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Gender, Status and Empowerment: A study among women who work in Sri Lanka's Export Processing Zones (EPZs)

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on research that was funded by AusAID's *Australian Development Research Award* and conducted by investigators from Edith Cowan University (ECU) – Australia and The Centre for Research on Women (CENWOR) – Sri Lanka. The research sampled 2304 women between 2008-2011 who worked in factories in Sri Lanka's Export Processing Zones as well as 22 key stakeholders. The research was designed in the broadest sense to give voice to women working in factories *vis-a-vis* gender empowerment. The data they provided was designed to provide alternate and empirical data with regards the lived experiences of women in a developing nation and who should be, according to neo-liberalist thinking, at the forefront of international development and the most likely to be empowered – simply by receiving a regular salary. The research was also designed to question the legitimacy of macro and positivistic measures of gender empowerment used internationally and which focus on binary census data (comparing women's data to men's). This research focused on three important gender-based measures, the Gender Empowerment Measure (the GEM), the Global Gender Gap Index (the GGGI), and later the replacement to the UNDP's GEM the Gender Gap Index (the GII). Our research found that these measures conceptualise gender and empowerment in simplistic and unrealistic ways. To counter this, this report provides new insights to the ways in which women experience formal employment and the myriad of ways in which they are empowered and simultaneously dis-empowered as a result of working in export-oriented factories in a 'developing' nation.

The research clearly showed that women in developing nations experience 'modernisation' in complex ways that are influenced strongly at the national level by societal norms, political and media discourse and public mores. The women who participated in this research were not simply empowered or dis-empowered; they were not simply victims or victors nor were they simply benign actors or free agents of structural change. Their lives, as a result of formal employment, were extraordinarily complex and one of the most important findings of our research was that empowerment, as a concept, theory or measurement needs further rigorous debate before we come to an agreed understanding of it. Further, we found that attempts to measure gender empowerment using binary and macro-based census data, where women are viewed as separate and measureable objects, divorced from their families and the society in which they live, are not helpful in this quest.

This report will show clearly the complex and extraordinary ways in which women were empowering themselves and their families, whilst at the same time facing enormous forces that would see them dis-empowered. These included global forces of neo-liberal development, but also patriarchal powers within the nation and from harsh working conditions. However, the report does show that wages were used to empower women and their families, but not in the sense that neo-liberalist argue, where empowerment is viewed as a gift. On the contrary, it was through the participant's free will and commitment to family and community that wages led to empowerment. Importantly, the majority of those sampled had deliberate and set strategies of employment – they planned to work for a specific number of years and leave formal employment once a goal had been achieved, again a finding at odds

with liberalist notions that formal wages automatically leads to empowerment or common arguments that factory women are simply 'victims' in developing nations.

Arguments that the majority of women in developing nations have been dis-empowered due to global and national patriarchy are also at question in this report. Certainly very strong evidence of gender-based subordination and subjugation was evident, as was the negative impact of patriarchy at national, factory and community levels. However, the research also found that many women were resisting these forces and doing so successfully. In short, empowerment and dis-empowerment were operating simultaneously for the majority of the participants and they required great skill and fortitude to negotiate the enormous challenges they faced. If any conclusion stands out, it is that the women sampled were empowering themselves, with the support of family and community, but at the wider levels of society they faced enormous problems predominantly related to a society not ready to allow women economic and social freedoms taken for granted in many developed nations.

Macro-positivistic indicators such as the GEM, GII and GGGI do not capture women's empowerment or gender inequality. They must be supplemented by studies such as this which are able to delve more deeply and empirically into the ways in which women from various sectors of society experience empowerment and inequality. In this sense, this research found that in the formal factory sector in Sri Lanka, women were significant financial contributors to their family's well being, as well as to their community. Women were also empowered, for example, as a result of gaining skills in factory work; these indicators are not mentioned in the GGGI, GEM or GII. On the other hand, women in this study were significantly dis-empowered by societal subjugation, public harassment and negative stereotyping of women who work in EPZs, again concepts not captured in macro measures. More research is required to allow fuller understanding of gender empowerment; research which should also erode myths and breakdown some of the societal barriers faced by women in Sri Lanka and other nations.

The data presented in Parts 1, 2 and 3 of this report are a combination of quantitative and qualitative data and provide empirical and 'generalisable' results that are valid and rigorous. The remarkable ways in which major findings and themes identified in the 1st stage of data analysis were replicated in each proceeding part of the data analysis was remarkable. This in turn provided 'triangulation' which was noteworthy and testament to the methodology and diligence of the research team. These findings are summarised immediately below and in the Findings sections of this report as well as in the body proper.

In summary, the research found that either explicitly or implicitly the women sampled experienced empowerment in the following ways;

- New knowledge, experience and attitudes gained from formal factory employment and associated lifestyles away from rural society (modern training methods, leadership skills, teamwork, financial planning, problem solving, organising, social skills, risk awareness, exposure to modern machinery and appliances, bargaining, exposure to other cultures).

- Earning significantly higher incomes than their parents and siblings.
- Significant financial contributions to their family and the ability to solve problems with regular income.
- Increased decision making inside the family and at societal levels in some EPZs.
- Regular savings and goal-oriented employment strategies.
- Coping with living away from home, long hours of work and harsh working conditions.
- Exposure to modern production methods.
- Positive opinion about factory work and respect from the village and their family.
- Resilience shown by women despite to public humiliation and harassment. Many spoke of the strategies they had used to overcome their fear and humiliation, such as always travelling in groups, ignoring comments and remarks and being careful not to react or provoke negative behaviour.

The research found the following were dis-empowering;

- Public humiliation and harassment associated with the EPZs and views on young women in Sri Lanka.
- Sexual harassment in public and the workplace.
- Lack of time to engage in community, social and political activities due to long working hours.
- Harsh working conditions and long working hours in repetitive and low skilled work.
- Poor diet and nutrition.
- Continued exclusion from decision-making at community and political levels.

Background

This research is an in-depth follow up to successful research conducted in Sri Lanka in 2004/05 (by Dr P Hancock). The original research, conducted in 2004/05 of 370 factory women in Sri Lanka's EPZs aimed to trace the impact of formal employment on women's status. The main findings were that factory women faced significant societal and community disempowerment as a result of their roles as workers. This occurred as a direct result of the ways in which the status of women is controlled and constructed in the nation and to societal resistance to modernization (and the widely held belief in the associated moral corruption of the Nation's women). The 2004/05 research was disseminated within Sri Lanka (to the Sri Lankan Board of Investment), Australia and internationally. Critical feedback focused on the need to conduct follow up research on a large sample to measure the extent to which factory women have been able/or unable to turn their employment experiences into economic and social empowerment. This led to careful analysis of three important gender-based measures, the Gender Empowerment Measure (the GEM), the Global Gender Gap Index (the GGGI), and later the replacement to the UNDP's GEM the Gender Gap Index (the GII).

The aims of this research were to further measure the extent to which women have been able or unable to turn their employment experiences into economic and social empowerment. In addition, the study focuses on the appropriateness and applicability of using the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP), Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)[1], and the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) as measures of empowerment in Sri Lanka.

The GEM has been criticised for 'under-conceptualising' gender, power and women's empowerment (Charmes & Wieringa, 2003), for ignoring the complexities of women's lives, particularly women in rural and working classes, and for prescribing universal norms for all women in all countries (McGillivray & Pillarisetti, 1998). The validity and utility of the GEM have been questioned by many researchers, NGOs and policy-makers in developing and developed nations. The fact that Sri Lanka ranks poorly in the GEM and GII and very well in the GGGI, despite the fact that both measures rely on very similar data and methods, is testament to their inadequacies.

The current research provides more appropriate ways of understanding women's empowerment. Given the power of the UNDP's yearly publication of the GEM and more recently the GII, the recent emergence of the GGGI and the dominance of gender aspects in the Millennium Development Goals, the research is timely and important. The current research is 'generalisable' to other Nations and other development settings and allows AusAID (and other stakeholders) to develop more appropriate and inclusive gender and development policies and programs.

[1] Note that in 2010 the GEM was replaced by the UNDP with the GII or Gender Inequality Index. This index is discussed in the literature review.

