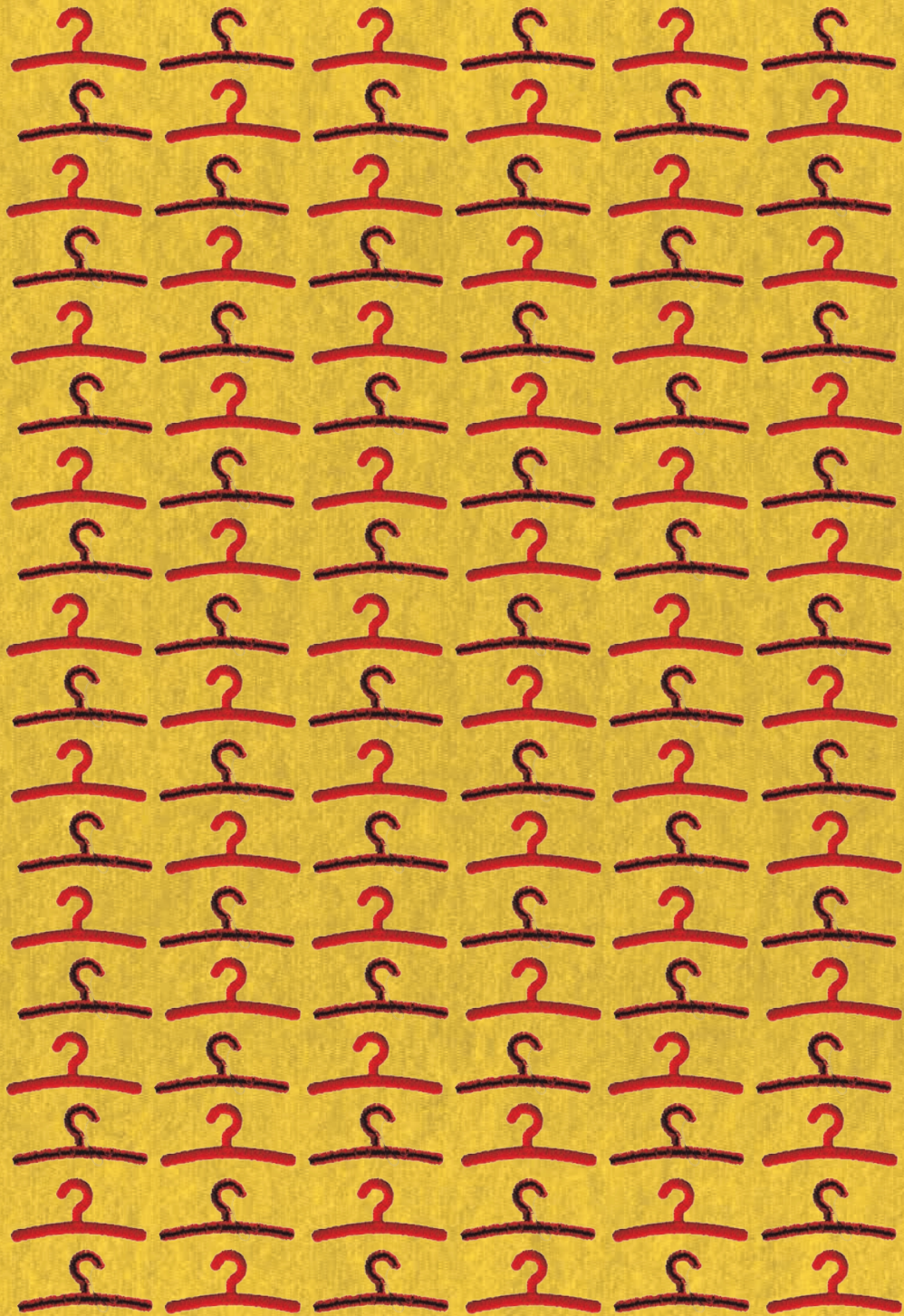


2 FAIR WEAR FOUNDATION



ARTWORK
FOCUS GROUP
PROJECT



INTRODUCTION

In southern India and in Bangladesh, up to 90 percent of workers in garment factories are women. Sexual harassment and violence in the workplace are widespread and over 60 percent of women workers have experienced some form of verbal or physical abuse. India and Bangladesh have legal frameworks to prevent and address workplace violence, but these laws are rarely fully implemented.

In 2011, Fair Wear Foundation (FWF), a Netherlands-based independent, non-profit organisation committed to improving labour conditions for garment workers, launched a project in Bangladesh and India entitled 'Preventing Workplace Violence' with the support of a three-year grant from the UN Trust Fund.

FWF, which seeks to improve the labour conditions of garment workers, is active in 9 countries in Asia, Europe and Africa that produce garments for its 80 member companies. Altogether, FWF members represent more than 100 brands sold in over 20,000 outlets around the world. Working in partnership with their suppliers, brands must ensure that the FWF Code of Labour Practices is implemented in the factories that manufacture their garments.

