

Implementation of Maternity Benefits and Workplace Safety for Women Workers in Bangladesh's Hosiery Industry: Evidence from Pabna District

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Abstract

Women's participation in Bangladesh's manufacturing sector has increased significantly, contributing to industrial growth and women's socio-economic empowerment. However, many women workers continue to face limited access to maternity protection and safe working conditions, particularly in small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises. This study examines the implementation of maternity benefits and workplace safety provisions for women workers in selected hosiery factories in Pabna District. The research is guided by the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (as amended), the Bangladesh Labour Rules, 2015, and relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, using a mixed-methods research design.

Primary data were collected from 150 women workers through structured questionnaires using stratified random sampling. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with factory managers, officials from the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), and trade union representatives. Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26 through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis, while qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings reveal a considerable gap between statutory labour protections and their practical implementation. Although maternity leave, employment protection, breastfeeding breaks, and workplace safety are guaranteed by law, many women—particularly contractual and probationary workers—remain excluded. Employment status, workers' awareness, management commitment, workplace facilities, and regulatory enforcement significantly influence the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety. Weak labour law awareness, inadequate monitoring, insufficient workplace facilities, and socio-cultural barriers further hinder compliance.

The study recommends strengthening labour law enforcement, improving workplace infrastructure, expanding labour rights awareness programmes, and enhancing institutional accountability to promote gender-sensitive workplaces and decent work. The findings provide valuable policy implications for government agencies, employers, labour organizations, and researchers working to improve women's employment conditions in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Maternity protection; workplace safety; women workers; Bangladesh Labour Act 2006; hosiery industry; labour rights; gender justice; occupational health.

1. Introduction

Women's participation in paid employment has become a major driver of socio-economic transformation in Bangladesh. Over the past three decades, rapid industrialisation and export-oriented manufacturing have expanded employment opportunities for women, contributing to poverty reduction, household income generation, and national economic growth. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2023), women now constitute a significant proportion of the manufacturing workforce, particularly in the ready-made garments (RMG), textile, leather, footwear, pharmaceutical, food processing, and hosiery industries. Their growing participation has strengthened industrial competitiveness while advancing women's economic empowerment and social inclusion.

Beyond economic contributions, women's employment has positively influenced education, healthcare, household decision-making, and gender equality. Previous studies indicate that female labour force participation enhances family welfare and community development (Kabeer, 2018; World Bank, 2022). Ensuring decent working conditions for women is therefore essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

The hosiery industry is an important labour-intensive sector in Bangladesh, producing knitted garments for domestic and international markets. Pabna District has emerged as a major hosiery manufacturing cluster where women perform key production activities, including sewing, knitting, finishing, packaging, quality inspection, and machine operation. Despite their significant contribution, many women workers continue to experience inadequate maternity protection, unsafe working conditions, and limited access to statutory labour rights. Occupational risks during pregnancy, including prolonged standing, repetitive work, poor ventilation, inadequate sanitation, and excessive workloads, may adversely affect maternal health, fetal development, and workplace productivity.

To safeguard women workers, the Government of Bangladesh has enacted the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (as amended), the Bangladesh Labour Rules, 2015, and other related legal provisions covering maternity leave, employment protection, occupational safety, workplace welfare, and non-discrimination. Bangladesh has also ratified several International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions relating to maternity protection, occupational safety, and decent work. However, legal provisions alone do not ensure effective implementation. Previous studies have identified considerable gaps between statutory requirements and workplace practice, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where weak enforcement, limited institutional monitoring, inadequate human resource management systems, financial constraints, and low awareness frequently hinder compliance (ILO, 2020; Rahman & Islam, 2020).

Although Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry has received substantial scholarly attention, comparatively little research has examined labour rights implementation in the regional hosiery sector. Most hosiery factories operate as SMEs with limited organisational resources and weaker institutional oversight, potentially placing women workers at greater risk of exclusion from maternity benefits and workplace safety provisions. Addressing this gap is important because effective maternity protection and occupational safety improve employee well-being, organisational commitment, productivity, and long-term business sustainability (ILO, 2019; OECD, 2021).

Against this background, the present study investigates the implementation of maternity benefits and workplace safety provisions among women workers employed in selected hosiery factories in Pabna District, Bangladesh. Specifically, the study examines the extent of compliance with statutory maternity protections, identifies organisational and institutional barriers, analyses the influence of employment status, workers' awareness, management commitment, workplace facilities, and regulatory enforcement, and proposes evidence-based policy recommendations. By integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative interview findings, the study contributes new empirical evidence to the literature on labour rights, occupational safety, gender justice, and human resource management while providing practical guidance for policymakers, employers, labour inspectors, trade unions, and development partners seeking to promote decent work and gender-sensitive workplaces in Bangladesh.