Key Findings/Recommendations

The respondents living and working in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) are relatively young and well educated; the large majority have migrated from rural areas to work predominantly in garment factories. 74.8% of women were 25 years or younger, with the average respondent aged 24.02 years. Only 10.3% of women were aged 26-30 and 14.9% aged 31 and over. This indicates a relatively young workforce typical in EPZs in developing nations. Most had worked less than three years; in fact the average length of employment was 3.10 years. They work long hours in mostly low status positions with 95% of women working overtime with limited opportunities for promotion. Our data showed that 100% of women worked 40+ hours per week, 80.6% of women worked 50+ hours per week and 15.1% of women worked 60+ hours per week. These working hours were far higher than national averages for women in other sectors. However, despite the hardships of working and living away from home, the women appear resilient and focussed on the benefits that employment has bought to them and their families.

The data was not all negative. Analysis revealed that 47.37% of women who had worked 6 years or more were promoted into managerial or supervisor positions compared to 25.56% of women who had worked 5 years or less. The women across all EPZs were well educated with 98.4% having an O-level or above education. A further 38.2% had completed A-level education, with 1.1% (n = 25) women engaged or having completed tertiary studies. Women with higher education levels are more likely to be employed in a management position than women with less education. This is supported by a chi-square analysis that found higher education was associated with higher job level χ^2 (12, n = 2301) = 52.41, p < .001. Women's salary increased with both age and number of years worked with each variable accounting for 1.69% and 7.51% of the variance in salary respectively. Salary was also compared across job title and marital status via one-way ANOVA's. Results indicated that higher job status led to significantly higher salary. Analysis of total monthly income with overtime was conducted against age and years worked. Results indicated a significant positive correlation between total monthly income with age (r = .09, p < .001) and also year's worked (r = .28, p < .001). This indicated that women were paid significantly more as they became older and were also paid more as they worked more years in the factory.

On average women across the sampled EPZs earned 44% of the total family income. Looking further we found that 3% (n = 70) women earned 100% of the total family income and only 11.6% (n = 267) women earned 20% or less of total family income. It was also interesting to note that 24% of fathers 66% of mothers made no financial contribution to the family. These are interesting results highlighting the importance of women's wages to family income. Each month 75.60% of women sent money home to their family. An average of 2646.84LKR was sent home each month, with the maximum being 15000LKR. From this data we again point to the importance of women's wages to family wellbeing. The money sent home was used in positive ways including home renovations, assistance with sibling's education needs, family medical fees and living expenses. Moreover, these remittances proved to be the major focus of the debate on work and empowerment. Qualitative data revealed that earning relatively

good salaries, and being able to remit to family, led to many young women feeling a sense of empowerment that they had not previously experienced.

The skills and economic power the women gained from formal employment has led to higher feelings of self worth for many, a sense of independence and pride in being able to help their families possibly move out of poverty. Economic empowerment has also led to higher levels of decision making in the home by women. 55.8% reported that they participated more in home decision making since working. This is more apparent among married women who were more likely to be involved in collective decision making than unmarried women. Gender as well as sibling hierarchy were underlying factors affecting whether women were involved in decision making, as well as the level of patriarchy in families and villages. 70% of women reported that they felt more socially included since working, but predominantly at the household and village level, rather than the societal level. Positive opinion about factory work and respect from the village and their family was an important source of support and empowerment for women.

However, there were several issues which seriously undermined women's empowerment and status. The data showed that despite economic empowerment and significant contribution made to the economy in Sri Lanka, women do not have the time for community and political involvement with 78.3% of women reporting that they did not participate more in community and political decision making as a result of their work, and only 37.8% of women were more involved in decision making outside the home. While the majority of women quoted 'lack of time' for their non-involvement in the community due to long work hours, it was clear that negative attitudes, stigma and social exclusion of factory women also play a large part in women's low participation rate in society.

The issue of physical, verbal and sexual abuse of workers is highlighted in this report. It appears that verbal abuse is particularly widespread in the workplace while there is an undercurrent of physical and sexual abuse and harassment which is present but under-reported. The cases reported show that women are particularly vulnerable to abuse and harassment in the workplace and community due to their low status in society, labour conditions, adoption of city culture and living arrangements outside the "norm" for Sri Lankan women. Only a minority of women felt they were socially included at the public/societal level and our data shows evidence of women being subjugated and disempowered at the societal level. This data should be used to supplement data provided by the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) or the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) and the Gender Inequality Index (GII).

All the major themes revealed in this study, including participation in community, decision making, public humiliation, social inclusion and exclusion and empowerment are not separate entities but all interact and affect women's experiences. Different levels of social inclusion in the data seem to be the result of women's overall experiences. At the lowest level are women who feel no inclusion at all from family, village or general society, tended to be more vulnerable and more likely to feel isolated and depressed. Once a woman feels a sense of empowerment from her work and gains respect and support from family, social inclusion and

general wellbeing appears to become more positive. Once there is support and respect from family as well as the village there is a further increase in social inclusion. However, the overall data shows very little inclusion at the general societal level, where the overall opinion towards factory women in society is low.

Rich qualitative data obtained from women's' narratives revealed the extent of the social stigma and often negative opinions of society towards women who work in factories as well as the experiences some women face through public humiliation and sexual harassment. This contrasting picture of both empowerment and disempowerment occurring simultaneously, provides a rich insight into the ways in which women have turned their employment experiences into economic and social empowerment. At the same time it illustrates the challenges and barriers faced by women moving into formal employment in developing countries.

a) Recommendation/Finding

To what extent are Sri Lankan factory women working in the Nation's EPZs empowered (or disempowered) as a result of their work?

The research team considers that Sri Lankan factory women working in the Nation's EPZs are disempowered with respect to political activities while being empowered in their social status but predominantly at the family level, societal patriarchy remains strong and was also evident in rural and isolated locations.

b) Recommendation/Finding

To what extent have women factory workers in EPZs been able to convert economic capital to social capital (in their homes and community)?

The research team found that Sri Lankan factory women working in the Nation's EPZs were able to convert economic capital to social capital. This was achieved by savings, contributions to family income and wellbeing and improving the socio-economic status of their families.

c) Recommendation/Finding

In what ways are the GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure), GII (Global Inequality Index), and the GGGI (Global Gender Gap Index) appropriate or applicable to the measured economic and social status of the women sampled?

The research team recommends a review of the GEM, GII and GGGI as measures of gender inequality with the aim of addressing social status. These indicators showed little or no traction with the lived experiences and constructions of gender and empowerment revealed in this research.

d) Recommendation/Finding

If the GEM, GII and GGGI are not appropriate how could they be amended and what policy implications would this have for agencies such as the UNDP, WB, UNIFEM, ILO and AusAID?

The research team recommends that specific monitoring arrangements be agreed to in order to ensure the measures are reasonable with due regard to the real world situations of women both in developing and developed countries. In reality this requires further social research such as that conducted in this study, social research that should be considered as important as the macro measures often used by policy-makers, development agencies, INGOs and academics when developing gender-based development policy and programs, especially with regard to gender mainstreaming.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, there has been an enormous shift towards export-oriented industrialisation in over 130 countries, with Sri Lanka being one of the forerunners in this development (Hancock, 2006a; Engman, Onodera & Pinali, 2007; Ruwanpura, 2009). Export Processing Zones (EPZs) are large dedicated manufacturing areas specialising in manufacturing for export. They promote trade and attract foreign investment through free trade conditions and special incentives from host governments such as tax exemptions, cheaper utility services and in many cases, lax labour laws (Engman et al, 2007). Sri Lanka has 13 government-controlled EPZs. They are a significant source of employment for women in Sri Lanka and are dominated by garments and textile industries. EPZs employed 76,612 women and 40,012 men in Sri Lanka in 2010 (BOI, 2010). Women are typically young (aged between 17-25 years of age) and migrate from poor rural areas. Women dominate the EPZs where garments and textiles are produced. (Gunadasa, 2009).