With this project, FWF focused on raising awareness of harassment, sexual abuse and violence in the workplace by engaging with workers and managers in several factories of Bangladesh and southern India. The programme, implemented in over 30 factories supplying FWF member brands in Bangladesh and in the southern Indian cities of Tirupur, Coimbatore and Bangalore, piloted ways of implementing existing legislation at factory level through enhanced monitoring and remediation systems.

The Artwork Focus Discussion Groups were developed to further these goals and monitor the impact of the programme. This publication has its origins in this project, but it does not focus exclusively on violence and sexual harassment. This is because the issue of violence against women at work cannot be separated from the larger framework of labour rights issues and economic pressures.

To measure garment workers' job satisfaction and assess the impact of its project, FWF devised an innovative methodology, which involves artwork and focus group discussions to encourage workers to talk about themselves.

The drawings produced by the female workers and their descriptions of their daily lives, their family background, their work, their likes and dislikes do more than reflect the garment labourers' perceptions of their working conditions. The women's stories also offer a fascinating insight into the lives of female garment workers in Bangladesh, revealing the social circumstances that push them to leave their rural villages to seek work in big cities, some of the challenges that confront them, but also the sense of empowerment that many workers gain from paid employment. Although by no means comprehensive, this study provides valuable information about the status of women producing garments in India and Bangladesh and their social and economic environment.

THE WORKSHOPS

The workers' testimonies in this publication were collected during two workshops. One of them, conducted in Bangladesh in February 2013 to test the methodology, involved 25 workers who were either trade union members or had links with workers' unions. They came from a number of factories, which were not part of the FWF project.

Already aware of their rights through their contact with trade unions, the women were outspoken and discussed their problems openly. Almost all of them mentioned harassment.

The second workshop, also held in Bangladesh, took place in February 2014. Twenty workers aged between 18 and 40 and operating in three different factories, participated in this session. All of them had migrated from rural villages to seek employment in the city, and few were members of trade unions.

The atmosphere in both workshops was relaxed, allowing participants to open up about their feelings. Many workers, especially those who had children, cried when they talked about living apart from their families.

The discussions were recorded and the transcript translated into English for data collection and analysis.

The results might not represent the situation of all garment workers in Bangladesh, but they provide information about the current situation in the factories visited. They also contribute to a better understanding of the workers' role in their families, their community and their workplace.

A WOMEN WORKERS' FAMILY LIFE AND FINANCE



“I have drawn a picture of my house, trees and people. I like my house and the trees, and I enjoyed living with my parents. Because of my situation, I had to move to Dhaka and I went through a lot of hardship. Sometimes I wish I could go home to my family, get their love and affection and be happy. It makes me happy to think about it. But the sad part is that I have to stay in Dhaka without my family. This is my biggest regret.”

“I have drawn a house. It is a very old house and belongs to my brother. At my father's house, I had a lot of money. My husband is an old man, which is why I don't like him much. My daughter lives with my sister and attends school. Every month, I send them 2000 Taka. My sister's husband lives abroad. She loves my daughter, but I feel sad that my daughter lives with her. She goes to school. My husband lives in Dhaka, but we don't live together. I don't cook. How can I work in the garment factory and cook as well! That's why we live in different places, but we are in touch. I don't like him much. He is very old! My brothers are angry with me. They wanted me to stay in our home in the village, but I didn't. I am making my own future. I left my child behind, while I was still capable. This is my greatest cause for sadness. Other than that, I have no problems.”



6 The picture shows my mother, father and my five sisters. We all love each other very much. It was my parents' dream that I could go to school, college and university and then have a good job. But my father died and his dream could not be fulfilled. My sisters were still very young and my mother faced many hardships as she raised us. She often remained hungry so she could feed us. She is the best mother in the world!

My mother managed to give us education to a certain level. My younger sister passed her secondary school exam (SCC). I studied until 7th grade. My sisters are now married and happy. I am unmarried and came to Dhaka on my own to earn money. I'm happy to be independent and no have to rely on anyone else. I'm just sad that my father is no more.

My mother lives in the village. I miss her very much. I try to keep her happy with the little money I make. Please pray that she and all of us stay well!
My mother puts a lot of trust in me.



6 My father, mother, brothers and I lived together in our village. We were a happy family; three brothers and one sister. We had a little land and some ducks and our household lived on the income from the land and the ducks' eggs. I dreamed of studying and becoming successful. Everyone in my family is well educated and my cousins have government jobs.

But my father lost both his eyes and I couldn't study further because of his health problems. We came to Dhaka and he went to a doctor who told him he needed an eye transplant. At the time, I was in 8th grade. My father came home crying about the hardship he faced. What a trick Allah played on him! My brothers were very young when he lost his eyes. When I saw my

father cry, I told him everything happened according to Allah's wish and I promised that even if it took a lot of money, he would get his eye treatment.

