stated that the impact of Covid-19 on women in the garment industry has worsened due to underlying challenges, including discrimination and harassment, underrepresentation of women's voices, wage gaps as well as unevenly shared unpaid care and family obligations” (Hasan 2020, sec. B).

**Type 5- Financial crisis**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a financial crisis for the garment industry due to lockdowns, order cancellations, and suspensions. Also, due to the financial crisis, garment workers face income loss and worsened food security and health. HER project surveyed 700 workers (57 percent female). The interview of garment workers in this project suggests that female and male workers were more financially resilient following wage digitization and financial capability training. However, the systemic gender inequalities that have long affected women and girls were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hui, 2020). The survey finds that Covid-19 disproportionately impacted women (Hui, 2020). An article provides an illustration for this situation: “Like Shirina, 22-year-old Rupa Akter, a helper at a textile factory in Mirpur, said that before the pandemic, she used sanitary pads to manage her menstrual hygiene. However, recently, she started using old rags. ‘I lost my job during the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, and at that time, it was difficult to manage our daily meals. Although from last October have managed another job, I am yet to repay my loans and due house rent,’ she said. ‘I have no option now other than to use old clothes. But since I have never used clothes before, this is something very uncomfortable for me,’ said Rupa” (Jahan 2021, sec. B). The following excerpt links the sanitary issue with the financial crisis: “Among those who said they faced
problems with accessing sanitary napkins, 80 percent mentioned that the problems were due to financial reasons.” (Jahan 2021, sec. C).

**Type 6 – Output (gender discrimination)**

This code focuses on stereotypical ideas about differences between men and women regarding skills at work and the outcome of it. For example, “About 67.7 percent and 51.4 percent of women and men respectively highlighted intense workload, and 40 percent suggested that women do not feel qualified for these roles. More than 80 percent of surveyed respondents believe that ‘men can work faster’ than women, and men’s ‘output is greater than that of women. Besides, 68.2 percent pointed out that men can work at night, while a greater proportion of male respondents noted that men do not face security problems when working or returning home late” (“Violence, harassment key reasons” 2020:2).

**4.3: Consequences of structural violence**

This section provides a list of consequences of structural violence experienced by female garment workers in the industry, including harassment, lack of health facilities, work-related issues, family obligations, and maternity. These forms of structural violence can have detrimental effects on the physical, mental, and financial well-being of women, ultimately perpetuating gender inequalities and reinforcing the power imbalances that exist within the garment industry.

**4.3.1: Harassment consequences**

This section delves into the consequences of harassment faced by female garment workers, which are numerous and complex. Harassment consequences can take many forms, including dismissal, retaliation, suicide, and threats. These consequences are not limited to the individual level but are shaped by systemic and structural factors that perpetuate the exploitation
of women in the industry. For instance, the silencing of women who resist harassment perpetuates the cycle of exploitation, while retaliation against those who report harmful practices prevents victims from seeking help or reporting their experiences. The mental health consequences of harassment are also significant, as workers who endure harassment may experience suicidal tendencies or feelings of hopelessness and despair. Threats by managers or owners can create a culture of fear and intimidation, leading to enormous production pressure and exacerbating mental health problems. Addressing these consequences requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the broader systemic and structural factors that contribute to the exploitation of women in the garment industry.

1. Dismissal

Women garment workers are deprived of their freedom of speech. Superiors coerce them to remain silent about the wrongdoers. “Women workers are silenced through violence or threats. In the factories, we are subjected to sexual harassment by superiors and if we resist, we are threatened or dismissed. That's why only a few dare to talk about their experiences,” the report quoted BCWS executive director Kalpona Akter” (“Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A). This quote shows the consequence of the female garment workers that lead to dismissals from their job.

2. Retaliation

Retaliation in the garments industry happens when an employee receives disciplinary consequences from the manager or supervisor due to reporting harmful and illegal practices in the garment industry. The general problem is presented as follows: “However, due to the power dynamics between the various actors in the industry and the difficult nature of the work itself, garment workers (female garment workers in particular) continue to face sexual harm and suffering, gendered industrial discipline practices (including physical violence, verbal abuse,
coercion, and threats), severe health consequences, barriers to freedom of association and collective bargaining, low wages, long working hours, and retaliation for reporting abuses.” (Saxena 2021, sec.C). Concrete examples are discussed as well: “When the workers demanded punishment of the official, the factory authorities did not take any steps, and that officer sexually harassed the female workers again on November 13. Later, when the workers protested against it again, the factory authorities fired 32 workers, said the workers.” (“RMG workers stage demo” 2022, sec. A).

3. Suicide

This code manifests the extent of mental stress that has to be endured by female garment workers, which leads them to suicidal tendencies. The female garment worker stated that for many women, dealing with menstrual hygiene while working is a significant mental challenge, often resulting in them having to quit their jobs due to the verbal harassment they receive from male colleagues. “I can still remember, one woman said that she felt like she will die by suicide for the intolerable bullying she had to face from her male counterparts said Monjun” (Jahan 2021, sec. D).

4.3.2: Consequences of lack of health facilities

The lack of healthcare facilities for female garment workers in the industry can have severe consequences on their physical and reproductive health. Workers may be forced to continue working in uncomfortable situations, such as wearing damp rags for prolonged periods, causing discomfort and long-term health issues. Furthermore, poor health management can lead to reproductive diseases, compromising their overall health and productivity. The lack of access to proper sanitary facilities also affects the productivity and profitability of factories, as women workers may miss work due to their menstrual cycle, leading to a loss of work hours and
decreased profitability. These consequences reflect the systemic neglect of the health and well-being of female garment workers, perpetuating structural violence within the industry. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive approaches that prioritize the health and safety of female garment workers and challenge the systemic gender inequalities within the industry.

1. Discomfort

This code focuses on health issues. Sometimes female garment workers have to continue their work even in uncomfortable situations, such as wearing damp rags for a long time. As a result, they even have to suffer in the long run. A quote mentioned earlier notes this: “Since unsanitary rags are the only recourse for Shirina, she finds it impossible to wash and dry those at the office lavatories and use a new one, when the need arises. Disposal of the used rags is another major setback” (Jahan 2021, sec. B). She added, “We work under huge production pressures; often, we find no time to use the toilets, except for the lunch breaks. So, I need to keep wearing the damp rags for a long time, and it causes itching and irritation,” she said (Jahan 2021, sec. B).

2. Productivity

Productivity can be measured through an efficient workforce. Better productivity is expected when the workers are able to produce a number of goods in a given time. In garment industries, this productivity is hampered due to mistreating the women workers badly. An article makes this point as follows: “Managing menstruation in an unhygienic way not only affects the reproductive or mental health of women but also hampers the overall productivity and profitability of the factories” (Jahan 2021, sec. D). Another article notes: “For example, if we consider that three million female workers remain absent for at least two days per month, the RMG industry of Bangladesh is losing 1,600 million work hours per month” (Jahan 2021, sec. D).
3. Profitability

Profitability refers to an organization’s profit in relation to its expenses. Profitability depends on revenue. When revenue is greater than expenses, it is considered profitability. In garment industries, this profitability is hampered due to mistreating the women workers badly. As noted above, “Managing menstruation in an unhygienic way not only affects the reproductive or mental health of women but also hampers the overall productivity and profitability of the factories” (Jahan 2021, sec. D). Similarly, “For example, if we consider that three million female workers remain absent for at least two days per month, the RMG industry of Bangladesh is losing 1,600 million work hours per month” (Jahan 2021, sec. D).

