

## Changing Patterns of Marriage and Sexual Relations among Young Single Female Workers in Garment Factories in Gazipur, Bangladesh

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**Abstract :** In Bangladesh, migration and employment opportunities in the ready-made garment factories presented an alternative to early and arranged-marriage to many young women from the countryside. Although the positive impact of young women's labour migration and employment in the garment industry on economic independence, increased negotiation power, and enhancement of self-esteem have been well documented, impact of employment on sexual norms and practices remained under-researched. This ethnographic study comprising of an in-depth interview of 21 single young women working in various garment factories in Gazipur, Dhaka, explores the implication of work on sexual norms and practices. This study found young single garment workers experience a range of consensual and coercive sexual relations. The mixed-sex work environment in the garment manufacturing industry and private housing arrangements provide young single women opportunities to develop romantic and sexual relationships in the transient urban space, which was more restricted in the rural areas. The use of mobile phones further aids lovers to meet in amusement parks, friends' houses, or residential hotels beyond the gaze of colleagues and neighbors. Due to sexual double standard, men's sexual advantage is seen as natural and accepted, while women are being blamed as immoral for being engaged in pre-marital sex. Although self-choice marriage and premarital relations reported to be common among garment workers, stigma related to premarital sex lead young single women to resort to secret abortion practices. Married men also use power position to lure women in a subordinate position in coerce sexual relations, putting their reproductive and psychological health at risk. To improve sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing of young female garment workers, it is important to understand these changing sexual practices which otherwise remain taboo in public health discourses.

**Keywords :** female migration, ready-made garment, reproductive health, sexual practice

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