Page 3372 - 3384 **DOI:** *https://doi.org/10.63108/IJLMH.13112*

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 9 | Issue 5

2026

© 2026 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*

Follow this and additional works at: https://www.ijlmh.com/
Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (https://www.vidhiaagaz.com/)

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of **any suggestions or complaints**, kindly contact **support@vidhiaagaz.com**.

To submit your Manuscript for Publication in the **International Journal of Law Management & Humanities**, kindly email your Manuscript to **submission@ijlmh.com.**

Leadership Practices vs. Legal Protections: How Autocratic Management Bypasses Employee Rights in Small NGOs of Bangladesh

MD. IBRAHIM HOSSAIN[*] AND KHADIJA AKTER[**]

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores how autocratic leadership in small, non-profit NGOs in Bangladesh exploits budget constraints and institutional structural deficits to bypass employees' legal rights. While previous research has discussed the psychological impacts of autocratic leadership, this study directly analyzes its intersection with the non-implementation of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, and the absence of human resource (HR) practices. Based on in-depth interviews with 30 NGO professionals, the data were analyzed using manual thematic coding. Re-evaluating the raw interview data revealed eight distinct themes of legal and psychological deprivation, ranging from near-universal issues such as unpaid overtime (93.33%) and a culture of fear (96.67%) to more specific grievances such as the denial of maternity rights (16.67%). The study integrates the five pillars of the "Supportive Leadership and Management" (SLM) model (Democratic Choice, Work-Life Balance Rule, Training and Growth, Fair Pay System, and Feedback and Help) and maps each pillar to statutory legal protections, including the Participation Committees that the Act requires in establishments ordinarily employing at least fifty workers and the Act's provisions on apprenticeship and training. The research concludes with categorized legal and management recommendations, demonstrating that strict enforcement of labor laws by policymakers and donor agencies is essential to dismantle the culture of fear and safeguard the fundamental rights of NGO workers.

Keywords: *Autocratic Leadership, NGO Management, Employee Rights, Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, SLM Model, Overtime Exploitation, Qualitative Research, Psychological Impact, Work-Life Balance*

[*] Author is affiliated with the Department of Business Administration, School of Business, Presidency University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7002-2838

[**] Author is affiliated with the Department of Law, Bangladesh University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1034-7982

© 2026. International Journal of Law Management & Humanities [ISSN 2581-5369]

I. Introduction

The contribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to the socio-economic development of Bangladesh is historically undeniable. Small or underdeveloped NGOs work extensively at the grassroots level, particularly in poverty alleviation, healthcare, women's empowerment, education, and disaster management.[1] However, hidden behind these developmental achievements is a large workforce sacrificing its legal rights and mental peace, a reality that largely remains outside institutional discussions. The working environment, mental health, and particularly the legal rights of employees in these smaller institutions are consistently ignored. Small NGOs usually face funding uncertainties, heavy reliance on international and domestic donors, budget constraints, and a severe lack of defined institutional structures.[2] Exploiting these structural weaknesses and a lack of accountability, top executives or founders frequently practice 'autocratic leadership'.

Autocratic leadership refers to a management style in which decision-making power is concentrated in the hands of a single individual and employees have minimal participation in decisions.[3] In small NGOs in Bangladesh, this leadership style has a severely negative impact on employees. Forcing employees to work excessive hours, denying statutory overtime pay, compelling them to work on weekends, and canceling festival holidays under the pretext of project deadlines have become everyday occurrences.[4] Additionally, withholding salaries for months effectively holds employees psychologically and economically hostage, pushing their personal lives toward extreme uncertainty.

The Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 (as amended, most recently in 2026) provides a robust and clear legal framework to protect the rights of workers and employees.[5] The law contains clear

---

[1] *See* Mahmuda Alam & Rubaiya Nasrin, Local Leadership in Humanitarian Response: Case Study Bangladesh 23 (InterAction 2024), https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Local-Leadership-in-Humanitarian-Response-Bangladesh.pdf (noting Bangladesh's "grassroots development expertise" and its "extensive network of local NGOs").

