The Jordanian garment sector employs roughly 65,000 workers, the majority of whom are women and migrants from South-Asia. Covid-19 has had a major impact on these workers over the last year, and worker mental health, already an area of concern, has suffered as a result. From April to June, union organizers surveyed workers remotely to learn about their concerns, experiences with Covid-19, and gather preliminary information on their mental health needs.

**Garment sector snapshot**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality and Gender Breakdown of workforce</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Worker Organizing and the Union**

Workers in Jordan are represented at the sectoral level by a single union, the General Trade Union of Workers in Textiles, Garment, and Clothing Industries. The union has operated in the garment sector for over 50 years, and has negotiated a series of four sectoral-wide collective bargaining agreements with employer representatives. Among worker’s surveyed by union organizers, a minority of workers were aware of their own union membership status, but most workers were aware of the union representatives in their factory, who are part of the Union Labour Committee (ULC) and have approached the union when they have a concern.

Many workers are not aware of their own union membership status, but they are more likely to know who their representatives to the union are.

**Covid-19 and Garment Workers**

Covid-19 has had a significant human and economic impact on the garment sector in Jordan. The sector contracted by 15% in 2020, six factories closed permanently, and the sector downsized by roughly 7,000 workers. To-date, nearly 7,000 positive Covid-19 cases have been reported among workers in the garment sector. The situation is looking more positive in 2021 with widespread availability of vaccines, fewer active cases (26 as of June) and orders coming back to the country.

**Effect on everyday life**

Almost half of surveyed workers reported reduced income from Covid-19 but only a quarter reported reduced working hours. Roughly 1 in 3 workers said that Covid-19 has not affected their everyday life.

**How has Covid-19 affected your everyday life?**

- Reduced income: 46%
- No change: 33%
- Reduced working hours: 25%
- Increased mental stress: 27%
- Unable to pay loans: 15%
Mental Health and Worker Well-being

Over the last several years, the issue of worker mental health has become a prominent issue in the sector. According to survey data gathered in July 2020 from 1,500 workers, 33 per cent of workers in the sector probably have depression or anxiety. These needs are not currently supported given the lack of focused resources in Jordan on the topic. However, the 2019 CBA seeks to tackle to topic of mental health and instructs employers to provide referrals to mental health specialists upon request and training to workers on the topic of mental health. This year, BWJ launched a project focused on supporting worker mental health through engagement with workers and relevant stakeholders.

Distress

Distress is the negative stress response that results from being overwhelmed by demands, losses, or perceived threats. Workers in Jordan have a high level of distress. We used the Distress Questionnaire 5, a validated set of questions to capture distress levels and the potential extent of mental health issues in the sector.

52% of surveyed workers screened for possible mental health issues

30% of surveyed workers likely have mental health issues and should be seen by a specialist

Jordanian workers have the highest level of distress. People who were unable to pay their loans because of Covid-19 or said that they or their family members experienced greater mental stress had worse distress scores.

Distress measurements in the last 30 days

Anxiety or fear interfered with my ability to do things I needed to do at work or at home

I had trouble staying focused on tasks

I found social settings upsetting

I felt hopeless

My worries overwhelmed me

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Focus</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Settings</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Worker resilience needs to be supported

Over half of workers surveyed are categorized as having low resiliency, meaning that they have trouble recovering from difficult events. We used the Brief Resilience Scale, a set of six questions that are combined to form a composite score. Of 338 workers who responded to the questions on resilience, 185 were categorized as having low resilience, 151 as normal, and two had high resilience. Jordanian workers have higher resilience than migrant workers on average.

Mental health project

In January 2021, Better Work Jordan launched the two-year mental health project to improve worker mental health by increasing resilience, awareness of mental health issues, and access to MHPSS services.

Employers shall: Care for the psychological health of their workers through referring them to specialized psychological healthcare centres in Jordan…Provide training programs and specialized courses on psychological healthcare, its importance and methods of care.

Collective Agreement dated 21 November 2019

Key Terms

- Mental health: State of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

- Mental well-being: Is about thoughts and feelings and how to cope with the ups and downs of everyday life. It’s not the same thing as mental health, although the two can influence each other.

- Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS): Includes any support that people receive to protect or promote their mental health and psychosocial wellbeing.

- Resilience: The ability to withstand adversity and bounce back from difficult life events.

Data presented is from publicly available sources and through Better Work interaction with workers and managers as of 17 July 2021 and subject to change. Factory managers reported data on Covid-19 cases in the garment sector and vaccinations numbers in June 2021. A team of four union organizers called workers in the sector from April to June as part of a joint data gathering effort from Better Work Jordan and the union. Definitions of concepts related to mental health are from the American Psychological Association.