



LIVELIHOOD PATTERN AND SECURITY OF WOMEN WORKING IN SHRIMP PROCESSING INDUSTRIES LOCATED IN SOUTHWEST BANGLADESH

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Abstract: Women play a crucial role in household management in Bangladesh. Economic responsibilities of the family are always expected to be borne by men. However, now-a-days the number of women's participation in local and national economic sector is increasing rapidly. Shrimp processing industry is one of the foreign currency earning industries of the country and plays a vital role in including women in economic sector. However, compared to men in these industries, women still have a marginalized and vulnerable position. This paper assesses the livelihood pattern and security of women working in shrimp processing industries located in and around Khulna city. Mostly the illiterate (78.3%), young (below-22 years 52.5%) and married (70%) women work in these industries. These work forces are mainly migrants from the adjacent districts. They are having very low income (77.5% below Tk 2500 *per* month) and they live in houses made off *golpata*, bamboo, *konchi*, tin etc. They work there as temporary low skilled labors. A number of problems such as, oppression by co-workers and others, lack of job security, mal-adjustment with officials and co-workers, communication problem with higher authorities, look down upon by the society, live under suspicion of husband and others, gender discrimination, unequal rights in socio-economic life, etc. have been identified responsible for various physical, mental, social and professional insecurities for the women working in shrimp industries.

Key words: Women security, livelihood security, marginalized women, shrimp processing industries, south-west Bangladesh

Introduction

Shrimp is one of the major natural resources in south-western Bangladesh. Generally, Bangladesh produces only 2% of the global production of shrimp. But shrimp is the second largest export industry of the country. It is estimated that shrimp culture occupied 20,000 hectares of land in 1979-80, whereas a total of 410,000 hectares of land came under this business in 1996-97 (Barkat, 2004). There are about 600,000 people employed in the shrimp sector in Bangladesh generating \$ 301 million annually from *bagda* and *golda* farms [US \$ 243 million from *bagda* alone] (Department of Fisheries, 2002). The area under shrimp culture has registered a three-fold increase over the last decade. Two southern region of Bangladesh: Chittagong-Cox's Bazar and Khulna-Satkhira-Bagherhat covering about 103000 hectares, accounts for 95% of the area under shrimp culture (Murtaza, 2004). Based on the shrimp culture, a number of shrimp processing industries have developed in and around Khulna city. There are 145 shrimp processing industries in Bangladesh. 78 of those industries are licensed and 67 are approved by European Union. These industries are located in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Jessore, Satkhira, Bagerhat, Coxes Bazar, Chandpur, Kishorganj, Patuakhali and Munsiganj (Huq, 2008). Out of them majority industries are located in Khulna city and adjacent area. From early 1991 to 1998, 46 shrimp processing industries were established in and around Khulna city, employing about 25,000 permanent and

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temporary workers with accounting for around 80 percent (Das, 2010). Apart from shrimp processing industries, some supporting factories also developed within the period. These factories play a crucial role in increasing employment opportunities in the area. Their multipurpose influence helps the growth and development of shrimp processing industries in the area. The present study highlights the livelihood pattern and security of the women working in the shrimp processing industries located in the southwest Bangladesh.

Materials and Methods

Twenty out of 56 shrimp processing industries developed in Khulna city and adjacent *Rupsha thana* are export oriented large scale industries and are supported by 36 other industries (SAFE, 2004). A recent survey observed that about 29 industries are in operation (Ahmed, 2007). Ten of these operating processing industries are selected purposively as representative for the present study. Social survey and some case studies have been conducted on 120 women workers to collect primary data. Secondary data source also have considered for the present study.

Results

Age structure: The age structure of members of a society shapes their social status and roles significantly. The age group presents different social and psychological attributes of individuals (Islam, 1995). In terms of age structure the women under the study are divided into five major categories, which are presented in Table 1. It shows that the women working in shrimp processing industries are relatively young and physically active. Usually, the authorities are reluctant to appoint aged women in their industries as they think young women can serve their purpose better than the old.

Table 1. Age Structure of the Women.

Sl. No.	Marital Status	No. of Women	Percentage (%)
1.	Married	84	70
2.	Unmarried	18	15
3.	Divorced	11	9
4.	Abandoned	07	6
Total		120	100

Table 2. Marital Status of the Women

Sl. No.	Age (in Yrs.)	No. of Women	Percentage (%)
1	13-17	21	17.5
2	18-22	42	35.0
3	23-27	28	23.3
4	28-31	20	16.7
5	33 and above	09	7.5
Total		120	100

Marital status: In regard to marital status of the women involved with shrimp culture it is evident from Table 2 that majority of the women are married, 15% unmarried, 9% divorced and 6% abandoned. Among the women those who are unmarried, abandoned and divorced are very much in danger in respect of having different outlooks either from the male members of society or their male co-partners in the working places.

Education: Education plays a vital role in giving human beings proper equipment to lead a gracious and harmonious life (Chalapathi, 1992). It is an instrument to lead a meaningful life in the society. Table 3 shows that most of the women (78.03%) under the study associated with shrimp processing industries are illiterate. They do not have any formal education. In fact, they were deprived of formal education during their childhood. And as such, their level of outlook towards improving quality of the life is very much narrowed down.