1.1 Research Objectives

General Objective

To examine the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety provisions for women workers in Bangladesh's hosiery industry, with particular reference to selected factories in Pabna District.

Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the statutory provisions relating to maternity protection and workplace safety under the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 and related regulations.
- ii. To assess the level of implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety provisions in selected hosiery factories in Pabna District.
- iii. To identify the organisational, institutional, legal, and socio-cultural barriers affecting effective implementation.
- iv. To examine the influence of employment status, workers' awareness, workplace facilities, management practices, and regulatory enforcement on access to maternity benefits.
- v. To propose evidence-based policy recommendations for improving compliance with labour legislation and promoting gender-sensitive workplace practices.

1.2 Research Questions

- i. To what extent are maternity protection and workplace safety provisions implemented in Bangladesh's hosiery industry?
- ii. What factors significantly influence women's access to maternity benefits and safe working conditions?
- iii. What organisational and institutional barriers hinder effective implementation?
- iv. How do management practices and regulatory enforcement affect labour law compliance?
- v. What policy interventions can improve maternity protection and workplace safety for women workers?

1.3 Research Hypotheses

H1: Employment status significantly influences women's access to maternity protection benefits.

H2: Workers' awareness of labour rights positively influences the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety.

H3: Adequate workplace facilities positively affect maternity protection and occupational safety.

H4: Supportive management practices significantly improve compliance with maternity protection provisions.

H5: Strong regulatory enforcement positively influences the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety.

2. Literature Review

The implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety has become an important issue in labour policy, human resource management (HRM), occupational health, and gender equality. As women's participation in industrial employment increases, organizations are expected to adopt policies that safeguard maternal health, ensure safe working conditions, and promote equal employment opportunities. International organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations (UN), and the World Health Organization (WHO) recognize maternity protection as a fundamental labour right and a key element of decent work (ILO, 2019; WHO, 2022). In Bangladesh, women's employment in labour-intensive manufacturing industries has grown significantly over the past three decades. However, this expansion has not been matched by consistent improvements in working conditions or effective enforcement of labour laws. As a result, maternity protection and workplace safety remain significant challenges, particularly in small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises (SMEs), where regulatory enforcement and organizational capacity are often inadequate.

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on maternity protection, workplace safety, labour rights, institutional compliance, and gender-sensitive HRM. It also identifies the research gap that provides the rationale for the present study.

2.1 Maternity Protection as a Fundamental Labour Right

Maternity protection refers to legal and workplace measures that safeguard women's health, employment security, and well-being during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period. According to **ILO Convention No. 183**, maternity protection includes paid maternity leave, employment security, medical care, breastfeeding breaks, protection from hazardous work, income replacement, and protection against pregnancy-related discrimination.

The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) states that maternity protection improves maternal and child health, promotes gender equality, reduces poverty, and supports women's labour force participation. It also benefits organizations by enhancing employee retention, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) emphasizes that adequate maternity leave and workplace support reduce maternal and neonatal health risks, making maternity protection both a public health and labour rights issue.

Many countries have strengthened maternity protection in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** and **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**. However, implementation remains inconsistent, especially in developing economies where informal employment and weak regulatory enforcement are common.

2.2 Legal Framework for Maternity Protection in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has established a legal framework to protect women workers' maternity rights and workplace safety. The **Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006**, along with its **2013** and **2018** amendments, provides paid maternity leave, employment protection during pregnancy, protection from dismissal, breastfeeding opportunities, welfare facilities, and occupational health and safety measures.

The **Bangladesh Labour Rules, 2015** further define employer responsibilities for workplace sanitation, safe drinking water, first-aid services, occupational safety, and employee welfare. Bangladesh has also ratified several international labour conventions on occupational safety, equal remuneration, non-discrimination, and decent work.

Despite these legal provisions, implementation remains a major challenge. Compliance varies across industries, with export-oriented firms generally performing better than smaller domestic enterprises. Weak enforcement, limited institutional capacity, inadequate labour inspections, and low awareness among employers and employees continue to hinder effective implementation of labour laws.

2.3 Workplace Safety and Occupational Health

Workplace safety is a key element of decent employment, aiming to prevent workplace injuries, illnesses, and hazards through effective policies, employee training, engineering controls, and regulatory compliance.

