

Gender Disparities in Employment Opportunities among Slum Residents in Dhaka City: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze the disparity in job opportunities between men and women among the inhabitants of Dhaka slums in Bangladesh. The rise in the number of slums due to fast urbanization has led to increased dependency on vulnerable and low-income jobs for urban poor communities, especially women. This research aims to determine the types of gender disparities in employment opportunities, wage disparities, working conditions, and social-cultural barriers to women's employment. A mixed-methods research design was used, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire survey of 50 respondents from Hazir Slum and Vatara (1212) in Dhaka city, while qualitative data were collected through case studies. The results show that women tend to engage more in poorly paid jobs like domestic help and garment production, while men have wider options for different types of employment. It is also observed that women's participation in the labor force is largely constrained due to the pressures of family obligations, lack of skills, fear of harassment, and societal patriarchal practices. The research results point out that social-cultural and structural disparities still dictate gender employment discrimination within urban slums. The paper calls for initiatives such as skills training, equal pay schemes, job safety, and institutional support to reduce gender inequalities in employment among slum dwellers. **Keywords:** A sociological study, Dhaka city, employment opportunity, informal labor, gender disparity

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Introduction

Rapid urbanization is a key feature of modern-day Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka, where constant rural-to-urban migration is driving the rapid development of informal settlements, including slums. As the center of commerce and administration in the country, Dhaka attracts thousands of migrants annually in search of job opportunities and improved livelihoods. This phenomenon, coupled with the lack of proper urbanization policies and housing needs, has resulted in the formation of slums that comprise congested populations with unfavorable housing and living conditions, poor infrastructure, insecure tenure, and limited job prospects. (United Nations Human Settlements Program [UN-Habitat], 2020).

Employment is one of the most basic factors in the survival and economic advancement of slum dwellers in urban areas. However, employment is unevenly distributed between males and females. The gender imbalance in labor force participation still exists in Bangladesh, whereby women constitute the majority in informal, underpaid, and precarious jobs like domestic work, home-based employment, and manufacturing of ready-made garments. In contrast, the opposite is true for men. (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2022). These inequalities are particularly visible in urban slum areas, where poverty and informality intersect with patriarchal social structures to limit women's participation in paid employment.

The norms of gender roles that are mixed with traditional roles confine women to duties related to household and caregiving work, leading to restricted mobility, skill acquisition, and a lack of opportunity to secure stable jobs. Moreover, the informal nature of work in slums exposes workers to greater risks of exploitation, low wages, job instability, and poor working conditions, especially since most women in these areas lack the leverage to bargain against these factors (World Bank, 2019). Women do much to help their families survive yet fail to receive the recognition and remuneration their work deserves. It is well documented that poor women living in urban areas face a double burden of unpaid domestic chores alongside income-earning tasks. (Kabeer, 2012).

Despite Bangladesh's notable strides in increasing female labor participation over the last few decades, there are still considerable differences between men and women in wages, promotion opportunities, job security, and the work environment, particularly within urban informal settlements. For this reason, a sociological investigation is required to uncover how gender impacts the employment experience in slums in Dhaka. Given the above, the goals of the current research paper are:

1. To establish what kind of employment options males and females slum dwellers have in Dhaka;
2. To study differences based on gender regarding access to employment opportunities in the formal and informal sectors.
3. To analyze wage differentials and working conditions among male and female slum workers, as well as factors impacting women's employment.

Literature Review

Gender Disparities in Employment Opportunities among Slum Residents (Global Context)

The World Bank (2021), in a policy-based study on gender, safety, and urban mobility, found that women's labor market participation is affected by workplace safety, mobility, and harassment. The study indicated that urban poor women tend to forgo higher-quality job opportunities due to a lack of safety in their movements and at work. Here, the study was primarily based on the analysis of urban atmosphere without paying sufficient attention to slums.