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Table 3. Educational Status of the Women

Sl. No.	Level of Education	No. of Women	Percentage
1.	Illiterate	94	78.3
2.	Up to class V	21	17.5
3.	Class V-X	05	4.2
Total		120	100

Table 4. Level of Income of the Women Worker

Sl. No.	Income per month (in Tk.)	No. of Women	Percentage
1.	Below 1500	07	5.8
2.	1501-2000	39	32.5
3.	2001-2500	47	39.2
4.	2501-3000	20	16.7
5.	3001-3500	02	1.7
6.	3501 and above	05	4.1
Total		120	100.00

Income: Income is an important factor to determine the status of the people and the income pattern of the women reflects their socio-economic condition. Mostly the low income women are involved in shrimp cultivation (Table 4). They do not have enough money to form any capital for further investment so as to improve their quality of life. The wage rate fixed for them is too low, that is between Tk. 70-80 *per* day. It is very difficult to lead a minimum livelihood with this meager amount of income. The women receive lower wage compared to their male counterparts in all the activities related to shrimp production as well.

Expenditure: It is said that the expenditure of a family mainly depends on the income pattern of the family. Generally, male members of the family are the key income earners in our society. But now-a-days many women have started to earn for their families. It is previously said that the women under the study work in shrimp processing industries as poverty is in vein in their families. But it is difficult to maintain their livelihood through their income. It is reported that majority of the women's income is less than their expenditure. It is found that 75 % of their income is spent mainly on food.

Household size: Household size indicates the characteristics and structure of family organization. The family size usually shapes the nature and type of this institution. The study reveals that a major number (33.3%) of the women under study have more than 4 members in their families. Besides, a few of them live alone. Household size of the women under study is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Household Size of the Women

Sl. No.	Household Size	No. of Women	Percentage
1.	One	08	6.7
2.	Two	16	13.3
3.	Three	23	19.2
4.	Four	40	33.3
5.	Five	17	14.2
6.	Six	11	9.1
7.	Seven and above	05	4.2
Total		120	100

Table 6. Permanent residence of the women workers

Sl No.	District	No. of Women	Percentage (%)
1.	Bagerhat	19	15.9
2.	Madaripur	13	10.8
3.	Khulna	27	22.5
4.	Barisal	31	25.8
5.	Pirozpur	12	10.0
6.	Satkhira	11	9.2
7.	Jessore	07	5.8
Total		120	100

Permanent residence: Generally, majority of the women working in shrimp processing industries belong to rural areas. Table 6 reveals that most of the women under study are not permanent inhabitant of the study area. They have migrated with their families from nearer districts surrounding Khulna. A large number of the women belong to different districts, such as Barisal (25.8%), Khulna (22.5%), Bagerhat (15.9%), Madaripur (10.8%), Pirozpur (10%), Satkhira (9.2%) and Jessore (5.8%).

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Housing structure: The women working in shrimp processing industries mainly come from the adjacent areas of the factories. Generally, they live in such houses where walls are made of either *golpata*, bamboo, *konchi*, tin or brick, floor is made of mud or brick and roof is made of *golpata*, tin, tally and bamboo. It means, the overall physical condition of their living is not satisfactory. On the other side they have no housing facilities on behalf of their employer. Actually, most of the authorities of shrimp processing industries do not provide housing facilities for the workers. There are only some tin-shed buildings in shrimp processing industries for any emergency situation where generally permanent male workers stay overnight in need. Female workers never stay in such temporary residences.

Security of the Women Worker: The women workers are involved with the shrimp processing industries mostly because they belong to low income group and they do not have other alternatives for involvement. They have little space to think of the security matter. Besides, the thought - earning women get honor in their families- has attracted a few of them to work in shrimp processing industries.

Job security: The women under the study are not provided any appointment letter on behalf of the authority of shrimp processing industries where they work. Actually, most of the jobs done by the women in the shrimp industries are temporary (either part-time or seasonal) in nature. As a result, the women always suffer from the fear of losing their jobs. In fact, the job of the women in the shrimp industries is factored on certain state of affairs which are both man-made and natural.

Workplace Environment: Generally, workers feel mentally, socially and professionally secure at the working place if the working environment is congenial there. In the case the behavior of workers of both sexes is very important. Besides, workers also prefer those factories where the behavior of the management is good (Khan and Molla, 2007). But the working environment of shrimp processing industries under the study is found to be very uncongenial for the women. Women under the study are reported to be harassed by their male co-workers, middleman or labour *sarder*, local hooligan, even sometimes by officials of the concerned industries. Generally, this harassment ranges from jokes and mere touching to blackmails and physical assaults. Under the situation the employers necessarily do not respond to provide justice to these women. Sometimes they are bound to do something depending on the complexity of the situation but in these cases also the women are the sufferer. They are fired as offenders, not the opposite party. That's why in most of the cases the women try to conceal the occurrences of harassment in the fear of either losing their jobs or for looking down by the community people.