For women workers, pregnancy requires additional workplace accommodations, including lighter workloads, ergonomic workstations, adequate seating, hygienic sanitation, safe drinking water, rest areas, breastfeeding facilities, medical support, and protection from hazardous substances.

The International Labour Organization (2020) states that pregnancy-sensitive workplace safety improves maternal health and organizational productivity. Studies in Bangladesh's manufacturing sector report inadequate workplace facilities, including poor ventilation, limited ergonomic support, and insufficient childcare and occupational health services. These shortcomings increase risks for pregnant workers and contribute to occupational stress, pregnancy complications, labour turnover, and lower productivity (Akhter et al., 2010; Rahman & Islam, 2020; UN Women, 2018).

2.4 Human Resource Management and Maternity Protection

From a strategic human resource management (HRM) perspective, maternity protection is an investment in organizational human capital rather than merely a legal obligation.

Modern HRM emphasizes employee well-being, work-life balance, occupational health, and inclusive workplace practices as drivers of sustainable performance (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Organizations that support employee welfare often achieve higher commitment, lower labour turnover, and improved productivity. Guest (2017) and Becker and Huselid (2006) argue that supportive HR practices strengthen organizational commitment and long-term competitiveness.

In maternity protection, HR departments are responsible for communicating labour rights, administering maternity benefits, raising employee awareness, and ensuring legal compliance. However, many SMEs in developing countries lack formal HR departments, making labour law implementation dependent on managerial discretion rather than established HR policies.

2.5 Determinants of Maternity Protection and Workplace Safety

Previous empirical studies identify several organizational, institutional, and individual factors influencing the implementation of maternity protection.

Employment Status: Employment status is a key determinant of access to maternity benefits. Permanent employees generally receive greater legal protection than temporary or contractual workers. Rahman et al. (2021) found that temporary workers are often excluded from paid maternity leave and other statutory benefits.

Workers' Awareness: Awareness of labour rights encourages women to claim maternity benefits and report labour law violations. Awareness programmes also strengthen organizational accountability and improve compliance.

Management Commitment: Strong management commitment promotes investment in employee welfare, workplace safety, and legal compliance. In contrast, production-focused management often gives lower priority to labour rights.

Regulatory Enforcement: Government inspections and legal sanctions encourage compliance with labour laws. However, limited inspection capacity and weak enforcement allow violations to continue.

Workplace Infrastructure: Adequate sanitation, ventilation, drinking water, ergonomic facilities, rest areas, breastfeeding spaces, childcare services, and medical support improve workplace safety, maternity protection, employee satisfaction, productivity, and labour retention.

2.6 Empirical Evidence

International evidence shows that maternity protection benefits both employees and organizations. Studies from Europe, Australia, and East Asia report that organizations providing comprehensive maternity benefits experience lower employee turnover, higher workforce participation, and stronger organizational commitment (OECD, 2021).

In South Asia, implementation remains weaker due to informal employment, limited organizational resources, weak labour inspections, and low awareness. In Bangladesh, research has mainly focused on the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector after the Rana Plaza tragedy. Studies by the ILO (2020), Fair Labor Association (2019), and UN Women (2018) found that labour standards have improved in export-oriented factories but remain weaker in SMEs outside export-processing zones.

Haque and Sultana (2020) also identified financial constraints, weak HR systems, limited institutional monitoring, and production pressures as barriers to compliance. However, research on maternity protection and workplace safety in Bangladesh's hosiery industry remains limited.

2.7 Theoretical Foundation

The present study is based on three complementary theoretical perspectives.

Institutional Theory suggests that organizations adopt policies in response to legal, regulatory, and social pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Compliance with maternity protection laws is influenced by governments, labour inspectors, regulatory agencies, and societal expectations.

Labour Rights Theory views maternity protection, workplace safety, and equal treatment as fundamental human rights rather than optional organizational benefits. Employers therefore have legal and ethical responsibilities to protect women workers.

Strategic Human Resource Management (HRM) Theory argues that employee welfare enhances organizational effectiveness. Supportive HR practices, including maternity benefits and occupational safety, improve employee commitment, productivity, and long-term competitiveness. Together, these theories provide the conceptual foundation for examining maternity protection and workplace safety in Bangladesh's hosiery industry.

2.8 Research Gap

Although considerable research has examined labour rights in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry, important gaps remain.