Hunt and Samman (2020), using gender and labor-market perspectives, demonstrated that women working in informal economies experience unequal pay, an insecure working environment, and limited access to decent job opportunities. According to the authors, the presence of care activities prevents women from participating in economic life. Nonetheless, the study was economically oriented rather than sociologically motivated.

According to UN Women (2023), women in developing economies are more prone to exploitation, income insecurity, and a lack of labor rights. In addition, the report noted that migrant and poor women faced different disadvantages regarding work. A limitation of this study is that it focused more on global results than on the particular conditions at the community level.

In another study, Heintz et al. (2024) compared the phenomenon of gendered inequalities and informal employment. It was established that women's opportunities were affected by the intersections of poverty, education level, and social conventions. Moreover, it was shown that compared to men, women were more likely to perform insecure jobs and those conducted at home. Nevertheless, the research considered global dynamics rather than the specifics of the environment, such as urban slums.

Gender Disparities in Employment Opportunities among Slum Residents (National Context)

Recent research in Bangladesh has indicated significant gender differences in terms of job opportunities for urban poor communities. Zuberi et al. (2023) conducted a qualitative study that found exploitation of women migrants working in the informal economy, wage discrimination, and insecure employment. In particular, women were shown to be powerless and work in low-paid jobs. However, the authors mostly focused on women migrants in their study and devoted little attention to comparisons with men.

Roy et al. (2024) conducted a socio-economic impact study of the effects of the pandemic on informal workers in Dhaka slums. They stated that women experienced higher unemployment rates and greater income losses than men. Thus, women are more vulnerable in the informal employment sector, although the pandemic period was mostly considered. Subah et al. (2024) investigated environmental vulnerability and livelihoods in urban Bangladesh and found that flooding and climate-related disasters disproportionately affect women's employment and income opportunities. Women faced greater challenges in maintaining livelihoods due to unpaid care responsibilities and limited mobility. However, the study focused more on environmental vulnerability than labor market structures.

In more recent research, Ahamed and Hasan (2025) carried out a cross-sectional survey examining women's labor force participation in slum areas of Bangladesh. It has been observed

that education, marital status, family composition, and economic dependence affect women's participation in the labor force. The authors posited that there still exist structural barriers to women accessing regular jobs. One of the major weaknesses of the study was its excessive reliance on the quantitative method of data collection, with no qualitative method.

While there is sufficient literature on gender discrimination and informal employment in Bangladesh, not many studies have addressed the issue of gender inequality in terms of access to job opportunities among people living in slums in particular. Available literature provides more focus on women's vulnerability and the informal nature of employment than on differences between women and men regarding employment access, pay, and employment conditions. Besides, very few studies have used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine social factors affecting women's employment in slum areas.

Methods and Materials

In this study, the researchers used a mixed-methods research methodology to investigate gender disparities in employment opportunities among slum dwellers. In mixed-methods research, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used to gain a thorough understanding of the research topic. In quantitative research, the survey method was used, whereas the case study method was used for qualitative research.

For this research, the researcher used the survey method because it is commonly used in the social sciences to collect primary data from respondents systematically. In the present study, an appropriately designed and structured questionnaire comprising both closed- and open-ended questions was developed to collect the required data from the respondents.

Data were gathered using the personal interviewing technique because the majority of people in slums had poor literacy skills. Through this approach, data were gathered efficiently, enabling effective communication with respondents to obtain accurate answers. Moreover, eight case studies were conducted to gather information on respondents' experiences regarding unemployment, wage discrimination, household responsibilities, and social practices. The research was conducted in some slum areas, such as Hazir Slum and Vatara (1212), where most residents work in the informal sector as daily workers, housemaids, factory workers, construction workers, and street vendors.

The total number of respondents chosen for the study was 50, comprising males and females from different slum areas who were either working or seeking jobs. Simple random and purposive sampling were the two techniques used to select the subjects. Simple random sampling ensured equal opportunity, while purposive sampling ensured the selection of subjects based on gender, employment, and informal labor participation. The analysis was done using percentage distribution and tables.

