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## Operationalising *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* through *toyyib* principles in labour ethics: Challenges and recommendations for the garment industry in Bangladesh

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### Abstract

The ready-made garment (RMG) industry of Bangladesh contributes significantly to the national economy but remains ethically fragile due to poor working conditions, wage injustice, and unsafe environments. This study operationalises *toyyib* as an applied ethical lens grounded in *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* to examine labour practices, identify ethical violations, and propose reform pathways. Data were collected through 22 semi-structured interviews where workers, managers, policymakers, and Islamic scholars participated. The findings reveal misalignment between existing labour practices and Islamic ethical requirements, particularly in relation to wages, working hours, workplace safety, hygiene, rest facilities, and the protection of workers' dignity. These issues are compounded by weak law enforcement and a lack of awareness of Islamic ethical obligations. The study advances Islamic labour ethics by empirically translating *Maqasid* objectives into assessable workplace conditions through the concept of *toyyib*.

### 1. Introduction

The ready-made garment (RMG) industry is a cornerstone of Bangladesh's economy, contributing significantly to export earnings and employment generation, particularly for women from low-income and rural backgrounds (Ahmed & Nathan, 2014; Islam & Rakib, 2019). Over the past three decades, the rapid expansion of the sector has positioned Bangladesh as one of the world's leading apparel exporters. Despite its economic significance, extensive research has documented persistent ethical challenges within the industry, including low wages, unsafe working conditions, excessive working hours, job insecurity, and gender-based vulnerabilities (Begum *et al.*, 2008; Kabir *et al.*, 2022; Saha, 2023).

Global attention to labour ethics in Bangladesh's garment industry intensified following the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, which exposed the severe human cost of neglecting worker safety and ethical responsibility in pursuit of economic competitiveness (Islam & Deegan, 2010; Ahmed & Nathan, 2014). In response, a range of regulatory reforms, international safety accords, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives were introduced to improve labour standards and workplace safety. While these interventions have improved factory inspections and structural safety, studies indicate that ethical deficiencies persist at the operational level, particularly in relation to wages, working hours, dignity, and worker participation (Haque & Azmat, 2015; Islam & Rakib, 2019).

Existing labour governance frameworks, including CSR mechanisms and International Labour Organization (ILO)

standards, largely emphasise compliance, audit performance, and risk management (Islam & Deegan, 2010; Reinecke *et al.*, 2019). While these frameworks improve formal compliance, they often fail to address workers lived experiences of moral harm, dignity violations, and ethical responsibility beyond regulatory minimums. Furthermore, although such frameworks provide important baseline protections, scholars argue that compliance-oriented approaches frequently prioritise documentation over substantive ethical transformation, resulting in symbolic or cosmetic compliance (Haque & Azmat, 2015; Rahman, K., 2021). Consequently, labour ethics are frequently reduced to procedural obligations, whilst workers lived experiences of injustice, vulnerability, and moral harm remain insufficiently addressed.

This limitation is particularly significant in Muslim-majority contexts such as Bangladesh, where ethical values, religious beliefs, and moral accountability play an important role in shaping social and economic life (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007; Chapra, 2008). Islamic ethical thought does not treat labour as a purely contractual or economic activity; rather, work is understood as a moral responsibility governed by justice (*adl*), trust (*amanah*), and excellence (*ihsan*) (Ali, 1988; Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008). From this perspective, labour practices that compromise dignity, safety, or fairness constitute not only regulatory but also moral failure.

Two Islamic ethical constructs are particularly relevant for evaluating labour practices: *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* as the higher-order ethical framework, and *toyyib* as its operational manifestation in everyday workplace practices. The concept of

*toyyib*, when grounded in the objectives of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, extends beyond legal permissibility (halal) to emphasise wholesomeness, balance, and the avoidance of harm in all aspects of production and employment (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007). In labour contexts, *toyyib* requires that wages, working conditions, and managerial practices protect workers' physical well-being, psychological health, and dignity. Similarly, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* provides a higher-order ethical framework aimed at safeguarding essential human interests, including life, wealth, intellect, dignity, and faith (Chapra, 2008). Contemporary scholars argue that *Maqasid* offers a normative foundation for evaluating modern socio-economic institutions, including labour governance and industrial relations.

Despite their relevance, empirical studies that operationalise *toyyib* alongside *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* to assess concrete labour practices in labour-intensive industries remain scarce. Studies on Bangladesh's garment industry have predominantly relied on economic, legal, and human rights perspectives, with minimal engagement with workers' ethical experiences interpreted through Islamic moral objectives (Begum *et al.*, 2008; Islam & Rakib, 2019; Kabir *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, research on Islamic Work Ethics has largely focused on organisational behaviour and conceptual discussions, leaving a gap in understanding how Islamic ethics can inform labour practices in large-scale manufacturing sectors (Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008).

In response to these gaps, this study examines labour ethics in Bangladesh's garment industry through an integrated *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* framework. Drawing on qualitative data from garment workers, factory managers, policymakers, and Islamic scholars, the study aims to examine how existing labour practices reflect or contradict *toyyib* principles when viewed through the lens of *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. Three research objectives guide the study: (1) to identify labour practices that violate *toyyib* principles and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* objectives, particularly in relation to wages, working hours, workplace safety, job security, and workers' dignity; (2) to explain the structural and policy failures that sustain these unethical practices; and (3) to propose *toyyib*-oriented ethical and policy recommendations for labour reform. By bridging Islamic ethical theory with empirical labour realities, the study contributes to the growing literature on Islamic labour ethics. It offers context-sensitive insights for policymakers and industry actors seeking ethically sustainable labour governance.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Ethical challenges in the garment industry

The global garment industry has been widely examined for its role in generating employment and export revenue, particularly in developing economies; however, it is also frequently associated with labour exploitation and ethical violations (Reinecke *et al.*, 2019). Studies consistently report that cost-driven competition, buyer pressure, and fragmented supply chains contribute to low wages, excessive working hours, unsafe working environments, and limited job security for workers (Islam & Deegan, 2010; Haque & Azmat, 2015).