First, few studies have investigated maternity protection and workplace safety in the hosiery industry despite its growing economic importance. Second, most research has focused on export-oriented factories, with limited attention to regional SMEs. Third, earlier studies have relied mainly on quantitative methods, offering limited insight into institutional and managerial perspectives. Fourth, few have examined the combined effects of employment status, workers' awareness, workplace facilities, management commitment, and regulatory enforcement using a mixed-methods approach. Finally, empirical evidence from Pabna District, a major hosiery manufacturing hub, remains scarce.

This study addresses these gaps by integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence to examine maternity protection and workplace safety in selected hosiery factories in Pabna District. Its findings are expected to contribute to labour rights, institutional theory, and strategic HRM while offering practical recommendations for policymakers, employers, labour inspectors, and development agencies.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

3.1 Theoretical Background

The implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety is influenced by legal, organizational, institutional, and socio-cultural factors. Although Bangladesh has enacted comprehensive labour laws to protect women workers, compliance varies across industries, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This study integrates **Institutional Theory**, **Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) Theory**, and **Labour Rights Theory** to explain labour law implementation in Bangladesh's hosiery industry.

Institutional Theory suggests that organizations respond to legal, regulatory, and social pressures, including government regulations, labour inspections, and stakeholder expectations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Weak oversight and limited resources often reduce compliance.

Strategic HRM Theory views employee well-being as a strategic asset. Maternity protection, workplace safety, and employee welfare enhance productivity, organizational commitment, and long-term competitiveness (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

Labour Rights Theory regards maternity protection, occupational safety, equal opportunity, and non-discrimination as fundamental human rights, requiring employers to provide safe and equitable workplaces.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for examining how organizational practices, institutional enforcement, and workers' awareness influence the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety in Bangladesh's hosiery industry.

