Sexual harassment prevention in the global garment industry:

An Assessment of Better Work Initiatives in Indonesia, Jordan, Nicaragua, and Vietnam

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DISCUSSION PAPER

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Sexual harassment prevention in the global garment industry: An Assessment of Better Work Initiatives in Indonesia, Jordan, Nicaragua, and Vietnam

Discussion Paper

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Executive Summary

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence (GBV) are pressing issues in the global garment industry, perhaps more so during the pandemic when people are facing increased economic and social hardship. According to World Health Organisation estimates, 1 in 3 women globally experience GBV and women, especially young women, are most affected by this violence and harassment when they work at the bottom of the global supply chain. Through targeted and systemic approaches to sexual harassment awareness, prevention and remediation, Better Work (BW)-facilitated trainings on sexual harassment prevention have been introduced and are an important intervention in workplace GBV across BW's eight country programs. The current study conducted an empirical analysis of the ILO Better Work's training program on sexual harassment prevention in Nicaragua, Jordan, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The analysis is undertaken with the dual goals of assessing the trainings' impact on raising awareness and increasing the likelihood of intervention at the factory level, and 2) identifying strengths and areas of improvement in existing processes and practices.

Broadly, the main objective of the study was to gather country-specific information about sexual harassment trainings and their factory-level impacts in order to compare dynamics and program effectiveness across the different countries. In order to assess the effectiveness of the training program, questions focused on four broad areas, namely, understanding of sexual harassment and gender equality, awareness of existing sexual harassment policies, incidents and reporting of sexual harassment, and grievance and resolution procedures were asked through interviews and focus group discussions.

Overall, findings indicate that improvements have been made in the levels of recognition of sexual harassment and in attempts to curb it in the factories and that the social and cultural lens through which the trainings are delivered and received significantly impacts their efficacy. The study participants showed an expanded or reinforced understanding of gender equality and how gender functions in the workplace to perpetuate inequalities and they have developed a better understanding of sexual harassment and ability to identify specific harassing behaviours. The participants demonstrated an awareness of the existing sexual harassment policies and increased understanding of how to report incidents of harassment.

Further, the study revealed that there remains significant work to be done in facilitating trust in the systems of reporting and accountability and that, for these training interventions to take hold, country-level stakeholders need to be on the same general page. Building capacity among managers, supervisors, and workers will continue to be critical elements to the success of Better Work's sexual harassment mitigation efforts. Frequency of training matters, both to address high-turnover across the sector and to provide opportunities for follow-up trainings. Mode of delivery also plays a crucial role. Although in-person trainings were described as more effective, virtual delivery seemed to expand the reach. In addition to all these, local stakeholder engagement, factory-level development of plans, and empowerment of trainers seemed to positively impact the outcomes.

The contextual differences are reflected in the country-wide outcomes. Presence of large numbers of migrant workers with different nationalities, cultural and religious backgrounds, gender norms, and languages spoken in Jordan makes it a complex context from a training perspective. Migrants are afraid to report being in a foreign country and native Jordanians see sexual harassment as a problem brought to the factories by migrant workers. In Indonesia, country-side towns with more entrenched patriarchal attitudes showed a difference in the level of seriousness toward sexual harassment as opposed to Jakarta city. However, more robust implementation of sexual harassment policies, presence of women leaders and trainers, and leadership support from foreign factory owners showed the potential to bring drastic change. In Vietnam, sexual harassment interventions are taking place in a hierarchical, patriarchal culture, shaped by a fundamental lack of acknowledgement of sexual harassment, and a "culture of silence" where women are largely afraid to report. Nicaragua has shown a lot of progress with respect to sexual harassment prevention, where awareness about sexual harassment and gender equality encompasses LGBTQ+ individuals as well. In Nicaragua, workers seemed confident about identifying and reporting sexual harassment, and management responsiveness to feedback on sexual harassment prevention has been favourable, which is making a positive impact.

Although Better Work sexual harassment training programs have helped to improve basic recognition of sexual harassment as a workplace issue, there is much to be done to effectively tackle sexual harassment and gender inequality in the workplace.

1. Introduction

The World Health Organization estimates that 1 in 3 women globally experience gender-based violence (GBV), a number that has remained steady for a decade. GBV takes many forms, including intimate partner violence, non-partner physical and sexual violence, and sexual harassment (WHO 2019). Women, especially young women, are most affected by this violence and harassment when they "work at the bottom of the global supply chain" in sectors like garment manufacture and in low-paid, low-skill positions. The human and economic costs of GBV in the workplace are significant. "Violence and harassment against women in the world of work … hampers women's empowerment and their access to and progress in the labour market. It also affects the sustainability of the economy in general and perpetuates occupational gender segregation. Violence and harassment against women are often rooted in unequal gender power dynamics, gender stereotypes, patriarchal values and historical inequalities between men and women" (ILO Handbook 2019). GBV in the workplace further results in high rates of turnover and absenteeism, lower productivity and performance, negative workplace relations, and stress-related illness, while having the potential to negatively impact a company's brand reputation (BFP 2019).

1.1 Background

The June 2019 ratification of International Labour Organization Convention no. 190 on Violence and Harassment established clear global benchmarks for adopting an inclusive, integrated, and gender-responsive approach for the elimination of violence and harassment in law and policy. As further delineated in the UN Model Policy for the Prevention and Remediation of Violence and Harassment, through proactive measures to prevent violence and harassment and to provide access to effective remedies, this includes company commitments to the creation and maintenance of diverse, inclusive, safe, and respectful workplaces strongly rooted in gender equality.

These advances in recognizing and addressing gender-based violence and harassment are colliding with the normative standards of labour across the global garment industry, which are characterized by long hours, low wages, and poor working conditions. Historically and at present, these common labour standards have impacted female wage earners disproportionally and negatively (Pike and English 2020) and were exacerbated as demand plummeted during the COVID pandemic, which resulted in severe market contractions across the apparel sector, and destabilized steady waged employment and the independence, stability, skill development, and improved quality of life that wage earners realized from that manufacturing employment. Now, even as the global economy and garment sector emerge from the pandemic downturn, structural power dynamics persist and function to replicate economic and gendered inequalities that perpetuate a range of gendered inequalities and are incredibly difficulty to dislodge (English 2013). Described as “structures of constraint” (Folbre 1994) these conditions are apparent in and undergird norms that reproduce gender inequalities through a range of practices, including hiring and promotion decisions, and the persistence of sexual harassment and harassing behaviours in the workplace.

Gender-based violence (GBV) against women has intensified since the outbreak of COVID-19 (UN Women, 2020) and women represent more than 80% of the workforce in the garment industry (ILO 2019). A substantial body of literature examining working conditions in the global supply chains has noted that women in the workforce experience long hours of work, low pay, unsafe and unhealthy factory conditions, and physical abuse and sexual harassment (Brown, 2021). In order to combat the issue of gender-based violence and sexual harassment in garment factories, Better Work introduced sexual harassment prevention training across garment factories. The Better Work programs have evolved over the years to a major intervention approach to develop anti-sexual harassment policies and to facilitate awareness through innovative training methods including videos and posters aimed at encouraging reporting and responding to those reports effectively through capacity building of managers, supervisors, and workers (Clarke, 2021).

However, there have been no evaluations of these sexual harassment prevention training programs until 2022. The overall objective of this study was to conduct an empirical analysis of the ILO Better Work’s training program on sexual harassment prevention in Nicaragua, Jordan, Indonesia and Vietnam. The analysis is undertaken with the dual goals of assessing the trainings’ impact on raising awareness and increasing the likelihood of intervention at the factory level, and identifying strengths and areas of improvement in existing processes and practices.

Hence, the key research questions are:

1. How far the trainings have helped the managers, supervisors, and workers improve their awareness about sexual harassment?
2. What are the barriers to reporting/intervention when they witness sexual harassment? and;
3. What are the underlying factors that contribute/hinder the training effectiveness?

1.2 Better Work Trainings to Address Sexual Harassment

Through targeted and systemic approaches to sexual harassment awareness, prevention and remediation, Better Work (BW) facilitated trainings on sexual harassment prevention have been introduced and are an important intervention in workplace GBV across BW’s eight country programs. As a partnership of the International Labour Organization and the International Finance Corporation, Better Work’s industry-wide and multi-stakeholder approach to sexual harassment mitigation through workplace trainings has the potential to elevate standards across the entire garment sector, without negatively impacting competitiveness both longitudinally across the international supply chain, and within individual supplier countries.

