Status of Working Women in Bangladesh: A Socioeconomic Study

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Abstract

Women’s work plays an important role in achieving strong socioeconomic status for any country. The status of women is completely different than of men, especially in Bangladesh. As nearly half of the population is women, their position reflects the society’s condition and status. Among the total labor force, 35.98% (BBS, 2013) are women and their contribution to society and economy is growing. Despite their remarkable contribution, women are still facing discriminatory behavior from both the social and the economic point of view. Their socioeconomic status is not correctly specified yet. This study tries to find out whether there is any significant relationship between socioeconomic status (dependent variable) and different socioeconomic factors (independent variables). Main purpose of this research is to find out the status of women who are working outside by analyzing socioeconomic factors such as education, employment, health, transportation, sociocultural status, the right to take decision, and overall environment. Total respondents are 100 working women who have been randomly selected from different working groups. For conducting the study, a survey questionnaire was administered on the respondents. Descriptive statistical analysis, a simple Pearson Correlation, and multiple linear regression models have been used to analyze the collected data. Results of the descriptive analysis show that almost half of the respondents responded against good socioeconomic status of women in Bangladesh. About one-third participants do not want to talk about their right to take any personal, social, or economic decision which may be because they are not comfortable to reveal the true scenario. Analysis shows that the correlation between socioeconomic status and factors such as education (0.297**), sociocultural status (0.205*), environment (0.344**), and right to take decision (0.282**) are statistically significant. The ANOVA table indicates that the model is statistically significant at P = 0.000 which ensures significant impacts of all variables on socioeconomic status. This study conveys the message that the socioeconomic status of working women in Bangladesh is not so good. Factors that influence the status are interrelated, and they have a strong impact on women’s social and economic development. Among women labor force, 92.3% (Labor Force Survey, 2013) are employed and they cannot be neglected. This research will help the family, society, government, and policymakers to make and take necessary steps to improve the status of women which will have positive impact on the whole society and the economy.

Keywords: Working Women; Socioeconomic Factors; Status; Socioeconomy

1. Introduction

In Bangladesh, women play an important role in each and every family. Their economic contributions are large but not granted substantially. Women’s employment status is changing day by day which is related to different socioeconomic factors.

The role and status of women are important indices to national development (Nujhat, 2012. p. 2). Status of women can be changed through their active participation in economic activities. Women have started to come out of the house and have started to do formal challenging jobs. Teaching profession is
very popular among women in Bangladesh. Many formal and informal teachers are there in the society. Private tuition is a form of informal teaching. It may be difficult to identify the actual number of informal female teachers as they are students of colleges, universities, homemakers, and teachers of different institutions. However, it is not hard to find out the number of formal teachers. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information & Statistics 2010 (BANBEIS, 2010), the total number of female college teachers was 18575; and the total number of female teachers in private universities was 4001 in 2014 as reported by the Bangladesh University Grants Commission (UGC Annual Report, 2014).

Women are now actively doing jobs in different financial institutions such as banks, security exchanges, and insurances as well as in corporate offices. According to the Labor Force Survey 2013 of BBS, in 2013, only 0.5% of total employed women were in financial and insurance sectors. This amount is very little, but there is a trend to increase the rate. Overall, number of female worker in service sector was 14 lakh and 60 thousand.

After globalization, women are bagging more and more job opportunities (Merinews, 2009). At the same time, they are facing numerous challenges, but their powerful, fearless, and dedicated act toward these opportunities help them to overcome the entire hurdles for their success (Azim and Sultana, 2010).

In Bangladeshi families, income earning is usually the responsibility of males, while the remaining family members - usually women and children - are economically dependent (Efroymson et al., 2007. p. 3). Although women are now widely involved in paying jobs and their earnings are increasing, they are still considered weak and useless.

The discrimination between the status of men and women in Bangladesh is widely observed. Wage differential is one of the reasons behind this inequality. Fischlová (2005) stated the same case for Czech Republic that the unequal status of women in the labor market is linked to lower wages, less involvement in management and decision-making, lower prestige and a greater risk to their jobs, and higher levels of unemployment.

1.1. Objectives of the study

The study aims to explore the current socioeconomic condition of working women in Bangladesh and to find out whether there is any relationship between the social and economic factors and their working status. Hence, the specific objectives of the study are:

• To identify the socioeconomic status of working women as a whole
• To specify the relationship between different factors (education, employment, health, transportation, right to take decision, socioculture, and environment) and the socioeconomic status of working women.

2. Review of Related Literature

There are no direct papers written on the status of women service holders, especially those who are engaged in jobs such as teaching, banking, and corporate sectors. Most of the articles are written on women’s employment, their empowerment, and violence against them, their health conditions, women entrepreneurs, garment workers, and many more. As Rahman and Islam (2013) presented that garment industry is the only major employer of women in the manufacturing sector.