4. Reproductive disease

Reproductive disease refers to diseases that affect the human reproductive system. It includes pelvic inflammatory disease, vaginitis, and sexually transmitted diseases. Women garment workers suffer from female organ infections due to poor health management in the garment industry. An article discussing a report on the matter notes that the report “found that three percent of them use no measures of the sort during their periods, while two percent use toilet tissues on days they have a heavy flow. Apart from toilet tissues, several women use cotton and garment waste clothes to maintain their menstrual hygiene, compromising their health, productivity, and dignity with the risk of embarrassing leaks and harmful infections” (Jahan 2021, sec. C). Similarly, “Monjun also pointed out the health hazard of using damp rags or toilet rolls as tampons, as these can cause "vaginal and urinary tract infections, pelvic pain, uterus ailment, itching, rashes, redness, and allergic problems” (Jahan 2021, sec. D).

4.3.3: Family matters
This section highlights the consequences of family obligations on female garment workers, with a focus on their children. The economic crisis resulting from the long-term unemployment of women garment workers can have adverse impacts on the health and education of children, particularly girls. Gender inequalities are perpetuated within society as women typically invest more of their income in their children's health services, education, and nutrition, and the loss of their income has a greater impact on the family. Addressing these gender-based inequalities within the garment industry and supporting the economic and social empowerment of female garment workers and their families is crucial for promoting social and economic justice.

1. Intergenerational impact

Intergenerational refers to the fact when multiple generations of people for example great, grandmother, grandmother, parents, and child, intermingle or live together. Here the code “intergenerational impact” focuses on how women garment workers’ economic crisis creates an adverse intergenerational effect on family members. One article notes: “Long-term unemployment of women garment workers adversely affects their economic and social empowerment, according to a new brief from the International Labour Organisation (ILO). It also may lead to adverse intergenerational impacts on health and education for children, particularly girls. As the ILO has observed in previous recessions, the loss of women workers’ incomes in lower-income households has a greater longer-term impact when compared to men because women tend to invest more of their income in their children's health services, education, and nutrition” (Hasan 2020, sec. A). This code emphasizes the impacts on children. Girls, in particular, are often reported to take on additional household duties and are pulled out of school, as sons are typically privileged over daughters (ILO Brief, 2020).
4.3.3: Work consequences

The consequences of work for female garment workers are significant, particularly with regard to their ability to save and make financial decisions. Due to low wages and the gender wage gap, female garment workers are less likely to save a portion of their income and make financial decisions than men. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation became even more precarious, with many workers suffering pay cuts and losing their jobs without a safety net to fall back on. This left millions of garment workers out of work and depleted their savings. Women are also less likely to make savings decisions on their own. Therefore, the lack of financial security and ability to make financial decisions can be traced back to systemic and structural factors that perpetuate the exploitation of women in the garment industry.

1. Savings

Female garment workers are less likely to save a portion of their income and make saving decisions than men are due to low wages and the wage gap. An article summarizes the issue as follows: “During the Covid-19 pandemic, already difficult conditions were made even more precarious for the millions who depend on these jobs for their livelihoods. Many Bangladeshi factories supplying international brands consolidated their business, and some went under. Bangladeshi workers suffered a 35 percent pay cut during the month of lockdown. Millions of garment workers found themselves out of work, furloughed without pay, and their savings depleted (for example, the report finds that 65 percent of female workers said they didn't save or used their savings to buy food)— all of this occurred without a safety net to fall back on” (Saxena 2021, sec. D). Furthermore, “When asked who makes the decisions on savings, 35 percent of the garment workers reported that they do it themselves. Women were less likely to report that they make savings decisions on their own, at 30 percent compared with 49 percent

**Empowerment**

The garment industry of Bangladesh represents a significant source of employment for over four million individuals, primarily women, thereby highlighting the importance of women’s empowerment. Empowering women in this sector involves facilitating access to education and training, equal pay, safe and healthy working conditions, protection from harassment and abuse, financial services, and leadership opportunities. Such measures hold the potential to augment the skill sets of women, improve their working conditions, and enhance their earning prospects. The promotion of women's empowerment in the garment industry can lead to their greater participation and contribution to the industry, thereby driving economic growth and development in the country. According to the literature review, the ready-made garment industry currently serves as the primary source of employment for women, resulting in a notable transformation of their socio-economic standing (Begum et al., 2016). The industry has facilitated financial independence for many women, thereby enabling their empowerment. The data unequivocally support the assertion that the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry is a significant source of women's empowerment, as it has been recognized as a means of providing employment opportunities for women. The subsequent section examines the extent of economic, social, and cultural empowerment experienced by female garment workers.

**4.4: Types of empowerment**

The newspaper articles I analyzed discuss a number of ways in which garment workers also get empowered. I group these into two types, economic empowerment and social and cultural empowerment. Each type involves subtypes as well. I discuss each in turn.
**4.4.1: Economic empowerment**

Female garment workers' economic empowerment is critical, and this section examines various facets of this empowerment, including employment opportunities that enable financial independence. The garment industry's provision of ample job opportunities has led to a significant increase in women's employment rates. Migration is another dimension of economic empowerment, with many female garment workers migrating in search of better opportunities, resulting in a decline in their numbers in Bangladesh. Additionally, consistent employment is vital for female garment workers' economic empowerment, as it provides them with a regular and stable source of income. Despite the fast fashion industry's environmental impact, it has created consistent employment for millions of women in Bangladesh, contributing to their economic empowerment.

**Type 1: Employment**

In general, employment is the state of having a paid job. The scope of employment for women creates an opportunity to be financially independent. Garment industries provide a wide range of employment opportunities for women to enter the workforce. Newspapers recognize this fact: “The RMG industrial growth underpinned the job expansion in the manufacturing sector, especially for women. It is estimated that women's employment grew by 4.4 percent annually due to the demand from urban industrial employment, well over twice the rate of growth in the overall working-age population” (“ADB finds low education” 2020, sec A).

Another article reiterates the link between industrial development and women entering the workforce as follows: “The RMG industry played a key role in the country's transformation into an industry-based economy from an agriculture-based one in the 1980s. The sector employs four million people, 67 percent of whom are women, and earns over $35 billion a year in exports,
which accounts for 84 percent of total exports” (“ILO to launch decent work” 2022, sec B).

**Type 2: Migration**

Migration refers to moving from one place to another country to settle down in search of good opportunities. Migration can be domestic and international. Migrant workers are a significant part of the global garment industry labor force. Bangladesh newspapers recognize the importance of migration for the country’s garment industry: “The survey found that 89 percent of respondents reported that they have migrated at least once, for any reason, 91 percent of women reported they had migrated compared to 83 percent of men, 81 percent of migrants said they had migrated for a work-related purpose, 64 percent of those respondents who had migrated for a work-related purpose said they had migrated just once” (“Covid-19 affected livelihoods” 2020, sec. A).

International migration, however, is decreasing women’s employment rates in Bangladesh, as reported by this newspaper: “Abdur Razzaque, chairman of the RAPID, said, ‘The number of female garment workers has been declining also because of the migration of a higher number of those workers abroad as there are ample opportunities abroad.’” (“Cost of female migration” 2021 sec. B). Bangladesh National Garment Employees League president Sirajul Islam Rony said to the Financial Express, “Besides, many skilled workers have gone abroad, especially to Jordan and Mauritius” (“Covid fallout” 2022 sec. A). Another article explains the process as follows: “At present, Jordan hires female garment workers from Bangladesh. During the meeting, the minister also discussed Bangladeshi workers' opportunities in Jordan's agriculture and tourism sectors, said the release” (“Recruit skilled male workers” 2022 sec. B).

