



Educated but Unemployed: Assessing the Factors of Unemployment Experienced by Graduated Women in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The majority of women's sectors in Bangladesh are developing rapidly such as women's education. In contrast, women's employment rate especially graduated women's employment rate is not increasing as well as women's education, which does not correspond to the current literature that assume education enhances the women's employment rate. Hence, the main research question was, what factors are responsible for graduated women in Bangladesh not getting jobs as graduated men do? The study aims to identify factors of graduated women's unemployment. The study followed the modified World Bank framework. This is qualitative study. Semi-structure interviews and KII were used to collect data from graduated women. The results have been discussed thematically. Therefore, this study identifies that not only education can increase women's employment rate but also local factors play an important role in increasing the graduated women's employment rate. These local factors are new knowledge and will be useful literature.

Keywords: Graduated women, unemployment, women empowerment, employment system, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is a developing country with a 50.6: 49.4 male and female ratio (BBS, 2021). It was freed from Pakistan in 1971. During the war, the country was destroyed. It was tough for the government to tackle those situations. Gradually, most of the sectors have been sharply developing. For instance, the maternal and child mortality rate decreased from 574 (1990) to 173 (2020) per 100000 (WHO, 2020); GDP increased from 306.26\$ (1990) to 2824 (2022) (The Daily Star, 2022), and life expectancy improved from 57.9 (1990) to 73.29 (2022), employment opportunities improved from 39 Million (1998) to 60.8 million (2016), literature rate was improved to 74.9% (2022) from 29.1% (1981) (Population census, 2022).

Table 1- Male and female education rate

Years /level of education	1990 (%)		2020 (%)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Primary	69.43	50.79	98.3	99.40
Secondary education	53.2	33.8	67.75	77.84
Higher secondary education	42.78	23.21	65	62
Bachelor or upper	41.22	12.43	58	41.7

Sources: BBS, 2021.

The most remarkable improvement was in the education sector, especially women education. Table 1 shows the changes of women education rate in Bangladesh. Over the last 30 years, the women's education rate has sharply increased. But their employment rate is slowly increasing. The ratio of males and females in employment is 71.6: 28.4 (ILO, 2018). In 1990, the female employment rate was 23.9 percent whereas the women's education rate was very low. At present (2020), the women's education rate is in a very good position as well as men but the employment rate is only 36.21 percent, whereas the male employment is 81.51 percent (BBS, 2021). Among the employed women, the majority is employed in agriculture and garment industry (Sultana, 2010). Consequently, day by day graduated women are becoming unemployed (Islam, 2016). Although other developing countries with the same socio-cultural conditions have achieved much higher women's employment ratios (Figure 1).

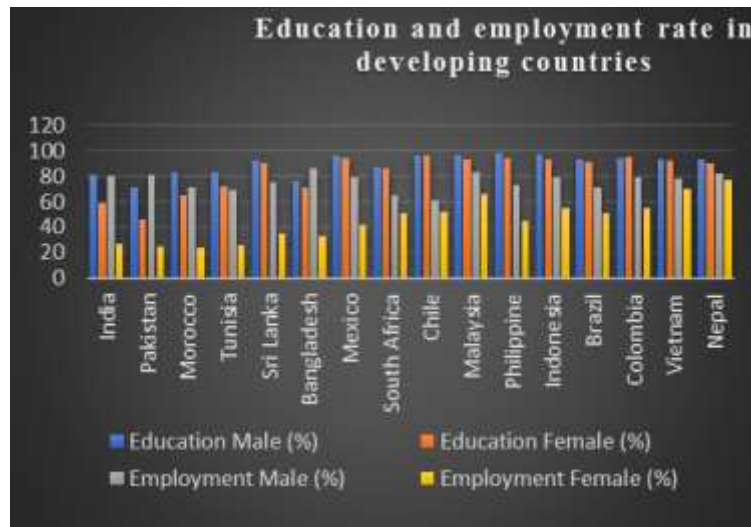


Figure 1- Male and female education and employment rate in developing countries

Sources: The world bank, 2020; ILO, 2012-2017

They face many problems from their families to society for being unemployed women. Within the family, they are just powerless women. Socially they are neglected and always they feel mental pressure for being unemployed (Rashid, 2019). The government of Bangladesh has taken various initiatives for women's employment as well as women's education. Nevertheless, graduated women are deprived of the job for various factors. Meanwhile, literature has been reviewed regarding the factors of women's education and unemployment. Sultana et. al. (2010) identified that education enhances women's labor force participation. At the same, lack of education, social norms, cultural barriers; and religious obligations increase unemployment rates (Lata et al., 2021). (Banerji et al., 2018) indicated that female labor participation rate as well as male in Vietnam because of women's education. In addition, low wages; lack of policies; unfavorable labor market; family obligations are the causes of women's unemployment (Islam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2018).