We sold our ducks and pawned the 5 'katha' land we owned. We spent all the money on my dad's eye treatment. He was told he wouldn't be able to work for a year. At the time, I was studying in a private school but we couldn't cover the cost anymore. When I asked my mum for my school fees, she scolded me. Where would she find the money when all we had went toward my father's treatment? My father's sight has now been restored.

I left school, angry that my mother couldn't afford to send me anymore. A cousin said she would get me married, but with our land pawned and no money, I would not be able to build a future if I got married, and my three younger siblings would be unable to study. Like me, they want to be educated. I told my mother that villagers may gossip because I was discussing my own marriage, but as her only daughter I asked her to wait until I am a bit older to get me married. She agreed and has kept her word.
My parents listen to what I say.

A lot of people from our neighbourhood had gone to Dhaka and I asked my mother to allow me go to Dhaka to work. She said no. My aunt used to live in Dhaka, so I asked her to take me with her so I could work. I could not study; I had to get my siblings educated. I also had to reclaim our land for 50,000 Taka. I thought about all this, and came to Dhaka without telling my parents.

I came to the garment factory with my aunt. After working for 6 months, I became an operator.

When I got a room, I brought my family here. I got the oldest of my brothers admitted in Class 5, the second one in Class 1 in BRAC and the youngest in Class 1. He is now in Class 5. The older one is in Class 10. The school principal was very pleased with him when he got A+ and he told him to let them know if he had any problem and they would help him.
They waived his school fees.

A year ago, my father became ill again with a stomach problem. He had a hernia. He underwent surgery, which cost 30,000 Taka. With the money I saved, I got the land back and I also paid for his surgery. Six months after my father recovered, my mother had a tumour. I got her surgery done too.
I achieved all this with my own income and my intelligence.

I wanted all three of my brothers to study. Later, they will have an income of their own. One of my brothers said he wanted to work rather than study. I told him education cannot be imposed, and he should work if that was what he wanted. He is now working at the garment factory as a helper while the other two are studying.

I paid for my parents' operations and I got our land back for 50,000 Taka. I opened a bank account where I deposit 2,000 Taka every month. At present, I am doing very well. I have saved 50,000 Taka separately for myself. If I had married when my cousin wanted me to, my family would not be in such a good position. Now my only wish is for my brothers to study and get a good job in the future, so that when I get married they won't face any problem."



“I’m pictured in the corner with a small body. Apart from my hair, I don’t like any part of my body.

The drawing on the white paper at the top shows my family. I am the one in black ink with lots of crosses. My children, a boy and a girl, are next to me, pictured in red ink. I’ve drawn many hearts to show I love them. But they live far away from me. They had to stay in the countryside.

On the blue paper, I drew the factory timekeeper to show the situation at work. He is holding a clock. He is not nice and he is unfair. If workers arrive 5 minutes late, he deducts half a day from their wages, but he is not doing it to everyone. He takes care of the good-looking girls and his own friends.

The man on the yellow paper is the production manager, who is ‘evil.’ He yells at workers all day long, sometimes hitting them with cloth and threads. I hate him. The line supervisor is depicted below the production manager. She, too, yells at workers all the time. She looks down upon them and makes up nasty tales to report to the production manager. I hate her so much that I’d like to throw a mango at her.”



“I like everything about myself. I have two daughters. I love them very much. My husband is pictured at the top corner. He drinks a lot and gambles. He is very bad. Whenever he comes home, he takes my money and leaves again. I put a large green cross on him. I don’t love him anymore and I don’t want to see him at all.

I enjoy my job. The best thing about it is overtime. On the yellow piece of paper, I drew the production record board. The factory is doing good business and we often work overtime. This brings me a lot of money.

The ventilation at the factory (see the top pink sheet of paper and the green paper) doesn’t work well and it is pretty dusty on the work floor. I most dislike this girl, drawn on yellow paper, who works at the factory. Everybody at the factory knows that she is a slut who makes friends with managers to get easier jobs. She probably gets more money too.

Things are going quite well, but I dream of going back to my hometown in the countryside. Life there is almost like heaven. I can plant my own vegetables and relax at home. I cannot wait until the day when I’ve saved enough money to leave the factory. Then I’ll go home, I’ll be with my mother and I’ll take care of my children.”

When talking about their families, most women deplored the fact that they had to leave their relatives to seek work in Dhaka. The majority of workers had migrated from the countryside. Poor road conditions and long distances meant that most workers were unable to stay with their families. The long working hours in their Dhaka factories made it impossible for them to pay regular visit to their relatives back home.

Contrary to common belief, not all workers explicitly stated that poverty had driven them to move to Dhaka. Six people (30 %) said they came because they were from a poor family or the family had urgent financial needs. Two girls said they came because of 'their situation', which turned out to refer to their unmarried status.

Three women said they had come to Dhaka to escape violence. 'I had a husband, but he left me. He was an alcoholic and tortured me. That's why I came here. He used to take my money and didn't give me anything.' Some workers were also displaced by local armed conflicts. 'In my region, there is chaos, people are fighting in different places. That is why we left our village and came to Dhaka.'