Research Instruments

The research instruments used in this study have been well-designed to obtain quality data from the respondents residing in Hazir Slum and Vatara (1212). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using appropriate methods, consistent with the objectives of this study. The main data collection tool was a questionnaire designed to obtain standardized data on socio-

demographic profile, employment status, occupation type, income level, working environment, and views on gender inequalities at work.

Data were collected through the field survey. This methodology was found to be appropriate because most slum dwellers have low literacy levels and limited education, making it difficult for them to provide accurate responses.

In addition, qualitative data were collected through case studies that captured respondents' experiences with issues related to employment.

Results

This section begins with the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and then moves through the major findings under thematic sections. This organization helps present the data clearly and systematically while also showing how the study's different dimensions are interconnected.

Table 1. *Socio-demographic profile of respondents*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	15	30.0
	Female	35	70.0
Age	15-24	16	32.0
	25-34	16	32.0
	35-44	9	18.0
	45-54	6	12.0
Marital Status	Unmarried	17	28.3
	Married	28	46.7
	Widowed	12	20.0
	Divorced/Seperated	3	6.0
Educational Level	No formal education	24	48.0
	Primary(1- 5)	9	18.0
	Secondary	4	8.0
	SSC+	5	10.0
Migration Status	Born in dhaka	5	10.0
	Migrated from rural area	28	56.0

	Migrated from another city	17	34.0
Duration in Slum	Less than 1 year	12	24.0
	1 - 5 years	12	24.0
	6 - 10 years	14	28.0
	more than 10 years	11	22.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The majority of respondents were female (70.0%), while males represented 30.0%. Most respondents belonged to the 15–24 and 25–34 age groups (32.0% each). Nearly half of the respondents were married (46.7%). Educational attainment was generally low, with 48.0% having no formal education. Most respondents migrated from rural areas (56.0%), and a significant proportion had been living in the slum areas for 6–10 years (28.0%).

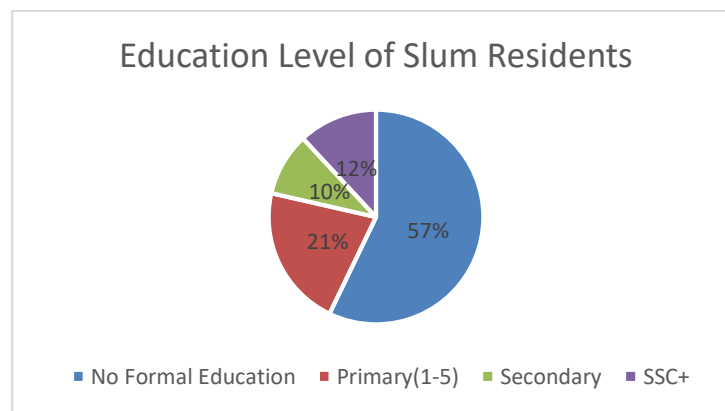


Figure 1. Education level of the respondents

The data highlighted in the graph show a significant lack of formal schooling within this community. Over 57% of residents have no formal education, and only about 21% have completed some level of secondary or higher education.

Table 2. *Employment Status of the Respondents*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Current Employment Status	Employed	33	66.0
	occasionally employed	17	34.0
Type of Employment	Formal	28	56.0
	Informal	22	44.0

	Both	8	16.0
Natures of Job	Day labor	2	4.0
	Domestic work	9	18.0
	Garment worker	10	20.0
	Rickshaw puller	6	12.0
	Small business	3	6.0
	Factory worker	11	22.0
	construction worker	9	18.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 presents the respondents' employment status and occupational patterns. The majority of respondents were employed (66.0%), while 34.0% were occasionally employed. More than half of the respondents were engaged in formal employment (56.0%), whereas 44.0% worked in the informal sector. A small proportion (16.0%) were involved in both formal and informal work. Regarding job types, factory work (22.0%) and garment work (20.0%) were the most common occupations, followed by domestic work and construction work (18.0% each). Smaller proportions were involved in rickshaw pulling, small business activities, and day labor.