In Bangladesh, the ready-made garment (RMG) sector has attracted extensive scholarly attention due to its economic importance and recurring labour rights concerns. Empirical

research documents persistent ethical challenges, including wage insufficiency, occupational health risks, verbal abuse, and restricted worker participation in decision-making (Begum *et al.*, 2008; Ahmed & Nathan, 2014; Islam & Rakib, 2019). These challenges are not isolated incidents but are embedded within structural and institutional arrangements governing the industry.

Gender-based ethical concerns are particularly prominent within the RMG sector. Female workers, who constitute the majority of the workforce, experience disproportionate vulnerabilities related to harassment, lack of privacy, inadequate sanitation facilities, and limited maternity protection (Begum *et al.*, 2008; Saha, 2023). Such conditions raise serious ethical questions regarding dignity, justice, and equality in labour practices.

The Rana Plaza collapse in 2013 marked a critical moment in global awareness of labour ethics in Bangladesh's garment industry. In response, national labour reforms, international safety accords, and CSR initiatives were introduced to improve workplace safety and compliance (Ahmed & Nathan, 2014; Islam & Deegan, 2010). While these interventions have contributed to improvements in factory inspections and infrastructure, studies indicate that ethical deficiencies persist in everyday labour practices, particularly regarding wages, working hours, and worker voice (Haque & Azmat, 2015; Islam & Rakib, 2019). In addition, although existing studies document widespread ethical violations in the garment industry, they rely primarily on regulatory, economic, or human-rights frameworks. As a result, moral values, dignity, and Islamic ethical accountability receive limited attention. This is an important omission in Muslim-majority contexts such as Bangladesh. This gap calls for ethical approaches that move beyond compliance toward moral responsibility.

### 2.2 Islamic work ethics and labour responsibility

Islamic Work Ethics (IWE) conceptualizes labour as a moral responsibility grounded in justice (*'adl*), trust (*amanah*), and social accountability, rather than as a purely contractual relationship (Ali, 1988; Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008). Work is viewed as an act of ethical significance, linking individual effort to collective social welfare and moral accountability before God and society. Empirical studies on IWE suggest that Islamic ethical values can positively influence organisational behaviour, employee commitment, and fairness in management practices (Ali, 1988; Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008). However, the majority of this literature focuses on organizational settings, leadership behaviour, and individual attitudes, with limited attention to labour-intensive manufacturing sectors. As a result, the relevance of Islamic Work Ethics for addressing labour exploitation and structural injustice in industrial environments remains underexplored.

In addition, scholars further argue that while IWE provides a normative ethical foundation, its practical application requires integration with broader governance frameworks to address systemic labour issues (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007). Without such integration, Islamic ethical principles risk remaining abstract ideals rather than operational tools for labour reform. To engage more directly with the conditions under which work is carried out in labour-intensive industries, the concept of *toyyib* provides a complementary framework for evaluating the quality, safety, and dignity of everyday workplace practices.

### 2.3 *Toyyib* as an ethical standard in labour practices

The concept of *toyyib* extends beyond legal permissibility (halal) to encompass wholesomeness, fairness, balance, and the avoidance of harm in all aspects of life, including economic and labour activities (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007). In labour contexts, *toyyib* requires that working conditions preserve workers' physical safety, psychological well-being, and dignity, and that employment relationships are free from exploitation and injustice. In practical terms, *toyyib*-compliant labour practice includes wages that are sufficient for a decent standard of living and paid promptly, reflecting the Prophetic injunction to pay the worker "before his sweat dries" (*Sunan Ibn Majah*); working hours that preserve time for rest, family, and worship; clean, ventilated, and safe production floors with adequate sanitation and rest facilities; supervision that is respectful and free from verbal abuse or harassment; and employment terms that offer security rather than fear of arbitrary dismissal.

Although *toyyib* is frequently discussed in relation to halal consumption and production, its application to labour ethics remains limited in existing literature. Studies on labour governance rarely employ *toyyib* as an evaluative ethical standard for wages, working hours, workplace safety, or managerial conduct. This omission represents a significant gap, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts where ethical expectations are shaped by Islamic moral values (Chapra, 2008). Three considerations justify extending *toyyib* to labour ethics. First, the *Qur'anic* pairing of *halalan toyyiban* (*Qur'an* 2:168) indicates that permissibility alone is insufficient: goodness attaches to how a product is made, not only to the product itself, and a garment produced through exploited labour cannot meaningfully be described as *toyyib*. Second, *toyyib* supplies evaluative criteria at the level of everyday practice, such as wages, hours, safety, hygiene, and dignity, where both compliance frameworks and the *Maqasid* remain too abstract to be directly assessed. Third, in Muslim-majority contexts like Bangladesh, attaching labour reforms in the concept of *toyyib* aligns with the Islamic ethical business

concept of *toyyib* aligns with the Islamic ethical business models outlined by Dusuki and Abdullah (2007). This connection provides a culturally relevant and actionable framework for both workers and employers.

### 2.4 *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* and ethical labour governance

While *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* defines the overarching moral objectives of labour relations, *toyyib* functions as the ethical qualifier through which these objectives are realised and evaluated in concrete workplace practices. *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* refers to the higher objectives of Islamic law aimed at safeguarding essential human interests, including life, wealth, intellect, dignity, and faith (Chapra, 2008). Classical scholars conceptualized *Maqasid* as a framework for promoting human welfare and preventing harm, while contemporary scholars argue for its relevance in evaluating modern socio-economic institutions and governance systems (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007; Chapra, 2008).

Applied to labour ethics, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* provides normative criteria for assessing whether employment systems protect workers' fundamental rights and well-being. Labour practices that compromise safety, dignity, or economic security directly contradict *Maqasid* objectives, indicating ethical failure at both institutional and moral levels. Despite growing scholarly interest in *Maqasid*-based governance, empirical applications of this framework in labour-intensive industries remain scarce. Much of the existing literature treats the *Maqasid* conceptually, without systematically linking its objectives to the everyday workplace realities faced by industrial workers. To meaningfully evaluate such realities, *Maqasid* objectives must be operationalised through ethical lenses capable of assessing the tangible conditions under which work is performed. Accordingly, this study conceptualises *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* as defining the normative ends of labour ethics, whilst *toyyib* serves as an interpretive and operational workplace conditions.

