



Women Empowerment or Gender Equality: Which One Should Come First for Augmenting Satisfaction and Performance of Female Employees: A study on the Ready-made Garment Sector of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

In this era of globalization, numerous court rulings and laws have legitimized women empowerment and their right to be treated equally both at the society and at the workplace. Yet certain discriminatory behaviors remind females that they are not truly equal at the workplace. Ready-made Garments (RMG) sector, especially of a developing and a male dominated country like Bangladesh, is also not an exception to that. Although women empowerment and gender equality are interrelated concepts; this paper tried to find out among these two concepts which one should be emphasized to enhance the job-satisfaction and performance of the female employees' in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Data were gathered following a quantitative survey by a structured questionnaire conducted among a diverse group of female employees (N = 350) working in 30 different ready-made garment factories of Bangladesh following convenience random sampling method. For analysis purpose, several statistical techniques have been applied using SPSS software. Based on the analysis it was found that gender inequality impedes women empowerment. This study, therefore, recommends that gender equality should be emphasized over women empowerment to augment the job satisfaction and performance of the female employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

Keywords: Employee Performance, Gender Equality, Job Satisfaction, Ready-Made Garment (RMG), Sector Women Empowerment.

JEL Codes: C15, G14, O15.

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1. Introduction

Since the independence of Bangladesh, this country has been experiencing a dramatic change in the economic contributions made by its female workforce. The industrialization of Bangladesh has been highly dependent upon women (Wright, 2000). The issues like women empowerment and gender equality have also become significant as result of this pattern of change (Wright, 2000). Recently

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Bangladesh has gained tremendous success by becoming one of the largest ready-made garments exporting countries in the world. The RMG industry, employer of 40 million workers, mostly rural women, contributed 83.49% to Bangladesh's total exports of \$36.66 billion to date (Hossain, 2018).

Women of the garment sector of Bangladesh mostly come from the poorer class of the rural areas (Jamaly and Wickramanayake, 1996). They actually join the garment sector because of various factors which may push or pull individuals toward the RMG sector (Absar, 2001). Poverty eradication and sustainable improvement in the livelihood of this community can be achieved through women empowerment and gender equality. Women empowerment is a multidimensional bottom-up process of transforming gender power relations, giving power and authority to women through the societal rules and regulations to legitimize their voice in the society, developing awareness of women's subordination and building their capacity to challenge it through individuals or groups (Baden and Reeves, 2000; Dejene, 2003; Ogato, 2013; Abdin, 2008; Muni, 2006; Mosedale, 2005). If women can work together as a group; then this collective action will enable them to exert power to gain something more than usual (Mosedale, 2005). When it comes to gender equality, it refers to equal opportunities and access of both men and women in all spheres of life including social goods, services and resources. To enhance job satisfaction and performance of the female workers; women empowerment and gender equality have widely been recognized as essential contributors.

The present scenario of Bangladesh may superficially portray the social and economic empowerment of the female garment workers; as these Bangladeshi female garment workers raised their voices against the male dominated tradition, culture and religious norms by taking decisions to join the garment sector. But gender inequality is still present in society and at the work place. Within the family these women sometimes face violence by their husbands, as their husbands control their incomes; at their work place Moreover, they are exploited and discriminated by getting low wages compared to their male counterparts and by suffering from physical and sexual harassment. Consequently, the social and economic empowerment of female garment workers fall short to achieve any fruitful outcome. The entire situation either directly or indirectly influencing the job satisfaction and performance of the female workers of the garment sector of Bangladesh.

The female workers occupy a majority portion of the total workforce in the ready-made garments sector of Bangladesh. Most of the garment factories hire female workers due to their delicate nature: they can't protest, they fear to lose their jobs and sometimes superior male workers like supervisors beat them, as female workers are physically weak. The existing discriminatory cultural practices in the society act as a dominant force behind the unequal gendered division of labor at the work place and unequal presence of women in higher-ranking positions. These kinds of gender inequality are not natural or God given but human created (Lorber, 2010; Sen, 2001; Farmer, 2005 cited in Ho, 2007). These social and economic discriminations between male and female garment workers impeding women's social and economic empowerment.

