



Gender and Care Responsibilities:

Examining the differences for garment workers in Better Factories Cambodia

RESEARCH
BRIEF

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Women make up the majority of garment sector workers worldwide but continue to carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid work within the home, including unpaid care and expenditures for children and other dependents. This “double burden” of paid and unpaid work can be compounded by excessive overtime, low wages, and harassment on the factory floor, among other labour rights violations, with significant negative consequences for life quality and well-being. In 2018, Better Factories Cambodia (BFC), a joint ILO-IFC programme seeking to improve working conditions and boost competitiveness of the garment industry, completed an independent study assessing the programme’s impacts on working conditions, worker well-being, and factory productivity. This brief builds on data collected during this evaluation, to present gender differences in contracts, training and promotions, overtime, wages, harassment and violence at work, occupational safety and health indicators, and life and job satisfaction. It does so by exploring differences between women and men, as well as between different groups of women, such as women with and without children, and women with and without infants. Marked differences exist in the experiences of male and female workers along different stages in the life cycle. Key findings include:

Lower-educated women with children are less likely to have an employment contract, to receive training on worker rights and new skills, or to be promoted.

Overall, about 39 per cent of workers have a short-term contract of three months or less and 38 per cent have not received any on-the-job training, pointing to the need to strengthen job security and worker skills. Taken together, these findings suggest that to best promote an inclusive workplace, particular attention should be given to the needs of workers with lower education and with caregiving duties.

The majority of workers are concerned about low wages and overtime. While women struggle in combining overtime demands in the factory with household pressures, men are more likely than women to report that they cannot refuse overtime for fear of being terminated.

Harassment and violence at work are pervasive, and differences in voicing exist between women and men. In general, fewer women than men appear to voice concerns about sexual harassment. Among women, lower-educated women with infants are most likely to report sexual harassment. Additionally, less than 45 per cent of workers believe that the reporting system for sexual harassment in their factory is adequate. These findings suggest the need to prioritize trainings to combat sexual harassment, to establish grievance reporting procedures, and to improve voice and representation generally.

Men are more likely to report safety and health concerns such as coughing, irritations and backache, while women report lower overall well-being. Working toward improving occupational safety and health and workers' job and life satisfaction, with a greater focus on measures to address their determinants, remains a key area for future action.

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1. Introduction

The garment and footwear industry in Cambodia has created employment for over one million workers, and women make up about 80 per cent of the employed workforce.¹ On average, workers in the industry are young, predominantly women and rural-urban migrants.²

The 1997 Labour Law provides for maternity leave of 90 days on half pay and benefits. Yet compliance remains limited, as employers can often exploit a loophole of short-term contracts that do not include benefits.³ The law also requires that employers provide new mothers with one-hour breastfeeding breaks, nursing rooms and day-care centres or allowances.

As the workforce is predominantly women under 30 years of age, the absence of adequate and affordable childcare in Cambodia's garment and footwear industry can be a significant obstacle for women returning to work after pregnancy. Workforce composition has important policy implications since workers at different stages in the life cycle have different needs in terms of social protection and workplace policy, including childcare and age-related pensions. ILO research finds that women, compared to men, devote 4.1 times more time to unpaid work on average in the Asia and Pacific region.⁴ Women with children under the age of six bear the highest "employment penalty," with only about 47 per cent in employment.⁵ Further, having children under the age of six also reduces the hours worked, which the research found to be an hour of paid work per week for women and 18 minutes per week for men.⁶ In Cambodia, 86 per cent of women versus 54 per cent of men perform unpaid care work.⁷

This brief analyzes a survey of workers in garment sector factories participating in BFC to test for any systematic differences in workplace outcomes for women with children and infants. Survey data collection was conducted between 2015 and 2018 in 57 Cambodian apparel factories as part of a broader impact assessment of the programme.⁸ All factories were new entrants within their first three years of enrolling in BFC. The ILO collaborated with external researchers to design worker and manager surveys

BOX 1. LEGAL PROVISION FOR PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY LEAVE IN CAMBODIA

- An employer may not terminate an employee: because she is pregnant, while she is on maternity leave, immediately before taking maternity leave.
- Pregnant women or women who have given birth or had a miscarriage within the last two months shall not move objects over five kilograms.