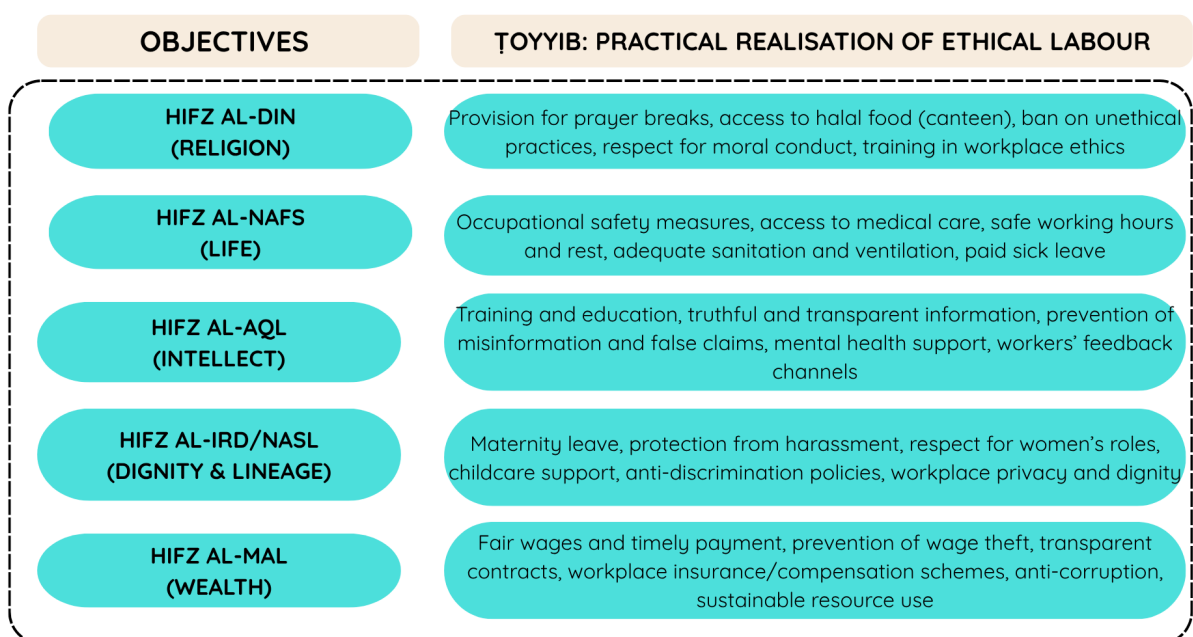


Figure 1: Applying *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* and *toyyib* for ethical workplace practices in the garment industry. (Author's adaptation, 2025).

Figure 1 visualises this integration by mapping key *Maqasid* dimensions onto specific *toyyib*-compliant workplace practices relevant to the garment industry. The protection of life (*Hifz al-Nafs*) is operationalised through *toyyib* indicators such as structurally safe and well-ventilated premises, hygienic sanitation, rest facilities, and working hours that safeguard physical and psychological health; the protection of wealth (*Hifz al-Mal*) through wages that are sufficient for basic needs, transparently calculated, and paid on time; the protection of dignity (*Hifz al-Ird*) through harassment-free supervision and gender-sensitive facilities; the protection of intellect (*Hifz al-Aql*) through freedom from chronic exhaustion; and the protection of faith (*Hifz al-Din*) through respect for workers' religious obligations. Therefore, in reverse, wage injustice, excessive working hours, unsafe workplaces, gender-based neglect, and job insecurity are not generic management failures but identifiable violations of specific *Maqasid* objectives and of the *toyyib* standard of wholesome employment.

Conceptually, this study does not treat *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* as parallel constructs. Rather, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* provides the normative foundation by defining the moral objectives of labour relations. At the same time, *toyyib* functions as the applied ethical qualifier that reflects how these objectives are realised or violated in everyday workplace practices. In other words, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* explains what ethical labour should aim to achieve, while *toyyib* explains what ethical labour should look like in practice. This approach helps connect Islamic ethical ideals with the real experiences of workers on the factory floor.

## 2.5 Research gaps and positioning of the study

The reviewed literature reveals several critical gaps. First, studies on Bangladesh's garment industry predominantly rely on economic, legal, and human-rights-based frameworks, with limited engagement with Islamic ethical perspectives (Ahmed & Nathan, 2014; Islam & Rakib, 2019). Second, while Islamic Work Ethics has been explored in organisational contexts, its application to labour exploitation in manufacturing sectors remains limited (Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008). Third, empirical integration of *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* as a combined ethical framework for labour analysis is largely absent. Moreover, workers' moral perceptions and ethical experiences are often marginalised in labour governance research, which tends to prioritise institutional compliance and policy analysis (Haque & Azmat, 2015; Saha, 2023). This gap constrains the ability of existing frameworks to capture ethical harm as experienced by workers themselves.

Positioned within these gaps, this study empirically evaluates labour ethics in Bangladesh's garment industry using an integrated *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* framework. To address this gap, the study adopts an integrated *toyyib*–*Maqasid* heuristic framework that links ethical objectives with concrete workplace practices. *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* defines the moral ends of labour relations. *Toyyib*, on the other hand, serves as the evaluative lens through which everyday working conditions are assessed. This study draws directly on workers' lived experiences, together with insights from factory managers, policymakers, and Islamic scholars, to assess ethical violations, explain their structural causes, and identify *toyyib*-oriented reform pathways. In doing so, the study connects Islamic ethical theory with actual industrial practice and advances a morally grounded, context-sensitive approach to labour ethics in a labour-intensive industry.

## 3. Materials and methods

### 3.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design to examine labour practices in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry through the ethical framework of *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study, as it enables an in-depth understanding of workers' lived experiences, perceptions, and ethical concerns, which quantitative methods cannot adequately capture (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that social realities are constructed through individual experiences and interactions. This perspective allows for the exploration of how different stakeholders: workers, managers, policymakers, and Islamic scholars interpret labour practices and ethical responsibilities within the garment industry (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Given the limited empirical research applying Islamic ethical frameworks in labour contexts, an exploratory design was considered suitable for generating new insights.