[2] Md. Ibrahim Hossain, *Exploring the Reasons for Autocratic Leadership in Bangladesh's Underdeveloped Humanitarian NGOs*, 3 Advances Urb. Reg'l Dev. & Plan. 1 (2026), https://www.opastpublishers.com/open-access-articles/exploring-the-reasons-for-autocratic-leadership-in-bangladeshs-underdeveloped-humanitarian-ngos-10365.html.

[3] Michael Kisenyi, Henry Musoke Buwule & Geoffrey Ssebabi Mutumba, *Leadership Styles and Project Implementation in Non-Profit Organizations*, 2 Ndejje Univ. J. Interdisc. Stud. no. 1 (2026), https://doi.org/10.64080/ndujis.2026.1.1.March008.

[4] Md. Ibrahim Hossain, *The Impact of Autocratic Leadership on Employee Well-Being in Bangladeshi Non-Profit Humanitarian NGOs*, 11 Int'l J. Rsch. & Innovation Applied Sci. 512, 516 (2026), https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2026.110200047.

[5] Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, Act No. XLII of 2006 (Bangl.), https://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-952.html [hereinafter Bangladesh Labour Act]; Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Act, 2026, Act No. 43 of 2026 (Bangl.), Bangladesh Gazette, Extraordinary, Apr. 10, 2026, at 15785, https://objectstorage.ap-dcc-gazipur-1.oraclecloud15.com/n/axvjbnqprylg/b/V2Ministry/o/office-dife/2026/4/1364654c-727e-4463-ad44-93e1cc3e3a3e.pdf [hereinafter Labour (Amendment) Act 2026] (assented to and published on Apr. 10, 2026, and in force at once

provisions regarding working hours, overtime, leave, salary payment deadlines, and grievance redressal. Surprisingly, small NGOs exhibit both an absence of modern HR practices and an extreme lack of labor law enforcement. While paper-based policies exist to appease donors, they are virtually non-existent in practice. Despite the presence of laws, employees face constant discrimination. Due to the fear of losing their jobs, the lengthy nature of legal proceedings, the terror of being blacklisted, and ignorance of their own legal rights, they are afraid to seek legal recourse. This study is a detailed endeavor to analyze the gap between autocratic leadership practices in the NGO sector and state legal protections from theoretical and practical perspectives.

II. Problem Statement and Research Gap

Previous studies detailed how autocratic leadership adversely affects the mental health of employees in small NGOs and identified the primary catalysts behind such dictatorial leadership.[6] Those studies primarily emphasized psychological impacts, over-reliance on donor funds, and institutional structural limitations. They revealed that budget constraints often prompt NGO executives to impose an excessive workload on their staff.

However, a significant research gap remained following those studies: the aspect of legal deprivation. Previous research has not academically addressed how autocratic leadership strategically and consciously circumvents the country's prevailing labor laws. While NGOs act as non-profit institutions advocating externally for human and labor rights, internally they perpetuate illegal practices, such as denying overtime or canceling festival holidays by citing project deadlines or budget shortages. These actions are blatant legal violations, directly contradicting the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006.

Why do educated NGO professionals continue to endure this discrimination day after day despite existing national laws? Why are they terrified to file legal actions or grievances against their employers under Section 33 of the Bangladesh Labour Act? And how do autocratic leaders weaponize Section 26 (termination without assigning any reason) to silence employees?[7] Very little qualitative research has explored these issues within the NGO sector to date. The current study addresses this specific gap, bridging leadership theory with legal compliance.

---

under section 1(2)); *see also* Global Law Experts, *Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Act 2026: An Employer's Practical Guide* (2026), https://globallawexperts.com/bangladesh-labour-amendment-act-2026-employers-guide/ (describing the 2026 Act as the enacted form of the Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025).

[6] Hossain, *Impact of Autocratic Leadership*, *supra* note 4, at 512–13; Hossain, *Reasons for Autocratic Leadership*, *supra* note 2.

[7] Bangladesh Labour Act §§ 26, 33.

