

# Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethical Practices in the Readymade Garment Industry: Unraveling the Impact of the Rana Plaza Catastrophe

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**Abstract:** *Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethics are increasingly important for companies worldwide. Unfortunately, ignoring CSR and ethical practices has become common in the business world nowadays. Looking at these phenomena, this study aims to show how CSR and ethics significantly impact businesses as well as society, backed by real evidence. To do so, it looks at information from the historical industrial disaster, the Rana Plaza (RP) collapse incident. Thus, this paper adopts the qualitative critical case study method based on secondary data. After careful examination of RP catastrophe in readymade garment (RMG) industry, the study finds that conforming to CSR and ethical guides are crucial for RMG companies' success through protecting employee and community rights, ensuring fairness, looking out for public interests, meeting social responsibilities, following social and ethical obligations, maintaining laws, and achieving economic interest, which in turn build good company reputation, and ultimately leads to enhanced profits and sustainability. In essence, the study supports the concepts that CSR and ethics really matter from the business domain and social perspectives. The findings stress the importance of businesses in the RMG industry to adopt the practices of CSR and ethics. The study recommends that appropriate stakeholders, especially business owners to pay close attention to social and ethical considerations from a broader perspective. Finally, the outcome of this study is crucial for the policy-level stakeholders to take prudent action to mitigate the likely hazardous occurrence in the coming days, to regain the industry's reputation and attractiveness.*

**Keywords:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Business Ethics, Readymade Garment, Industrial Disaster, Bangladesh

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In Bangladesh, a vital export-oriented industry, the readymade garment (RMG) has evolved from a million-dollar business in the early 1980s to a USD 31 billion industry today, contributing approximately 14% to the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) and covering over 80% of its total exports (Islam & Azad, 2023; Kusmawan & Rasyidah, 2023; Sarker, 2018). Bangladesh has made significant strides in generating foreign currency through the blessing of this industry, with around 5,600 companies providing employment to over four million people, a majority of whom are women (80%), especially most of whom are underprivileged women (Ansary & Barua, 2015; Paul, 2023). Thereby, the industry contributes to reducing poverty (Grier et al., 2023). As a result, the silent revolution in the industry is positively impacting the economy as well as empowering women and preventing child marriage (Khan et al., 2019; Hossain, 2019; Swazan &

Das, 2022). The RMG business expansion since the late 1970s has provided women with significant wage employment opportunities (Berik, 2017). Swazan and Das (2022) identified four major competitive advantages for the Bangladeshi RMG industry: price, on-time delivery, quality, and product advantages. As a result, 79% of leading global firms source from Bangladesh, with 31% of these firms having a sourcing office in the country (Islam & Azad, 2023; Sarker, 2018). Since 2010, the RMG industry in Bangladesh has emerged as the world's second-largest exporter, after China (Barua et al., 2021; Kusmawan & Rasyidah, 2023). This rapid growth has attracted increased global scrutiny, prompting the adoption of stricter labor standards and voluntary codes of conduct, often framed as aspirational tools for improved corporate accountability and ethical sourcing (Berik, 2017). A number of authors have made efforts to comprehend corporate social responsibility (CSR). According to Carroll (1991), CSR refers to the activities of an organization on the basis of ethical and discretionary considerations, alongside meeting the financial and legal obligations to society. Firms, irrespective of location, should be held accountable for protecting the environment, upholding human rights (Giuliani, 2014), and poverty alleviation (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007; Jamali et al., 2015; Schuster et al., 2016). Various researchers have also delved into the realm of business ethics, providing a philosophical foundation for corporate ethics to guide business managers through complex ethical dilemmas. Hill et al. (2015) assert that ethics encompasses accepted principles of right or wrong, governing the behavior of business people, espoused by Alam et al. (2019).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Despite its progress, the industry faces challenges, some of which result from the actions of company authorities, especially the owners. Political instability, industrial disputes, and a lack of cooperation from bargaining agents and trade unions further tarnish the industry's image and harm the country's economy (Hossen, 2016). The global RMG industry grapples with issues like low wages, inadequate occupational health and safety, and restrictions on the right to organize (Arnold, 2013). In Bangladesh, garment workers earn a monthly minimum wage of just USD 68 or less (Fitch & Ferdous, 2014), whereas Bossavie et al. (2023) noted that there was a 10% increase after the Rana Plaza (RP) collapse. Although the government has raised the minimum wage to approximately USD 114 in November 2023, labor associations still deem this increment insufficient (Paul, 2023). The RP tragedy brought global attention to worker safety issues (Barua et al., 2021; Bossavie et al., 2023). The RP collapse significantly shifted public perception, highlighting the urgent need for better working conditions and safety in the RMG industry (Kusmawan & Rasyidah, 2023; Sultan et al., 2023). Inferior working conditions and workplace insecurity might be the result of non-compliance of the CSR norms and ethical business practices.

## **1.3 Objectives**

In line with earlier sub-sections, the current study aims to examine how violations of CSR and ethics contributed to the RP collapse and its consequences. The specific objectives are to –

- (i) Identify the causes of the RP tragedy
- (ii) Analyze the impact of CSR and ethical practices from the Bangladeshi RMG industry perspective, and
- (iii) Argue that the incident resulted from the failure of CSR obligations and ethical practices by RP authorities.

## 1.4 Research Questions

An era has passed since the devastating collapse of the RP in Savar occurred. The tragic incident occurred on Wednesday, the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2013, at 8:30 am (Berik, 2017; Bossavie et al., 2023; Grier et al., 2023; Islam, 2023; Kabir et al., 2021; Kusmawan & Rasyidah, 2023; Motlagh & Saha, 2014; Koenig & Poncet, 2022; Sultan et al., 2023). Along with the loss of more than a thousand lives and human sufferings, as argued by Brown and Peterson (2022), the unintended effects of such incidents include external costs like lost wages, health issues, environmental harm, and community deterioration. The consequences of RP collapse spurred legal actions, with 42 individuals accused of negligence, homicide, and building code violations, reflecting the severe consequences of unethical business practices (Jannat et al., 2022; Macfarlane-Horn, 2022). The incident also highlights how CSR practices are shaped by stakeholder expectations and external pressures, which critically influence managerial decision-making and ethical accountability (Jones et al., 2007; Singh & Mittal, 2019). In response to these dynamics, this study seeks to explore the following research questions:

RQ1. What were the causative factors behind the RP collapse, and what insights have been derived from the analysis of these factors?

RQ2. To what extent do CSR and ethical practices play a significant role in the context of the RP collapse?

RQ3. How were CSR principles and ethical considerations overlooked in the tragic incident of the RP collapse?

RQ4. What is the imperative of adhering to CSR and ethical guides for the betterment of RMG businesses and society?

## 1.5 Organization

The subsequent sections are organized as follows: first, the research background is discussed, thesis and problem statement, objective, and research questions are discussed under the introduction section; then, earlier literature is reviewed from the RP point of view. The next section describes the methods used in this study. Subsequently, the RP collapse consequences are described, covering the happenings and actions before and after the incident as well as examining whether CSR and ethical practices are impactful, providing logical reasoning behind the RP collapse. The study then outlines the result and discussion section, involving factors affecting the incident, role of CSR and ethical practices in the industry, stakeholders' inaction and its consequences, and refined CSR pyramid. In the final section, the study outlines the conclusion, including recommendations, contributions, limitations, future study directions, and final remarks.

## 2. Literature Review

The social and ethical responsibilities of businesses, particularly in hazardous industries like the RMG industry, have become increasingly subject to academic debate during the past few decades. Researchers have discussed how CSR, business ethics, and governance frameworks intersect to shape organizational behavior, especially where regulatory oversight is weak and labor rights are compromised (Jamali & Mirshak, 2007; Sinkovics et al., 2016). The literature increasingly highlights how CSR mechanisms, business ethics, and stakeholder relationships

interact to influence decision-making, especially in the context of industrial disasters (Carroll, 1991; Jones et al., 2007). This literature review critically examines existing research on CSR activity, business and individual ethics development, limitations, and stakeholder accountability. Pointing out their relevance in industrial disaster cases such as the RP building collapse in Bangladesh.