### 3.2 Participants and sampling

The study involved twenty-two (22) participants selected from four key stakeholder groups within Bangladesh's garment industry: garment workers (shop-floor employees from sewing, cutting, finishing, and dyeing sections), factory management (supervisors, human resource personnel, managers, owners, and directors), government officials (including trade union representatives and district labour administrators), and Islamic scholars with expertise in Islamic law, *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, and *toyyib* principles.

Purposive sampling was employed to identify participants with relevant experience and knowledge of labour conditions, regulatory processes, or Islamic ethical principles. This sampling strategy is appropriate for qualitative research where the objective is to gain rich, contextual insights rather than statistical generalisation. Participants were selected against explicit eligibility criteria: each had to be directly involved in the garment industry or in a relevant regulatory or scholarly role; factory-based participants were required to have a minimum of six months' experience in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector; and only individuals willing to share their perspectives were included. To ensure diversity and representation, the sample balanced male and female participants to capture gender-specific experiences, particularly relevant given that women constitute the majority of the RMG workforce, and was drawn from multiple locations (Dhaka, Gazipur, Savar, and Narayanganj for factory-based roles; Gombak, Malaysia for Islamic scholars), with interviews conducted both in person and online to accommodate participants' availability and geographical constraints. The full demographic composition is presented in Table 1. In addition, the inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups enabled source triangulation, whereby the same labour practices were examined from complementary points (Nowell *et al.*, 2017).

### 3.3 Data collection procedures

A total of 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted between May and July 2025 in convenient locations and

Table 1: Demographic profile

| Category             | Code Range                                                    | Number of Participants | Gender Distribution | Roles/Position                                                                              | Location   |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Factory Workers      | C.5, C.6, C.7, C.10, C.11, C.12, C.13, C.17, C.15, C.19, C.20 | 11                     | 6 Female, 5 Male    | Sewing operators, cutting & finishing workers, machine operators, technicians, coordinators | Bangladesh |
| Factory Management   | C.1, C.3, C.4, C.8, C.14, C.9, C.16                           | 7                      | 7 Male              | Supervisors (QC), HR personnel, factory managers, owners, directors                         | Bangladesh |
| Government Officials | C.2, C.18                                                     | 2                      | 1 Female, 1 Male    | Trade union representatives, district labour administrators, policy officials               | Bangladesh |
| Islamic Scholars     | C.21, C.22                                                    | 2                      | 2 Female            | Islamic ethics experts, lecturers                                                           | Malaysia   |
| <b>Total</b>         |                                                               | <b>22</b>              | —                   | —                                                                                           | —          |

comfortable for participants, including factory offices, neutral meeting spaces, and, in some cases, online sessions. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they allow participants to express their experiences while enabling the researcher to probe deeper into key issues related to labour conditions, governance, and ethical practices (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Each interview lasted between 30 and 50 minutes, depending on the availability and willingness of participants, who were given the option to speak in either Bangla or English. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented by the researcher's field notes, ensuring accuracy in capturing participants' voices and facilitating a richer analysis during the transcription and coding process.

Given that the research was conducted whilst the researcher was based in Malaysia and the study site was in Bangladesh, a combination of strategies was employed to access participants. Some interviews were conducted directly by the researcher via online platforms, allowing participants to share their experiences virtually whilst maintaining confidentiality. To complement this, a trained research assistant based in Bangladesh conducted face-to-face interviews following the same interview protocol, ensuring consistency in data collection across both modes. This arrangement enabled the researcher to engage with participants despite geographical constraints, whilst also reaching those who preferred in-person interaction. The research assistant received detailed training on the study's objectives, the semi-structured interview guide, and ethical procedures, including confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, whereby no new ethical categories or substantive insights emerged from additional interviews (Saunders *et al.*, 2018).

The recordings were transcribed verbatim and subsequently translated into English for analysis. Care was taken to preserve the original meaning and contextual nuance of participants' responses throughout the translation process.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and

Clarke (2006). This analysis involves systematic coding and pattern identification in qualitative data, making it suitable for exploring complex social and ethical issues. It began with data familiarisation through repeated reading of transcripts, followed by the generation of initial codes related to labour conditions, worker experiences, and governance practices. These codes were then organised into broader themes, including wage injustice, working conditions, governance failures, and ethical reform pathways.

The study employed both inductive and deductive approaches. While themes emerged from the data (inductive), they were interpreted through the ethical lens of *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (deductive). This integration enabled the study to connect empirical findings with Islamic ethical principles such as justice, dignity, and welfare (Chapra, 2008; Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007).

In addition, to enhance the credibility of the analysis, data were compared across different participant groups, and representative quotations were used to support key findings. This approach ensured transparency and strengthened the validity of the interpretations (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). The workers provided first-hand accounts of everyday conditions. Managers explained the operational and commercial pressures shaping those conditions; government officials clarified the regulatory framework and its enforcement. On the other hand, Islamic scholars offered an interpretation of these accounts against *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. Where accounts converged across groups, for example, workers, managers, and officials independently describing weak enforcement, confidence in the finding was strengthened; where they diverged, such as differing descriptions of compliance practices, the divergence was itself treated analytically as evidence of policy–practice gaps. This cross-group corroboration enhanced the credibility and depth of the findings.

### 3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, and they were informed of the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned codes (e.g., C.1; C.2) (See Table 1), and all identifying information was removed

Table 2: Summary of key findings

| Theme 1: Violation of <i>toyyib</i> Principles                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Theme 2: Challenges                                                                                                                                                                          | Theme 3: Scholarly and Actionable Solutions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Workers in Bangladesh's garment industry face and endure the following unethical labour practices:<br>1. Wage Injustice<br>2. Exploitative Work Hours<br>3. Lack of Rest & Facilities<br>4. Unsafe & Unhygienic Conditions<br>5. Gender-Specific Neglect & Harassment<br>6. Job Insecurity | The study identified:<br>1. Weak enforcement of labour laws<br>2. Corruption in & non-compliance<br>3. Profit-Over-Welfare Model<br>4. Policy–practice gaps<br>5. Weak Worker Representation | Recommendation include:<br>1. Fair Wage and Financial Justice<br>2. Safe & Hygienic and restful Workplace<br>3. Respect for Women Workers and Gender Equality<br>4. Participatory Policy and Strong Worker Representation<br>5. Decent Work Hours and Job Security<br>6. Transparent Governance and Ethical Compliance |

from the transcripts. Data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes. Given the sensitive nature of labour issues, particular attention was paid to protecting participants from potential risks, including workplace retaliation. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the 22 participants in this study, categorized by stakeholder group, gender, role, and location.