Literature mainly highlights that education is one of the important factors in women's employment which is the opposition of the current educated women's situation in Bangladesh. Currently, 2.5 million men and .6 million women do the jobs who have completed graduation but their graduation ratio is 58:42 (BBS, 2021). It was a puzzle and a huge gap between women's education and the employment rate. Therefore, it can be said that not only education can enhance women's employment rate. Besides education, there are also some local factors for women's employment. No research has been conducted on this issue. Given the lack of research regarding this issue, the main research question was, what factors are responsible for graduated women in Bangladesh not getting jobs as graduated men do?

2. Objective of the study

Graduated women in Bangladesh want to do the same job as graduated men but they do not get as well as men do. The study found a literature gap. However, it seems that some local factors are responsible for their unemployment besides education. Therefore, the main objective of the study was to identify the factors of graduated women's unemployment in Bangladesh.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Theoretical framework

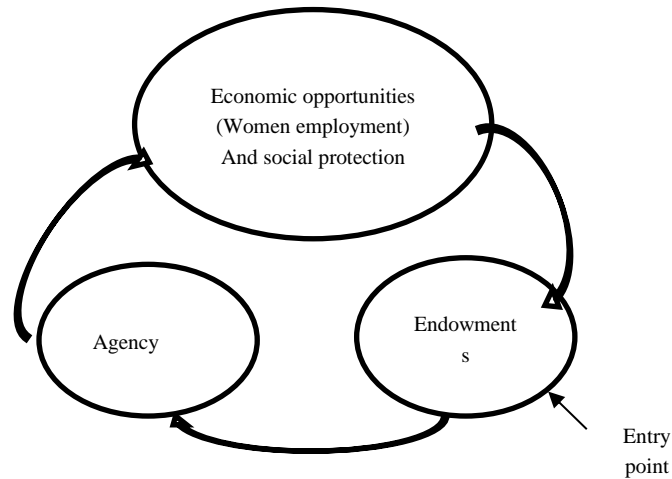
Many theories identify that education enhances employment. For instance, Human Capital Theory mentions that education enhances women's employment (Nafukho et al., 2004). In addition, the labour market theory illustrates that education is the key indicator of employment (McNabb, 1987).

The analysis of human capital theory and labor market theory reveal that only education can enhance women's employment which is the opposite of Bangladeshi scenario. In contrast, The World Bank Framework (WBF) mentioned that besides education, the agency plays an important role in women's employment (Figure 2) (Arzu, 2018). Among the theories, the WBF was applicable but it needed to modify considering Bangladesh's perspective because, besides education and agency, socio-cultural and local factors play an important role in graduated women's employment. The modified World Bank framework (Figure 3) was used in this study.

3.2 Qualitative approach

This study is a qualitative approach; conducted through the case study method and carried out in the Dhaka district in Bangladesh.