While EPZs are a viable source of employment and poverty alleviation for women, they have also been a source of controversy due to labour and social issues (Engman et al, 2007). Much attention has focused on the impact and outcomes of this rapid shift to formal employment on women in developing countries (Hancock, 2006a). In 2004-2005 we conducted a study of 370 factory women working in Sri Lanka's EPZs to trace the impact of formal employment on women's status and to provide new understanding into the way in which women's empowerment is conceptualised (Hancock, 2006b). The main findings were that factory women faced significant societal and community disempowerment as a result of their roles as workers (Hancock, 2008). However, despite the hardships of factory work and societal subjugation, many Sri Lankan women showed resilience and were able to overcome the obstacles to empowerment as a result of factory work (Hancock 2006).

Previous research by Hancock (2006b) showed that focus groups and open-ended questionnaire items provided critical information on empowerment that would not have been available in quantitative measures such as the GEM, GII and GDI. In general, the women (n = 375) were subjugated at the factory and community level as a result of working at the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) but not at the individual and family level. Regular wages and new lifestyles associated with factory work empowered many women and 92% stated that their status in their family had improved as result of working (Hancock, 2005). The women considered generational changes in status and equal roles in decision making were also important to the measure of empowerment. Those that felt disempowered from working reported feelings of shame, long working hours, fatigue and oppressive management systems (Hancock, 2005).

Macro measures such as the GEM, GII and GGGI provide problematic and one dimensional measures of women's position in society and theoretically the extent to which they are empowered or achieve gender equality over time. These measures gloss over more important issues such as violence, subjugation and subordination of women in many nations where long held patriarchal systems and institutions are invisible in macro-based measures. Further, many of the most impoverished and isolated women in many developing nations, those who are not captured in census and survey data, are therefore not counted in the GEM, GII or GGGI. While this is not the case in Sri Lanka, the reality is that economic and societal data in many nations is incomplete and focuses on those segments of society that are easy to sample, the middle class urban based populations.

One important hypothetical question remains as to the invisibility of factory women in EPZs to the GEM, the GII, the GDI or the GGGI. For example, given that EPZs in all nations are 'typically' closed to public access, and most factories operate 24 hours a day, what happens to women working on the specific day and time that the census data is collected? And indeed are census workers allowed to enter EPZs at all? One must wonder if their experiences are captured as they should be. Finally it is strongly recommended that future discussions on national census data and questions related to empowerment *vis-a-vis* focus on standard questions that capture the family and household realms as foci of women's empowerment. A cohort of simple questions should be agreed upon at an international forum sooner rather than later.

2. GLOBAL MEASURES OF EMPOWERMENT

2.1 How is Gender Empowerment measured?

Interest in improving the lives of the world's women has been gaining momentum, particularly since the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing where a Platform of Action was agreed upon, to address 12 dimensions of gender inequality (Walby, 2005). Measuring progress in gender inequality required the development of indicators supported by valid and reliable data which could be compared across countries and over time and be able to evaluate the effectiveness of innovative policies (Walby, 2005). Relevant benchmarks were also needed to monitor change. The traditional use of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of economic progress was challenged by the UN and others as not being applicable to the measurement of human progress (Walby, 2005). This led to the development by the United Nations Development Project of a suite of indicators to measure progress in Human Development. The main one was the Human Development Indicator (HDI) which measures several aspects of human wellbeing including life expectancy, education and income per capita (Walby, 2005; United Nations Development Program, 2007). A cross-country comparison report is published each year including a series of tables and rankings on each country where data is available. In 2007 there was data for 177 countries and this number fluctuates only in minor ways from year to year (UNDP, 2007).

Two further indices were developed to create gendered indicators that are appropriate for cross-country comparisons and over time. The first was the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the second was the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The GEM and GDI were first introduced in the United Nations' 1995 Human Development Report (Hancock, 2005). While the GDI focuses on capabilities, the GEM focuses on opportunities (Klasen, 2006). The GDI is based on the HDI but is corrected for gender gaps in the three HDI dimensions of Education, Health and Income (Dijkstra, 2006; Klasen, 2006). Thus the GDI is an adjustment of the HDI in terms of gender gaps only and is in essence a basic measurement in gender inequality in relation to mortality and morbidity, knowledge and standard of living affecting human development (UNDP, 2007). The GEM is a measure of women's relative political and economic empowerment and ranks nations according to the extent to which gender equality has changed or improved over time (UNDP, 2007). The GEM measures gaps in gender equality based on income, political representation and management positions (UNDP, 2007). In the GEM, simplistic and binary comparisons are made between men and women in terms of economic and political participation; however complex formulae are used to calculate the GEM:

1. The proportion of seats held by women in parliament (political and decision making power)

2. The proportion of women administrators and managers (economic participation)

3. The proportion of women professionals and technical workers and (economic participation)

4. Women's real GDP per capita (earned income, women's economic independence)

As would be expected rankings on these two measures vary widely. The number one ranking country (out of 177 countries) on the GDI in 2007/08 was Iceland with 0.962 (0.0 inequality to 1.0 is equality) with Australia ranked second (0.960) (UNDP, 2007/2008). The number one ranking country on the GEM was Norway with 0.910 with Iceland ranked fifth and Australia ranked eighth. Sri Lanka had a relatively high GDI ranking of 0.735 and ranked 89 in 2007 (UNDP, 2008). In 2008, The GEM in comparison ranks Sri Lanka 85 (out of 93 countries) with an index of 0.369 which is relatively low in equality. Thus in terms of gender and development, Sri Lanka ranks at a reasonable level on the GDI but still have a long way to go in terms of empowerment. Sri Lanka's GEM index has improved slightly since 2002 (0.274) but its GEM ranking has dropped from a ranking of 69 (0.372) in 2006 to a ranking of 85 in 2007/08 (UNDP, 2007). By 2010 the GEM and GDI had been replaced by the Global Inequality Index (GII), testament to the issues discussed in this review. The GII is discussed in detail below, however the GGGI has remained unchanged and our understandings of women's empowerment elusive and cursory, despite the introduction of the GII in the 2010 Human Development Report.

Consider for a moment Sri Lanka's relatively poor ranking on the GDI and GEM. In 2006, the World Economic Forum launched the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) which aims to provide another framework on which to measure four critical areas of gender inequality between men and women including:

(i) Economic participation and opportunity
(ii) Educational Attainment
(iii) Political empowerment
(iv) Health and survival
(World Economic Forum, 2008)

The index has extensive coverage of 130 countries and focuses on gaps, not levels, of resources distributed between men and women in a particular country. Also, the World Economic Forum specifically points out that the index does not and is not intended to, measure women's empowerment (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2008), despite this point iii (above) on its measurement is political empowerment, this is contradictory as it clearly attempts to measure empowerment. The *2008 Global Gender Gap Index Report* shows that Nordic countries lead the way with Norway no. 1 in closing the gender gap. Not only do they have narrow gaps between men and women in health and educational attainment, but also in economic and political participation (Zahidi, 2008). Sri Lanka has a high ranking of 12 on this Index and has moved up three places since 2007 ahead of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2008). However Sri Lanka's ranking in educational attainment is only 65 (out of 130 countries) and 99 in economic participation and opportunity. A high ranking of 1 on the subindex 'health and survival', as well as 5 in

'political participation' (because of the number of years with a female head of State) may have biased the measure, giving Sri Lanka an unusual high ranking.

As previously discussed, the issue of political participation is also problematic, the assumption that the empowerment of women in parliament 'trickles' down to women in all levels of society is problematic (Hancock, 2006b). Useful additional data on the GGGI is included on a country's basic rights and social institutions, including legislation for punishing violence against women where Sri Lanka has a score of 0.33 (1=worst score, 0=best score) (World Economic Forum, 2008). Again, although multidimensional, the Index is complex to calculate and has a strong focus on developed countries (Jutting, Morrison, Dayton-Johnson and Dreschsler, 2008). Also, even with the presence of legislation punishing violence against women, the actual reporting of violence by women in all South Asian nations is low (Gomez & Gomez, 2004; Goonesekere, 2004). This problem is not isolated to developing nations. By 2010 the GGGI rankings remained the same with Nordic nations dominating the top ten but Sri Lanka had moved to a slightly lower ranking of 16 globally in 2010 from 15 in 2009 (World Economic Forum, 2010), a questionable move up or down the so called ladder. Given a high ranking on the GGGI compared to a poor ranking on the GEM and GII (see below) the problems of both macro-measures seems to provide unworkable indicators.