Factory workers (n = 11) constituted the largest group. This group provides direct insights into labour conditions and lived experiences. Factory management (n=7) participants contributed organisational perspectives, while government officials (n=2) provided regulatory insights. Islamic scholars (n=2) offered ethical interpretations based on *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. The diversity of participants enabled triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings by capturing multiple dimensions of labour practices.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Overview of findings

The analysis of interview data revealed three interrelated themes reflecting the ethical condition of labour practices in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry. As shown in Table 2, the first theme addresses Research Objective 1 by identifying violations of *toyyib* values and *Maqasid* objectives related to wages, working hours, workplace safety, job security, and women's dignity. The second theme addresses Research Objective 2 by explaining the structural and policy failures including weak enforcement, symbolic compliance, profit-driven business models, and limited worker participation that sustain unethical labour practices (Islam & Deegan, 2010; Reinecke *et al.*, 2019). The third theme addresses Research Objective 3 by presenting *toyyib*-oriented ethical and policy recommendations proposed by participants to improve labour welfare and governance in the garment industry.

Overall, the identified themes reveal a consistent gap between existing labour practices and the ethical ideals articulated by *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. These conditions represent failures to realise *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*, as reflected in non-*toyyib* labour practices, undermining fairness, justice, human dignity, and the protection of life and wealth (*Hifz al-Nafs*, *Hifz al-Mal*). Similar to prior studies, the findings indicate that ethical violations are systemic rather than isolated

and are shaped by structural, economic, and governance-related factors (Ahmed & Nathan, 2014; Haque & Azmat, 2015).

These structural and policy shortcomings hinder ethical labour practices, allowing systemic exploitation and failing to ensure compliance with *toyyib* principles. Regulatory frameworks are insufficient to safeguard worker rights or promote equitable working conditions. These findings are discussed in the following sub-sections.

### 4.2 Theme 1: Violations of *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* in labour practices

Theme 1 fulfils Research Objective 1 by identifying and analysing concrete labour practices related to wages, working hours, workplace safety, job security, and workers' dignity. Using the integrated *toyyib*–*Maqasid* framework, this theme evaluates whether these practices protect or undermine key *Maqasid* objectives, particularly the protection of life (*Hifz al-Nafs*), wealth (*Hifz al-Mal*), and dignity (*Hifz al-'Ird*). The findings demonstrate widespread ethical misalignment between existing practices and Islamic ethical requirements. Consistent with earlier research on the RMG sector, participants described labour conditions that undermine justice, dignity, and human well-being (Begum *et al.*, 2008; Kabir *et al.*, 2022). These conditions represent direct violations of multiple *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* objectives. This theme draws primarily on workers' first-hand testimony, supplemented by factory management's own acknowledgment of practices such as undisclosed wage deductions (Section 4.2.1); the corresponding government-official and scholarly perspectives that corroborate these accounts are presented in Themes 2 and 3, where the same underlying practices are examined from complementary points.

#### 4.2.1 Wage injustice

Wage injustice emerged as one of the most prominent concerns among participants. Workers consistently reported that their earnings were insufficient to meet basic living needs, reflecting a disconnect between wage structures and economic realities.

One worker stated:

*"My salary is not enough for rent, food, and my family. Even with overtime, I still struggle every month."* (C.6, Factory Worker)

A factory management participant likewise acknowledged problems of wage:

*“Even now, some factories deduct wages or make workers work until midnight but pay them only for work until 10 PM.” (C.1, Factory management)*

These findings align with previous studies that highlight persistent wage insufficiency in the garment sector (Ahmed & Nathan, 2014; Islam & Rakib, 2019). From a *Maqasid al-Shari’ah* perspective, such practices violate the protection of wealth (*Hifz al-Mal*) and undermine workers’ dignity. Within the *toyyib* framework, wages that fail to ensure basic well-being are not ethically acceptable (Chapra, 2008). Beyond confirming prior findings, these interviews reveal the mechanism of the ethical harm: unexplained deductions render wages unpredictable as well as insufficient, transferring business risk onto those least able to bear it and breaching the trust (*amanah*) inherent in the employment contract. The violation of *Hifz al-Mal* is therefore twofold (1) workers’ wealth is diminished in quantity and (2) destabilised in reliability. Assessed against *toyyib* indicators, a wage is ethically adequate only when it is sufficient for basic needs, transparent in calculation, and paid punctually; the testimonies indicate failure on all three counts. This distinguishes the present analysis from compliance audits, which verify only whether the statutory minimum wage has been paid.

#### 4.2.2 Excessive working hours and physical strain

Participants consistently reported excessive working hours driven by production targets and shipment deadlines. Mandatory overtime and insufficient rest were described as routine, leading to physical exhaustion and psychological stress. These findings align with previous studies documenting exploitative working-hour regimes in the RMG industry (Islam & Rakib, 2019; Saha, 2023).

*“Many of our workers are women who start early in the morning and often return home late, especially during high production seasons” (C.4, Factory Management)*

Such conditions are consistent with prior research findings on excessive working hours in labour-intensive industries (Saha, 2023). These practices contradict the *Maqasid* objective of protecting life and well-being (*Hifz al-Nafs*) and violate the ethical principle of balance (*mizan*) emphasized in Islamic teachings (Chapra, 2008). The working-hour regime described by participants operates as a structural condition rather than an occasional demand: overtime is driven by shipment deadlines set upstream by buyers, making exhaustion a predictable output of the business model rather than an exception to it. Chronic fatigue endangers life and health (*Hifz al-Nafs*) and simultaneously erodes intellect and judgment (*Hifz al-Aql*), raising the risk of workplace accidents. Measured against the *toyyib* indicator of balance hours that leave room for rest, family, and worship, mandatory late-night work fails not because it exceeds a statutory ceiling but because it subordinates the worker’s whole human welfare to production targets.