Figure 2- The framework of relationship between education and women employment

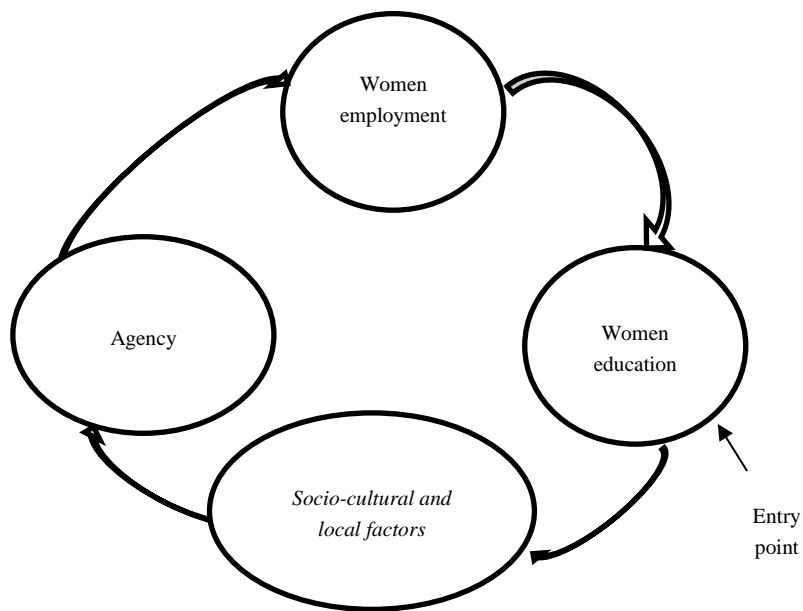


Source: World development report, 2012, p-9

3.3 Data collection and analysis

Eight (8) graduated unemployed women, four (4) graduated employed women (graduated from Dhaka and Jagannath University), and two (2) employers were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The author contacted the selected respondents and collected the required data from December 2021 to February 2022 virtually (via Skype, and WhatsApp) due to Covid-19. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and Key Informant Interviews (KII) (table 2).

Figure 3- Modified framework of women education and employment



Source: The author

Table 2- Methods, respondents, and timetable

Types of respondents	Data collection technique	No of respondents	<u>Timetable</u>
Graduated unemployed women	In-depth interviews	8	✓ November 2020 (Pre-interview) ✓ December 2021
Graduated employed women	In-depth interviews	4	
Employers	KII	2	

The study was conducted according to their favorable time, place, and willingness. The conversation was in Bangla language and recorded taking permission from respondents. Later it was translated and discussed thematically with the narratives of the participants. The respondent's pseudonyms like A, B, C, D; also maintained confidentiality throughout the study.

3.4 Ethical considerations

It is an integral part of the modern social research process. Code of ethics of research during the study time was fully followed, for instance, APA code of ethics. The interest of interviewees, confidentiality, willingness, and fruitfulness were given priority to accomplish the study. The APA reference style was used.

4. Results of interviews

This section represents the results of the interviews. Results have been discussed under the themes and subthemes. There were two (4.1, 4.2) themes (Table 3) based on interview results. The first (4.1) theme shows the common factors and the second (4.2) theme contains the local factors.

Table 3- Summaries of the interview results

Themes	Sub-themes
4.1 Common factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males' dominant interview boards • Marital status and family responsibilities impact on interview boards • Physical appearance • Education system • Company's benefits
4.2 Local factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bribe system and discrimination among siblings • Marriage, family, & job preparation are close to one another, and self responsibilities. • Job recruitment process • Lobbying and Political aspects • Leaked job examination questions • Dhaka based job examination center

Participants graduated from Dhaka University and Jagannath University at least two years ago majoring in Humanities and Social Sciences. Participants' pseudonyms were used to analyze the data. For instance, eight graduated unemployed women (A to H), four graduated employed women (I to L), and two employers (M,N).

4.1 Common Factors of Graduated Women's Unemployment

Common factors mean the factors that are known to us and other countries have already identified. The results of the interviews identified some common factors.

The male domain interview board

The results of the interviews show that interview board members do partial toward women because most board members are men. They try to give priority to male candidates. In addition, when a woman candidate enters the interview board she feels uneasy and less confident. Participant F had experienced male-dominant interview boards:

"I have appeared many times in job examinations but did not get any job. I saw the board members were trying to exclude me. Because most interview members were men. When I entered the interview board then felt nervous." Interview with F

The interview board is important to get jobs for women. One of the graduated employed women (I) shared her experiences about the good interview board:

"I faced four interview boards including the present job. I saw some of the boards were friendly and good environment (there was an equal of men and women among the board members). In contrast, I had a bad experience where the majority of board members were men." Interview with I

This is badly true that more or less the male domain interview board impacts women's employment.

Marital status and family responsibilities impact on interview boards

The results of the study illustrate that married women face more problems in getting jobs. Among them, who have children they sometimes stay away from their jobs.

