



## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH PROBLEMS OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN GARMENT INDUSTRY: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN BANGALORE CITY OF KARNATAKA

**Dr. Siddaraju V. G**

Associate Professor cum Deputy Director, Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy, University of Mysore, Mysore – 570 006

### ABSTRACT

The garment industry is highly labour intensive, providing employment to a large number of workers. The garment industry occupies a unique and important place in India. It is one of the earliest industries to come into existence in the country. The garment and textile industry is one of the oldest industries in India and has made significant contributions in the foreign exchange earnings and employment. It is one of the mainstays of the economy. In this paper, an attempt is made to study the occupational health problems faced by women employees of garment industries in Bangalore city of Karnataka. The overall analysis shows that the that the pertinent to health problems most of the workers accepted that occupation related diseases such as back pain while stitching, inhaling problem while collecting and dumping the garments, piles due to long hour of sitting at a place while stitching and knee pain for those standing for more than 13 hours, are high in the garment industries.

**KEYWORDS** : Women, Health, Occupational and Garment Industry

### INTRODUCTION

Women can play a decisive role in economic development of a country. Her contribution in economic development is great and is both in the visible and invisible form. If she is transformed from being primarily a vehicle of human reproduction, producing biological goods to a vehicle of social, cultural and economic good she can certainly create wonders. The Oxford American Dictionary defines "Empowerment" as "to make stronger and more confident especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights". It means to give women power and help them face the challenges of being women in the society. Our constitution in its fundamental rights has provisions for equality, social justice and protection of women. By empowerment women would be able to develop self-esteem and confidence realize their potential and enhance their collective bargaining power. Women empowerment can be viewed as a contribution of several inter related and mutually reinforcing competent.

Clothes are an epitome of a culture. People in different parts of the world have their own styles of dressing which symbolize their culture and status. The last two centuries have seen an upsurge in the use of manmade textiles like polyester, nylon, acrylic etc in almost every part of the world. The garment industry is highly labour intensive, providing employment to a large number of workers. The garment industry occupies a unique and important place in India. It is one of the earliest industries to come into existence in the country. It has been reported that major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bangalore have been the major centers of garment production. The garment industry caters to one of the most basic requirements of people and holds importance; maintaining the prolonged growth for improved quality of life. The sector has a unique position as a self-reliant industry, from the production of raw materials to the delivery of end products, with considerable value-addition at every stage of processing. Over the years, the sector has proved to be a major contributor to the nations' economy. Its immense potential for generation of employment opportunities in the industrial, agricultural, organized and decentralized sectors & rural and urban areas, especially for women and the disadvantaged is noteworthy.

The garment and textile industry is one of the oldest industries in India and has made significant contributions in the foreign exchange earnings and employment. It is one of the mainstays of the economy. In Karnataka, a majority of the garment manufacturing units are located in Bangalore City (The Hindu 2003; Roopa 2003). According to the figures provided by the Department of Labour, Government of Karnataka, Bangalore, the total number of garment manufacturing units located in Bangalore city was 858 in July 2006. The number of workers in these 858 units was 1,95,943; of them, 67.3 percent were women workers. Thus, female workers

constitute a major share of the workforce in the garment industry in the state capital. The second important area where garment manufacturing is prominent in the state is Bellary City. Here, mostly the manufacturing of jeans, takes place. The city is dubbed as jean capital of India. We do not have any studies on the total number of workers involved in the manufacturing of jeans in Bellary. The Labour Department located at the district headquarters stated that there are 5000 workers involved in the industry, but it has not collected any statistics. The industry sources, however, put the figure at 10,000. Most of these workers are stated to be women.

### OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In this paper, an attempt is made to study the occupational health problems faced by women employees in garment industries in Bangalore city of Karnataka. The study is based on primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected from 100 women workers of garment industry in Bangalore city of Karnataka. The secondary data were collected from books, journals, research reports, and other published materials etc. The data were analyzed by using the simple percentage and average wherever appropriate.

### Health and Safety

Health and Safety of the employees are important aspects of an organization's smooth and effective functioning. Good health and safety performance ensures an accident free industrial environment. Awareness of occupational health and safety (OH&S) still needs improvements in India considerably. Organizations have not yet started attaching the same importance to achieve high OH&S performance as they do to other key aspects of their business activities. This demands adoption of a structured approach for the identification of hazards. A properly documented OH&S management manual enables an organization to formulate policies and objectives, taking into account statutory requirements and information about significant hazards and risks, which the organization can control and over which it can be expected to have an influence, to protect its employees and others, whose health and safety may be affected by the activities of the organization.