Table 3. *Employment opportunities of the respondents*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
About Current Job	Family	4	8.0
	Friends	19	38.0
	Contractor	6	12.0
	NGO support	21	42.0
Belief of better job opportunities of men than women	Yes	35	70.0
	No	4	8.0
	Not sure	11	22.0
Rejected From Jobs Due to Gender	Yes	30	60.0
	No	20	40.0
Faces more Difficulty getting	Men	4	8.0

work	Women	32	64.0
	Both	14	28.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 3 presents respondents' access to employment opportunities. Most respondents obtained their current jobs through NGO support (42.0%) and friends (38.0%), while smaller proportions relied on contractors or family connections. A large majority (70.0%) believed that men have better employment opportunities than women. In addition, 60.0% of respondents reported being rejected from jobs due to gender. Most respondents (64.0%) stated that women face greater difficulties in obtaining work compared to men, indicating the existence of significant gender disparities in employment opportunities.

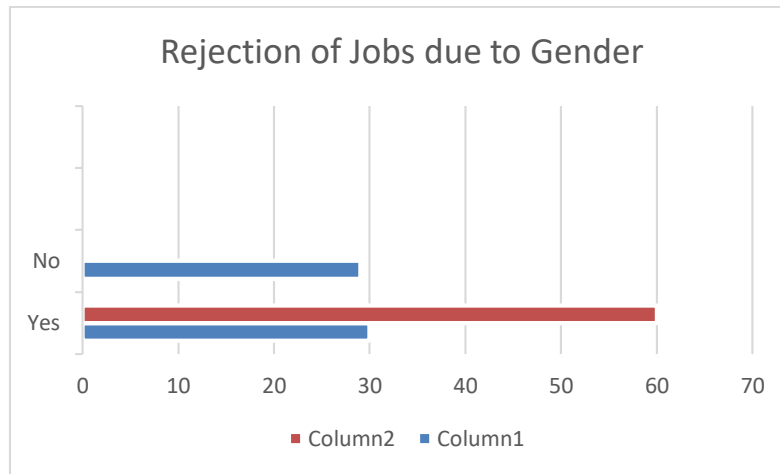


Figure 2. Rejection of employment due to gender

This chart clearly illustrates that the majority (60%) of the respondents believe the rejection of employment is due to gender, and females are the majority of the respondents.

Table 4. Wage, job security, and working conditions of the respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Monthly Income	8000	23	46.0
	8000 - 12000	20	40.0
	12000 - 15000	4	8.0
	15000+	3	6.0
Men-women get equal wages	Yes	3	6.0

Working conditions	No	29	58.0
	Don't no	18	36.0
	Safe	22	44.0
	Moderate	23	46.0
	Unsafe	5	10.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 4 presents the respondents' income levels, wage equality, and working conditions. Nearly half of the respondents (46.0%) earned below 8000 taka per month, while 40.0% earned between 8000 and 12000 taka, indicating generally low income levels among slum workers. A majority of respondents (58.0%) believed that men and women do not receive equal wages for similar work, whereas only 6.0% reported wage equality. Regarding working conditions, most respondents described their workplace conditions as moderate (46.0%) or safe (44.0%), while a smaller proportion (10.0%) considered them unsafe.