Fraedrich (2024) observed that CSR has been around in some ways for the past century. The applicability of CSR increases as countries become more developed, beyond focusing on shareholder value maximization to enhancing the quality of life, and the number of multinational corporations expands. The foreign direct investment (FDI) growth in South Asia after 1990, especially after economic liberalization, emphasizes the significance of supporting and engaging workers in developing countries (Berik, 2017; Macfarlane-Horn, 2022; Sarpong, 2018; Vanpeperstraete, 2021). Boudreau et al. (2015) found that companies that do not consider CSR norms may face greater costs than benefits. Leong et al. (2024) conducted a study using Brunei as a case study to examine the nature of CSR activities that companies engage in and how they report these activities publicly. The study found that business models in Brunei typically align with the concept of CSR. In this context, organizations perceive CSR and public relations as strategic business practices intertwined with societal and religious responsibilities. The focus is on enhancing human capacity and well-being, addressing environmental challenges, and participating in altruistic activities. Matten and Moon (2008) drew a distinction between “explicit” and “implicit” CSR, the former being spontaneous, strategic voluntary actions publicly made by firms, and the latter being part of institutional arrangements, often driven by social norms and expectations - offering a rich context for studying CSR practice from different national and cultural contexts. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) stated that while CSR efforts can create brand image and public support, stakeholders respond differently based on perceptions of authenticity and consistency with intrinsic brand values, and the importance of strategic communication in CSR involvement is highlighted. Kilcullen and Kooistra (1999) argued that at a minimum, SCR should be grounded in the ethical principle of “do no harm,” asserting that businesses have a moral obligation to prevent practices that endanger human life, dignity, or well-being. Beckers (2017) contended that in the context of globalization, voluntary CSR codes are insufficient and must be supported by legal enforcement mechanisms to ensure accountability and prevent the recurrence of corporate negligence in transnational supply chains. Alam et al. (2019) emphasized that business ethics and personal ethics govern individual conduct, which are intertwined. Liu et al. (2022) argued that all professional engineers should commit to upholding ethical obligations towards community members, employers, surroundings, and peers. Conversely, Ahmed and Uddin (2021) highlighted the prevalence of intense workplace bullying when coercive control measures are applied, such as locking employees inside, frequent wage reductions, setting movable targets, and close observations. Those who have negative attitudes toward their work and teams are more likely to tolerate and perceive corruption in their leaders. Leadership development and staff training programs that take into account the impact of cultural norms on corruption tolerance and reporting, while explicitly defining ethical behavior, could contribute to reducing corruption tolerance and fostering greater integrity in the workplace. The findings of Aumentado et al. (2024) indicate that followers’ tolerance for corruption mediates the relationship between their experiences of corrupt leadership and workplace outcomes. Hossain (2019) argues that while the RP disaster exposed the deeply ingrained vulnerabilities of women garment workers, it also spurred new waves of collective protest and political mobilization, bearing witness to the inseparably interlinkage between disaster, labor rights, and empowerment

within Bangladesh's RMG industry. Alam et al. (2024) critically examined the RP tragedy from the victims' perspective through illustrative cases and emphasized that the collapse was a direct consequence of deeply rooted unethical business practices in the RMG industry, including negligence, corruption, and disregard for worker safety. However, their study lacks how ethics are violated in the RP incident. Christensen et al. (2013) emphasized that the strategic orientation and ethical commitment of organizational leaders play a pivotal role in shaping, implementing, and sustaining meaningful CSR practices, or conversely, in facilitating their avoidance.

Over the past 50 years, the world has witnessed a rise in both artificial and natural disasters, frequently worsened by corporate owners' neglect of their social and ethical responsibilities (Khan et al., 2020). Studies by Khattak et al. (2017) and Grier et al. (2023) highlighted the impact of RMG product suppliers on economic and social upgrading. However, despite social audits, ethical codes, and CSR disclosures, human rights for employees in the garment industry in Bangladesh have not improved, with the situation worsening during the COVID-19 pandemic (Islam, 2023; Islam et al., 2023). However, Berik's (2017) discussion of feminist opponents during and after the RP debate emphasized the comparative benefits of the apparel industry, overlooked the importance of union rights, and opposed labor globalism. Though Alam et al. (2024) discussed the aftermath cases from the victim's perspective due to unethical business practices at RP; nevertheless, they did not analyze how CSR matters in the case of RP collapse as well as in the RMG industry. The list of relevant studies is enumerated in Table 1.

**Table 1: List of Related Literature**

Sl. No.	Citation	Objective	Method	Key Finding	Limitation
1.	Alam et al. (2024)	To examine RP as an unethical business practice.	Review-based qualitative study using victim narratives.	Systemic negligence and ethical failures were identified.	Relies on secondary victims' reports.
2.	Grier et al. (2023)	To study safety-employment trade-offs driven by anti-sweatshop activism.	Firm-level econometric analysis.	Safety improved, but employment opportunities declined.	Activism effects are hard to isolate from broader reforms.
3.	Kusmawan and Rasyidah (2023)	To evaluate ILO's Better Work Bangladesh Phase II (BWB II) program, a joint program by the ILO and the International Finance	Policy and program analysis.	BWB II enhanced awareness of worker rights.	Long-term effectiveness remains unclear.

Sl. No.	Citation	Objective	Method	Key Finding	Limitation
		Corporation (IFC), the role after RP.			
4.	Mittal and Agrawal (2023)	To examine CSR's role in rebuilding the garment industry post-RP.	Thematic review and case analysis.	CSR contributed to restoring the reputation and regulatory reforms.	Narrative-based; lacks quantitative backing.
5.	Prentice and Sumon (2023)	To assess labor instability and social protection mechanisms post-collapse.	Critical policy analysis with empirical insights.	Technocratic responses failed to address structural labor issues.	Focuses on national policies; limited firm-level detail.
6.	Bossavie et al. (2023)	To evaluate the effects of international scrutiny on workers post-RP.	Econometric analysis using panel data.	Scrutiny improved wages and safety, but employment effects were uneven.	Focuses on formal industry; lacks qualitative context.
7.	Koenig and Poncet (2022)	To assess the impact of RP on French importers' sourcing decisions.	Quantitative trade data analysis.	Importers reduced sourcing from Bangladesh post-collapse.	Focus limited to France; global context not explored.
8.	Ahmed and Uddin (2021)	To explore workplace bullying and labor control post-RP.	Qualitative study using interviews and ethnographic data.	Bullying intensified as informal labor control after the disaster.	Limited generalizability beyond the studied factories.
9.	Vanpeperstraete (2021)	To argue for enforceable brand agreements post-RP.	Legal-political analysis of global value chains.	Enforceable agreements are more effective than voluntary CSR codes.	Focuses on legal frameworks; limited discussion of uptake.
10.	Kabir et al. (2021)	To examine mental health outcomes among female RP survivors.	Qualitative in-depth interviews.	High prevalence of trauma and suicidal thoughts post-collapse.	Small sample; gender-specific focus only.
11.	Alam et al.	To assess post-	Policy analysis	Multi-level	Focuses more on

Sl. No.	Citation	Objective	Method	Key Finding	Limitation
	(2021)	RP labor regulation in the RMG industry.	and regulatory review.	reforms were initiated; enforcement remains weak.	structure than implementation.
12.	Barua et al. (2021)	To assess the recurrence risk of RP-type disasters.	Risk assessment using engineering and policy data.	Structural risks persist despite reforms.	Lacks focus on political enforcement.
13.	Berik (2017)	To revisit feminist debates on labor standards post-RP.	Theoretical and critical literature review.	Highlights gendered vulnerabilities in global supply chains.	Mainly theoretical without empirical data.
14.	Doorey (2017)	To critique CSR via Loblaws' legal defense in the RP case.	Legal case analysis and normative critique.	CSR lacks enforceability; inadequate legal structures.	Single case focus; lacks broader empirical support.
15.	Schuster et al. (2016)	To analyze CSR in South Asia post-RP.	Comparative case studies.	CSR is often used strategically, not for systemic improvement.	Broader South Asian focus; less on Bangladesh specifically.
16.	Sinkovics et al. (2016)	To evaluate CSR auditing effectiveness post-RP.	Critical review of CSR auditing mechanisms.	Auditing found insufficient to guarantee CSR compliance.	Does not include informal industry practices.
17.	Hossen (2016)	To analyze the causes and nature of industrial disputes in Bangladesh's RMG industry.	Quantitative and descriptive analysis of labor unrest cases.	Wage dissatisfaction, poor conditions, and managerial misconduct were key drivers of disputes.	Lacks qualitative insights and updates post-RP.
18.	Begum and Solaiman (2016)	To evaluate the effectiveness of CSR in Bangladesh post-RP.	Legal and corporate policy analysis.	CSR remains non-binding and largely symbolic.	Limited empirical evidence.
19.	Taplin (2014)	To analyze responsibility	Critical conceptual	Responsibility for ethical	Lacks empirical validation.

Sl. No.	Citation	Objective	Method	Key Finding	Limitation
		in global fast fashion supply chains.	analysis.	lapses is diffused across supply chain actors.	
20.	Motlagh and Saha (2014)	To document the human and emotional costs of the disaster.	Investigative journalism and narrative reporting.	Exposed deep-rooted negligence and corruption.	Anecdotal; lacks formal empirical analysis.

