

Needs Assessment for Childcare Facilities in Bangalore's Garment Industry

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SUMMARY

Bangalore's vast export-oriented garment industry has nearly 1200 factory units belonging to countless companies. The bigger companies have at least ten units each, while the largest of the lot have as many as thirty units or more. An estimated 95% of these factories lack functional crèches. The Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights conducted a study in 2011 and 2012 to statistically assess childcare facilities in Bangalore's garment factories. Of the 118 factories that responded to the KSCPCR's notice, only 12 admitted to not providing a crèche, but for those running a crèche, there was only one each for up to 1000 and more workers. No employee availed of the crèche in 10 out of 106 factories, and only 5.7% of the worker population at the sample factories made use of the factory crèches, even though working parents made up 34% of the workforce in these factories. The study also found that only 6% of the reported number of employee's children benefited from the employer-provided crèches.¹

The Karnataka Rules for the Factories Act, 1948 states that all factories with thirty or more regularly employed women workers must have a crèche within the factory premises for children six years of age and under, unless exempted under certain special circumstances. However, in practice, companies often take advantage of a loophole in the law that makes it obligatory for factories to have a room or space assigned for a crèche, but not for workers to bring their children to it. As a result, a space is designated for a crèche on the factory premises, but an environment conducive to the presence and care of children is not created. There is no teacher, nurse or caretaker to man the crèche, and toys, milk, snacks and other provisions for young children are conspicuously missing. Workers prefer to leave their children with relatives or elsewhere instead of entrusting them to the dubious care of the factory crèche. Consequently the majority of factories have a crèche room, but with no children in attendance. The factory then cites the mothers' failure to bring their children to the crèche, thereby washing its hands off the responsibility of running a functional childcare facility. This highlights the need for companies to move beyond mere compliance.

For companies with functional crèches, there is much lacking in terms of quality and the standard of care provided. A particularly prominent gap is in the lack of well-trained teachers equipped to deal with the developmental needs of young children. The focus is entirely on physically caring for the child by keeping them clean and providing milk and snacks. No effort is put into their psychological and intellectual development at this crucial age, where 90% of brain development

1 Order on Childcare Provisions in Garment Industries, 23-02-2012, Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, KSCPCR: Garment Industries: 2011-12

takes place by the age of five.² The practice of engaging children in activities that build their social, emotional and cognitive capacity and develop their problem-solving and language skills is conspicuously missing. At most, children learn a few letters of the alphabet or some numbers. This study found that many crèches are equipped with toys, but these are not made available to the children for play as they fight over them. Instead they spend their days at the crèche sitting idly or sleeping. Workers at one factory were wary of taking their children to the crèche as they had heard rumours of sleeping pills being administered to the children to make them sleep.

Another concern is the tendency of factories to strictly exclude children below the age of one and above the age of three, in direct contravention of the law. Some factories do not allow more than one child from a family into the worksite crèche. We found that a factory without a crèche pays parents a meagre Rs 200 per month for childcare, which is not even sufficient to cover the costs of milk and snacks.

It is a serious matter that most factory Welfare Officers are oblivious of desirable standards for existing crèche facilities. These officers belong to the Human Resources Department, and are legally required to be appointed at factories. This is especially disappointing because all Welfare Officers hold advanced degrees in Social Work in accordance with the law.

Workers can rarely afford external, private childcare facilities, preschools and crèches. 81% of workers surveyed for this study earn between INR 5000 and INR 7500 per month. The total family income rarely exceeds INR 10,000 to INR 15,000. A 2014 study by Cividep and Future In Our Hands, Norway found that the total food expenses for a family of three would be INR 5511 in Bangalore according to the prices of various commodities listed on the website of the Civil and Consumer Affairs Department. The total monthly expenditure for a family of three, including rent, water and electricity charges, medical and schooling expenses, transport to the workplace, etc., would amount to INR 13581 in Bangalore.³ As a result, many parents are forced to leave their young children in the ancestral village with grandparents, or to entrust them to the care of older children, which is dangerous.

2 Singh, D. (2006) "Crèches: Are they worth the investment?" in CIRCUS [Citizen's Initiative for Right of Children Under Six] Focus On Children Under Six, Abridged Report New Delhi: Right to Food Campaign. p. 9.

3 Mind the gap - How the global brands are not doing enough to ensure a dignified life for workers in the garment and electronics industry in India, Table 1: Estimated monthly living cost (in INR) of a family of three (2 adults and 1 child). Framtiden i våre hender (Future In Our Hands, Norway) and Cividep India, February 2015. p. 80.

For the purpose of this study, sixty women workers were interviewed from four garment factories. Four focus group discussions were also conducted for the factories, with ten to fifteen workers in attendance in each case. 41% of the sixty women surveyed individually said that they had quit their jobs at the garment factories during pregnancy. After giving birth, the vast majority stayed away from employment for much longer than the government stipulated three months of paid maternity leave. While 66% said that they had taken a break from employment for more than a year, 23% had stayed away for 9 to 12 months. All workers who were interviewed said that three months of maternity leave was not enough. One major reason for this is the cultural expectation for women to breastfeed their children at least up to the age of one.

As a result, most workers leave their jobs after childbirth, resulting in a break in career. Even though they receive wages at the same fixed rate as all workers of the same designation, role or position when they return to employment, they incur a major financial loss in the form of a loss of gratuity. Gratuity is a loyalty reward paid for continued service with a company for a period of five years. They also lose interest on their Provident Fund (PF) accounts. Moreover, women miss out on crucial social security in the form of Employee State Insurance (ESI) healthcare benefits during their absence from employment, which in normal circumstances would extend to cover their children, spouses and other near family members. A functional crèche at the factory would allow women to return to work after three months of maternity leave, as their breastfeeding needs would be accommodated. They would not be forced to surrender benefits such as ESI coverage and gratuity.

The benefits of a high-quality functional factory crèche extend to the management of the factory. 95% of the workers interviewed in this survey said that they would willingly continue service with the current factory if the standard of childcare on site was raised. High attrition rates are a major problem plaguing factory managements, and good childcare would go a long way in controlling attrition in an industry where the vast majority of workers are women of reproductive age. According to the Report of the National Commission on Labour 2002, studies show that the provision of childcare facilities results in up to 50% enhancement in the productivity of the mother as well as in lower morbidity and better growth for the child.⁴

4 Report of the National Commission on Labour, 2002. P. 973.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

C&A	Clemens & August
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CIRCUS	Citizens' Initiative for Right of Children Under Six
Cividep-India	Civil Initiative for Development and Peace
CWDS	Centre for Women's Development Studies
DA	Dearness Allowance
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education or National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ESI	Employees' State Insurance Scheme
FLA	Fair Labor Association
FORCES	Forum for Crèches and Child Care Services
H&M	Hennes & Mauritz
HRD	Human Resources Department
KSCPCR	Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
OBC	Other Backward Castes
OT	Overtime
PF	Provident Fund
RSOC	Rapid Survey on Children
SC	Scheduled Castes
ST	Scheduled Tribes
WI	Wealth Index

1. INTRODUCTION

In the garment industry in Bangalore, as in other Indian industries, there is an overwhelming need to adequately and effectively address one of the primary challenges that women workers in the country face – that of caring for their children while negotiating the demands of the workplace. According to a 2014 report on Women Employees in Garment Industries in the International Journal of Management Research and Business Strategy, women make up 80% of the workforce in Bangalore’s garment sector.⁵ Culturally, responsibility for children is still solely the mother’s, even when she is employed outside the home. This report seeks to study the various aspects of this need in four garment factories in Bangalore, as a first step to formulating a model for workplace childcare that can be implemented in a sustainable manner within the industry.