© 2026. International Journal of Law Management & Humanities [ISSN 2581-5369]

III. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in both theoretical and practical standpoints, with the potential to inform policymaking:

Firstly, theoretical significance: It establishes a novel theoretical connection between leadership theory (specifically autocratic leadership) and legal compliance. Leadership is typically viewed solely through the lens of management or psychology; however, this study demonstrates how a specific leadership style directly results in the violation of state laws. By doing so, the scope of the 'SLM Model' (Supportive Leadership and Management Model) proposed in previous research is expanded, making legal protection an inseparable component of the theoretical framework.

Secondly, practical significance: It is intended to serve as a guide for the Ministry of Labour and Employment of Bangladesh, the NGO Affairs Bureau, the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), and international donor agencies. It will help donors realize how employees are severely exploited under the guise of nominal HR policies in small NGOs. Furthermore, this study provides a realistic roadmap on how proper enforcement of the Bangladesh Labour Act can end these conditions and protect employee rights.

IV. Research Objectives

To provide a structured approach to this study's primary goals, the objectives are divided into two main categories:

Primary objective: To analyze in depth how autocratic leadership in small, non-profit NGOs in Bangladesh exploits budget constraints and structural deficits to systematically deprive employees of their legal rights and uses the non-enforcement of labor laws to its advantage.

Secondary objectives:

1. To identify the specific forms of employee exploitation under autocratic management, such as extreme workload, cancellation of festival leave, and salary withholding, which directly conflict with specific sections of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006.
2. To represent mathematically and thematically the diverse array of complaints from employees, showing the magnitude and frequency of the psychological and personal damage inflicted upon them.

© 2026. International Journal of Law Management & Humanities [ISSN 2581-5369]

3. To analyze the gap between the lack of institutional HR practices and the non-enforcement of state labor laws, uncovering the psychological fear that prevents employees from taking legal action.
4. To provide a categorized, practical roadmap (legal and management recommendations) for resolving these systemic issues based on the legally integrated five pillars of the SLM model.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

To establish a strong foundation for this research, we reviewed prior studies, articles, and legal gazettes regarding autocratic leadership, workload, the NGO work environment, and the Bangladesh Labour Act.

A. The psychology of autocratic leadership and NGO work environments

Autocratic leadership is a management style in which the leader alone makes decisions, centralizes power, and maintains tight control over subordinates.[8] In non-profit organizations or NGOs, democratic or participatory leadership is expected, since these institutions are founded on human rights and social development. However, the literature shows a completely opposite picture in small NGOs in Bangladesh. Studies indicate that the founders of small or local NGOs often retain dominant control over their institutions and are reluctant to delegate authority.[9] Using limited funding from international donors, pressure to reduce overhead costs, and strict project deadlines as excuses, they subject employees to inhumane pressure.[10]

B. Workload, exploitation of volunteerism, and legal deprivation

A major and subtle weapon of autocratic leadership is concealing employee rights under the guise of a "volunteerism" mentality. Since NGO employees primarily work for the welfare of humanity, management constantly manipulates them into believing that claiming overtime or requesting personal leave contradicts the noble principles of the sector.[11]

According to the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, the standard working hours for an adult worker are 8 hours per day (Section 100) and 48 hours per week (Section 102). However, subject to the provisions of Section 108, a worker may work up to 10 hours in a single day and beyond the standard 48-hour weekly limit, provided that the total working hours do not exceed 60 hours in a week. When employees work these additional hours, Section 108 entitles them to an overtime

[8] Kisenyi et al., *supra* note 3.
[9] Hossain, *Reasons for Autocratic Leadership*, *supra* note 2.
[10] Hossain, *Impact of Autocratic Leadership*, *supra* note 4, at 513.
[11] *Id.* at 516 (reporting that work is "framed as 'social service' without breaks").

