Female worker in fish processing industry: a study on Atlas Seafood Industry Ltd., Khulna, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to determine the livelihood status of female workers of Atlas Seafood Industry Ltd., Khulna, Bangladesh, from July to December, 2022. The data were collected through the questionnaire, survey, group discussion and public interview. The present study provides a clear-cut picture of the female workers in Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. The study's results revealed some interesting facts and showed that most involved females are in 16-30 years age group, whereas most were Muslim (90%). About 75% of workers were illiterate and 24% were literate. It was found that 61% of house were Kacha (Made of mud and straw) while 37% of house were Semi-pucca (Tin shed buildings) and only 2% of house were pucca. (Bricks Built house). The major constraints were the lack of proper knowledge and illiteracy, not as much governmental support. The result found that 60.83% of female workers joined the fish processing industry without their husbands, 23.33% absence of father, 11.67% absence of legal guardian and 4.17% others, respectively. Most of the female (72.5%) were found to work at lower levels, while only 1.67% worked on higher level jobs in the industry and this portion were permanent workers. The weekly salary system is only for temporary workers whose income ranges between Tk.600 to 3000 per week while the permanent workers receive their monthly salary income between Tk.12000 to 20000 per month.

Key Words: *Livelihood status, Female workers, Atlas Seafood Industry Ltd.*

I. Introduction

The previous fifty years of Bangladesh's development have been full of surprises in terms of development and the incredible resiliency of the people in the face of recurrent natural disasters and man-made catastrophes. The nation's economic transformation has mostly been fueled by social changes brought on by women's empowerment, and it offers a unique illustration of a neo-liberal development model in which social progress has vastly outpaced economic growth. The three

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development pillars of desirable structural improvements, growth to close the income and productivity gaps (convergence), and increased equality are crucial to Bangladesh's ambition of being an upper middle income country by 2031 and a high income country by 2041 (Hossain et al., 2021). Of the total population of 165,158,616, as many as 81,712,824 are males, while 83,347,206 are females (BBS, 2023). The percentage of female population is 49.47% compared to 50.53% male population. Bangladesh has 1.8 million more males than females. In Bangladesh, there are about 56.0 million labour, of which 21.3 million are female labourers (ILO, 2021). The female workers of Bangladesh cover about 38% of the total country's labour. Although there are significant gender disparities still present in Bangladesh's labor market, women's participation in the official labor force is increasing (Mustafa, 2021).

Fisheries sector can directly support the goals of the pro-poor movement by offering employment (as fishers and other associated trades) and a means of subsistence. More than 18 million people in the nation rely on the fisheries sector for their livelihoods directly and indirectly (FRSS, 2017). According to the BFTI (2016), 1.4 million women rely on the fishing industry for their livelihoods through fishing, farming, fish handling, and processing. Additionally, this industry offers great promise for the future of the nation's economic growth. Economic development and the expansion of agriculture are closely related (Mohsin et al., 2015). When the agricultural sector begins to improve, the export of the country immediately improves. Countries that ignore to expand their agriculture cannot boost their economies. So, revenue starts to increase and strengthen the country's economic development.

In frozen fish businesses, about one million workers are engaged. Among them, near 80% are women (Coulter and Disney, 1987). Most of the workers are illiterate. Many of them do not know about their responsibility. However, the female workers' activities influence the socio-economic status of the industry (Islam, 1975). The employment of women is a topic that receives a lot of discussion today and needs proper consideration. This topic has been the subject of numerous research around the nation. The majority of studies have focused on female textile workers in different Bangladeshi cities like Dhaka, Chittagong, etc., but no research has been done on female employees in the fish processing industries. Recent assessments of female workers by the sociology department at Dhaka University paint a general picture of female workers in the apparel sectors. However, there has to be more research on female employees in the frozen fish industry. Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. has been chosen for the study in light of all of these factors. This study focused on the position of women employed by Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. in terms of their means of subsistence, issues they encountered while working, and opportunities for economic advancement.

II. Materials and Methods
Sampling design
Sampling size has been determined depending on the number of employees employed in the selected section of the Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. In most cases, about 25%-50% of samples have been considered from the total sample size in different working sections. It should be mentioned here that it is impossible to count the number of female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. because there were many temporary workers.