A 2013 report commissioned by the Ministry for Women and Child Development, Government of India, and produced by the Forum for Crèches and Child Care Services (FORCES) and the Centre for Women’s Development Studies (CWDS) notes that large numbers of women are now joining the workforce as a result of the changing social set-up and an economy where making ends meet with a single income has become more and more challenging. The young children of workers from disadvantaged social groups have borne the brunt of the burden on their mothers.

“The children, particularly young children up to 6 years, have felt the cumulative impact of the crisis in the most palpable ways, i.e. in the form of high rates of malnutrition and high morbidity and mortality rates specifically among the poorest and most marginalised sections of the population. Given the above backdrop, the need for crèches is a serious issue that needs urgent policy attention.”⁶

In its report ‘Focus on Children under 6’, the Citizens’ Initiative for Right of Children Under Six (CIRCUS) explains that childcare is a social responsibility that should be duly undertaken for a number of reasons. Poverty prevents many parents from taking adequate care of their children. What care and nurturing poor parents are able to provide often depends on the provision of public facilities like good and accessible health services. Parents are more likely to look after their children’s health when this is available. Similarly, adequate breastfeeding, which

5 Saha, S. (2014) Women Employees In Garment Industries: A Case Study Conducted In Selected Garment Industries Of Peenya Industrial Area, Bangalore. International Journal of Management Research and Business Strategy, Vol. 3, No. 3, July 2014

6 Need Assessment for Crèches and Child Care Services, 2013. Forum for Crèches and Child Care Services (FORCES)and Centre for Women’s Development Studies (CWDS). p. 11.

is one of the main determinants of child nutrition, can be very difficult in the absence of workplace crèches and maternity entitlements. Limited knowledge of good child care and nutrition practices is also a barrier in achieving good health and development in young children. For all these reasons, the report suggests, the care of children cannot be left to the family alone and social intervention is required, which is best addressed through childcare at the parents' workplace.⁷

Workplace child care contributes to women's wellbeing in various ways, such as by reducing the burden of looking after young children, thus increasing women's access to employment. An ILO report on 'Workplace Solutions for Childcare' observes that it also increases employment opportunities for women in childcare and contributes to job creation in the service sector, which replaces some of the unpaid household work that women engage in. The report estimates that ten jobs are created for every hundred additional women. The industrialized countries have seen a rise in employment in childcare.⁸

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This study addressed the need for crèches in factories manufacturing garments for various large European brands in the southern city of Bangalore, which is a hub of the export-oriented garment industry in India. A previous study by the Fair Labor Association (FLA) in collaboration with the Bangalore-based NGOs Cividep-India and Samvada, and a report by the Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) found that childcare provisions at garment factories in Bangalore fall far short of what workers typically require. Cividep is seeking to move a step forward by initiating fresh dialogue among stakeholders about improving childcare provisions at the worksite for children under the age of six.

This report studies existing childcare provisions at four factories supplying to the large global apparel brands H&M and C&A. The objective of the assessment at the four factories, which shall remain unnamed, is not only to gain a general idea about workers' childcare needs and the quality of existing crèches in the industry, but to study conditions specific to these four units. A viable model crèche can then be set up in these factories, which can later be replicated at other factories in the industry.

7 Focus On Children Under Six, Abridged Report, 2006. Citizens' Initiative for the Rights of Children Under Six (CIRCUS). pp. 5-6.

8 Workplace Solutions for Childcare, 2010. International Labour Organization. p.10.

Unto this end, the needs assessment report addresses the following questions:

1. What are the needs of women garment workers with regard to childcare? Do current childcare facilities meet these needs?
2. What are the international and Indian standards for workplace childcare, and what should a functional, high-quality crèche look like?

2.1. Methodology

We targeted factories that are supplying to H&M and C&A, two giants in the global branded apparel market. They are regular buyers from the Indian export-oriented garment industry, and many manufacturers in Bangalore are currently producing clothing for their labels. Our aim was to select at least two factories presently manufacturing for each of these brands. All four of the factories chosen currently supply to H&M, while three supply to C&A. The units were chosen randomly, but the focus was on selecting at least two that were already operating crèches on their premises.

Individual interviews were conducted with sixty women workers, along with four focus group discussions. We interviewed fifteen workers from each factory, along with one focus group discussion for each factory, usually attended by 10-15 women. The FGDs shed light on issues that had not been adequately covered in the interviews, and served to answer all outstanding questions.

This study has its limitations. Various constraints did not allow a larger sample size. Research on a wider scale already exists. For example, studies by the KSCPCR and the FLA interviewed hundreds of workers from dozens of garment factories in Bangalore. A viable body of knowledge on the childcare needs of garment workers is already in place.

The purpose of our study was not to reinvent the wheel by repeating this work. We focused on looking at childcare in four specific factories with the ultimate aim of, firstly, establishing a model crèche where it is absent, and secondly, improving existing crèches in keeping with compliance and quality considerations.

3. HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE (AND EDUCATION) AT THE WORKPLACE IN INDIA

The Constitution of India provides a guarantee of early childhood care till the age of six in Article 45, which states that “The State shall endeavour to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years.” As the private sector increasingly takes over the social functions of the state, the responsibility for the care of employees’ children rests with companies.

In the second decade of the twenty first century, indicators of child well-being in India continue to remain abysmally poor. The UNICEF-aided Rapid Survey on Children (RSOC) 2013-2014 found that over 50% of children from the lowest quintile of the Wealth Index (WI) are stunted. 25.8% of children in the lowest quintile are severely stunted.⁹

42.1% of children under 5 in the lowest quintile are underweight. Of children between 6 months and 2 years who are breastfed, only 35.9% in the lowest quintile and 40.1% in the highest quintile are fed a minimum number of times a day (at least twice a day for infants 6-8 months old, and at least three times a day for children 9-23 months old). Only 26.5% children aged 6-23 months in the highest quintile had minimum dietary diversity (four or more food groups). The figure is even lower for the lowest quintile, at 14.2%.

34.7% of children aged 3-6 years in the lowest WI quintile are not attending any kind of pre-school education, and 12.6% of children between 1 and 2 years of age in the lowest WI quintile have received no immunization.

As in other Indian industries, in the garment industry of Bangalore too, prior research suggests that the children of working parents are sometimes left to the care of older siblings. The ILO report states that evidence from developing countries consistently point to child nutrition faring poorly when children are used as substitute caregivers, as compared to when the care is provided by another adult.

