

When Women Take on Wage Work

A Report from Tamil Nadu's Export Processing Zone

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Our economy has demonstrated an inability to generate much employment in the organized sector, and most of those jobs are in government. Most people make a living in the informal sector; within that sector vast numbers are below the poverty line. The harshness of such a situation is experienced more by women, who have to combine the tasks of production and reproduction with serious consequences to their well-being. And yet the government's data collection systems have a built-in bias towards excluding large numbers of activities and, therefore, a large chunk of our work force from the category of "employed." This bias is also reflected in official discussions on "underemployment."

In the sections that follow, we reproduce highlights from conversations with women workers on the themes of "women, work, and health" based on two studies conducted by me. It was, one, a joint study, entitled, "The Costs of Work" [Jeyaranjan and Swaminathan, 2001], the other, a study based on the lives and experiences of garment workers of the Madras Export Processing Zone [MEPZ] [Swaminathan, 2002].

For analytical purposes, observations based on women's narratives can be grouped into two categories:

- a) Those pertaining to the structure and functioning of the households to which the women belong; and
- b) Those related to conditions of work at the worksite, including the gendered experience of such employment.

To some extent, even minimal investments in basic infrastructure at home and at worksites could go a long way in relieving households, particularly women, from some of the wretched conditions under which they work and live.

The "Costs of Work" study begins by outlining the socio-economic transformation taking place in District Chengalpattu, close to the metropolitan city of Chennai in Tamil Nadu. The nature of the transformation includes: the changeover from a predominantly agrarian to an industrial-based economy; the consequent impact of this transformation on the occupational profile of the labour force; and, the social implications of this change, namely, the visibility it has given to the Dalits of the region, hitherto involved only in agricultural work. The study then focuses specifically on what this transformation means for women.

We have sought to capture the wide-ranging impact on women of straddling several spaces simultaneously every day. Women's experience of work at home and at the workplace and their perceptions of their health form the core of this analysis against the backdrop of their induction into "modern" employment, which is equated with non-farm or industrial employment — the latter equated with "development." The MEPZ study complements the other mentioned study in that it depicts starkly the terms on which workers—women in particular—are inducted into what is otherwise organized sector employment; the harsh conditions of and the humiliating experience of this work is added to the oppressive atmosphere and burden of tasks that many of these women workers face at the household level. While the experiences of the women workers at both the field sites are similar in many respects, whether at home or at the factory, the degree of harshness is greater at the MEPZ — compulsory overtime, immediate retrenchment if the worker refuses overtime, impossible targets, restricted use of toilets, preference for unmarried girls, and a pervasive practice of sexual harassment. It is also true that MEPZ workers are paid better than non-MEPZ workers.

On the Plus Side

The discussion of what kind of benefits factory employment has conferred on them as individuals and on their households brought forth very interesting responses from the women workers covering several related themes. It was difficult for respondents to arrive at one-dimensional answers. We reproduce a few of the observations to give a flavour of the interrelated themes involved in the answers.

A 35-year-old respondent, who took up work after becoming a widow and after being shunned by her in-laws, described the plus side of her new status as a job earner in the following words:

“Before going to work I used to feel miserable for being a burden to my parents, and I also suffered because of poverty. Now the situation is better because I have an income. We are able to afford fish once or twice a month and egg once a week. Earlier I found it difficult to take care of my children; now I can spend on them and I am also educating them”.

A 28-year married respondent also acknowledged the advantages that came with a regular job:

After I started going to this factory my status has improved and I am respected by my society. I have borrowed Rs. 20,000 for my brother's education. Before this job the food we ate was much poorer in quality, even though quantity was sizable; now it is vice-versa.

A 32-year-old widowed respondent also experienced improvements in her family's status as a result of her regular job:

I am living with my mother. We have borrowed Rs. 10,000 for my sister's marriage, which has to be repaid with interest. There is no other income except mine. With this income we are able to repay the loan and feed ourselves. The quality of food has

improved though the quantity has not. Mutton is cooked on festival days while cooking of fish depends on the availability of time.