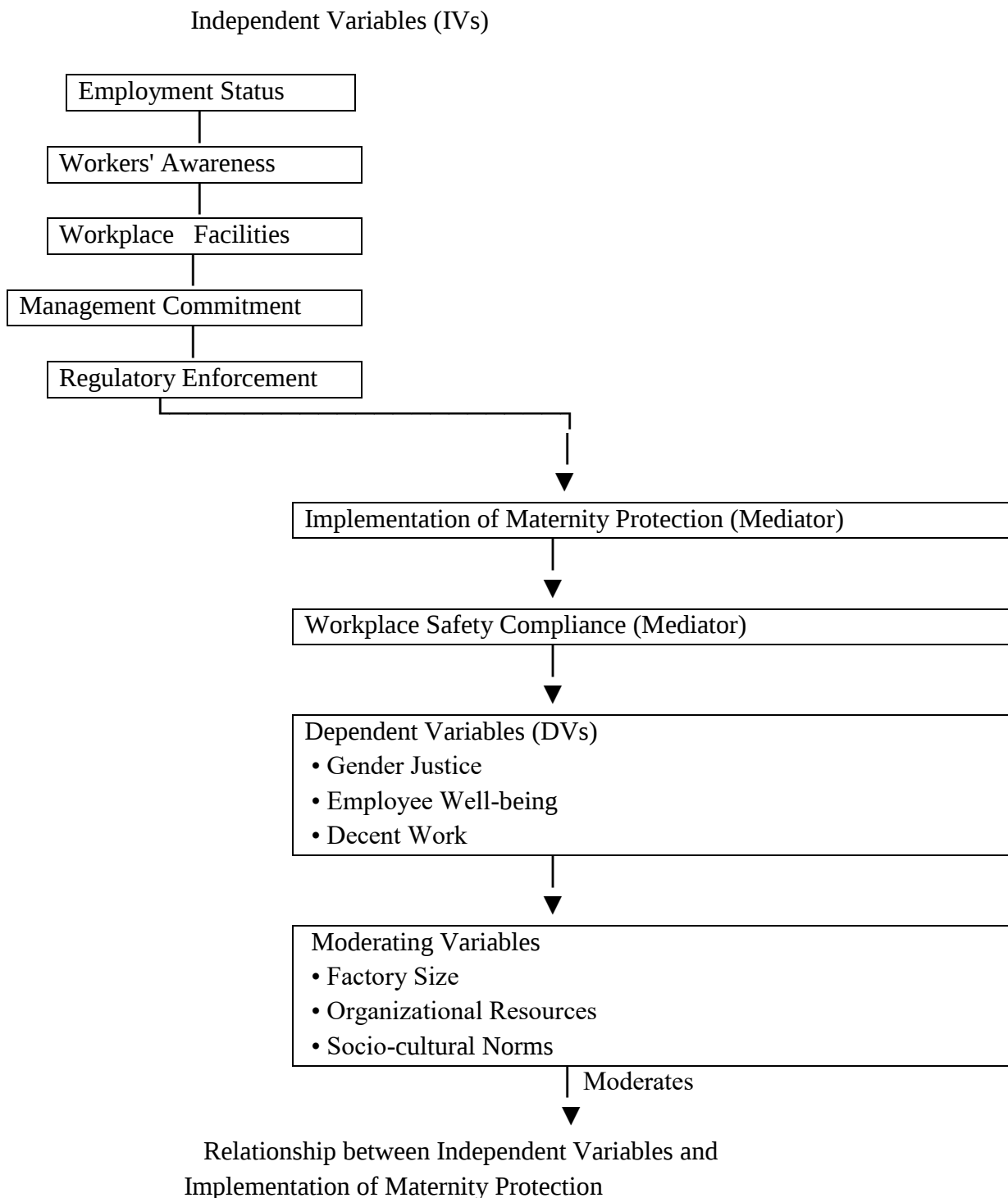
3.2 Conceptual Framework

Based on the reviewed literature and theoretical framework, this study proposes that the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety is influenced by several organizational and institutional factors.

The independent variables are **employment status**, **workers' awareness of labour rights**, **workplace facilities**, **management commitment**, and **regulatory enforcement**. These factors affect the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety, which in turn promote **gender justice**, **employee well-being**, and **decent work**.

The model also considers **factory size**, **organizational resources**, and **socio-cultural norms** as moderating factors that may strengthen or weaken compliance with labour legislation.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework



Source: Developed by the authors based on the literature on maternity protection, workplace safety, gender justice, and decent work.

3.3 Development of Research Hypotheses Employment Status and Maternity Protection

Employment status is a key determinant of labour rights implementation. Permanent employees generally receive greater legal protection than temporary or contractual workers, who are often excluded from maternity leave, medical benefits, and job protection (Rahman et al., 2021).

H1: Employment status has a significant positive influence on women's access to maternity protection.

Workers' Awareness and Workplace Safety

Awareness of labour rights encourages women to claim maternity benefits, report violations, and seek institutional support. The ILO (2020) notes that labour rights education improves compliance by increasing transparency and employee participation.

H2: Workers' awareness of labour rights positively influences the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety.

Workplace Facilities and Occupational Safety

Adequate facilities, including hygienic sanitation, ergonomic workstations, rest areas, drinking water, breastfeeding rooms, childcare services, and first-aid support, improve maternal health and workplace safety. Better workplace infrastructure also enhances employee satisfaction and organizational commitment.

H3: Workplace facilities positively influence the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety.

Management Commitment

Management commitment is a major determinant of labour law compliance. Organizations that prioritize employee welfare and invest in HR policies and occupational safety programmes generally achieve better implementation (Guest, 2017).

H4: Management commitment positively influences the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety.

Regulatory Enforcement

Government inspections, legal sanctions, and regulatory monitoring encourage compliance with labour legislation, while weak enforcement increases the risk of violations.

H5: Regulatory enforcement positively influences the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a **mixed-methods research design**, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine maternity protection and workplace safety in Bangladesh's hosiery industry. The quantitative component analyzed relationships among organizational variables using statistical techniques, while the qualitative component explored implementation challenges through stakeholder interviews. This approach enhanced the credibility, validity, and robustness of the findings through methodological triangulation.

4.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in selected hosiery factories in **Pabna District, Bangladesh**. Pabna is a major hosiery manufacturing hub with numerous small and medium-sized enterprises producing knitwear, socks, sweaters, undergarments, and other textile products. The district was selected due to its high concentration of women workers engaged in labour-intensive manufacturing.

4.3 Target Population

The target population consisted of:

- Women workers employed in registered hosiery factories;
- Factory managers responsible for production and human resource management;
- Officials from the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE);
- Trade union representatives actively involved in labour welfare.

4.4 Sample Size Determination

The sample size was determined using **Yamane's (1967)** formula for finite populations.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} n = 300$$

Where:

n = sample size (what you want to find)

N = population size

e = margin of error (in decimal form, e.g., 5% → 0.05)

Given:

N=1200

e=0.05 (which is 5%)

Confidence level = 95% (this corresponds to e=0.05e = 0.05e=0.05)

If your total population is 1,200 people, and you want a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, then you only need to sample 300 people to get statistically reliable results.

Hence, 300 respondents were targeted, and 150 valid responses were received (50% response rate).

4.5 Sampling Technique

A combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques was used.

