

# **An Evaluation of Counseling Service Provided to the Female Workers of Readymade Garments: Bangladesh Perspective**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The main objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of Counseling Service (CS) provided to the female workers of the ready-made garments (RMG) industries located in Chattogram, the Commercial Capital of Bangladesh. An extensive literature review helped the researcher to identify the variables of CS and a questionnaire was designed based on that. A total of 130 female workers were selected as samples from the 10 factories located outside of the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ). The study discovered that the CS of the sample factories is successful in reducing workplace harassment and have failed to manage workplace conflicts. The counselors are found qualified but they have failed to show commitment and sincerity towards CS. The top management of the RMGs is suggested to prioritize the CS functions and regularly monitor the performance of the counselors.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Human Resource Management, Counseling Service, Readymade Garments, Export Processing Zone, Bangladesh, and Job Stress*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector of Bangladesh has made an essential contribution to makeover our economy (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2002; Huda *et al.*, 2020), and this sector has created the attention of the world for maintaining quality in an affordable cost. The workforce of this sector is the main competitive strength of this sector. Apart from this, it contributes to the national economy and has created a massive employment generation in Bangladesh contributing to the women empowerment. According to Mahmud (2012), the garments industry of Bangladesh employs 2.8 million female workers, but despite its extraordinary achievement, this sector lacks ensuring a favorable work environment which leads to labor unrest. Such a turbulent condition also damages capital assets and ruins work life. This situation happens due to frequent abuse at work, bad labor relations, insufficient wage, and health & safety issues (Huda, 2016).

Female workers of this noble industry always stay in angst and psychological stress and finally force them to embark on aggressive actions (Huda, 2016). The outcome of such regular disturbance damages the image of the country in the world market. To invigorate the brand equity of this industry in the world market this sector a comprehensive CS should be framed to diminish such workplace tensions. An effective CS may cure the conflicting situation between employers and workers and may ensure better human resource management (HRM) practice in this industry. CS is an accepted organizational practice started during 1970-1980 in the USA (Weiss, 2010) and it has a significant contribution to initiate standard HRM practice among many fast world countries (McManus & Compton, 2015). It is mostly a service provided to an employee to facilitate his/her mental wellbeing with the aim to progress individual performance at work (Attridge, 2010). It is mainly used to manage stress at work. CS provides counseling aid to the female workers of RMGs to help them recover from the stress caused by family-related problems, workplace abuse, matrimonial issues, mental stress, and many other issues. CS helps a worker to cope with critical situations of life (Sharar & Lennox, 2009).

In Bangladesh, many RMG factories have introduced CS mainly for the female workers to provide counseling services under the responsibility of the human resources department and most of the RMGs located in CEPZ has a clear policy and company code of conduct in this regard (Huda, 2018). Expert female counselors are recruited to provide necessary services to the victims. CS services CEPZ mostly includes counseling services on individual disciplinary issues cases, health & safety, conflict management, sexual harassment, and many more in accordance to Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) rules (Islam, 2015). However, it is a matter of great concern that such service is not widely practiced in the RMGs located outside of the CEPZ area. This study will endeavor to measure the performance of CS of some selected RMG factories located in different industrial areas basing on the opinions of the female workers.

### **Significance of the study**

Female RMG workers of Bangladesh encounter different mental stress, workplace abuse, and many family-related problems in their work-life (Ahamed, 2013) and such pressures trigger different types of stresses which hampers individual's performance and productivity. However, stress is inhabitable in every job but organizations must come forward to helping their employees to combat stress (Huda & Azad, 2015) where CS could be a helpful intervention to deal with the stressful situations and to maintain individual productive (Huda, 2018). Many researchers have also agreed on the significance of CS for organizational performance development. Though CS is an effective intervention for individual and organizational performance development, very little amount of study is available in the existing literature. This study will try to minimize the vacuum of existing literature by examining the performance of CS through an empirical investigation and will propose some policy framework to make the Service effective.

### **The objective of the study**

The broad objective of the study is to examine the effectiveness of CS of some selected RMGs of Bangladesh in reducing different work and family-related problems. The study will also measure the performance of the counselors in providing services to female workers.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Counseling Service (CS) is a welfare program for the workers who encounter with different psychological problems due to their work and family-related disturbance. It is also a very popular occupational stress management service (Huda, 2018). This service is designed to provide mental counseling services and used as an intervention to manage occupational stress (Clavelle, 2009). Employees are given support to substance workplace abuse anxiety and depression management (Richmond, 2014). It helps the worker who had faced traumatic injury and is a victim of intimate partner hostility (Salomon *et al.*, 2010). Victims of sexual harassment are regularly treated through CS (Newton *et al.*, 2005) and matrimonial issues are also addressed through it (Johnson, 2008). CS also covers issues like career guidance, financial assistance, and an effective tool to manage interpersonal conflict (Scott, 2015). Many organizations achieved an extraordinary result of CS in minimizing occupational stress (Cooper & Cartwright, 1997).