Constitution Art 46, Labour Law Arts 182-183, Prakas 124/01

- Women are entitled to 90 days (3 months) maternity leave.
- An employer may not terminate an employee: because she is pregnant, while she is on maternity leave, immediately before taking maternity leave.
- Employers must pay employees who have at least one-year work seniority half their wages and benefits for the duration of the maternity leave. Employers should calculate the payment on the basis of the employee's average pay during the 12 months prior to departing on maternity leave.
- During the first two months after returning from maternity leave employees may only be required to perform light work.

Constitution Art 46, Labour Law Arts 182-183, AC Awards 24/03, 49/04, 66/06, 80/10

to ask about a range of working conditions, factory operations, and life at home. Local research partners conducted data collection independent from BFC factory visits. Two rounds of data collection were conducted, and when possible, the same individuals were surveyed in both time periods. The sample of the study covers about 12 per cent of BFC factories. The present analysis will inform existing understanding of workplace policies aiming at retaining and reintegrating women workers after pregnancy, as well as creating more equal workplaces for everyone.

2. GENDER, CHILDCARE AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Findings shed light on the existence of marked differences in the experiences of male and female workers in factories participating in the BFC programme. The analysis covers four broad themes: (i) contracts and workplace treatment, including promotions and access to training; (ii) overtime and wages; (iii) harassment and violence at work; and (iv) health and well-being. When a significant difference in outcomes is observed, results are further disaggregated by childcare responsibilities and educational sub-groups, namely “low education,” (education up to primary school), and “high education,” (secondary and higher). The sample average is reported alone when no statistically significant difference is detected among the groups. The methodology and data are detailed in the Annex.

CONTRACTS AND WORKPLACE TREATMENT

As shown in Figure 1, short-term contracts of three months or less are the most common contract type reported by workers (39 per cent), with no statistically significant difference by gender. About 11 per cent of respondents reported being employed without a contract. This is true particularly for women with children in the low education sub-group, for whom the chances of not having a contract are significantly higher than the other women (13 per cent of women with children and with education up to primary school, relative to 7 per cent of highly educated women).

There are no statistically significant differences in training and promotion opportunities between male and female workers, but some gaps exist among women with different educational levels. Women with greater childcare responsibilities, and particularly those with education only up to primary school, are less likely to receive training and promotions than highly educated women, as seen in figure 2 and 3 respectively. About 16 per cent of women in this sub-group were trained on worker rights and 17 per cent on new skills, while a large minority has not received any trainings. The corresponding share among women with higher education is 23 and 24 per cent for worker rights and new skills, while 28 per cent did not receive any trainings. Further, about 34 per cent of highly educated women were promoted at least once in the past year, compared to 25 per cent for female workers with education up to primary school.

FIGURE 1. CONTRACTS

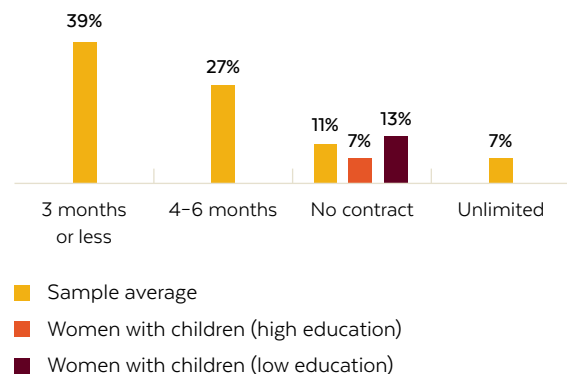
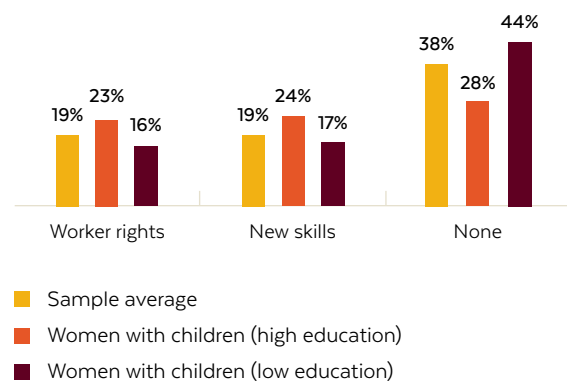