**Type 3: Reliable work**
Reliable work refers to consistent employment. The garment industry’s work ensures women’s economic independence, as noted in the following newspaper quote: “Fast fashion might not be great for the environment, but it is brilliant for job creation. It has provided consistent, reliable work for millions of women in Bangladesh” (Uddin 2020 A2, sec. B).

4.4.2: Social and cultural empowerment

Social and cultural empowerment of female garment workers is a crucial aspect of their overall empowerment. The exploration of different dimensions of social and cultural empowerment reveals various challenges and opportunities for female garment workers in Bangladesh. One significant dimension is ensuring equal access to facilities and resources in the garment industry, such as healthcare and washrooms. Another aspect is family planning, where access to resources for reproductive health issues is a concern, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic was also crucial for the safety of female garment workers, and some garment owners tried their best to fulfill their needs. Lastly, changing positions and designations in the garment industry is a significant dimension of social empowerment, enabling women to pursue careers and financial independence. Despite the challenges, social and cultural empowerment of female garment workers holds the potential to bring about positive change in their lives and communities.

Type 1: Equal access

Ensuring gender equality is a burning issue in the garment industry. As discussed earlier, women face abuse, for example when accessing washrooms. Interviews with garment industry officers reveal that officers acknowledge the issue of ensuring equal access for both men and women in healthcare access. For example, Shammin Sultana, Programme Officer, Gender Mainstreaming, Ready-Made Garment Sector Programme, ILO, states that “The workers' health
is our priority. Therefore, both men and women in our factory have equal access to healthcare facilities. When our factory was built, we had ensured equal access to washrooms for all our workers. We also have sanitary napkins readily available at a subsidized cost.” (“Access to general and reproductive health” 2020, sec. E).

**Type 2: Family planning**

Family planning is the process of limiting pregnancies. Women use modern contraceptives or natural techniques, including pills, male and female sterilization, and male and female condoms to limit pregnancies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, health facilities were scarce for workers in the garment industry. Some garment industries provided resources for women’s reproductive health issues when the situation returned to normal. For instance, Dr. Dabir Uddin Ahmed, Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for Women and Child Health, states, “During the lockdown, workers were scared to seek medical services. Now we have entered the new normal stage. We have embraced the precautions for COVID-19 while working. We have also been successful in ensuring sanitary pad supplies and distributing contraceptives and birth control pills. However, we have been a little helpless during the pandemic due to a lack of support” (“Access to general and reproductive health” 2020, sec. D).

**Type 3: Vaccination**

Vaccination during the COVID-19 pandemic was a great need for workers. For garment workers, the duration of lockdown was not very long because they had to make masks. Garment owners tried their best to meet the needs for worker safety by providing vaccinations. An article reports on these efforts as follows: “From January to July, we provided our services to 134 male and 303 female workers and successfully continued all our vaccination services although other organizations in the area had ceased their operations” (“Access to general and reproductive health” 2020, sec. D).
health” 2020, sec. E).

Type 4: Changing positions

Changing position refers to how women are trying to make radical changes in their life situations in the garment industries. One article reports on the following personal story of transformation: “Daughter of a farmer, Tania was born and raised in the remote village of Bhaturia in Sirajganj, had five brothers and sisters. In spite of hardship, Tania got admitted to Rajapur Degree College. Three months into college, Tania got married and eventually had two children. She then tried her luck and landed up with a job of a quality inspector at a garment factory” (Huq 2022, sec. C). The article follows up with another story: “Sharmin Akter from Kishoreganj was the youngest of five siblings. With her father's death, her eldest sister dropped out of school and took a job at a garment factory to support the family. In 2016, Sharmin passed her HSC exams, followed her sister's footsteps, and almost immediately started working in the Quality Department at a garment factory” (Huq 2022, sec. C).

4.5: Consequences of empowerment

Empowerment of female garment workers has numerous positive consequences, such as improved economic opportunities, greater financial independence, and better living standards for both the workers and their communities. This can translate into better access to education and healthcare, improved health outcomes, and reduced poverty rates in their communities. Empowerment can also lead to social and cultural changes, allowing female garment workers to challenge gender norms and participate in decision-making processes, becoming role models for other women and girls, and contributing to the promotion of gender equality. Additionally, empowerment can lead to more sustainable and equitable supply chains, as empowered workers demand better working conditions, fair wages, and improved social and environmental practices.
within the industry. Ultimately, the empowerment of female garment workers can have a positive impact on individuals, communities, and the industry as a whole. The following section delves into the outcomes of economic, social, and cultural empowerment as experienced by female garment workers. This section provides a comprehensive list of consequences of empowerment experienced by female garment workers.

4.5.1: Consequences of economic empowerment

The consequences of economic empowerment for female garment workers are multifaceted and extend beyond individual benefits. Economic growth and contribution to the national economy are two significant consequences of women's empowerment in the garment industry. The garment industry is a significant contributor to Bangladesh's economic growth, accounting for approximately 80% of the country's total export earnings and constituting 12% of the country's GDP. The involvement of women in the industry is also remarkable, with about 85% of the industry's workers being women. Financial independence resulting from employment in the garment industry can also impact household spending and decision-making roles in families, as well as increase men's participation in unpaid care work. Additionally, migration can facilitate economic cooperation between countries, as exemplified by the hiring of Bangladeshi female garment workers in Jordan's garment industry and discussions about opportunities in the agriculture and tourism sectors. In summary, female garment worker empowerment has the potential to enhance economic growth, contribute to the national economy, and promote economic cooperation between countries.

1. Economic growth

In general, economic growth means expansion in the capacity of the economy to produce goods and services through a transitional period of time. Garment industries have a big impact on
economic growth. Economic growth manifests in the empowerment of a country that is made possible through the participation of women in export earnings. As a result, women empower themselves too, as they get an opportunity for employment in garment industries in large numbers and keep impacting the country’s economic growth. An article outlines this chain of effects as follows: “The economic growth of Bangladesh, to a great extent, depends on the export of apparel, which account for approximately 80 percent of the country's total export earnings. It also constitutes approximately 12 percent of the country's GDP. It is the only sector that provides employment for about 4 million people where about 85 percent are women” (“Bangladesh apparel industry” 2020, sec. A).

2. Contribution to the national economy

The national economy refers to how a country’s wealth is produced and how it is utilized. Economic activities contributing to the national economy include trading, farming, banking, fishing, manufacturing, and others. Gross domestic product (GDP) measures the national economy. As the garment industry is the largest export industry, it plays a significant role in the national economy. The women of Bangladesh are phenomenal. Articles report on women’s contribution to the national economy in the following way: “RMG sector is contributing the most in Bangladesh's export earnings, and most of these garments workers are women. World Bank report says, according to female labour force participation, 36 percent of all Bangladeshi women are contributing to their national economy where India has this number only at 20 percent. Including women in the national economy is so far the best thing that happened in Bangladesh” (“BD economy” 2020, sec. A).

3. Spending

Financial independence helps women in household spending and decision-making roles in
the family. The following is an example of how newspapers report on this: “Women's employment in 'Better Work' factories has enabled them to improve their leverage and influence in household spending and decision-making and has increased men's participation in unpaid care work” (“Women bearing brunt” sec. C).