Most of the research work, especially relevant for ready-made garment (RMG) sector, focused on either the financial outcome or the impact of women empowerment or the existence of gender inequality. But these are not the only or even primary objective of such practices. Few studies have explicitly addressed the influence of Women empowerment and gender equality on improving the job satisfaction and performance of the female workers of the RMG sector. This study, therefore, tried to find out that, though both women empowerment and gender equality are interrelated concepts, but among these two concepts which one should be emphasized to enhance the job satisfaction and consequently the performance of the female employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. The research question is: "Women empowerment or gender equality: which one should be emphasized to augment the job satisfaction and performance of the female employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh?"

This research consists of total four variables. Two are independent variables such as women empowerment and gender equality, and two are dependent variables such as job satisfaction and performance of the female employees. Primary data for this research was collected from 350 female employees working in 30 different ready-made garment factories of Bangladesh by using structured questionnaire and secondary data was collected from different publications of this field.

As link to the next remaining sections; First, a brief background will be provided regarding the influence of women empowerment and gender equality on the job satisfaction and performance of the

female employees focusing on the RMG sector. Next, several hypotheses will be developed. Thereafter, the methods and results of the data analysis will be provided. The article will be concluded by making the choice among women empowerment or gender equality to augment the job satisfaction and performance of the female employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

Various studies by different researches uncovered the role, effectiveness, and impact of women empowerment and gender equality in the RMG sector. The following section demonstrate the main literature that discussed about women empowerment and gender equality and ultimately their influence on enhancing the job satisfaction and performance of female employees in the ready-made garment sector:

Recently the concept of empowerment has become a much talked about issue for the development of disadvantaged women in society (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). Empowerment is associated with the concept of power; implying that the power and responsibility should be delegated from higher levels to lower level employees in the organizational hierarchy, especially to make decisions (Baird and Wang, 2010; Pieterse et al., 2010). Improved productivity, enhanced performance and increased job satisfaction can be achieved through proper empowerment (Nick et al., 1994).

The lower costs, docility and nimbleness of women, in comparison to men, have emerged them as preferred workers by the employers in export production factories around the world (Elson and Pearson, 1981, Lim, 1990 cited in Kibria, 1998; Rhee, 1990; Mahmud, 2003). So women's high level of involvement in the garment industry is not only true for Bangladesh but it's also a global trend (Kibria, 1998).

Women empowerment redefines the situations for creating opportunities for women to have time together along with other women in order to discuss their current situation, finding out the strengths they have, formulating strategies to achieve positive changes and materializing what is possible for them to be and do that was once restricted compared to men (Mosedale, 2005). Violence against women and gender discrimination are the main obstacles on the way of empowering women (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). To enhance women's possibilities to redefine gender roles, it is necessary to transform the structures of society through the reduction of gender inequality. (Abdin, 2008).

When both women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, and are equally valued and favored in terms of different behaviors, aspirations and needs; then gender equality is ensured. Gender equality is as much a political as a technical project and efforts have been directed towards creating "voice" and influence, lobbying and advocacy. Development and implementation of different training programmes, frameworks, planning tools and even making checklists for unpacking organizational development, all have contributed to building technical capacity and pushed forward technical processes for the integration of gender equality concerns in development (Mukhopadhyaya, 2016). Whenever there is gender inequality, it is always women who are more likely to be disadvantaged and marginalized. Forgoing marriage, motherhood, discrimination, insufficient time for friends and family, and for hobbies, difficulties in promotion, long working hours and job conditions and inadequate time for performing household duties etc. are some of the major challenges and barriers that the female employees face while working in the organizations (Okumus et al., 2010). It is important to fulfill the expectations of female employees in order to retain them in the organization. But female employees get fewer opportunities for promotion; even females who are highly qualified, cannot reach administrative rank in the organizations (Li and Leung, 2001; McCuddy et al., 2010). This situation causes dissatisfaction among the female employees regarding their job and compels them to leave their position in the organization (GLiselli et al., 2001). General progress in economic development correlates well with progress in women's empowerment, and spillover effects from gender-economic equality are positive for both the economy and women's empowerment. Only with interventions in the economic dimension do such direct spillover benefits exist (USAID, 2013).