The logical question that must be asked at this point is this, why does Sri Lanka rank very well on the GGGI and relatively poorly on the GDI and quite poorly on the GEM? At the same time while Sri Lanka's GEM ranking was worsening between 2005 and 2008, it was improving on the GGGI (from 15 to 12). These three indicators were the pre-eminent indicators of gender equality and empowerment, they rely on similar formulas and indices, yet they contradict each other dramatically. The measures have caused a great deal of confusion and as will be seen below, were seriously investigated by the UNDP in 2006/07.

Despite these measures, research has shown that Sri Lankan women have a better status than women from many other developing countries in terms of education, health and in selected formal areas of the economy (Jayawardena, 1998; Jayaweera, 2002a & 2002b & Samarasinghe, 2002). In fact, Son (2009) recently made special mention of Sri Lanka as one of the high achievers in Standard of Living compared to other countries in South Asia. Life expectancy at birth and primary enrolment was even superior to Asia as whole. Son (2009) goes on to praise Sri Lanka's achievement of basic needs such as widespread schooling relative to its income level. However, Son (2009) does concede that social and psychological characteristics such as justice, freedom of choice, security and satisfaction is not included in the measurement of Standard of Living.

2.2 Critique of the GEM and GDI

Both the GDI and GEM have been important and influential, particularly in raising awareness about gender inequality, but have been subject to criticism, first emerging in the literature following their introduction in 1995. This also included a general critical discussion on gender, power and women's empowerment (Hancock, 2006b). Most of this discussion has emanated from Western-educated academics and from development practitioners (Attanapola, 2003; Bardham and Klasen, 2000; Charmes and Wieringa, 2003; Dijkstra, 2002; Dijkstra and Hanmer, 2000; Hancock, 2001; Jayaweera, 2002b, 2003; Pyle and Ward, 2003; Sharma, 1997; Visvanathan, 1997).

It is useful to examine the critique of the GEM by each indicator. The first indicator 'The proportion of seats held by women in parliament' does not necessarily indicate empowerment of all women in society. For example, China ranks highly on the GEM because women make

up 20% of the national parliament. However, this doesn't mean all Chinese women are empowered as a result (Hancock, 2006a & Hancock, 2006b). In reality, unequal access to political power is prevalent among women in developing and developed nations alike (Hancock, 2006a). Norris (2003) argues that attitudes towards gender equality is the significant issue and would explain why wealthier post-industrial countries had a higher level of political representation of women. Paxton (1997) however, found that institutional factors were more responsible for blocking women's access to political power than other factors such as level of education, attitudes towards gender equality and employment.

Tripp and Kang (2008) concur with an important study carried out of 153 countries on the effect of gender quotas on the political representation of women. The introduction of gender quotas has increased since the mid 1990's which is why there is little research on quotas prior to 2000. Many reasons have been documented about the pursuit of quotas such as political leaders wanting to appear "modern" and not necessarily to increase the civil and political rights of women (Tripp and Kang, 2008). When quotas are introduced, such as in China, factors such as democracy, religion and economic development maybe less of a constraint to some groups of women (Tripp and Kang, 2008), however, it is still important to consider that women in parliament tend to be from the middle to elite classes and do not represent the majority of women in developing countries (Hancock, 2006a; Beteta, 2006).

The second and third indicators on the GEM, 'the proportion of women administrators and managers', and 'the proportion of professional and technical workers' is generally representative of a minority of women in most developing nations and over-represents women from the middle and elite classes[2]. One could argue that it does not represent the large numbers of women who work in export – oriented factories or in agriculture in Sri Lanka (Hancock, 2006a). In fact, Hancock (2006b) argues that this is one of the major weaknesses of the GEM, in that women from low socio-economic groups, villages and rural areas in developing countries are overlooked on the GEM and are prone to omission in many nations' official census data and other economic surveys. This is also evident in the 4th indicator 'Women's real GDP per capita' or earned income. The GEM uses an estimation of non-agricultural wages to compute the earned income component and ignores the fact that in many developing countries, the rural agricultural sector (and indeed the export-oriented sector) is an important source of employment for women (Schuler, 2006).

The overall nature of the GEM has also been criticised due to the way universal norms are prescribed for all women (McGillivray & Pillarisetti, 1998); ignorance of rural/urban differences, ethnicity and class (Hancock, 2006a); and the reliance on data that is often highly inaccurate and prone to manipulation in some developing countries (Bulmer & Warwick, 1993; Gulrajani, 1994; Hancock, 2005; Jones, 1987; Warushamana, 2004). These census problems have not been reported in Sri Lanka however.

Much of the recent critique in the literature in the past five years arose from a formal review conducted in 2005-06 by the United Nations Human Development Program (UNDP) who commissioned several 'expert' advisors to examine the impact of the measures and suggest ways in which the GEM and GDI could be modified (Klasen, 2006). The results of that review were published in a special edition of the *Journal of Human Development* in 2006. The main conclusion to this review was that the measures were not as effective as they could have been and a number of weaknesses were revealed (Klasen, 2006; Klasen & Schuler,

[2] Sri Lanka is an exception to this rule as it has a long history of high quality public education and gender equality in all levels of education and as a result women have moved into technical and professional roles in far greater numbers than many other nations. Despite this, it ranks poorly on the GEM.

2007). One of the biggest issues found by several authors (Beteta, 2006; Dijkstra, 2006; Klasen & Schuler, 2006) was that the measures are often misinterpreted. The GDI was never meant to measure gender inequality; it is merely an adjusted measure of Human Development due to gender gaps on the three components of the HDI (Klasen, 2006).

The GEM was also subject to misinterpretation because of limited data coverage and the earned income component was biased towards countries with higher income levels (Klasen & Schulen, 2007). Another major criticism of the GEM which was touched on earlier is that it does not capture empowerment at the household level (Beteta, 2006). Hancock (2006a) agrees. Our previous research on Sri Lankan women working in EPZ's found that it was in the realm of the family and household that women were most likely to experience positive empowerment and these realms are overlooked on the GEM and GDI. It is important that new ways of capturing these realms are included in future discussions by both the UNDP and international agencies, and all nations who provide their census data to international agencies. Adding new census questions to all national censuses that capture family and household empowerment change is an achievable objective, one that is specific and realistic.

In 2007 the UNDP released the following critique of the GEM and the GDI, based on feedback from the panel of 'expert advisors' referred to above and which highlights the points made above. The UNDP (2007, p 62) stated that the GDI;

1) Is confused as a measure of inequality due to its complexity and presentation

2) Earned income statistics are based on crude assumptions of a relationship between male/female wages and assumptions that women have no power over household income, regardless of who earns it

3) Ignores unpaid labour and assumes this has no bearing on human development.

In the same report the UNDP stated that the GEM;

1) Does not adequately measure the gap in earned incomes between males and females

2) Ignores women at the grass roots level and does not capture the overall labour force, ignoring important sectors where women work

3) Is based on a false assumption that women in parliament always work to empower women

These critiques have finally been accepted by the UNDP, in 2010 the Human Development Report introduced the Gender Inequality Index was introduced to replace the GDI and GEM. Like the GEM, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a composite measure reflecting inequality in statistical achievements of women compared to men, but it focuses on three major areas; reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. It has 8 new measures, but is a new variant on the GEM and GDI but with new health variables (maternal mortality ratio, adolescent prevalence rate, contraceptive prevalence rate, and evidence of 1 ante natal visit and presence of a health care professional at birth). The empowerment components of the GII have changed and retain political participation rates and labour force participation rates, with previous measures discarded. However, these are claimed to measure empowerment by the UNDP and still contain the flaws outlined in the GEM critique but are now far more narrowly scoped with one measure for political participation and 1 for labour

force participation added to a predominantly reproductive health-dominated measure. Indeed of the 8 measures used, 5 are focused on reproductive health (but only of married women).