"Several times I faced the interview board. The board members were pleased with me about my academic results and board performance. When they saw I was married and had two kids then their attitudes radically changed. They tried to exclude me. Employers think I will be busy with family. Interview with C

Physical appearance

Physical appearance includes brightness, charming faces, and style. The study identified that good-looking women get extra benefits on the interview boards. Interestingly physical appearance of male candidates does not affect on interview boards. There are many examples of physical appearance on interview boards. Participant D had the same experience:

"I answered most of the questions and my academic result is good. One problem was my skin color. When the board members see my black face then their first expression is unexpected to me. One of my best friends looks very good and attractive. She faced only one interview board and got the job." Interview with D

This is true that their appearance works besides their academic background and good performance. An employed woman (I) was the beneficiary of the physical appearance:

"I am bright and good-looking. I can remember an incident on the interview board. A board member admired my appearance on the last interview board. He said, 'You are good-looking'. I have no idea whether this factor is responsible or not but I got that job." Interview with I

An employer recognizes that sometimes good-looking women get extra benefits on the interview board. He compared a good-looking woman with good handwriting. He mentioned:

"When we see a good-looking woman on the interview board, all members do favor her besides their educational qualifications. At the same, some positions are fixed for good-looking women." Interview with M

Graduated women's physical appearance is considered sometimes a part of the requirements for getting jobs, which is very sad. Sometimes it happens.

Education system

In Bangladesh, general education has three branches such as science, arts (humanities), and commerce. The study reveals that women mostly graduated in humanities. In contrast, the majority of jobs need science, technical, and commerce background students that are occupied by the graduated men. There are many examples of not getting jobs because of educational background. Participant F is a brilliant student. She faced many interview boards but she was rejected for her academic background.

"My first interview was with a private bank. They asked me why I was there because I had completed my graduation from Bangla literature. This is a gap between the education system and the job examination system. If I was a student of business studies or science, I had many opportunities." Interview with F

An employed woman also stated the same argument:

"I am a physics teacher at a college. In this department, 80 percent of total students are males and less than 20 percent are females. Still now, besides government jobs, many private jobs are fixed for the science background student." Interview with L

The company's benefits are given more priority

Companies always try to avoid women in field-level jobs for their benefit. The results of the interviews reveal that participants have an interest in field-level jobs but the authority ignored them:

"Defense and field-level jobs are given priority to men. It is assumed that women are not strong as well as men. Most of the posts are occupied by the men candidates." Interview with N

To sum up, the common factors illustrate that the males' dominant interview board, marital status, education system, self-responsibilities, and company benefits are importantly responsible for the graduated women's unemployment.

4.2 Local Factors

Local factors are the factors that were not identified previously. This research only identified these factors of graduated women's unemployment. The results of the study identified some local factors that obstruct graduated women from getting jobs in Bangladesh.

Bribery system and discrimination among siblings

The first is the bribing system which is illegal in Bangladeshi law but many jobs need bribes secretly. Sometimes parents support the boys by providing bribes to get jobs but deprive them of their daughters. Participant E shared the incidents of the family regarding the bribe system in Bangladesh.

“One day I had an offer of a job exchanging a large amount of money. I consulted with my father, but he refused to give me the bribe money. In addition, my father gave bribe money to my older brother. I am not saying that bribe is good, but parents do discriminate among siblings.” Interview with E

The bribe is a social disease in Bangladesh and graduated women are mostly the victims of this system. An employed woman explained her incident about the bribe:

“Three days before an interview, a person phoned me and offered me the job exchanging a big amount of money. My parents could not provide the money. So, I refused that’s why I was not selected for that job.” Interview with J

Marriage, family, & job preparation are close to one another, and prefer official jobs

In the Bangladesh context, women aged more than 30 years seem difficult to marry without a job. So, women try to get married before 30 years. The results of the interviews reveal that unemployed unmarried women feel tension about their marriage which impacts their job preparation. Interestingly, marriage tension can be seen among the women, men have no tension in their marriage before getting jobs (Zahangir& Nahar, 2021). After getting jobs, they want to marry women who are below 30.

“When a girl aged 27-30, unmarried, unemployed, feels mental stress because she has no job, is still single, who will marry her, and what will be the future? As a result, most of the time I cannot concentrate on job-related studies. On the other hand, boys have no tension about these matters.” Interview with H

An employer shared a story of a woman candidate who came to appear on the interview board. He said:

“One day a woman came to board with her kids. When she entered the interview room and kept her kids to other candidates outside of room. Can you imagine how she prepares for job examinations? This is difficult for the women to take preparation besides families and children.” Interview with N

Job recruitment process

Government jobs need 3/4 years to complete the procedures. Men candidates have the patience to keep themselves in this process but women after their graduation, keep them busy in their family life. It is tough for women to continue the process besides families. Participants mentioned that:

“I applied for a job one and half years ago, but the authority still did not take the preliminary examination. Can you imagine how a woman can continue her job examination curriculum during this time besides family tension?” Interview with B

Employed women also mentioned the same report that the recruitment process in Bangladesh is very lengthy.