FIGURE 2. TRAINING



OVERTIME AND WAGES

Over 80 per cent of workers expressed in survey responses some degree of concern about low wages. A significant difference is observed between highly educated women with children versus other women (87 per cent expressing wage concerns versus 78 per cent), as seen in Figure 4.

On average, men show higher concerns about overtime and are more likely to fear being terminated if they refuse overtime. Specifically, over 50 per cent of men surveyed were concerned about overtime, and about 32 per cent believe they would be terminated if they refuse to work beyond the legal limit, compared to 40 and 20 per cent among women. Men were also more likely to report that they work on Sundays than women. This reflects the common observation that men are more likely than women to be employed in positions at end-of-production processes, such as finishing or packing, which periodically face greater pressure to make shipping deadlines.

Baseline data show there is no significant difference on overtime concerns between women with and without children or infants. However, the endline data shows that women with children worked fewer Sundays relative to women without children. This difference is also statistically significant when comparing women with and without children within the low education group, possibly suggesting that demands on women's time on the factory-floor reduced in BFC factories throughout the study period.

HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE AT WORK

As shown in Figure 6, a large majority of workers are concerned about insulting language used at work, with no significant difference by gender. Nevertheless, some differences are observed in how women and men experience or acknowledge harassment in the workplace. Women are more likely to experience material thrown at them (7 per cent among women, relative to 2 per cent of men). Simultaneously, men reported seeing or getting warning letters more commonly than women. Fewer women than men, however, appear to voice their concerns about sexual

FIGURE 3. PROMOTIONS

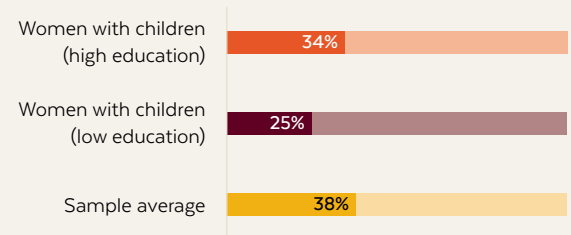


FIGURE 4. LOW WAGE CONCERNS

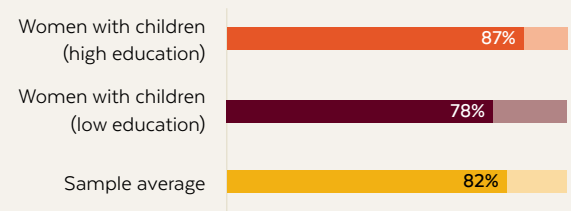


FIGURE 5. OVERTIME

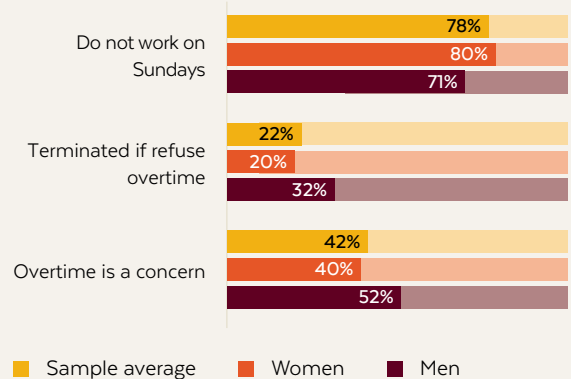


FIGURE 6. SEEN OR EXPERIENCED

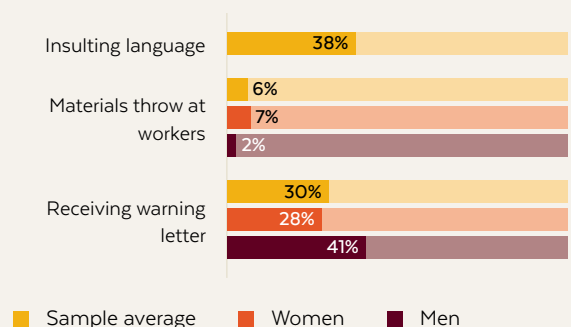


FIGURE 7. VOICING OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT CONCERNS