The Better Work country-based programs on sexual harassment have four key objectives: 1) to raise awareness on gender equality and sexual harassment; 2) to build the capacity of factory teams to conduct their own trainings and awareness-raising campaigns; 3) to improve policies, grievance mechanisms, and other management systems to prevent and address sexual harassment; and 4) to equip factories with the tools for long-term success. Sexual harassment trainings, delivered from the management to the factory level through a variety of modalities—as discussed in more detail below—are based on specific country situations and environments. The objectives of these trainings are to educate around definitions of and what constitutes gender, gender equality and sexual harassment, mechanisms for reporting, responding to and supporting victims of sexual harassment, and sexual harassment prevention, in order to lessen incidents of sexual harassment and thereby create more respectful and equitable workplaces.

2. Methods and Data

The overall objective of this study is to conduct an empirical analysis and comparative study of Better Work's sexual harassment training programs in Nicaragua, Jordan, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The study's overarching goals are to 1) assess impacts on raising awareness and mitigating instances of sexual harassment at the factory level, and 2) identifying strengths and areas of improvement in existing processes and practices to better effect change at the individual factory level and across Better Work workplaces.

Several Better Work programme countries have participated to some extent in training on sexual harassment prevention. These countries were identified by Better Work Global as a useful starting point for this qualitative research. The team in Nicaragua had already done one round of preliminary interviews to assess the impact of the training. The team in Jordan had completed extensive training in two large factories, including a quantitative survey of the impact of that training. The team in Indonesia had also undergone more than one year of RESPECT training, and about to take part in a virtual reality training pilot. And the team in Vietnam expressed interest in examining early impacts of the training underway.

2.1 Country Contexts

The garment industry is a key manufacturing employer and generates significant export value across the four countries selected for this study. In Indonesia, the textile and garment sector employ over 5 million workers countrywide—with pre-pandemic employment in the garment sector alone employing just over 2 million—making it one of the country's largest manufacturing sectors. The garment industry in Vietnam employs nearly 2.5 million people in over 6,000 factories, generating some 40 billion USD in export value, representing 16 percent of the country's total GDP and supplying over 6 percent of the world's apparel exports. The garment industry in Jordan and Nicaragua comparatively employs a relatively smaller number of workers—approximately 68,000 and 125,000 respectively—but are important entry points to industrial employment and export-oriented production in both countries. Nicaragua produces 1.5 billion USD of exports annually, representing some 28 percent of national exports, while garment sector export value has reached 1.6 billion USD in Jordan, representing 18.5 percent of Jordanian national exports.

In total, Better Work has enrolled 735 factories across the four countries, employing over 500,000 garment sector workers. The workforces across the four countries are majority female, ranging from a high of 80 percent in Vietnam and Indonesia, to 75 percent in Jordan, and 53 percent in Nicaragua. Further segmentation of the workforce reveals a complex industrial landscape that may impact the delivery and efficacy of sexual harassment awareness and mitigation efforts. In Jordan, for example, migrant workers comprise some 75 percent of employees in the garment sector, with migrant workers from Bangladesh

representing approximately 42 percent of Jordan's garment sector workforce, native Jordanians 31 percent of the workforce, and with the remaining workforce consisting of migrant workers from countries including India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, and Syria. In Vietnam by comparison, employees are largely Vietnamese, often from rural areas of the country and first-time entrants into waged work.

2.2 Data collection

This study employed qualitative methods with data collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals and in focus group discussions (FGDs) with managers, supervisors, union representatives, and workers in the four country settings. It is important to note that while the findings are an important baseline snapshot of sexual harassment mitigation efforts across Better Work country settings, the sample size only captures a portion of BW factories: 5 of 27 in Nicaragua, 2 of 97 in Jordan, 3 of 215 in Indonesia, 5 of 459 in Vietnam.

▶ **Table 1. Summary of participants and data collection methods**

Country	Factories	Interviews and FGDs	Total # Participants
Nicaragua	5	23	76
Jorda	2	2	62
Indonesia	3	15	42
Vietnam	5	10	35
All Factories	15	71	215

The broad objective of the study is to gather country-specific information about sexual harassment trainings and their factory-level impacts in order to compare dynamics and program effectiveness across the different countries. Interview questions focused on four broad areas: understanding of sexual harassment and gender equality, awareness of existing sexual harassment policies, incidents and reporting of sexual harassment, and grievance and resolution procedures.

3. Country-specific Training Modalities

3.1 Nicaragua: POSH Trainings

Better Work Nicaragua's Program on Sexual Harassment (POSH) training modules focus on six questions that cover key topics:

1. *What is gender?*: gender, gender identity, impact of social norms and upbringing, discrimination and privilege;
2. *What is sexual harassment?*: what constitutes sexual harassment, root causes, discrimination and privilege;
3. *How do we support victims and survivors of sexual harassment?*: the role of bystanders, victim- and survivor-centered approach, psychological first aid, importance of referral systems;
4. *How do we respond to cases of sexual harassment?*: grievance mechanisms, barriers to reporting, effective grievance mechanisms, handling cases;

5. *How do we prevent sexual harassment in a holistic way?*: prevention spectrum, preventative approach, areas of improvement;
6. *How do we facilitate sessions of sexual harassment?*: facilitation skills, techniques, and methodologies.

The POSH sexual harassment trainings utilize a training of trainers (TOT) modality, where Better Work staff deliver instruction to members of a POSH committee—factory-based teams of trainers—in these 6 areas. These POSH committee members who represent both management and employees then themselves, or with a Better Work co-facilitator, lead trainings in their individual factories. "I remember the pyramid example," one supervisor who received the training noted. 'It starts with me, and it grows as I replicate the training. I really liked the methodology." As a result of the TOT delivered to the POSH committee, tools were provided so that the committee representatives were empowered and encouraged to train workers at the factory level. A BW staffer observed that "today they train with more confidence and it has been a success."

In the Nicaragua factories surveyed, nearly all the employees had received at least one round of sexual harassment training at the time of this study from TOT-trained POSH committee members who delivered the module-based trainings to other supervisors and line-level employees. TOT trainings lasted approximately 18 hours in total—6 three-hour online sessions or over 2.5 days in person. Subsequent trainings for workers lasted approximately 1 to 2 hours, with trainings made available to employees frequently at varying intervals in the individual factories, ranging from 1 to 3 times per week. As noted by one study participant trying to attend in-person trainings during the work day posed challenges. In their factory, "the trainings usually happen one hour before the lunch break so people want the training to finish right at the hour. We are limited in the topics that we can discuss because of the time."

Due to COVID-related disruptions, BWN trainings in 2021 were undertaken entirely in a virtual modality. This necessitated adapting POSH materials, originally meant for in-person delivery, so they could be utilized in virtual trainings, as well as modifying approaches to engage participants who were not able to sit in a room together. These modifications included convening trainings online in small group sessions, assigning pre-work and homework to prepare, simplifying training modules to include more time for discussion and debriefing, having frequent breaks and temperature checks to collect feedback and gauge understanding, and providing post-session coaching.

Beginning in 2022 as COVID restrictions eased, BWN POSH trainings began to be delivered through an in-person format, in addition to continued virtual delivery. While adaptations made it possible for Nicaragua factory employees to undertake POSH training through the pandemic and virtual delivery may help address training capacity issues, what was lost was the "workshopping" aspects of the trainings that study participants flagged as being most interesting and useful, including group drawing exercises, role playing, and other interactive elements. "At first, people were hesitant and bored with the topic … But once we did the drawing activities, which were great, people realized that it was an interesting topic. We had a lot of fun in our training, even management had fun," noted one recipient of in-person training. Another recipient of in-person training added, "the training was very dynamic. We drew, we interacted, we shared." Another praised a role-playing exercise for enhancing their understanding of the need for and strategies to implement a victim-centered approach to sexual harassment interventions, saying, "I also really liked learning about the victim-focused technique, thinking about what the victim needs."

3.2 Jordan: GBV awareness and training program

The joint IFC/BW gender-based violence and awareness and training program in Jordan project focuses on of three key elements: training, advising, and referrals. The training involves intensive middle management training and subsequent shorter worker trainings, in practice a TOT model similar to that

found in Nicaragua. Advising includes working with management to improve factory policies and practices. This is a typical component of BW core services, but in this case had an increased GBV focus. Advice was also based on what was learned from and workshopped with middle management during training. The third element, the GBV referral system, has been developed but stakeholders still need to build capacity in this area.

Rolled out initially in a remote modality because of COVID and with only 2 trainers, Jordan's GBV program training has been multi-layered, and delivered through a system of trickle down and out trainings. Training was delivered to factory-level management from an IFC gender specialist and the BWJ team, focusing on direct, intensive training of this middle management. This training involved the most resources, but targeted managers positioned within the factory hierarchy as a key go-between for workers and for upper-level factory management. BWJ then also conducted training of trainers training to union representatives and factory in-house trainers for outreach across the broad spectrum of multinational workers.