© 2026. International Journal of Law Management & Humanities [ISSN 2581-5369]

allowance at twice the ordinary rate of basic wage, dearness allowance and ad-hoc or interim wage, if any.[12] However, previous literature indicates that overtime pay is a mere illusion in underdeveloped NGOs.[13] Similarly, extreme discrimination is observed regarding festival and casual leave. Under Section 115 of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006, every worker is entitled to 10 days of casual leave with full wages in each calendar year; if this leave is not used within that year, it is not accumulated and cannot be carried forward to the following year.[14] Additionally, Section 118 entitles every worker to paid festival holidays in each calendar year: eleven days under the Act as enacted, raised to thirteen days by the Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Act, 2026.[15] If an employee is required to work on a festival holiday, Section 118(3) requires the employer to provide one substitute holiday along with two days' compensatory wages.[16] While this compensation is a legal right and often verbally promised, the practical reality, especially within NGOs and emergency response sectors, is often quite different. Following major festivals like Eid, the immediate pressure to resume regular office operations or manage emergency situations frequently prevents workers from actually taking their promised substitute leave, forcing them back to work without the time off they are owed. This has devastating impacts on employees' personal lives, representing a severe psychological contract breach.[17]

C. Fear of legal action and Section 26 abuse

Section 33 of the Labour Act provides a clear legal framework for a 'grievance procedure'.[18] But in a small NGO where the founder is simultaneously the owner and HR head, to whom can the grievance be submitted? The root cause of this fear is Section 26 of the Labour Act. Under this section, an employer can terminate a permanent worker without assigning any reason, by giving 120 days' written notice to a monthly rated worker (60 days to other workers), or wages in lieu of notice, and paying compensation of 30 days' wages for every completed year of service or

[12] Bangladesh Labour Act §§ 100, 102, 108(1).
[13] Hossain, *Impact of Autocratic Leadership*, *supra* note 4, at 516 (reporting routine 12–17 hour days extending into nights "without compensation").
[14] Bangladesh Labour Act § 115.
[15] Bangladesh Labour Act § 118(1); Labour (Amendment) Act 2026 § 28 (substituting "13 (thirteen)" for "eleven" in section 118(1)); *see also* Global Law Experts, *supra* note 5 (noting that the festival-holiday entitlement has been expanded).
[16] Bangladesh Labour Act § 118(3).
[17] *See* Muhammad Ismail, Momina Rasheed, Arnob Debnath Arup & Saima Hassan, *Moderated Mediating Effect of Organizational Support on the Relationship Between Duty of Care and Employee Outcome*, 7 AM. INT'L J. BUS. & MGMT. STUD. 39, 41 (2025), https://doi.org/10.46545/aijbms.v7i1.372 (discussing perceived organizational support and the unwritten psychological contract between employer and employee).
[18] Bangladesh Labour Act § 33(1)–(6) (written complaint to the employer within thirty days, then complaint to the Labour Court, with an appeal to the Tribunal).

gratuity, whichever is higher.[19] Autocratic leaders weaponize Section 26 to create a culture of fear among employees, deterring them from seeking justice.

VI. Conceptual Framework: The Legal Integration of the SLM Model

In a previous study, the SLM Model (Supportive Leadership and Management Model) was introduced to mitigate the negative impacts of autocratic leadership.[20] To make this model robust and legally enforceable rather than merely theoretically supportive, we have now mapped all five of its pillars directly to the statutory provisions of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. This legally integrated framework shows that effective leadership is indistinguishable from strict legal compliance:

1. **Democratic Choice:** Encourages staff involvement in decisions, such as project planning, to foster ownership and reduce resentment. *Legal integration:* This corresponds to Sections 205 and 206 of the Bangladesh Labour Act, which require the employer of every establishment in which at least fifty workers are ordinarily employed to constitute a "participation committee", whose main function is "to inculcate and develop sense of belonging to the establishment among the workers and employers and to aware the workers of their commitments and responsibilities to the establishment".[21] The committee's listed functions include promoting mutual trust and faith, understanding and co-operation between employers and workers, and ensuring the application of labour laws. Autocratic leaders who centralize power run counter to the spirit of Sections 205 and 206 and, in NGOs that meet the fifty-worker threshold, to their mandate.
2. **Work-Life Balance Rule:** Mandates fixed hours, mandatory holidays (including Eid and statutory leave), and strictly enforces a "no after-hours calls" policy. *Legal integration:* This directly aligns with Sections 100 and 102 (standard working hours),