Job satisfaction is the result of the characteristic evaluation of a particular job. If someone feels positive from the appraisal of one's job or job experience that is referred to as job satisfaction (Robbin and Judge, 2008; Nasaradin, 2001). The employees' work itself, salary, promotion opportunities, supervisor, colleagues etc. can be used as the indicators of job satisfaction (Luthans, 2006). Job

Satisfaction is directly related to the worker’s productivity, personal well-being, worker’s interest and liking towards their work as it helps to determine the sense of achievement and success of workers (Miller & Ross, 2002; Spector, 1997).

Employee Performance is the quality and quantity of the work results that are achieved by someone or group by following the authority, responsibility, moral and ethics of the organization in an effort to reach the organizational goals legally (Prawirosentoso, 2000; Mangkunegara, 2005). The performance of an employee is the ultimate expression of whether the employee is satisfied with his/her job or not.

In this research, Women empowerment and Gender Equality have been taken as independent variables and job satisfaction and performance of the female employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh have been considered as dependent variables. After the deep study of the above stated literature, the following hypotheses have been proposed.

H₀: Women Empowerment is not able to improve the performance of female employees.

H₁: Women Empowerment is able to improve the performance of female employees.

H₀: Gender Equality is not capable of enhancing the performance of female employees.

H₂: Gender Equality is capable of enhancing the performance of female employees.

H₀: Women Empowerment if accompanied by job satisfaction is not able to improve the performance of female employees.

H₃: Women Empowerment if accompanied by job satisfaction is able to improve the performance of female employees.

H₀: Gender Equality if accompanied by job satisfaction is not capable of enhancing the performance of female employees.

H₄: Gender Equality if accompanied by job satisfaction is capable of enhancing the performance of female employees.

In case of H₀₃, H₃, H₀₄ and H₄ job satisfaction has been used as a mediator variable. A mediator variable is the variable that causes mediation in the dependent and the independent variables (Statistics Solution, 2018). In other words, job satisfaction explains the relationship between the dependent variable (enhanced performance of female employees) and the independent variables (women empowerment and gender equality). The process of complete mediation is defined as the complete intervention caused by the mediator variable.

3. Data and methodology

3.1 Conceptual framework

This research consists of total four variables, and two are independent variables such as women empowerment and gender equality, and two are dependent variables such as job satisfaction and performance of the female employees. The conceptual framework focuses on making choice among women empowerment or gender equality to augment the job satisfaction and performance of the female employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. (Figure 1).

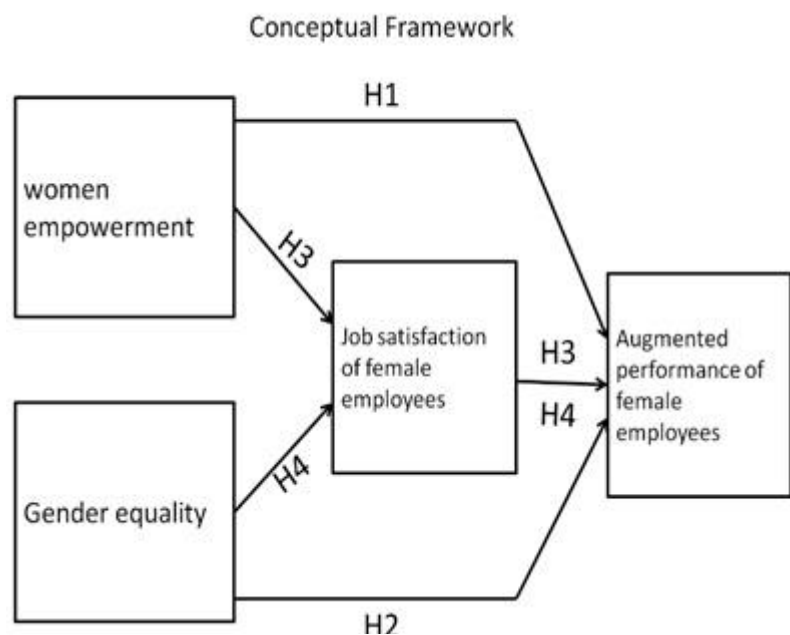


Figure 1

3.2 Research design

The purpose of the research is to test, despite of the interrelationship among the concepts of women empowerment and gender equality; among these two concepts which one should be emphasized to enhance the job satisfaction and consequently the performance of the female

employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Two sources have been used to collect data for this research.

i) The primary source refers to the collection of quantitative data from the female employees of the RMG (ready-made garment) sector in Bangladesh. Structured questionnaire was used to get the sufficient data. ii) The secondary source refers to the collection of different publications of this field.