*Source:* Author's Compilation.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Approach

This qualitative study centers on a meticulous examination of CSR and ethical practices within the RMG industry in Bangladesh. CSR encompasses a company's ethical conduct, commitment to sustainable development, and consideration of its social, environmental, and economic impacts on stakeholders, who, according to Jones et al. (2007), can be categorized as agents, instrumentalists, moralists, corporate egoists, or altruists. Carroll (1991, 2021) and Carroll and Shabana (2010) considered CSR to be made up of four levels of responsibility that converge into a "pyramid," namely philanthropic, ethical, legal, and economic, which establish the expectations of business in society. The European commission (2011) prescribed CSR as an "enterprise responsibility for their impacts on society," in a bid to encourage companies to incorporate social and environmental concerns into business operations voluntarily. Additionally, Dahlsrud (2008) suggested that CSR encompasses the engagement with stakeholders and moves beyond compliance requirements to encompass societal expectations. The RP complex, housing five RMG producers with connections to multinational enterprises, is chosen due to its historical importance in the industry. This study employs a critical instance case study approach, using the RP collapse as a representative and extreme case of CSR and ethical failure in the RMG industry of Bangladesh. While case studies can be classified into various types, such as descriptive, illustrative, intrinsic, exploratory, explanatory, causal, or critical (Epler, 2019; Yin, 2017) - this study aligns most with the critical typology. A critical case allows for in-depth exploration of systemic issues with broader implications for policy, theory, and practice (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2017). Although interpretive qualitative case studies are often exploratory, they also allow for critical inquiry into specific, real-world phenomena, particularly when the aim is to challenge assumptions and expose systemic failures (Ponelis, 2015); thus, this approach supports the present study's use of a critical case study design to examine the CSR and ethical breakdowns revealed by the RP collapse. As noted by Alam et al. (2024), who illustrated the RP tragedy consequences through the lens of unethical business practices, making it a critical case for analyzing the intersection of social responsibilities and business ethics practices.

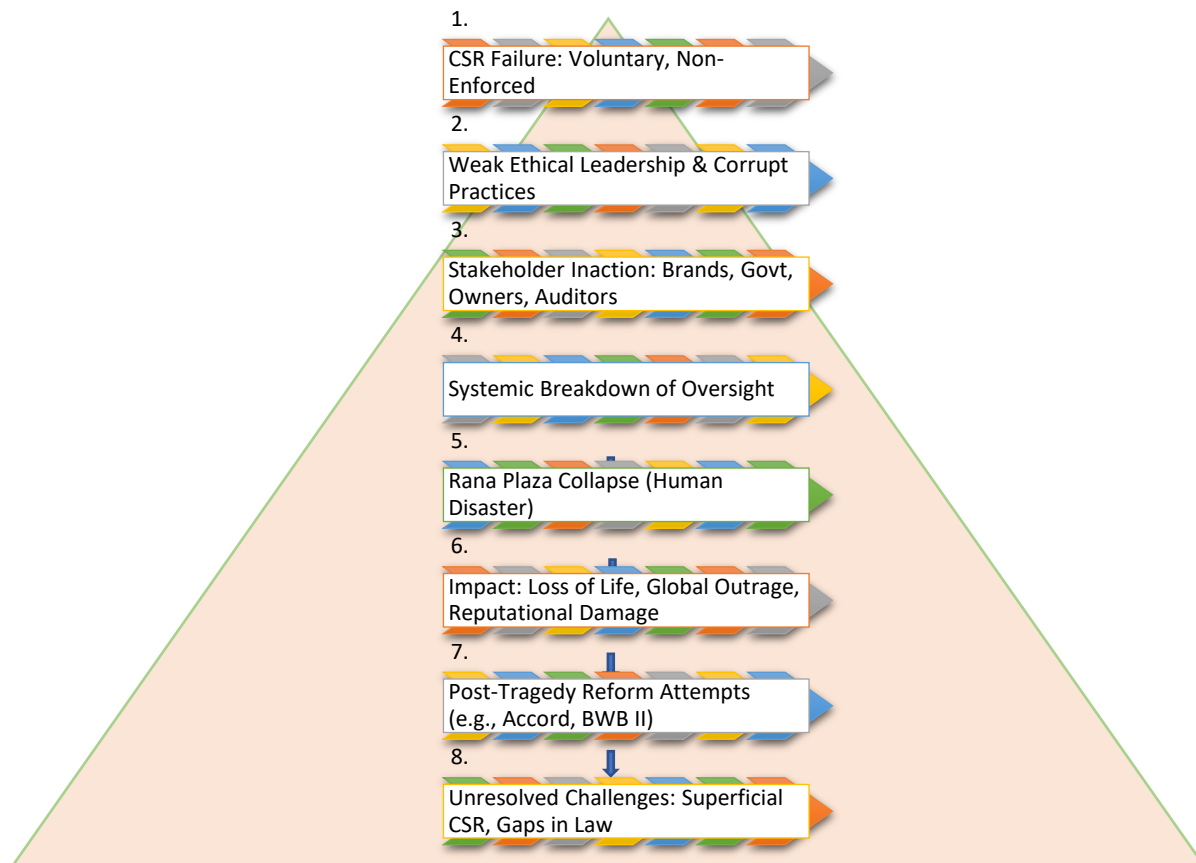
#### 3.2 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework (Figure 1) is developed to illustrate the interconnected social, ethical, legal, and institutional failures leading to the RP collapse. Rooted in stakeholder theory (Jones et



al., 2007) and the CSR pyramid model encompassing good corporate citizen, ethical, legal, and economic responsibilities, where profit generation falls bottom of the pyramid keeping CSR at the top (Ackerman & Bauer, 1976; Carroll, 1991, 2021; Carroll & Shabana, 2010), the framework maps the causal flow from unregulated CSR practices and weak ethical decision-making to systemic oversight failures and human tragedy. Post-tragedy responses are also incorporated to reflect the ongoing struggle between symbolic compliance and meaningful reform (Doorey, 2017; Sinkovics et al., 2016). The model serves as a theoretical guide for analyzing the case data and deriving recommendations.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of CSR and Ethical Failures Leading to Rana Plaza Collapse**



**Source:** Author's Compilation.

This conceptual framework in Figure 1 integrates the CSR pyramid, stakeholder theory, ethical decision-making models, and CSR literature to illustrate how systemic ethical breakdowns, regulatory failures, and stakeholder inaction contributed to the RP disaster.

### 3.3 Literature Survey

The study relies extensively on existing literature that comprehensively covers the RP tragedy and its consequences in relation to CSR and ethics. Following the principles of robust qualitative inquiry, this study ensures the credibility and relevance of secondary sources by evaluating their origin, triangulating across multiple perspectives, and assessing their alignment with the research

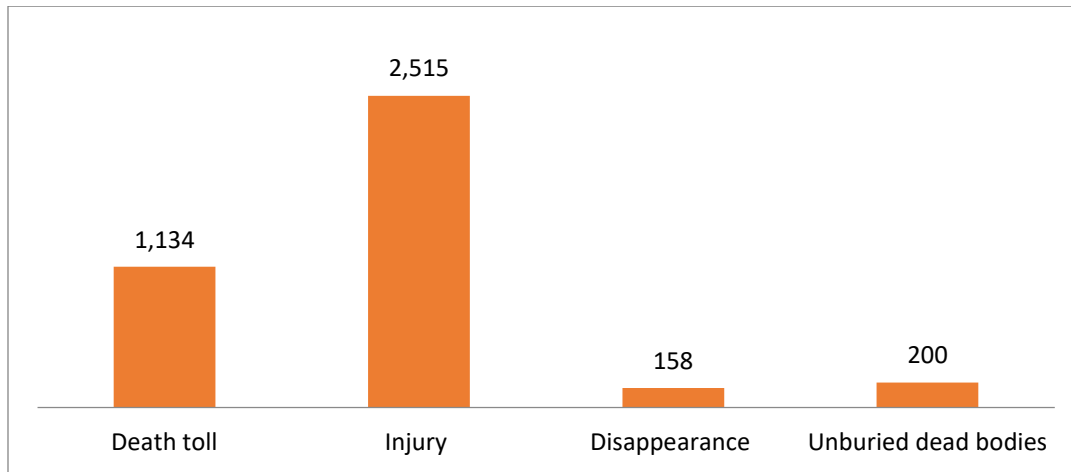
context (Burgman, 2015). Secondary data sources, including reputable national and international journal articles, book chapters, books, conference papers, theses, organizational reports, and other online sources like newspapers and magazines, were employed to provide a thorough examination of the impact of non-compliance with CSR regulations and ethical business practices surrounding the RP collapse. A literature review from secondary sources of data is applied in this research to respond to the research questions and provide contextual information on the CSR and ethical dimensions of the RP tragedy (Snyder, 2019). To comprehend and organize conclusions drawn from the reviewed literature, a qualitative approach was adopted. Here, thematic content analysis is a suitable method for retrieving major patterns and conceptual themes in the literature. Thematic content analysis is a qualitative method used to uncover, explore, and interpret patterns (themes) of text data. It allows researchers to sort complex information into understandable categories that reflect the study questions and objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reputable databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, ScienceDirect, Springer, Emerald, Sage, and Wiley and Sons were primarily utilized for research articles. Supplementary data from Google Scholar and ResearchGate were also considered. Rigorous criteria were applied to select articles, prioritizing relevance and insightfulness. However, considering the context and for a better understanding of the phenomenon, news and views expressed in the online platforms are considered. Thus, contemporary local and international newspaper articles were included, following a meticulous selection process based on relevance, source reputation, and publication timing. Reports focusing solely on incident narration were excluded in favor of those offering substantive insights. Keyword search strategies incorporated terms such as “corporate social responsibility,” “ethics,” “Rana Plaza collapse,” “readymade garment,” “Sohel Rana,” and “unethical business practice.” Selected papers underwent rigorous evaluation for relevance and scholarly contribution. The selected sources adhere to stringent criteria to ensure the study’s topicality, quality, and alignment with the contemporary scholarly landscape. The methodology is designed to provide a robust analysis of CSR and ethical considerations in the context of the RP collapse within the RMG industry in Bangladesh, adhering to standard journal publishing norms.

