

# GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

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*Excel*  
INDIA PUBLISHERS

EXCEL INDIA PUBLISHERS

New Delhi

First Impression: 2010

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Avinashilingam Deemed University for Women Coimbatore-641043

*Gender Equality and Inclusive Growth*

ISBN: 978-93-80697-38-3

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*Published by*

**EXCEL INDIA PUBLISHERS**

61/28, Dalpat Singh Building, Pratik Market, Munirka, New Delhi-110067

Tel: +91-11-2671 1755/ 2755/ 5755 • Fax: +91-11-2671 6755

E-mail: [publishing@excelpublish.com](mailto:publishing@excelpublish.com)

Website: [www.excelpublish.com](http://www.excelpublish.com)

*Typeset by*

Excel Publishing Services, New Delhi - 110067

E-mail: [prepress@excelpublish.com](mailto:prepress@excelpublish.com)

*Printed by*

Excel Printing Universe, New Delhi - 110067

E-mail: [printing@excelpublish.com](mailto:printing@excelpublish.com)

# Gender Equality among Garment Workers: An Area of Concern

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## INTRODUCTION

Clothing is the basic necessity of any human being. The textile garment industry is the largest foreign exchange earner. It is also the second largest employment provider next to agriculture [1]. The garment industry contributes 16.63% to the foreign earnings of India and it employs over 3.5 million workers. There are five different garment production hubs such as Delhi, Mumbai, Tirupur, Bangalore and Chennai in India; all specialize in different types of garment production, [2].

Garment is one of the many labour-intensive sectors that provide a gateway for developing countries to the global market. Garment production in Tirupur, also known as "T-Shirt City", located in Tamilnadu, South India, accounts for approximately 80 per cent of India's total production of knitwear for export. [3]. Tirupur industrial cluster constitutes one of India's important foreign exchange earners, with a total export value of around Rs.11,000 crore in 2007. It is estimated that there are about 10,000 production units in Tirupur, employing more than 4,00,000 workers, but real numbers may well be higher than this. There are small number of large factories, employing 1,000 workers or more per unit, with smaller enterprises employing between 100 and 250 workers just below [4].

Women around the world have moved into industry and the service in increasing numbers. In the past 15 years, they have become almost 50% of the workforce in many countries. A significant proportion of women are found in certain types of occupations in the service sector, in the informal sector and particularly in agriculture. In the garment industry, women workers are employed in all the three sections namely, cutting, stitching and finishing of garments. For the majority of women engaged in paid economic activity, the fact of being female means being paid less than men for their work. Gender based wage disparity exist across all sectors and all occupations. It is unjust that a worker spends many hours at different work and does not even earn enough to feed herself and her family. It is surprising, that even when opportunities have increased, women are earning a pittance. Hence, The present paper focuses gender imbalances arising from women's employment in garment industries located in Tirupur.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to compare wages paid between male and female workers in selected Tirupur garment industries.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study was taken up in Tirupur district which is situated in the Western Tamilnadu. Tirupur is also known as Knit City and is famous for knitted cotton hosiery, popularly known as "Banian" [5]. The proprietors and workers in garment units were met by the investigator and the purpose of the study was clearly explained to them and the willingness to participate in the survey was confirmed orally. They agreed to participate either before/after work hours or during lunch hours. An interview schedule was prepared in English but was communicated to them in their local dialect (Tamil). Thus 515 workers employed in 13 large, medium and small scale garment units participated in the study. The data thus collected was analyzed using SPSS 11.0

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The demographic features of five hundred fifteen garment workers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Features of the Garment Unit Workers