In 2010 Sri Lanka ranked 76 out of 121 nations on the GII (UNDP, 2010). The rationale behind choosing the measures used to create the GII are very similar to the GEM. However, by introducing health and reproductive indicators the GII is placing too much emphasis on health-specific measures that are not directly proven to be related to gender empowerment or inequality. Reproductive issues and contraceptive use are far more likely to be culturally embedded with bias toward developed western nations where contraceptive use for example is widely accepted, whereas in developing nations it is not accepted among un-married women for example. Again we argue that the GII is a mis-leading measure and when we compare the poor ranking of the Sri Lanka in 2010 with a far better rating on the GGGI in the same year this is more compelling. Moreover, the new measures added to the GII related to reproductive health seem quite biased as the use of contraception is viewed as a positive gender indicator or a way in which to measure gender inequality. These indicators ignore the majority of young women in the developing world who are un-married, and particularly those at the fore front of economic development, young women in EPZs. Moreover the GII relies on Census data that is inconsistent and which would be unreliable as many women would not answer questions such as those related to reproductive issues candidly.

The GII claims to focus on the labour market to measure gender inequality over time. However, only one measure related to labour is used in the GII; this is the labour force participation rate of men compared to women, and this was based on 2008 Census data which indicated that 38.5% of women participated in the labour market, compared to a very high 80.3% for men. These figures, like most in the GII ignore the reality of life for women in developing nations, their labour maybe unpaid, or paid in kind, their labour maybe not considered work (housework and childcare) and many women work in informal markets and do not figure on this measure. Norway, for example, which ranked 5th on the ne GII in 2010 had very high female labour force participation rates, with women measuring 99.3%, higher than males and therefore raising their ranking (UNDP, 2010). However, developed nations like Norway don't have large informal markets or large rural populations where women work as unpaid labourers in seasonal conditions and commonly work for in kind remuneration. It is these sectors that are dominated by women in developing nations and are invisible to the GII. The UNDP has a long way to go before it gets any measure that will not attract constant criticism.

3. METHODOLOGY – Part One and Part Two

A number of trained female Sri Lankan Research Assistants facilitated the data collection in Sri Lanka. The Research Assistants were fluent in English and Sinhalese and received intensive training and guidance from the Principal Investigator, CENWOR Research Director and Project Manager. The respondents were randomly selected by the Research Assistants and were sourced from the countless boarding houses that surround the EPZs, as well as from non-government organisations. To be eligible for selection women had to have worked in an EPZ for at least one year prior to data collection.

Respondents were approached to complete the two-page survey (see Appendix 1) or participate in a focus group (see Appendix 2), in safe locations in community areas and care was taken not to interfere with their work or family duties. The women were informed that

their results would be anonymous and confidential and would not link them to any village or factory. No names were used on the questionnaire or in focus groups. The questionnaire and focus group data was translated to Sinhalese and the Research Assistant translated the results back to English using the process of Back Translation. Ethics approval was granted by Edith Cowan's Ethics Committee in late 2007.

The questionnaire and focus group data was designed to provide insights into the ways in which young women may be empowered or indeed disempowered as a result of their work. The data collected was also designed to provide alternate ways to measure and understand empowerment as opposed to the macro-measures used in the GEM, GII and GGGI for example. The first part of the questionnaire was quantitative and focused on demographic data such as age, marital status, and education level. Other questions focused on work profile such as type of factory, job title, hours worked and promotion, as well as information on salaries and savings. The women were also asked whether they had experienced verbal, physical or sexual harassment at work, and whether they had experienced public humiliation for being an EPZ worker.

The second qualitative part of the questionnaire asked the women five open-ended questions and 1062 of these surveys (approximately 40% of each EPZ) as well as information from eight focus groups (Number of participants in total=74), have been analysed for this report:

1. In what ways has your salary allowed you to accumulate capital or buy a house or similar or empower yourself or your family?
2. As a result of working do you participate more in community and/or political activities? If yes, explain
3. As a result of working do you participate more in decision making processes within the home? If yes, explain
4. As a result of working do you participate more in decision making processes outside the home? If yes, explain
5. Do you feel as a result of working in factories that you have experienced increased social inclusion in Sri Lanka IE. Being included in social, cultural, religious and political processes? If yes, explain

The focus group questions were similar to the questionnaire questions with additional items on measuring women's empowerment, the development of skills and the use of banks versus informal savings. The focus groups were facilitated by the Sri Lankan research assistants and supervised by senior members of the research team. The focus group data was designed to allow the women more freedom to express their concerns and air sensitive problems that they encountered as a result of working in an EPZ. The eight focus groups included 74 women altogether, mostly from rural villages with ages ranging from 20-38. The eight sessions provided valuable insights and the ability to triangulate issues and themes revealed in the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the questionnaire.

The data was analysed using SPSS Statistics 17.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and the qualitative open-ended questions were first transcribed into word documents and then

coded and further analysed using Nvivo qualitative software. While the full quantitative dataset of 2304 women was analysed, only the qualitative data of 1062 women (in order of ID number in each EPZ), or approx 40% of total, were analysed due to time constraints. However, this qualitative analysis is considered to be a representative sample of the remaining qualitative data. The five open-ended questions were treated as overarching themes in Nvivo and the women's comments were coded into these main themes and further coded into relevant sub-categories or into other themes. These results are presented below and are used in a mixed-method approach to the study.

4. FINDINGS – PART ONE

4.1 Introduction

Part one of the findings presents the quantitative results of the data from the survey including demographics of the participants and data related to their employment profile, salary and savings habits. The second part of the findings (Findings – Part Two) presents an analysis of the qualitative data from the surveys and focus groups including the major themes as well as sub-themes that have emerged from the women's narratives. The third part of the findings (Findings – Part Three) presents data from 22 key stakeholders.

4.2 Demographics of respondents

There were 2304 questionnaires completed by women working across 6 EPZs (Katunayake, Biyagama, Koggala, Wathupiwela, Pallakele, and Seethawake) and all quantitative data for 2304 women was analysed using SPSS Version 17.0. The detailed sampling frame is presented in Table 1 and the sample demographics are shown in Table 2.

Analysis revealed that 74.8% of women were 25 years or younger, with the average respondent aged 24.02 years. Only 10.3% of women were aged 26-30, leaving only 14.9% aged 31 and over. This indicates a relatively young female workforce across the EPZs. Analysis found that 79.4% of women were unmarried and 19.3% were married, the remaining 1.3% of women were either in a defacto relationship (n = 3), divorced (n = 15), widowed (n = 6), or separated (n = 4).

Table 1: Number of participants by EPZ compared to all women in EPZs.

EPZ	Number of Women	Percentage of Total Sample	Total Women in EPZ / % of Total
Katunayake	901	39.1%	27,198 (3.31%)
Biyagama	500	21.7%	9,685 (5.16%)
Koggala	199	8.6%	8,169 (2.43%)
Wathupiwela	204	8.9%	4,628 (4.41%)
Pallakele	100	4.3%	4,551 (2.20%)
Seethawake	400	17.4%	11,367 (3.52%)
TOTAL	2304	100.0%	65,598 (3.51%)

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires & BOI (2010).

The women across all EPZs were well educated with 98.4% having an O-level or above education. A further 38.2% had completed A-level education, with 1.1% (n = 25) women engaged or having completed tertiary studies. Of the entire sample of 2304, only 1.6% (n = 36) of women had failed to complete O-level education. To make mother-daughter comparisons, women were asked about their mother's level of education. A total 89 (3.9%) of mothers were removed from analysis as women indicated they did not know their education

status. Overall only 62.5% of mothers had completed O-level education; with 7.1% having completed A-level education (only 8 mothers in total had completed tertiary education). Overall 37.5% of mothers had incomplete O-level education, with 9.2% of these mothers having no formal education at all (3.4% of overall sample). A chi-square analysis comparing education levels indicated a significantly higher level of education of the women in comparison to their mothers χ^2 (24, n = 2206) = 112.07, p < .001.

Table 2: Respondents by age group, marital status and education level.