The CIRCUS report observes of workers' young children:

“Most of them are left to their own devices until the age of six years, when they are finally herded into school. Yet the first six years of life (and especially the first two years) have a decisive and lasting influence on a child’s health, well-being, aptitudes and opportunities. The consequences are staring at us. About half of all Indian children are undernourished, more than half suffer from anaemia, and a similar proportion escapes full immunization. Few countries in the world have such poor indicators of child well-being.”¹⁰

In a developing economy, the report notes, the focus on economic growth often becomes the primary concern. However, studies by economists suggest that devoting resources to child nutrition and health is among the most economically justified uses of public resources. This is because, the report suggests, there are substantial gains in productivity as a result of the physical capacity to perform tasks. Reduced capacity is often related to stunting as a result of poor nutrition. Productivity can also be increased through better cognitive development and schooling.¹¹

9 Rapid Survey on Children, India Fact Sheet, 2013-2014. Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India

10 Focus on Children under Six, p.1. (CIRCUS)

11 Focus on Children under Six, p.34. (CIRCUS)

The National Policy on Education (1986) considers early childhood care and education (ECCE) to be a critical input for human development, while the National Nutrition Policy (1993) recommends interventions for child care and nutrition during early childhood.¹²

Studies have assessed the effects of early childhood education (ECE) from about age 3 years on the development and future outcomes of children. These interventions have positively affected school readiness, retention and success in primary school. Effective ECE enhances children's cognitive and language skills, as well as their social and emotional development.¹³ This is especially important as in many instances child delinquency may be directly related to a lack of adequate care and supervision in early childhood. Early education programmes are especially important for young children from low-income groups, and build a strong foundation for future growth and development.

3.1. The National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy

The National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (ECCE) was formulated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2012. The resolution was passed in 2013. The policy “reaffirms the commitment of the Government of India to provide integrated services for holistic development of all children, along the continuum, from the prenatal period to six years of age.”

The policy's standards apply to ECCE services in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The private sector, whether in an organised or unorganised form, is possibly the second largest service provider of ECCE in the country, with increasing outreach even in rural areas. Factory crèches are an important part of private sector contribution to national ECCE, and play a major role in achieving the ECCE goals set out by the Government of India.

4. INDIAN LAWS ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE

4.1. The Factories Act, 1948

is a Central law that sets out standards to be followed at factory crèches. All factories where more than thirty women workers are regularly employed are required to have a crèche for children under the age of six years. It gives the State Government the mandate to establish standards to be followed at factory crèches in the State.

¹² The National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy, p. 4

¹³ Workplace Solutions for Childcare, 2010, p. 22. International Labour Organization

4.2. The Karnataka Factories Rules, 1969

prescribes the following standards to be abided by in the construction and maintenance of factory crèches in Karnataka State.

a. Construction and Equipment of the Crèche

The crèche facility should not be in close proximity to any part of the factory where obnoxious fumes, dust or odours are present, or where excessively noisy processes are carried on. There should be at least 1.86 sq. m. of floor area for each child to be accommodated in the crèche, and it should maintain adequate ventilation by the circulation of fresh air.

It should be furnished with one suitable cot or cradle with the necessary bedding for each child. For children over two years of age, suitable bedding will be sufficient. There should be at least one chair or equivalent seating accommodation for the use of each mother while she is feeding or attending to her child. A sufficient supply of suitable toys for the older children is also prescribed.

The Rules state that a suitably fenced and shady open air playground should be provided for older children, but the Chief Inspector may exempt any factory from compliance with this rule if they are satisfied that sufficient space for the provision of a playground is not available.

b. The Washroom

The washroom should be adequately lighted and ventilated. The floor should be properly drained and maintained in a clean and tidy condition.

There should be at least one basin or similar vessel for every four children in the crèche, along with a supply of water provided, if possible, through taps from a source approved by a Health Officer. The source of water should allow each child a supply of at least 23 litres of water a day.

An adequate supply of clean clothes, soap and clean towels is mandatory for each child while they are in the crèche.

Adjoining the washing room, a flush out type latrine must be provided for the sole use of the children. The design of the latrine and the scale of accommodation will be decided by the Health Officer. It must be kept clean at all times by a sweeper especially employed for the purpose.

c. Supply of Milk and Refreshment

At least 400 centilitres of clean pure milk (2 glasses) should be available for each child every day. The mother of the child must be allowed two intervals of at least fifteen minutes during the course of her daily work to feed the child. For children

above two years of age, an adequate supply of wholesome refreshment should be available along with the milk.

d. The Crèche Staff

A woman-in-charge and one female attendant for every 20 children attending should be appointed for each crèche. There should also be at least one sweeper. The woman-in-charge should possess a Nurse's qualifications, or produces a certificate that she has undergone training for a period of at least 18 months in child care at a hospital, a maternity home, or a nursing home. The crèche staff must be given suitable clean clothes for use while on duty in the crèche.

Exemption from the Provision of a Crèche

The Rules makes provisions for an exemption from the requirement of a crèche under certain circumstances.

In factories where the number of married women or widows does not exceed 15, or where the factory works for less than 180 days in a calendar year, or if the number of children in the crèche were less than 5 in the preceding year, the Chief Inspector of Factories and Boilers may exempt it from the legal requirement for a crèche on the factory premises. However, he must be satisfied that alternate arrangements are provided by the Factory.

The alternative arrangements must include a crèche building which has minimum accommodation at the rate of 2 sq. metre per child, has a suitable wash room for washing of the children and their clothing, and adequate supply of soap and clean clothes and towels, and an adequate number of female attendants who are provided with suitable clean clothes for use while on duty. The exemption can be withdrawn by the Chief Inspector if he finds that the factory has violated the sub-rule.

In factories where it is not practicable to provide and maintain a crèche in accordance with the law, the Chief Inspector of Factories has the authority to exempt it from the provisions of Rules 101 to 104 if he is satisfied that alternate arrangements have been made. However, the factory must obtain the consent of the employee, furnish full details of the places, owners, persons or NGOs who are providing crèche facilities, and also bear the cost incurred by the parent on childcare.

5. INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR WORKSITE CHILDCARE

The ILO's 'Workplace Solutions for Childcare' considers some of the primary international instruments that address the topic of childcare. The Convention

on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly envisions childcare as one of the primary measures preventing discrimination and ensuring women's effective right to work. Article 11 2(c) states that:

States Parties shall take appropriate measures to encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities.

The ILO Convention on Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981 (No. 156) 11, calls for childcare measures to promote equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers:

All measures compatible with national conditions and possibilities shall further be taken to develop or promote community services, public or private, such as childcare and family services and facilities. (Article 5(b))

It is pertinent to note that these conventions call for childcare for working parents, and not just working mothers, thereby stressing the family responsibilities of both men and women.

Some of the measures that the report suggests to help parents look after their children better are maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave, emergency leave or sick leave which can be used to care for sick children, reduction of long working hours and overtime for all workers, flexitime options which give some choice on arrival and departure times and the possibility of a temporary switch to part-time or reduced hours.

Various kinds of childcare support from the employer are mentioned in the report. These include:

1. Childcare centre of the company (companies) or on-site
2. A facility in the community which is linked to the workplace (through arrangements such as negotiated discounts, reserved places, subsidized places)
3. Some form of financial support (childcare vouchers, funds or subsidies)
4. Advice and referral services.¹⁴

¹⁴ Workplace Solutions for Childcare, 2010. p. 15. International Labour Organization

6. FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BRANDS: CODES OF CONDUCT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPLIANCE

Bangalore's garment industry is mainly export-oriented, i.e., production is geared towards foreign brands with a strong presence in the global market for ready-made garments. As consumer awareness about labour conditions in developing countries hosting manufacturing units has grown, brands have realised that it is imperative to ensure that fair labour practices are followed throughout their supply chains. The perception of exploitation can make or break a brand's public image. Strong social accountability and high bargaining power in the countries of the global North have been pivotal in framing consumer attitudes that encourage brands to take steps towards resolving issues in their Southern supply chains.