4. Economic cooperation

Migration helps to create a strong economic bond between two countries. In the case of Bangladesh, this is made possible by migrating skilled female garment workers. An excerpt reports on women’s migration in the context of economic cooperation as follows: “At present, Jordan hires female garment workers from Bangladesh. During the meeting, the minister also discussed Bangladeshi workers’ opportunities in Jordan's agriculture and tourism sectors, said the release” (“Recruit skilled male workers” 2022, sec. B). The article continues, “At present, nearly 70,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers are directly contributing to Jordan's economic development, he added. Jordan Labour Minister Nayef stressed that his country could work closely with Bangladesh for strengthening economic cooperation” (“Recruit skilled male workers” 2022, sec. B).

4.5.2: Social and cultural empowerment

The social and cultural empowerment of female garment workers plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality, reducing poverty rates, and improving the overall well-being of individuals and communities. The ready-made garment industry is a vital contributor to women's empowerment and poverty reduction in Bangladesh, providing formal employment to a large number of women and contributing to positive changes in society, such as increased female literacy rates and environmental awareness. Empowered women are also more likely to delay marriage and pursue education, contributing to a more equitable and just society. By
strengthening women and promoting their self-worth and choices, the garment industry has created economic opportunities and empowered women to participate in decision-making processes, contributing to sustainable economic growth and improved social and health outcomes for all.

1. Strengthening women (empowerment)

Strengthening women refers to empowering women. It includes promoting women’s self-worth, developing their own choices, and contributing to social change for themselves and others. This code focuses on how ready-made garment industries are strengthening women and what are the positive consequences of it. The newspapers report on women’s empowerment as follows: “The RMG industry is leading from the front in making Bangladesh self-reliant. It is a vital cog in Bangladesh’s economy and also the largest formal employment sector, especially for women. Approximately 60 percent of garment workers are women, mostly within the age group of 18-30 years. As a result, the industry has not only immensely contributed to women’s empowerment and poverty reduction but also brought about numerous positive changes in society like a drop in early marriage and early motherhood, an increase in female literacy rates, a curb in population growth, and increase in environmental and personal hygiene awareness, etc. Moreover, the RMG sector provides economic opportunities to thousands of backward and forward linkages” (“50 years of Bangladesh” 2021, sec. A). Another article reiterates the point: “On the other hand, research has also shown that when women are hopeful of getting employed by garments factories, they tend to delay marriage and get more schooling” (Ahsan 2022, sec. F).

**Others Findings**

4.6.1: Participation decline
The decline in women's participation in the garment industry can have negative consequences for both individuals and society. Automation, complex production processes, marriages, and wage hikes are some of the reasons why women's participation in the garment industry is declining. Automation and the shift towards capital investments have led to a reduction in the workforce, while complex production processes and wage hikes have made it difficult for the garment industry to recruit enough workers. Additionally, marriages can also limit women's participation in the industry. The decline in women's participation in the garment industry can lead to reduced economic opportunities for women and their communities and limit progress toward gender equality and women's empowerment.

1. Automation

Automation refers to the application of technology. It includes the use of various equipment and control systems of machinery. Automation is an important reason for women’s participation decline in the garment industry, as noted in the following newspaper quote: “Over the last few years, the participation of female workers in our ready-made garments (RMG) industry has been on the decline. A survey by the Asian Centre for Development reported that 65 percent of workers in the sector were women. Also, as indicated by Farole and Cho in their study, men now make up around 54 percent of the labor force in this industry, in contrast to the oft-repeated statistic that women comprised 80 percent of the labor force. There is no concrete evidence as to why the participation of female labor is decreasing. One reason may be that a positive change has been taking place in the industry as new capital investments have been made—a shift from manual labor to automation” (Rahman 2021, sec. A). The argument continues: “Technology is in the process of replacing labor, and dependency on automation has resulted in the reduction of the size of the workforce. This could explain why many workers,
perhaps disproportionately women, are removed from the workforce. Such a development raises concerns about our efforts to improve the skills of the RMG workforce, particularly women workers who have limited job availability” (Rahman 2021, sec. A). Another article makes the same argument: “The survey was conducted among 1,119 workers in 160 woven and knit garment and sweater factories in Dhaka, Savar, and Chattogram. It said the female worker ratio declined because of automation and the nature of the machinery in the sector” (“Female garment worker” 2021, sec. B).

2. Marriages

Women’s participation decline relates to the decrease in women’s empowerment. Marriage is one reason why women’s participation is declining in industries. This newspaper quote lists marriages among other relevant factors: “Rapid automation, wage hikes, the complex production process in the garment sector, and marriages have narrowed female workers' participation in the apparel industry in Bangladesh, according to a survey” (Mirdha 2020, sec. A).

3. Complex production

The garments industry is one of the most complex sectors, including a wide range of subsectors. These subsectors cover the entire production cycle, from raw materials to the production of final products. Apparel manufacturers deal with production-related problems such as large inventory quantities, long lead times, and high levels of work-in-process” (Bowers et al. 1993). This code highlights another reason why women’s participation declined in the Garment industries. For example, as noted above, according to a survey, “Rapid automation, wage hikes, and complex production process in the garment sector and marriages have narrowed the female workers' participation in the apparel industry in Bangladesh. The study showed that the current
ratio of male to female workers in the garment sector is 41.7 to 58.3. This challenged previously established data that women account for up to 80 percent of the apparel industry's total workforce” (Mirdha 2020, sec. A).

4. Wage hike

A wage hike means a salary increase. The wage hike is another reason for women’s participation decline. Due to a wage hike, the garment industry was unable to recruit enough workers. Women tend to be the victims in such cases. The above-mentioned quote makes this point as well: “Rapid automation, wage hikes, the complex production process in the garment sector, and marriages have narrowed female workers’ participation in the apparel industry in Bangladesh, according to a survey. The study showed that the current ratio of male to female workers in the garment sector is 41.7 to 58.3, which challenged previously established data that women account for up to 80 percent of the apparel industry's total workforce” (Mirdha 2020, sec. A).

4.7: Suggestions

Suggestions for improving the conditions of female garment workers include improving their working and living environments, promoting gender-friendly working conditions, eliminating inequality, educating workers about their human and labor rights, and promoting their well-being. These suggestions have been put forth by various experts and stakeholders, highlighting the importance of addressing the challenges faced by women in the garment industry. Initiatives such as skill development, social safety net programs, dissemination of welfare and service provisions, and workplace safety measures can go a long way in improving the lives of female garment workers and ensuring their rights and well-being.

**Improving working and living conditions**
The COVID-19 pandemic has had an adverse effect on the working conditions and living conditions of female workers in garment industries. One of the speakers at a conference suggests that “Both the working conditions and the living environment of female RMG workers of Bangladesh need to be improved as Covid-19 has impacted drastically” (“Drastic Covid impact” sec. A 2021). In addition, “Professor Muhammad Azizul Islam (University of Aberdeen Business School) presents another proposition at the conference, he said, “Our research findings emphasize that both retailers in the UK and their suppliers in Bangladesh have equal responsibility to prevent the exploitation of women and create gender-friendly working conditions in the garment industry” (“Drastic Covid impact” sec. B 2021).

Addressing inequality

Equality is fundamental in every aspect of our lives, including social and family life. Gender equality is one of the essential ways in garment industries to eliminate marginalization, exploitation, and disparity between men and women. The code inequality explores how women garment workers experience gender inequality in their working place. Eliminating inequality in the garment industry is an important initiative to ensure women’s rights as well. According to Jessica Wan, Better Work Gender Specialist, “It's crucial that governments, businesses, and other stakeholders understand the multi-dimensional impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on both women and men workers, and design policies that enable a smart, sustainable and gender-responsive recovery. Otherwise, the Covid-19 crisis threatens to exacerbate preexisting inequalities and will hamper the social and economic sustainability of the garment sector” (“Women bearing brunt” 2020, sec. D).