Data collection
Data were collected from the field survey according to the sample design from the selected section of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. For data collection, semi-structural interview schedule having open-ended and close-ended questionnaires were used to the objectives of the study.

Indicators used
Some indicators have been selected to collect relevant data from the Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. in context of the study. These are types of employment, working status, income, family size, education, religion, job satisfaction, social causes, economic causes, monetary and non-monetary contribution to the family.

Data assembling and presentation
The data collected from questionnaire were grouped, categorized and interpreted according to the objectives as well as the indicators. Some data contained numeric and some contained narrative facts.

For measurable and indicative answers, data have been grouped in tabular forms. Assembled data are presented in tabular and graphical forms for better understanding.

III. Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics of female workers

Family size: In Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd., 38.33% of female workers have families consisting of 5-6 members, 27.5% have 7-8 and 17.5% have 3-4 family members (Table 01). Some families have two or more members who are female and working in this or other industries. According to this study, most of the female worker's family consisted of about 5-6 members. The family size of female workers at Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. is near an average of 5.6 persons/house (BBS, 2021).

Table 01. Demographic characteristics

Particulars	No. of family member	Frequency	Respondent (%)
Household size	1-2	15	12.50
	3-4	21	17.50
	5-6	46	38.33
	7-8	33	27.50
	9-10	05	04.17
Types of family	Single Family	65	54.17
	Joint Family	34	28.33
	Extended family	21	17.50
Age	Below 18	10	8.33
	18-25	48	40.00
	26-35	37	30.83
	36-45	19	15.83
	46-55	02	1.67
	Above 55	04	3.33
Religion	Islam	108	90.00
	Sanatan (Hindu)	12	10.00
Marital status	Married	30	25.00
	Unmarried	11	09.17
	Divorced	23	19.17
	Oppressed	49	40.83
	Widow	07	05.83
Education	Illiterate	35	29.17
	Can sign	20	16.67
	Class i-iv	23	19.17
	Class v-viii	19	15.83
	Class ix-x	13	10.83
	S.S.C	07	05.83
	Above S.S.C	03	02.50
Migration status	Permanently migrated	42	35.00
	Seasonally migrated	78	65.00

Types of family: Type of family with their environment is an important factor to consider the family. This factor is one of the causes for female workers to join industries. The survey revealed that 54.17% of the female workers have single families, 28.33% have joint families, and the rest were extended families (Table 01).

Age: Table 01 shows that nearly 70% of female workers fall within the age group of 18-35. Child labor, i.e. below 18 years, was 8.33% and above 55 years was 3.33%, respectively. According to BBS (2021), 65% of the total women in the country are below 34 years old.

Religion composition: Religious status of female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. is discussed here. It is observed that about 90% of the female workers are Muslim while the rests are Hindus (Table 01). Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd has no christens or Buddhist female workers. The findings of the result are similar to that of population in the country (BBS, 2021).

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Marital Status: The result revealed that 60% of the female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. were found divorced and oppressed by their husbands. The survey findings indicated that 25% of female workers are still married and living happily (Table 01). The percentage of divorce is higher than prevailing in the country.

Education: Education is a fundamental right of all population besides food, cloth and medicine. The survey result revealed that 30% of female workers are illiterate. This study found that about 70% of the female workers are literate, as the concept of literacy is related to signature only. This literacy rate did not correlate to the Atlas literacy rate, which accounts for about 74.66 percent, according to the preliminary report of "Population and Housing Census 2022". The literacy rate was 51.77 percent in the previous census conducted in 2011 (BBS, 2021).