The discussions showed that even at a young age, the women felt a strong responsibility to take care of their families. Most of the women in the workshop were around 20 years old. Some of the women moved to Dhaka with the whole family and they took care of their parents. Four workers said they saved money to send their siblings or children to school. Most of the participants had between 4-6 siblings.

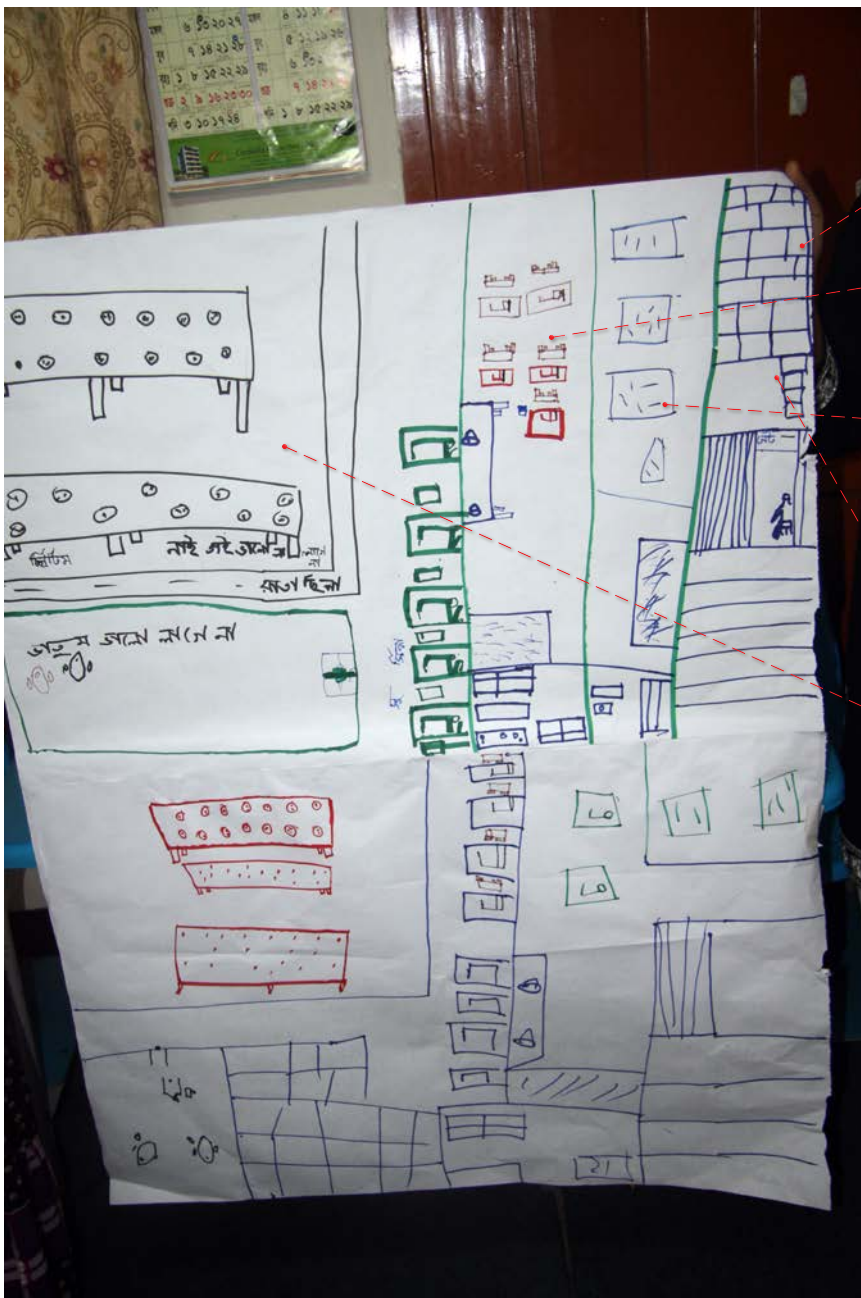
In most cases, the relatives they leave behind are dependent on their income, which makes workers reluctant to complain when they experience violence or are unfairly treated. One woman mentioned that her family members used to be hungry and they could now eat, thanks to her income.

Several women referred to the death or illness of their father, the family breadwinner, as the turning point that made them seek employment. Farming is the most common way of earning a living in rural Bangladesh, and women are often stigmatized and traditionally not considered capable of carrying out these activities on their own. Six young women said they had moved to Dhaka after their fathers had died or become ill. In some cases, the workers abandoned their own dreams of getting an education to allow younger brothers or sisters to stay at school. Many workers had dropped out of school, while two girls said they had completed grade 7 and 8 (at age 12-13) respectively.