Educating workers about their rights

Workers’ rights refer to many human rights, from the right to fair work and freedom of
association to equal opportunity and safety against discrimination. Safety and healthy working conditions are also included in workers’ rights. One suggestion presented in a newspaper article is to educate workers on their rights: “Professor Salma Akhter, in the presentation, mentioned that female RMG (Readymade garments) workers need orientation on their human rights and labor rights” (“Drastic Covid impact” sec. A).

**Improving worker wellbeing**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, women garment workers experienced an adverse effect on their working conditions. The quote above continues outlining suggestions for improving workers’ wellbeing: “Professor Salma Akhter, in the presentation, mentioned that female RMG (Readymade garments) workers need orientation on their human rights and labor rights. She suggested incorporating jobless RMG women workers in the government’s social safety net programs and skill development for employment generation for their wellbeing. She also emphasized wide dissemination of the welfare and service provisions of the Ministry of Labour, BGMEA, and other relevant organizations to the destitute RMG female workers for their welfare” (“Drastic Covid impact” sec. A). BGMEA President Faruque Hassan makes similar recommendations: “It is imperative to keep the workplace safe and welcoming for mothers and pregnant women working in garment factories to protect their well-being and ensure that their children receive key nutrients necessary to support a baby's healthy development” (“Unicef to support” 2022, sec. B).

**4.8: Policy recommendations**

In response to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women garment workers, various policies were recommended in 2022 to address issues of low pay, financial health, literacy skills, and worker empowerment. The “Good Clothes, Fair Pay” campaign aims
to secure payment of living wages for workers in global garment supply chains, while the
International Labour Organization (ILO) has been supporting the RMG sector by enhancing
social protection and promoting decent work. Initiatives such as the “Sarathi- Improving
Financial Health” program and the UNCDF project “Promoting Digital Ecosystem Solutions
Addressing Women Livelihoods in Bangladesh through Ready-Made-Garment Sector
Sustainability amidst COVID-19 and Beyond” aim to provide financial and digital literacy skills
to improve the lives of women garment workers. These policies are essential for empowering
women, promoting social and economic justice, and addressing the long-standing issues faced by
women in the garment industry.

1. *Fair pay campaign*

Many women garment workers deal with low wages. To mitigate this issue of low wages
the “Good Clothes, Fair Pay” campaign was launched in 2022. Newspapers reported on this
campaign as follows: “Dhaka, July 20 -- A campaign, titled ‘Good Clothes, Fair Pay,’ was
launched on Tuesday, aiming to secure payment of living wages for workers in global garment
supply chains. Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) and other campaign organizations aim to collect
1.0 million signatures from European citizens to support the European Citizens Initiative (ECI),
which calls for concrete measures to ensure workers in the global garment industry are paid a
living wage” (“Workers in global garment” 2022, sec. A).

2. *ILO efforts*

ILO is an international labor organization that aims to ensure social and economic justice
by implementing international labor standards. ILO has been supporting the RMG sector in the
areas of working conditions, minimum wages, occupational safety, and health, eliminating
workplace-based discrimination and enhancing productivity. Major initiatives are also taking
place in the areas of skills development and increasing the employability of young and adult
women and men. Newspapers report on the ILO’s efforts as follows: “In addition, the ILO has
been working with the Government and social partners to enhance social protection and decent
employment conditions for Bangladeshi migrant workers” (“ILO to launch decent work” 2022,
sec. B). Also, “In continuation of the joint effort of the Bangladesh government and ILO to
promote decent work, full productive employment, and social justice, the ‘Decent Work Country
Program (DWCP) 2022-2026’ has been launched on March 31, 2022” (“ILO to launch decent
work” 2022, sec. C).

3. Financial health programs

Financial health refers to one’s personal monetary affairs. Financial health solutions have
always been an urgent need for women garment workers. An article notes that “The 24-month
project ‘Sarathi- Improving Financial Health’ is aimed at improving financial health for the
garment workers in Bangladesh, Swiss contact said in a statement. The program will focus on
providing at least 200,000 ready-made garment factory workers, of which 65 percent will be
women, with a wider range of financial health solutions, including savings, affordable loans, and
micro-insurance” (“MetLife, Swiss contact” 2022, sec. A).

4. Literacy skills programs

A new pilot business was launched to help garment workers to enhance their financial
and digital literary skills. An article reports on it as follows: “A new business pilot project will be
carried out to help 135,000 readymade garment workers in Bangladesh, at least 60 percent of
whom will be women, to build their financial and digital literacy skills” (“UNCDF to provide”
2022, sec. A). The article continues, “The UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), together
with financial wellness platform wage and a consortium of digital training platform Quizrr and
technology and data company Ulula have committed $556,000 to improve the financial and digital inclusion of garment workers through this commitment; the UNCDF will provide performance-based grants and technical assistance” (“UNCDF to provide” 2022, sec. A). The article notes that “These investments came as a result of the UNCDF project ‘Promoting Digital Ecosystem Solutions Addressing Women Livelihoods in Bangladesh through Ready-Made-Garment Sector Sustainability amidst COVID-19 and Beyond’” (“UNCDF to provide” 2022, sec. B).
Johan Galtung’s theory on structural violence focuses on how social structures can harm individuals or groups by depriving them of fundamental human rights such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education. The literature review suggests that structural violence is sometimes invisible and systematically embedded in society's social and economic structures. Structural violence happens when institutions, policies, and systems make unequal power relations and social hierarchies that sustain the exploitation of certain groups. Galtungs’s theory is significant for analyzing various social issues, from poverty and racism to gender inequality. My argument is that the gendered division of labor, the economic crisis, poor working condition, and poor health access in the Bangladeshi garment industries make women more vulnerable. At the same time, I argue, women are being empowered through easy access to resources.

5.1: Findings from newspapers

In my thesis, I have analyzed articles from two Bangladeshi national newspapers to identify the source, types, and consequences of structural violence and women's empowerment in the country’s garment sector during the COVID-19 pandemic period, 2020-2022. These newspapers are The Daily Star and The Financial Express. Based on reviewing the existing literature, I have identified various forms of discrimination against female employees, such as wage gaps, sexual, verbal, and physical harassment, poor working conditions, recruitment
procedures, overtime work, inadequate maternity benefits, and underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. The repercussions of these issues are numerous health problems, including fever, headache, back pain, eye infections, jaundice, typhoid, weakness, anemia, skin disorders, diarrhea, financial hardship, and psychological trauma. Newspaper data for 2020-2022 corroborates the types and consequences of structural violence in the garment industry that the literature review highlights. Overall, gender-based structural violence is rampant in the garment industry making women’s lives difficult. As one female RMG factory worker notes, “There are many things I dislike about the factory. The one I most dislike is the rude scolding and shouting of the supervisors. They physically abuse us by hitting or slapping us. They slap us to force us to work” (“Apparel workers”2022, sec. A). Another continuous issue is the persistent wage gap. A Daily Star report indicated that in December, the average salary for female workers was Tk 12,000, while male workers received an average of Tk 12,500. In January, the salaries for female workers remained constant at Tk 12,000, but their male colleagues experienced an average increase of Tk 500 in their earnings (“54% garment workers” 2022,).