Residential facilities: The condition of houses was below the living standard and 85.83% of workers lived in rented houses, while only 6.67% of workers had their own residences. Figure 01 shows the percentages of workers who used residence facilities. The result showed that 62.5% of female workers used semi-pacca and 37.5% used pacca latrin (Figure 02).
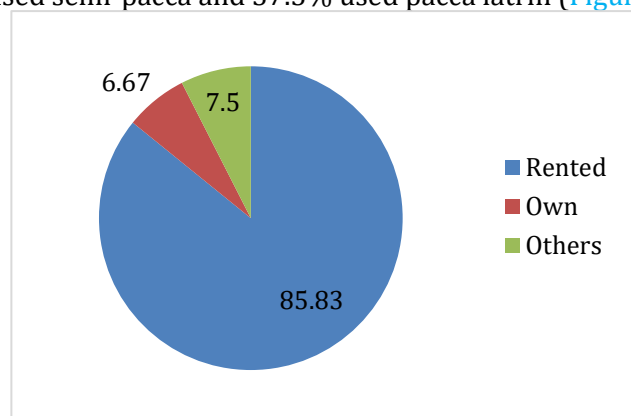
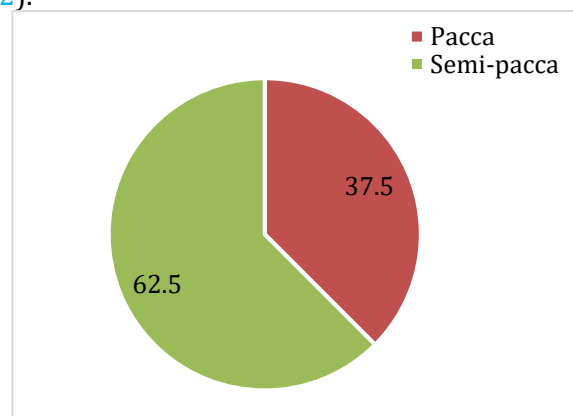Figure 01. Housing condition of female workers surveyed
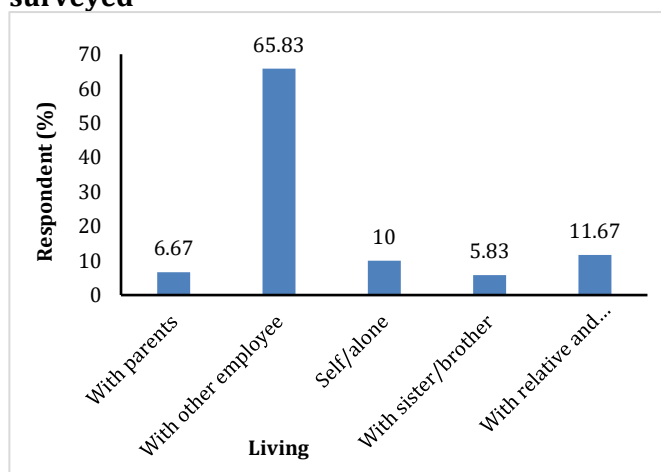
Figure 02. Sanitation of female workers

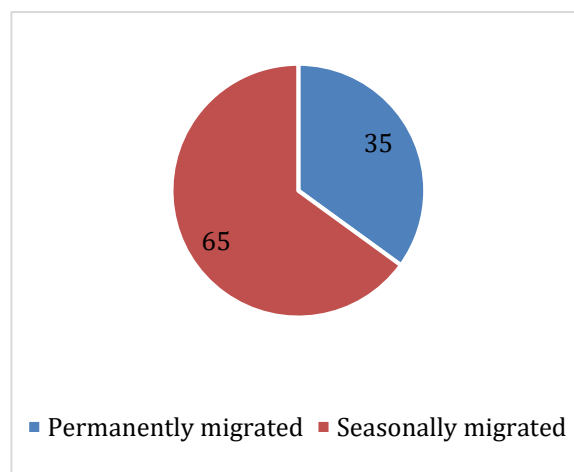Figure 03. Living arrangement of the female

Figure 04. Migratory status of the female

Nature of living arrangement: The present study found a large number of female workers living with other than their families and it was found that 65.83% lived with other employees, 11.67% lived with relatives, self or alone, 10% and 12.5% lived with the family of female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. (Figure 03).

Migration status of female workers: Figure 04 shows everything about migration status of female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. It was found that 65% of the surveyed female workers seasonally migrated to the industry, while 35% migrated permanently (Figure 04). A good number of female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. migrated from different districts of the country. Most of them migrated from different parts of Khulna division. It was found that the driving force behind the migration was mainly economic/poverty. Some socio-cultural reasons compelled them to migrate. Female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. migrate on a seasonal or permanent basis. The

seasonal workers stayed in industry for a particular time and returned to their native homes. Permanently migrated females lived in Khulna city for many years and they mainly migrated from Morelgonj, Paickghasa, Begerhat, Pirozpur, Satkhira, Batiaghata, Shamnagar, Tala, Jessore and Barisal etc.