Sl. No.	Particulars	Frequency (n = 515)	Percentage
1	<b>Age (Years)</b>		
	Up to 20	74	14.4
	21 – 30	214	41.6
	31 – 40	171	33.2
	41 – 50	44	8.5
	Above 50	12	2.3
2	<b>Sex</b>		
	Male	295	57.3
	Female	220	42.7
3	<b>Marital status</b>		
	Married	311	60.4
	Unmarried	196	38.1
	Divorced	1	0.2
	Widow	7	1.4
4	<b>Education</b>		
	Illiterate	54	10.5
	Primary	91	17.7
	High school	291	56.5
	Higher secondary	63	12.2
	College	16	3.1
5	<b>Type of family</b>		
	Nuclear	333	64.7
	Joint	182	35.3
6	<b>Size of family</b>		
	Small (1-3)	166	32.2
	Medium (4-6)	301	58.4
	Large (Above 7)	48	9.3
7	<b>Community</b>		
	Backward Community	298	57.9
	Most Backward Community	153	29.7
	Schedule Caste	52	10.1
	Schedule Tribe	12	2.3
8	<b>Religion</b>		
	Hindu	468	90.9
	Christian	18	3.5
	Muslim	29	5.6

The mean age of garment workers was 30 years ( $\pm 8.7$ ). Above half of the workers (57%) were male and rest (43%) were female. It may be due to long working hours and improper worksite which may be unsuitable for women to work. Sixty per cent of workers were married. Fifty seven per cent of the workers had high school education, followed by primary school level education (18%), higher secondary level education (12%), illiterate (10%) and only three per cent had college level education. More than half of the workers (65%) were from nuclear family and only 35% were from joint family. In the current familial scenario, the nuclear family system of living is gaining importance drastically irrespective of their economic status. Nearly half of the workers (58%) belonged to medium family with four to six members. Fifty eight per cent of the workers were Backward community followed by Most backward community (30%), Schedule caste (10%) and only two per cent Schedule tribe. Majority of the workers (91%) were Hindu.

The garment workers' details of job are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Details of Job of Garment Workers

Sl. No.	Particular	Frequency(n = 515)	Percentage
1	<b>Source of motivation</b>		
	Friends	399	77.5
	Relatives	117	22.7
	Indoor work	512	99.4
	Workspot nearby	425	82.5
	Regular work	3	0.6
	Attractive bonus	196	38.1
2	<b>Nature of job</b>		
	Cutting	53	10.3
	Stitching	246	47.8
	Finishing	216	41.9
3	<b>Duration of work hours in regular days (hrs.)</b>		
	8-10	41	8.0
	11-12	406	78.8
	Above 12	68	13.2
4	<b>Duration of work hours in peak days (hrs.)</b>		
	11-12	37	7.2
	12-15	14	2.7
	Above 15	464	90.1

Majority of the workers' (99%) source of motivation to work in garment industry was indoor work. Workspot nearby was preferred 82% of the workers and the least preferred was regular work by only one per cent of the workers. The whole process in garment industry is mainly categorized into three sections namely cutting, stitching and finishing. The cutting section include pattern making of fabric and its layout cutting while finishing section include checking of stitched fabric for damaged one, ironing and packing of garments. Workers in stitching and finishing section were more or less equal. The former had 48% and the latter 42%. Only 10% of workers were engaged in cutting section. The mean age of garment workers' age of entry in cutting section was 19 years ( $\pm 2.7$ ), stitching section 18 years ( $\pm 3.8$ ) and finishing section 22 years ( $\pm 7.1$ ). A study [6] conducted in Bangladesh export and non-export garment industries reveals that female workers belonged to the youngest age group (19 years or less). Export industries comprised about eight per cent while non-export 14% of total workers. Garment employers prefer young women due to their nimble fingers and low price. They do not try to keep female workers when they marry; instead, they recruit new workers at lower starting wages. In all the sections of garment industry, the mean work experience of workers was found to be 10 years or more.

On record, a shift companies eight hours of work, but in actual terms it is twelve hours, that is one-and-a-half shift. In other words, the regular working day is from 8.30 am till 5.30 pm, six days a week. On top of this there is usually overtime. 'Normal' overtime is three hours per day. During peak season for work namely in September, October, November and December, the workers would work night shifts too until 1.30 am. Low season for work is February and March.

Income and other allowances of garment workers are represented in Table 3.