3.3 Population and sample size

The target sector of this study is the RMG (ready-made garment) sector of Bangladesh. The target population of the study are the female employees of all the ready-made garment factories in Bangladesh. According to BGMEA (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association), in the year 2016-17 the total number of ready-made garment factories in Bangladesh were 4482. For the purpose of this study, 30 (thirty) different ready-made garment factories of Bangladesh were selected as sample from the above stated list of the factories.

3.4 Sampling technique

Data was collected from 350 female employees working in 30 different ready-made garment factories of Bangladesh. The respondents were picked following convenience random sampling method (Zikmund et al. 2013).

3.5 Nature of data

In this study, nature of data is quantitative which reflects the influence of women empowerment and gender equality on the feelings, behaviors, job satisfaction and performances of the female employees of ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh. An exploratory research was conducted to achieve the desired outcome from this study.

3.6 Instrument

A structured questionnaire was used as the instrument of this study. The questionnaire was divided into two segments: First segment was devised for collecting demographic information of the respondents and second one for measuring the perceptions of independent (Women empowerment and Gender Equality) and dependent (enhanced job satisfaction and performance of the female employees) variables under investigation. A total of 17 (seventeen) items were used in this study. A five point likert scale was used with an interval scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree).

3.7 Data collection

Survey questionnaires were mostly distributed manually to the target people. As majority of the female employees of the RMG sector of Bangladesh are not that much literate, for collecting the data the questionnaires (which were originally developed in English) were translated into their native language Bengali.

Even for many of the respondents, the surveyor narrated and clarified the questions to them, gathered their opinion and put tick mark on the questionnaires. Around 400 questionnaires were distributed among the female employees of 30 (thirty) different ready-made garment factories. A total of 357 people returned their answers whereas 350 data were considered usable.

3.8 Data analysis technique

The primary data were analyzed employing SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Science) software. Partial Least Square Analysis by Falk and Miller (1992) was employed in this study. Partial Least Square Analysis was used for testing, (1) linearity assumption test (2) Goodness of Fit model test (outer model) (3) structural model test (inner model) and test for structural model hypothesis (inner model). And Sobel Test was conducted for testing whether the variable is mediating variable or not (Solimun, 2011).

3.9 Demographic profile

Table 1: Demographic profile

Variables		Frequencies	Percentages (percent)	
Gender	Male	0	0.00	
	Female	350	100	
	Total	350	100	
Age (in years)	Below 20	62	17.71	
	20-29	253	72.29	
	30-39	25	07.14	
	40-49	08	02.29	
	50 and above	02	0.57	
	Total	350	100	
Marital Status	Single	120	34.29	
	Married	108	30.86	
	Seperated	52	14.86	
	Divorced	43	12.29	
	Widow	27	07.70	
	Total	350	100	
Area of Origin	Urban	53	15.14	
	Rural	297	84.86	
	Total	350	100	
Level of Education	Level	Class		
	Primary	1-5	90	25.71
	Secondary	6-10	213	60.86
	Higher Secondary	11-12	44	12.57
	Graduate	Bachelor or Master degree	03	0.86
	Total		350	100
Respondent's Position	Top level	0	0.00	
	Mid level	3	0.86	
	First level	16	4.57	
	Operator Level	331	94.57	
	Total	350	100	

According to the Table 1, 350 female employees (sample) were randomly selected from 30 (thirty) different ready-made garment factories of Bangladesh. Regarding the age of respondents, 17.71 percent was below 20 years old. 72.29 percent was between the ages of 20-29 years. 07.14 percent was between the ages of 30-39 years. 02.29 percent were between the ages of 40-49 years. 0.57 percent was above 50 years old.

