

THE PLIGHT OF GARMENT INDUSTRY WORKERS IN BANGALORE CITY-INDIA: WHAT WE KNOW AND WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

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ABSTRACT

Indian garment industry has done commanding and tremendous breakthrough regarding employment opportunities for all sections of the society. Availability of cheap and skilled labor is a vital issue in the rapid growth of the garment industry. Today, majority of women are placed in the garment sector only. The hard work and exploitation of millions of workers have played a vital role in earning highest cash reserve ratio through export to any country. At present, garment sector is providing the highest number of employment opportunities in the formal manufacturing sector. It is found that more than 75% of female workers have been involved in this sector. It has completely become a more popular sector irrespective of any educational background. However, garment workers are facing numerous problems; especially women have been victimized for various kinds of harassment. The inappropriate work environment has become common in the garment industry today. This paper is the result of a study conducted in Bangalore, South India. According to the study the working atmosphere is unsafe, exploiting and unhealthy; especially for the female workers.

Key Words: Garments, Industry, Labour, Plight

INTRODUCTION

The Garment industry is relatively new industry to India. It is a labour intensive industry. This industry plays a vital role in increasing economic growth of the country. Garment industry got importance after increased in export of the country. This industry got its momentum after lifting restrictions by the USA and EU countries. Today, majority of female workers are placed in the garment sector only. This adds to their sense of vulnerability. Now-a-days, government industries are facing tough competition from China and some other Asian countries. It is found that the total share of developed countries in world manufacturing value added declined from 74.3% ,in 2000, to 69.4% ,in 2005 (IDR. 2009). In certain states, primarily, only male workers were employed. People who are working in the government sector are basically from low-Socio-economic background. Studies have proved that the working conditions in the garment sector are relatively poor. Majority of the workforce is being migrated from the rural areas. Recent study shows that Indian government sector has earned more than 8 billion dollars foreign exchange. Government industry has spread across the country. Today, we can see the garment units even in small towns (Begum. 2002).

Today, some of the government companies have a turnover of more than thousand crores. Garment industry has provided employment to a large number of people after the

service sector. Some of the studies have shown that the working conditions of employees are quite the same. Sometimes, even owners will turn hostile. There is no union among the government workers. Majority of them are facing different occupational health disorders. In Karnataka, Bangalore has large numbers of garment industries, report says, where more than 1000 garment units are working. More than 70,000 males and 1.50 lakh women are working only in Bangalore. None of the companies has provided all welfare facilities to its employees. Their wages are also very low when compared to other garment sectors in Tamilnadu and Maharashtra. Some time they do not get wages on time. It is found that wages below the standard level is an ongoing problem in Indian garment sector. The recent law to protect employees in unorganized sector has also not benefitted the garment workers.

Table 1: Share of Tirupur in Total Output of Garments in Quantity and Value (selected years)

YEAR	Total Garment Produced Qty. India (In lac pcs)	Total Knit-Garment Produced Qty. India (In lac pcs)	Total Garment Produced Qty. Tirupur (In Rs. crore)	Total Knit-Garment Produced Qty. Tirupur (In Rs. crore)	Percent Share of Tirupur in Knit garments (output)
1996	11,847	5,377	2,574	47.87	38.16
1997	13,014	6,324	2,983	2,943	46.54
2002	121316	8527	3555	34448	45.79
2003	12425	8,787	3804	3704	42.15
2004	12814	7,376	4,098	4,004	54.28

Source: AEPC, Tirupur (what is AEPC?)

The above mentioned data shows a rapid rise in garment industry in India. This industry got flourished during a time when the economic health of the country was poorly shaped. It was overwhelmed by a range of problems both structural and politico-economic in nature. It is found that a total of 7000 garments factories shot up in 2004 and by 2007, it reached 13780. Also, it is found that by 2007-08, exports had reached US\$ 12.6 billion. Furthermore, the average growth rate of export during 1993-97 was almost 33% a year (Hamid. 1989). However, the growth rate of export declined in 1999-2005. The decline was mainly due to unavoidable factors like the global recession in 2000, and some politico-economic changes in the US. This study has been conducted in South Karnataka-India.

With the transformation in market economy, new kinds of pressure emerged. Women, especially, the poor ones suffered a lot to support their families. Countries like India

witnessed a rapid urbanization. The reasons were: increase in poverty, family disintegration, migration and population displacement, erosion of social safety nets and deterioration in health and education services. The people were forced to move to urban areas, looking for job avenues. This paper deals with the plight of garment workers in Mysore City –India.

METHODOLOGY

This current study has been conducted in the selected garment factories in both in Bangalore, and districts of Karnataka state, India. A total number of 100 garment workers have been interviewed with a scheduled questioner. Samples were selected using simple random technique. Qualitative data has been analyzed using SPSS AND NUD*ISD data base.

RESULT

Table 2: Nature of Work

Type of work	Frequency	Count
Cuttings	34%	34.0
Stitching	21%	21.0
Leveling	25%	25.0
Finishing	10%	10.0
Packing	10%	10.0
Total	100%	100.0

Table 3: Age and Gender of the Respondents

Age in years	Gender			Total
		Male	Female	
Between 25-30	COUNT	3	53	56
	%	3.0	53.0	56.0
30-45	COUNT	2	42	45
	%	2.0	42.0	45.0
45-60	COUNT	1	9	10
	%	1.0	9.0	10.0
Total				100

Table 4: Educational Attainments of Garment workers

Education	Frequency	count
No Schooling	40%	40.0
Lower Primary	23%	23.0
Upper Primary	21%	21.0
Secondary	16%	16.0
Total	100%	100.0