Job satisfaction: Job satisfaction of an employee plays a vital role on his or her productivity, efficiency, health and wellbeing (Khan and Molla, 2007). It affects adversely on the commitment of workers and to their quality of work (Begum, 1997). The women involved in shrimp processing industries are in general satisfied with their jobs to the extent that they are employed. As there is little job opportunities for unskilled, uneducated women, getting a job is of great relief to them as well as for their families. But they have complaint about salary/ wage, overtime, duration of work, work environment, absence of leave, treatment of concerned officials and lack of medical facilities. Out of 120 women workers under the study only 28% are found to be satisfied with their jobs, whereas the majority i.e., 72% workers have expressed their dissatisfaction.

Problems faced by women workers: The women working in shrimp processing industries are found to face various problems at their personal and family levels. Table 7 shows that a major (19.2%) of the women involved in shrimp processing industries are reported to be oppressed by co-workers and others, 9.2% feel that they are looked down in the society, 5% are threatened by fatwa, 11.7% feel social insecurity, 7.5% are the victims of social discrimination, 8.3% live under the suspicion of their husbands and others, 10% face reluctance of others to marry them, 10.8%

feel maladjustment to the officials and co-workers in shrimp processing industries, 5% feel problem of communication with higher authorities under any odd situation suffered for any person related to shrimp processing industries, 5% suffers from housing problem and the rest 8.3% are the victims of eve teasing.

Table 7. Problems faced by the women at their workplace

Sl. No.	Problems Faced by the Women Worker	No. of Women	Percentage (%)
1.	Oppressed by co-workers and others	23	19.2
2.	Look-down upon by the society	11	9.2
3.	Threatened by <i>fatwa</i>	06	5.0
4.	Feeling of social insecurity	14	11.7
5.	Socially discriminated	09	7.5
6.	Suspected by husbands and others	10	8.3
7.	Reluctance of others to marry them	12	10.0
8.	Maladjustment with officials and co-workers	13	10.8
9.	Problem of communication with higher authorities	06	5.0
10	Lack of housing facilities	06	5.0
11.	Eve-teasing	10	8.3
Total		120	100

Discussion

The women workers of shrimp processing industries are relatively young as they can serve the purpose of the industries better than older. Many of them are married and illiterate as well as have more than 4 family members. Majority of them earn below Tk 2500 *per* month and it is very difficult to lead their livelihood with such small amount of income. In majority cases 75% of their income is spent mainly on food. Even in many cases their expenditure is reported to be more than their income. Under the situation they have no other option but to live in poorly constructed houses and bear hardship in silence. These women workers are mainly temporary inhabitants of the study area and belong to nearer districts surrounding Khulna. Of them women from Barisal, Khulna and Bagerhat districts are the majority. They have come to study area with or without their families to find out a job for their livelihood. Actually, their livelihood pattern is similar to other poor sections of the country.

Again, these women workers do not get any opportunity to play any important role in shrimp processing industries as they mainly participate there as low skilled temporary workers. They work there under various problems in absence of alternative working opportunity in the area. In fact, authorities of shrimp processing industries, who are mainly outsiders, always try to make profit by using the labour of their local workers' in full capacity with low wages. For their own interest the authority does not provide their women workers any dependable option for sustainable livelihood. Women workers in spite of understanding the attitude of the authority are bound to sell their labour in need of their families. Actually, they are not only bound to work in low wages but also facing different kinds of socio-political and cultural problems in work places. They are reported to be harassed by their male co-workers, labour *sardars* and local hooligans as well as sometimes by the officials of the concerned industries. In most of the cases they keep silent regarding the harassment occurred to them as none of them want to get fired and looked down upon by the community people.

Conclusion

It is obvious that in the age of globalization women in Bangladesh are being exploited as cheap source of labour in different industrial sectors. Shrimp processing sector one at. The change from

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traditional to industrial shrimp farming that is rapidly taking place might bring short term benefits to the government and the large-scale shrimp investors due to foreign currency generation, but the environmental and social costs associated with the industry by far outstrip the benefits. Local communities are particularly marginalised and exploited and local social structures are threatened by growing tensions and conflicts due to this. To bring a change in the situation at first the minimum salary/wage for women workers of shrimp processing industries has to be set equal to the national minimum wage. National employment policy on women should immediately be implemented in the line with Employment Policy Convention of 1964 and Equal Remuneration Convention of 1951 adopted by the ILO Conventions so that job security of women workers may be retained. Group insurance, specially for the women workers of shrimp processing industries should be introduced. This will help the workers saving their small amount of income. Shift work should be introduced in shrimp processing industries so that overtime hours of works may be reduced. Hostels or residential facility for unmarried women workers should be arranged so that they can get relief from different social problems like eve-teasing, communication problems etc. Women workers should be provided with independent education and training concerning their rights at work as well as training for skill development and capacity building. Finally, cooperation is required from the workers themselves, since no organization can be formed unless the women workers are ready to fight for their own rights. They must themselves struggle to acquire their proper position in the labour market. For them awareness raising training and then of a large scale public awareness building campaign should be provided by both the Government and NGOs on the priority basis. Only then occupational and social security system of women involved in shrimp processing industries may improve.

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