Among the selected 350 female employees 0 percent were working in top level, 0.86 percent were in midlevel, 4.57 percent were in first level management and 94.57 percent were in operators' level. Nearly about 84.86 percent respondents were from rural areas of Bangladesh whereas 15.14 percent were from urban places.

34.29 percent of the female respondents were single followed by 30.86 percent were married women and 14.86 percent were separated women. The proportion of divorced women in this survey were 12.29 percent of the total respondents whereas 07.70 percent were widowed. In this survey, the respondents' qualifications were varying from primary level to graduate level.

As most of the respondents were garments operators, 60.86 percent of the respondents had Secondary (class 6- class10) level of education, 25.71 percent of the respondents had primary (class 1- class5) level of education, 12.57 percent of the respondents had higher secondary (class 11- class12) level of education and only 0.86 percent of the respondents were graduates.

4. Analysis and findings

In this study, Curve Fit linearity was used for the linearity assumption. Curve Fit linearity shows the relation among the variables stated as linear, if significance of linear model is <0.05 .

Certain symbols were used while running the tests for the simplicity of indicating the dependent variables (Job Satisfaction, Performance of the female employees) and independent variables (Women Empowerment, Gender Equality). Such as:

X1= Women Empowerment, X2= Gender Equality, Y1= Job Satisfaction (of the female employees), Y2= Employee (female) Performance. The test results presented as follows:

Table 2: Linearity assumption test

Variable	Relation	Linear Model Test	Sig. of Linear model	Conclusion
X1	Y1	Significant Linear Model	0.000	Linear
X1	Y2	Significant Linear Model	0.008	Linear
X2	Y1	Significant Linear Model	0.000	Linear
X2	Y2	Significant Linear Model	0.000	Linear
Y1	Y2	Significant Linear Model	0.000	Linear

From table above, that significance of linear model is <0.05 , for the four variable relations, so the linearity assumption is fulfilled.

Goodness of Fit Model Test

Goodness of fit test of structural model at outer model

Goodness of fit test of structural model at outer model can be calculated by using convergent validity, discriminant validity and composite reliability measurement.

Table 3: Convergent validity test results

Variables	Indicators	Outer Loading	Explanation
Women Empowerment (X1)	Economic Contribution	0.805	Valid
	Education	0.869	Valid
	Governance	0.667	Valid
	Work Environment	0.715	Valid
Gender Equality (X2)	Freedom	0.790	Valid
	Role Play	0.838	Valid
	Insurance	0.639	Valid
	Proper Practice of Compliance	0.687	Valid
Job Satisfaction (Y1)	Active role of Trade Union	0.675	Valid
	Job Security	0.709	Valid
	Wage and Salary Structure	0.664	Valid
	Productivity	0.582	Valid
Employee Performance (Y2)	Quality	0.606	Valid
	timeliness	0.574	Valid
	Less Absenteeism	0.716	Valid
	Low Turnover	0.626	Valid
	Resource Utilization	0.706	Valid

The results showed that the value of the construct loading indicator has a value of over 0.30, so it can be concluded that the measurement meets the requirements of convergent validity.

Table 4: Discriminant validity test results

Variables	AVE	Root AVE	Score Correlations Between Latent Variables			
			Women Empowerment	Gender Equality	Job Satisfaction	Employee Performance
Women Empowerment	0.616	0.785	1.000	0.060	0.374	0.275
Gender Equality	0.613	0.783	0.060	1.000	0.388	0.596
Job Satisfaction	0.456	0.675	0.374	0.388	1.000	0.643
Employee Performance	0.389	0.624	0.275	0.596	0.643	1.000

Testing results showed the root value of AVE (average variance extracted) showed the greater score than correlation among the latent variable score, so it can be concluded that all constructs fulfill the discriminant validity criteria.

Table 5: Composite reliability test results

Variables	Composite Reliability
Women Empowerment	0.826
Gender Equality	0.825
Job Satisfaction	0.807
Employee Performance	0.790

According to Table 5, the reliability composite root showed the value which is greater than 0.7. So it can be concluded that all construct fulfill composite reliability.