The mix of nationalities, languages, and cultural contexts represented by the workforce, poses challenges to implementation and capacity building. The diverse workforce that comprises Jordan's garment sector makes it necessary for the delivery of trainings to take place through managers representing various nationalities and in different languages (sometimes through translators), and that are responsive to an array of culturally-prescribed gender dynamics and sensitivities of those receiving the trainings. As one manager observed of his department, "there are people with five nationalities working here. Hindu, Muslim, Bangladeshi, and Christian culture are different. Sexual harassment can be culture dependant."

Jordan's GBV training program is therefore highly dependent on local stakeholders for delivery of training to the beneficiary level, and the trainings have a locale-specific, grassroots quality made necessary and amplified by the sheer diversity of the workforce that functionally has the potential to scale the program in a way to reach large audience even with a limited staff capacity. On the one hand this makes this type of model more sustainable by grounding the trainings in local capacity and increases the likelihood that participants will be receptive to trainings that are culturally sensitive, especially in the context of mixed-gender instruction. "According to our culture," observed a native-Jordanian, "females prefer females. So we don't mix a training batch. Males and females are always trained separately." In fact, interview responses revealed that mixed-gender trainings, or trainers of an opposite gender in an otherwise gender-segregated group, functioned to inhibit the effectiveness of participation and information delivery. On the Better Work side, this was sometimes the case as both trainers were women, and this capacity issue meant that they conducted training for men. This also was the situation in delivery of training to workers at one factory with a diversity of nationalities represented among the workers, where the selection of participants was done by factory management due to production concerns. "When I ask for examples," one trainer noted of mixed-gender groups, "males give examples but females don't talk that much. They feel ashamed maybe." Gender-segregated trainings though create space for training participants "so that they can freely talk," noted one study respondent, and drew men more meaningfully into the trainings, observed another, "because they are too shy to speak in front of women." This situation speaks to the importance of the TOT approach to trainings so that capacity can be expanded by the training of male trainers who can then deliver content to male workers. More female HR staff who typically conduct the sexual harassment training, reflecting the ratio of female to male workers would also help to expand capacity so that a gender-segregated approach to training can take place.

On the other hand, however, there are significant logistical challenges to overcome. Training presentations and activities need to be adjusted based on different nationalities of workers and it is impossible to develop and deliver a single training across the board when different national contexts, different cultures, and different norms for male-female interactions abound. External trainers can be more neutral, not filtering trainings through cultural lenses that may normalize or otherwise serve to perpetuate harassing

behaviours. Though this is the ideal, limited resources makes this impossible. This means that some elements of control are lost as GBV trainings are interpreted and filtered through those same stakeholders and differing cultural contexts. With so many variables at play, robust training of trainers does not always translate to effective worker training or improved outcomes.

3.3 Indonesia: RESPECT training

Indonesia's RESPECT sexual harassment trainings at the three factories in this study utilize a Training of Trainers (TOT) modality, with focus of the training in four broad areas broad areas: types of sexual harassment, how to report and where to report, the ways to precent sexual harassment—the "spectrum of prevention"—and how to develop policies and procedures for sexual harassment prevention and handling complaints. In Indonesia generally, TOT participants consist of management, (HR, department and line managers, and compliance managers), workers (non-union), and union representatives. At one factory RESPECT training was delivered largely to managers, and took place separate from but in tandem with GBV trainings by GAP, that was delivered largely to shopfloor workers. These two trainings were described by one study participants as complementary and "very similar."

All TOT participants in each factory are then required to join a RESPECT Team that functions similar to the POSH committees in BW Nicaragua factories. After receiving training, the RESPECT teams individually develop a factory-specific action plan for training and prevention which is then implemented throughout that factory. Yet the frequency of trainings and seriousness with which the trainings were approached varied across factories, as did the commitment to pushing out sexual harassment training to additional managers and workers. Action plans and training delivery were dependent on and shaped by key individuals at the factory level, whose commitment to training and leadership styles can be characterized as "individual champion," "team-led," and "old boys club," and that were female, mixed-gender, and exclusively male, respectively.

In Indonesia, the RESPECT teams deliver training and additional TOT delivery. They however also undertake work beyond simply delivery of training that is critical to the success of the sexual harassment training program. Members of the RESPECT teams also facilitate "socialization campaigns" that educate and raise awareness factory-wide beyond the specific training sessions. They create informational banners and posters that hang in production and common areas in the factories, create audio broadcasts and short videos that are posted to social media, and continually review and revise their factory-specific action plans, and the policies, procedures and grievance mechanisms in place, in order to most effectively address sexual harassment in their places of work.

Across the factories included in the study, trainings occurred mostly in mixed-gender groups ranging in size from 30-60, and relatively frequently, in one factory every Wednesday for 20-30 minutes, in another two times a month, and in a third, every month "depending on the production schedule." TOT training sessions lasted from 1.5 to 2 hours, while interview participants gave positive assessments of the trainings which were delivered in person. Interviews highlighted the importance of the timing and settings in which trainings were offered, being more positively received when offered at times convenient for workers (e.g., in the morning before working hours when the traffic situation is easier; during lunchbreaks), and in dedicated and comfortable spaces at the factory as was the case at one locale rather than, as was typical in another factory, as hurried trainings given after the end of shifts when employees are tired and wanting to go home, in a hot and poorly ventilated room. Interview participants expressed interest in modalities for training delivery, including through virtual reality technology.

3.4 Vietnam

Like the other countries in this study, Better Work sexual harassment training at the Vietnam factories begins with Training of Trainers (TOT) instruction by Better Work Vietnam staff.

Factory-level managers (HR staff, compliance officers), trade union members, PICC members, and staff charged with training at factories participate in the majority of the trainings with BWV. These trainings range from sexual harassment prevention "basic" to "advanced," and additional TOT trainings. Those who participate in the sexual harassment TOTs are expected to deliver at least the basic sexual harassment training content to workers. The work schedule and production priorities at the individual factories impacts the delivery of this content outside of TOT, from those HR managers, compliance officers, PICC members and designated staff who are responsible for training line supervisors, who then in turn are responsible for training their line workers. The sexual harassment training however is not effectively trickling through the hierarchy, and therefore is not being delivered robustly at the worker level. In fact, there is only one factory where a group of line-level workers has been trained. It remains difficult to gauge the quantity and quality of information related to sexual harassment and existing policies that is trickling out and down to line supervisors across Vietnam's Better Work factories within this system.

Through the COVID pandemic, virtual training was utilized for sexual harassment trainings. While study respondent observed that these trainings were "not very effective," and there was a quality spectrum across the virtual trainings because of variations in equipment availability, adequate numbers of trainers, personnel comfortable with the technology and adapting materials, and locations made available to conduct the training, they did provide an opportunity to maintain engagement with factories. At present, factories still do not have enough staff for training the broader workforce, and sexual harassment trainings are one of many competing priorities.

Even with a return to in-person trainings, when trainings happen, they occur infrequently or in large, impersonal groups of 100 to 150 employees. One factory in the study had not undertaken trainings of workers at all. "Some factories have more than 7000 workers. Some have a very strong management and compliance team which are willing to conduct the training," observed one study participant. "Whereas in some factories, [the] team leader does not share anything with the workers except those things that pertain to production." Further, managers balance myriad competing priorities and thus are not prioritizing trainings—delivering information over loudspeakers while employees are working rather than having dedicated training time—and this appears to be true even when production is low, and dedicated trainings that do happen are calibrated to how they will impact production. Especially in the context of a relatively new sexual harassment mandate in Vietnam's state labour code[2], multiple, sometimes competing training requirements from the government and buyers means that Better Work and other sexual harassment trainings are edited and condensed as noted above into one big infrequent (annual) training. Cultivating upper management buy-in is critical in all country contexts but especially in order to facilitate a greater willingness to allow trainings to take place during work hours, regardless of a short-term impact on production. One interview participant succinctly observed that company priorities are "production, quality of products, and [then] social dialogue and compliance."

2 Added in 2020, Vietnam's state labour code provisions related to sexual harassment require factories to have sexual harassment programming in place as well as include a chapter on sexual harassment prevention in factory rule books. While factories have an allotted 15 days for public training, ILO in-country staff estimates that some 30 percent of factories do not use the time.

4. Findings

4.1 Understanding of gender equality and sexual harassment

4.1.1 Gender Equality

Better Work trainings on sexual harassment include modules meant to better equip stakeholders with an understanding of gender, gender identity, and gender discrimination and privilege. These provide a broad baseline for understanding how and why gender equality is important in the workplace, and how sexual harassment can then undermine it (and vice versa, how gender inequality can foster sexual harassment). Interview respondents identified areas both of progress and of persistent inequalities.