B WOMEN WORKER'S LIFE AT THE FACTORY

The second workshop was conducted with workers from three different garment factories in Bangladesh. Two were large composite factories producing everything from fabric to ready-to-wear garments and employing over 1,500 workers. The third one was a smaller production plant, with fewer than 1,000 workers. The workshop was conducted in February 2014, soon after the minimum wage increased from 4,000 to 5,300 Taka. Almost a year after Rana Plaza collapse, factories, workers and the whole society were engaged in heated discussions about safety.

FACTORY 1



6 I work at Factory 1. Our main problem is the stairs, which are too narrow. When we are all using them at the same time, there is a lot of pushing and shoving and we end up falling down and getting hurt. This is what I tried to convey in this picture. The guard who sits there also takes up a lot of space. People can't even walk up the stairs. As a result, we are late giving our time cards.

Boxes of garments are also kept on the stairs, making it hard to step down. On many occasions, girls get hurt.

This is a finished product that I couldn't draw properly, covered by the box that contains finished products. The passage near the iron is very narrow. If there is a fire, we cannot get out. We've seen the iron fall on people many times, which is why I drew it.

We sometimes have to climb over the machines to save our lives. It would be more convenient if the wires were under the tables. As you can see, workers even work in the gap between two lines of workers. They produce pockets in that gap and pieces of garments are left over there, blocking the way. We cannot escape in that direction.

In the dining room, we have to sit on the floor to eat. The 'buas' don't clean it well. We also perform the prayers on the floor. I show here that there is no table.

The staircase is a big problem for going up and down. If there is a fire, there is no facility from where we can go down quickly. The gate is usually also locked. In the training sessions, we learned that the gates should be open.

We tell them, then the production manager and general manager tell us that they won't let us die before they die and if they live, then we will also live. But when the production manager and general manager leave, the door gets locked behind them.

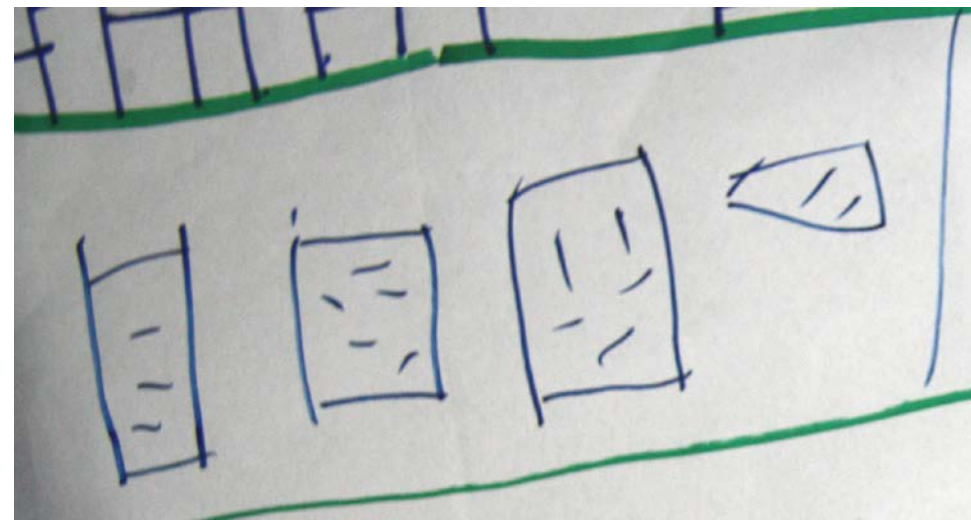


“The sweeper does not clean the bathroom properly and it stinks. That’s why I have drawn that we want a clean bathroom. We used to live in a village, but we have not come across such stench before. In Dhaka, everyone uses the same toilet and at the factory, all the girls use it. There is no separate place for drinking water. We have to take drinking water from the bathroom. The passage is very narrow.

Near the gate, there is a room where we can report problems, but solutions are not always provided. Fire inspectors go everywhere and get angry, but there is no result. There is a system, but the system is not maintained. This is what I explained in the drawing.

I showed that there should be a table in the dining room, and the Namaaz prayer room should be next to it; the bathroom should be clean and fresh, with proper access. In case of fire, everyone should be able to escape easily; there should be a wider gate and the staircase should be kept empty. The iron on the ironing table is often very hot. It can catch fire and burn. That’s why I have kept an empty space in the drawing so that people can escape quickly, without accident. If there were such a system, it would be good.”

“We have to clean the canteen after our meal. There is no separate room for Namaaz prayer. We have to perform Namaaz in the place where we eat and we don’t get the opportunity to do it. Sometimes they provide us with a table, chair and a glass. In many factories, they have a separate room for Namaaz. Here they don’t.”



“And the hallways! Suppose there was an accident right now, there wouldn’t be enough space for us to run and escape. Suppose the Line Chief was standing there, we would have to push him aside to get past. In the process, someone’s hand or leg would get hurt. There is no space around the machines. We sit at the machines and work. Don’t we need some space? If someone stands at our table, do you think we can work there? Suppose there was a fire, do you think we could escape? In such an event, we would have to escape by jumping out.”