## **4. Analysis of the Rana Plaza Collapse**

### **4.1 What’s gone wrong?**

The RP tragedy unfolded during the peak of the Bangladeshi RMG industry boom. The consequence of the tragedy was appalling (Figure 2). This disaster was the cause of the largest number of casualties in the garment industry’s history and the worst industrial disaster in the history of construction (Alam, 2015; Kusmawan & Rasyidah, 2023). Thus, the tragedy date should be remembered as the ‘National Garment Workers Mourning Day’ (Sultan et al., 2023).

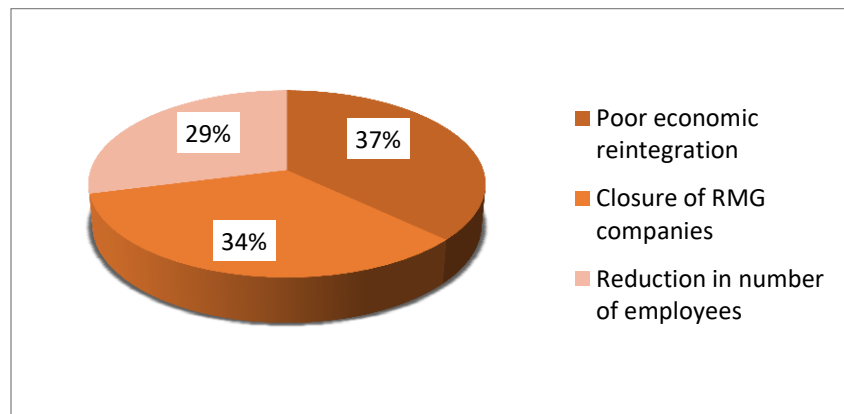
**Figure 2: Adverse Impact of Post-Rana Plaza Collapse**



**Source:** Alam (2015); Kusmawan and Rasyidah (2023).

The victims of the RP plant accident also faced short-term and long-term challenges, such as socio-cultural barriers, economic difficulties, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, hopelessness, and serious health issues. The accident led to severe physical and psychological trauma, with victims reporting difficulties in labor due to injury, declining physical health, and susceptibility to suicidal behavior (Kabir et al., 2021). The economic reintegration of RP collapse victims was adversely affected (see Figure 3), with an evident drop in their earnings after the tragedy. Around 36.6% of victims had poor economic reintegration, where women were twice as susceptible compared to men. The tragedy influenced the economy of Bangladesh, even though not fundamentally, and by 2013, contributed to the slowdown (Ahmad, 2014). According to Grier et al. (2023), by 2016, the number of garment manufacturers in Bangladesh had decreased by 33.3 percent, and by 2017, the number of employees in the garment industry had dropped by 28.3 percent.

**Figure 3: Adverse Impact of Economic Reintegration during Post-Rana Plaza Collapse**



**Source:** Ahmad (2014); Grier et al. (2023)

The incident also had international repercussions, with a relative drop in imports from Bangladesh for merchants associated with the collapsed facilities. Brands and companies involved in the RMG supply chain faced scrutiny, and some experienced a decline in imports. While certain brands distanced themselves, others faced criticism for maintaining connections with suppliers from Bangladesh (Koenig & Poncet, 2022). A list of losses resulting from the collapse is listed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Detrimental Impacts Incurred due to Rana Plaza Collapse**

Sl. No.	Physical Aspects	Behavioral Aspects
1.	Closure of 18 garment plants the day after the collapse	Loss of a significant number of human lives, many of whom were the sole wage earners in their families
2.	Warnings from world politicians against purchasing Bangladeshi RMG products	Legal actions, including the filing of a case against 56 individuals directly or indirectly involved in the incident
3.	Warnings from various national and international advocacy groups, researchers, and consumers regarding unsafe working conditions	Legal proceedings against SR for not reporting his movable and immovable property
4.	Rioting garment workers attacked cars, commercial structures, and clothing factories, demanding justice, safer working conditions, and fair pay	Suspensions against seven police inspectors for negligence in renewing the license of RP
5.	A 10-story garment factory, associated with Western brands, was set on fire by garment workers in protest	The collapse revealed systemic negligence in labor laws and regulatory failures in building safety inspections, corruption in permit issuance, and the absence of union protections
6.	Bangladesh's regulatory bodies were seen as ineffective and complicit	Many survivors suffer from PTSD, chronic pain, and disability, as well as many of them, particularly women, reported high rates of suicidal thoughts and depression
7.	Voluntary codes often failed to address deep-rooted power imbalances	Retailers faced global scrutiny and reputational damage
8.	Brands like Primark, Walmart, and others were criticized for their lack of oversight	The "safety vs. employment" trade-off intensified, especially for informal workers

**Sources:** Alam et al. (2024); Doorey (2017); Grier et al. (2023); Kabir et al. (2021); Sinkovics et al. (2016)

The RP collapse brought to light the exploitative aspects of the global RMG supply chain and prompted significant international attention and reactions against unsafe working conditions and corporate practices in the industry. Despite many companies responding by tightening audits and introducing CSR policies, critics argue that these changes were symbolic, with limited real empowerment for workers (Doorey, 2017; Sinkovics et al., 2016).

## 4.2 Reasons behind the Collapse

The collapse of the RP involved a combination of factors, each contributing to the tragic incident. Yardley (2013) reported widespread blame, indicating that the higher floors of RP were illegally constructed, as asserted by Ali Ahmed Khan, head of Bangladesh's fire service and civil defense. Despite engineers raising safety concerns, authorities were uncertain about the seriousness of these issues, as noted by Gavin and Lin (2015) and further emphasized by Macfarlane-Horn (2022). The building's construction over a drained pond without proper authorization added to the structural concerns (Doorey, 2017). Architect Massood Reza revealed that the original plan of the structure was intended for shops and offices, but it was repurposed for factories, stressing that the building might not withstand the machinery's weight and vibrations (Burgman, 2015; Gavin & Lin, 2015). Furthermore, competitive pressures in the Bangladeshi RMG industry, known for the emergence of unethical behavior, persisted in the RP business (Kulik et al., 2008). Despite the identification of structural cracks just before the incident, with evacuation and closure requests made and televised, compliance with these requests did not occur (Macfarlane-Horn, 2022). The lack of employment alternatives for workers, coupled with the contagious nature of corruption influencing poor construction decisions, further endangered safety (Gavin & Lin, 2015). Westerman (2017) underscored shoddy construction, overloaded floors, and excessive use of heavy equipment as primary causes. Ultimately, the collapse was exacerbated by the building's inability to bear the weight of the owner's greed.

## 4.3 How CSR and Ethics Violated?

Sohel Rana (SR), according to reports from various dailies, the entrepreneur behind the RMG business, gained notoriety for constructing the 'Rana Plaza,' a factory building named after him. Born in 1978 and with only a seventh-class education, SR, the son of a poor peddler, ventured into the RMG industry and became a prominent political figure in Bangladesh. He joined the Bangladesh Jubo League, the youth wing of the Bangladesh Awami League, in 1996, subsequently gaining attention from political leaders. On the day of the tragedy, despite being informed of dangerous cracks in the factory walls, eyewitness accounts suggested that even though other stores and the bank closed their operations due to safety concerns (Macfarlane-Horn, 2022), approximately 3,639 garment workers were compelled to enter the factory on the tragic day due to pressure from higher authorities to fulfill orders promptly. Threats of pay deductions, such as Ether Tex, were issued by supervisors to workers who refused to report for work (Fitch & Ferdous, 2014). This coercive behavior towards employees is deemed unsocial and unethical. Such behavior violates Immanuel Kant's principles, asserting that human beings have dignity and should not be used merely for the enjoyment or happiness of another (Bennett, 2010; O'Neill, 2017). Again, examining the incident's full context reveals systemic issues that encouraged various parties to engage in workplace policies leading to accidents or labor abuses (Taplin, 2014). Doorey (2017) highlighted Loblaws' stance, asserting that it had no obligation to safeguard workers or ensure the structural integrity of the buildings where its products were manufactured. While Loblaws had the entitlement to monitor supplier factories, it contended that it bore no responsibility. Even when pre-collapse violations of Bangladeshi law and Loblaws' supplier code of conduct were identified, no corrective actions were taken to ensure compliance. Serious breaches of health and safety laws were reportedly overlooked. Gavin and Lin (2015) highlighted missteps in both the design and ethical practices leading to the RP collapse. SR's

ascent to wealth through illicit means, including hijacking and land seizure, under the protection of political leaders, further exemplifies the ethical violations. The anti-corruption commission (ACC) also identified SR's substantial illegal wealth. Even though followers see corrupt leadership as self-serving, unethical, and subtly dishonest, they still endure it for several reasons, including personal benefits from the corruption and fear of retaliation (Aumentado et al., 2024).