According to Yamatani *et al.* (1999), modern CS is a critical function of an organization that assists the employees to recover from physical health problems, mental health issues, and family life disturbance. Such counseling service includes analysis of a problem and providing need-based aids to the employees (McCann *et al.*, 2010). It facilitates an organization in maintaining a better organizational culture and to ensure better Human Resource Management practice (Agyemang *et al.*, 2014). An effective CS ensures employee retention, individual performance development, productivity improvement of an employee which results in achieving job satisfaction, cost efficiency, customer satisfaction, and corporate reputation (Arthur, 2000). These services help reduce absenteeism and increase employee motivation (Kirk & Brown, 2003). According to Yun *et al.* (2007), CS is crucial in maintaining the work-life balance of an employee and also to maintain a congenial work environment (Arthur, 2002). However, organizations must conduct a regular audit of their performance to keep the service function effectively (McLeod, 2001). However, every organization should provide training to the counselors to make them skilled and knowledgeable in service delivery (Cooper & Sadri, 1995).

The literature review has identified the key variables of CS and its critical success factors. It mainly provides employee assistance services and organizations must keep it operational to maintain its initiative. There are many studies available in the existing literature but most of them are in the context of developed countries and no research work is available in Bangladeshi context. This study will try to contribute to the literature by measuring the current performance of CS practiced in the local RMGs of Bangladesh considering the opinion of the female workers.

### **The methodology of the study**

This study is quantitative in nature and conducted in a different phase to attain the research objectives. At first, an extensive literature review was conducted to explore the significant variables of CS and identify the research gap. However, the variables are used to develop the questionnaire. In the second phase, questionnaires were distributed among 130 female workers to collect primary data. The questionnaire consists of 13 questions and the statements were translated into the native language for better understanding. The female workers were selected randomly from 10 RMGs located in Chattogram District (apart from export processing zone). A popular 5-point Likert rating scale (*5 strongly agree ... 1 strongly disagree*) was used to take the opinion of the workers. The respondents were mostly fulltime workers with a minimum experience of five years. SPSS 20 is used for data analysis and the survey was conducted out from June to August 2019. Influential variables of CS have been identified by considering the Standardized Coefficients of each variable (Table 2). The results of

coefficients analysis are used to find the relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Table 2). A higher value was considered as highly influential variables of CS and vice versa.

A theoretical model of the female workers' counseling service (CS) of RMGs is given below

Overall effectiveness of EAP = A + B<sub>1</sub> Stress + B<sub>2</sub> Harassment + B<sub>3</sub> Conflict + B<sub>4</sub> Strain + B<sub>5</sub> Matrimonial Disturbance + B<sub>6</sub> Qualified + B<sub>7</sub> Helpful + B<sub>8</sub> Well Behaved + B<sub>9</sub> Time + B<sub>10</sub> Committed + B<sub>11</sub> High Priority + B<sub>12</sub> Listen + B<sub>13</sub> Suggestion

### III. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Results of Regression analysis

In this study, the R-value showing the overall fitness of the model and that is .819. (Any R-value is greater than 0.50 shows an acceptable fit of the model). However, the value of R is more than 0.80 that indicates the model of

Table 1: Regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.819 <sup>a</sup>	.746	.631	.713	.661	11.60	17	89	.003

Source: SPSS 20

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stress, Harassment, Conflict, Strain, Matrimonial disturbance, Qualified, Helpful, Well Behaved, Time, Committed, High Priority, Listen, Suggestion

the study is satisfactorily fit. The analysis shows less deviation between the value of R Square (.746) and Adjust R Square (.631). This also indicates the better fitness of the model (Table 1). The model is also highly significant as the F value of the model is .003. (Sig value less than 0.05 is highly significant)

#### 3.2 Proposed model based on results

Overall effectiveness of EAP = 2.16 -0.26 Stress + 0.34 Harassment -0.28 Conflict - 0.32 Strain -0.28 Matrimonial Disturbance + 0.15 Qualified +0.19 Helpful +0.16 Well Behaved - 0.57 Time -0.19 Committed - 0.23 High Priority + 0.26 Listen - 0.31 Suggestion