Table 5: Average Monthly Earnings of the workers

Monthly Earnings in Rupees	Frequency	Count
2500-3500	34%	34.0
3500-4500	24%	24.0
5000-6000	26%	26.0
6000-7000	11%	11.0
Above 7000	5%	5.0
Total	100%	100.0

Table 6: Reasons for choosing this job

Monthly Earnings in Rupees	Frequency	Count
Poverty	56%	56.0
For more income	21%	21.0
Big households	12%	12.0
No other options	11%	11.0
Total	100%	100.0

Table7: Difficulties faced by the Garment workers

Difficulties	Frequency	Count
	Heavy load of work	34%
No payment on time/off	23%	23.0
More working hours	21%	21.0
No difficulties	11%	11.0
Sexual harassments	11%	11.0
Total	100%	100.0

Table 8: Opinion about Infrastructure and Physical Working Condition

Response	Frequency	Count
	Factory over-crowded, congested and poorly ventilated	25%
Small and stairways are narrow	23%	23.0
Work under hundreds of powerful electric bulbs	21%	21.0
Sound of the operation of 100-200 sewing machines is difficult	21%	21.0
Other	10%	10.0
Total	100%	100.0

Table 9: Reasons of Dissatisfaction

Dissatisfaction	Frequency	Count
	Abuse & injury are common	35%
Employer is not good	18%	18.0
Less salary	20%	20.0
More Extractions	21%	21.0
No Security	6%	6.0
Total	100%	100.0

Table 10: Common Ailments found among the Workers

Ailments	Frequency	Count
	Deep cuttings	32%
Joint Pain	22%	22.0
Eyes problem	19%	19.0
Back pain	18%	18.0
Lungs	19%	19.0
Total	100%	100.0

Table 11: Risks Involved in this job

Risks	Frequency	Count
	No life security	21%
Any time may get fired out	34%	34.0
No future in this job	19%	19.0
Chances of serious health problems	12%	12.0
Sexual favour	10%	10.0
Other	2%	2.0
Total	100%	100.0

DISCUSSION

It is found that 34% workers have been involved in cutting garments, 21% in stitching, 25% in leveling and 10% each in finishing and packing. Majority of them are between the age group of 25 to 30, whereas 45% of them belong to the age group of 30-45. 40% of them are illiterate while 23% of them are primary educated and 4% are upper primary educated. 34% of them are earning between Rs.2500-3500 while 24% are earning between Rs. 3500-4500, and only 5% are earning above Rs.7000.

56% of the workers chose this job because of poverty, 21% to earn more income, and 12% because of maintaining big households. Furthermore, 34% said a heavy load of work. 23% said no payment on time and no off. 21% said more working hours whereas 11% said sensual harassment. On the subject of reasons for dissatisfaction it is revealed that 35% said abuse and injuries, 18% said employer is not good, 20% said less salary, 21% said more extraction. Regarding common ailments 32% said deep cutting, 22% said joint pain, 19% said eyes problems, 18% said back pain, and 19% said lungs problems. About risks involved in this job, we found that 21% said no job security, 34%

said anytime they may get fired out, 19% said no future in this job, and 12% said serious health problems whereas 14% said demand for sexual favor by the management and colleagues. There are two factors which played a vital role for the rapid growth of the garment industry in India: 1. Large number of skilled resources. 2. Cheap labour. Due to the high cost many developed countries outsourced garment work to the countries like India and Pakistan etc. Today, garments culture has become a life line in the economy of the country. This study has found that a majority of the garment workers are illiterate and underpaid. In many cases workers may have to work in human physical working conditions all factory building, except a few are overcrowded and absence of enough heights and ventilations. The majority of the factories are overcrowded and congested; some factories don't even have toilet facilities. Sometime they have to work under powerful electric bulbs and unbearable sound from the machine. There are no canteen facilities also.

In a large number of cases, regular buildings have been converted into garment factories. Respondents opined throughout the day they have to work in a standing posture. Only a few factories are following security guidelines of the workers including masks, gloves etc. Physical injuries are most common and first aid boxes are relatively rare. Fire accidents are most common and emergency exits are also absent in many factories. There are no precautionary measures taken to handle emergency and incidental situations. None of the factories has a regular doctor to be visited. Transport allowance is not given. Childcare facilities in the factory premises are also absent. Men are dominated and female workers are not treated equally. The gender gap in wage distribution can be seen. Recreations and leave grants are very rare. Due to gender discrimination female workers are not getting any promotion. Verbal, non-verbal and physical abuses inside the factories are common. Even small mistakes may end in losing the job. Sexual harassment of female by male co-workers is quite widespread. Physical abuse including assault has become a general feature for female workers.

CONCLUSION

Employments in garment industries have provided economic benefits and some sort of empowerment. Majority of the workers' socio-economic status is quite pathetic. In many cases, they are exploited, underpaid, and female workers sexually harassed. They have to work in human conditions. Garment workers have no job security, any time they may get sacked. Only a few companies abide by the government rules. This is the time that the government should take appropriate measures to safeguard garment workers. Government should extend different labour benefits to all the garment workers including free insurance. The flight of Migrant Construction workers is quite pathetic. The urban anti-poverty programme should be threefold: poverty reduction, construction of productive assets and promoting mainstream employment subsequently. We strongly believe that an Act needs to include this long-term focus of the programme, as the strategies use of surplus manpower for sustainable development

has to be an important component of any new programme. Government should target poverty as a vital point embeds with garment industry. Policies and programmes should be implemented in a decentralized manner and there should be enough scope for grass root level development of the garment workers. This kind of programme should be more suited to the local conditions and norms. Government should bring equal wage policy strictly in all unorganized sectors.

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