“I applied in February 2014, nine-months later the preliminary examination was held. A few months later, the preliminary result was published. Gradually the next step was taken with a long time gap. Finally, I joined the job in late 2016. It took approximately three years.” Interview with I

Bangladesh is a unique country where the job examination process takes more than three years to complete this process. In this process, the graduated women sometimes cannot continue.

Political aspects and lobbying

Bangladesh politics, especially student politics have some bad examples. There is a remarkable relationship between politics and jobs. If the candidates have a political identity and lobbying, they get extra advantages in getting some jobs. Most participants said the bad political system is responsible for their unemployment:

“I know some of my friends (boy) who did politics, they faced only one or two interview boards and got prestigious jobs. During the first year of my bachelor’s education, I involved in politics. Later I stopped for some incidents. Politics sometimes force women into another life that is very harmful to moral character. In contrast, boys have no chance of this incident. They get benefits from politics.” Interview with A

Some of the employed participants agreed that political aspects and lobbying worked to get their jobs besides educational qualifications. Participant L was the beneficiary:

“I had an opportunity that had a connection with politics and my father had a good relationship with our Member of Parliament (MP). He contacted the principal of this college and requested for my job. The interview board selected me. I think this background helped me besides my educational qualification.” Interview with L

Sometimes, they are powerless if the upper-level position leaders put pressure on a candidate.

“Political pressure and lobbying in interview boards influence partially. Sometimes, we get pressure from political leaders to appoint some candidates. About 90 percent of recommended candidates come for males.” Interview with M

Both lobbying and student politics are sometimes obstacles to getting jobs in certain fields for graduated women.

Leaked job exam questions

It shocks when we see the news that the job examination questions are leaked before the examinations. For instance, Zaman et al., (2019) reported many cases of job examination questions in Bangladesh. In the leaked process, 95% of beneficiaries are men and only 5% are women. Participant B shared how the question leaked kicked her to qualify:

“One day later of job examination, one of my friends (boys) said that he collected the questions of the examination. The result was published, and I saw he was selected for the next step and I was disqualified.” Interview with B

Many of the job examinations were canceled due to the question leakage. The questions are mainly leaked in the government job examinations rather than private jobs.

“Sometimes I saw in the newspaper about the question leaked. This is very bad for the candidates. Some officers do this illegal task.” Interview with N

The job exam questions leaked are a disaster in the education system. In this illegal task, men are more beneficiaries and women are looser.

Dhaka-based job examination center

Most of job examination centers are in Dhaka city. Candidates, who live in remote areas, have to travel to Dhaka to sit the examinations. Women candidates face problems with security and night stay because 10/12 hours are needed to come to Dhaka. In this regard, some graduated women candidates cannot sit for all job examinations. Participant C had the experience of being unable to sit in job examination in Dhaka:

“All job examinations are held in Dhaka city. Three years ago, I lived one year in Barisal district for my husband’s job location. That one year, I gave only one job examination because of the jobs examination center”. Interview with C

An employed woman mentioned that,

“Many of the women are graduating at the district level. It is tough for them to travel to Dhaka and sit in the examination. The boys can travel because they have no tension of security.” Interview with K

To sum up, there are some local factors by which graduated women in Bangladesh are not getting jobs rapidly such as physical appearance, bribe system, marriage vs. job preparation, job recruitment process, political aspects, lobbying, leaked job examination questions, and Dhaka based job examination center.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The study aimed to identify the factors of graduated women’s unemployment. The results of this study suggest that not only education can enhance women’s employment, but also some local factors can play an important role in enhancing the women’s employment rate. Here the major findings have been discussed.

The study identifies ‘male dominant interview boards’ as an important factor of graduated women’s unemployment. Most of the job interview boards are formed by male members. Claringbould & Knoppers (2007) found in their research that the chair of most of the job interview boards is male, and they control the board. This is the consequence of patriarchal society which is another factor. For example, a study found that the board members give more priority to male candidates (Karim et al., 2018). The findings of the study also show that good-looking women get extra benefits and less priority than are married and having children. Many researchers illustrated that good appearance does matter in the interview boards (Desrumaux et al., 2009; Chowdhury, 2010). Hall et. al. (2012) reported that the bright appearance of women gets favor in their jobs. Likewise, marital status and having kids highly a negative impact on labor force participation in Bangladesh (Bidisha et al., 2020). Popay (1985) identified that women, family, and unemployment are interrelated. In Bangladesh, traditionally women are responsible for household work (Mahmud, 2003). In this regard, the company always tries to avoid women which are another important factor of women’s unemployment.