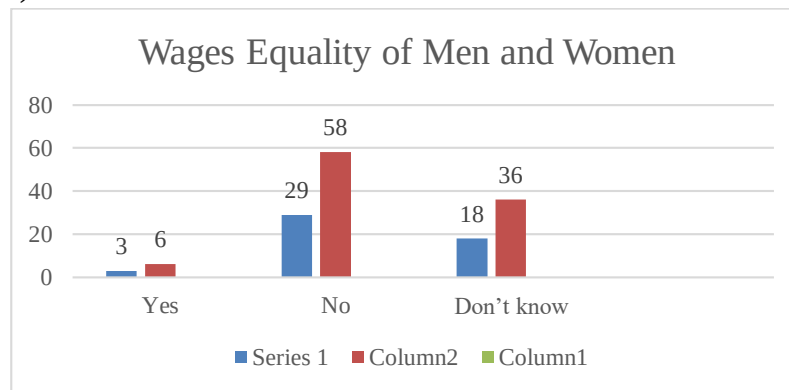


Figure 3. Wages equality between men and women

From the graph, we find wage equality between men and women; the findings reveal a strong sense of inequality. A majority of respondents (58.0%, 29 individuals) believe that men and women do not receive equal wages for similar work. Only 6.0% (3 respondents) reported that wages are equal, while a notable 36.0% (18 respondents) indicated that they do not know. This suggests that gender-based wage disparity is a significant issue, although some respondents may lack clear awareness due to informal employment arrangements.

Table 5. *Social, cultural, and structural factors of the respondents*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Family responsibility remain women's employment	Yes	26	52.0
	No	11	22.0
	Sometimes	13	26.0
Women was discouraged working outside	Yes	12	24.0
	No	38	76.0
Main barriers of women employment	Household	5	10.0
	Childcare	7	14.0
	Social norms	4	8.0
	Safety	6	12.0
	Lack of skills	28	56.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Table 5 shows the socio-cultural barriers to women's employment. More than half of the respondents (52.0%) stated that family responsibilities limit women's employment opportunities. Although most respondents (76.0%) reported that women were not discouraged from working outside the home, 24.0% still faced such discouragement. Lack of skills (56.0%) was identified as the major barrier to women's employment, followed by childcare responsibilities and safety concerns.

This section presents a series of case studies to provide an in-depth understanding of gender disparities in employment among slum residents in Dhaka city. While quantitative data highlights general patterns, case studies offer detailed insights into individual experiences, challenges, and coping strategies.

Employment and Gender Inequality

Case Study 1: Rahima is a 32-year-old married woman who works as a garment worker and resides in a slum in Dhaka. She is an internally displaced person from a village who came to the city eight years ago after getting married and has been residing in the slum since then. Rahima's monthly income amounts to about 9,000 BDT.

Barriers to Women's Employment

Case Study 2: Amina is a 30-year-old woman who has been married to her husband for many years. They reside together in a slum area with their three kids. She has never attended any school but has spent the last six years of her life in Dhaka city. It was clear that Amina wanted to engage herself in some work to earn money for her family. Unfortunately, she could not do so because of her housework.

Gender Preference in Employment

Case Study 3: Jamal, a 33-year-old male respondent, works in construction and lives in a slum area. Jamal stated that employers prefer male workers for many jobs, especially those that require physical labor. He believes that women are often overlooked even if they are capable.

Discussion

Findings from this study show that there is a gender disparity among people living in the slums of Dhaka concerning their access to employment opportunities. The results show that there are higher proportions of females in low-paid and unstable forms of employment compared to males in diverse and physically challenging employment types. Specifically, females are involved in jobs such as domestic work and garment labor, whereas males tend to engage in construction work and rickshaw pulling. Results from this study align with those of Salway, Rahman, and Jesmin (2003) and Zuberi, Akter, and Islam (2023).

Furthermore, females were also more challenged in accessing employment opportunities due to their duties, lack of skills, and safety. Most participants indicated that men had a greater chance of accessing employment than women. This finding aligns with Gender Role Theory and has also been confirmed in previous research conducted by Lata, Walters, and Roitman (2021). Regarding salary levels and working conditions, it can be argued that there was wage inequality among slum workers. For instance, the majority of the participants cited an imbalance in salaries of both men and women within the slum communities. Additionally, low incomes and job security emerged as significant issues among the participants. This is consistent with the International Labor Organization's (2022) reports on gender inequalities in the informal economy.