Harassment: Female workers working in different sections have to work in various unfavourable situations. The result revealed that 53.17% of workers in this industry were mentally tortured by their employer, both company and contractor. It was alarming that many female employees (32.71%) were physically harassed. It was also found that a small portion of females were sexually harassed by their co-male workers (Figure 05). The study found that workers at the base of seafood value chains in Bangladesh suffer non-enforcement of legal rights and violations of ILO labour standards, including restricted freedom of association and collective bargaining (Shikha. 2022).
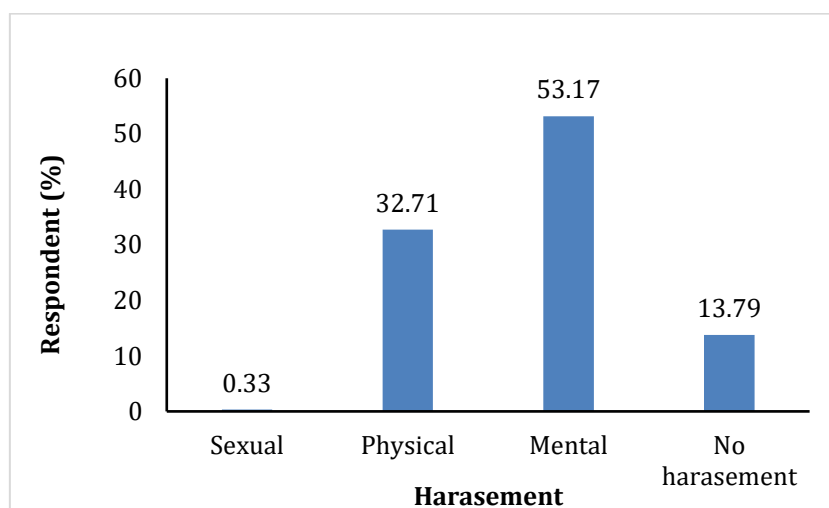
Figure 05. Harassment faced by female workers in the workplace

Causes of being female workers

Poverty is the leading cause which compels women in third world countries to work. The present research on Atlas Sea Food Industries Ltd had identified the major causes for which the female labors were seen to work. The principal reasons were the absence of a husband, father or guardian. The result found that 60.83% of female workers joined the fish processing industry without their husbands, 23.33% without fathers, 11.67% absence of legal guardians and 4.17% others, respectively (Figure 06).
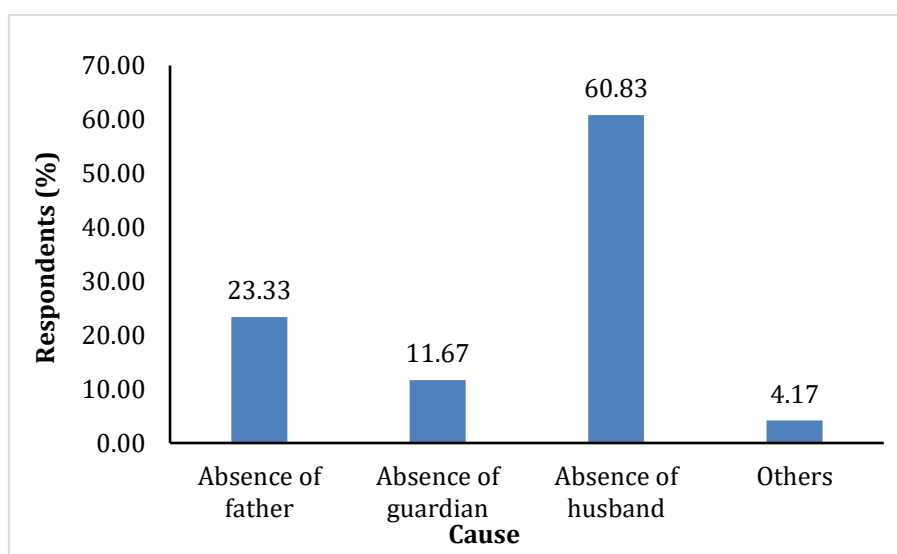
Figure 06. Causes of being female workers