FACTORY 2

“This is our road, the main road. At the end of it, there is a gate where we deposit our card before entering. These are the stairs; they are quite good. We can move around easily. And this is the main gate. From there, we walk straight and then up. There is also our bathroom. And this is where we work. These are our machines, and here we are, the workers. Over there, you can see the line chief and the supervisor, who is very nice. The main problem is our line chief. He is very bad. He abuses us with filthy language, using insults and calling us motherfucker. He also grabs us from the back of the neck. If we complain, he pushes us away, telling us to get out of the office by pointing at his shoe. Then we have to leave the office.”

“Have all salaries been hiked? Not for everyone. It has been 4 months since we came here. Throughout those 4 months, our salary has been 4000 Taka. Our salaries have been hiked. They have increased the salaries of some workers, but not others. In all factories, big or small, salaries were raised in December. The government decided on 5300 Taka, but it was not given to us. Senior helpers get 5300 Taka and the new helpers are given 4000 Taka. We face a lot of problems at work. Of the 35 helpers, they have fired many.”

“In every line, there are 20 helpers. There used to be 35 helpers. Now they make 20 helpers do the work of 35. We face a lot of difficulties. If we ask for leave, we don't get it. Even if we are sick, we don't get leave. We often request leave, but we don't get it. Then they abuse use, use slang words like motherfuckers and don't give us our salary.”

“If the work is not submitted by 5 p.m., and if they don't return their card to the people who haven't finished by then, it means that person has no salary. We work in production, this is production. Per hour, there is a production target of 120-130 pieces. One helper alone cannot do it. It is possible to cut 50 pieces per hour, but they give us a target of 120.”

“Each helper is made to work 2-3 hours for free. They (the managers) don't pay us for it. If we don't do the extra hours, then they grab us by the neck and throw them out. If we don't, we are asked to leave. We don't get anything in exchange. We feel bad that they don't pay us. We have to work hard and they make us work for free. How long can someone work like this! If we protest, then they throw us out. They abuse us and they don't give us our card and they mark us as absent. A lot of trouble! The line chief and the production manager do these things. Even if we are sick, we don't get leave. And if we've been absent, they make us stand for 3-4 hours in the office.”

FACTORY 3

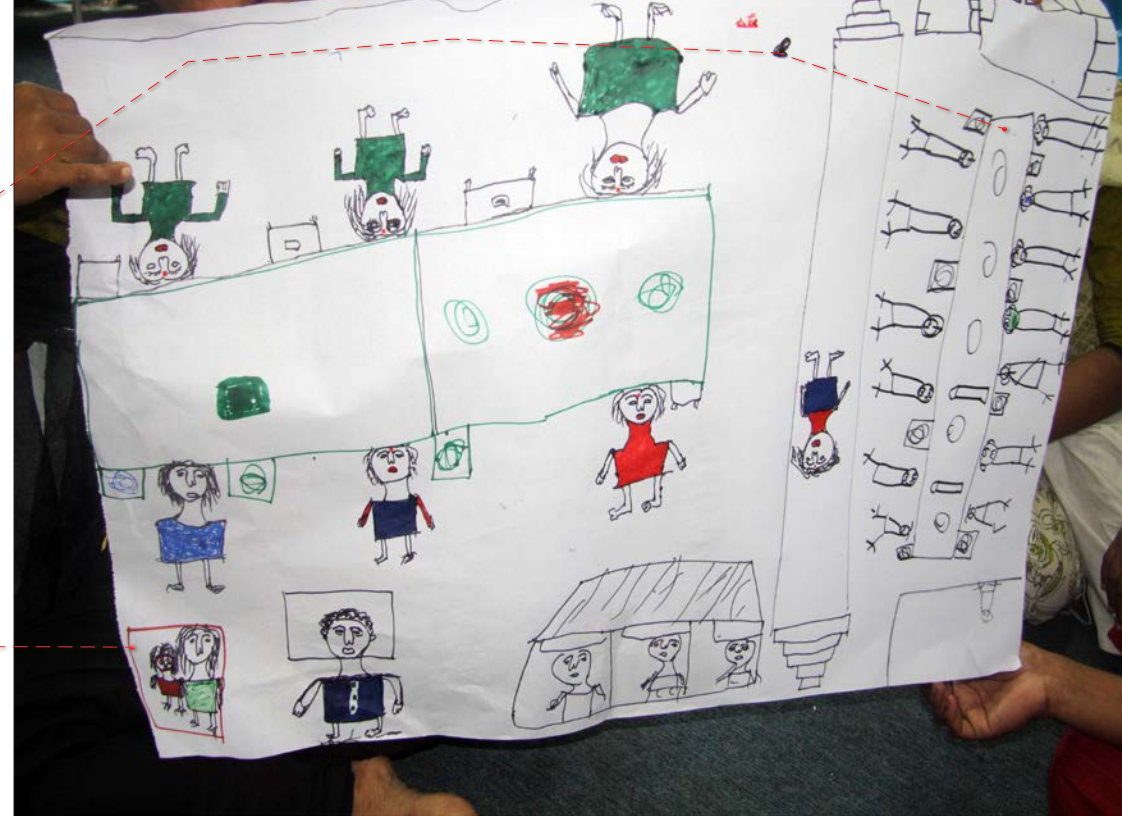
“This is our table. We work in the Quality department, so we have to stand and work. There are stools here and there, but they have material on them. There are two girls on each side. Here's the material on the table and us standing around the table and working. There is a table on the side as well. We work on it too. There is a water bottle on the table; we drink when we are thirsty.”