Demographic Characteristic	Percentage of Respondents (n)			
Age	< = 25 years 74.8 (1,724)	26 - 30 years 10.3 (237)	31+ years 14.9 (343)	
Marital Status	Married 79.4 (1,829)	Unmarried 20.6 (475)		
Respondent's Education	O-levels 60.3 (1387)	A-levels 37.1 (854)	Tertiary 1.1 (25)	Incomplete O-levels 1.6 (36)
Mothers Education (n =89 removed due to "Don't know"	O-levels 55.4 (1223)	A-levels 6.7 (148)	Tertiary 0.4 (8)	Incomplete O-levels 37.6 (829)

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

4.3 Employment profile – Questionnaire respondents

4.3.1 Type of factory and Job title

The women were asked several questions regarding their work. When asked which type of factory they worked in (see Table 3), 81.5% of respondents indicated they worked in garment factories, followed by haberdashery (3.8%), toys (2.5%) and textiles (2.4%). The average amount of years worked in any EPZ was 3.10 years, with well over half of all women (69.7%) had only been working in the EPZ's for 1-3 years, with a further 18.8% having worked 4-5 years. Overall only 11.5% of women had worked 6 or more years in the EPZ's, with only 65 women (2.7%) working 10 or more years and only 5 women (0.2%) working 20 or more years. An analysis of job type found that 79.0% of women were employed in low-to-medium level jobs including machine operator, packer and cutter. A further 14.6% of women were employed in trainee or starter level positions, with only 5.3% (n = 117) in management positions and 1.0% (n = 23) considered skilled workers. Only 1 woman with incomplete O-

level education was in a management position (she had been working in the EPZ for 10 years), with 97.6% of managers having O-level education or above. Furthermore the highest percentage of trainee level workers was seen in women with incomplete O-level education (30.6%), with the highest level of managers coming from women with A-level education (7.7%) or tertiary education (20.0%). Thus it is evident that women with higher education levels are more likely to be employed in a management position than women who are less education. This is supported by a chi-square analysis that found higher education was associated with higher job level χ^2 (12, n = 2301) = 52.41, p < .001.

When asked about their mother's employment, 65.0% of women indicated their mothers did currently work, leaving 806 mothers from the sample who did not work. Of these mothers that worked 70.7% were farmers, 6.6% were housemaids, 4.0% were self employed and a further 7.3% worked as labourers or on tea plantations. Only 1.9% of mothers were considered skills workers such as teachers and 65 women (4.2%) reported their mothers were deceased.

Table 3: Type of factory worked in.

Type of Factory	Frequency	%
Garment	1878	81.5
Textile	55	2.4
Shoes	33	1.4
Machinery	46	2.0
Computer Electronics	17	0.7
Jewellery	41	1.8
Cigars/Cigarettes	34	1.5
Haberdashery	88	3.8
Fishing	24	1.0
Toys	58	2.5
Food	24	1.0
Other	6	0.3

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

4.3.2 Garment and Textile Workers

As Shown in Table 3, 83.9% of respondents worked in garment or textile factories. These type of factories have attracted negative public attention and have been reported in the media and research as being a major threat to the "moral fibre" of Sri Lankan women (Hewamanne, 2003; Hancock, 2006a). Part 2 of this report provides rich narratives concerning the subjugation of women working in EPZ's, mainly garment factories, as well as frustration from women at the misconceptions associated with their work.

4.3.3 Hours of work and promotion

Long hours or work for factory women have been reported in the literature above. Hours of work and promotion data are presented in Table 4. On average, women worked 45.73 hours per week before overtime with the minimum hours being 30 and the maximum being 88. Over three quarters of the sample (80.4%) reported working overtime, with an average of 9.62 hours or overtime worked per week. Overall women worked 55.35 hours per week; earning an additional 2125.77LKR per month by working overtime (the maximum additional income earned via overtime was 13,482LRK).

Comparing these hours to the Sri Lankan national average (Vidyarathne, 2009), significant results are apparent. Nationally in 2008, 32.2% of the female labour force worked 40-49 hours per week and 18.9% worked 50+ hours per week. This is in comparison to the current sample where women worked 55.35 hours per week on average, 19.4% of women worked 40-49 hours per week, 65.5% of women worked 50-59 hours per week and 15.1% of women worked 60+ hours per week (see Table 4). To put these statistics in a more cohesive statement, our data showed that 100% of women worked 40+ hours, 80.6% of women worked 50+ hours per week and 15.1% of women working 60+ hours per week.

A one sample t-test with hours per week set at a conservative 45 (indicating the Sri Lankan national average for women), indicated that women across the EPZs worked significantly more hours than the national average $t\ (2302) = 63.61$, $p < .001$. This finding is significant and while the national Labour Force Survey focused on the entire female labour force, its results are relevant to our study as they show the EPZ women in Sri Lanka worked vastly longer hours than national averages, which is an area of concern.

When asked if they had ever been promoted at work, 14.2% of women reported being promoted (see Table 4). Of the 14.2% (n = 332) only 31.3% of these reported being promoted to a managerial, supervisory or leadership position, with the remaining simply being promoted into other low to medium level roles or getting a rise in pay. These low promotion results are not unexpected as only a small portion of women have worked in the EPZ for 6 or more years, though it does show some evidence of promotion. There was also a significant relationship between education level of women and reports of promotion, $\chi^2\ (72, n = 327) = 160.40$, $p < .001$. This analysis indicated that 98.47% of women who reported promotion had completed O-level education at a minimum. Only 5 women with incomplete O-level education reported promotion, with further analysis revealing these women had worked at average of 9.6 years in EPZs and had an average of 36.6 years. Further analysis of years worked and promotion revealed that only 12.56% (n = 256) of women who had worked 5 years or less (n = 2038) reported promotion, compared to 28.67% (n = 76) of women who had worked 6 years or more (n = 265) reporting promotion. Further analysis revealed that 47.37% of women who had worked 6 years or more were promoted into managerial or supervisor positions compared to 25.56% of women who had worked 5 years or less.

Table 4: Weekly hours of work and promotion status.

Work Characteristic	Percent of Respondents (n)			
Hours of work per week including overtime	**Less than 40** **0.0 (0)**	**40-49** **19.4 (447)**	**50-59** **65.5 (1509)**	**60+** **15.1 (348)**
Overtime Worked	**Yes** **80.4 (1853)**	**No** **19.3 (444)**		
Promotion	**Yes** **14.2 (327)**	**No** **85.8 (1969)**		

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

4.3.4 Salary

The average monthly salary of women was 7837.55LKR (SD = 1247.91) excluding overtime (equivalent to $71.92 AUD in October 2010). The average salary after overtime was 10459.15LKR (SD = 1917.05) a month (based n = 1853 women who worked overtime), which was equivalent to $95.97 AUD in October 2010). These salaries were constant and reliable; however salaries ranged significantly with the maximum earned before overtime 18000.00LKR and the minimum 4300.00LKR and the maximum earned including overtime 24182.00LKR and the minimum 6280.00LKR. As can be seen by Table 5, average monthly salaries did vary and Pearson's correlation revealed this variance was positively related to age ($r = .13$, $p < .01$) and number of years worked ($r = .27$, $p < .01$). This indicated that women's salary increased with both age and number of years worked with each variable accounting for 1.69% and 7.51% of the variance in salary respectively. Salary was also compared across job title and marital status via one-way ANOVA's. Results indicated that higher job status led to significantly higher salary, $F (3, 2299) = 77.33$, $p < .001$ with trainees (M = 7459.73LKR) earning significantly less than both low-to-medium workers (M = 7795.92LKR) and managers (M = 9107.07LKR). Also, as expected, managers earned significantly more than low-to-medium level workers.

Table 5: Average monthly salary without overtime.