In tune with this need, brands have framed Codes of Conduct that their suppliers must comply with mandatorily. These codes, which are also known as Compliance Codes, set out the basic standards that suppliers must follow in order not to violate international labour laws and standards, or those of the brand's country of origin and the main countries consuming its products. Compliance would ensure that at no point in the production cycle are its products tainted by illegal or exploitative labour practices.

Most brands require suppliers to comply with local law on the subject of workplace childcare. However, some brands set out their own basic guideline for manufacturers to follow.

For this needs assessment, we looked at what H&M and C&A ask of their supplier factories in terms of childcare at the workplace.

6.1. H&M

H&M's Code of Conduct does not contain any childcare requirements for the factory site. However, it does briefly hint at maternity benefits under Workers' Rights. The code states that “[n]o employee shall be discriminated against in employment or occupation on the grounds of sex, race, colour, age, pregnancy, sexual orientation, religion, political opinion, nationality, ethnic origin, disease or disability.”¹⁵ Since it mentions pregnant workers, the statement should cover women workers' right to maternity benefits. However, there is no provision to counter discrimination against new mothers in the form of inadequate or absent childcare facilities, which can make returning to work challenging.

The employer is also required to pay all other types of legally mandated benefits and compensations. Paid maternity leave is one such legally stipulated benefit. It

¹⁵ Code of Conduct, H&M. Version 2, 2010. p.3.

explicitly states: *“The employees shall be granted and correctly compensated for any types of paid leave to which they are legally entitled. Examples of such leave include annual leave, maternity/parental leave and sick leave.”*¹⁶

6.2. C&A

C&A too omits any mention of childcare in its code of conduct. Maternity leave can be considered to be covered by the statement *“Suppliers must compensate workers by paying wages, overtime pay, benefits and paid leave which meet or exceed legal minimum and/or industry benchmark standards, whichever is higher.”*¹⁷

The code does state that *“[s]uppliers must give special consideration to the rights of those most vulnerable to abusive labour practices, such as women, home workers, agency workers, temporary workers, and migrant workers.”*¹⁸ Moreover, it states that *“[t]he sole basis for differentiating between worker must be the ability and willingness to do the job, rather than personal characteristics.”* These personal characteristics include but are not limited to gender, age, religion, marital status, race, caste, social background, diseases, disability, pregnancy, ethnic and national origin, nationality, membership in worker organizations including trade unions, political affiliation, and sexual orientation. Even though it condemns pregnancy being used as a premise for discrimination, this clause can be discriminatory for pregnant women, whose ‘ability and willingness to do the job’ may be compromised to some extent during the course of their pregnancy, or for the mothers of very young children. This cannot legitimately be used as a reason to differentiate between workers. The ability of any worker to do the job may be compromised by illness, injury or other factors outside their control.

6.3. The Benefits of Childcare for the Employer

It would be entirely inaccurate to assume that childcare at the workplace benefits the worker alone. The positive impact for the employer has been summarised by the ILO report on Workplace Solutions for Childcare. A childcare facility at the workplace has proved to reduce turnover and help retain employees, including women who go on maternity leave. The last is extremely important in the context of the Bangalore garment industry, as many women leave their jobs after childbirth. Moreover, it helps attract new employees, reduces absenteeism and lateness, and increases productivity and focus by enhancing employees’ morale, commitment, motivation and job satisfaction, while simultaneously reducing

¹⁶ Code of Conduct, H&M. Version 2, 2010. p.4.

¹⁷ C&A Code of Conduct for the Supply of Merchandise, 2015.

¹⁸ C&A Code of Conduct for the Supply of Merchandise, 2015.

stress and stress-related disorders in the workplace. The interviews conducted by Cividep with women garment workers corroborate all these points.

An outstanding example is that of the Indian IT giant, Infosys. According to the company's management, many employees who have completed technical training and have gained sufficient work experience to move on to other jobs do not leave because of the crèche. The crèche service contributes immensely to the company's relatively low attrition rate.¹⁹

7. FACTORY-WISE ANALYSIS OF WORKERS' CHILDCARE NEEDS AND STANDARDS AT EXISTING CRÈCHES

7.1. Overview of Employment at the Garment Factories

The lived experiences of the workers which emerged in the interviews and focus group discussions shed considerable light on the scenario in the industry. The data obtained from these interviews is expounded below, factory-wise. The all-women Garment Labour Union (GLU) also helped us with information on some questions, which is common to all the factories surveyed, and across the industry in general.

Wages earned by the women are uniformly low, and are presented in the table below. The usual rate paid per day is Rs 262, which is the minimum wage. As a result, some women prefer to work under contractors as piece rate workers instead of joining factories. The wage that can be earned on a particular day by doing piece work is usually in the vicinity of Rs 500. This can be even higher, depending on the number of pieces. These workers lend a hand at different factories each day, depending on what various companies and units require in terms of manpower because of staff absenteeism, large orders and other factors. There exists an agreement between the factory and the contractor for the latter to make up the deficit on any given day.

These workers are not covered under ESI or PF, and are bereft of any other benefits. Moreover, they cannot bring their children to the crèches of the factories where they work, not least because of the uncertainty of where they would be working the next day.

The majority of workers in the industry, however, are employed by factories directly. All the workers interviewed for this needs assessment are employed by their respective factories, and not by any individual contractors. All of them are in possession of offer letters from their respective factories, which serve as proof

¹⁹ Workplace Solutions for Childcare, 2010. p. 70. International Labour Organization

of employment. These letters, however, do not make any mention of the hours of overtime (OT) they may be required to do, simply stating that the rate of overtime is double the normal rate. Nor is it specified whether overtime can be refused. Overtime is also not properly documented. The payslips we were able to see did not bear any record of the OT done by the worker that month.

All the factories lack complaints mechanisms which the workers can avail of in case of grievances, including those involving the crèche. There are no unions, and members of the work committees are not elected. Workers often avoid making complaints for fear of a backlash from the management.

Women often face discrimination in the form of verbal abuse from their male supervisors, and in some cases, sexual harassment. Workers were not very willing to talk openly about these experiences in the interviews and focus group discussions. Another major concern is the inherently discriminatory nature of the industry when it comes to older women. Workers often drop out after the age of forty because they find it difficult to meet the demanding daily targets as they grow older. Most take up domestic work, or earn an income as street vegetable vendors.

7.2. Commonly Experienced Health Problems

A recent unpublished study by Cividep on occupational health and safety at Bangalore's garment factories describes the woeful state of women workers' health. Apart from the punctures, burns and other injuries that are regularly sustained during work, there is a high incidence of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) among women workers. Reproductive health is another area of concern, with irregular periods, excessive bleeding, lower abdominal pain and white discharge being commonly reported. The management, which is predominantly male, does not usually make concessions for workers when they are indisposed.

Women often choose not to take toilet breaks because of the pressure to meet targets, which predisposes them to Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs). They fare poorly with regard to nutrition as a result of low pay, the poor quality of food at factory canteens and the pressures of daily targets forcing them to forego their lunch breaks. The study reports a pediatrician working with the State ESI as stating that the children of workers often suffer from malnutrition, growth retardation and behavioral problems as a result of poor nutrition.