#### 4.2.3 Unsafe and unhygienic working conditions

Despite improvements following the Rana Plaza incident, participants reported ongoing concerns related to workplace safety and hygiene. Issues such as overcrowding, poor ventilation, and inadequate sanitation facilities were frequently

mentioned:

*“The working area is crowded, and sometimes it feels difficult to breathe.” (C.5, Factory Worker)*

These findings are consistent with studies documenting persistent occupational health risks in the garment industry (Kabir *et al.*, 2022). From an Islamic ethical perspective, such conditions violate the obligation to protect human life and safety, which is central to *Maqasid al-Shari’ah* (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007). The persistence of these hazards more than a decade after Rana Plaza suggests that audit-driven reform has addressed visible, inspectable risks such as building integrity while leaving everyday environmental harms—overcrowding, heat, poor ventilation, inadequate sanitation—largely intact. From a *Maqasid* perspective, *Hifz al-Nafs* encompasses cumulative harms to health, not only catastrophic ones. At the same time, the *toyyib* emphasis on cleanliness (*taharah*) sets a proactive hygiene standard that goes beyond hazard avoidance. The observation that conditions improve when buyers visit (Section 4.4.2) reinforces the interpretation that safety often functions as a performance for external audiences rather than an internalised ethical obligation.

#### 4.2.4 Gender-based neglect and dignity violations

Female participants highlighted specific challenges related to dignity and well-being, including inadequate sanitation facilities, lack of privacy, and limited support during health-related needs:

*“There are not enough proper facilities for women, and sometimes we feel uncomfortable at work.” (C.7, Factory Worker)*

These findings align with existing literature on gender-based vulnerability in the garment industry (Begum *et al.*, 2008; Saha, 2023). Such conditions violate the protection of dignity (*Hifz al-Ird*) under *Maqasid al-Shari’ah*, reinforcing the need for gender-sensitive labour practices. Importantly, the gendered harm described here operates through neglect as much as through overt harassment: the absence of adequate sanitation, privacy, and health-related support imposes routine indignity on a majority-female workforce. In *Maqasid* terms, this is a compound violation of dignity (*Hifz al-Ird*) directly, and of life and health (*Hifz al-Nafs*), where women continue working through illness or pain for fear of penalties. A *toyyib*-compliant workplace would treat gender-sensitive facilities not as an optional amenity but as a baseline condition of wholesome employment, since ethical obligations attach to the actual composition and needs of the workforce.

#### 4.2.5 Job insecurity

Participants described pervasive job insecurity, including fear of dismissal due to illness, family emergencies, or raising workplace concerns:

*“Helpers or junior machine operators feel insecure, especially during order gaps or cancellations. One big cancellation from a buyer, and we might have to halt production lines temporarily—which directly affects workers”.*

*He further added that:*

*“Workers usually ignore early symptoms due to fear of wage deduction or being marked absent. Many don’t report until*

*their health worsens.” (C.15, Factory Worker)*

Similar patterns of employment precarity have been documented in earlier studies on labour governance in the RMG sector (Islam & Rakib, 2019). From a *toyyib* perspective, employment relationships characterised by fear and disposability contradict principles of justice and trust (*amanah*). Job insecurity, therefore, represents not only economic vulnerability but also ethical harm. The deeper ethical significance of this finding is that insecurity functions as a mechanism of control: fear of dismissal suppresses complaints, deters sick workers from reporting illness, and thereby sustains the other violations documented in this theme. Job insecurity is thus not merely one harm among several but a structural amplifier of them. In *Maqasid* terms, it simultaneously threatens wealth (*Hifz al-Mal*), life and health (*Hifz al-Nafs*), and dignity (*Hifz al-Ird*); in *toyyib* terms, an employment relationship premised on disposability cannot be considered wholesome, however formally lawful each dismissal may be.

### 4.3 Theme 2: Structural and policy failures

Theme 2 addresses Research Objective 2 by explaining why unethical labour practices persist despite the existence of labour laws and compliance mechanisms. This theme links ethical violations identified in Theme 1 to systemic factors such as weak law enforcement, corruption, profit-driven production models, policy–practice gaps, and limited worker representation. These findings demonstrate that ethical misalignment is structurally embedded rather than the result of isolated managerial behaviour. The second theme highlights that unethical labour practices persist due to systemic governance failures rather than isolated managerial misconduct. This finding aligns with studies emphasising structural determinants of labour exploitation in global supply chains (Islam & Deegan, 2010; Reinecke *et al.*, 2019).

#### 4.3.1 Weak enforcement of labour laws, corruption & non-compliance

Participants identified weak enforcement of labour laws as a key factor contributing to unethical practices. Although policies exist, their implementation remains inconsistent:

*“There are rules, but they are not always followed properly.” (C.12, Factory Worker)*

This reflects broader concerns about symbolic compliance and governance inefficiencies (Haque & Azmat, 2015; Transparency International Bangladesh, 2017). From an Islamic ethical perspective, weak enforcement undermines trust (*amanah*) and justice (*‘adl*), which are essential principles in governance (Chapra, 2008).

#### 4.3.2 Profit-over-welfare models

The findings indicate that profit maximization and cost-cutting pressures significantly influence labour practices. Factory owners often prioritise efficiency over worker welfare:

*“Buyers demand low prices, so factories try to reduce costs wherever possible.” (C.4, Factory Management)*

This aligns with global supply chain research highlighting the role of economic pressures in labour exploitation (Reinecke *et al.*, 2019). While profit is a legitimate goal, *toyyib* principles

emphasise that economic activities must not compromise

ethical standards and human well-being (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007).

#### 4.3.3 Weak worker representation

Participants reported limited opportunities for workers to express concerns or participate in decision-making processes:

*“We are afraid to complain because we might lose our jobs.” (C.2, Government Official)*

This lack of participation reflects a power imbalance within the workplace and contradicts the Islamic principle of consultation (*shura*), which promotes inclusive and participatory governance (Chapra, 2008).