In the Chengalpattu study in particular we found that larger proportions of the younger generation of the Dalit population have consciously shunned agriculture-related activities and gone for factory-based work. Indeed, there is a strong perception among them of having become more “modern” because of their work in factories. There is no denying the prestige value attached

members in each, and the contribution of each member to the running of the household. It was clear from the narrations that their earnings were crucial to the sustenance of the families, particularly given the limited aspirations of the households: to invest in a “pucca” (concrete) roof over their heads, a bore-well to ease their water problem, to replace cooking over a wood fire with kerosene or gas and to provide some level of education to the younger generation. All this was in addition to the almost inflexible life-cycle



to factory work, or the fact that employment away from the bonded nature of agricultural work confers a certain sense of liberation for the hitherto landless Dalit caste in particular. Further, this segment of the population perceives this change as resulting in upward mobility and beneficial in terms of relative security of employment, not because of permanency of service contract but more in terms of availability of jobs in the area because of the growth of industries, and regularity of pay. This has enabled them to obtain more and better food and clothing for their family.

Almost all respondents in both the studies mentioned above gave us an idea of the composition of their households, the number of earning

expenses that make or break these fragile households.

The gendered nature of households came out quite clearly in the manner in which the different members shared housework, the differential contribution made by each to meet common expenses of the household and the consequent differential levels of stress experienced by the different members on a day-to-day basis just to keep the household going.

The work day at home and at the job for both single and married women sometimes stretches over 18 hours, leaving them exhausted. In fact “tiredness” is the single most common complaint we recorded. We reproduce a few of the almost

uniform responses we recorded on the theme:

Tasks to be done by our respondents before leaving for the factory and after reaching home in the evening.

An unmarried woman, age 25 years, working in a garment unit in MEPZ described her day thus:

We wake up every morning at 5.30 a.m. My sister cooks and leaves for work. I help a bit with the cooking. Then I clean the courtyard, draw kolam [rangoli], wash dishes, sweep and swab the house and such other activities in a hurry and leave without even being able to eat. I have to run because at 8.55 a.m. the company rings a bell. We have to be inside before that. At 9 a.m. they ring another bell. By then we should have started our work. If we are even 2 minutes late, the gate is locked and we have to return home. There is no leeway. The regular work hours are from 9 a.m. till 6 p.m. Compulsory overtime of one hour has to be done in the evening every day. If necessary, one hour in the morning and two hours in the evening has to be done. 'Those not doing this can stay home' - that is how strictly they talk, without even a little bit of conscience.

The company provides no bus facility. For those who come from a distance an amount of Rs. 100 is provided. For those coming from nearby places the Rs. 100 is not provided. I walk daily for 15 minutes to reach the company. It takes the same amount of time in the evening. When there is urgent work, like in the past 3 years, in the morning from 7.30-9 a.m. and in the evenings from 6-8 p.m., overtime has to be done. Those who refuse to do overtime are given one week or one month's leave and asked to discontinue after that. So the company gets to pay one less salary for a month. Not only

The Methodology We Used

The primary objective of the larger study was to capture as concretely as possible work related health outcomes, particularly for women. We began with a questionnaire hoping to simultaneously net information on several different dimensions: personal, household, factory, trade union/industry associations, experiences with doctors, health workers, etc. From the seemingly vague references to general ill health that this questionnaire (administered to about 20 people) elicited, we realized that we needed to expand the definition of work to include pre and post-factory schedules. In addition, we were also advised to make the discussion free flowing, rather than structured.

At the second stage then, we drew up broad parameters as guidelines while allowing a free-flowing discussion. We interviewed about 10 people using this approach, and found that it did lead to a qualitatively rich haul of information. The workers were asked to describe an average day in their lives, beginning with the time they got up, to the time they went to bed. Information from these descriptions were schematised into the following heads: personal details, household profile, pre and post-factory work schedule, factory atmosphere and schedule of work in the factory, remuneration and other benefits, health perceptions, and any other observations.