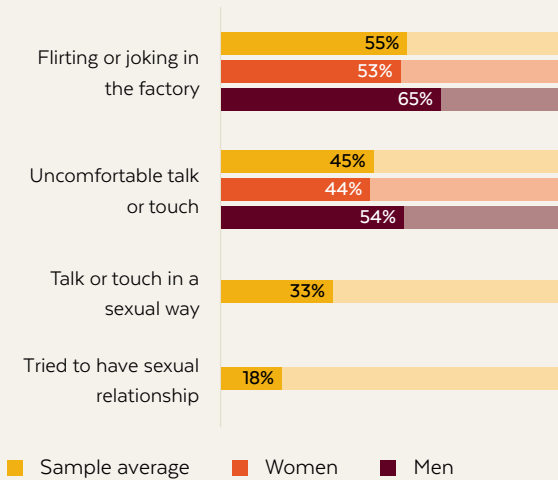


FIGURE 8. FLIRTING OR JOKING IN THE FACTORY

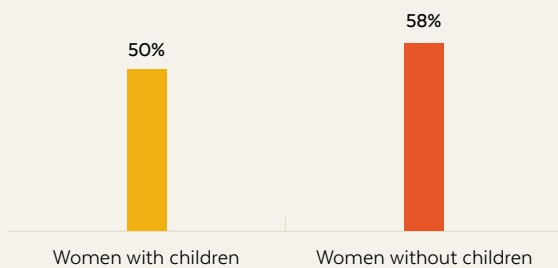
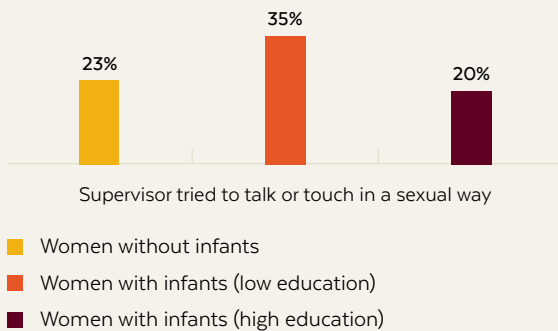


FIGURE 9. SUPERVISOR TRIED TO TALK OR TOUCH IN A SEXUAL WAY



harassment. When asked if there was any flirting or joking in the factory that made workers uncomfortable, 53 per cent of women reported feeling uneasy compared to 65 per cent of men. This suggests that men have greater propensity to speak up or to recognize that these issues are a concern in the factory. Further, only 44 per cent of workers believe that an adequate reporting system for sexual harassment exists in the factory, with no statistically significant difference by gender, suggesting the need to strengthen grievance procedures and anti-harassment training. Interventions designed to improve women's voice and representation could provide an entry point for gender-responsive dialogue to reinforce these efforts.

Findings for different sub-groups of women demonstrate that women without children are more likely to experience flirting or uncomfortable joking than other women (58 vs 50 per cent). In addition, women with infants, specifically in the lower education sub-group, are more likely to be exposed to sexual harassment from their manager or direct supervisor relative to highly educated women. When asked about managers or supervisors talking to or touching workers in a sexual way, 35 per cent of women with infants and education up to primary school reported some level of concern, relative to 20 per cent of women in the higher education sub-group. The baseline analysis also found statistically significant differences in how women with and without dependents experienced verbal abuse and harassment in the workplace. These findings corroborate the dynamic whereby young women without children are more likely to be subject to sexual harassment due to stereotyping and gendered beliefs that intersect with age and stage on the life cycle.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Survey responses reveal that excessive heat and severe thirst are among workers' most significant health concerns, reported by 55 and 32 per cent of workers respectively. In general, men tend to report occupational health and safety concerns more frequently than women. Specifically, they are more likely than women to feel severe backache, irritation of the eyes, nose or skin and cough relative to the sample average. This supports the global trend that more men are employed in high-risk operations in the garment sector. They are also significantly less likely than women to receive training at their factory on chemical handling and safe machine operations.