Goodness of fit test of structural model at inner model

Goodness of fit test of structural model at inner model by using predictive -relevance (Q2) value, calculated from the R-square value, has range value $0 < Q2 < 1$. R-square is based on determination coefficient of all the dependent variables. This study has two dependent variables, namely: Job Satisfaction (Y1) and Employee Performance (Y2). The Coefficient of determination, R², of the dependent variables are presented below:

Table 6: Goodness of fit test of structural model

Dependent Variable	R-square
Job Satisfaction	0.608
Employee Performance	0.670

Based on Table 6, the Q2 Value can be calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Q^2 &= 1 - \{(1-0.608) \times (1-0.670)\} \\
 &= 1 - \{0.392 \times 0.33\} \\
 &= 1 - 0.129 \\
 &= 0.871
 \end{aligned}$$

The calculation showed the predictive -relevance value of 0.871 or 87.1 percent. So, it can be said that the model has relevant predictive value. The predictive relevance value of 87.1 percent indicated that the data variance can be explained 87.1 percent by the model.

Hypotheses testing

The hypothesis testing done by t test (t test) at each influence path partially. It is shown in table 7 below.

Table 7: Direct influence hypotheses test

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient	p-value	Statistic	Explanation
Women Empowerment	Employee Performance	0.081	0.322	0.990	Not Significant
Gender Equality	Employee Performance	0.417	0.000	7.362	Significant
Women Empowerment	Job Satisfaction	0.352	0.000	4.358	Significant
Gender Equality	Job Satisfaction	0.367	0.000	5.641	Significant
Job Satisfaction	Employee Performance	0.451	0.000	7.056	Significant

Table 8: Mediation analysis results of job satisfaction to women empowerment to the employee performance

Sobel Test Results					
Relation	Coefficient	Se	Z _{calculation}	Significance	Explanation
WE _→ JS _→ EP	0.159	0.047	3.398	0.000	Significant

Explanation: WE= Women Empowerment, JS= Job Satisfaction, EP= Employee Performance

Table 9: Mediation analysis results of job satisfaction to gender equality to the employee performance

Sobel Test Results					
Relation	Coefficient	Se	Z _{calculation}	Significance	Explanation
GE _→ JS _→ EP	0.166	0.038	4.386	0.000	Significant

Explanation: GE= Gender Equality, JS= Job Satisfaction, EP= Employee Performance

Based on table 7, table 8, and table 9, the research hypotheses test results can be explained as follows:

Women Empowerment influence test (X₁) to the employee performance (Y₂), obtained path coefficient of 0.081, t calculation value of 0.990 and p-value of 0.322. Because the t calculation value is lower than the table value of 1.96 and p-value was higher than the alpha value of 0.05 (5percent), it indicates that the null hypothesis H₀₁ is accepted. This means, Women Empowerment (X₁) is not able to improve the performance of female employees (Y₂).

Gender Equality influence test (X₂) to the employee performance (Y₂), obtained path coefficient of 0.417, t calculation value of 7.362 and p-value of 0.000. Because the t calculation value is higher than the table value of 1.96 and p-value was lower than alpha value of 0.05 (5percent), it indicates that the null hypothesis H₀₂ is rejected. This means, Gender Equality (X₂) is capable of enhancing the performance of female employees (Y₂).

Based on the testing it was found that, Women Empowerment does not have any direct and significant influence on female employee's improved performance in the ready-made garments industry of Bangladesh, but job satisfaction has significant influence on improving the performance of female employees. As a result, it was assumed that there is indirect influence (mediation) between women empowerment and improved performance of the female employees. That mediation was possible by job satisfaction. To test further whether job satisfaction as a mediating variable can influence the relationship between Women Empowerment and female employee's improved performance, the Sobel test was done. Table 8 showed the Sobel test (mediation test) of job satisfaction to women empowerment influence to female employees' performance, where the mediating effect of job satisfaction to the women empowerment to the female employees' improved performance with Sobel test, obtained indirect path coefficient of 0.159, Z calculation value of 3.398 and significance of 0.000. As Z calculation =3.398 is higher than Z table =1.96 and significance value of 0.000 is lower than 0.05, so it indicates that there is a significant influence between women empowerment to female employee's improved performance through job satisfaction. It indicates that there was enough empirical evidence to accept hypothesis (H₃) that, the job satisfaction is able to mediate the influence of women

empowerment to the female employees' enhanced performance. The positive path coefficient showed the higher the women empowerment provided to the female employees, the higher their job satisfaction; the higher their job satisfaction, the higher their performance.

