

HAPHAZARD INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE RISK OF FIRE: A STUDY ON GARMENTS INDUSTRIES IN DHAKA

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ABSTRACT

Readymade garments are the most important export item from Bangladesh, yet the working conditions and fire safety records in the factories are often not up to the standard. In Bangladesh, fire accidents in export-oriented garment factories continue to kill workers; most of them are women and children. Despite a number of initiatives to curb fire accidents in the garment industry, there are still a significant number of fire occurrences in this industry. The main focus of this paper is to find out garments workers vulnerability to fire risk due to haphazard industrialization in the different areas of Dhaka. Beside this, some other issues also examined such as existence of fire warning system in the garments, workers knowledge about the fire equipments, their personal experience and opinion about fire hazard, any visit from fire service, people's knowledge about existing law on fire drill, condition of gas and electricity lines in the buildings, emergency exit condition etc. For the purpose of the study quantitative methodology was employed and interview is used as a technique of data collection. Six garments were selected randomly by which 180 (30 from each garment) garments workers were interviewed in a same manner. The study revealed that the safety scenario of the Bangladesh garment industry is one of the worst in the world. Since this is a highly labor intensive industry (hence Bangladesh's competitive advantage through its abundant supply of unskilled cheap labor) the sector is also the largest industrial employer in the country with around 3.6 million people directly working in these factories. Inclusion of backward and forward linkages would further increase the number of employees' dependant on this sector. Due to those reasons industries haphazardly grow here and there without following any kind of construction law that enhances the risk of fire hazard further. Fire is purported to be the largest cause of on-the-job injuries and fatalities in this sector. Each new incident of fire and related damage adversely affects the reputation of the industry abroad, especially since the working conditions in the manufacturing sectors in the developing countries is a general cause of concern in many developed countries. Despite the various measures, rules and regulations implemented in the past decades, there are still several instances of fire outbreak in the garment factories every year, resulting in significant losses of lives, livelihoods (through injuries), equipments and materials. These incidents raise questions about the effectiveness of existing fire prevention and fire fighting rules, regulations and practices. Based on this conceptions finally this study formulated a number of recommendations to bring a positive change in the garments industries and round up with conclusion.

KEYWORDS: Industrialization, Risk, Haphazard, Fire, Garments Industries