At a very basic level, study participants in Jordan noted that from their training they learned that gender equality means that men and women are treated the same, recalling a module from training that illustrated socialized gender difference through items selected to give to children as birthday presents, wherein boys received “male” toys like cars and building blocks, and girls received “female” items like make-up and other trinkets related to their looks. Across all four countries, interview participants showed an expanded or reinforced understanding of gender equality and how gender functions in the workplace to perpetuate inequalities. In Nicaragua, participants reflected this, with respondents noting how gender equality includes gay and trans individuals, and that training has led to a positive change in attitudes and behaviour toward LGBTQ+ employees. This indicates important movement in Nicaragua toward more equitable workplaces. In Indonesia, on the other hand, there were instances of LGBTQ+ individuals being discussed as perceived threats such as lesbians presenting a threat to female employees, and a female worker who was fired for “looking too male”.

Regarding gender equitable promotions, a shift was evident with some respondents specifically noting this change came about after training. On one end of the spectrum was Vietnam, where interviews revealed that it was common practice in the past for only men to receive promotions but that managers are “now considering” women for promotion based on skill. Male managers at one factory in Indonesia had just started to encourage women to take leadership roles after the training, whereas before, women’s “opinions” were not “valued.” On the other end of the spectrum are factories for example in Nicaragua, where study participants also observed that there was more transparency in the promotion process and that they were “considering sex less,” instead basing promotion decisions on skill, seniority, and experience. And, while men are still dominating certain departments like packing, ironing, cutting and in the majority of supervisory roles, respondents noted changes were happening both to hire more women into male-dominated departments and supervisory positions, and to hire men into female-dominated departments. Additional Indonesian study participants observed that wages were equally paid to men and women doing the same job, promotion was based solely on skill and on-the-job performance, that there were no formal barriers to women being supervisors or managers, and that all jobs were open equally to men and women.

In practice, however, responses revealed that gender inequities are still perpetuated in practice, especially through customary differences in job assignments and gendered assumptions of ability. Nicaragua is a particularly illustrative case in this regard, referring varyingly to reasons for this as “mindset,” “machismo,” and other “learned” behaviours. In areas of production, it was observed as still common to reserve certain jobs for men and others for women for reasons including that some work is “very strenuous,” women “cannot carry heavy loads,” men “tend to be apt at certain kinds of work,” and because “of course men are physically stronger and women are more sensitive and docile.” In one Nicaraguan factory, the practice of hiring only men for ironing and cutting positions was described as “a custom that has become law,” and

an HR manager observed, “we have seen [female] operators that should be in positions of leadership but it is males in those positions. The males are given more opportunities.” Seen as well in Indonesia, where although men and women worked in mixed production groups, “heavy work” and work requiring “physical capabilities” were observed as done only by men, these gendered structural practices will arguably take more deliberate action to alter, such as that by a general manager at a factory in Nicaragua who, after participating in TOT, put into a place a factory-wide gender equality plan for managers to follow.

4.1.2 Sexual harassment

The Model Policy for the Prevention and Remediation of Violence and Harassment defines sexual harassment as, “any unwelcome or unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, which makes a person feel offended, humiliated, and/or intimidated.” Better Work trainings have helped develop a better understanding of sexual harassment. Findings show, somewhat simply but critically, that there were respondents who did not know what sexual harassment is, but now do because of BW’s intervention. In Nicaragua, for example, respondents said they were glad to have had the training because they did not realize that they were doing something wrong by behaving or speaking in certain ways. “At first, we were confused but the training helped us clarify and learn. We also learned what we can and cannot do. I liked it because it clarified a lot of doubts and questions that I had,” observed one, while another noted, “our males colleagues mentioned that they did not realize they were committing so many wrongs. The environment is much more respectful now,” and a third that, “before, I wouldn’t identify, or I labeled … situations as a ‘joke’. However, I realize now that these situations are harassment.”

This was echoed by a study participant in Vietnam who said, “training helped me to create awareness about sexual harassment. Before training, I didn’t know that certain behavior could be read as sexual harassment,” and another in Indonesia who observed of their co-workers that “they stopped doing certain things and now they know their BOUNDARIES.” One focus group participant in Indonesia asserted that sexual harassment is caused by lack of education and awareness, but that “[training] participants can identify better now. Before the training, they didn’t know about the different types. Now they know about physical and verbal harassment. The examples actually helped them a lot.” Others noted that they now have the language to explain why certain behaviours are wrong. One respondent summed up these sentiments, saying that they would have ignored sexual harassment before “due to my lack of knowledge.”

There was likewise more clarity about how sexual harassment is not only something done by men to women, but that women can sexually harass men, harassment can happen between men and between women, and sexual harassment can specifically target LGBTQ+ individuals. In the words of one Indonesia study participant, sexual harassment can happen “in all directions.” “Before, I thought it could only happen to women. At first, I thought it was weird to think of sexual harassment happening to men,” a worker in Nicaragua reported, while another said that they had “also witnessed that men can be victims of sexual harassment,” noting that they “recently saw a group of drunken women harassing a young man on the bus.” A female worker in Jordan similarly told of how sexual harassment “can happen between female to female,” giving the example of when female co-workers “talk about private body parts,” which made her feel “uncomfortable.” Interviewees also noted that they learned about the concept of consent—that it was the recipient of a look, comment, touch, or joke who decides whether that behaviour is harassing—and how power dynamics shape sexual harassment. A male focus group participant in Jordan summarized his newly learned knowledge, noting “he got to know that if the females do not like [a touch], it can become sexual harassment.”

Across the four countries, at the factory level, study participants were able to identify specific behaviours that constitute sexual harassment and said that they able to recognize sexual harassment when they see

it. Responses showed a clear understanding of specific harassing behaviours, enumerated as including verbal harassment, whistling and suggestive gesturing, hugging or other touching that is unwanted or makes a person feel uncomfortable, explicit texts or messages by phone, using dirty or disrespectful language, using phrases with a double meaning, supervisors seeking a quid pro quo for a favour, promotion, wage increase or other benefit, bullying and creating a hostile work environment through sexually demeaning language and actions, and showing and sharing inappropriate pictures. The trainings also equipped respondents with a better understanding of the differences between sexual harassment and other kinds of workplace harassment, and what kinds of day-to-day interactions did not qualify as sexual harassment. In Jordan, for instance, focus group participants used the example of a man taking an empty seat next to a woman on a crowded bus as an example of a male-female interaction that is not necessarily sexual harassment but rather a situation in which a person is simply finding a place to sit. “After training, the female realizes that the male may find the seat empty, which may be the only empty seat on the bus. Therefore, this is the only empty seat … this event does not refer to sexual harassment.”

While awareness has improved, there is a spectrum of awareness of sexual harassment across different country settings. Better Work trainings resulted in increased sensitization, and overall, as discussed below, an increased willingness to intervene and report, the cultural contexts through which the trainings are filtered shape their ultimate impact. For example, Jordanian interview respondents, both male and female, showed an understanding of what sexual harassment is but saw behaviours—such as some kinds of touching—as innocuous in the context of their cultural norms around gender interactions, and that they highly value respecting women and contextualize gendered interactions through a family-like lens (e.g., seeing women as “sisters”). While one focus group participant noted, “males and females have a brother sister relationship and no issues,” a participant of a separate focus group observed, “sometimes the males call them sister and then do a bad touch or look at them differently (with a different intend) in their mind.” Interview responses suggest that sexual harassment was not necessarily perceived as a problem for native Jordanians—and by extension sexual harassment training had little relevance—and that there was a perception that sexual harassment was not home grown but rather was something being brought into the factories by migrant workers.

In Vietnam, respondents showed an awareness of harassing behaviours—specifically noting whistling, inappropriate comments, touching and staring, quid pro quo situations, supervisors asking for “favours,” and the creation of a hostile work environment when victims of harassing behaviour feel threatened that there will be punitive consequences for rejecting demands or reporting. At the same time, there was pushback from the higher-ups against a more expansive Western concept of sexual harassment, as many harassing behaviours—in fact, almost anything other than rape—were seen as being “grey areas.” Because of this and other cultural factors, assessing the scope of, and fully understanding the issue of workplace sexual harassment there and in other country settings, can be problematic. So, while this study found that there was some acknowledgment that a variety of forms of sexual harassment might exist, this acknowledgement remains deeply engrained in cultural dynamics and norms.