In conclusion, SR's activities were unsocial and unethical, resulting in significant losses to individual and public interests. Therefore, the RP collapse shed light on social and ethical lapses and disregard for human dignity, prompting a reevaluation of business practices within the RMG industry.

#### **4.4 Do CSR and Ethics Matter?**

Fraedrich (2024) examined CSR through the lens of the “good, better, best” theory. In the first stage, companies aim to be “good” by addressing the needs of their stakeholders, such as consumers, employees, shareholders, communities, or specific nations or unions. The second stage, referred to as “Better,” involves companies striving to be exemplary stewards of their stakeholders, recognizing that this approach can lead to financial rewards and increased goodwill among employees, unions, channel members, and the community. Companies at this stage are typically associated with strong brands and focus more on long-term growth through CSR, rather than on short-term public relations. They adopt proactive strategies to achieve long-term profit maximization. The ultimate goal is to reach the third stage, or “best,” where the company becomes the ideal workplace. At this stage, the business ethicist questions what the company defines as “best.” This concept is often misunderstood by non-business consultants who provide advisory services. The initial challenge is to convince these consultants that profit is inherently “good” and essential for all publicly traded, for-profit companies. CSR becomes a crucial requirement for such companies, and those that effectively integrate all aspects of CSR with a strong financial incentive have the greatest potential to reach stage III or become a “best” company. The significance of CSR in the business landscape is a subject of ongoing debate. While public agencies continue to advocate CSR as a source of corporate competitiveness, leading companies express concerns about potential negative impacts on their competitiveness (“Do Stakeholders Really Demand CSR?” 2016). The primary motivation for businesses implementing CSR practices often lies in enhancing marketability and attracting more customers. However, resource constraints can hinder the continuation of socially valuable operations (Sinkovics et al., 2016). Some argue that CSR activities by suppliers in the Bangladeshi RMG industry are pursued for achieving a better competitive position rather than altruism, playing an essential role but not necessarily guaranteeing a competitive advantage for future positioning (Fontana, 2017). The global fashion industry, which ranks second after the oil industry in terms of pollution, is urged to prioritize safety and focus on reusing products. Oxford Analytica predicted an increase in fashion companies purchasing returned merchandise to create new products. However, multi-national corporations' (MNCs) CSR initiatives are sometimes deemed insufficient to address complex challenges (Giuliani & Nieri, 2019). Social sustainability initiatives in the apparel industry face challenges related to resource management, strategy, cost considerations, and cultural, regulatory, and monitoring issues (Akbar & Ahsan, 2020). The connection between the government and business in Bangladesh is criticized for violating human rights, with family-led political parties contributing to human rights disasters to protect their business interests (Siddiqui & Uddin, 2016). Despite challenges, CSR is seen as imperative to

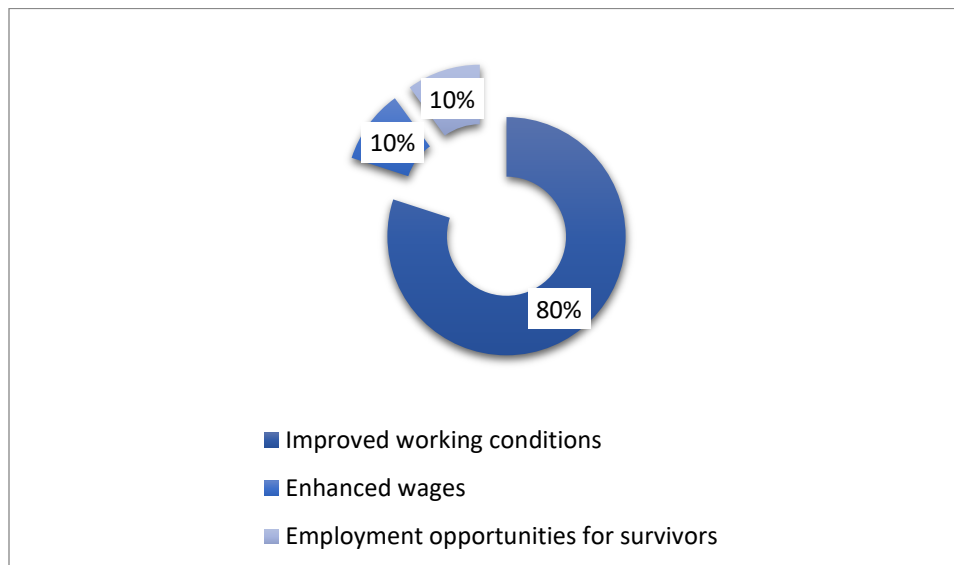
sustain the garment industry in Bangladesh and prevent tragedies like the RP disaster (Begum & Solaiman, 2016). While ethical considerations in the clothing industry may loosely impact consumer attitudes (Magnuson et al., 2017), their significance is undeniable. Khan et al. (2019) argued that moral and ethical behavior is not spontaneously initiated but is sustained in response to external stakeholders, increasing legal and political pressures, and various factors. The impact of the collapse reflected ongoing struggles for rights, better living standards, and safer working environments, suggesting a lack of responsiveness to these concerns (Khan & Rodrigues, 2015).

In conclusion, the discussion underscores the significant importance of CSR, with the RP disaster serving as a stark example of the consequences when CSR has overlooked, leading to gross violations of laws, corrupt practices, and a disregard for human rights and lives (Begum & Solaiman, 2016), ignoring every stage of Fraedrich (2024)'s CSR theory of good, better, best. Some studies have concluded that complying with CSR and corporate ethics leads to significant shareholder wealth enhancement (Kilcullen & Ohles Kooistra, 1999). These phenomena emphasize the crucial need for ensuring CSR and ethics for mitigating the risks of further similar kinds of accidents.

#### 4.5 Post-Rana Plaza Collapse Measures and Impacts

The effect of the RP collapse presented a challenging recovery process, marked by elusive justice and limited reform activities (Motlagh & Saha, 2014). Despite some positive developments, such as improved workplace safety, with increased international inspections leading to enhancement in working conditions and enhanced wages, employment opportunities for survivors showed mixed results, with a portion finding jobs in the garment industry (see Figure 4), but a substantial percentage remained unemployed (Bossavie et al., 2023). The industry witnessed progress, particularly in structural assessments, but the focus on addressing the harsh working conditions appeared insufficient, allowing the existing administrative system in Bangladesh to remain largely unchallenged (Ansary & Barua, 2015).

**Figure 4: Post-Rana Plaza Positive Impact**



**Source:** Bossavie et al. (2023)

According to various national and international news articles, following the RP collapse, legal actions were initiated, including a case filed by the anti-corruption commission (ACC) in 2014. Numerous suspects, including the owner, were charged with offenses ranging from murder to violating building codes. The legal proceedings involved complex challenges, with many suspects remaining at large, and only a few facing jail sentences. Even after the legal proceedings, victims and families continued to struggle for justice and improved living conditions, with a widespread sense of unmet needs among the affected population. The two factory inspection initiatives, the alliance for Bangladesh worker safety (ABWS) and the accord on fire and building safety in Bangladesh (AFBSB), were established to promote better labor standards and ethical business practices. The initiatives were viewed as being more effective compared to individual corporation-oriented monitoring (Alam et al., 2021; Vanpeperstraete, 2021). Despite these efforts, there were still issues to address, and the compensation provided under the Rana Plaza arrangement (RPA) was found to be insufficient (Prentice & Sumon, 2023). The industry was accused of having a limited budget and for lack of transparency in the reporting of results. The private industry, foreign organizations, and the government of Bangladesh launched a number of measures to advance workplace safety, including the national tripartite plan of action (NTPA) and negotiations with the international labour organization (ILO) (Koenig & Poncet, 2022). The RP tragedy ignited debates in securing CSR in the value chain globally (Vanpeperstraete, 2021). The Accord and Alliance, European and North American garment-dominated safety monitoring organizations, acted as a considerable force but exited Bangladesh in 2018 due to clashes with the Bangladeshi government. The incident ignited efforts in improving workplace safety legislation, workers' rights, and health awareness (Kusmawan & Rasyidah, 2023).