In the next round of interviews we asked our investigators to collect additional information: could team members take time off for essential bodily needs such as going to the toilet? Did the work involve continuous standing/sitting/bending—in short, the posture of work? Was the respondent a

specialist in any particular job or was she shunted around and if so, how frequently? Was the team as a whole penalised for not meeting targets? What kind of stress did such team work lead to? Similarly, on the personal and household front, we asked our investigators to cover household consumption patterns, and whether earnings have brought changes in this pattern. If yes, in what manner, and if not, why not?

On the details relating to health, we found some interesting patterns from the free-flowing discussions. For example, irrespective of the nature of job or industry, most workers, especially women, complained of stomach pain and/or uneasiness in the stomach. Our woman investigator was also specifically instructed to record descriptions of how women (across marital status) cope with their jobs during menstruation. From the preliminary information that she had collected on this issue in the first round we asked her to probe further into the issue to pinpoint the exact nature and intensity of menstrual problems, regularity of cycles, changes in cycles perceived by the workers consequent to their taking up a job.

Apart from surveying the industrial workers, we also surveyed the agricultural labourers in the same villages. The sample size of agricultural labourers was smaller (about 45 per cent of the size of the sample for the industrial workers), as we found that the responses from them were turning out to be repetitive. This survey among agricultural labourers was for lateral comparison of their health problems with that of industrial labourers. In all we covered 180 industrial workers and 80 agricultural workers.

that, they dump the work on someone else. But if the workers do not get salary for a month and if they have to stay home, what will happen to the family?

As my sister does all the cooking and the bore well has solved the water problem, I am able to do overtime daily. But if you look at earlier times, we suffered a lot. At that time I just could not manage and would come home and cry. On some days, I would even cry at work.

A married woman, age 38 years provided the following account of her double work burden:

I wake up daily at around 5 a.m., put the motor on, and fill the bathroom buckets with brackish water. Then I get five pots of water from the public tap for drinking. I make some tiffin for the morning and lunch. After the children leave for school and by the time I leave, I feel enough is enough. My older daughter keeps saying she has to study and does not do any work. Only in the evenings she washes the dishes. Nobody else helps me with the housework. They wake up, do their own thing, and leave.

My company timing is from 8.15 a.m. to 5.15 p.m. I return home at 7.30 p.m. It takes 30 to 35 minutes to reach the company gate. I go by bus, and all the company workers wait together at the gate around 8 a.m. From the gate to our company is quite a distance. So our company bus transports us from the gate to the company. In the morning, I cannot eat in such a hurry. If we miss the bus, we reach late. If we go late, they do not let us in. In the evening, it takes, 45 minutes to reach home. If there is work, then in the evening, they have one or two hours of compulsory overtime. Everyone has to do it and if we refuse, then we have to leave the job.

Every day after doing overtime I have to do the housework and sometimes I think to myself, “Why

was I born a woman?” and feel very frustrated. At times, this causes tension. My husband and I have fights at home. Sometimes the fight starts as a verbal one and becomes physical. Then we stop talking with each other for some days. But he definitely would never say that I should not go to work.

Stress at the Worksite

The stress experienced at the worksite is not just varied but also very blatant at times. For convenience of analysis, we have grouped the narratives under different heads to bring out the complex manner in which the organization of work and the conditions under which the job is carried out takes a toll on the workers lives, mentally and physically. In the Chengalpattu study, where most of the units are pharmaceutical units, work is carried out in batches. Discrimination between workers begins at the gates of the factory when workers are grouped into batches; young women have almost no say in the choice of batches. Who gets into which batch depends very much upon how “friendly” a worker’s relationship is with the supervisor.