Influences of different socioeconomic factors such as education, employment, health, and right to take decision on working women play a great role to find out their socioeconomic status. In Bangladesh, women are mainly involved in informal jobs and household chores which are essential for an economy and society to grow. In this context, Ali (2013) mentioned that the earning capacity of women helps to make societies and economies healthier and sustainable.

Historically, women have been discriminated against men in the male-dominated society (Sivanesan, 2013. p. 98). Although they play an important role in their families, they have been always deprived from their rights in every spheres of life. They have very limited right to take household and other decisions. Ullah and Parvin (2015) proved that in urban areas most women cannot be the decision-makers for family matters. They even cannot take decisions on choosing jobs or spending their income.
According to BBS report on Violence against Women survey 2011, published in 2013, only 15% women get the freedom to earn willingly, and only 24% of those who can earn have control on their income.

Inadequate amount of literature is available on the importance of socioeconomic status of working women. Although many researches have been done on women entrepreneurs throughout the world, inadequate amount of literature is available on the importance of socioeconomic status of working women. As Malik (2009) presented in his paper that women entrepreneurs are seen in subordinate roles; with low levels of education and technical skills; low exposure to business; lacking role models; lacking peer support and business.

Like most of the developing countries in Bangladesh, there is a strong inequality between male and female position. Women do not get equal right to take educational, health-related, and other social decisions as men. Goode (1971) argued that the person who does not belong to the same level of income, educational achievement, and society, then there is an inequality between the status of men and women. Further, Islam (2013) identified that the situation of Bangladeshi women illustrates the problem of turning legal principles into social, political, and economic practice.

Women’s participation in labor force is a widely accepted factor for their sound socioeconomic status (Assignment Point, 2015). Female employment in formal sector is very low for both public and private sector. Few women are in top position of different institutions though government sectors fail to attract and encourage women to take the decision-making responsibility. Most of the time women’s participation is affected by limited resources, assets, and opportunities, especially compared to men (UNDP, 2016).

As identified in the literature review, it is quite apparent that very little research has been conducted in this area. The status of women is closely connected with their economic status, which in turn, depends on rights, roles, and opportunities for the participation in economic activities. The economic status of women is now accepted as an indicator of a society’s stage of development (Shodhganga, 2016).

3. Methodology

The present study aims to determine the socioeconomic status of working women in Bangladesh. The reason for including this sector is the trend of fast-growing working women.

This research uses both the quantitative and qualitative method. Data have been collected from both the primary and secondary sources. Subjects for the study were one hundred (100) working women of education, banking, and corporate job sectors of Dhaka, Bangladesh. We did not include garments sector workers and entrepreneurs as many works have been done on women of these sectors, whereas only a few researches have been done on the selected sectors.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. Part “A” consists of four items seeking demographic data such as age, education level, marital status, and experience. Section B consists of items which sought to collect information about education, employment, health, transportation, right to take decision, socioculture, and environment. The second section that is “B” is ranged from 5-1 point Likert scale in the following pattern. The questionnaire asked participants to rank the importance of seven factors that influence socioeconomic status: 5 = Strongly agree … 1 = Strongly disagree.

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed among different working women. No monetary incentives were given to participants as it was a participatory study. The obtained data are analyzed through Statistical Package for the Social Science version 20. The statistical methods are involved those of descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson correlation) for the predictors of status of working women. Multiple regressions are applied for the purpose of testing hypothesis and finding the answers of the study questions. The level of significance in the present study is 1% and 5% for testing the null hypothesis.

Secondary data were collected from books, journals, articles, blog write-up, and reports of different national and international organizations, statistical review written in home, and abroad.

3.1. Hypothesis

Hypotheses developed for this study are:

Null hypothesis ($H_0$): There are no significant association among working women’s socioeconomic status and seven socioeconomic factors.
Alternative hypothesis (H$_1$): There are significant association among working women’s socioeconomic status and seven socioeconomic factors.

### 3.2. Analysis and findings

In Bangladesh, religious beliefs and norms have strong influences on society. Women remained inferior to male in almost all phases of their lives. They often do not have easy access to credit and other opportunities and are still doing relatively low risk, low payment jobs.

Participation of women in labor force is needed to change the scenario of the economy of Bangladesh. Although the number of women labor force is less than half of that of the men, the rate of increase in labor force of women is more than that of men. According to Labor Force Survey (2013) of BBS, which is shown in Table 1, the labor force participation rate for women has increased from 26.1% in 2002–2003 to 33.5% in 2013, whereas male labor force participation rate has decreased to 81.7% in 2013 from 87.4% in 2002–2003. Ali (2013) attempted to find out the reasons behind this increase in women labor force participation rate which resulted as the rate of increase in women education, augmentation of the garment industry, awareness of people, advancement of media, and the role of government and various NGOs.