In conclusion, the reaction to the RP collapse showed a complex interaction of social, legal, and industrial reactions. While positive developments were noted, there are still issues that remain, where ongoing efforts would be necessary to end systemic issues, enhance workers' rights, and create a sustainable and moral means in the RMG industry of Bangladesh.

## 5. Results and Discussion

The collapse of RP was not a mere accident but a culmination of a series of social non-compliance and unethical actions. RP authorities, especially the owner of SR, broke social and ethical norms for more profits, and the outcome was a horrible accident that took many lives and left permanent scars. This section is separated into a number of criteria, which are discussed in seven sub-sections.

### 5.1 Violations of Social and Ethical Business Practices and Reasons behind

- *Violations of Building Code and Inferior Construction:* RP authorities, in their quest for greater profit margins, violated codes of ethics by building four unauthorized floors and using shoddy construction materials (Doorey, 2017; Gavin & Lin, 2015).
- *Lack of Spiritual Depth:* RP authorities' involvement in unethical behavior is due to a lack of spiritual depth. Spirituality plays a role in determining one's ethical stance, and RP authorities' actions were indicative of a moral judgment-action gap (DeTienne et al., 2019; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003).
- *Wealth-Induced Unethical Behavior:* Excessive wealth has the propensity to corrupt



ethics, and SR's embrace of undesirable business is no exception. This is an indicator of the power of wealth on organizational behavior (Mazar & Ariely, 2006)

## 5.2 Government Negligence

- *CSR Awareness Post-Incident:* The RP disaster brought global attention to the CSR issues of Bangladesh. While CSR gained momentum post-the incident, it also underlined the imperative of pre-emptive measures to prevent such tragedies (Mittal & Agrawal, 2023; Oxford Analytica, 2019).
- *CSR Challenges in RMG Industry:* The RMG industry is facing difficulty in adopting CSR initiatives due to resource management, strategy, finance, and cultural barriers that hinder the industry's CSR efforts (Akbar & Ahsan, 2020).
- *Government-Business Nexus and Human Rights Violations:* The symbiotic relationship between the government and business in Bangladesh has undermined human rights. Family-dominated political parties prioritize business over human rights, reflecting a need for improved governance and ethical conduct (Siddiqui & Uddin, 2016).

## 5.3 Business Ethics and Industry Performance

- *Ethics and Industry Performance:* Unethical leadership behavior, as in the case of SR, is linked to negative industry performance. Ethical conduct should not be sacrificed by high-performing firms, and thus, ethical behavior is required (Christensen et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2019).
- *Human Rights and CSR:* Individuals' demands for global human rights can help to enhance the reputation of a firm. Long-term CSR efforts are required for maximizing shareholders' return as well as performing sustainable business (Buhmann et al., 2018; Swazan & Das, 2022).

## 5.4 Causative Factors behind Rana Plaza Collapse

The RP collapse was the culmination of a confluence of systemic failures, starting from social regulation failure and negligence to ethical management practices: deficiencies in regulatory oversight and high-pressure international buyers. News indicated that factory owners disregarded warnings of apparent cracks on the building and made the workers report back or face dismissal (Yardley, 2013). The building had been extended illegally beyond its initially designed capacity, and machinery was placed on floors that were structurally unsound (Gavin & Lin, 2015). These proximate causes were also compounded by deep-rooted structural issues in the RMG industry, such as weak institutional governance and weak enforcement agencies. Implications of the collapse stress that, apart from technical flaws, it was a manifestation of even deeper governance and accountability lapses fueled by both domestic corruption as well as global supply chain imperatives (Alam et al., 2024; Sinkovics et al., 2016). Table 3 lists the identified themes that influence the RP collapse and its consequences.

**Table 3: Thematic Codes and Factors Leading to the Rana Plaza Collapse**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Thematic Code/Factor</b>	<b>Factor Explanation</b>	<b>Espousing Source</b>
<b>1.</b>	Negligence of Structural Safety	Building Code Violation or Illegal Construction	Gavin and Lin (2015); Yardley (2013)
		Weak Government Oversight	Siddiqui and Uddin (2016)
<b>2.</b>	Coercion and Exploitation of Worker	Forced Labor Under Pressure	Alam et al. (2024); Motlagh and Saha (2014)
		Absence of Worker Representation	Kabir et al. (2021)
<b>3.</b>	Symbolic CSR and Audit Failure	Symbolic CSR Compliance	Begum and Solaiman (2016); Doorey (2017); Sinkovics et al. (2016)
		Ineffective Third-Party Audits	Grier et al. (2023)
<b>4.</b>	Global Supply Chain Pressure	Buyer-Induced Time Pressure	Begum and Solaiman (2016); Giuliani and Nieri (2019)
		Diffuse Accountability Across Supply Chain	Taplin (2014); Vanpeperstraete (2021)

Sl. No.	Thematic Code/Factor	Factor Explanation	Espousing Source
5.	Lack of Ethical Leadership	Neglect of Ethical Responsibility	The building owner and factory managers prioritized profit over social and ethical considerations and human life, and made irresponsible choices
		Profit Over People Mentality	The building owner prioritized profit, ignoring structural damage warnings; brands prioritized deadlines over safety
6.	Regulatory Lapses and Corruption		Corruption and poor governance facilitated illegal construction and lax inspection. Authorities ignored earlier warnings.
7.	Absence of Ethical Representation		Workers lacked independent unions or representation through which they could voice safety concerns or resist coercion
8.	Failure of Stakeholder Accountability		Brands, regulators, factory owners, and local government alike ignored their role in preventing catastrophe and protecting workers' safety

*Source:* Author's Compilation.

### 5.5 Role of CSR and Ethics

CSR and ethics come into focus while attempting to make sense of the RP tragedy. The tragedy exposed the seeming character of CSR compliance in the global garment value chain, where brands are more interested in reputation-making than in making long-lasting changes (Begum & Solaiman, 2016). Ethical philosophies such as stakeholder theory argue that businesses have obligations not only to shareholders but to all stakeholders involved - employees, society, and government (Jones et al., 2007). In the case of the RP collapse, this obligation was blatantly violated. CSR processes could not hinder the tragedy since they were not binding and did not genuinely involve the local labor force in the decision-making process. Consequently, CSR and ethics, taken as voluntary or symbolic actions, are insufficient to ensure justice and security in global supply chains (Doorey, 2017; Jamali & Mirshak, 2007).

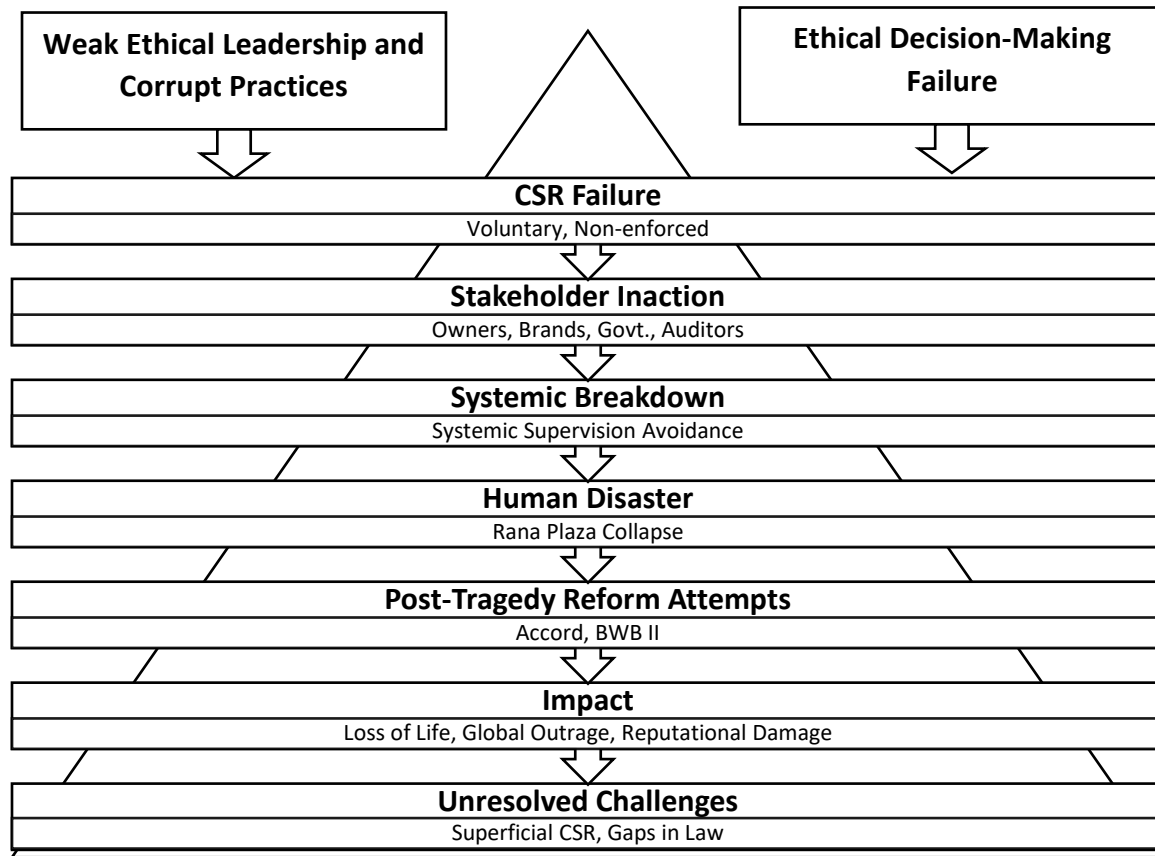
## 5.6 Stakeholder Inaction and Consequences