“This is the room where we keep our children. You can see a child there and a 'bua'. Those who have children leave them there. This is our general manager Sir's office. Here, GM Sir is sitting on the chair. If we have any problem, we go to him. And this is the dining room where we have our lunch. The atmosphere of the place is very nice. The 'buas' clean the place up after we eat.”

“Here you can see the stairs. In our office, there are four staircases, two in the front and two at the back.”

“We use one staircase, which is very big. The other three staircases are closed. There is security there all the time. We can only use these staircases if there are accidents. This is the Namaaz prayer room. We are not scolded for performing Namaaz, but it is better if we can finish reading the Namaaz as fast as we can.”

“There are a few problems sometimes. Like now, they have hiked the salaries so the target is now twice as high as before and we face some difficulties. If we fail to deliver the target, then we have to work for half an hour or an hour for free. Apart from that, the overall environment is good. The salary and everything else is good. There is a doctor's room, with a doctor and a nurse. If we are sick, we can go there. They treat us and the doctor gives us leave.”



While discussing their work environment, workers were divided in groups according to the factory they worked in. They raised some of the issues that bothered them at work. During the first workshop, which was conducted by FWF in Bangladesh in 2013, before the Rana Plaza tragedy, harassment was the dominant topic. At a group session held at a later date, fire safety had become a more pressing issue.

Some fire safety inspections had been carried out at Factory 1 and 2. The workers, however, did not know who the fire inspectors were. They referred to them as 'fire people'. They were also unaware of the issues that were raised by the inspectors. They felt that the factories had not made significant changes to the production system, such as the placement of products or the arrangement of production lines. One worker was quoted earlier in this publication as saying that people were producing pockets in the



gap between two production lines. In case of a fire, they would not be able to escape.

Fire and building safety inspections should involve the workers, especially the women who are

the majority in the production line. Working on the spot every day, the women showed they developed ideas and could make useful suggestions. In the workshop, the women workers pointed out that the factory should move cables and wires under the tables to ensure the workers could escape easily in emergency.

At least half of factory workers in Bangladesh are women. But programmes on fire and building safety rarely involve women. The ideas of what women can and cannot do, or should and should not do, means that women also believe they are not suitable to be trained as safety coordinators or managers. The lack of training about safety means that women are not given the opportunity to think about their own safety, or protect themselves, which puts them at further risk.

Another pressing issue concerns violence at work. Women mentioned being frequently verbally abused by managers using insults and foul language to make them work faster. Several workers said the shouting and production pressure had increased after salaries were raised. The managers also raised the workers' targets, forcing the women to work longer hours to fulfill their quotas. Some women said they experienced less verbal violence after supervisors and managers received training, but that it was not enough. If they made even a small mistake, they would either be paid less, or be fired.

METHODOLOGY

1. BACKGROUND

Job satisfaction is related to an individual's life satisfaction. How workers feel about their work affects how they feel about life in general. Since most garment workers in South India and Bangladesh have low levels of education and often cannot read or write, using existing quantitative indices to assess their job satisfaction would be difficult.

To monitor and evaluate the impact of its Workplace Education Programme (WEP) in Bangladesh and India, FWF developed a new methodology using drawings and focus group discussions (FGD) to collect qualitative data that would help measure workers' job satisfaction, including capturing workers' experience of verbal and sexual abuse.

The methodology took its inspiration from the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) and the body mapping/factory hazard mapping of the Hesperian foundation (A workers' guide to health and safety – publication forthcoming).

The method was used on six occasions between February 2013 and October 2014 – twice in India and four times in Bangladesh – in different settings.

In small groups, workers were encouraged to discuss what they most liked and disliked about themselves. They were also asked what they enjoyed most, and least, about their family life.

Individually, they were asked to draw their family life and how they spend their time outside work on paper, using coloured pens to highlight positive and negative aspects.

The women engaged in a similar exercise about their work life, drawing aspects of work that they most and least enjoyed. Again, coloured pens were used to highlight their likes and dislikes.

On a large sheet of paper, the workers stuck their self-portraits and life drawings, as well as the drawing illustrating their factory environment, including the machines, their co-workers and managers, the salary they receive, the working hours, using colour as a way of emphasizing positive and negative perceptions.

If several workers were from the same factory, they were asked to discuss their working conditions in a group and illustrate their perceptions of the factory together.