Psychosocial problems arise out of frustration from long working hours, work hazards, a lack of recognition and job satisfaction, daily abuse from male supervisors, and tensions at home and at the workplace. A study on the mental health of women garment workers in Bangalore's garment industry found that the GHQ

Likert score for 45.1% of the workers studied was 5, which is the cut off for probable mental illness.²⁰ The results revealed hypochondriasis, symptoms of anxiousness, social impairment and feelings of dejection and unhappiness. Neurological problems such as constant headaches, hand tremors and peripheral neuritis plague workers as a result of continuous work.²¹

7.3. Factory 1: H&M and C&A

Overview

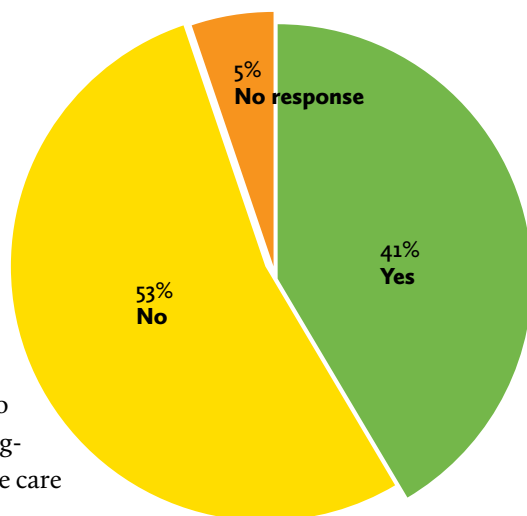
Factory 1 is located in the Peenya Industrial Area. The company it belongs to produces all kinds of apparel, including tops, skirts, shirts, dresses and pants. Factory 1 is one of five manufacturing units set up by the company, which has joint ventures with other companies in Jordan, Kenya, Bangladesh and India. H&M and C&A are among its main buyers. Factory 1 has approximately 800 to 1000 workers, mostly female. Despite the number of women workers, it has no crèche.

Regular work hours at the factory are from 8:30 am to 5:30 pm. Most women travel to the factory by bus, as they live 10-15 km away. Fourteen women workers from the factory were interviewed at home or near the workplace. 15-17 other workers took part in a focus group discussion which was held about 5 kilometres away from the factory, at Pipeline Road.

Maternity Benefits

All workers at Factory 1 stayed away from work for a year or more after having a child. They receive three months of paid maternity leave, which is legally mandated. However, none extended their leave with loss of pay. Out of the three women from among those interviewed who said that they had quit their jobs during pregnancy, two said that they had done so to take care

Fig.1 Workers at the four factories who quit their jobs during pregnancy



20 Shanbhag, D and Joseph, B. (2012) Mental Health Status of Female Workers in Private Apparel Manufacturing Industry in Bangalore City, Karnataka, India. International Journal of Collaborative Research on Internal Medicine & Public Health. Vol. 4 No. 12.

21 Joseph, B, Minj, C, Fernandes, G and Marandi, M. (2011) A longitudinal study of the morbidity and nutritional status of workers employed in a garment factory. Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences. Vol 27, No. 1 (2011)

of their new-borns, as 3 months of paid leave was not enough.

While many women have been in the industry for 2 or 3 years, some have had much longer stints of 8 to 10 years. All the women have worked in multiple factories, and the primary reason cited for this was the birth of their children. This means that a break in career after childbirth is common practice.

On returning to employment, they receive wages at the same fixed rate that holds for all workers of the same designation, role or position at that time. This is also the case with workers at Factories 2, 3 and 4. However, a financial loss is incurred in the form of a loss of gratuity, a bonus paid to workers for continued service with a company for a period of five years. Moreover, they lose social security in the form of ESI (state healthcare) benefits during the period of absence from employment, which in normal circumstances extends to cover their children, spouses and other near family members.

Early Childhood Care at Factory 1: Needs, Demands and Experiences

Workers have few options that can be a viable substitute for a crèche at the factory. Some have left their children in their villages, as private crèche facilities in the city are too expensive. *“If only there was a crèche at the factory, I could have watched my child grow up near me, and not had to leave him in the village. I only left him there because my husband and I could not afford to spend money on private child care,”* said one mother. Almost all the workers interviewed said that their children were looked after by grandparents.

All but one of the workers interviewed earn a monthly wage between INR 5000 and INR 7500. The monthly family income rarely exceeds INR 10000, of which they often spend INR 5000 to INR 10000 on rent, food and other utilities. Of this, rent alone accounts for up to INR 5000. Shelling out INR 500- 1000 every month for childcare is financially unmanageable. A few do take their children to external child care facilities, but they have to pack food, milk and snacks for their children as the crèche does not provide any of these.

Others said that their children are left alone at home after they return from school. This appears to be a common practice. *“My son is now 4 years, and for the past 2 years he has been going to school and coming back and staying by himself. I leave food in a plate for the child,”* said one mother. Another woman recounted how she had to scare her children in order to ensure that they did not endanger themselves in the absence of adults: *“We had told them that if they did not go straight back home from school, someone would kidnap them and make them beg on the road. From the age of 3 years, they have been coming home in the afternoon, eating and going to sleep till my husband and I return home from work. We thank God that they have been safe all these years.”*

Most were aware that they had a right to a workplace crèche facility, but all of those interviewed stated that the factory management had not sought their permission for not having a crèche. Though they face a hard time ensuring that their children are taken care of, they have never asked for a crèche at the factory. This is because the management targets those who make a demand or make their dissatisfaction known. If a worker demands or asks something of the management, they are subjected to harassment later. The management and supervisors find opportunities to shout at them or blame them for any kind of mistake.

In place of a crèche, parents of children below the age of 3 years are given INR 200 every month for childcare. Even if a mother has more than one child in that age group, they are paid for only one child. This pittance does not even begin to fulfil their childcare needs. INR 200 cannot so much as buy a month's supply of milk and snacks for their children.

Workers complained that the high production target at Factory 1 means that many have to work overtime. Six workers said that they often work overtime. When a production target has to be met urgently, workers can do 1.5 hours of overtime each day, and also work on Sundays. Most said that it was compulsory, and that they usually cannot refuse. The management wrings work from them, and does not treat them with respect.

There is no workers' union at Factory 1. None of the workers have joined external unions either. There are workers' committees, but the committee members are nominated by management, and not elected by the workers. If an issue is raised, the committee members do not share any details of the matter with them.

As a result of these difficulties, some of the workers said that they had quit working till their children were a little older.

7.4. Factory 2: H&M and C&A

Overview

Factory 2 belongs to the same company as Factory 1. Like Factory 1, it is located in the Peenya area. The factory has between 1200 and 1500 workers - again, primarily female. There is a crèche in the factory, which was set up in March or April this year. Workers claim that this was because of pressure from one of the buyers, who threatened to stop sourcing products from Factory 2 if a crèche was not set up.

The work hours are similar to those at Factory 1. Workers live 3-5 kilometres away from the factory, and usually walk to work. Fifteen women from Factory 2 were interviewed individually. A focus group meeting was conducted with 14-15 other workers in a small open area close to the factory.

Most of the women interviewed are aged between 21 and 25 years. All but two are 30 years of age or below. While most earn between INR 5000 and INR 7500 per month, a few earn between INR 7500 and INR 10000. This is inclusive of PF, DA, ESI and all other benefits²². For most, the monthly household earnings do not exceed INR 10000. Out of their meagre earnings, many spend between INR 1500 and INR 2500 on rent every month, while others pay up to INR 5000. Most spend up to INR 5000 on essentials like rent, food, water and electricity, while for some families spending on utilities is as high as INR 10000.