The RP collapse is a clear example of how CSR principles were overlooked in practice. Despite compliance claims, the factories in the building lacked proper occupational safety standards. Multinational buyers' audits were typically shallow, failed to capture severe issues, or were deliberately fabricated to show compliance (Sinkovics et al., 2016). Ethically, factory owners' actions, such as sealing workers inside the building when they noticed cracks, reflected a prioritization of profits above human life (Motlagh & Saha, 2014). Besides, global brands failed to uphold their ethical responsibility to ensure that their sourcing practices protected workers' rights and safety, thereby contributing to systemic exploitation within the supply chain. Such failures mean CSR practices in the RMG industry were decoupled from ethics and founded on minimum compliance rather than a revolutionary method (Giuliani & Nieri, 2019).

## 5.7 Toward a Reformed CSR Framework

Observance of CSR and ethics is not merely a social and ethical need but a strategic necessity for long-term development in the RMG industry. Social and ethical conducts contribute to trust building, enhancing brand value, and avoiding the risk of reputation and legal harm. Figure 5 is a thematic map, which shows systemic CSR or philanthropic and ethical failures as well as legal noncompliance, and ultimately leads to economic loss through the RP tragedy according to the CSR pyramid advocated by Ackerman and Bauer (1976) and Carroll (1991). It also incorporates secondary data with stakeholder theory and an ethical decision-making framework. The above diagram illustrates the cascading chain of failures that led to RP collapse, reconciling this study's findings and key theoretical principles. The study finds that unethical leadership based on moral disengagement and profit objectives caused CSR failures to be largely symbolic and non-enforceable (Christensen et al., 2013). This was further compounded by complacent regulation and brand blameability, substantiating Stakeholder Theory's argument that firms are prone to neglect non-shareholding stakeholders (Jones et al., 2007).

**Figure 5: Thematic Map of Systemic CSR and Ethical Failures Leading to the Rana Plaza Collapse**



**Source:** Author's Compilation.

The breakdowns in ethical decision-making, such as ignoring warnings to do with building safety or prioritizing shipment schedules over the safety of employees, indicate a breakdown in moral judgment (DeTienne et al., 2019; Mazar & Ariely, 2006). These resulting breakdowns led to a breakdown in systemic supervision, with catastrophic consequences - over 1,100 deaths, global outcry, and widespread reputational damage to global brands. While post-collapse reforms such as the Accord and BWB II emerged (Kusmawan & Rasyidah, 2023), the study finds that superficial CSR compliance and gaps in law enforcement remain, allowing the same risks to persist in the RMG industry (Sinkovics et al., 2016; Vanpeperstraete, 2021). This thematic framework thus not only captures the essence of the current study but also critiques the effectiveness of CSR and ethical reform in high-risk value chains.

In the case of emerging economies like Bangladesh, the inclusion of good CSR practices results in better labor standards, reduced industrial accidents, and better social welfare (Buhmann et al., 2018; Rahman & Moazzem, 2017). It also aligns with international standards of human rights and ethical sourcing, helping Bangladeshi companies to compete with global businesses. When CSR becomes part of business strategy at its foundation, it can create system change that benefits

workers, firms, and society at large (Carroll, 1991; Jamali et al., 2015). Table 4 enlists the comparison of the current study's results with the contemporary ones.

**Table 4: Comparison of Results with Other Contemporary Studies**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Citation</b>	<b>Key Finding</b>	<b>Comparative analysis with the current study</b>
<b>1.</b>	Alam et al. (2024)	Systemic negligence and ethical failures were identified.	Aligns directly with the current study's core argument that unethical practices were central to the disaster. However, it confirms an additional aspect as CSR, which is another core point for this catastrophe.
<b>2.</b>	Grier et al. (2023)	Safety improved, but employment opportunities declined.	Highlights a trade-off that the current study also raises between compliance and job security.
<b>3.</b>	Kusmawan and Rasyidah (2023)	BWB II enhanced awareness of worker rights.	Complements the study's recognition of international efforts while noting their limited impact on ground-level practices.
<b>4.</b>	Mittal and Agrawal (2023)	CSR contributed to restoring reputation and regulatory reforms.	Partially aligns with the current study result, but is more optimistic about post-tragedy CSR evolution.
<b>5.</b>	Prentice and Sumon (2023)	Technocratic responses failed to address structural labor issues.	Directly aligns with the critics of post-RP superficial reform efforts.
<b>6.</b>	Bossavie et al. (2023)	Scrutiny programs developed wages and safety, though employment effects were uneven.	The current study also supports this finding; ethical failures persist even amid international scrutiny.
<b>7.</b>	Koenig and Poncet (2022)	Importers reduced sourcing from Bangladesh post-RP collapse.	Supports the findings on global market impacts and shifting sourcing behaviors.
<b>8.</b>	Ahmed and Uddin (2021)	Bullying intensified as informal labor control after RP disaster.	Supports the current study's finding on the deterioration of labor rights post-RP due to weak CSR enforcement mechanisms.
<b>9.</b>	Vanpeperstraete (2021)	Enforceable agreements are more effective than voluntary CSR codes.	Validates the current study's espousal for enforceable and legally binding CSR commitments.
<b>10.</b>	Kabir et al. (2021)	High prevalence of trauma and suicidal thoughts post-collapse.	Deepens the current study's human-centered analysis by emphasizing the survivors' long-term psychological toll.
<b>11.</b>	Alam et al.	Multi-level reforms	The current study advocates these

Sl. No.	Citation	Key Finding	Comparative analysis with the current study
	(2021)	initiated; enforcement remains weak.	findings by showing that reforms lacked depth and consistent implementation.
12.	Barua et al. (2021)	Structural risks persist despite reforms.	The current study's view also corroborates that cosmetic changes failed to prevent underlying risks.
13.	Berik (2017)	Highlights gendered vulnerabilities in global supply chains.	Supplements the current study's ethical discussion by integrating intersectional feminist perspectives on worker exploitation.
14.	Doorey (2017)	CSR lacks enforceability; inadequate legal structures.	Reinforces the current study's call for binding CSR frameworks rather than voluntary CSR guides.
15.	Schuster et al. (2016)	CSR is often used strategically, not for systemic improvement.	Advocates the study's finding that CSR is a frequently used tool for brand image rather than a transformative force.
16.	Sinkovics et al. (2016)	Auditing found insufficient to guarantee CSR compliance.	Supports the current study's criticism of audit-based CSR models as ineffective.
17.	Hossen (2016)	Wage dissatisfaction, poor conditions, and managerial misconduct were key drivers of disputes.	Aligns with the study's findings on internal organizational failures and exploitative management.
18.	Begum and Solaiman (2016)	CSR remains non-binding and largely symbolic.	Imitates the current study's criticism that CSR practices lack legal binding and are insufficient to safeguard worker rights.
19.	Taplin (2014)	Responsibility for ethical lapses is diffused across supply chain actors.	Supports the current study's argument on fragmented accountability and moral disengagement across actors.
20.	Motlagh and Saha (2014)	Exposed deep-rooted negligence and corruption.	Strongly supports the current study's discussion of systemic ethical failures.