#### 3.3. Results and discussion based on Coefficients analysis

Table 2: Coefficients

Serial No	Variables	Code	Coefficients Values	t	Sig
1	Success of CS in minimizing Job stress	B <sub>1</sub> Stress	-.261	-2.534	0.05
2	Success of CS in Reducing Workplace Harassment	B <sub>2</sub> Harassment	.344	3.724	0.02
3	Success of CS in Managing Conflict	B <sub>3</sub> Conflict	-.280	-2.773	0.01
4	Success of CS in Curing Psychological Strain	B <sub>4</sub> Strain	-.323	-3.257	0.02
5	Success of CS in Managing Matrimonial Disturbance	B <sub>5</sub> Disturbance	-.128	-1.311	0.07
6	Counselors are Qualified to provide adequate service	B <sub>6</sub> Qualified	.153	1.377	0.08
7	Counselors are Helpful in providing service	B <sub>7</sub> Helpful	.194	1.725	0.04
8	Counselors are Well Behaved	B <sub>8</sub> Well Behaved	.162	1.524	0.05
9	Counselors provide sufficient Time during CS	B <sub>9</sub> Time	-.573	-5.156	0.02
10	Counselors are Committed regarding CS	B <sub>10</sub> Committed	-.196	-1.731	0.07
11	Counselors consider CS as High Priority	B <sub>11</sub> High Priority	-.234	-2.396	0.05
12	Counselors listen to the issue Seriously	B <sub>12</sub> Listen	.263	2.974	0.03
13	Counselors provide necessary Suggestion to overcome problems	B <sub>13</sub> Suggestion	-.317	-3.134	0.01

Source: Compiled by Author

The results of the analysis of the coefficients are showing the relationship between the dependent variable (effectiveness of CS) with the independent variables listed in Table 2. It is revealed from the study that a total of 08 independent variables out of 13 are having an inverse relationship with the dependent variable as they have a negative value. It is clear from the study that, CS of the sample RMGs have failed to minimize job stress as it is found with the opposite relationship (-.261). The result is similar in the case of managing conflict (-.280), in curing psychological strain of the female workers (-.323), failed in managing matrimonial disturbance (-.128). On the other hand, the study also discovered the incapability of the counselors in providing CS to the workers as we observe some inverse relationships between dependent and independent variables. The data depict that the counselors have shown their failure in providing sufficient time to the workers during CS (-.573). They are found uncommitted to deliver quality service to the counselee (-.196) and less prioritized the CS(-.234).

However, they have also failed to provide the necessary suggestion to workers in managing their problems (-.317).

On the other hand, some success of CS is also revealed from the study. According to the respondents, the CS of the sample RMGs are effective in minimizing workplace harassment (.344). However, the respondents are positive about the qualification of the counselors (.153), their helpfulness (.194) in providing CS, they are found well-behaved (.162) and most importantly they listen to the workers seriously (.263)

### **Policy Implication**

The study has unearthed some facts of CS provided to the female workers of the RMG industries of Bangladesh. CS is somewhat successful in reducing the degree of workplace harassment. Huda (2018) had found a similar result in his research. However, the psychological health of the female workers is not facilitated by the CS. Job stress issues, conflict management, and family disturbance management has not succeeded through this intervention. Though the counselors are found qualified and committed, they have failed to provide effective service to the workers due to their preoccupation in different HRM departmental activities. Counselors should be freed from departmental activities and to be engaged dedicatedly for CS only. Personal empowerment of the counselors should be ensured to deliver the service with full freedom. Organizations should regularly monitor the performance of the counselors and set performance parameters for them.

## **IV. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH POTENTIALS**

CS is an effective intervention to address different mental problems of female workers. Hence, the RMGs of Bangladesh have been somewhat successful in this regard. The top management must realize the potentials of this program to keep the workers motivated and focused to the work. The effectiveness of CS will increase the job performance of the workers which will contribute to the productivity and profitability of the RMG organization. It will also help the RMGs to maintain better industrial relations and foster change management. However, the corporate image of the RMG could be raised if the initiative is maintained with full efficiency. The study has made a substantial contribution to discover the facts of CS provided to the female worker of RMG industries of Bangladesh. The findings of the study may support the management of the RMGs to bring perfection in CS and also to create a congenial workplace for the workers. Academicians and the researchers may enlarge the scope of the study and conduct research with a large sample size. They could conduct research in a different context and different industries i.e. textile sector and steel mills

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