At the MEPZ garment units, there is no batch work but individual targets have to be met. While the specifics of different jobs and different industries

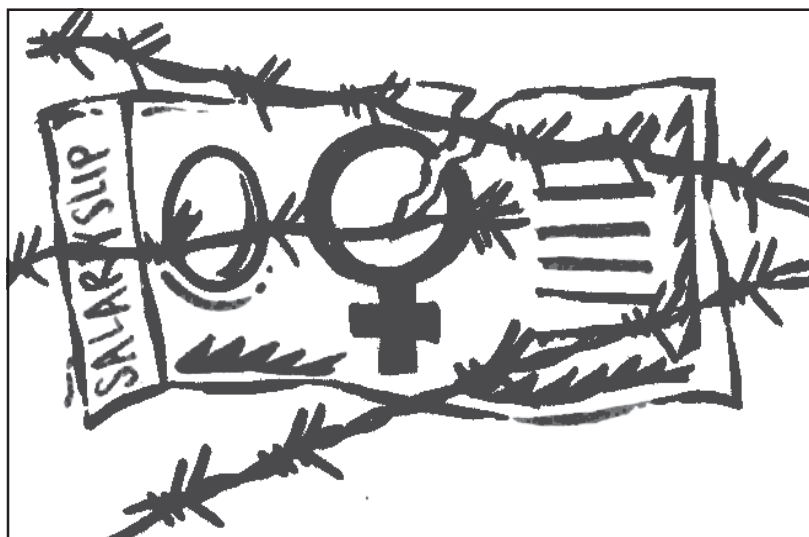
require different kinds of work organization, we found a remarkable level of similarity among the experiences of the workers in both our studies and in spite of their different settings, as far as the conditions under which workers had to carry out their tasks.

Process and Targets

Pressure on the workers is maintained by fixing well near impossible targets for each process of work. Breaks for lunch and tea are minimal. Many units insist on overtime. However, none of the units takes care of the health problems of its workers.

A young woman worker in a garment unit told us:

“In one hour we have to produce 100 pieces and, therefore, in eight hours, 800 pieces have to be completed before leaving. Whether it is a small job or a big job, the same rules apply, that is, people who have small jobs can complete 100 pieces in one hour easily. But persons doing big jobs cannot complete 100 pieces in an hour. Those people who are unable to finish have to stay compulsorily and work overtime and complete the work before they leave. Those who are still unable to finish, their identity card is taken away and kept with the management. This implies that our access to work gets



cut, since both in the morning and evening entry can be made only with the identity card.

If we do not have the I-card, even if we come to the company, they do not mark us present. As a result our salary gets cut.

We are very scared of such a situation arising and therefore have to work very hard. As a result we feel very tired. Tea is only provided to those doing overtime. If, due to particular circumstances, we are unable to do overtime and inform them in advance, then that day they do not let us take tea and lunch breaks or even go to the bathroom; they compel us to finish the work that very day. Even if we do not eat, they are not concerned. They just want the work to get done. We cannot complete 800 pieces each day in the normal course. Only if we work extremely hard without a break can we finish.

From morning till noon we work very fast. But in the afternoon it is not possible to maintain that speed. We do not have the strength. But only if you can keep up the very fast pace can we finish. That is why we feel very tired. My back hurts a lot. Hands and legs feel weak. Legs swell up. Even if we lift our heads while stitching, we are shouted at. After all this, when we have to go home and do the housework, and pay attention to our family, it feels as though we will just die.

A young woman worker explained the pressures to meet with work quotas as follows:

We do not have a permanent job, we are only temporary. In this company, there is work only for six months, after which they will remove us. Then they will recruit new staff and begin work again. I do the soldering work. We do not do any work in groups but only individually. Every day, each of us have to complete 3,000 pieces. Only if we can do that can we work here. We are



given two chances to meet the quota. If you fail they tell you to look for another job. To do 3,000 pieces is almost impossible, but somehow we do it. We can do it only if we work very hard. In addition overtime has to be done. During overtime, more pieces have to be done. Further, compulsory overtime has to be done. Those who refuse have to go home. There is no way one can get around doing overtime work. There is no difference in the work that women and men do. It is the same work. Neither men nor women have a chance for a promotion, as this is a six-month temporary job.