I have identified a number of issues that add new insights to our understanding of the sources, types, and consequences of structural violence affecting garment workers in Bangladesh. My newspaper data suggests that the purchasing practices of UK fashion brands are an important source of structural violence. No particular UK brands were mentioned. In terms of types of structural violence, I have found that women garment workers experience various forms of harassment (namely, silence and production pressure), lack of health facilities (related to childbirth, sanitary pad availability, and toilet restriction), and family matters (namely, family obligations). Structural violence leads to various negative consequences, such as retaliation,
suicide, decreased productivity and profitability of garment industries, reproductive health issues, intergenerational impacts, and financial crises, including savings issues.

In terms of empowerment, my new findings include migration, equal access to healthcare, family planning, and women's changing position. These developments can lead to positive outcomes. These include contributing to the national economy, engaging in economic cooperation with foreign countries, and achieving financial independence, including increased household spending.

Overall, these new findings highlight the importance of addressing the root causes of structural violence in the garment industry and empowering workers to achieve better working conditions and greater economic independence. In what follows, I further elaborate on these new findings in the context of garment workers.

Previous literature has argued that social structure is the origin of structural violence, which refers to systemic forms of harm and inequality perpetuated by political, economic, and cultural systems. My analysis of newspaper data has identified an additional potential source of structural violence in the context of garment workers: UK fashion brands' purchasing practices. Despite the fashion industry in Bangladesh being notorious for its poor labor practices, the way that UK fashion brands procure their products has been linked to the exploitation and suffering experienced by these workers.

Lack of access to toilets and sanitary pads can perpetuate gender-based discrimination in the workplace by causing female workers to miss work or experience health issues. Providing these basic facilities is an essential step towards promoting gender equality and ensuring that female workers can perform their jobs comfortably and without discrimination. The policy of restriction on women’s toilets access and lack of supply of sanitary pads lead women to have...
reproductive diseases such as vaginal and urinary tract infections, pelvic pain, uterus ailment, itching, rashes, redness, and allergic problems (Jahan 2021). It causes women to be absent from garments that hamper the overall productivity and profitability of garment industries as well (Jahan 2021).

Female garment workers can create a substantial intergenerational effect across economic, social, health, and educational domains. Facilitating opportunities and resources for women in the garment industry can help them overcome the cycle of poverty and drive constructive change for forthcoming generations. Due to low wages and the wage gap, women face financial crises more than men in the garment industry. As a result, women have fewer savings and face adverse intergenerational impacts. Especially garment workers’ girl children face problems with health and education. Additionally, this situation could negatively affect the health and education of children, especially girls, across generations. As noted by the ILO, in past economic downturns, income loss for women workers in low-income households tends to have a more significant lasting impact compared to men's income loss. This is because women are more likely to allocate a more significant portion of their earnings toward their children's healthcare, education, and nutrition (Hasan 2020). Due to the patriarchal culture of Bangladesh, intergenerational impacts are most acutely felt by girl children, leading to their increased suffering. The impacts on children, particularly girls, include taking on additional household duties and getting pulled out of school, as sons are typically privileged over daughters (“Gendered impacts” 2020, Research report 2). Female garment workers can disrupt the cycle of poverty and open up better prospects for their children by earning wages and supporting their families. This can create a favorable impact on the next generation, as children are more likely to succeed in life with access to education and other resources.
Silence and production pressure are other kinds of harassment from supervisors or managers toward women garment workers. According to the *Daily Star*, production pressure causes many uncomfortable situations, such as beating from supervisors, finding no time to have lunch and use the toilets, and is bound to use unsanitary rags for a long time. Sometimes women garment workers face many uncomfortable situations due to production pressures. For example, “About 64 percent of the respondents report that they are under enormous production pressure, and a third have been threatened or beaten by superiors due to production pressure” (“Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A). When external investigators come for factory audits of oppression, women garment workers are bound to keep silent. If they raise their voice, retaliation occurs for reporting abuses, such as they are threatened and dismissed. In the factories, “we are subjected to sexual harassment by superiors, and if we resist, we are threatened or dismissed. That's why only a few dare to talk about their experiences,” the report quoted BCWS executive director Kalpona Akter (“Fast fashion” 2020, sec. A). However, to address the problems that female garment workers face with silence and production pressure, it is critical to promote their rights and ensure a safe and just workplace. This can be achieved by enforcing labor laws, providing legal and social services to support workers facing harassment or abuse, and fostering collective bargaining and unionization among garment workers. Employers, brands, and consumers must also actively promote equitable labor practices and uphold female garment workers' honor and dignity.

Regrettably, it is a reality that some female garment workers have resorted to suicide due to gender-based discrimination, harassment, and abuse. Furthermore, these workers may encounter difficult working conditions, inadequate pay, extended working hours, and job insecurity which can exacerbate mental health problems and lead to suicidal thoughts.
Sometimes women may attempt suicide for intolerable harassment from male colleagues. “I can still remember one woman said that she felt like she will die by suicide for the intolerable bullying she had to face from her male counterparts,” said Monjun (Jahan 2021, sec. D). The garment industry in Bangladesh is well known for its fast-paced production and low labor costs. Still, this worldwide reputation of the Bangladeshi industry comes at the expense of workers' rights and safety, particularly for women. To prevent such a tragic consequence, it is imperative to tackle the root causes of these issues and create a safe and just working environment for female garment workers.

Empowering women in Bangladesh's garment industries is essential for the industry's and society's sustainable development. This empowerment can have wide-reaching benefits, not only for women but for society as a whole. Improving working conditions and increasing productivity and profitability can contribute significantly to sustainable economic growth. Bangladesh's garment industry plays a vital role in its economy, accounting for a significant share of its GDP and serving as one of the world's largest exporters of readymade garments.

Skilled worker migration has become increasingly common worldwide as individuals seek better job prospects, higher incomes, and improved living standards in foreign countries. In a bid to enhance economic collaboration, Bangladesh has taken steps to send proficient female garment workers to Jordan and Mauritius, a process that involves migration. Bangladesh National Garment Employees League president Sirajul Islam Rony said to the Financial Express, “Besides, many skilled workers have gone abroad, especially to Jordan and Mauritius” (“Covid fallout” 2022 sec. A). During the meeting, the minister also discussed Bangladeshi workers' opportunities in Jordan's agriculture and tourism sectors, said the release (“Recruit skilled male
workers” 2022). Moreover, migration can have significant social, economic, and political consequences for both sending and receiving countries.

Female garment workers require access to family planning services for significant reasons. Family planning allows them to manage their fertility and make informed choices about when to start a family, which can help them balance their work and responsibilities more efficiently. As a result, this can improve their overall quality of life and minimize the stress and anxiety associated with unexpected pregnancies. One article indicates that the RMG industry not only can protect women from sexual violence but can also decrease discrimination and enhances their visibility in society. This, in turn, can contribute to women's social and cultural empowerment (Begum et al., 2016). In an effort to reduce gender discrimination, some garment industries are taking steps to ensure women have equal access to healthcare and restroom facilities. Providing family planning services is also significant for women to limit their number of pregnancies. Some garment industries even distribute contraceptives and birth control pills once they have returned to a normal position. For instance, Dr. Dabir Uddin Ahmed, Chief Executive Officer, of the Centre for Women and Child Health, states “During the lockdown, workers were scared to seek medical services. Now we have entered the new normal stage. We have embraced the precautions for COVID-19 while working. We have also been successful in ensuring sanitary pad supplies and distributing contraceptives and birth control pills. However, we have been a little helpless during the pandemic due to a lack of support” (“Access to general and reproductive health” 2020, sec. D). In a nutshell, family planning services are a fundamental requirement for promoting the health and welfare of female garment workers, as well as advancing their social and economic empowerment.
Empowering female garment workers can have far-reaching positive consequences that extend beyond their individual growth and development. For example, reducing early marriage and motherhood can improve health outcomes for both mothers and children, and increase educational and economic opportunities for girls and young women. Moreover, family planning can help to control population growth, reduce strain on natural resources, and foster sustainable development. This can promote environmental protection and better health outcomes for communities. Additionally, increasing awareness of environmental and personal hygiene can prevent the spread of infectious diseases and promote healthy living. Other consequences of female garment workers’ empowerment are numerous positive changes in society like a drop in early marriage and early motherhood, an increase in female literacy rates, a curb in population growth, and an increase in environmental and personal hygiene awareness (“50 years of Bangladesh” 2021).