Salary Scale LKR	Number of Respondents
4000 – 6000	26
6000 – 7000	389
7000 – 8000	900
8000 – 9000	685
9000 – 10000	193
10000 – 11000	51
11000 – 12000	13
12000-13000	35
13000 – 18000	12

Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

Comparisons were also made between the sampled women's income and the Sri Lanka National Income Receiver's Income based on individuals who earned an income during the 2006/2007 Census (Vidyarathne, 2008). The mean population income in the Receiver's Income was 14457.00LKR per month in 2007, with the median income being 8,693.00LKR. A one sample t-test indicated the sampled women's monthly income before overtime (M = 7834.51LKR, Median = 7720.00LKR) was significantly lower, t (2303) = -253.09, p < .001, than the mean monthly Sri Lankan population income. A further one sample t-test indicated that the samples women's monthly income, including overtime income (M = 9957.23LKR, Median = 9940.00LKR) was significantly lower, t (2304) = -101.79, p < .001, than the mean population income, indicating women earned 31.13% less than the national Census average. Thus women across the sampled EPZs are working significantly more hours than the national population average, whilst earning significantly less income. It is also important to consider that the incomes reported on the census combine both male and female workers. Conservative estimates assume that Sri Lankan males earned 20-28% more than their female counterparts; therefore the female national income average would likely be slightly lower than the data reported above (Hausmann, Tyson, & Zahidi, 2009).

To make comparisons with salaries earned by their parents, the women were asked about their parent's salaries as well as their contribution to the family income. On average women across the sampled EPZs earned 44% of the total family income. Looking further we found that 3% (n = 70) women earned 100% of the total family income and only 11.6% (n = 267) women earned 20% or less of the total family income. It was also interesting to note that 24% of fathers 66% of mothers made no financial contribution to the family. These are interesting results highlighting the importance of women's wages to family income. However such ratios are invisible outside research such as this and are certainly invisible in the GEM, GII and GGGI and most gender-based discourse and analysis. From these data alone, we can conclude that the women sampled are important financially to their families and community, however this economic power does not automatically translate into social empowerment.

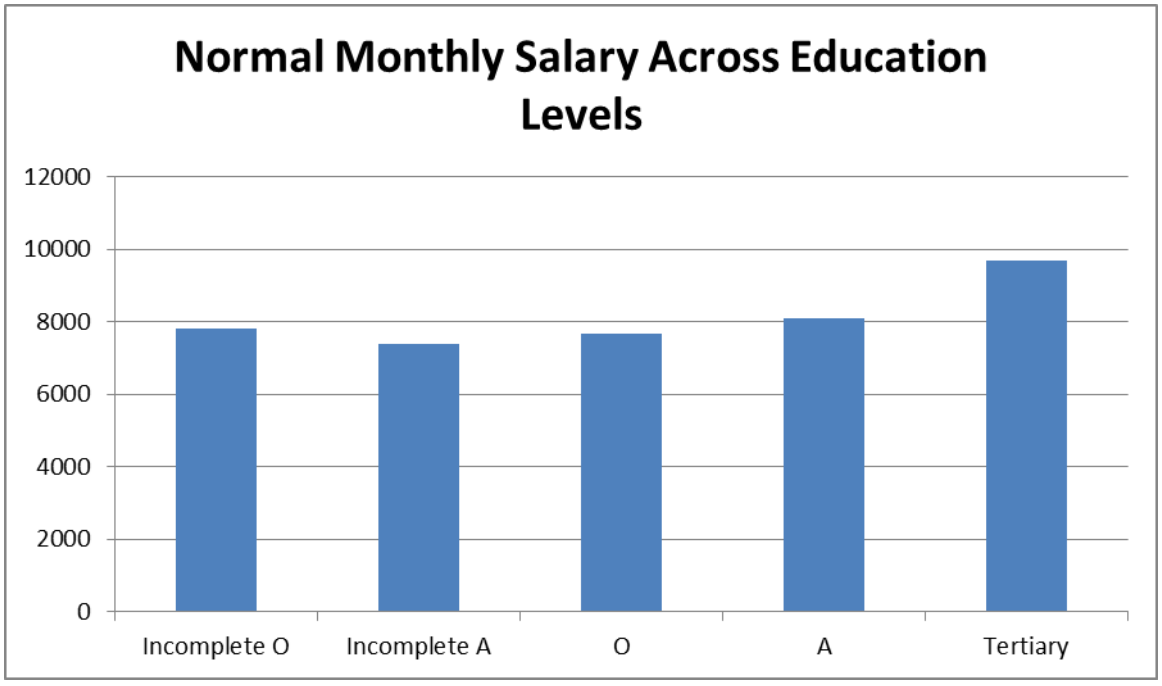
On average, the women sampled earned significantly higher salaries than their parents. Of mothers, 34% did not earn any income and a further 32% only contributed to household income through seasonal or ad hoc salaries or produce, with only 14.4% of mothers earning 5000LKR or more each month. A paired samples t-test indicated that the women in our sample (M = 9980.88LKR) earned significantly more money than their mothers (M = 1703.52LKR), t (2231) = 95.58, p < .001. In terms of comparison with fathers, 6.9% (n = 127) of fathers earned no income. The average father's income excluding those fathers who were deceased was 7489.75LKR, with 30.3% of fathers earning 10000LKR or more per month, with 12.4% earning 15000LKR or more per month and finally only 18.9% of fathers earned 3000LKR or less per month. A paired samples t-test indicated that women earned significantly more money than their fathers, *t* (1843) = 17.79, p < .001.

Analysis of total monthly income with overtime was conducted against age and years worked. Results indicated a significant positive correlation between total monthly income with age (r = .09, p < .001) and also year's worked (r = .28, p < .001). This indicated that women were paid significantly more as they got older accounting for 0.81% of the variance in total monthly income and were also paid more as they worked more years in the factor,

accounting for 7.84% of the variance in total monthly income. Separate one-way ANOVA's were then conducted to compare total (with overtime) and normal (without overtime) salary against education level. Results indicated a positive main effect for normal salary, F (4, 2301)

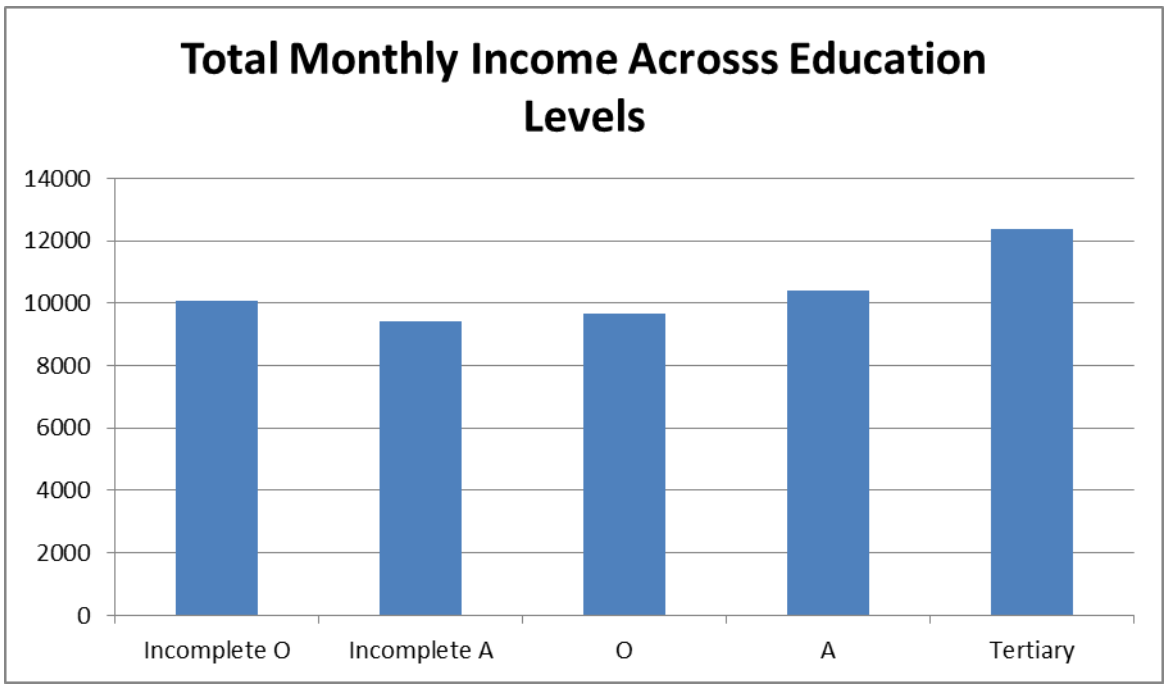
= 37.76, p < .001 and total salary, F (4, 2301) = 26.49, p < .001 against education. Post hoc tests for normal monthly salary indicated that women with A-level and Tertiary earned significantly more normal income than women with incomplete O-level, O-level or incomplete A-level education. Also women with Tertiary education earned significantly more money than women with A-level education. Post hoc tests for total salary produced the same results. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of normal monthly income without overtime by education levels while Figure 2 shows total monthly income by education level. These results indicate that education is a key indicator of increased income among our sample.