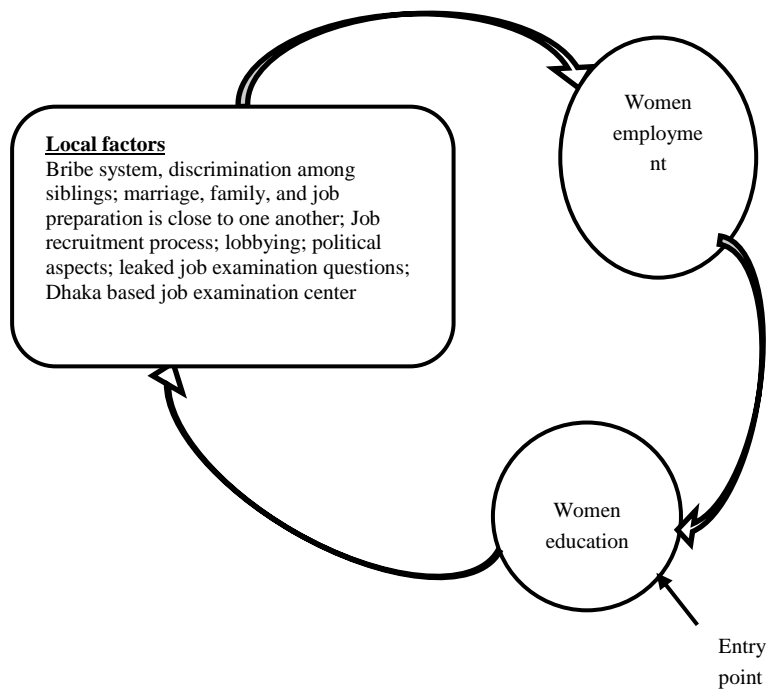


Figure 4- Local factors of graduated women's unemployment.

The findings of the study identify many local factors of graduated women's unemployment in Bangladesh perspective that are originality of this study (Figure 4). The study reveals the first local factor is the 'bribery system'. Participants' stories reveal that most graduated employed and unemployed women were demanded bribes by someone for specific jobs. Naturally, parents refuse to provide bribes for daughters but agree for sons. Many researchers identified that bribe is needed for jobs in Bangladesh. For instance, Tanny and Zafarullah (2022) found in their study that less-qualified people are getting jobs from bribing. This deal is mostly done with male candidates (Kaiser & Sinanan, 2020). Parents sell their properties and give money to their sons but ignore giving daughters (Mair & Marti, 2007). Thus, the bribe system is pushing the graduated women from jobs. The 'recruitment process' is another factor in graduated women's unemployment. Government jobs need more than a two-year exam process (Islam, 2016). For example- The government published the circular for the 40th BCS Jobs in August 2018, March 2022 the interview results were published (The Daily Star 2022). Other important local factors are 'political involvement and lobbying'. Participants' stories reveal that many people take benefits for the sake of politics in various institutes. The Daily Star (2021) reported that 20 posts of hospital management are appointed based on political involvement among them 18 were men. Currently, lobbying is playing an important role in getting jobs in Bangladesh (Rashid, 2019). Women are far more distant in lobbying and politics (Chowdhury, 2010). Last few years, 'leaked job examination questions' is growing fast which is another factor for the graduated women's unemployment. The job examination questions are leaked out before the exams (Zaman et al., 2019). The Daily Star (2019) reported that there were many people arrested for questions leaked and among them, 95% were men and only 5 percent were women. Lastly, Dhaka-based job examination centers are pushing the graduated women into unemployment. Thus, the graduated women cannot take part in all job examinations in Dhaka city. In this way, they get less scope in employment.

To sum up, this study finds that women's higher education rate is sharply increasing but their employment rate is slowly increasing. The study identified some local factors that are responsible for graduate women's unemployment that discourage girls from pursuing higher education. In this regard, the study strongly suggests that some initiatives can be taken. For example, to reform or formulate new policies; age of women for jobs should be expanded; job examination centers should be divisional cities; women must be involved in technical education. The author believes that it will be good literature for researchers. In addition, further research should be conducted in large study areas on the same issues.

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Conflict of interest: N/A

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