

Lack of daycare centres frustrates working women

SOHEL PARVEZ

Bina Rani Dey got back to work after her maternity leave of six months. However, it was her parents who had to take a major life changing step.

They had to shift from Armanitola in the old parts of Dhaka to Gopibag to take care of their grandchild Somadrita when Bina goes to work.

"My husband and I both work. And we have no one else to look after our daughter. Left with no choice, we had to pursue them to shift here," said Bina, a physician at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

This is not an isolated case. Thousands of working women suffer from a lack of proper, reliable care givers at home or daycare facilities at the workplace.

At a time when an increasing number of women are joining the labour force and contributing to the economic development of the country, many women still have to quit their jobs or take up part-time work to look after their children.

At present, 1.68 crore women work in sectors ranging from bank and insurance, IT and telecom, NGOs, agriculture and above all, the country's main export earning garment industry, according to Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2013.

Nearly two decades ago, the number of employed women was only 49.69 lakh, according to LFS 1995-96.

Women's share in total employment increased to 29 percent in 2013 from 14 percent in 1995-96, according to LFS.

Despite a spiral in the number of employed women, the issue of ensuring care for babies and toddlers remained neglected at both the public and private sectors.

Analysts said the worry over proper care and early childhood development of babies acts as a barrier to women's participation in economic activity; it also deters many from reaching the highest tier in jobs.

With no actual estimate on the total number of daycare facilities, the number of such centres is scanty, according to analysts.

For example, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) runs 43 daycare centres throughout the country. Some 24 of them are located in Dhaka. The rest are outside the capital. And there is no such facility in 36 districts. Most of the daycare centres are meant for low income households, said MOWCA officials.

Some businesses, particularly garment factory owners, banks and NGOs, have opened daycare facilities for their employees at the offices.



STAR

Working women in Dhaka have to depend a lot on the day care centres.

State-run banks opened a daycare centre at Motijheel for their employees in 2015. Later, 21 private banks opened another for their employees in the same area.

Some NGOs and private entrepreneurs also operate a number of daycare centres.

However, there are concerns over the quality of such centres established commercially.

Bina said there is negative perception on the quality of care given at the private daycare centres. "There are allegations that children are made to sleep with sedatives," she said. "I also do not feel confident about hiring domestic workers to take care of my child."

Fahmida Khatun, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), said many women get employed after completing their education. But a section of them quit after failing to manage everything after marriage, she added.

"It is a barrier to women's increased participation in economic activities. The government should establish an increased number of daycare centres."

To overcome this problem, many women prefer to live in joint families, she said.

In addition, safe transport and hostels are necessary for women to contribute more, she added.

Rushidan Islam Rahman, executive chairper-

son of the Centre for Development and Employment Research, said adequate child care facilities help all, including workers, employers and the society as a whole in the long-run.

"Many women do not join the labour market for an absence of child care at home."

Visiting some factories, she said the day care facilities were not enough to ensure a congenial environment for children.

Rahman said employers in Dhaka are not interested in establishing daycare centres due to a scarcity of land and high rentals in the capital.

She suggested the government establish low cost child care facilities to bring more women into the workforce; training for the care givers is also necessary, said Rahman.

Kaniz Fatima, publicity secretary of Nari Sanghati, said the labour law has a provision that an organisation with at least 40 female staff must have daycare facilities for children less than six years of age. But this is not complied with in most cases, she added.

"Not only in jobs. Mothers who are still studying also need daycare."

Fatima said the labour law suffers from limitations. "What about offices that have only three women? Daycare facilities should be established at every workplace."

Leading the way in judicial services

PANKAG KARMAKAR

Back in 1984, women in judicial services was a rare sighting. But that did not stop Kabita Khanam from joining as a BCS judicial cadre official.

"When I joined office, everyone was skeptical of my abilities in the courtroom," said Khanam, the first female election commissioner in Bangladesh.

"Such surveillance by others prompted me to perform my duties properly and efficiently," she said sharing tales of initial struggle in her career in an interview with The Daily Star.

"It was always on the back of my mind that if I performed poorly, people would say it was because I was a woman. But as the days went by, I started gaining the confidence of my colleagues and others around me by proving my skills and merits."



Kabita Khanam

In her 32-year career, she was easily promoted from one post to the next and finally retired as district and sessions judge in 2016.

On the challenges of building a career in a male-dominated society, Khanam said, "I did not have any bitter experience of harassment by male colleagues or bosses. I believe that if a female officer is bold, has the skills and merit, and is sincere in her work, she has very little to worry about."

"That is why, I request women to prove their worth in the workplaces with merit and skills."

Support from the family is the most important aspect of developing a woman's career, said Khanam. "Without her father or husband's support, it is impossible for a girl to climb the career ladder."

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Better strategies key to women empowerment: Green Delta MD

JEBUN NESA ALO

Every institution should put a strategy in place in order to advance women empowerment, said Farzana Chowdhury, managing director of Green Delta Insurance.

"The strategy will ensure women's fair job placement, rights and safety issues and engagement in decision-making processes," she said.

Four years ago, Chowdhury became the first woman to head a leading insurer of the country. But it was not a smooth journey.

After completing post-graduation in 1993, she joined Scholastica as a teacher in 1994. Soon she came to realise that it was not the area she wanted to build her career into.

She joined Brac in 1997 where she chose to work in credit and microfinance. In 2000, she went to Australia to do an MBA in



Farzana Chowdhury

finance and banking at Monash University to further her grip on the subject.

After finishing the course she returned to Bangladesh and joined Brac Bank in 2002. She worked for the bank for nearly seven years. When she left she was the head of its SME division.

Chowdhury joined Green Delta in 2009 as its additional managing director and group chief financial officer.

In May 2013 she was picked as the CEO.

"Though I inherited my father, I had to prove my capacity. Even, the regulators took two months to give me clearance and had verified my qualification through two assessors."

Under her leadership, Green Delta has adopted a policy to ensure women's rights and put women in senior management roles.

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