As in the baseline analysis, women with and without children reported somewhat similar outcomes in the endline survey. The exception to differences in health outcomes is reports of severe hunger, where women with infants are more likely to report feeling often uncomfortably hungry or too hungry to sleep at night when compared to other women (23 per cent, as seen in Figure 13). This difference, however, is not statistically significant, likely due to the relatively small sample size.

The baseline analysis found significant difference between women with and without children for cases of fainting as well as concerns about excessive heat. The baseline results also show that women without children were more concerned about being exposed to excessive heat whereas women with children were more likely to report fainting. This pattern was not observed in the endline data.

With respect to broader indicators of well-being, men report higher satisfaction than women. About 41 per cent of women report that they are very satisfied with their job overall, compared about half of men. Women are also less likely to report that they are very satisfied with their life, while differences among sub-groups of women are not observed.

FIGURE 10. TOP HEALTH CONCERNS REPORTED BY WORKERS

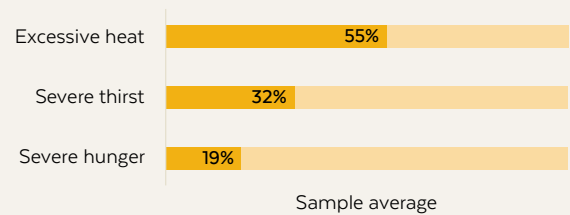


FIGURE 11. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN HEALTH CONCERNS

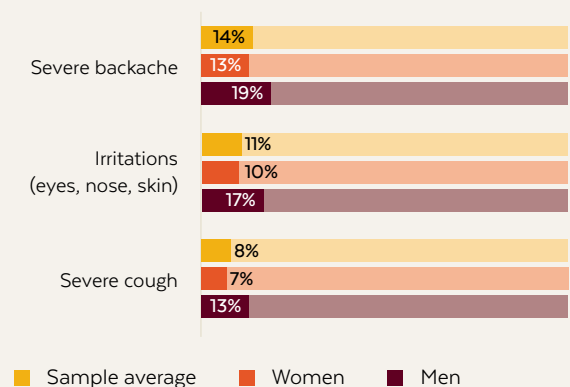


FIGURE 12. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN FACTORY TRAININGS

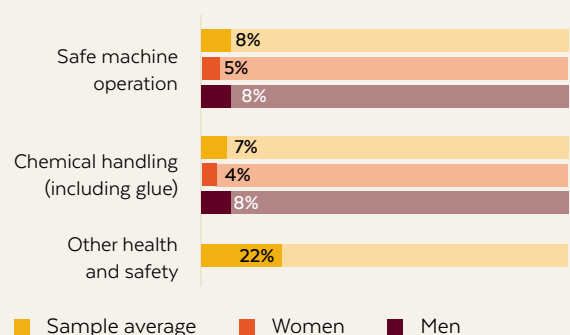


FIGURE 13. SEVERE HUNGER AMONG WOMEN WITH INFANTS

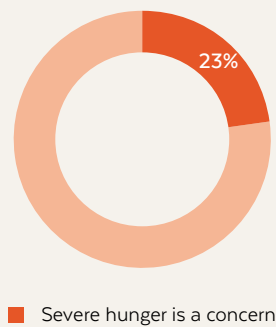
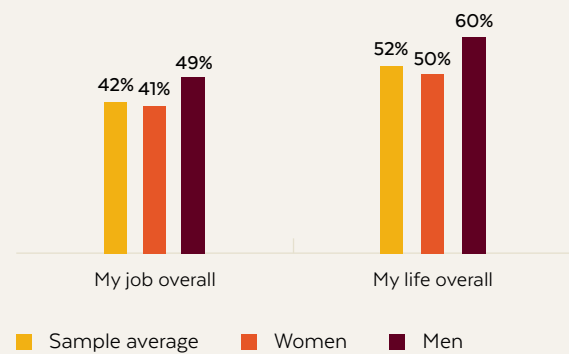