Those dynamics will take a considerable amount of time to evolve—and only with the guidance and involvement of local stakeholders embedded in the culture. Interview participants in Vietnam for example, noted that a “culture of silence” exists not only among factory workers but at all levels. Though this culture of silence is deeply embedded, it may be possible to open lines of communication with the workers by providing more information at the factory-level: who else is saying something, what are they saying, and to what extent does it reflect my own personal experience? Having a charismatic trainer, for example, certainly got their attention and helped them to retain much of what they had learned. They were also keen to receive more information, for example about statistics on women reporting sexual harassment. Further, top stakeholders would benefit from the expertise and guidance of local stakeholders who can

provide extensive detail and training on the symbiotic relationship between gender equality and sexual harassment, how this fits for them in the context of the local cultural dynamics, and what this means in terms of moving forward together.

4.2 Awareness of existing sexual harassment policies

Despite variations across the four countries in their understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment, interviewees overwhelmingly responded that they knew sexual harassment was prohibited in their workplaces and were aware of existing sexual harassment policies. Some interviewees noted that policies prohibiting sexual harassment have long been in place but, before training, few knew about them. Because of this, study participants reiterated that more workers should receive the training, and that the trainings should be more frequent—for TOT and employees—and longer in duration. Respondents likewise knew that there was "zero tolerance" of sexual harassment by management and that there were consequences for violation of sexual harassment policies. Interview responses show a range of consequences for those who violate sexual harassment policies, including warnings from management, being fired, and in the case of migrant workers in Jordan, being sent back to their home country.

4.3 Responses to training

Across all countries in this study, recipients of BW sexual harassment training had positive reactions. In Nicaragua, feedback included particularly positive comments about videos, interactive modules and drawing activities. "It was a very dynamic, fun, and clear training. We watched a video to better understand different situations. It was dynamic, it helped us not fall asleep or be bored," said one TOT participant. A worker who had received training especially liked the exercise where, "each group made a drawing that demonstrated sexual harassment. Then they described what was going on. I thought this was very effective because it really opened your mind." In Indonesia, these activities as well as training material being shared in advance, and "draw and explain" modules were particularly well received. "The 'draw and explain the incident' was interesting," said one worker, "I am a visual learner and so drawings help to remember."

In Vietnam, factory mapping exercises were effective both to train and to recognize that sexual harassment was actually happening. "They had a large sized paper. They had to make pictures with markers. They put * mark for storage area, production area, or any place where this is more risks and more number of stars depending on the risks. Eventually, they marked even the meeting room, canteen, training room and all over the factory." In Jordan, workers appreciated that training was coming from factory-level managers or union representatives. There was a preference for in-person trainings, though adaptations for virtual presentation helped to overcome challenges presented by virtual trainings. Some of these adaptations included convening trainings smaller groups, assigning pre-work and homework to prepare, and simplifying training modules to include more time for discussion and debriefing. A universal observation from interviews in Nicaragua, Jordan, Vietnam, and Indonesia, was that more workers are open to and need to receive the training (this is especially important due to high worker turnover).

4.4 Additional modes of information sharing

In addition to facilitated trainings, information about sexual harassment policies is typically conveyed in all factories through notices, posters, and banners posted on bulletin and information boards in high-traffic areas throughout all the factories. In Vietnam, all workers receive some sexual harassment information at induction trainings, and at one Nicaragua factory new employees are required to sign a "no tolerance

letter" after receiving training that outlines the company's sexual harassment policy. "We have information posted throughout the factory, we have trainings," a compliance manager explained, "and we ask everyone that takes the training to sign a 'zero tolerance' letter that they will not engage in these actions. If someone does not know when they begin working here, they learn later. Not everyone comes in understanding what sexual harassment looks like, but we try to let them see that all these actions are hurtful, however small, or large." Information-sharing through video monitors was noted in Vietnam and Indonesia, with the former playing sexual harassment training videos on canteen televisions before work and during lunch, and the latter playing information videos on canteen televisions at lunch. Employees in Vietnam and Indonesia flagged the importance of having information about sexual harassment printed in the local language in the worker rulebooks.

Specific educational campaigns outside formal trainings also help to raise awareness. For example, in Nicaragua, the POSH committee started a "No Means No" initiative as one among other factory-based campaigns to share information. In Indonesia, numerous interview respondents mentioned a recent "Stop Harassment" campaign organized by Better Work's RESPECT team around Independence Day events. A member of a factory sexual harassment committee said that there should be more campaigns like this. "Workers asked many questions during the campaign on Independence Day and they were able to learn more. There was a booth as well on Independence Day. Almost all the workers visited the booth. So workers can learn beyond the training."

Importantly, study participants in Jordan, Nicaragua, and Indonesia observed that awareness raising was also happening outside formal trainings through more casual worker-to-worker communication and interactions. Study participants said that co-workers tell each other when they are "doing something incorrect," and that training gave them the ability to speak to someone in a friendly and non-confrontational about their behavior so that individual would not be "hurt or offended." In Vietnam, research revealed that line leaders are key to information dissemination, though this information often focused on production-related issues and not on sexual harassment or mitigation efforts.

Leadership and the commitment of upper management to take seriously sexual harassment as a critical workplace issue is a key factor in awareness raising about harassment policies. In one Vietnam factory where awareness was particularly strong, interview participants said that the factory president was "very keen on the sexual harassment issue" and was focused on providing training to everyone in the factory. In this particular factory, after line supervisors train workers, they are required to take a test and then train again if they fail. A factory compliance manager in Nicaragua asserted that knowledge about the company's zero tolerance policy is so ubiquitous that "even our clients know." A common observation across the four countries was that it would be helpful for executive management to receive sexual harassment training, since it is at the corporate level where operation-wide decisions are being made and change can occur through standard-setting. As a BWJ staffer summed it up, "top management decides."

4.5 Incidents of harassment and reporting

4.5.1 Reporting

Post-training, interview participants showed a recognition—if only through tacit acknowledgement in Jordan and Vietnam—that sexual harassment does occur in the factories. This is progress from when training interventions were first introduced when, for instance in Jordan, sexual harassment was not acknowledged at all and something too taboo to even talk about or recognize or, in Nicaragua by comparison, what passed for "normal" and "acceptable" behaviour was in fact widespread harassment. One focus group participant in Vietnam said that "with more training, things are changing slowly. It is getting better. At least now workers know how to report sexual harassment." In Nicaragua, a POSH committee member similarly

observed, “now people know how to report these cases, previously, they didn’t know their rights, they didn’t know who to go to. Now they know what sexual harassment is and how to report it.” Interview participants there said they thought workers were “very comfortable” to share and report. Interview respondents in all countries were well versed in ways to report, including direct reports to supervisors, committee members of sexual harassment training teams, union representatives, or HR (in Nicaragua workers said there is a general “open door policy” of their HR managers), as well through dedicated phone hotlines, complaint boxes, and WhatsApp. In Nicaragua, POSH committee members thought that the majority of employees simply knowing how to report was having a deterrent effect on sexual harassment.

Increased understanding and awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment, and recognizing when it happens, did not necessarily translate to increased reporting. Across all the countries, managers noted that very few or no reports of sexual harassment had been made to them. Thus, there seems to be a disconnect between factory employees saying that they are willing to intervene and report on one hand, and following through with it on the other hand. This points to the need to develop processes through which heightened awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment can facilitate a willingness to report.

For example, there could be training modules to provide not just examples of how to report, but scenarios whereby a worker files a complaint, and what happens next. Workers know, in theory, that they bring an issue to someone, and that issue works its way up the chain of command, but they may not know how it is going to affect the victim, perpetrator, or them if they are not the victim. It could be useful to provide clear examples of how this plays out, the ramifications for individuals, and the workplace benefits (e.g., physical and emotional health, etc.).

Confidentiality was expressed as a concern in many factories, and fear about potentially getting in trouble later or putting one’s job at risk was a common concern—both in terms of intervening and reporting—even when done through anonymous complaint boxes or reporting hotlines. This was especially salient for migrant workers in Jordan where, as one female focus group participant succinctly stated, “we worry about our work and income.” In Nicaragua, interviewees said that reports were being made, however, they were described as “infrequent,” and that there are still likely many cases that go unreported. Workers and managers cited the reason for under-reporting as linked to confidentiality and that people are embarrassed, afraid of being fired, receiving threats, or having someone hurt them outside the factory in retaliation. One respondent said of their factory, “confidentiality does not exist here,” while another said, “there are so many of us that are afraid.”

In Vietnam, interview participants also cited concerns about confidentiality and fear of losing one’s job as reasons for not reporting, as well as fear of the power of the perpetrator and potential retribution by managers. In Indonesia, respondents said that there is an overarching need to do more training on the role of bystanders in stopping harassment, as well as to better inform workers of protections in place when reporting and about where and how to report.