**Source:** Author's Compilation.

Even with more international attention given following the 2013 RP tragedy, Bangladesh's RMG industry still has a serious problem of social and ethical issues. They are more likely to be deeply rooted in systemic negligence of CSR practices and ethical standards. One quite significant example is the July 2021 factory blaze at Hashem Foods Ltd. in Rupganj that killed a minimum of 52 individuals, including children. Fact-finding reveals that the factory lacked adequate fire safety arrangements, had its emergency exits blocked, and employed child labor. Despite prior warnings by the department of inspection for factories and establishments (DIFE) of non-

compliance with fire safety and the employment of children in the workplace, nothing was addressed by the company or the authorities. Moreover, earlier this year, in April 2024, a fire at Habiganj's PRAN-RFL Industrial Park left a female worker dead and 30 injured. The incident indicates persistent failure in safety, as the worker had leaped off the rooftop to escape the blaze. These disasters highlight persistent failures in the enforcement of regulations and corporate accountability, highlighting the need for across-the-board reforms in safety protocols and moral standards in the industry. In fine, the RP collapse resulted from CSR code violations and unethical business practices that disrespect human lives. Thus, the accident has created increased sensitivity to CSR issues in Bangladesh, particularly in the RMG industry. The debate emphasizes the need for proactive CSR activities and ethical business practice, and respect for human rights to prevent future tragedies and ensure sustainable industry culture.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has sought to analyze the convergence of CSR and ethics, and industrial safety in Bangladesh's RMG industry in the backdrop of the RP tragedy. To some extent, the study critically analyzed the root causes of the tragedy, investigated the effect of CSR and ethical practices in light of RP collapse, and dissected the broader implications of stakeholder failure. From secondary data and thematic content analysis, the study prioritized the central role of window-dressing CSR complacency, ethical neglect, and lack of regulatory enforcement played in the run-up to the disaster. The result of the RP collapse was a profound loss of human lives and of property. Though the incident urged the RMG industry in Bangladesh to turn towards ensuring safety in work, the adequacy of such efforts remains questionable. It is a reminder to RMG company owners to stick to CSR practices and moral codes of ethics more rigidly so as to reduce the risk of future calamities. The RP collapse has emerged as a key driver demanding precautionary measures against unforeseen catastrophic occurrences. Responding to all three research questions, corporate CSR and ethics were the focal points in the RP collapse. Neglect of these fundamental principles led to corporate failure and violation of societal interests at a larger level. The significance of corporate CSR and ethics thus becomes imperative for organizational stakeholders like employees, owners, and societal interest groups. The breaches of these principles by RP authorities from a variety of different perspectives demonstrate their key importance both from a business perspective and from a societal perspective. The RP collapse is a classic example of a tragic incident due to the breach of ethical conduct and adherence to CSR in society and business. The failure to follow these ethical principles by the RP authorities was the key reason behind the disastrous outcome. The result of the incident has led to greater compliance with CSR principles and ethical codes of conduct by industry players to prevent such disasters from occurring in the future. It also serves as a bitter reminder that CSR and ethics in business are not only required for workers' and public well-being as well as community interests, but for the sustainability of the industry and overall success as well.

### **6.1 Recommendations**

On the basis of the revelations and hard-earned experience from the RP tragedy, the following recommendations are presented in a logical pattern, addressing in four priority stakeholder groups: (1) regulatory bodies and government authorities, (2) RMG companies and factory owners, (3) international buyers and brands, and (4) civil society, NGOs, and academia.



### **6.1.1. Regulatory Bodies and Government Authorities**

- Strengthen and enforce labor laws as a reality through regular monitoring and imposition of penalties for non-compliance.
- Institutionalize independent labor inspection and hasten legal procedures associated with industrial catastrophes.
- Support the formation and protection of independent trade unions and collective bargaining organizations.
- Reconstitute the BGMEA to ensure greater transparency, inclusiveness, and accountability.
- Engage in effective negotiation on purchasing practices by buyers with a view to securing ethical sourcing agreements.

### **6.1.2. RMG Companies and Factory Owners**

- Provide specialized training to middle and line management in CSR practices, labor rights, ethical workplace behavior, and occupational safety.
- Have workers represented at all levels of decision-making, including health and safety committees.
- Apply enforceable and sustainable CSR and ethical practices of production with international labor and environmental standards.

### **6.1.3. International Buyers and Brands**

- Move forward to strict compliance-driven CSR and make enforceable, long-term contracts on ethical sourcing.
- Review and modify purchasing practices to avoid indirect pressure on suppliers that undermines workers' safety and labor rights.
- Increase transparency in the supply chain and incorporate workers' voices in social auditing processes.

### **6.1.4. Civil Society, NGOs, and Academia**

- Intensify public campaigns on ethical consumption and sustainable fashion to modify consumer culture.
- Form coalitions to apply pressure on international brands and policymakers to reform and be held accountable.
- Promote research, documentation, and awareness schemes for CSR practices to prevent industrial disasters and amplify workers' voices.

Thus, there is a need for a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach that combines legal accountability, monitoring through regulation, and structural reformation in the global supply chain towards developing a safer, more equitable, and more ethical RMG industry in Bangladesh.

## **6.2 Contributions**

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on CSR, business ethics, and industrial safety in developing economies by its critical case study of the RP collapse in Bangladesh's RMG industry. It contributes both theoretically and practically.

### **6.2.1 Theoretical Contribution**

First of all, the paper uses stakeholder theory, CSR pyramid and ethical decision-making models in analyzing the roles of government bodies, factory owners, global brands, and civil society in industrial disasters. By placing the analysis in the context of a paradigmatic critical case study, it depicts how symbolic CSR, ethical disengagement, and institutional enforcement weakness combine to perpetuate dangerous labor conditions in global supply chains. Second, the study contributes to business and human rights literature through its demonstration of the limitations of voluntary CSR approaches amid the absence of legal enforceability. The conceptual framework developed herein offers a visualization of the superficial social and ethical compliance as well as institutional failure into human tragedy, extending existing frameworks with empirically grounded integration.

### **6.2.2 Practical Contribution**

Practically, the study provides structured, multi-level policy recommendations for regulatory bodies, RMG factory owners, international buyers, and civil society. The study refers to recent industrial disasters, such as the Hashem Foods fire incident of 2021 and PRAN-RFL factory fires in 2024, as contemporary evidence of CSR and ethical breakdowns, contributing to the need for systemic transformation. These findings underpin calls for binding sourcing contracts, stronger labor inspection systems, and more transparent corporate accountability processes, which are all within current arguments in global development and sustainability policy.

## **6.3 Limitations**

Despite the relevance and depth of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research is based solely on secondary data, including academic literature, policy documents, and media reports. While such sources offer rich contextual insights, they may lack the immediacy and emotional nuance of first-hand narratives or primary interviews. Furthermore, there is a risk of source bias, especially in politically influenced or corporate-affiliated publications. Second, the study adopts a single case design, focusing on the RP collapse. While this case is paradigmatic and critical, its specificity limits generalizability across other contexts, industries, or countries. This constraint is inherent in qualitative case studies, which prioritize depth over breadth. Third, although the study engages with established CSR and ethical frameworks, the application remains theoretical, without empirical validation through stakeholder interviews or field-based investigation. As such, it cannot assess lived experiences or organizational dynamics in real time.

## **6.4 Future Research Direction**

Future research might address these limitations by adopting a mixed-method approach that combines documentary analysis with primary qualitative interviews of survivors, factory managers, brand representatives, and regulators. This would enrich the understanding of CSR

practices from multiple stakeholder viewpoints. Second, comparative case studies across other industrial disasters (e.g., Tazreen Fashions fire or Covid-era supply chain breakdowns) could illuminate whether CSR failures in the RMG industry reflect a broader structural pattern. Such cross-case analysis would strengthen theoretical generalizations and policy relevance. Third, longitudinal studies are necessary to assess the sustainability of post-disaster reforms, particularly in light of critiques that CSR efforts often remain symbolic or superficial. Evaluating the long-term effectiveness of initiatives like the Accord and Alliance could provide actionable insights into ethical sourcing, compliance regimes, and brand accountability. Lastly, future work should critically examine the global governance mechanisms, such as trade agreements, brand codes of conduct, and international labor standards, to understand how power asymmetries between Western brands and global South suppliers influence ethical outcomes.

## 6.5 Final Remarks

The findings prove that the RP collapse was not only an accident but a consequence of failure to fulfill CSR commitments and entrenched ethical lapses, and, most prominently, by the building owner, SR, and facilitating supply chain collaborators. The workers were compelled into risky conditions despite prior awareness of structural vulnerabilities, revealing an unambiguous disregard for human rights and ethical workplace conditions. The study corroborates the need for enforceable CSR standards, robust ethical leadership, and multi-level stakeholder responsibility to prevent tragedies like this one from ever occurring again. Ultimately, safeguarding workers' lives requires more than codes of conduct - it requires real, systemic commitment to ethics, transparency, and social responsibility at every level of the global clothing industry.

In conclusion, the author affirms that the RP collapse resulted from the failure to adhere to CSR principles and ethical codes by RP authorities, emphasizing the dire consequences of neglecting these crucial aspects in business operations. Thus, the concluding remark suggests that CSR and ethics are violated extremely before the RP collapse and the resulting analysis indicates that complying with CSR and ethics by business owners are the prerequisite for the sustainability and growth of the RMG industry in Bangladesh and suggests that the failure might cause the likely incidents in coming days causing an indeterminate loss of the industry as well as the country economy as a whole. So, in the Bangladeshi RMG industry, there is a crucial need for enforceable ethics-infused CSR practices.

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