Restrictions on Movement

The organization of work coupled with the pressure to meet targets very often means that workers can hardly take time off even to visit the toilet. In fact, most units regulate work time so strictly that they close the toilets 15 minutes before the closing time. For menstruating women, the ordeal of dealing with such a requirement is so enormous that they end up absenting themselves on such days. Almost all women workers have reported menstrual cycle disorders. The overwhelming nature of the problem has convinced us that work-related dysmenorrhoea needs to be addressed seriously and urgently.

The women workers at MEPZ narrated how accessing toilets for as basic a human function as urination was converted into a humiliating

experience; in addition, women have to endure the embarrassing remarks of the male supervisors when they ventured to visit the toilets for any emergency.

Hear the words of a young unmarried woman, age 21 year old garment worker:

There are in total twelve toilets. All of them have water. But every evening at 5 p.m., they stop the water at the top. The reason given for this is that workers go to the toilet around that time to wash their faces and apply make up. Because of this, their work might suffer and so sometimes the toilet is locked. But at other times the toilet is open. We cannot go to the toilet often. Each of us has a token number. This number is noted and we are scolded: "You are given tea time and lunch time breaks. That is when you should go to the toilet. If you go often, I will tear your chit, remember that". Especially during our periods, it is sheer torture. If you suddenly get your periods they do not give you a small pad or anything. We have to go to the cutting section and ask for waste cloth. The cutting section is very far. Even if we go and ask, the way they look at us is disgusting. 'What? The red light has leaked?', they ask openly. We feel shy and do not go and ask there. We bring cloth or pads from home. In an emergency; girls who forget to bring pads or cloth have to go to the cutting section and ask for waste cloth; they come back and cry. They send her back in a very upset and angry state.

During our periods, even if we have a severe stomach ache, we are not permitted to sit down and take a short break. Till we complete those 800 pieces, we are not allowed to get away from the machine. They verbally abuse us saying things like - 'one gets fed up just trying to get these *'shaniyankal'*, (witches) to do their work.'

Little Time for Meals

We have already noted that almost all women reported not being able to eat any meal for want of time before leaving for work. This means that the first solid meal taken by these workers is around noon. The workers attribute their complaints of constant stomach aches and acidity to the prolonged gap in the intake of food spread over their working day. This apart, the intensity of work is such that workers are hardly able to make use of their lunchtime to eat their meal at leisure.

A woman, age 25 years, in a garment unit described the difficulties they face in having proper meals:

In the afternoon, we have a half-hour lunch break. In that half hour, we cannot eat properly because the stitching material pieces have to be counted and stacked. We have to wash our hands, and by the time we even touch our food, ten minutes have passed. At 1.25 p.m. the first bell is rung, and everyone has to sit at the machine. At 1.30 p.m. the second bell is rung. At that time we are supposed to start working. All in all, it is a ten-minute break. In this time we have to eat, wash our lunch boxes, and visit the bathroom. So we eat very fast. We eat as if to fulfill a duty, and days go on in this manner. In the morning as there is no time to eat, we rush to work without eating. In the night, there is nothing special for dinner, only what remains from the morning.

Routine Sexual Harassment

Relationships between women workers and male supervisors/colleagues are another area that generated enormous stress. Younger, relatively better-looking and better-dressed women were able to wrangle several favours from their supervisors, such as choosing the batches they preferred to work. The day-to-day operations of such discrimination at the worksite inhibited the emergence of any solidarity among the women

workers. All women workers, but especially younger and unmarried workers spoke of the constant and humiliating verbal and physical abuse that they suffered at the hands of male supervisors and, sometimes, at the hands of the owners of the units that they worked in.

A young woman garment worker, age 21 years, told us:

The supervisors behave in a different way with men from the way they behave with women. They may scare some men but they do not treat them without respect. But with



women they behave very badly. Women get scared. The supervisors speak in a threatening and arrogant manner. "Bitch! You have grown your body like that of a buffalo, and you do not even know how to do this work!! You know how to apply make up but do not know how to do this. What is this? Why have you come like a ghost (*pey*) with all your hair loose?" "You can see the world through this *churidar*." Looking at a woman's breasts they will say, "This is very pointed". They speak with double meanings. Not just the supervisors but also the men who work with us harass us sexually. There is a girl in our company who walks in a particular way. They harass her a lot as she has large breasts: "Look at that AK47 coming." If that woman talks back, they say, "Look at how she speaks,

she has guts, if she was a little more beautiful, we would not have been able to hold on to her.