Women workers were selected through **stratified random sampling** based on employment status, production department, and factory size.

Managers were chosen through **purposive sampling** from production, administration, and human resource departments.

Additionally, **five experienced DIFE labour inspectors** and **five trade union representatives** involved in labour rights advocacy were selected purposively.

4.6 Data Collection

Primary Data	Secondary Data
Primary information was collected using: • Structured questionnaires • Face-to-face interviews • Direct workplace observation	Secondary information was obtained from: • Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) • Bangladesh Labour Rules (2015) • ILO publications • BBS reports • DIFE reports • Government publications • Peer-reviewed journal articles • Books • Research reports

4.7 Measurement of Variables

Variable	Measurement
Employment Status	Permanent / Contractual
Workers' Awareness	Five-point Likert Scale
Workplace Facilities	Five-point Likert Scale
Management Commitment	Five-point Likert Scale
Regulatory Enforcement	Five-point Likert Scale
Maternity Protection	Composite Index
Workplace Safety	Composite Index
Gender Justice	Composite Index

4.8 Reliability and Validity

Internal consistency was evaluated using **Cronbach's Alpha**, with values greater than **0.70** considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2022). Content validity was established through expert review involving academics and labour law specialists. Construct validity was assessed using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), while a pilot survey was conducted prior to the main field survey to refine the questionnaire.

4.9 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using **IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26**.

The following statistical techniques were employed:

- Descriptive Statistics
- Frequency Distribution
- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- Cronbach's Alpha
- Pearson Correlation
- Multiple Regression Analysis
- Independent Sample *t*-test
- Chi-square Test

Qualitative interview data were analysed using **thematic analysis**, enabling identification of recurring themes regarding implementation challenges, organizational practices, and policy recommendations.

Statistical significance was evaluated at the **5% significance level ($p < 0.05$)**.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents were informed about the study's purpose before data collection. Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous, the information would be used only for academic purposes, and they could withdraw at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was obtained before administering questionnaires and conducting interviews.

5. Results

This chapter presents the findings obtained from the quantitative survey of **150 women workers** employed in selected hosiery factories in Pabna District and qualitative interviews with factory managers, officials of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), and trade union representatives. Quantitative data were analysed using **IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26**, while qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis. The findings are organized according to the research objectives and hypotheses.

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Understanding the demographic characteristics of respondents is essential for interpreting labour rights implementation within the hosiery industry.

Table 5.1: Demographic Characteristics of Women Workers (N = 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25 Years	38	25.3
	26–35 Years	67	44.7
	36–45 Years	33	22.0
	Above 45 Years	12	8.0
Education	Primary	42	28.0
	Secondary	71	47.3
	Higher Secondary	29	19.3
	Graduate	8	5.4
Marital Status	Married	104	69.3
	Unmarried	36	24.0
	Others	10	6.7
Employment Status	Permanent	91	60.7
	Contractual	59	39.3
Work Experience	Less than 3 Years	34	22.7
	3–5 Years	63	42.0
	More than 5 Years	53	35.3

Source: Field Survey (2026).

The findings indicate that nearly **45%** of respondents belonged to the **26–35 years** age group, reflecting the predominance of young female workers in the hosiery sector. Approximately **69%** were married, highlighting the importance of maternity protection within this workforce. Furthermore, **39.3%** were employed on contractual appointments, raising concerns regarding equal access to statutory maternity benefits.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 5.2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Employment Status	3.82	0.76
Workers' Awareness	3.41	0.82
Workplace Facilities	3.27	0.91
Management Commitment	3.48	0.79
Regulatory Enforcement	3.14	0.88
Maternity Protection	3.31	0.83
Workplace Safety	3.44	0.81

Source: Author's computation based on field survey data (2026) using SPSS Version 26.

The overall mean scores indicate a **moderate level** of implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety. Workplace facilities and regulatory enforcement received comparatively lower scores, suggesting that these areas require greater organizational and governmental attention.

5.3 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha was used to evaluate internal consistency.

Table 5.3: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Workers' Awareness	0.86
Workplace Facilities	0.88
Management Commitment	0.91
Regulatory Enforcement	0.84
Maternity Protection	0.89
Workplace Safety	0.87

Source: Computed by the researcher based on field survey data using SPSS Statistics Version 26 (2026).

All Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of **0.70** (Hair et al., 2022), indicating satisfactory internal consistency and reliability.

5.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis examined relationships among the variables.