FIGURE 14. WELL-BEING



3. CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The analysis in this brief attempts to deepen the understanding of structural differences in the experiences of women with different care responsibilities. While doing so, the analysis also reinforces understanding of different lived experiences between women and men in the garment industry, as well as how education levels may affect these interactions. It is important to note that several of the findings simply provided support to existing knowledge or anecdotal evidence. The analysis has important implications for both programmatic decisions and future research. Analysis of survey responses point to the need to strengthen the provision of employment contracts, specifically to women with children with lower education levels, and to prioritize their training on worker rights. Given

persistent concerns regarding low wages levels and levels of overtime, industry stakeholders should intensify efforts to address workers' concerns about low wages, as well as concerns about excessive overtime among male workers. Additionally, there is clear work to do to eliminate harassment and discrimination at work. This can be addressed by providing training and establishing grievance systems, taking into account the diversity of workers' circumstances and experiences. Finally, working toward improving occupational safety and health and workers' job and life satisfaction, with a greater focus on measures to address their determinants, remains a key area for future action.

ANNEX

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The averages for survey questions under each group and subgroups are compared and tested for statistical significance.⁹ This includes a simple t-test to observe any systematic differences between the groups. The t-tests were performed using Stata's ttest command with the option unequal in order to account for differences in variances between the groups (Fontana and Silberman, 2013).¹⁰

The t-test determines whether the difference in average response given by two different groups is statistically different from the null hypothesis (that is, 0). The test can be expressed as follows:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_a - \bar{X}_b}{\sqrt{\frac{S_a^2}{n_a} + \frac{S_b^2}{n_b}}}$$

Here, \bar{X}_a is the average response across group A and \bar{X}_b is the average response across group B. The null hypothesis is rejected at the 95% confidence interval if the t-statistic is above a critical value. The null hypothesis is rejected when there is a statistically significant difference between the average between the two groups.

When no significant difference in average is detected between the sample groups, estimates for the overall group of respondents are presented. Statistically significant results (that is, p-value<0.05) are presented in disaggregated form and discussed in the narrative.

Better Work collects data from workers to assess impact made on working conditions and broader development outcomes in its participating factories. In Cambodia, baseline and endline data was collected from workers, supervisors and managers across 57 factories. Data for this brief draw from a total of 1,421 surveys of workers completed at endline in 2018. Table 1 presents the worker composition for this sample.

TABLE 1. SUMMARY STATISTICS

	PER CENT OF RESPONDENTS (N=1,421)
Women	81%
Women with children	40%
Women with infants	22%
Women with children and education up to primary school	31%
Women with children and secondary school or higher	16%
Women with infants and education up to primary school	18%
Women with infants and secondary school or higher	9%

ENDNOTES

- 1 ILO. (2018). Cambodia Garment and Footwear Sector Bulletin, “Living conditions of garment and footwear sector workers in Cambodia.” Issue 8, December.
- 2 ADB. (2015). *Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment in Cambodia*. Manila, Philippines.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 ILO. (2018). *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. International Labour Organization. Geneva.
- 5 ILO. (2018) Cambodia Garment and Footwear Sector Bulletin, “Living conditions of garment and footwear sector workers in Cambodia.” Issue 8, December.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 ILO. (2018). *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*. International Labour Organization. Geneva.
- 8 For a summary of the BFC impact assessment, see: “Harnessing Compliance to Improve Well-being and Productivity: The Impact of Better Factories Cambodia” Better Work Research Brief, August 2020
- 9 That is, with a p-value less than 0.05.
- 10 Fontana, M., and Silberman, A. (2013) “Analysing Better Work Data from a Gender Perspective: A Preliminary Exploration of Worker Surveys with a Focus on Vietnam”. Better Work Discussion Paper Series No.13.

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