Maternity benefits

Workers at Factory 2 are able to take 3 months of paid maternity leave. Only two of the women interviewed said that they were allowed to extend their maternity leave with loss of pay. One worker had taken 10 extra days of leave. However, thirteen others said that they could not do so. One woman states, *“We have to take a break and join again. So there is a break in service.”*

Most workers said that they had stayed away from work for more than a year after child birth, while a few said that they had stayed away for 9 to 12 months. Six of the workers interviewed had had to quit their jobs during pregnancy. The common reason for doing so was the inadequacy of 3 months of paid leave. The mother would have to care for the young child even after.

Early Childhood Care at Factory 2: The Crèche

The crèche at Factory 2 is fairly new. As with Factory 1, women with children between the ages of 1 and 3 years were given INR 200 for childcare before the crèche facility was started at the factory. No money is presently charged for its use.

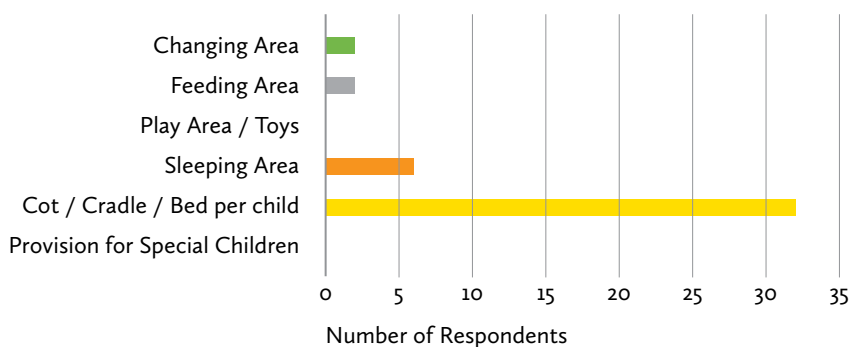
The crèche is located in a safe space which is not near areas that are noisy, fume-filled or cotton dust-filled, have high voltage, high heat, or are at a great height. Two workers stated that the crèche does not have covered electrical sockets, while three others said sockets were covered

The crèche consists of one room and a toilet. Each child has a separate cot or cradle to themselves. There are separate feeding and changing areas in the room. Workers agreed that the space was clean. The toilet has proper ventilation and good light, running water, wash basins, soap, flushable toilets, proper drainage, and a separate bathing area. Children are given 1-2 glasses of milk and snacks (biscuits, bread, etc.) every day. While some workers said that their children are

²² The abbreviations refer to the Provident Fund, Dearness Allowance and Employees' State Insurance Scheme

given one glass of milk, others stated that the children got two glasses each day. The children are not given any milk during OT hours.

Fig. 2 Separate areas at the three existing factory crèches



The number of children in the crèche was agreed to be around 10 by interviewees and focus group participants. This seems to be a fairly low number for the age bracket workers commonly fall in. The sample of workers chosen for interview suggests that women working at the factory are predominantly in their early or mid-twenties. All of those interviewed are married and have one or two children. Mothers in their twenties would overwhelmingly have at least one child 6 years of age or under. Moreover, only six of the fifteen women said that they bring their children to the factory crèche. This is indicative of the fact that most workers' children are not in the crèche.

There are two people manning the crèche – a nurse and an ayah/helper. The children's medical records are not maintained by the factory. In the interviews, workers said that no child is excluded from the crèche on the basis of age, but the focus group discussion contradicted this. The women who took part in the latter said that only children above the age of 1 year and below 3 years are presently allowed in the crèche. Mothers are allowed to meet them once or twice a day.

Needs and Experiences

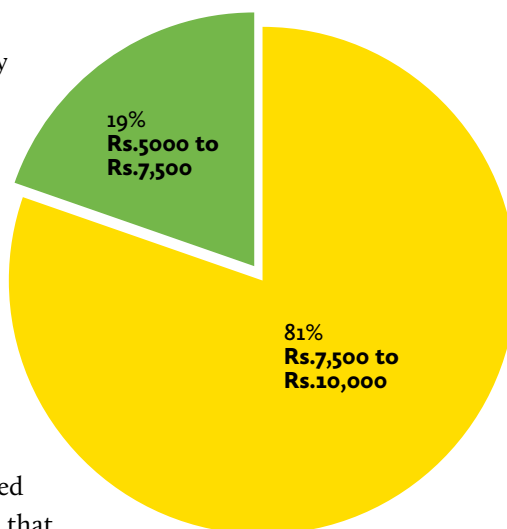
Thirteen out of fifteen workers walk to work. While most walk at least 2 km, some walk as far as 5 km to work every day. Nine out of fifteen workers said that they do not bring their children along to the crèche when they come to the factory. Some said that this was because the crèche was new, and they were not sure whether it would run for a long time or would close down. Distance from the home and transportation to the factory likely play a role in this decision. Some of these women said that their children are looked after by grandparents or extended family. Some women make use of private childcare facilities, at a cost of INR 500 or more. This is a substantial amount, especially since their wages are low.

The women are entitled to 12 days of earned leave in a year. Some said that they get 14 days. It emerged that the number of leaves women take because of their children is quite high, leaving little opportunity to take leave for other purposes. Several women said that they take 1-2 days off every month because of their children. This implies that they lose pay on the some occasions. Others have taken between 3 and 12 days of leave over the course of a year because of their children. One woman had had to take an entire week off.

Some of the women work overtime, but most said that they do not. However, when overtime is required, they cannot opt out.

The factory has no union, and workers have not joined any external unions. There are various work committees, but members of the committees are nominated by the management and not elected directly. There is no crèche committee or any mechanism for registering crèche-related complaints. The women said that they do not have any complaints against the management at present.

Fig.3 Wages earned by workers at the four factories



7.5. Factory 3: H&M

Overview

Factory 3 is located in the Yeshwanthpur area. It belongs to a company headquartered in Mumbai, which has 16 factories in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Tirupur and Mumbai. The company has about 11,000 employees across the country.

The factory has two buildings of four floors each, with one crèche just outside the buildings, near the entrance to the factory premises. In the focus group discussion, workers stated that the two buildings together have 2000 to 2500 workers. Some workers live close to the factory and can walk to work. Most, however, travel to the factory by company bus or truck from surrounding areas in Tumkur. Fourteen workers were interviewed individually, and the focus group discussion was held at a spot close to the factory premises with 12 – 15 workers.

The workers interviewed were mostly in their early or mid-twenties, with a few in their late twenties and early thirties. The majority earn between INR 5000 and INR 7500 per month. Twelve out of fifteen workers interviewed receive monthly wages in this bracket, which is inclusive of all benefits. This usually makes up the entirety of a family's monthly income, implying that in many cases, the worker's partner does not earn or contribute. Workers' families usually have 3 to 4 members, and the majority of those interviewed have only one child. Almost all workers live in rented accommodation, at a cost of INR 1000 to INR 5000, with most rental amounts falling within the INR 2500- INR 5000 range. Total expenses on rent, groceries and utility bills are usually between INR 2500 and INR 5000, with some spending up to INR 10000.

Maternity Benefits

As elsewhere, workers get three months of paid maternity leave, but most stay away from work for 9 months to over a year after childbirth in order to look after the young child. Since they are usually not allowed to extend their maternity leave with loss of pay, they must quit their jobs and join afresh later. They are paid the current rates for their position at the time of joining a new job, but lose benefits such as gratuity and interest on Provident Fund contributions. Nine out of fifteen workers interviewed from Factory 3 had quit their jobs during pregnancy. Reasons included delivering the child at the paternal home (and not the marital home), having to care for the young child and physical exhaustion at work.