### 4.4 Theme 3: *Toyyib*-oriented ethical reform

Theme 3 focuses on ethically grounded recommendations proposed by workers, managers, policymakers, and Islamic scholars. Drawing on *toyyib* principles and *Maqasid* objectives, this theme outlines practical reform pathways including fair wage structures, safe and hygienic workplaces, gender-sensitive facilities, reasonable working hours, participatory governance, and transparent enforcement. These recommendations translate Islamic ethical principles into actionable labour governance measures. Participants proposed several recommendations aligned with *toyyib* principles and *Maqasid al-Shari’ah*. These include fair wages, improved working conditions, and stronger governance mechanisms. Each sub-theme below deliberately sequences worker, government-official, and Islamic scholar perspectives on the same issue. As described in the following sub-section on fair wages, a worker's testimony of financial hardship is followed by a government official's call for cost-of-living-based reform and a scholar's explanation of fair wages as a *Maqasid* obligation.

#### 4.4.1 Fair wage and financial justice

The findings indicate that fair wage systems are central to achieving *toyyib*-compliant labour practices. Participants consistently emphasized that current wage structures fail to meet basic living needs, necessitating reforms grounded in economic justice and ethical accountability. Workers highlighted the inadequacy of wages to sustain their daily lives, reflecting a disconnect between income and the cost of living. One worker explained:

*“After paying for food, school fees, and medicine, there’s hardly anything left. When prices go up, we just reduce our meals.” (C.11, Factory Worker)*

This testimony demonstrates the lived reality of financial insecurity, which contradicts the principle of justice (*‘adl*) and undermines workers’ dignity (*karamah*). Similarly, a government representative emphasized the need for structural reform:

*“Wages should reflect the real cost of living, allowing workers to live with dignity rather than just surviving.” (C.2, Government Official)*

From an Islamic ethical perspective, fair wages are not optional but constitute an obligation under *Maqasid al-Shari’ah*, particularly in protecting wealth (*Hifz al-Mal*) and well-being.

This is further reinforced by scholarly insight:

*“Fair wage is not charity; it is an obligation to protect dignity and life.” (C.21, Scholar)*

These findings align with the existing literature, which demonstrates that fair compensation enhances worker morale, productivity, and social welfare (Ahmed & Nathan, 2014; Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007). Therefore, establishing fair and transparent wage systems is essential for achieving both ethical compliance and sustainable labour practices.

#### 4.4.2 Safe, hygienic, and dignified working environment

The findings further highlight the need for safe and hygienic working conditions as a core component of *toyyib* labour practices. Participants reported that inadequate sanitation, lack of rest, and unsafe environments continue to affect their physical and psychological well-being. A female worker described:

*“There is still a lack of hygiene, especially for women... we have to work even when we are in pain because asking for rest leads to warnings.” (C.6, Factory Worker)*

Another worker revealed discrepancies between compliance and actual practice:

*“When buyers visit, everything becomes clean, but otherwise many problems continue.” (C.19, Factory Worker)*

These findings indicate that workplace safety is often superficial and driven by external audits rather than genuine concern for worker welfare. From a *Maqasid al-Shari’ah* perspective, such conditions violate the protection of life (*Hifz al-Nafs*) and contradict the principle of *taharah* (cleanliness), which is fundamental in Islamic ethics. Scholars’ perspectives reinforce this view:

*“Cleanliness is not optional; it is part of faith and ethical responsibility.” (C.21, Scholar)*

Additionally, gender-specific challenges further highlight ethical deficiencies. Female workers reported a lack of privacy and safety:

*“The toilets are dirty and unsafe... we feel ashamed and scared.” (C.19, Factory Worker)*

These conditions reflect systemic neglect of gender-sensitive needs and align with previous research highlighting vulnerability among female garment workers (Begum *et al.*, 2008; Saha, 2023). Therefore, ensuring safe, hygienic, and dignified working environments is essential for aligning labour practices with *toyyib* principles.

#### 4.4.3 Participatory governance and worker representation

The findings reveal a significant gap in worker participation and representation within organisational decision-making processes. Participants consistently reported that workers have limited voices and are often excluded from discussions affecting their welfare:

*“We don’t know who represents us... committees exist, but they don’t talk to us.” (C.19, Factory Worker)*

Another participant added:

*“When workers speak, it is seen as complaining.” (C.18, Government Official)*

These findings indicate that participation mechanisms are often symbolic rather than functional, reflecting a top-down governance structure. From an Islamic perspective, this contradicts the principle of consultation (*shura*), which promotes inclusivity and shared responsibility in decision-making.

#### 4.4.4 Decent work hours and job security

Another key finding relates to excessive working hours and job insecurity, which significantly affect workers’ well-being. Participants reported long working hours, mandatory overtime, and fear of job loss:

*“Sometimes we work 10–12 hours... we fear losing our job if we complain.” (C.3, Factory Worker)*

*“When production is slow, workers are fired without notice.” (C.12, Factory Worker)*

These findings reflect structural instability and exploitation, which contradict the *Maqasid* objective of protecting life and dignity. From an Islamic ethical perspective, labour conditions must ensure balance, fairness, and security. Experts interviewed further support this:

*“Exploiting workers through long hours violates justice and dignity.” (C.21, Scholar)*

*“Islam views labour as a noble activity and mandates good standards in employer-employee relations. The Qur’an establishes the foundational principle of human dignity in Surah Al-Isra (17:70)” (C.22, Scholar)*

These findings align with the existing literature, which highlights the negative impact of excessive working hours on health and productivity (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007). Therefore, ensuring reasonable working hours and job security is essential for ethical labour practices.