Based on the testing it was found that, Gender Equality has direct and significant influence on female employee's improved performance in the ready-made garments industry of Bangladesh. As job satisfaction was also found to have significant influence on improving the performance of female employees, it was assumed that there is indirect influence (mediation) between Gender Equality and improved performance of the female employees. That mediation was possible by job satisfaction. To test further whether job satisfaction as a mediating variable can influence the relationship between Gender Equality and female employee's improved performance, the Sobel test was done. Table 9 showed the Sobel test (mediation test) of job satisfaction to Gender Equality influence to female employees' performance, where the mediating effect of job satisfaction to the gender equality to the female employees' improved performance with Sobel test, obtained indirect path coefficient of 0.166, Z calculation value of 4.386 and significance of 0.000. As Z calculation =4.386 is higher than Ztable =1.96 and significance value of 0.000 is lower than 0.05, so it indicates that there is a significant influence between gender equality to female employees' enhanced performance through job satisfaction. It showed that there was enough empirical evidence to accept hypothesis (H4) that the job satisfaction is able to mediate the influence of gender equality to the female employees' enhanced performance. The positive path coefficient showed that, the higher the gender equality value instilled into the female employees, the higher their job satisfaction; the higher their job satisfaction, the higher their performance.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the primary data showed that, women empowerment does not influence female employees' improved performance in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. The argument of Kabeer (2001) regarding women empowerment supports this result. Women are not a homogenous group but a group of individuals. What empowers one woman, may not empower another. So, empowerment should not be considered as a linear process in which causes and effects are universal (Kabeer, 2001). Very few women workers consider their employment in the garment industry as a reason behind the up gradation of their social status; rather women who work until late at night in the garment industry, have a negative image in society (Paul-Majumder and Mahmud, 1994; Paul-Majumder and Zohir 1994 cited in Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000). This perception exerts negative influence on their performance.

There were enough empirical evidence (H2) that “the higher the gender equality, the more improved will be the female employees' performance”. The positive path coefficient of 0.367, indicated the influence of gender equality on the enhanced performance of the female employees in one direction. In this sense, the garment sector has brought the women workers out of their households. it helps to create a more gender equitable cultural norm by normalizing women's public mobility and access to various institutions. Now women and girls have wider menu of options and more room for maneuver around appropriate female behavior than in the past” (Hossain, 2012). Gender equality creates an upward aspiration for women to improve their performance and do something new (Rashid, 2006 cited in Khosla, 2009).

The statistical results showed a positive and significant influence of women empowerment on female employees' improved performance through mediating variable of job satisfaction. The positive path (0.159) showed the stronger the women empowerment, the higher will be the work satisfaction, which will ultimately improve the performance of the female employees. The results were supported by Sobel test. Job satisfaction is a mediating variable that is partial in nature. Ripley and Ripley (1992) and Spatz (2000) stated that empowerment enhances the responsibilities as well as employee motivation and satisfaction at their daily work; followed by improved product & service quality, productivity, loyalty of employees and decreased employee turnover.

The statistical results showed a positive and significant influence of gender equality on female employees' improved performance through mediating variable of job satisfaction. The positive path (0.166) showed the higher the gender equality, the higher will be the work satisfaction, which will ultimately improve the performance of the female employees. The results were supported by Sobel

test. Even though it is about gender equality, it basically highlighted on equal opportunity of women in comparison to similarly situated men. Because it is the women who are always deprived of when it comes to equal opportunity (Lorber, 2010). Satisfied employees feel powerfully motivated to reinstate good working situation and become hopeful about the possibilities for development. High job satisfaction is evident by employee loyalty such as good citizenship performance (Rusbult et al., 1988).