Table 5.4: Correlation Matrix

Variables	MP	WS
Employment Status	.48**	.39**
Workers' Awareness	.56**	.49**
Workplace Facilities	.61**	.68**
Management Commitment	.64**	.59**
Regulatory Enforcement	.58**	.55**

Source: Computed by the researcher based on field survey data using Pearson's correlation analysis in SPSS Statistics Version 26 (2026).

Note: $p < 0.01$

All independent variables demonstrate statistically significant positive relationships with maternity protection and workplace safety. The strongest relationship exists between **workplace facilities and workplace safety** ($r = .68$), followed by **management commitment and maternity protection** ($r = .64$).

5.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis assessed the influence of independent variables on maternity protection.

Table 5.5: Regression Results

Predictor	Beta	t	p-value
Employment Status	.18	2.74	.007
Workers' Awareness	.24	3.56	.001
Workplace Facilities	.29	4.12	.000
Management Commitment	.31	4.63	.000
Regulatory Enforcement	.22	3.37	.001

Model Summary:

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p
0.78	0.61	0.59	45.62	< 0.001

Source: Computed by the researcher from survey data collected from 150 female workers in the Pabna hosiery industry using multiple linear regression analysis in SPSS Statistics Version 26 (2026). The regression model explains approximately **61%** of the variation in maternity protection implementation. Management commitment emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.31$), followed by workplace facilities ($\beta = 0.29$), workers' awareness ($\beta = 0.24$), regulatory enforcement ($\beta = 0.22$), and employment status ($\beta = 0.18$). All predictors were statistically significant.

5.6 Hypotheses Testing

Table 5.6: Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5
Result	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported	Supported

The findings indicate that all proposed hypotheses are supported.

5.8 Qualitative Findings

Semi-structured interviews identified five major themes.

Theme 1: Limited Awareness of Labour Rights

Many workers had only basic knowledge of maternity leave and workplace safety, while managers acknowledged limited awareness programmes.

Theme2: Financial Constraints

Owners of smaller factories reported that providing maternity benefits creates financial and operational challenges, particularly when replacement workers are needed.

Theme3: Weak Institutional Monitoring

Participants noted that labour inspections are infrequent and suggested that stronger enforcement would improve compliance.

Theme4: Workplace Infrastructure

Respondents highlighted inadequate rest areas, childcare facilities, breastfeeding rooms, and medical services, which particularly affect pregnant workers.

Theme5: Management Commitment

Factories with dedicated HR departments generally showed better implementation of maternity benefits, safer workplaces, and higher employee satisfaction.

6. Discussion

The findings indicate that maternity protection in Bangladesh's hosiery industry is **moderately implemented**, with compliance varying across factories despite comprehensive labour legislation.

Employment status significantly influenced maternity protection, as permanent employees received greater legal protection than contractual workers, supporting the findings of Rahman et al. (2021). Workers' awareness also had a positive effect, with informed employees more likely to claim benefits and report labour law violations, consistent with the ILO (2020).

The strongest predictors were **workplace facilities** and **management commitment**. Factories providing adequate sanitation, breastfeeding facilities, medical support, and effective HR practices demonstrated better implementation, supporting Strategic Human Resource Management Theory (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Regulatory enforcement also promoted compliance, although interview participants reported insufficient labour inspections, particularly in SMEs.

Qualitative findings identified financial constraints, limited institutional capacity, production pressures, and socio-cultural attitudes as major barriers. Overall, the results suggest that stronger awareness programmes, improved workplace facilities, enhanced labour inspections, and gender-

sensitive HR practices are essential for effective implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of maternity protection and workplace safety for women workers in selected hosiery factories in **Pabna District, Bangladesh**. Using a **mixed-methods** approach, it combined survey data from **150 women workers** with qualitative evidence from factory managers, labour inspectors, and trade union representatives to assess the implementation of the **Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (as amended)**.

The findings show that although legal provisions for paid maternity leave, employment protection, workplace safety, and welfare facilities exist, implementation remains inconsistent. Quantitative results indicate that **employment status, workers' awareness, workplace facilities, management commitment, and regulatory enforcement** significantly influence implementation, with **management commitment** and **workplace facilities** emerging as the strongest predictors.

Qualitative findings identified **financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, weak institutional monitoring, limited awareness, and production-oriented management** as major barriers. These results suggest that legal provisions alone are insufficient without stronger organizational commitment, effective enforcement, and greater awareness.

Overall, the study concludes that improving maternity protection requires coordinated efforts from government agencies, employers, labour inspectors, trade unions, and civil society. Strengthening compliance will protect women's rights, improve organizational performance, and support sustainable industrial development.

8. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to the literature. First, it extends **Institutional Theory** by showing how labour laws and regulatory inspections influence compliance with maternity protection in Bangladesh's hosiery industry. Second, it supports **Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)** by demonstrating that management commitment and employee welfare improve labour law implementation and workplace safety. Third, it advances labour rights research by showing that effective maternity protection depends on organizational culture, workers' awareness, and institutional capacity, not only legal provisions. Fourth, it provides new evidence from Bangladesh's under-researched hosiery industry rather than the widely studied RMG sector. Finally, the **mixed-methods** approach offers a more comprehensive understanding by combining quantitative findings with the experiences of key stakeholders.

9. Practical Implications

The findings have several practical implications for employers and factory management. Factory owners should view maternity protection as an investment that enhances employee satisfaction, commitment, and productivity. HR departments should develop clear maternity policies and conduct regular labour rights awareness programmes. Factories should improve workplace facilities by providing hygienic sanitation, breastfeeding rooms, medical support, safe drinking water, and rest areas. Equal maternity benefits should be ensured for both permanent and contractual workers, while regular occupational safety training should be provided. These measures can improve employee well-being, reduce labour turnover, strengthen organizational reputation, and enhance compliance with labour laws.

10. Policy Implications

The findings have important implications for policymakers and regulatory authorities. The **Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE)** should strengthen labour inspections by increasing inspection frequency and expanding trained personnel. The Government of Bangladesh should enforce the **Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006** more effectively through stricter penalties for non-compliance. National awareness campaigns should improve women's knowledge of maternity rights and workplace safety, while financial incentives may encourage SMEs to invest in maternity protection and occupational safety. Collaboration among government agencies, employers, trade unions, the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, and development partners, supported

by digital monitoring systems, can further improve compliance. These measures will contribute to achieving **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** and **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)**.

11. Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. It was conducted only in selected hosiery factories in **Pabna District**, limiting the generalizability of the findings. The quantitative analysis relied on self-reported data, which may involve response bias. As a **cross-sectional** study, it cannot establish causal relationships. In addition, the research focused on registered factories and excluded informal or home-based production units. Finally, time and resource constraints limited the sample size and geographic coverage.

12. Future Research Directions

Future research should examine maternity protection across different manufacturing sectors, including garments, textiles, leather, pharmaceuticals, and food processing. Studies should also explore informal and home-based industries, adopt longitudinal research designs, and investigate the roles of organizational culture, leadership, and corporate social responsibility. In addition, applying **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** and conducting cross-country comparisons within South Asia would provide deeper insights into labour rights implementation and identify regional best practices.

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Appendix A

Structured Questionnaire (5-Point Likert Scale)

Section A: Demographic Information

1. Age
2. Education
3. Marital Status
4. Employment Status
5. Length of Service

Section B: Employment Status

- My employment status provides adequate job security.
- I receive equal employment benefits regardless of employment category.

Section C: Workers' Awareness

- I understand my maternity rights.
- I know the maternity leave provisions under the Bangladesh Labour Act.
- I know how to report labour rights violations.

Section D: Workplace Facilities

- The factory provides clean sanitation facilities.
- Safe drinking water is always available.
- Adequate rest facilities are provided.
- Medical support is available.
- The workplace environment is safe for pregnant workers.

Section E: Management Commitment

- Management supports pregnant workers.
- HR policies are implemented fairly.
- Supervisors encourage labour law compliance.

Section F: Regulatory Enforcement

- Labour inspectors regularly visit the factory.
- Labour laws are effectively enforced.
- Factory management responds to inspection recommendations.

Section G: Maternity Protection and Workplace Safety

- Paid maternity leave is provided.
- Employment is protected during pregnancy.
- Breastfeeding breaks are allowed.
- Safety equipment is provided.
- Occupational safety measures are effectively implemented.

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

For Factory Managers

1. How is maternity leave implemented in your factory?
2. What challenges do you face in complying with labour laws?
3. What workplace facilities are available for pregnant workers?
4. How does management ensure occupational safety?
5. What improvements would enhance compliance?

For DIFE Officials

1. How frequently are hosiery factories inspected?
2. What are the most common labour law violations?
3. What barriers limit effective enforcement?
4. What policy reforms are required?
5. How can compliance be strengthened?

For Trade Union Representatives

1. What maternity-related complaints are most common?
2. How aware are workers of their legal rights?
3. What challenges do women workers face?
4. How effective are grievance mechanisms?
5. What recommendations would improve labour rights implementation?