The existing literature and Bangladeshi newspapers from 2020 and 2021 primarily depict women as occupying lower positions in the garment industry. However, in 2022, there is a sense of optimism due to changes that have led to their development and acquisition of higher positions. One reported example is Tania, who grew up in the secluded village of Bhaturia in Sirajganj, had five siblings (Huq 2022). Despite facing difficulties, she managed to enroll at Rajapur Degree College. After three months of attending college, Tania got married and later had two children. She decided to explore job opportunities and ultimately secured a position as a quality inspector in a garment factory (Huq 2022). Garment industries are providing opportunities for employment. As a result of their participation in the garment industries, women are achieving financial independence and taking on decision-making roles within their families,
such as managing household spending. Additionally, their contribution to the industry is positively impacting the national economy.

On the other hand, due to rapid automation, wage hikes, the complex production process in the garment sector, and marriages, women’s participation in garment industries are declining. According to a survey conducted by the Asian Centre for Development, 65 percent of the workers in the sector are women. Furthermore, a study by Farole and Cho reveals that men currently constitute approximately 54 percent of the industry's workforce, which contrasts with the frequently cited statistic that women make up 80 percent of the labor force (Rahman 2021, d8). In addition, a research study revealed that the present gender distribution in the garment sector is 41.7% male to 58.3% female. This finding challenges the previously accepted notion that women represent as much as 80% of the total workforce in the apparel industry (Mirdha 2020, d13). A survey indicates that the accelerated adoption of automation, wage increases, intricate production processes in the garment sector, and marriages have contributed to the reduced participation of female workers in Bangladesh's apparel industry (Mirdha 2020, d13). Despite the abundant opportunities the garment industry provides for women's employment, certain factors such as wage increases, automation, and complex production processes are leading to a decrease in women's participation. This has created a complex situation in which the industry both empowers and disempowers women.

5.2: Newspaper discussion, including timeline difference

After reviewing news articles published in the Financial Express and the Daily Star, newspapers of Bangladesh, between 2020-2021, the following observations can be made regarding female garment workers:

Coverage
Both newspapers cover news about female garment workers in Bangladesh, with the *Daily Star* providing more coverage than the *Financial Express*. The image coverage of the *Daily Star* newspapers mostly highlights the protests demanding due wages of female garment workers (Saxena 2021, Khatun 2021, Uddin 2021 A1).

**Focus**

The *Daily Star* tends to prioritize reporting on issues related to workers' rights, including those of female garment workers. This is a typical kind of coverage in the *Daily Star*: “The ongoing pandemic has adversely affected women around the world in a number of ways, including through employment and income loss” (Khatun 2021 sec A). In contrast, the *Financial Express* reports more broadly on the garment industry, with a focus on the role of women in it. This is a typical kind of coverage in this newspaper: “As Bangladesh's exports are highly concentrated in the readymade garments (RMG) industry (84.0 percent of the value of total goods exports) and are disproportionately distributed among the major industrialized countries (71.0 percent of total goods are exported to top 10 export destinations), the sector remains highly vulnerable to economic shocks in those destinations. As of May 26, 2020, these top 10 major export destinations of Bangladesh together share 52.0 percent of the total COVID-19 cases worldwide” (“Covid-19’s fallout” 2020, sec. A).

**Content**

Articles in the *Daily Star* often provide detailed and investigative reporting, highlighting specific incidents and cases involving female garment workers. The *Financial Express* articles are more general and centered on trends and statistics. An example is an article about a report about ActionAid from 2019, which notes that “80 percent of garment workers in the country experienced sexual violence at their workplace. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
states that around 87 percent of married women in Bangladesh have been subjected to various types of domestic violence.” (“Me too movement” 2021).

*Tone*

Both newspapers acknowledge the challenges female garment workers face in Bangladesh, but the *Daily Star's* coverage tends to be more critical of industry practices and government policies. In contrast, the *Financial Express* maintains a more neutral tone.

*Perspective*

The *Daily Star* includes perspectives from female garment workers, their advocates, government officials, and industry representatives. The *Financial Express* articles include views primarily from industry representatives and experts.

Overall, while both newspapers cover the topic of female garment workers in Bangladesh, the *Daily Star* provides more comprehensive and critical coverage of the challenges these workers face, while the *Financial Express* provides a more general overview of the garment industry and the role of women in it.

In 2022, newspapers shifted their focus toward policies that can bring about positive change and empowerment for women in the garment industry. This shift comes after years when violence against female garment workers increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on underlying challenges such as discrimination, harassment, wage gaps, and unpaid care obligations.

Newspapers such as *The Financial Express* and *The Daily Star* are now highlighting policies such as “Good Clothes, Fair Pay,” “Decent Work Country Program (DWCP) 2022-2026,” “Sarathi-Improving Financial Health,” and “Promoting Digital Ecosystem Solutions.”
These policies aim to promote fair wages, decent work, and financial health solutions, including initiatives such as savings, affordable loans, and micro-insurance, as well as programs to enhance economic and digital literacy skills for garment workers, mainly for women.

Newspaper articles from 2022 have identified some positive changes in women's empowerment in the garment industry, specifically regarding their positions within the industry. In previous years’ newspaper coverage and in the secondary literature, it was noted that men were given higher positions than women in the garment industry. However, in 2022 newspapers’ articles, there is a noticeable shift toward women holding leading positions. The example of Tania, the daughter of a farmer, was born and raised in the isolated village of Bhaturia in Sirajganj alongside her five siblings, is illustrative (Huq 2022, d52). This indicates a gradual progress towards gender equality in the industry.

5.3: Research limitations

The amount of time invested in compiling data for the thesis was a crucial factor, especially considering the broad and explanatory topic of structural violence against women in the readymade garment sectors of Bangladesh. More time would have been necessary to conduct thorough research on the subject. Due to my time management obligations in other courses, the scope of this research was limited to a small scale, making it challenging to allocate additional time for it.

My primary challenge was untangling the intricate relationship between women's empowerment and structural violence in the garment industry. While some newspaper articles highlighted women's empowerment among garment workers, these were relatively scarce compared to the prevalence of structural violence. Although I extensively explored the concept of structural violence, I cannot make a blanket statement in my thesis that it hinders women's
empowerment, as my research sample is not representative. My argument could have been
generalizable if I had conducted interviews using a representative sampling method.

