

Conditions of women workers in Smokeless Tobacco factories in Bangladesh

Investigation by UBINIG (Policy Research for Development Alternative)

Smokeless tobacco use in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, 20.6% of adult population (22 million) uses smokeless tobacco. The mostly used smokeless tobacco (SLT) products are Zarda, Gul and Sadapata. Overall among the 37.8 million tobacco users in the country, smokeless tobacco use is higher (20.6%) than smoking 18% [1]. Bangladesh ranks the third (after India & Nepal) highest smokeless tobacco use among 9 southeast and south Asian countries [2].

The Smoking and Tobacco Use (Control) Act, 2005, amended 2013 has included three smokeless tobacco products (Zarda, Gul and Sadapata) in the definition of tobacco products, bringing these under the purview of the law to regulate their use.

Survey on Smokeless tobacco factories & workers

UBINIG conducted a study on 88 SLT manufacturers who were interviewed in 29 districts in 8 divisions of the country on the production, factory conditions as well as workers wages. The interviews were done with the factory owners or the managers; no worker was interviewed. A desk review was done on other studies on tobacco industries employing women workers. Survey data was collected during August to November, 2020. The study was supported by Campaign for Tobacco free Kids (CTFK)

Findings

SLT factory and product information

- 61% have no factory building, use owners' house space of less than 500 sq. ft. as a factory. Only 2% had a signboard in front of the factory.
- 91% factories are producing the SLT products manually.
- 88 SLT manufacturers produce 131 zarda and 7 gul brands, 37% produce more than one brand.
- 28% produce zarda and 70% of gul are of low weight (10g).
- 37% brands of Zarda and 90% of Gul brands price is less than Tk. 10 (USD0.12)

Workers' Information

- 80% of the factory owners provided information on the workers.
- There are 631 full-time workers with 236 (37%) male, 358 (56%) female workers.
- The average number of workers is 9 with (male 3.4, female 5).
- There are more female workers than males among the full time workers.

- Only 20% factory owners reported on part time workers.
- There are 56 part-time workers in 18 factories with 22 (39%) male and 34 (61%) female workers.
- The number of part time female workers is higher than male workers.

Gender distribution of work.

Male workers: The male workers are engaged in pre-production work of carrying the raw materials such as tobacco leaves, chemicals, ingredients, packaging materials. They are also engaged in handling SLT finished products (in canisters) and taking them to the retailers and other sellers in the post-production stage.

Female workers: The female workers are engaged in drying tobacco leaves, cutting them into small pieces, mixing with "medicine" and ingredients (additives, flavours, perfumeries), they have to fill the canisters of different sizes with mixed tobacco and the ingredients. Children help the female workers in packing the canisters.

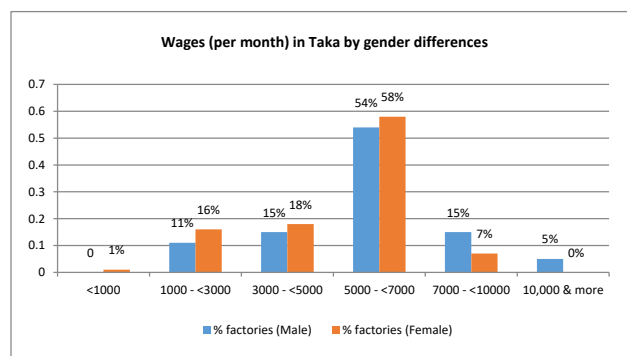
Working conditions

- 63% manufacturers reported having full time or part time workers who work more than 8 hours per day
- 74% manufacturers have weekly leave provisions for full-time workers, 17% reported of granting general holidays and only 4(5%) factories have maternity leave.
- 29% manufacturers pay wages on daily basis, 28% weekly basis and 51% on monthly basis.

Table 1: Wage per month of male and female workers in SLT factories

Categories	Male Workers (in Taka)	Female workers (in Taka)
Average wage/per month	5416	4718
Minimum wage/per month	1000	800
Maximum wage/per month	12000	9600

Source: UBINIG study, 2020



Smokeless Tobacco factories in Bangladesh

Child labour

Thirty seven children (below 18 years) as full-time workers, are found in 10 Zarda factories in Mymensingh. The wage for child labor is less than Tk.200 (\$2.5) per day (not specified as a formal wage, and the amount varies and does not exceed Tk.200 (\$2.5)) with more than 8 hours of work; sometimes going up to 10 hours.