[19] Bangladesh Labour Act § 26(1), (3)–(4); *see also id.* § 33(9) (no complaint lies against a termination under section 26 unless it is alleged to have been made for trade union activities or with an ill motive, or the worker has been deprived of the benefits that section provides); Sabrina Mahisha Mahboob, *Termination of Employment by Employer*, JURAL ACUITY (Sept. 23, 2021), https://juralacuity.com/termination-of-employment-by-employer/; LEGALSEBA, *Bangladesh Labour Law: 2026 Employment Regulations Guide*, https://legalseba.com/bd-articles/labour-law-in-bangladesh/ (last visited Oct. 24, 2026) ("An employer has the right to terminate a permanent worker without assigning any reason by providing written notice").

[20] Hossain, *Impact of Autocratic Leadership*, *supra* note 4, at 515.

[21] Bangladesh Labour Act §§ 205(1), 206(1).

Section 108 (overtime allowance), and Sections 115 and 118 (casual leave and festival holidays).[22]

3. **Training and Growth:** Provides regular skill-building workshops (e.g., IT or videography training) to equip staff for diverse tasks without overload. *Legal integration:* The long title and preamble of the Bangladesh Labour Act expressly extend to "apprenticeship", which Chapter XVIII of the Act regulates.[23] Furthermore, commentary on the Act lists "human resource development" among the workers' rights that it reaffirmed.[24] By depriving employees of proper training and forcing unskilled workers to multitask, autocratic leaders fail to meet the statutory expectations of workforce development.
4. **Fair Pay System:** Establishes salaries independent of project funding delays, ensuring timely payments and bonuses. *Legal integration:* This enforces Section 123 of the Labour Act, which requires wages to be paid before the expiry of the seventh working day following the last day of the wage period, rendering the excuse of "delayed donor funds" unlawful.[25]
5. **Feedback and Help:** Implements anonymous channels for voicing concerns, coupled with mental health support like counseling, to address issues early. *Legal integration:* This gives practical effect to the grievance (complaint) procedure in Section 33 and directly dismantles the culture of fear created by the abusive use of termination without assigned reasons under Section 26.[26]

VII. Research Design and Methodology

This research was conducted using a qualitative research methodology, enhanced by a numerical thematic mapping technique.

Participant selection: In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 employees from small NGOs. Participants were divided into three categories: mid-level and core support staff (10 individuals), field-level workers (12 individuals), and project implementation level (8 individuals).

[22] Bangladesh Labour Act §§ 100, 102, 108, 115, 118; *see* Soma Islam, *Workers' Rights*, Ain o Salish Kendra, https://www.askbd.org/ask/workers-rights/ (last visited Oct. 24, 2026).
[23] Bangladesh Labour Act pmbl., ch. XVIII.
[24] Islam, *supra* note 22.
[25] Bangladesh Labour Act § 123(1); Sailglobal, *Bangladesh Payroll Guide 2026: Tax and Pay Rules* (Aug. 26, 2026), https://www.sailglobal.com/blog/2026-bangladesh-payroll-guide.
[26] Bangladesh Labour Act §§ 26, 33.

© 2026. International Journal of Law Management & Humanities [ISSN 2581-5369]

Data collection and analysis: Interviews lasted 15 to 20 minutes per respondent. The transcripts were analyzed using manual thematic coding. To represent the real-world experiences of the respondents authentically, we did not force the complaints into predefined categories. Instead, we extracted eight distinct themes based on the actual grievances mentioned by the 30 participants, calculating their frequency to reveal which issues were universally systemic and which were specific but highly severe.

VIII. FINDINGS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The manual coding of the 30 interviews resulted in the identification of eight distinct themes that reflect a workplace devoid of employee rights. Some complaints were almost universal, while others, though experienced by fewer people, highlighted severe legal violations. Table 1 sets out the frequency of these themes across the 30 interviews.