Early Childhood Care at Factory 3: The Crèche

There is only one crèche for both buildings of Factory 3. It is managed by a teacher and two helpers. Most workers said that there is also a nurse to attend to the children. The crèche consists of a big room and a toilet. There is no separate kitchen – a stove in the corner of the room is used to heat milk. The facility is not located in or near any areas that pose a health or safety hazard to the children. No payment is demanded for the use of the crèche.

There is a separate cot, cradle or bed for each child. Workers agreed that the crèche space was clean. The bathroom has sufficient ventilation and light, flushable toilets, proper drainage, running water, soap and towels, and a separate person to clean it. There are no toys for the children in the crèche.

The children are given two glasses of milk a day. Some mothers said that they are also given snacks. In the focus group discussion, workers said that they had heard of instances where the staff had added sleeping pills to the milk to put the children to sleep. The children sometimes continue to sleep after going home from the crèche, but their mothers are not sure of the reason for this. As a result, some workers refrain from bringing their children to the factory for fear of this happening to them.

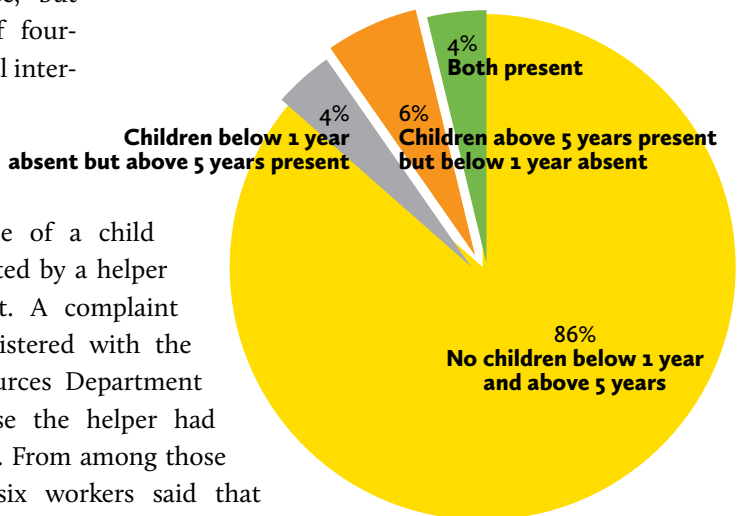
According to the focus group discussion the crèche has about 20 children, though individual interviews placed the number higher at 30, 35 or even 40. According to the focus group discussion, the factory is very strict about not allowing in children below the age of 1 year or above the age of 3 years. There are other limitations as well. “After 3 years of age, the option to leave the child in the crèche is ruled out as there are no teachers to teach the children. We are forced to put the children in private play schools or nurseries,” one mother complained.

A few workers thought that the crèche maintains the children’s medical records, but most said otherwise. In the focus group discussion, workers said that mothers are allowed to go and

see their children once or twice, but eleven out of fourteen individual interviews refuted this.

In one interview, the case of a child being mistreated by a helper came to light. A complaint had been registered with the Human Resources Department (HRD) because the helper had hurt the child. From among those interviewed, six workers said that they were not satisfied with the crèche, while five stated that they were.

Fig. 4 Children excluded at the three existing factory crèches



Needs and Experiences

Those who do not bring their children to the crèche usually leave them with grandparents. External crèche facilities are not used by any of the women interviewed. As most of their income every month is spent on meeting basic needs like house rent, food and utility bills, very little is left to support the costs of external childcare.

Out of the 14 paid leaves that workers are entitled to, several are taken because of their children. In the past year, many have taken 4-6 leaves because of their children, while some have had to take 10 or even 15 days off.

While not all workers undertake overtime, those who do usually put in between 1 and 4 extra hours in a week. In case of an urgent production deadline, workers

are asked to do one hour of overtime per day. They cannot, however, refuse to do OT when they are asked to.

Workers have to travel a long way by bus or truck to reach the factory every day. This poses a problem in bringing their children to the factory. Some suggest a factory-run or factory-assisted community crèche as a solution to this problem. *“We travel for one to one and a half hours every day, so we find it difficult to bring the children. They have to be woken up early and made read. If the factory helps with some assistance to pay fees, or has a day care centre for the children near our house, it would be better.”*

The factory has no union, and workers have not joined external unions. Several workers said that the management discourages them from joining unions. There are work committees, but as elsewhere, the members are nominated by the factory management. Workers variously mentioned a canteen committee, a workers committee, a health and safety committee and an anti-sexual harassment committee. There is no crèche committee. Workers usually take their grievances directly to the HRD.

Two of the workers said that they had registered crèche-related complaints with the management in the past. Both had complained to the HRD when they saw their children being beaten or roughly treated by the crèche helper, but did not know if any action had been taken against the helper subsequently.

7.6. Factory 4: H&M and C&A

Overview

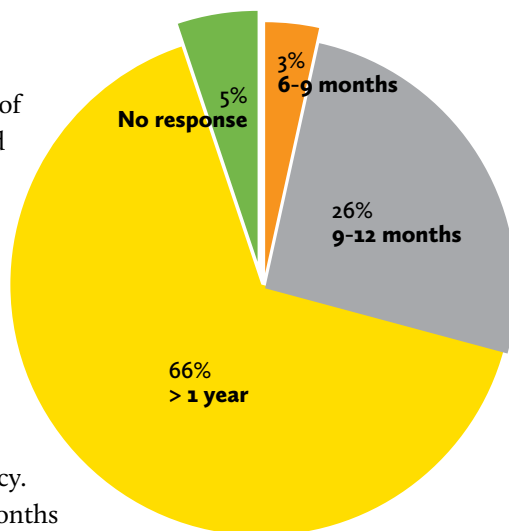
Factory 4 is a unit of a company that was begun in Bangalore, and is headquartered in the city. It currently employs around 10,000 people, and is capable of producing up to two million pieces every month. These products encompass a range of casual garments for men, women and children, including shirts, pants and tops.

Factory 4 is located in Kamakshipalya, just north of Bangalore city. The unit is a four-storeyed building with around 800-1200 workers. Workers usually live within a 2-5 kilometre radius of the factory, and walk to and from work every day. Fourteen workers were interviewed individually for this study. A focus group discussion was held close to the Indian Designs office, on a local temple's premises. About 15 – 18 workers took part in the discussion.

Almost all workers are aged between 21 and 30 years, and are married with one or two children. They earn between INR 5000 and INR 7500 monthly. The monthly family income does not exceed INR 10000 or INR 15000, as the case may be. Their

families usually have 3 to 4 members, while some have 6-7 member households. Almost all the workers live in rented accommodation, spending up to INR 2500, or in some cases, up to INR 5000, on rent. Most share toilets with their neighbours. The total monthly expenditure on rent, food and other utilities often goes up to INR 10000.

Fig. 5 How long women at all four factories stayed away from work after childbirth



Maternity Benefits

Workers get the usual 3 months of paid leave for maternity. Most said that they cannot extend it with loss of pay. Only two women said that they had been able to extend their maternity leave – one for a month, and the other, for four months. The majority stayed away from work for 9-12 months or for over a year. Seven had quit their jobs during pregnancy. Most cited the inadequacy of 3 months of leave as the reason for doing so.

