

A story from the FWF Preventing Workplace Violence Programme

Sexual harassment and violence against women are widespread problems in garment factories in Bangladesh and India. In 2011, [Fair Wear Foundation](#) (FWF) initiated the [Preventing Workplace Violence Project](#); thousands of workers and managers in factories have had training on the importance and benefits of preventing workplace violence against women; worker anti-harassment committees have been elected and telephone helplines have been established.

During 'art focus group discussions' FWF assesses women workers' situation in factories. They are asked to draw and tell stories about themselves, their families and their workplaces. Through the group discussions, the programme team gained deeper knowledge on the impact of the society, community and families on women's positions at work.

feb '14 – Bangladesh – Family



'My father, mother, three brothers and I lived together in our village. We had a duck farm and a little land. My parents made a living from the income from the land and duck eggs. We were a happy family. I was in class 8, I dreamed of studying a lot and becoming successful. Everyone in my family is very educated. My cousins have government jobs. I also had such a dream until one day my father couldn't see properly anymore.

We came to Dhaka and went to a doctor. The doctor told us that the treatment required a lot of money. My father came home and started crying. I was the oldest child. My brothers were very young. I understood everything my parents said. My parents sold the farm and the land. They no longer had money to pay my school fee. I ran away to my aunt, who worked in Dhaka as a garment worker.

Life alone in Dhaka is not easy. But thanks to Allah, my family is doing great. Every month I save 2,000 Taka (€21) for my family and work as hard as I can. My parents both got sick again. But because I had a job, I could support them. My brothers all go to school and get very high grades. They will have a bright future.'



The Factory



‘There are two staircases in the factory and we think we could escape in case of fire. There is also a day care room and a canteen. Our factory has no water problems. The owner always gives us money at the end of the month.

The government has decided on 5,300 Taka as minimum wage, but that is not given to us. The senior helpers get it but the new helpers are only given 4,000 Taka. The factory fired many helpers because the owner could not pay that much.

They now make only 20 helpers do the work of 35 helpers. If we ask for personal leaves, we don’t get it. Even if we are sick, we don’t get leaves. If we ask for leaves, the line supervisors and production manager threaten that they don’t give us our salary. They now shout at us even more after salary increased, using bad words like ‘motherfucker’.

If the work is not submitted by 5pm, they don’t give the time card back to the worker and mark them as absent. That means the worker has no salary for that day. This is called ‘production management’. There has to be production output of 120 pieces per hour but it is only possible for us to cut 50.



Because of this system, each helper is made to work for 2 to 3 hours for free. If the workers don’t make the extra hours, they grab the workers by the neck and throw them out. The ‘Personal Room’ is the room for the production manager and the compliance manager. When we do something wrong, they make us stand on one foot, until they believe we have had enough punishment.

We feel bad that we work hard, and yet they make us work for free and punish us when they want to. We sometimes feel hopeless. How long can we work like this?’

After listening to this story from a workshop given in Bangladesh in February 2014, FWF provided trainings for the factory managers and supervisors concerned. With the support of the FWF-member sourcing from this factory, the helpers now receive minimum wages. The workers elected an anti-harassment committee to reduce workplace violence, which is now under the guidance of FWF-trainers.