Employment and income pattern

Types of occupation: The female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. were found to be occupied in a variety of activities. Table 02 shows that approximately 12 types of occupation were found to be done by the Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd female workers. The highest numbers of female workers (35.83%) were found in beheading section, followed by 18% in panning/dressing, while 12.5% work respectively in washing section. Meanwhile, mostly females were found mobile and worked in various sections according to the need of the factory.

Table 02. Composition of female respondent workers by occupation and their working hours and level of income

Particulars	Section	Frequency	Respondent (%)
Occupation	Washing	15	12.50
	Size of Grading	10	08.33
	Chilled water deepening	04	03.33
	Unit weighing	03	02.50
	Beheading	43	35.83
	Panning	22	18.33
	Glazing	08	06.67
	Freezing	02	01.67
	Unloading	02	01.67
	Packing	07	06.83
	Checking	02	01.67
	Cleaner	02	01.67
Job status	Permanent	05	04.17%
	Temporary	115	95.83%
Working hours	4-5	03	02.50
	6-7	15	12.50
	8-9	25	20.83
	10-12	77	64.17
Income level (Tk/week)	600-1000	11	9.17
	1100-1500	22	18.33
	1600-2000	38	31.67
	2100-2500	33	27.50
	2600-3000	9	7.50
	above 3000	7	5.83
Overtime facilities	Overtime facilities	115	95.83
	No overtime facilities	5	04.17
Contribution to family	Gives total to the family	96	80.00
	Gives partial to the family	05	04.17
	Gives nothing to the family	19	15.83

Working status: Most of the female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. were temporary. A few numbers of female workers in this industry were permanent. Table 02 shows that 95.83% of female workers are temporary workers and the rest, 4.17%, are permanent. As the numbers of temporary workers are very high, it is disadvantage to the industry. It is therefore suggested that more female workers should be taken as permanent workers. Most of the females (72.5%) were found to work at lower levels, while only 1.67% worked on higher level jobs in the industry and this portion were permanent workers (Figure 07).

Daily working hours: The permanent workers of female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. have definite daily working hours, while temporary workers in this industry have no definite daily working time. The daily working hours of the permanent workers were about 8 hours, while the daily working hours of the temporary worker were variable and varied between 4-12 hours. The present study found that about 64.17% of female workers worked round the clock. All the workers in this industry get leisure time during their working period.
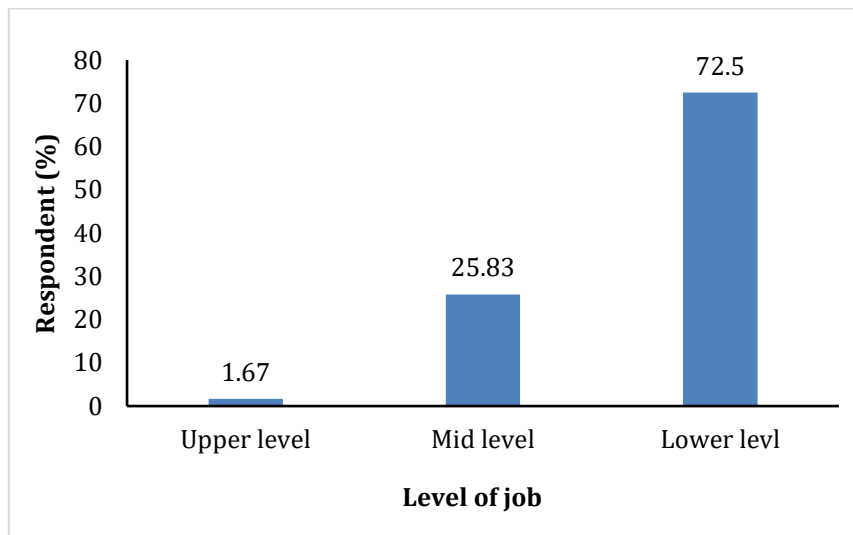
Figure 07. Level of job of the female workers at Atlas Seafood Industry Ltd