Conclusion

The study concludes that there are notable differences between genders in relation to access to employment in Dhaka slums. Women, in particular, engage in poorly paid, informal, and precarious jobs. The women are also at a disadvantage in terms of accessing employment compared to men. There are several factors that make it difficult for women to engage in wage work, including a lack of skills, family obligations, cultural beliefs, and safety concerns. The study further identifies some wage gaps and differences in working conditions between male and female employees.

Recommendations

Suggestions have been made to develop skills and vocational training programs to enhance the economic status of slum women by providing better job opportunities. There must also be equal pay for both genders and proper working conditions for them. The government and NGOs must ensure that women workers' working conditions are safe. Furthermore, gender discrimination and patriarchy in the slum community must be eradicated through appropriate campaigns. Economic and social support programs can be developed to provide more job opportunities for poor urban workers.

About the Author

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AI Statement

The document has benefited from AI-driven tools used minimally to proofread it. It is important to note that the core intellectual content, data interpretation, and analysis presented are entirely the work of the authors.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, findings, and recommendations. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Section A: Socio-Demographic Information

1. Gender

- a) ☐ Male
- b) ☐ Female
- c) ☐ Other

2. Age

- a) ☐ 15–19
- b) ☐ 20–29
- c) ☐ 30–39
- d) ☐ 40–49
- e) ☐ 50 and above

3. Marital Status

- a) ☐ Unmarried
- b) ☐ Married
- c) ☐ Widowed
- d) ☐ Divorced/Separated

4. Education Level

- a) ☐ No formal education
- b) ☐ Primary (1–5)
- c) ☐ Secondary (6–10)
- d) ☐ SSC or above

5. Migration Status

- a) ☐ Born in Dhaka
- b) ☐ Migrated from rural area
- c) ☐ Migrated from another city

6. Duration of Living in Slum

- a) ☐ Less than 1 year
- b) ☐ 1–5 years
- c) ☐ 6–10 years
- d) ☐ More than 10 years

Section B: Employment Status and Type

7. Current Employment Status

- a) ☐ Employed
- b) ☐ Unemployed
- c) ☐ Occasionally employed

8. Type of Employment

- a) ☐ Formal sector
- b) ☐ Informal sector
- c) ☐ Both

Survey Questionnaire

9. Nature of Job

- a) ☐ Day labor
- b) ☐ Domestic work
- c) ☐ Garment worker
- d) ☐ Rickshaw/van puller
- e) ☐ Small business
- f) ☐ Factory worker
- g) ☐ Construction worker
- h) ☐ Other (specify):

10. Working Hours per Day

- a) ☐ Less than 6 hours
- b) ☐ 6–8 hours
- c) ☐ 9–10 hours
- d) ☐ More than 10 hours

Section C: Access to Employment Opportunities

11. How did you get your current job?

- a) ☐ Family connection
- b) ☐ Neighbors/friends
- c) ☐ Labor contractor
- d) ☐ NGO support
- e) ☐ Own effort

12. Do you think men have better job opportunities than women in slums?

- a) ☐ Yes
- b) ☐ No
- c) ☐ Not sure

13. Have you ever been rejected from a job due to gender?

- a) ☐ Yes
- b) ☐ No

14. Who faces more difficulty in getting work?

- a) ☐ Men
- b) ☐ Women
- c) ☐ Both equally

Section D: Wage, Job Security, and Working Conditions

Daily/Monthly Income

- a) ☐ Less than BDT 8,000
- b) ☐ BDT 8,000–12,000
- c) ☐ BDT 12,001–15,000
- d) ☐ More than BDT 15,000

16. Do men and women receive equal wages for similar work?

- a) ☐ Yes
- b) ☐ No
- c) ☐ Don't know

17. Working Conditions

- a) ☐ Safe
- b) ☐ Moderately safe
- c) ☐ Unsaf