2. DATA COLLECTION VIA FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

FWF devised the Artwork Focus Group project as a means to measure the impact of its programme against workplace violence and harassment. Developed as a monitoring instrument, the Focus Group Discussions turned out to be a rich source of information about the workers' daily lives, their social, cultural and economic background, what drives them to take jobs in garment factories and how they perceive their workplace.

For ethical reasons, FWF kept workers' identities confidential. Factories were informed that FWF would conduct research on workplace harassment with the workers. No information regarding individual workers and individual factories was revealed.

Selecting suitable factories and enlisting participants for the group discussions was not easy. Recently hired workers were reluctant to talk. Long-

term employees or those who had other relatives employed at the same factory were more confident. The groups were deliberately kept small – about 20 workers at a time in most cases – to create a comfortable environment, conducive to open discussions. Each workshop was led by an experienced facilitator and most of them involved about 20 female workers.

A rapporteur wrote down what was discussed in each group. Workshops were recorded if participants gave their approval. Women were assured that their names would not be mentioned in any reports. They were also asked to respect the confidentiality of the group discussion. The facilitator took notes separately to be used in the final analysis of the workshop. Participants had access to coloured pens, coloured paper, scissors, sticky tape, coloured stickers, A4-sized white paper and flipchart-sized paper.

The findings in the focus group discussions are the workers' subjective perceptions and do not necessarily reflect the full reality.

3. NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

The art focus group methodology achieves best results when conducted outside the factories, in a location where workers feel comfortable and safe – where the factory managers cannot listen. The venue should not be a hotel conference room or a place that is not familiar to the workers. Local unions and NGOs should be consulted to find the most suitable venue.

FINDINGS

The following are some findings from one of the workshops in Dhaka, which was organised in February 2014. Twenty workers from 3 factories participated in the workshop. They were first asked to draw themselves and their family individually. Then they were divided into groups according to the factory they worked for. They discussed and drew the situation in the factories. Some of the drawings and workers' stories are from this workshop.

The workshops were not designed to ask direct questions regarding harassment or violence against the women. Rather, three simple questions were posed to them: what they liked and disliked most about themselves, their relatives and the factories in which they worked. The answers of nearly all women reflected their experiences with issues of violence and discrimination.

During the workshop, most workers (5 out of 8) said they liked 'everything' about the way they looked. One person explained that it was because 'God had chosen this body'. Six women also mentioned that they liked their black hair, and black as a colour. But one worker complained that she disliked her 'dark' skin. Interestingly, one worker painted the line chief at the factory in black, because he was very bad.

Eight women said they never got married. One was divorced and two women were later abandoned by their husbands. Only two workers were happily married. Four out of the seven currently married women explicitly said that they 'disliked' their husbands, who did not contribute to the family. 'He is an alcoholic and tortured me, that's why I came here. He used to take my money and not give me anything,' one worker said. Only one married woman thought her husband was making a contribution to the family.

Among the twenty participants, only three – who were working alongside other family members – said they were happy with their situation. Many women mentioned the longing they felt for relatives left in the village, particularly their children, and all talked of the happiness they experienced when they were reunited with family members.

'Coming to Dhaka' was perceived by many as a sad event, a choice the women had to make to provide a better life for their relatives. The workers used words like 'hardship', 'difficult', 'suffer' to describe their daily lives in Dhaka.

Women shared the reasons that compelled them to leave the countryside for a garment factory in Dhaka. Each of them has their own story. They either have children or younger siblings to feed, or parents to take care of. Some escaped from abusive husbands or conflict areas. And this also helps explain why in some cases they were unwilling to stand up and fight for their rights. Domestic violence and poverty made these women even more vulnerable to violence at work, yet fear of ending up without a job to a large extent explains why women were reluctant to complain when facing unfair treatment at the factory.

But the life stories were not all bleak. For some of the workers, 'coming to Dhaka' was also a symbol of independence. Many workers spoke of the friendships they had formed at work. 'I have got a new friend, who is very nice. I will try to be with her always and I'll be happy.' Some women, who had escaped unhappy marriages or family pressure, also spoke of the independence and sense of confidence that earning a salary gave them. 'My brothers were angry with me. They wanted me to stay in our home in the village, but I didn't stay. I am making my own future.'

These Focus Group Discussions only offer glimpses of the workers' daily lives. The women's housing conditions in crowded slums, the threats they face on their way home after a long day at the factory and indeed the constant risk of sexual abuse and violence they face outside work as well as on the factory floor are topics that need to be further explored and could be the subject of additional research.

Moreover, to prevent and reduce violence against women, it is crucial to understand the social and economic conditions of women workers in garment factories, and the culture in which they live. This methodology and the material collected provide an opportunity to gain insights into these areas.

By presenting these short life stories, told in the workers' own words and illustrated by them, FWF seeks to provide a more rounded picture of women workers who are not just victims of fate, condemned to exploitation, but also independent individuals seeking happiness and ways to improve their own lives and those of close relatives through paid employment in garment factories.





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