Comparison of women workers in tobacco and other sectors

Type of work	Daily wage	Work environment	Holiday	Reported Health risk
Zarda- Gul worker	Daily wage Tk. 200 (\$2.5) Weekly wage Tk. 2000 (\$24)	Work for more than 8 hours Work in a confined room, doors and windows locked to hide the work	No weekly Holiday.	Lack of appetite. Pain in lower abdomen, waist pain. Headache. Eye problem.
Women worker in Tobacco cultivation	Daily wage Tk.300 (\$3.6) Tk. 400 (\$4.8) for curing tobacco leaves.	Work from 8am to 5pm in the field. Work in the Kiln for curing tobacco leaves. It takes 2-3 days (48 -72 hours), so long curing is completed.	No Holiday.	Hand becomes black due to sap of tobacco leaves, lack of appetite. Breathing complication, weakness. Burning sensation on hands and legs. Headache and vomiting.
Women worker in bidi factory	Permanent worker Monthly wage Female Tk. 2447 (\$30) Daily-based workers Tk. 1685 (\$20.5) per month	9 to 10 hours daily, average 18 days of work a month	weekly holiday for permanent worker, Daily labours no holidays.	Asthma, respiratory problem and other health impacts.
Women workers in Rice mill	Daily wage-Tk. 200 (\$2.5)	Paddy parboiling and drying. From 7am to 5pm. Work continued so long sun shine available.	No Holiday.	Waist pain. Chest pain. Lack of test. Lack of sleep and wasting.
Women workers in Paposh Factory	monthly wage- Tk. 6000 (\$73). Temporary workers monthly wage- Tk.4000 (\$49)	Shifting duty 8 hours, Thread making of jute and make paposh. putting thread in bobbins, finishing bags and work as helper in the machine	Permanent workers get one day holiday a week.	Asthma, waist pain. Impaired vision. Majority of workers suffer from jaundice.
Women workers in Paper Mill	Daily wage Tk. 150 (\$1.8).	Work from 8am to 5pm. Sorting different types of paper in the go-down	No Holiday.	Waist pain. Breathing problem.
Women workers in construction sector	Daily wage Tk. 400 (\$5).	Work from 7am to 5pm. Carrying bricks and other materials for construction.	No Holiday.	No toilet facility. Suffer from Waist pain. Pain on feet.
Women workers in brick breaking	Tk. 80 for breaking 100 bricks. Earn Tk. 560 (\$7) per day	Work from 7am to 5pm. Irregular work	No Holiday.	No toilet facility. Suffer from Waist pain, headache and pain on hands.
Women workers in Road construction	Irregular wok. Daily wage Tk. 250 (\$3).	Work from 8am to 5pm. Earth cutting, material carrying, road repair and other activities.	No Holiday.	No toilet facility. Suffer from Waist pain, headache and pain on hands.

1USD = 82 BDT

References

1. GATS, 2017: Global Adult Tobacco Survey, Fact Sheet Bangladesh 2017, MOHFW, government of Bangladesh, WHO, CDC and BBS, 7 Aug 2018
2. CTFK, 2019: Smokeless Tobacco: Bangladesh, Fact Sheet, 2019 Campaign for Tobacco-free Kids, CTFK, Washington
3. Sreeramareddy CT, Pradhan PM, Mir IA, Sin S. Smoking and smokeless tobacco use in nine South and Southeast Asian countries: prevalence estimates and social determinants from Demographic and Health Surveys. *Popul Health Metr.* 2014; 12:22. Published 2014 Aug 28. doi:10.1186/s12963-014-0022-0
4. Narigrantha Prabartana, 2014: Dhowa Bihin Tamakjat Drobo“ Jarda O Gul” Utpadon: Ekti onushondhan
5. National Board of Revenue (NBR), 2019: The Revenue and Employment Outcome of Biri Taxation in Bangladesh
6. UBINIG, 2012: “Tamaker Srigkhol theke Mukti (Freedom from Tobacco Chain)”
7. UBINIG, 2020: Factors Inhibiting Payment of Taxes of Smokeless Manufacturers Operating Outside the Tax Net in Bangladesh
8. WBB Trust, 2010: “Tamak O Daridrota”, Tamak Chash, Biri Shromik O Biri Saboer Provab Shirshk Gobesona

1 May
2021