### 3.3. Descriptive statistics

Educational attainment of women is generally considered a useful index of socioeconomic status as well as of the level of overall social sophistication (Assignment Point, 2015). Education is the key factor to have a better social and economic status. It makes people economically skilled which in turn increase the capacity to earn more. Education is proportionally related to working status, especially in case of higher studies. In teaching, banking, and corporate job sectors, education has become inevitable. Jobs in informal sectors mostly do not need higher education. Almost all the respondents of our study give their positive opinion about education. Families and relatives helped them to achieve their education. Hossain and Tisdell (2003) spotted the actual situation of employment status of women. He came across that, customarily, the productive activities of women in Bangladesh have still remained locked-up mostly to the non-monetized household sector and, to some extent, selected agricultural activities. From the last three decades, the employment situation of women is gradually changing. Now education has become the pre-requisite to get a good job. The rate of increasing female educational achievements makes more women to join actively in different job sectors. Nearly 65% respondents of the study agreed that they get full support to do the job from their families. Hence, the scenario is improving along with the status of women.

Health is an important indicator that influences the status of working women. In the context of social background of Bangladesh, women are not comfy to share their actual health condition. In our survey, most of the respondents were neutral about their health. Maybe they are not aware enough to identify their own health problems and hence cannot resolve the problems.

Transportation is an important factor for choosing a job, but for women of Bangladesh, its impact is relatively low. Women are not usually interested to do job very far away from their residences. In our study, this factor moderately affects women’s status.

Women’s right to take decision is an important indicator of their status. It can be divided into different parts as right to take household decisions, freedom to movement, freedom to wear cloths, and freedom to choose work and use their earnings. Bangladeshi women face restrictions to take any kind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>81.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Labor Force Survey, 2013. BBS
of decisions. According to Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2007 of NIPORT (2009) among ever-married women, only 47.8% said that they can go outside alone and 48.3% can go to health-care center alone. According to BDHS 2014 of NIPORT (2016), 32% of currently married employed women make decisions by themselves on how to use their own earnings. Women’s decision-making power about choosing work increases with their level of education and economic condition of household.

Of the entire respondents, 48% agreed on their freedom to movements and freedom to choose and wear clothes. However, 30% were neutral meaning; they were not easy to talk about this matter. As most of the female workers belong to middle-class families, commenting about their freedom, especially in case of taking family decisions may make them embarrassed.

Women’s bodily purity or “ chastity,” as well as their distinctive ways of behavior and dressing, that symbolize the group’s cultural identity and its boundaries, are always kept under keen observation and monitored by the state or nation (Ali, 2012. p. 4). In Bangladesh, sociocultural norms are bound to be maintained by all its members, especially women. As women generally do not tend to cross their boundaries, they can wear clothes and go to any social and cultural programs according to their own choice. More than half of our respondents reacted positively about sociocultural condition.

Environment is a vital factor for measuring the status of a person. In this study, most of the respondents agreed that the working environment, family, or living environment is good. Environment for a woman in our country is superior. This factor highly influences the status of working women.

Socioeconomic condition of a person depends on their education, employment status, health condition, overall environment of the living society, their mobility to movement and taking decisions, social and cultural ethics, and many other factors. Each of the respondents was asked whether they are happy with their status. Nearly 50% women were not pleased with their socioeconomic status. Only 5% women strongly agreed about their good socioeconomic status.

3.4. Correlation matrix analysis

Correlation measures the degree of the linear relationship between two variables. In this paper, Table 2 shows the correlation coefficient among socioeconomic status and influencing factors (education, employment, and health, and transportation, right to take decision, socioculture, and environment).

The factors such as education, right to take decision, socioculture, and environment are positively correlated with socioeconomic status of working women. However, health and transportation are negatively correlated because in the context of Bangladesh, these two factors have little impact for measuring the status of women working in formal sectors.

3.5. Multiple regression analysis

From a statistical point of view, the estimated regression line moderately fits the data. Table 3 shows that the socioeconomic factors entered into the regression model have a combined correlation of 0.532 with the dependent variable. In this model, the value of the coefficient of determination $R^2$ is 0.284, means only about 29% of the variation in the status of the women employee is explained by the predictors.

As in the ANOVA Table 4, the F value is 5.201 indicates that the regression model is statistically significant at $P = 0.000$. Significance implies that the impact of all explanatory variables on dependent variable is viable. Hence, we can say that there is a significant relationship among predictors and dependent variable which support our alternative hypothesis. Hence, it reveals that the null hypothesis is rejected.