While there is a range of willingness and comfort in reporting incidents of harassment, interview respondents in all countries except Jordan said that workers have become more respectful to each other since their training and are more willing to intervene if they observe harassment happening. In Jordan, workers said that they were less comfortable about the idea of saying something in the moment or reporting it later but, among both male and female study participants in the other three countries, there has been what might be described as self-policing and worker-to-worker oversight at the factory level. This may be, in part, because of the concerns and fears noted above about confidentiality and potential retaliation. It could also be attributed to the effects of increased awareness-raising.

In this regard, the Stop Harassment Campaign in Indonesia, for example, was cited as not just an awareness-raising tool, but as a tool to empower people to stay “stop” when harassment occurs. As part of

a general increased willingness to intervene and a broader sense of confidence about reporting following their training, interview participants pointed to the Stop Harassment Campaign as something that would help them to say “stop” or “don’t do that” in the moment when harassment happens. A female focus group participant said training made her “bold” and not afraid to speak out.

Proactively correcting one’s behaviour has become a critical intervention that workers are making themselves. In Nicaragua, people are more “open” about confronting harassing behaviour when it happens. A female focus group member recounted, “I hear them tell each other that they need to stop, or they will submit a complaint to HR.” One male focus group participant noted that he would not have been comfortable intervening a year ago (before training) because he did not have the tools, knowledge, or confidence that the factory would not respond punitively. Similarly, others said that training equipped them to intervene directly, saying that training gave them the tools know when someone is “doing something incorrect,” and to speak to them in a friendly and non-confrontational about their behaviour so that individual would not be “hurt or offended,” but would still be called out for their problematic behaviour.

In Indonesia, male focus group participants revealed that they had started to self-police their behaviour by being more careful about how behaviours such as winking or certain body language could be received as harassment, stopping overtly harassing behaviours, and recognizing boundaries. They noted that “just joking around” is now something understood as problematic, and groups of workers “remind” each other how to behave. In Vietnam, likewise, interviews include references to workers being more cautious about their behaviour, more aware about the language they use in the workplace, and how comments or text messages can be harassing. A male worker in Nicaragua said that he and his co-workers now observe a “5 steps rule” for how close they can be to a female co-worker before she may feel uncomfortable. A female supervisor there recounted an instance when a newly hired woman was harassing a male co-worker and a third worker stepped in and told her that she could get in trouble. “We can see people are putting the training into practice,” she observed.

4.5.2 Cultural and community contexts

Across the countries included in the study, cultural context is another factor impacting both recognition and reporting. Though it comes through in each of the sections of this paper thus far, in this section we further elaborate on the theme.

The conceptualization that values, beliefs, and behaviours are a function of culture (“cultural relativism”) exerts a powerful influence on the perception, definition, tolerance, and legislative remedies surrounding sexual harassment in the workplace because all individuals strongly internalize their cultures of origin and there is considerable divergence around these all over the world (Zimbroff, 2007). Through her illustration of how varied individuals of South American, European, and Asian cultures perceive and respond to sexual harassment, Zimbroff (2007) noted that laws around sexual harassment is also interpreted through the lenses of the internalized societal norms. Patriarchal cultures set asymmetrical gender roles and honour and shame codes for men and women that can lead to the normalcy of men’s behaviour, while women may seek less formal advocacy in sexual harassment incidents (Cortina & Wasti, 2005). Perceptions of sexual harassment can vary among individuals from different countries and the reason for such differences can be attributed to the cultural contexts (DeSouza et al, 2007; Merkin, 2008). Hence, cultural contexts make the whole concept around identification and responding to sexual harassment very complex when the intent of the sexual harassment prevention training is universal.

Interviews with male and female Jordanian managers, for instance, reflect a hesitancy or unwillingness to intervene in possible cases of observed sexual harassment, unless they are being asked for help and, even then, they attribute it to culture and do not treat it as a complaint. Reflecting cultural norms about

how men are expected to treat their “sisters,” there was an attitude of normalcy around both potential and actual harassing behaviours (e.g., familiar touching, verbal interactions) in interactions between men and women. In the Vietnamese culture, according to one respondent, “people think women are always the reason for sexual harassment,” and so “we encourage female workers to dress modestly and also be careful while speaking to others.” This sentiment about women’s modesty was also expressed in Jordan.

Other interview participants in Vietnam reflected a “culture of silence” around the issue of sexual harassment, where certain behaviours were said to be normal and part of the culture and not sexual harassment. Importantly, these comments were made by managers and other higher-ups. In meetings with workers, however they described these behaviours as examples of sexual harassment. One BWV staffer noted that women are “very shy and afraid … In Vietnam, even if you ask multiple times, they will say everything is fine,” leading to “a gap between theory and practice.”

In Indonesia, there were lingering barriers to reporting due to what one respondent called “village culture.” For some, this barrier to reporting was a sense of embarrassment or fear of being bullied by the perpetrator outside the factory. For others it was concern about the wider community’s response, including fears of a perpetrator’s family further harassing or attacking someone who had reported an issue, or being shunned, shamed (e.g., being called a “cheap”), or blamed (e.g., one male interview participant in a leadership position noted that women should “dress modestly” to avoid sexual harassment).

In Indonesia and Nicaragua, study participants reflected on the connection between sexual harassment in the community and at work as a factor shaping recognition and reporting, though in a positive way, where the factory was positioned as a safe space. One female interview participant noted that, though there was improvement in her factory, sexual harassment was routinely experienced outside, especially as part of her train commute to work. In Nicaragua, numerous interview participants discussed the prevalence of sexual harassment in the community in connection to and contrasting with the existence of sexual harassment policies in the factories. Noting the zero-tolerance policies in their workplaces and consequences for infractions, they said this was radically different from what was happening out in the community. There was a clear division between factory and community in terms of sexual harassment, and while incidents of harassment were observed to be declining in the factory, they were largely staying the same outside. Women especially said that they felt safe at work and that their work environment was one in which they felt protected from harassing behaviour, in contrast to the community. One female worker in Indonesia said she has been in the factory for 8 years “because it is safe.” In Nicaragua, an interview exchange among female focus group participants is instructive. When asked where they felt safest, in the factory or on the street, all members of the group responded that they felt safest in the factory, and that the situation was a change from just 2 years ago, before the Better Work trainings.

Noting that even though sexual harassment still happens at work, study participants in Nicaragua said they were not afraid or compelled to change their behaviour and routines in the same way that they commonly do in the community (e.g., altering the route of a commute, not going out, etc.). The existence of policies meant to stop harassment, and accountability mechanisms for perpetrators, were positively discussed in this wider cultural and community context. Some workers said that they were taking what they learned from their training back home and into the community. For example, a participant in a worker focus group in Nicaragua relayed, “the training replicas I have taken home to my family. Even though it is focused on the work environment, we can take this outside the factory. I have tried to replicate this information at home and in my community. Yes, I think [sexual harassment] is most common in the village and in the community. We try to show others how to do things correctly.”

Processes for building trust and confidence in the system were noted as critical for the success of sexual harassment interventions. From Vietnam is was observed that, “the workers will open up only when they

feel safe. Factories should be a true safe house like home where they can share everything." In Nicaragua, one factory put into place an "obligation to report" policy for management, and in other Nicaraguan factories respondents said that the fact that HR takes complaints seriously is an important factor in individuals' willingness to report. "If you feel supported you will not stay quiet," one respondent observed. Simple structural supports, including, in Nicaragua for example, putting in place a supervisor to whom reports can be made during night shifts rather than having to wait until the day shift to report incidents during overnight work, had a significant impact both in perception of support and reporting practice.

In Vietnam several interview participants said that it remains very difficult to share and discuss sexual harassment, and that even where resources and options are available to report they are not used because they do not feel that they have support from management. One female factory manager observed that there are extremely limited resources for victims of sexual harassment or domestic violence in Vietnam generally, though agencies and organizations in Vietnam supporting women and children suffering from violence and sexual abuse do exist. The 2021 directory of these organizations, including addresses and published by MOLISA, UN Women and AusAID, is introduced to participants taking the BWV advanced sexual harassment prevention training.

In Indonesia, reporting was not only an issue for workers reporting to management, but reports coming from managers to those above them. One manager said that they did not feel comfortable reporting sexual harassment to upper management for fear of losing their job, fear of losing contracts from buyers who would not want to source from a factory where there was sexual harassment, or both. "If I report, contracts can get cancelled," it was explained. "Buyers are not going to like the fact that there is sexual harassment in the factory. Also, there is taboo around sexual harassment. … For sure, buyer will cancel the contract. After the training I feel slightly more confident. However, I will not report directly but use the complaint box." The situation in Jordan sums up well the challenges faced at the structural support level: collectively, workers observed that management responses to reported harassment were better after the managers had received training, while managers said they would be better equipped to respond if they had more support from upper management.