There is no connection between the owner and us. The manager, supervisor and the workers cannot get along. If someone new comes looking for a job, the manager recruits those who look pliable or good looking. He talks with them, laughingly tries to touch them, holds the woman's hands, brushes his hand over it (runs his hand over it) Flirts a little. Those who go along get good salaries. If they refuse, he shouts crazily. When supervisors talk with women, they do not make eye contact. They look at her breasts. They pretend to teach/train as they try to touch your breasts with their elbows or the back of their hand. Some women who are alert avoid it. A few who are careless do nothing but shout at the man: "If only he had sisters." The supervisors pretend to be just standing idly near the machine while they feel your legs. If we stare at them angrily they say, "Sorry," or look silly. But till now, no case of rape has taken place.

A young woman garment worker, age 25 years, recounted her experience thus:

Our owner refers to women without any respect. There cannot be anyone worse than him. He will say things like, "Look at that *shiriki* – (a colloquial degrading term for girl); 'whose hair (pubic) is she plucking there instead of doing her work?'" He does not differentiate between married and unmarried women. He shouts at everyone equally. Seeing the owner, the supervisor follows suit and shouts, too. The owner does not even give the minutest amount of respect. He talks in an unbecoming/horrible manner. The supervisors see this, and they too do not give us any respect. They are even more arrogant than the owner. Most of the time we cannot

tolerate his behaviour and we start crying. There have been days when we have not had lunch. There have been times when I have thought about it all night, which gave me a headache and I could not sleep. The manager just drools over women. When he stares, I feel like taking an iron box and bashing it into his face.

Unmarried Women Preferred

A woman, age 28 years, separated from her husband, removed her “*thali*” (*mangalsutra*) so that she could be employed in the soldering unit; the latter employs only unmarried women. She told us:

Majority of the persons who work in our company are unmarried. I removed my *thali* and instead, wear a simple chain. I told them that I am not married. That is why I was recruited. The employers believe that unmarried women work fast and briskly, they do not take leave often; they work sincerely; they adjust to the owner’s, supervisor’s, and manager’s behaviour; they do evening overtime and also Sundays; and they finish any amount of work fast in the given time; they work for low wages. They also believe that married women are not like that — they take leave often; they do not work fast; they do not adjust even to the smallest thing; and they give some excuse and do not do overtime.

A young unmarried woman worker, age 21 years, told us:

In the perception of the employer, an unmarried person works faster (*surusurupag*), they will not take leave often, and they will not talk back or against the supervisor or manager. If the supervisor or manager (*site adital*) sexually harasses them, they will adjust. If there is overtime in the morning or overtime in the evening, they will do the overtime and then go. But

married persons will not agree to that. They do not do overtime. They take leave often, “Mother-in-law is unwell, child is unwell; relatives have come.” They cite some excuse/reason and ask for permission or leave. They talk back, ask questions. This is not suitable to the management, and if a person is married, even if she has experience, they will not employ her. If there is a lot of work, that is, on days when there are lots of orders, daily one-hour overtime in the morning and two hours overtime in the evenings is compulsory. Those who refuse are asked to leave. I am able to do overtime as my sister-in-

How Work Impacts Health

An unmarried garment woman worker, age 21 years, described the health implications of this over stressed life in the following words:

As we breathe this dust daily, a lot of people suffer from respiratory problems. One person had to undergo an operation to clean his lungs as they were blocked with the dust. Due to this, several persons got scared and left. A lot of people have piles because they have to sit continuously at the machine. The body becomes thin because of sitting at power machines. We have ulcer problems because a lot of people come without eating in the



law looks after the chores at home. Some persons who are unable to manage both household work and company overtime keep complaining. I feel terrible when I see that. They say that they keep tossing and turning but cannot sleep.