Resulted regression equation is as follows:

$$
\text{Status} = -1.758 + 0.526X_1 - 0.219X_2 + 0.032X_3 - 0.134X_4 - 0.335X_5 - 0.010X_6 + 0.519X_7
$$

Std. error = (0.168) (0.153) (0.152) (0.103) (0.121) (0.130) (0.152)

$R^2 = 0.284$  F value = 5.201  DW = 1.553

The equation shows that employment ($X_1$), transportation ($X_4$), and socioculture ($X_6$) do not have positive impact on women employee status indicating that the variables are inversely related to status of working women which is quite unrealistic. We get the result based on the given data. Many women were neutral about giving their opinions on these factors. The regression coefficient of education is
Table 2: Correlation among factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Socioeconomic status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>transportation</th>
<th>Right to take Decision</th>
<th>Socioculture</th>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.297** (0.003)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>0.051 (0.614)</td>
<td>0.333**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>−0.074 (0.467)</td>
<td>−0.058</td>
<td>−0.005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>−0.126 (0.213)</td>
<td>−0.040</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to take decision</td>
<td>0.282** (0.005)</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.251*</td>
<td>−0.050</td>
<td>0.251*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioculture</td>
<td>0.205* (0.040)</td>
<td>0.179</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>−0.098</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>0.446**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>0.344** (0.000)</td>
<td>0.297</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>−0.074</td>
<td>−0.126</td>
<td>0.282**</td>
<td>0.205*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). (…) parenthesis indicates the P value
0.526 which has the highest impact on working women’s status. On the other hand, the coefficient of socioculture has the lowest impact. The coefficient of right to take decision is 0.335 indicating that a 1% increase in right to take decision raises the socioeconomic status of working women by 33.5% holding all other variables constant. Figures 1 and 2 show the responses toward right to take decision and good socioeconomic status.

### Table 3: Model Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Adjusted R²</th>
<th>Standard error of the estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.532a</td>
<td>0.284</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>0.89174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Predictors: (Constant), Education, employment, health, transportation, right to take decision, socioculture, environment*

### Table 4: ANOVAa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>28.952</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.136</td>
<td>5.201</td>
<td>0.000b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>73.158</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>0.795</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>102.110</td>
<td>99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dependent variable: Socioeconomic status. *Predictors: (Constant), education, employment, health, transportation, right to take decision, socioculture, environment*

**Figure 1:** Responses toward right to take decisions

**Figure 2:** Responses toward good socioeconomic status
4. Conclusion and Recommendation

In Bangladesh, there have been continuous progresses of socioeconomic status of women, but it is quite low. Most of these progresses are achieved because of increasing awareness among women about their economic, social, and political positions. A research work done by Pathways (2012) shows that in Bangladesh women’s husbands and relatives can be an enabling factor in their political careers.

According to the Election Commission Report (2013), actual number of women candidates in the 2008 parliament election was 34 out of which 19 were elected. For about 26 years, two women by turn are becoming the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. Further many other women politicians are in the top positions of Government like the Speaker of Parliament, opposition leader, ministers of different important sectors, leader of one of the most influential political party, BNP, of Bangladesh, elected parliament members.

Although so many political achievements are gained on gender discrimination in Bangladesh, gender equality is not a very common-event as regards with women folks in the country because of uncongenial religious and sociocultural environments. The Global Gender Gap Index (2014) prepared by the World Economic Forum ranks Bangladesh 68 out of 142 countries in terms of gender equality.

Despite the fact that women’s equal right is secured in article 10 of the Constitution which provides that steps should be taken to ensure the participation of women in all spheres of national life, women continue to be disadvantaged, deprived, neglected, and face discrimination. Bangladeshi women continue to face numerous challenges (Khatiwada, 2014). A common perception about women in India is that their status has always been low compared with women in advanced countries (Razvi et al. 2004. p. 170). To some extent, this is applicable to the context of Bangladesh as well.

Moreover, there are many obstacles that women face in the workplace than men do. Obstacles are sexual harassment; unjust hiring, uneven payment, and hindering career advancement. Such obstacles make it difficult for women to move forward in their workplace or receive fair payment for their work. The devaluation of women labor in labor market also hinders women right (Das, 2014).

The Government of Bangladesh and many non-government organizations are trying to pace in the right course, but still more needs to be done. Even different international organizations are helping to make the society and economy better by overcoming the inequi\table situations. As social and economic development cannot be achieved without the development of half of the population “women,” the society should change their mental attitude against them, especially working women and ensure their social and economic right. We hope the people of Bangladesh will respect women and help to ensure their social, economic, and political status. Further government policies should be made to strengthen the power inside women by making them self-sufficient. Moreover, women should respect and have belief in them. They can change their status if they have the courage and get enough support. The words of Safeen (2008) is appropriate in this case as she mentioned in her blog that the disciplined life and vision for success is a key factor in overcoming the barriers in the road of achievements of women. Women need much attention from all for the development of Bangladesh. It is nearly impossible to attain economic growth and development without their safe and secured position in the economy. Socioeconomic development of women can empower women as well as raise the status of Bangladesh economy.

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NIPORT. (2016), Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2014. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.