Early Childhood Care at Factory 4: The Crèche

Factory 4 has a crèche, which is run by a nurse and a helper. The nurse looks after both the crèche and the first aid room. Workers say that the ratio of children to staff in the crèche is too high, as there are usually 30-40 children in the crèche, with an even higher number during the summer vacation. One doctor attends to both the crèche and the first aid room. When children are admitted to the crèche, their birth certificate, injection card, photographs, and the parents' details are collected and filed. Mothers must sign a register while dropping the child off at the crèche.

The crèche is a stone's throw away from a construction site. The windows are kept closed to keep out the dust from the construction. One worker pointed out that it is located at a height, posing a safety problem. There is a cot, cradle or bedding in the crèche for every child, and the room is kept clean. The bathroom is also hygienically maintained, with proper light and ventilation, drainage, toilets that flush, running water, wash basins, soap and towels.

The children are given two glasses of milk every day, along with biscuits. During the focus group discussion, there was some disagreement over whether milk and biscuits are provided once a day or twice. No extra biscuits are given if a child is

hungry, since other children would then cry for more biscuits too. The children are not given any milk or snacks during OT hours. The mother has to pack and send a meal for the child every day.

There are no toys in the crèche for the children to play with, because they fight over any toys that are available. The parents have requested the management to keep the children busy with some activities, so that they do not spend the entire day in the crèche sitting or sleeping. However, nothing has been done so far.

Parents are not allowed to visit the child during the day. If a child becomes unwell, the mother is asked to take them home. Some workers complained that when children soil themselves several times, they are dragged to the bathroom and scolded harshly by the helpers. This can be traumatising, and the children often begin to wet their beds at night, or develop a fear of telling their parents that they have soiled themselves.

Workers said that they would prefer a teacher to a nurse, who would be able to teach the children a few things before they start going to school. Some have left their children in the village with grandparents because they are not satisfied with or convinced about the quality of the childcare facility at work.

Workers have been told to bring only one child from a family to the crèche. This means women with more than one child under the age of six must keep at least one child at home.

Needs and Experiences

Workers who make use of private crèche facilities spend INR 500 on the same. Others leave their children with grandparents.

Many workers have had to take one or two days off every month because of their children, while others take eight to ten days of leave in a year. This number is very high, since they typically get 12 to 15 days of earned leave in a year. Workers who have left their children in the village said that they have had to take more days off because of their children than others.

The factory does not have a union, and workers have not joined any other unions. The management had not expressly forbidden joining unions either. There are committees, but the members are nominated and not elected. There is no crèche committee, but there is a mothers' group to take up childcare-related problems.

Workers said that they had filed a complaint with the management about the staff using bits of waste cloth to wipe the children's mouths and blow their noses, as a result of which they had begun to develop allergies.

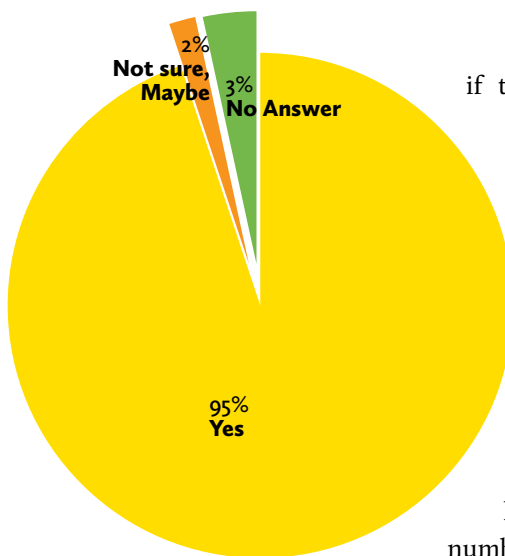
Most of the women have worked in multiples factories. The most common reason

cited for changing jobs was the birth of a child, after which a woman would quit work for a year to look after the child. One woman stated that in her previous factory, the crèche had been little more than a godown, because of which she had quit her job to look after her child. Another worker, a helper, had quit when her child was born because there was no one to take care of the child. It emerged that the factory had not allowed helpers' kids in the crèche at an earlier time.

8. CONCLUSION

An overwhelming majority of workers have changed jobs several times, so much so that remaining at the same factory is very much the exception rather than the rule. Very commonly, this happens at the time of the birth of a child. Most often this is because three months of paid leave is grossly inadequate, and there is a cultural expectation for the mother to be near the child for at least a year after it is born. Women also traditionally breastfeed their children for a year, which is impossible at a factory without a crèche where the child can be kept while the mother is at work. Though workers have the option of extending their maternity leave by a month with loss of pay, most do not know of this provision or do not make use of it, preferring to quit the job and join anew after a break in employment.

Fig. 6 Whether child care would be one of the factors to continue service at all four factories



Workers at all four factories unanimously stated that they would readily continue their services with their present factory if the standard of childcare on site was raised. Some mentioned that having their children near them would give them peace of mind and contentment.

Three out of the four factories surveyed have crèches in place, but this number does not reflect the reality on the ground, since only 5% of the approximately 1200 garment factory units in Bangalore have functional crèches. A large number of women have no confidence in the existing functional facilities. A lack of productive activity at the crèche, which is vital for the development of the child in the crucial years between 0 and 6, make many parents think twice about bringing their children to the factory. In other cases, workers prefer to leave their children with grandparents or in the village fearing abuse and malpractice.

There is an immediate need for well-trained teachers, proper training for HR and welfare officers to enable them to effectively monitor the crèches and greater accountability of the crèche staff and the factory management. It is a serious matter that most Welfare Officers, whom the law requires factories to appoint,

are oblivious of good crèche standards and legal requirements as well as the state of existing facilities. This is especially disappointing because staff appointed as Welfare Officers hold advanced degrees in Social Work.

Distance from home and travelling in buses with a young child is often a problem. Community crèches supported by the brand or its supplier companies would form a solution where women have to travel in public transport to get to work, and prefer not to bring their children along on buses. This in no way undermines the importance of worksite crèches. Many women would prefer to have their child in close proximity to them, especially if they are still breastfeeding. Both options need to be available to workers so that women can have the choice of using either facility based on their convenience and preference

If we consider the number of leaves women take because of their children, a high-quality crèche would ensure less absenteeism. Worker turnover could be significantly reduced in garment factories, where the majority of workers are women of child-bearing age. A stable worker population would be profitable for the factory's operations.

Surprisingly, a large percentage of workers are unaware that they are legally entitled to a crèche at their factory. This lack of consciousness is a weakness in the efforts to build and improve childcare facilities at the workplace, and must be corrected through systematic awareness-building.

More importantly, the fact that good childcare is something working women deserve should not be overlooked. It has been proved to be crucial for their well-being as workers and as mothers. The significance of women in the workforce cannot be ignored, nor can their interests or those of their children be compromised. The matter is best summed up in the words of one woman: *"Our children are very important, and we are working very hard to bring them up and make their life better. We do not want their life to be like ours, where we struggle every day. We want to give them a good education so that they earn better. Sometimes we fail because of our low salary, which is just about sufficient for food and accommodation. We can often not pay school fees in time. We have so much loan accumulating every year."*

Another woman voices a major concern of these working mothers. *"We feel sad for not being able to keep them safe when they are small. We hear about so many incidents involving children of a young age. We only pray that nothing should go wrong with our children."*

Indian factories employ thousands upon thousands of economically weak parents. According to Indian law, it is the responsibility of the company and its owners to have crèches at their factories, where the children of these workers can receive a high standard of care. They are under legal obligation to maintain the high standards stipulated by the law for factory crèches.

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