4.6 Grievance and resolution procedures

Grievance and resolution procedures across the four factories is the area in which there was the widest spectrum of effectiveness, from Nicaragua, with well-established and clear procedures, to Vietnam, where there are significant deficiencies. In Nicaragua, grievance procedures across the factories encompassed a common process: a complaint is made and then documented, an investigation takes place where those involved and their immediate supervisor are consulted and other evidence is gathered as needed, and the results then go to management for a final decision (which perpetrators have the right to appeal). As this process plays out, victims can change areas of work and a complainant's identity is kept hidden from the accused individual.

Several respondents said that they felt safer reporting because there was transparency in the process, and they provided examples of resolved cases to show that the established grievance and resolution procedures work. Interview participants said that most cases were usually resolved in a few days, after speaking to the victim and perpetrator, letting the perpetrator know that a certain behaviour is not allowed, and outlining the consequences (e.g., dismissal, being banned from the factory) if it is repeated. Establishing a positive track record of action, by maintaining consistent processes and procedures, was an important part of building trust and an effective system.

In contrast, in Vietnam grievance and referral services for victims are at best opaque. Even when referral services are available, workers would not necessarily know about them until they attend a training but, as

discussed above, workers are often not trained or trained through a variety of programs that, while they may overlap in content, are not consistent or necessarily factory-specific. Interview respondents flagged the PICC or the union as the best options for reporting and seeking redress (or the standard 'tell your supervisor and they will work it up'), but there are seemingly no referral services for victims at the factory-level or in the community. Though factory management across countries will understandably be focused on production and contracts with buyers, there were varying levels of prioritization across countries with respect to sexual harassment training. In Vietnam, based on the information we were able to gather, this level was lowest. There did not appear to be any meaningful or victim-centred approach to grievance and resolution procedures.

Between these two poles are systems in Indonesia and Jordan. In Indonesia, interview respondents said that training gave them a clearer sense of how and to whom one could report sexual harassment cases but they had less clarity on next steps. Manager responses to what actually happens with a complaint also varied on the specifics, and it was observed that something currently missing is what one manager called a "standard intervention" model, though managers' responses to questions about how a complaint would be handled generally followed the complaint-investigation-sanction pattern seen in Nicaragua. Following receipt of a complaint, some managers said that if they witnessed the incident, they would respond with an intervention and reprimand immediately. In the absence of direct knowledge, they would encourage the victim to file a formal complaint with HR or factory sexual harassment committee (e.g., POSH, RESPECT, etc.) representatives. Information would then be gathered from the victim, perpetrator, and any witnesses, and with proof of the incident established, some sort of reprimand would be issued, increasing in severity until the perpetrator was fired.

The large number of migrant workers in Jordan's factories makes grievance and reporting procedures in Jordan more complex. Interview respondents knew well that the grievance procedure for cases of sexual harassment started with a report to a manager or HR representative and, as BWJ staff observed, as there are more migrant workers in the factories, there are more compliance officers assigned to their respective lines that speak their language. Yet even in cases where workers want to self-report or are willing to intervene, interviews reveal that incidents of sexual harassment are not always reported to the appropriate person or through the correct channel. Workers often said they were most comfortable talking to other workers, where they can "go and speak to someone under such circumstances at least to a friend. Workers can complain and there is no pressure from anyone like Supervisor," a worker in Jordan explained—especially in cases where a manager is the offending party, where an individual is in the position of having to report to a manager of the opposite gender (e.g., men to a female manager, or women to a male manager), or where managers downplay instances of sexual harassment reported to them.

While it was acknowledged that it is important that victims of harassment are at least talking to someone, this circumscribes the degree to which interventions can be made through formal processes and mechanisms. So, while a reporting and grievance mechanism is in place on paper, operationalizing a victim-centred, confidential reporting and grievance process is still an ongoing challenge. When in-house grievance procedures are not responsive, victims often turn to other stakeholders for redress, namely unions, a worker centre, or even the police. The complex relationships between stakeholders however, can complicate and even exacerbate problems for individuals trying to navigate sexual harassment reporting and grievance processes. On the surface, this reporting to a union and/or worker centre seems like a very good option, but just because workers are going to these external organizations, it does not necessarily translate to the resolution of a complaint.

5. Conclusions

This comparative study allows for broad themes to be drawn from the impacts of and experiences with Better Work's sexual harassment interventions and trainings in multiple country settings, and, reflecting the study's goals, to 1) assess impacts on raising awareness and mitigating instances of sexual harassment at the factory level, and 2) identify strengths and areas of improvement in existing processes and practices to better effect change at the individual factory level and across Better Work workplaces.

5.1 Impact of training modalities

Across the country settings there have been a variety of outcomes some of which can be ascribed to differences in training modalities and practices. One of the most important factors in successful sexual harassment prevention training is the frequency with which the trainings are held. This is true in two ways: 1) more frequent trainings mean that a larger proportion of any given factory have access to and receive training, which is particularly important in the garment sector where employee turnover is high; and 2) more frequent trainings provide an opportunity for follow-up trainings to reinforce and expand information shared during an initial training session. Here, Nicaragua's POSH program is an example of a successful model. All workers in the factories included in this study have received at least one round of training—with some having participated in multiple rounds—and study participants reflected a nuanced understanding of gender equality that extends beyond a male-female gender binary and hetero-normative conventions, and of the power dynamics underlying sexual harassment. In country settings where trainings happen infrequently due to the prioritization of production and other factors, or are bundled as part of other work-place trainings rather than dedicated and stand-alone sessions, the impacts on understanding across all four issue areas considered in this study are not as robust.

The mode of content delivery—whether in-person or virtual—is also consequential to the impacts of sexual harassment trainings. There was general consensus across all the country settings that in-person trainings were more effective than virtual ones due in large part to the group interactions that are possible when participants are in a room together (e.g., role playing exercises, group drawing activities, etc.). Yet, the staff capacity required for fully in-person delivery of both TOT and more general sexual harassment training content is far beyond the current resources available, especially at the frequency with which trainings would ideally be delivered for the broadest and most consistent reach, delivery of training in multiple languages as is required in Jordan, and given the sheer numbers of workers who need to be trained in country settings like Vietnam. Here then virtual trainings could be leveraged as part of a hybrid-model of training delivery, with TOT and factory-level initial trainings taking place in person with follow-up sessions taking place in a virtual setting and/or with modules specifically designed for virtual delivery (vs. trying to simply adapt in-person activities to the virtual space), utilizing virtual reality technology, and other virtual content-delivery strategies.

Local stakeholder engagement and empowerment of trainers at the factory-level is a third critical element for successful training implementation and outcomes. Here, local committees—e.g., POSH committees in Nicaragua, RESPECT committees in Indonesia—play a key role not only in the transfer of information within the factories but and sometimes extending to the broader community through activities such as formulating factory-level action plans, organizing awareness-raising campaigns in the community, and broadening the reach of information transfer through the creation of social media collateral. These factory-level interlocutors also help to normalize a culture that supports sexual harassment awareness and prevention within factories, while oftentimes serving as a first point of contact for a complainant and a resource and support mechanism through a grievance process. Local stakeholders likewise help to

expand capacity, especially in country settings like Jordan where delivery of training needs to take place in multiple languages and in ways that are culturally sensitive to a multinational workforce.

5.2 Country-specific observations

5.2.1 Jordan

There are complex gender dynamics due to the presence of large numbers of workers with different nationalities and related, different perceptions around values due to employees' different cultural backgrounds and religions. Through trainings employees are gradually acquiring a common understanding of what is "right" and "wrong" when it comes to interacting with different genders. Study participants reported (as in Indonesia as well) that there is gender equality at work, but that gender awareness/ inclusiveness is in the developmental stage.

The languages that workers speak, and the norms that they follow interacting with other genders, play a role in the effectiveness of training reception. For example, Jordanian females do not talk about sexuality and Indian males are more comfortable discussing sexual harassment when there is a male trainer present. Hence, migrant workers have different levels of understanding about sexual harassment, and may be afraid to report issues since they are in a foreign country. Although some factories have line supervisors and compliance officers that speak the respective language of their employees, workers still feel the most comfort speaking with their "friends". This may be due to a lack of a streamlined process for reporting, especially in the context of workers utilizing the union and Worker Centre as reporting resources.