Level of income: Most of The female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. received their salary on a weekly basis. It was found that the temporary female workers' income depends on production of the products. Table 02 shows the income level of female workers in Atlas Seafood Ltd. The weekly salary system is only for temporary workers whose income ranges between Tk.600 to 3000 per week while the permanent workers receive their monthly salary income between Tk.12000 to 20000 per month. The highest, 31.67% of the female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd. earn Tk 1600-2000 per week, whereas they worked seasonally and suffered from various problems during off-season. There were no similarities in income level between the female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd.

Overtime facilities: Permanent female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd had no overtime facilities, but temporary workers could do overtime work. Overtime is counted as extra production time in Atlas Sea Food Industry. The survey result of overtime is shown in Table 02. About 95.17% of the female workers of Atlas Sea Food Industry Ltd are facilitated for overtime facilities.

Level of job satisfaction: The findings of the present study exposed that 81.25% of workers were not satisfied with their income and job status, 12.5% satisfied and 6.25% have their no comments (Figure 08).

Female and male workers ratio: Figure 09 shows the female and male workers ratio of Atlas Seafood and it was found that 76.67% of the workers were female and only 23.33% male. According to this survey, a few female workers thought their status was always lower than the male worker though they were higher in number.
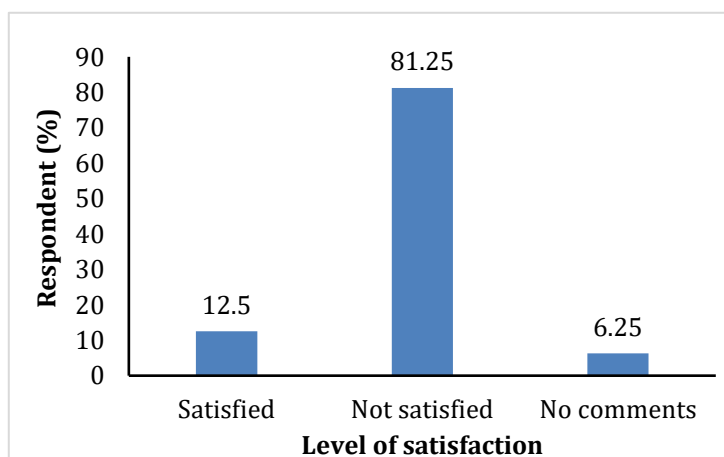

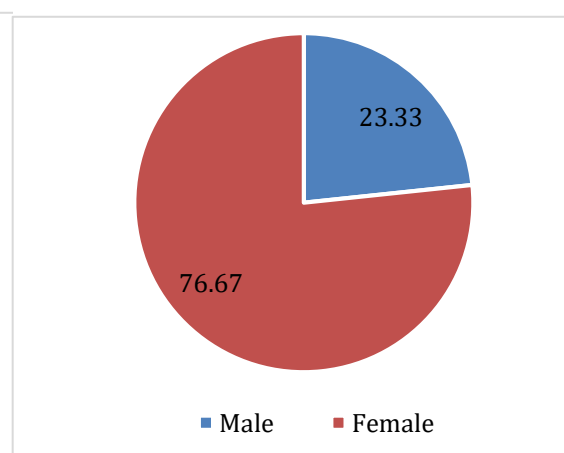**Figure 08. Job satisfaction level of female workers**

Figure 09. Male and female ratio

IV. Conclusion

The study findings showed that many female workers in frozen fish industries lived below the poverty level. Many female workers are passing their days with great despair because of their ignorance. They were deprived of their fights. Simulation of this problem needed a practical and integrated approach immediately to protect their rights in the industry. Appropriate strategies have to be adopted and in order to do that reliable database is essential. This research study has made a humble attempt and this is not an end in itself. This study has been conducted within certain limitations. Nevertheless, the study provided some ideas on the status of the life of female workers of Atlas Sea Fish Industry Ltd. Further detailed analysis of all the frozen fish industries regarding the status of female workers should be carried out.

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