6. Conclusion

The practices of women empowerment and gender equality are vital in the RMG (ready-made garment) sector of Bangladesh, and garment factories should have alternative approaches for practicing both women empowerment and gender equality successfully. The main contributions of this study to the literature on women empowerment and gender equality and employee performance in the RMG sector concerns though both women empowerment and gender equality are interrelated concepts, but among these two concepts which one should be emphasized to enhance the job satisfaction and consequently the performance of the female employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.. In this respect, we examined women empowerment and gender equality as independent variables and job satisfaction and female employees' performance as dependent variables. For the analysis purpose, job satisfaction was also used as a mediating variable.

However, from the analysis of the collected primary data we can say that women empowerment cannot directly influence the female employees of the RMG sector to improve or augment their performance. But it can indirectly influence the female employee's performance if accompanied by the job satisfaction of the female employees. On the other hand, Gender equality can influence the female employees of the RMG sector to improve or augment their performance both directly and indirectly (through job satisfaction).

Majority of the female employees of the RMG sector of Bangladesh came from the rural areas, belongs mostly to the lower class of the society, economically not that solvent, and their educational background is also not that strong. So, to them women empowerment basically means social and economic empowerment. To some extent women are empowered socially and economically by working in the RMG sector. But lack of aptitude to raise voice in the family and at the work place, exploitation by the garment factory owners by not providing deserved salaries, gender discrimination in terms of lower wages for women, forced labor in the factories, inadequate measures by the factory management to safeguard their lives, and physical and verbal harassment at the work place etc. are some of the obstacles that hinder the actual empowerment of women. All these factors support the presence of gender inequality in society and in the garment sector. Whenever there is gender inequality, it is generally women who are discriminated in comparison to similarly situated men (Lorber, 2010) and because of this female garment workers are disempowered.

The employment of the female workers in the garment industry releases their parents from the burden of their dependent daughters and offers independence (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012). However, the only advantage these female workers get from the garment sector is that they earn money. When they earn money, their family becomes the beneficiary. As these women are from poor families; by working in the garment sector they become able to remove their poverty at least to some extent. They don't have to starve anymore. But in terms of their salaries, the owners of the garment factories exploit them (Galtung, 1990). By depriving someone economically, it is not feasible to ensure economic empowerment.

The late working hours mandated by garment factory management causes a woman's social position to be degraded. Their lower social class status provides the fuel for society's devalued impression of them (Hossain and Al-Amin 2012). Thus, socially women become disempowered as well.

Gender based discrimination leaves the female garment workers with limited resources both at the micro and macro levels; which impedes their power to exercise choices. Ultimately, they remain with negative achievements (Kabeer, 1999, 2001 and 2005).

Therefore, it is obvious that gender inequality is playing an influential role on the way to impede women empowerment in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Directly or indirectly this impediment is exerting a negative influence on the augmentation of job satisfaction and performance of the female employees in this sector. So, in response to the research question, "Women empowerment or gender equality: which one should be emphasized to augment the job satisfaction and performance of the

female employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh?"; based on the analysis of the collected primary data and secondary data we can say that gender equality should be emphasized in this case over women empowerment. If gender equality can be ensured in the RMG sector, then the implementation and practice of women empowerment in this sector will be facilitated. Consequently, this will lead to enhanced job satisfaction and improved performance by the female employees of this sector.

7. Limitations and future directions

This article is concluded by presenting some limitations. An important limitation of this research is the veiled assumption that the ultimate findings of this study will work for all organizations. Therefore, the inclusion of different alternative strategy and practices in research designs will be an important addition. The scales used for measuring various data sources are not based on previous academic literature. In further research, validated scales should therefore be employed. Moreover, a disadvantage of using secondary data is that not all the desired research concepts were covered in the data. Another limitation of this study is the sample size. Although the underlying dataset is large, the data were aggregated at the level of 30 ready-made garment factories. This could be considered quite low. Nevertheless, future studies might attempt to replicate the findings using larger sample sizes. The study is conducted in Bangladesh, it would be interesting to replicate the study to test the proposed conceptual framework in other countries using different sectors.

Therefore, the ready-made garment sector of Bangladesh should have a clear strategic direction and clear objectives to identify and improve the job satisfaction and performance of the female employees in addition to ensuring gender equality and women empowerment; which are consequently critical to the positive and successful transformation of the ready-made garment sector of this country.

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