5.3: Further research interest

While researching various forms of economic empowerment, I came across an exciting
type: migration. According to a newspaper article, skilled female workers from Bangladesh are
sent to Jordan and Mauritius, where they have ample employment opportunities. The newspaper
article also suggests that the government should address any issues these workers face, although
it does not specify what those issues are. Instead, the report focuses on the benefits of migration
for these workers. Specifically, it notes that Bangladeshi female garment workers in Jordan are
employed in agricultural and tourist jobs, while the types of jobs provided by Mauritius are not
mentioned. I am curious to learn more about the challenges faced by these migrant workers in
Jordan and Mauritius, including any potential structural violence they may encounter in other
types of work or other countries.

5.4: Recommendations

After conducting an analysis of two newspaper sources over a three-year period, I have
formulated a set of recommendations aimed at promoting the rights of workers in the ready-made
garment industry. These recommendations are based on the advice and suggestions that were
gathered during the research process

1. To establish a working environment that is more friendly towards gender equality, UK
   brands need to make some positive changes to their purchasing practices. This will require UK
   retailers and their suppliers in Bangladesh to be more uncompromising when addressing
   violations of workers' rights in non-compliant factories.
2. Not considering the wide-ranging impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on male and female workers could exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and negatively impact the social and economic sustainability of the garment industry. To prevent this, governments, businesses, and other stakeholders must develop policies that support an innovative, sustainable, and gender-responsive recovery. It is crucial that they fully understand the various effects of the pandemic on workers of all genders.

3. To ensure that women garment workers are empowered to advocate for their rights and take action when needed, it is essential to provide them with comprehensive orientation on their human and labor rights. This knowledge will allow them to be more informed and take necessary steps to protect themselves against exploitation and abuse. Moreover, employers are responsible for establishing an environment that upholds and respects these rights, while governments should enforce regulations that safeguard workers from mistreatment. By prioritizing human and labor rights education, we can strive towards building a fairer and more equitable society that prioritizes the welfare of all workers.

4. It is essential to prioritize the well-being of mothers and pregnant women in garment factories by creating a safe and welcoming workplace. Not only does this ensure the health and safety of these women, but it also promotes the healthy development of their children by providing access to necessary nutrients. This requires implementing policies such as flexible work arrangements and adequate healthcare support. Additionally, addressing any forms of discrimination or stigma these women may face while working is crucial. By prioritizing the needs of these workers, we can foster a culture of inclusivity and care, ultimately resulting in a more supportive and productive work environment.

5. The implementation of policies such as “Good Clothes, Fair Pay,” “Decent Work
Country Program (DWCP) 2022-2026,” “Sarathi- Improving Financial Health,” and “Promoting Digital Ecosystem Solutions” can play a crucial role in upholding the rights of garment workers. These policies strive to promote fair compensation, decent working conditions, and financial security for workers, with a particular focus on improving the well-being of women in the sector. They aim to achieve this through providing various financial health solutions, including savings, affordable loans, and micro-insurance, as well as initiatives to enhance workers' digital and financial literacy skills. By implementing these policies, we can promote equitable and just practices in the garment industry, safeguarding the rights of all workers, especially women who have often been marginalized and underpaid in the sector.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis has sought to address the question how the garment industry's structural violence impacts women's empowerment in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also explored the relationship between women's participation in the labor market, women’s empowerment, and victimization due to ongoing structural violence. The thesis delves into various areas, including the emergence and growth of the Bangladesh garment industry, the patriarchal society shaping women's lives in the country, factors driving women's involvement in the industry, the different forms of structural violence impeding their empowerment, the sources of such violence, its consequences, and the interplay between structural violence and empowerment.

The discussion of drawbacks in the garment industry highlights the issue of women garment workers being disregarded in their homes and workplaces. The conditions in these factories are often cramped and substandard, leading to a range of ailments such as fever, headache, back pain, eye infections, jaundice, typhoid, skin diseases, and diarrhea, among others (Ahamed 2013). Furthermore, building collapses and fires are frequent occurrences in these factories, resulting in numerous workers' deaths each year. Shockingly, statistics reveal that 90% of those who lose their lives in such accidents are female workers (Hossain 2012). Also, Gender-
based discrimination is prevalent in the workplace, with men being favored regarding wages, promotions, and other benefits. Women workers face structural violence both at work and in their communities, including verbal abuse, physical assault such as hair-pulling and hitting, use of sexually explicit language, unwanted advances, sitting too close, touching, sexual exploitation, vulgar comments, whistling, grabbing, groping, shoving, defamation, coerced marriage, rape, abduction, and other forms of gender-based violence. Regrettably, a lack of efficient mechanisms exists for women to register instances of violence, and gender-related violence is infrequently brought to light.

Apart from the drawback, according to this research, the emergence of the garment industry in Bangladesh has led to significant social and economic benefits for women. Specifically, the industry has provided women with opportunities to leave their homes and enter the workforce, reducing their dependence on their families and allowing them to contribute to their families' financial well-being. Additionally, the availability of work in the garment sector has played a crucial role in promoting basic education, including primary and secondary schooling, among girls from rural areas (Hossain 2012). Moreover, research indicates that women employed in the garment industry tend to marry later and have children later in life, potentially due to their career aspirations and desire for professional advancement. As noted by authors, this career consciousness is seen as a positive factor contributing to their social and economic empowerment (Paul-Majumder and Begum 2000).

Through my data analysis, I have observed that the world is rapidly transforming due to the adoption of automation by various industries. Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry has offered economic opportunities for underprivileged women from rural backgrounds with little or no formal education. However, these women are vulnerable to being the first to lose
their jobs as technological advancements become more widespread. This trend aligns with previous research indicating that female garment workers are often viewed as a cheap and expendable source of labor. At the same time, men tend to occupy skilled positions requiring technological expertise and reap the primary benefits of the industry due to gendered work assignments.

In my research on structural violence and empowerment, I have uncovered new findings that shed light on the sources, types, and consequences of these issues for women garment workers in Bangladesh. The sources of structural violence were found to be rooted in the purchasing practices of UK fashion brands, and the types of violence included harassment (in the form of silence and production pressure), lack of access to health facilities (for childbirth, sanitary pads, and restricted toilet use), and family obligations. These issues have resulted in several negative consequences, including retaliation, decreased productivity and profitability in the garment industry, reproductive health problems, intergenerational effects, and financial crises such as savings. However, my research also found that certain forms of empowerment, such as migration, improved access to healthcare, family planning, and women's changing societal position, can have positive outcomes, including contributing to the national economy, engaging in economic cooperation with foreign countries, and achieving financial independence through increased household spending.

Moreover, I wanted to unpack what “structural violence” means in the context of female garment workers. It is crucial to consider structural violence and women's empowerment when examining the experiences of garment workers in Bangladesh, particularly female workers. Structural violence refers to the systemic and institutionalized forms of oppression and harm present in social structures and institutions. At the same time, women's empowerment centers
around empowering women to have agency and greater control over their lives. Poor working conditions, low wages, and limited access to healthcare and education are examples of the various forms of oppression that can arise from structural violence, hindering women's ability to achieve empowerment and perpetuating gender inequality in the workplace and society. Initiatives such as promoting education and training opportunities, advocating for better working conditions and labor rights, and equal pay can promote women's empowerment and help address the structural injustices faced by female garment workers.

Overall, my research aims to understand better the multifaceted social, and economic factors that influence the experiences of female garment workers in Bangladesh by addressing the issues of structural violence and promoting women's empowerment. Consequently, it can lead to more well-informed policies and interventions designed to enhance the well-being of these workers.
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References

(Available upon request)

Declaration:

I, certify that to best of my knowledge & belief, this resume correctly describes my qualifications & me. I understand any willful misstatement described here may lead to my disqualification.

Sincerely,

Fowzia Binte Faruque