#### 4.4.5 Transparent governance and ethical compliance

The findings also highlight significant issues related to transparency and ethical governance. Participants reported that policies often exist only on paper and are not effectively implemented in practice. The participants noted:

*“They (polices) look good on paper, but they don’t speak to our workers’ realities” (C.16, Factory Management)*

*“Companies manipulate the system because workers cannot take legal action.” (C.7, Factory Worker)*

These findings indicate a gap between formal compliance and actual practice, reflecting systemic governance failure. From a *toyyib* perspective, ethical governance requires sincerity (*ikhlas*), trust (*amanah*), and accountability. A scholar emphasised:

“...*toyyib* compliance means being accountable not only to laws but also to Allah.” (C.21, Scholar)

These findings align with research highlighting symbolic compliance and corruption in labour governance systems (Haque & Azmat, 2015; Transparency International Bangladesh, 2017). Therefore, strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms is essential for achieving ethical labour practices.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that labour challenges in the garment industry are deeply rooted in structural and ethical deficiencies. While compliance-based frameworks have improved certain aspects of safety and monitoring, they have failed to address fundamental issues related to dignity, fairness, and worker well-being. By applying a *Maqasid*-based ethical framework operationalised through *toyyib* principles, this study provides a holistic framework for evaluating labour practices. Unlike conventional approaches, this framework integrates moral accountability with economic and social considerations, offering a more sustainable and ethical model for labour governance (Chapra, 2008; Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007).

## 5. Conclusion and recommendation

This study evaluated labour practices in Bangladesh’s garment industry through an integrated *toyyib–Maqasid al-Shari’ah* framework, demonstrating that ethical violations related to wages, safety, dignity, and job security are systemic rather than incidental. By foregrounding workers’ lived experiences and linking them to Islamic ethical objectives, the study shows that compliance-based governance mechanisms

remain insufficient for addressing substantive ethical harm. The findings highlight the relevance of *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari’ah* as a morally grounded framework for labour evaluation and reform in Muslim-majority contexts.

By empirically linking workers’ lived experiences with Islamic ethical objectives, this study demonstrates that ethical labour reform requires more than regulatory compliance. It requires moral accountability grounded in *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari’ah*. Drawing on qualitative evidence from garment workers, factory managers, policymakers, and Islamic scholars, the findings demonstrate that ethical challenges in the industry are not merely operational shortcomings but reflect deeper structural and moral failures. Persistent issues such as wage injustice, unsafe working conditions, excessive working hours, job insecurity, and gender-based neglect continue to undermine workers’ dignity and well-being, despite the presence of labour laws and international compliance mechanisms (Ahmed & Nathan, 2014; Islam & Rakib, 2019; Kabir *et al.*, 2022).

The study further reveals that these ethical violations are sustained by governance-related weaknesses, including weak enforcement of labour regulations, symbolic compliance practices, profit-driven business models, and limited worker participation. These findings are consistent with earlier research highlighting how compliance-oriented governance frameworks often prioritise audit performance and reputational management over substantive ethical transformation (Islam & Deegan, 2010; Haque & Azmat, 2015; Reinecke *et al.*, 2019). From an Islamic ethical perspective, such governance failures represent breaches of justice (*‘adl*) and trust (*amanah*), undermining moral accountability at both

Table 3: Recommendations for implementing *toyyib*-compliant labour practices in Bangladesh’s garment industry

| Stakeholder                               | Key Recommendations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Link to Findings                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Garment Factory Owners</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement fair and transparent wage systems.</li> <li>Ensure safe, hygienic, and gender-sensitive work environments.</li> <li>Monitor working hours to prevent forced overtime.</li> <li>Develop grievance mechanisms and worker feedback channels.</li> </ul> | Responds to findings on wage injustice, unsafe conditions, gender neglect, and lack of worker voice, (Theme 1) |
| <b>Government &amp; Regulatory Bodies</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen labour law enforcement through regular audits.</li> <li>Penalize factories violating ethical standards.</li> <li>Promote transparency and reduce corruption in inspections.</li> <li>Support worker education and union representation</li> </ul>   | Addresses weak enforcement, corruption, and limited worker awareness identified in Theme 2.                    |
| <b>International Buyers</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include ethical labour compliance in sourcing decisions.</li> <li>Support factories implementing <i>toyyib</i>-aligned practices.</li> <li>Encourage supply chain accountability and sustainability.</li> </ul>                                                | Reflects the role of global pressure in cost-cutting and labour exploitation (Theme 2).                        |
| <b>Policy &amp; Academia</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop <i>toyyib</i>-compliant labour certification schemes.</li> <li>Conduct awareness programs on Islamic labour ethics.</li> <li>Integrate <i>toyyib</i> and <i>Maqasid</i> principles into labour policies.</li> </ul>                                    | Tackles the policy–practice gap and absence of ethical frameworks.                                             |

institutional and organisational levels (Chapra, 2008).

Building on these findings, the study proposes a set of targeted *toyyib*-oriented recommendations, summarised in Table 3, to guide ethical reform in the garment industry. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on Islamic labour ethics as this study contributes to the literature on Islamic labour ethics by empirically operationalising *toyyib* alongside *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* within a labour-intensive industrial context. While prior studies have largely treated Islamic ethics conceptually or within organizational behaviour research (Ali, 1988; Ali & Al-Owaidan, 2008), this study demonstrates how these ethical principles can be applied to evaluate concrete labour practices and governance structures. The integration of workers' lived experiences with Islamic moral objectives offers a holistic ethical framework that extends beyond compliance-based approaches.

From a practical and policy perspective, the findings highlight the need for labour governance reforms that embed moral responsibility alongside regulatory enforcement. *Toyyib*-oriented reforms—such as fair wages aligned with living costs, safe and hygienic workplaces, gender-sensitive practices, participatory governance, and transparent enforcement mechanisms—are essential for achieving ethically sustainable labour practices. These reforms require shared responsibility among factory owners, government authorities, and international buyers, rather than placing ethical accountability solely on producers (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007; Chapra, 2008). See Table 3.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations. The qualitative design and focus on selected industrial regions limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research could employ mixed-methods approaches, comparative cross-country analyses, or sector-specific studies to further examine the applicability of *toyyib* and *Maqasid al-Shari'ah* across diverse labour contexts. Nevertheless, this study underscores the relevance of Islamic ethical principles as a complementary framework for advancing justice, dignity, and human well-being in contemporary industrial labour systems.

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