Table 3: Income and other Allowances of Garment Workers

Sl. No.	Particulars	Frequency(n = 515)	Percentage
1	<b>Type of employment</b>		
	Permanent	211	41.0
	Temporary	304	59.0
2	<b>Mode of payment</b>		
	Piece rate	172	33.4
	Shift	343	66.6
3	<b>Wages per week (Rs.)</b>		
	Up to 1000	271	52.6
	1001-1500	157	30.5

Payment of wages is generally on a weekly basis and in most of the units, as stated by owners' representatives; it is paid on the basis of minimum wages as declared by the government of Tamilnadu. However, this is only partially true [7].

Women workers are usually at the lowest-paid end of any sector, they are usually termed as unskilled, even though very often their work, though low-paid, requires a certain level of technique. Discrimination exists not only in terms of wages but also in terms of access to employment. Often women are found concentrated in occupations where the wage rates, as well as working conditions are poor and substandard. Low levels of skill on entry, lack of access to on the job training, employment histories punctuated by time spent bearing and raising children, time off to care for family members and the assumption that men are the primary earners all contribute to the implicit assumption that women should be paid less than men [8].

In the present study, wage inequality is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Comparison of wage Per Week Among Male and Female Garment Workers

Gender	Frequency(n = 515)	't' - Value	Inference
Male	295	13.039	**
Female	220		

\*\* one per cent level

When male and female garment workers were compared in terms of wage per week, a significant difference at one per level was found. A study [9] indicates that female workers earn significantly less than their male counterparts. Workers in the garment industry received 41% higher pay for being male whereas in other non-export industries they received 24% higher pay for being male. This implies that there is greater gender wage discrimination in the garment industry.

Any additional bonuses or incentives, like attendance bonus, productivity bonus and incentive for reaching the target are not provided to the workers. Deepavali festival bonus is the only exception. Bonus is calculated based on their basic pay, it varies from company to company. Bonus is distributed during deepavali festival in Oct/Nov. Eligibility for the bonus is that the workers must have worked for a minimum of 4 months. Minimum bonus is 8% and the maximum is 30% and most of the companies are giving the bonus as 20% on an average. However, many of the employers are evading payment of bonus by providing false information that the company is running in loss [10].

The most popular form of private standard initiatives in the Tirupur garment industry is the company codes of conduct. Generic Ethical Code of Conduct is presented in Table 4.

Table 5: Generic Ethical Code of Conduct

1	Compliance with local labour laws and workplace regulations
2	Prohibition of child labour
3	Regulation of contract labour
4	Non-discrimination
5	Prohibition of forced labour
6	Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining
7	Humane treatment
8	Minimum wages, living wage and other benefits
9	Regulation of working hours
10	Working conditions (health and safety)

Source: De Neve (2009)

There has been increasing concern labour standards in source countries, especially from the global buyers and international retail chains. As a result, in addition to company codes of conduct, several international voluntary labour standards have made inroads into Tirupur, of which the Social Accountability 8000 Standard (SA 8000) and the Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production (WRAP) Certification are most prevalent [11]. But such company codes of conduct and certifications are followed only to some extent in export garment units and never in medium and small scale garment units.

## CONCLUSION

The paper clearly analyzes the gender sensitivity at the workplace of Tirupur garment manufacturing units in terms of wage disparity. It has been noted that employees prefer women over men as both unskilled and skilled workers especially when an industry is growing. This is attributed to the following reasons: First, female labour is cheaper than male labour. Second, women workers are considered to be more docile, loyal and law-abiding in nature than men. Third, women workers are also more hard-working and sincere than their male counterparts. Finally, women workers have less contacts, exposure and bargaining power than male workers. The fundamental of any development strategy should be removal of inequalities and dissatisfaction among women. Women need encouragement, protection, sympathy, education, equal participation and healthy social and family environment. If women's productivity and employment are not raised and remunerative that leads to enhancement of women's position relative to men, humanity cannot achieve its crowning glory and the highest achievement only when women are emancipated and without their active and willing cooperation nothing immense and lasting can be achieved.

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ISBN 93-80697-38-4



₹1200