Identified Complaint / Thematic Area	Frequency (Out of 30)	Percentage of Agreement
Theme 1: Culture of Fear & Threat of Arbitrary Termination (Fear of Section 26 abuse)	29	96.67%
Theme 2: Excessive Workload & Unpaid Overtime (Working 10–12 hours without overtime pay)	28	93.33%
Theme 3: Delayed or Withheld Salary Payments (Salaries paused due to donor fund excuses)	26	86.67%
Theme 4: Cancellation of Festival and Casual Leaves (Denied Eid/public holidays)	24	80.00%
Theme 5: Absence of Independent Grievance Mechanisms (No safe HR to report abuse)	22	73.33%
Theme 6: Lack of Professional Training & Forced Multitasking (Expected to do three people's jobs)	18	60.00%
Theme 7: Working without Formal Appointment Letters (Kept informal to avoid legal bindings)	8	26.67%
Theme 8: Denial of Maternity Rights & Gender Discrimination (Violation of Section 46)	5	16.67%

Table 1: Statistical representation of qualitative themes (N=30)

A. Narrative analysis of the themes

Themes 1 and 5: The culture of fear and absence of grievance redressal. The most widely shared issue (96.67%) is the paralyzing fear among workers. Twenty-two of the 30 workers

(73.33%) specifically highlighted that they have nowhere to complain. Autocratic leaders constantly use the threat of Section 26 (termination without assigning any reason) to silence any voice raised for rights.[27] Protesting means losing the job without a show-cause notice, entirely defeating the purpose of the Section 33 grievance procedure.

Themes 2 and 4: Unpaid overtime and stolen leave. An overwhelming 93.33% of respondents complained about unlimited working hours, and 80% reported that their festival leave is arbitrarily canceled. Field officers and support staff are manipulated into working 10–12 hours a day. While Section 108 of the Bangladesh Labour Act requires overtime to be paid at twice the ordinary rate of basic wage and dearness allowance, management avoids this by citing the "volunteer" nature of the job.[28] Employees are forced to work on Eid, severely breaching their psychological contract and violating Sections 115 and 118.[29]

Theme 3: Delayed salary payments. Of the workers, 86.67% reported that their salaries are frequently withheld for months on the excuse that "donor funds have not arrived." This traps employees in an economic hostage situation, forcing them to take loans for basic survival. It directly violates Section 123 of the Labour Act, which mandates timely payment regardless of project funding status.[30]

Theme 6: Lack of training and forced multitasking. Sixty percent of respondents complained that, because founders want to save money, one person is forced to do the jobs of a field officer, an IT person, and a data entry clerk without any prior training. Autocratic leaders demand immediate results but provide no human resource development or apprenticeship, severely burning out the employees.

Themes 7 and 8: Informal contracts and maternity denials. Though fewer in overall percentage, these are severe violations. Of the workers, 26.67% reported not having clear, formal appointment letters, allowing owners to dodge labor law definitions altogether. More disturbingly, 16.67% of the total sample reported extreme difficulty in securing statutory maternity leave (a violation of Section 46),[31] with bosses viewing pregnancy as a "loss of project productivity."

---

[27] Bangladesh Labour Act § 26.
[28] Bangladesh Labour Act § 108(1).
[29] *Id.* §§ 115, 118.
[30] Bangladesh Labour Act § 123(1); Sailglobal, *supra* note 25.
[31] Bangladesh Labour Act § 46(1) (as amended by Labour (Amendment) Act 2026 § 16, which replaced eight weeks before and eight weeks after delivery with sixty days each); *see* Islam, *supra* note 22.

© 2026. International Journal of Law Management & Humanities [ISSN 2581-5369]

IX. CATEGORIZED RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the empirical findings and the legally integrated SLM model, the following recommendations are divided into legal and management categories to provide a clear, actionable roadmap for reforming small NGOs in Bangladesh.