Despite all these challenges, strategic interventions by BWJ have produced better results through the TOT modality of training delivery, as well as language-based training, and the openness from the leadership and management to act on issues that are reported and accommodating trainings despite production targets.

5.2.2 Indonesia

Interviews reveal a difference in the level of understanding or "seriousness," and more patriarchal attitudes in the factories as one moves from factories closer to Jakarta out to those in smaller urban areas drawing workers from country-side towns. The most robust implementation of sexual harassment policies was where there are women leaders and trainers on the ground, and where factory management plays a key role in supporting them. There remains however a fear of losing contracts when sexual harassment issues are reported, and sometimes managers are afraid to take actions fearing the "local" threats from men. Leadership support from the foreign owners has the potential to bring drastic changes.

But at the factory-level, men are becoming careful and women have become confident through training. Opportunities are being utilized by BWI to effectively intervene at the factory level through collaborations and trainings.

5.2.3 Vietnam

Sexual harassment interventions in Vietnam are taking place in a patriarchal culture, shaped by a fundamental lack of acknowledgement of sexual harassment, and a "culture of silence" where women are largely afraid to report. This environment highlights the need for widespread trainings and effective implementation of training programming. For young migrant women workers from rural areas, their employment status is a significant concern, especially after COVID-related layoffs. As a result, sexual

harassment is likely going unreported. Likewise, a lack of clarity among workers as to where to go if there is an issue creates a barrier to reporting, although there are unions and PICCs.

However, wherever there are strong women leaders there have been positive changes. For example, in one factory with a female leader who is very committed to training, she has been able to implement training and convince the Chairman to give buy-in for those efforts.

5.2.4 Nicaragua

In Nicaragua BWN interventions have led to better understanding and reporting, better gender awareness and an expanded sense of equality. Workers are expressing more confidence across critical markers of success, including awareness, identification, reporting, and resolution. Management buy-in and responsiveness to feedback has shown itself an important factor as well. In the case, for example, of workers who said a barrier to reporting was not having anyone to report to during the nightshift, a supervisor was assigned to that shift to facilitate reporting and thereby responsiveness.

5.3 Multi-country observations

A key finding is that improvements have been made both in the levels of recognition of sexual harassment, including what behaviours and actions it encompasses, and in attempts to curb it in the factories. The greatest willingness to acknowledge that sexual harassment is an issue was found in Nicaragua, where awareness about gender equality encompasses LGBTQ+ individuals. This change has come with better awareness through training on definitions of sexual harassment, reporting mechanisms, and known consequences. Likewise, there is a spectrum of understanding around what constitutes sexual harassment, the difference between sexual harassment and other types of harassing behaviours, and what constitutes a gender-inclusive work environment.

Awareness and understanding have developed significantly, with respondents being able to enumerate specific behaviours that constitute sexual harassment, and, in some instances (e.g., Nicaragua), how these involve consent and power dynamics. Although interviews reveal that there remains much work to be done to change attitudes and practices that circumscribe gender equality in practice, interviews show an increased awareness of what a gender-inclusive work environment *should* look like, where hiring and promotion practices are currently falling short, and an expanded understanding of gender that encompasses sexual preference and a spectrum of gender identity.

In general, the respondents have demonstrated an increased awareness about the reporting and grievance mechanisms in all factories. However, it didn't always seem to translate to reporting in their own factories. The study also revealed that there is no universal mechanism of reporting and investigation across the four countries. While individuals' mentioning of different options to deal with sexual harassment is a positive indication of awareness and response, it also shows inconsistency in the processes which in turn will not always lead to a favourable outcome for the victims. A separate module in the training around the existing sexual harassment policies, with reporting mechanisms clearly identified should provide better transparency to the workers about the options that they may have. Some statistics around the sexual harassment incidents, cases being investigated, and the potential outcomes of those investigations could be beneficial. The use of scenario-based examples in the training indicating the consequences of bad behaviour can make the perpetrators of sexual harassment vigilant and can enhance the confidence of victims to report.

A second key finding is that the social and cultural lens through which the trainings are delivered and received significantly impacts their efficacy. Interview respondents seemed to have a firmer grasp of different kinds

of harassing behaviours, but barriers remain at various steps in the recognition, reporting, and response mechanisms. This is true for reasons ranging from pushback on the Western conceptualization and definition of sexual harassment as encompassing a range of behaviours and patriarchal social practices, to cultural norms that make learning, sharing, and reporting in mixed-gender environments a challenge and that function to shame and stigmatize victims of harassment. Here, having more female trainers and supervisors reflecting the ratio of female to male workers could help with information delivery and reporting by female workers. Collectively, these cultural barriers contribute to and feed into a disconnect between recognizing what behaviours constitute sexual harassment, naming this behaviour as sexual harassment, and then reporting and response.

A third key finding is that while awareness of sexual harassment appears to have significantly increased across all countries—even in countries like Vietnam and Jordan where it is not necessarily named as such—there remains significant work to be done in facilitating trust in the systems of reporting and accountability. While the study shows a level of psychological safety acquired through training that has led to reporting of sexual harassment, there are still barriers. Hesitancy to report based on concerns of confidentiality, retaliation, structural barriers to reporting (e.g., lack of accessibility to management for nightshift workers), and/or lack of knowledge of the complaint procedure and grievance mechanisms, work against putting knowledge learned in training into practice and shifting workplace norms in ways that protect victims and work to eliminate sexual harassment.

Here, upper management buy-in is critical both for standard-setting from the top, putting in place and regularizing functioning processes for reporting and resolution, and in facilitating broad buy-in and trust in those complaint, grievance, and accountability procedures. A sense of safety provided by the leadership team, particularly women leaders, leads to better reporting. Leadership's openness to training, maintaining an open-door policy, providing quick action on reported cases, and providing repeated training during work hours, can help overcome reporting trepidations of victims and witnesses. A victim centred approach, likewise, is also needed to help overcome potential or actual cultural stigma imposed on women who report. That is, an approach that encourages and supports reporting, maintains confidentiality, and places resolution for the victim and accountability for perpetrators at the centre of complaint, grievance, and accountability processes and procedures.

A fourth finding of the study is that building capacity will be critical to the success of Better Work's sexual harassment mitigation efforts. Interview participants across all four countries expressed that they want trainings to be expanded to more workers, that managers want trainings expanded to upper corporate management, and that workers want reinforcement of their training through refresher modules. Increased training for upper management, corporate practices that prioritize and develop infrastructure within workplaces (e.g., televisions in the canteens for showing videos during lunch, dedicated meeting spaces for workers to convene for trainings and meet for continued discussions) and upper management's support for a climate of openness are key elements to facilitating change through top-down standard setting.

Some of the capacity deficits are due to multiple, sometimes competing training requirements and expectations, and the realities of production schedules that make management less willing to schedule trainings and refresher sessions during the course of a normal workday. Here, it will be important to effectively communicate how and why addressing sexual harassment can enhance productivity by, among other things, creating a better work environment and thereby limiting worker turnover, and to create factory norms where reporting is encouraged. Indeed, workers' and managers' fear of management retaliation or buyer flight is counterproductive to creating the kinds of respectful workplaces that those same buyers claim to want and that ultimately enhance production.

A final key finding is that in order for these training interventions to take hold, people need to be on the same general page. In Jordan, for example, there is a significant disconnect around recognition of sexual harassment because of different nationalities, languages, and cultures at play. This creates challenges—not insurmountable, but challenges nonetheless—for the training to have its intended effects. This is compared to Indonesia where there is broad consensus across stakeholders, both men and women, that sexual harassment is a problem that needs concerted action to keep in check. Because there is variation in the degree to which people embrace this consensus, even when there are good intentions around sexual harassment interventions, the cultural lenses through which they are filtered can limit their impacts. This is true when working with multiple cultures and languages, and dependent on a number of factors including where a given country or even factory lands on the patriarchal-gender equality spectrum, the approach to leadership and knowledge dissemination around this issue, and the persistence of a culture of silence around sexual harassment.

While no intervention can sweep in and change the cultural norms of a nation to move the needle on sexual harassment mitigation and gender equality, one can address issues at the workplace level to build buy-in for creating safer and more respectful workplaces. With this as a starting point, then, the most useful approach for assessing sexual harassment interventions is developing an understanding of what is going on at any given workplace in terms of giving people the information they need to be able to recognize issues and say something about them if they choose to do so. There is much to be done to effectively tackle sexual harassment and gender inequality in the workplace, but it is important to remember that important progress has been made and an underlying and critical shift—facilitated and supported by Better Work sexual harassment training programs—has already started with basic recognition of sexual harassment as a workplace issue calling for systemic intervention. In the words of one worker in Nicaragua, “great strides” have been made.

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