Occupational health and safety is a cross-disciplinary area concerned with protecting the safety, health and welfare of people engaged in work or employment. The goal of all occupational health and safety programs is to foster a safe work environment. As a secondary effect, it may also protect co-workers, family members, employers, customers, suppliers, nearby communities, and other members of the public who are impacted by the workplace environment. It may involve interactions among many subject areas, including occupational medicine, occupational (or industrial) hygiene, public health, safety engineering, chemistry, health physics, ergonomics, toxicology, epidemiology, environmental health, industrial relations, public policy, industrial sociology,

medical sociology, social law, labour law and occupational health psychology.

**Reasons for Health and Safety**

The reasons for establishing good occupational health and safety standards are frequently identified as:--

**1. Moral:** An employee should not have to risk injury or death at work, nor should others associated with the work environment.

**2. Economic:** Poor occupational health and safety performance results in cost to the State (e.g. through costs for medical treatment and the loss of the "employability" of the worker). Employing organizations also sustain costs in the event of an accident at work (such as legal fees, fines, compensatory damages, investigation time, lost production, lost goodwill from the workforce, from customers and from the wider community). Loss of trained man power results in low productivity as the new employees would need training & further experience. Healthy worker would also protect the organization against accidents and disasters

**3. Legal:** Statutory requirements for health & safety may be reinforced by law. It is accepted that without the extra "encouragement" of potential regulatory action or litigation, many organizations would not act upon their implied moral obligations.

**Hazards, risks, outcomes**

"Hazard", "risk", and "outcome" are used in other fields to describe e.g. environmental damage, or damage to equipment. However, in the context of OSH, "harm" generally describes the direct or indirect degradation, temporary or permanent, of the physical, mental, or social well-being of workers. For example, repetitively carrying out manual handling of heavy objects is a hazard. The outcome could be a musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) as well as Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI) or acute back pain or joint injury. The risk can be expressed numerically (e.g. 0.5 or 50/50 chance of the outcome occurring during a year), in relative terms (e.g. "high/medium/low"), or with a multidimensional classification scheme (e.g. situation-specific risks).

**Various Occupational Hazards**

- **Physical Hazards:** Heat, Noise, Unsatisfactory Lighting and Vibrations
- **Chemical Hazards:** Chemical Exposures, Dust and Fumes/ Gases
- **Man Machine Relationship:** Fatigue/ Exhaustion and Injuries
- **Accidents:** Electrical Burns, Hot Water Burns, Gas Burns, Slipping the Floor, Cuts from Plants & Tools
- **Psychological:** Stress / Tension because of Work Place, Coping with routine work at Home

In this context, the following table depicts the Health problem of women workers of garment industry in the study area.

**Table – 1: Health problem of women workers**

Sl.No	Health problems	Frequency*	Percentage
1	No problem	4	4.0
2	Leg Pain	82	82.0
3	Asthma	54	54.0
4	Back pain	87	87.0
5	Upper back pain	47	47.0
6	Eye problem	38	38.0
7	Headache	51	51.0
8	Allergy	72	72.0

Source: Primary Data, \* Multiple responses

Table 1 shows that out of the total 100 respondents, majority of them i.e. more than 80 per cent says that they are suffering from leg pain and back pain. About 54 per cent of the people are suffering from asthma due to more pollution. While around 50 per cent of women workers are suffering from upper back pain and headache.

Only 4 per cent says that they are not suffering from any illness. Good health will bring good productivity in any business. The necessary steps to be taken in order to reduce the illness among the people especially asthma.

**CONCLUSION**

The overall analysis shows that the pertinent to health problems most of the workers accepted that occupation related diseases such as back pain while stitching, inhaling problem while collecting and dumping the garments, piles due to long hour of sitting at a place while stitching and knee pain for those standing for more than 13 hours, are high in the garment industries. Enabling the women garment workers in the process of developing their own collective organization, sensitising to put forth a strong fight against all kinds of health problems. Trade unions have been more successful in mobilizing the women workers and building their economic, social and political empowerment of them and thereby bringing them on to mainstream development of the economy.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

*This work is a part of ongoing research project entitled 'An Empirical Study on Empowerment of Women Employees in Garment Industries in Karnataka', supported by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Hyderabad. The author is very much thankful to ICSSR-SRC for the financial support to undertake this study.*

**REFERENCES**

1. Bharathi, D. (2007), Tears of the emerald isle: women garment workers in EPZ's of Sri Lanka. Committee for Asian Women.
2. Jayaweera, S. & Sanmugan, T. (2001), Women in garment and textile industries in Sri Lanka, Centre for Women's Research.
3. National Commission Report on Empowerment of Women; Chapter 5.6; Social Welfare: Page No's., 5,6,7,18,19.
4. Report of Directorate of Industries and Commerce, Govt. of Karnataka, Bangalore.
5. Report of Ministry of Textile, Annual Report 2008 and 2009, Govt. of India.
6. Report of National Commission on Labour, Government of India, 2002.
7. Verma, Samar (2001), WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing: Impact on India's Textiles and Clothing Industry, in G.K.Chadha (ed), WTO and the Indian Economy.