



Baseline Research

Empowering the Ready-made Garments Workers Living in Urban Slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh

BRAC Urban Development Programme (UDP) is implementing a project titled “Empowering Ready-Made Garments Workers (ERMG)”, which aims to improve livelihoods and ensure well-being of RMG workers in 25 garments factories in Gazipur, Savar and Tongi. The baseline research was undertaken by BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University between September and December 2018.

Objectives

- To assess the present health and socioeconomic conditions of RMG workers in three areas – Gazipur, Savar and Tongi
- To assess the knowledge and practice of the RMG workers regarding health care utilization, financial inclusion (DPS, health insurance), skills training and use of online health, legal & psycho-social support provided by the Maya Apa app
- To explore RMG workers empowerment, workers satisfaction, challenges to form workers unions/ committee, worker-owner relationships in the factories, priority services for RMG workers, and gaps in service integration (GO-NGO services)
- To explore the sustainability of the BRAC One Stop Service Centers (OSSCs)



Methodology

A concurrent mixed methods approach was applied for data collection with quantitative and qualitative techniques. A survey was conducted among 486 RMG workers. In addition, we conducted 21 In Depth Interviews (IDIs), 4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 11 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with different service providers (HR compliance manager, line supervisor, iron man, staff welfare officer, branch manager).

Findings:

Health

From the quantitative and qualitative findings it is revealed that majority of the respondents suffer from various types of illnesses in the last three months. Survey data shows that fever (52%), back pain (55%), headache (58%), weakness (63%), dizziness (39%) were the most commonly suffered illnesses in the last three months. Most of the qualitative respondents said that in order to resolve such health issues, their first point of contact is pharmacy / drug store.



“ While working on sewing machine sometimes needles get pierced in the finger. The nail fell off for some workers, again some workers got infection in their nails (RMG worker)

Health Insurance

Survey findings indicate that only 10.5% of the respondents know about health insurance. However, after gaining a perception about health insurance, 26% of the survey respondents expressed their interest in health insurance. Qualitative findings suggest that respondents are interested to enroll in a convenient and favorable health insurance plan which will be free of any complexities or additional costs.

Financial Behavior

Survey findings showed that 20% of the 486 respondents' monthly family expenditure is below BDT 10,000 (USD 119.11). Out of 486 survey respondents, 155 mentioned saving money either regularly or irregularly. Most of them do not have any type of savings because whatever they earn, usually exceeds their expenditures. From the qualitative findings, we have observed that workers have the propensity to save money in different forms such as through bank deposit, cooperative/ micro-finance, deposit premium scheme (DPS) and saving cash. After receiving information regarding BRAC DPS scheme, multiple respondents showed interest to enroll into the program.

Skills Training

Many of the survey respondents (66.1%) mentioned that it is convenient to have a job if they had prior training. Qualitative findings revealed that workers are willing to receive training from BRAC but they are not sure what type of training would be useful for them.

“Females do not go for the legal stuff that much... they rely on their fate

Legal Aids

Majority of the survey respondents are aware of the right to get weekly holidays (99%), right to get maternity leave (99%), right to get casual leave (80%) and right to sick leave (96%). Survey findings suggest that only 0.8% respondents mentioned about ever experiencing any legal problem in their lives. From the qualitative findings, it is revealed that female RMG workers do not seek legal support for their personal issues because they consider such incidents as an outcome of their fate.

GO/NGO Service Utilization

Qualitative findings revealed that health services is largely provided by different NGOs in the community and the workers usually go to the MoU NGO clinics for services. Only 7% respondents received any services from government and about 95% of the 486 respondents opined that a government health center is needed to resolve many problems of the garments workers.

Communicative Literacy and Use of Maya Apa app

Overall 81% of the 486 survey respondents have personal mobile phone. It is found that 93.4% of them are not aware of Maya Apa app. Qualitative findings showed that respondents are hesitant to use Maya Apa app or the kiosk because they are not accustomed with typing in mobile phone and exchanging conversation through messages.

Worker Owner Relationship

Survey findings revealed that about 88% of the respondents met their factory owner at least once after joining the factory. From the qualitative findings, it is revealed that owners visit different floors within the factory occasionally but usually they do not communicate directly with the workers.

Sustainability of One Stop Service Centre (OSSC)

In general, beneficiaries are satisfied with the services provided by the BRAC OSSC. However, to ensure sustainability community people can be included at a subsidized cost and fee for the training of the potential garment workers can be introduced.

Recommendations

- BRAC UDP can organize health promotion activities/health campaigns in collaboration with the factory management to educate RMG workers about different types of illnesses and diseases.
- Quality health care can be ensured by providing adequate consultation time to the patients, understand their problems and provide symptomatic treatment them accordingly by BRAC health service center unit.
- Community health workers of BRAC can be 'change agents' to work as a bridge between the community and BRAC.
- BRAC can work with the factory management to organize appropriate skills training for the existing workers to enhance skill. Flexible entry criteria in skill development center could be set to enroll new applicants and training recipients should be given incentives.
- Training on alternative income generating activities can also be considered.
- BRAC can raise awareness on using Maya Apa app on health and other issues.
- Government, BGMEA and organizations like BRAC can come up with plans where workers can raise their issues and have legal services.
- In order to sustain OSSCs, BRAC can consider popularizing the services at the community level more effectively.
- There is a need to build awareness among the garment workers about the scope for grievances in the garments factory.
- Worker participation committee can play an active role to act as a liaison between workers and the management/owner.
- To ensure sustainability BRAC should maintain the continuity of providing quality services and also identify opportunities for fund towards sustainability.