Category	Identified Issue (From Findings)	Relevant SLM Pillar & Labour Law	Actionable Recommendation
Legal	Evasion of Overtime and Working Hours	Work-Life Balance Rule (BLA Sections 100, 102, 108)	Donor agencies must mandate the installation of digital attendance and automated payroll systems before releasing funds. Any work beyond 8 hours must automatically trigger overtime pay at twice the ordinary rate of basic wage and dearness allowance.
	Arbitrary Termination and Culture of Fear	Feedback and Help (BLA Sections 26, 33)	The Ministry of Labour must restrict the use of Section 26 in donor-funded NGOs. Establish a neutral 'Grievance Redressal Cell' with an external legal advisor. Launch a dedicated hotline for NGO workers to report abuses anonymously to DIFE.[32]
	Withheld and Delayed Salaries	Fair Pay System (BLA Section 123)	NGO Affairs Bureau must enforce a strict regulation that NGOs must have an emergency reserve fund to pay employee salaries on time, independent of project funding delays.[33]
Management	Denial of Festival and Casual Leaves	Work-Life Balance Rule (BLA Sections 115, 118)	Implement a strict, written 'Annual Leave Calendar' accessible to all staff. Management must strictly prohibit after-hours work calls and guarantee compensation days if emergency holiday work is required.[34]

[32] *See* LEGALSEBA, *supra* note 19 (noting DIFE's 24-hour toll-free helpline, 16357, for workers' complaints).
[33] *See* Sailglobal, *supra* note 25.
[34] *See* Bangladesh Labour Act § 118(3).

Category	Identified Issue (From Findings)	Relevant SLM Pillar & Labour Law	Actionable Recommendation
	Lack of Unity of Command and Centralized Control	Democratic Choice (BLA Section 205)	Restructure the organizational chart to ensure clear unity of command. Autocratic leaders must establish functional "Participation Committees" (Section 205, mandatory where at least fifty workers are ordinarily employed) to involve staff in project planning and delegate authority.
	Burnout and Lack of Career Progression	Training and Growth (HR Development)	NGOs must allocate a specific portion of their budget explicitly for continuous skill-building workshops (e.g., IT, videography) to ensure employees are equipped for their tasks, aligning with statutory goals for human resource development.[35]

Table 2: Legal and management recommendations

X. CONCLUSION

While small and local NGOs make extraordinary contributions to improving the lives of marginalized populations in Bangladesh, their own employees' rights are severely violated. This study shows that autocratic leadership in small NGOs not only damages the mental health of employees but also systematically flouts the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. As the statistical representation of the qualitative data shows, an overwhelming majority of employees suffer from a culture of fear (96.67%), unpaid overtime (93.33%), and withheld salaries (86.67%), while others face severe violations such as the denial of maternity rights.

This exploitation of educated young professionals under the pretext of structural deficits and funding delays cannot be allowed to continue. To free employees from this mental and economic misery, the practical implementation of the five legally integrated pillars of the 'SLM model' is required immediately. Without the coordinated efforts of the Government of Bangladesh, the NGO Affairs Bureau, and international donors to enforce categorized legal and management reforms, ending this culture of fear and legal deprivation will not be possible.

[35] *See* Islam, *supra* note 22.

© 2026. International Journal of Law Management & Humanities [ISSN 2581-5369]

XI. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study highlighted the depth of the problem by mapping the qualitative experiences of 30 employees numerically, uncovering eight distinct themes of deprivation. In the future, an extensive quantitative study could be conducted using structured surveys across hundreds of small NGOs in the various divisions of Bangladesh. This would allow advanced statistical modeling of the correlations between legal deprivation, psychological contract breach, and mental health. Additionally, independent research is critically needed on the gender-based legal deprivation of female employees under autocratic leadership, particularly the violation of maternity rights (Section 46) identified in this study. Such research would assist in transforming Bangladesh's non-profit sector into a sustainable and employee-friendly work environment.

*****

© 2026. International Journal of Law Management & Humanities [ISSN 2581-5369]