By using various threats, employers have been able to increase targets as well as to extend the working day without increasing payments for overtime. Due to the extension of the workday, workers are left with very little time to devote to their household chores—married women in particular cannot cope with this on a day-to-day basis.

morning. Headaches are caused by intense concentration on stitching for eight hours. As all this dust falls on our heads, we have dandruff problems, our hair falls out. Shoulder aches are also common. If you are unable to finish the work given to you, don’t come - stay at home. Why do you come here and make my life miserable?” the supervisors shout at us. Sometimes I feel like dying.

A married garment woman worker, age 38 years, gave the following account:

Daily, we go to work without eating. A lot of people have ulcer problem, headaches, stomach aches,

especially during periods when we do not get any rest. Sitting constantly at the machine gives us lower back ache, middle back ache, pain in the legs and arms, and swelling in the legs. We suffer from sore throat as we drink cold water. A lot of dust falls on our heads and causes skin problems. If a target is set for the day, then it has to be completed. If we are unable to finish, they ask us not to come to work again. We are afraid of that, and we work without going to the bathroom or for water, without lifting our heads from our work. Only if we do that can we finish. But it is almost impossible to finish that work quota in a day.

Most work places, particularly machine rooms, are generally clouded with suspended fine particles; in sections like packing where such suspended particles are less prevalent, the bad odour of chemicals is pervasive, resulting in the loss of appetite and, therefore, a reduction in the intake of food. In some units, protective gear is provided for the workers, but the gear hinders their mobility and rapid movement. With such gear on, workers complain that it is impossible for them to achieve the targets set, and, consequently, most of them do not use protective gear. Problems may arise through a combination of both stiff targets that are set without any consideration for a gradual slowdown during the hard day's work in the bodily movement of workers, as they get more tired, as well as the poor design of such gear. Given the conditions in the industrial units of the region, the workers, in general, recognize that their health is deteriorating.

To Sum Up

1. There is no doubt that wage employment has improved the self-worth and self-perception of the women workers, married or unmarried, apart from conferring monetary benefits on them.
2. The observation that wage income has enabled families to improve the quality of food consumed has to be juxtaposed against the reports of many respondents that they were unable to eat before leaving for work for want of time and also they often say there was an odour pervading the work areas leading to a loss of appetite and reduced intake of food.
3. All married respondents and quite a few of the unmarried ones spoke of the burden of housework that they had to shoulder with little or no help from male members. The burdensome nature of this work has, in addition, a lot to do with the poor infrastructure in terms of the lack of convenient availability of water, fuel and sanitation.
4. The inequitable manner in which households function manifests itself in the way in which wage-earning, female members are made to borrow and repay loans taken either to fund education of their brothers, support the businesses of male members of the household, marry off younger siblings, etc. While there is justifiable pride in being able to help one's family, a little probing also brought out that not many brothers would borrow to support their sisters' education or support their sisters' business ventures.
5. The conditions under which women work in factories compounded by their household tasks render their lives extremely stressful. The lack of investment in basic facilities at the worksite, such as sanitation, drinking water, compounds the problem even further. Investment in keeping workplaces safe for workers is almost negligible; the workers are subjected to a whole host of health hazards.
6. The various ways in which women are subjected to harassment (both

sexual and general) at the workplace have severe implications for their health and well-being. The narratives that we have reproduced in our analysis capture vividly the hardships of these working women.

While narratives cannot establish causality between particular work environments and related adverse outcomes, the strength of this method lies in the insights it provides into what is likely to be blighting these women's lives. Almost everywhere work in industries outside the home has not conferred the expected benefits on women. Advocates for women should pay attention to both their remuneration for work and the costs to their health and well being of such employment, so that policies aimed at employment generation are also sensitive to the adverse outcomes of such employment. The issues that we have described above cannot be redressed solely within the existing legislative and administrative framework since the laws and regulations are not geared to address and tackle structurally in-built inequities and/or inimical patriarchal forces.

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