Figure 1: Monthly salary (LKR) without overtime by education level.



Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

Figure 2. Monthly income (LKR) including overtime by education level.



Source: 2007 – 2009 questionnaires

4.4 Savings and money sent home to family

Of women 82.3% saved money in either formal or informal savings schemes, with only 17.7% of women reporting no savings at all. Of women who saved either in a bank or informally (n = 1897) the average amount saved was 3053.52LKR per month. A total of 297 women (12.89%) saved in both informal (Cheetu) and bank plans, saving an average of 3712.62LKR per month. A paired samples t-test indicated that overall women saved significantly more money in informal savings schemes (1329.31LKR) than bank plans (1185.22LKR), $t(2303) = -2.34$, $p < .05$.

Each month 75.60% of women sent money home to their family. An average of 2646.84LKR was sent home each month, with the maximum being 15000LKR and 24.40% of women sending no money home each month. From this data we again point to the importance of women's wages to family wellbeing. The money sent home was used in positive ways including home renovations, assistance with siblings education feeds, family medical fees and living expenses. Moreover, these remittances proved to be the major focus of the debate on work and empowerment. Qualitative data revealed that, young Sri Lankan women earning relatively good salaries, especially when compared to total household or family income, as well as remittances, led to many young women feeling a sense of empowerment that they had not previously experienced. This will be discussed in the next section and described in more detail in Table 6. Data on money sent home to family is just one part of the valuable data we have obtained by the women in our survey on various aspects of factory life in EPZs including demographic information such as type of factory and education levels, employment and salary variables, such as overtime, promotion and hours worked and money saved. This quantitative data has provided an accurate 'picture' of women who work in Sri Lankan EPZs at this point in time.

5. FINDINGS – PART TWO

5.1 Introduction:

This section presents an overall analysis of the qualitative data from both the surveys and focus groups for all Export Processing Zones (EPZs) studied. However, points of interest in the data about a particular EPZ is also included where possible, to illustrate diversity in the data in some cases. The qualitative data of 1062 women who participated in surveys were analysed. This equated to approximately 40% of the surveys from each EPZ (See qualitative questions in Appendix 1 and 2). We also analysed data from eight focus groups of 74 women in total. All the data was coded and analysed in the Nvivo qualitative software program. The qualitative data is also supported by quantitative statistics obtained from the full dataset, n= 2304.

All written and verbal comments from women who participated in the survey and focus groups were electronically coded to particular themes and sub-themes. Table 6 lists the major themes (based on actual questions in the survey) and sub-themes coded in Nvivo and the number of comments coded to each theme. Due to the large number of comments to be analysed and to make more sense of the data, sub-themes were developed based on the most common comments that women made under each question or theme. For example, under the theme "Increased decision making in the home" women's narratives tended to state whether they made decisions as part of the family or marriage (e.g. *I am always consulted*), or were only *sometimes consulted* or *never consulted* usually due to sibling position or age. The common themes of 'collective decision making', 'not consulted' or 'sometimes consulted' then became sub-themes and all text related to this question was coded to one of the sub=themes. For instance, the text *I am always consulted* would be coded to the sub-theme 'collective decision making'. While most of the sub-themes were applicable to all EPZs studied, some new sub-themes were created for a recurring theme relevant to a particular EPZ.

5.2 Summary of findings from the qualitative data

The main findings from the qualitative data themes and sub-themes (see Table 6) can be summarised as follows:

1. There was a positive shift towards an increase in decision making in the home as a result of working. This was largely attributed to the financial contribution women were able to make to the family economy.

2. In terms of outside (the home) decision making, there was no overall increase as result of working. The most common form of outside decision making was in the workplace. A minority of women made all their own decisions outside the home.

3. Increased participation in community and political activities did not occur as a result of working, mainly due to a lack of time to be involved for the majority. Some women reported that factory management discouraged women from being involved. A

minority were able to be involved in village organisations or on factory committees, while some factories actively promoted community and social activities.

4. Women gained personal empowerment from being able to use their income to assist their families, and/or improve their homes and living standards. Most women spent their salaries on a diverse number of items with jewellery, furniture and household goods, and assisting siblings in their education being the top three. 'Pride' in earning an income and 'Independence' were also important sub-themes of empowerment.

5. Public humiliation was expressed in two main forms including humiliating remarks and comments (the most common type) and sexual harassment. Verbal abuse was also a common occurrence in the workplace. Overall public humiliation appears to be under-reported in survey formats.

6. There was an increase in perceived social inclusion at the village and family level as a result of working, with 'respect' being the main term used by women. Many women contributed a significant amount of their salary to their family income which also equated with an increase in inclusion at the family and village level. However, there was no increase in inclusion at the societal level and many women felt 'no difference' in social inclusion.

The results of the qualitative analysis as described above forms the basis of the discussion of the data to follow. It provides a useful fact file of women's insights, experiences and processes of empowerment and disempowerment.

Table 6: Narratives from women describing social exclusion and inclusion

Increased decision making in the home		
	Collective decision making increased	442
	Not consulted	258
	Sometimes consulted	45
Increased decision making outside of the home		
	Within village organisation	10
	Workplace decisions – Union involvement	18
	Decisions made with family members	38
	Workplace decisions – not specific	46
	Outside decision making not her role	50
	Makes own decisions outside the home	60
	Give advice and support to family	65

	Do not participate	73
	Workplace decisions – give ideas and opinions to factory management	137
	No opportunity	230
Increased participation in community and/or political activities		
	Company/factory discourages participation	32
	Work related participation eg.Union, social organiser	84
	Participates when returning home	23
	No time	376
	Not interested	24
	Give money to family so they can participate	30
	Participate in village organisation	78
Personal empowerment		
	Examples of Empowerment	
	Accumulate capital	83
	Buy, build, renovate house for self	113
	Contributed to building or renovating family members' home	103
	Dowry	37
	Furniture, household goods	258
	Further own education	46
	Helped pay for sibling or family education	146
	Jewellery	502
	Sewing machine	24
	Agricultural inputs e.g..Tractor, fertiliser, three wheeler	75
	Mobile phone	17
	Obtained utilities to home e.g. water supply, electricity	22
	Own small business	13
	Other themes related to 'feelings' of empowerment	
	Happy and proud to be earning an income	89
	Independence	65
	Pride in being able to help family	37
	Pride in belonging to an EPZ and helping the nation	21
	Improved status	17
	Examples of Disempowerment	
	Lack of sleep and proper meals	7
	High cost of living	14
	Supporting family members	14
	Workplace related eg. Treated badly	9
Public Humiliation	Humiliating comments or remarks	128
	Sexual harassment	32
	When using public transport	24
	None, because transport is provided	41
	No longer occurring	14
	Vulnerable to robberies on way to work	16
Social Inclusion		
	Decreased inclusion at family and village level	
	Lower status	40
	Negative opinion from village about EPZ workers	74
	Lack of time to return home and distance to home	29
	Parents unhappy about their job or prefer them to study	28
	Unhappy about job	15
	Decreased inclusion at societal level	

	Lack of recognition	21
	Negative public opinion about EPZ workers	160
	Increased inclusion in family and village	
	Feel respected by family and village	267
	Found employment for other women	26
	Village has good opinion about EPZ	25
	Respect more now than early days	37
	Respect new attitudes, skills, knowledge gained from working	53
	Increased inclusion in society	
	Bring in money to Sri Lanka – good assets	7
	Improved public opinion	15
	Treated well in the city	7
	No difference felt in social inclusion	123
	Unsure of social inclusion	20

Source: 2007-2009 Questionnaire (based on N=1062 questionnaires and N=74 women from focus groups)

5.3 Increased decision making in the home

When the women were asked if they participated more in home decision making since working at an EPZ, 55.8 percent reported 'yes', with collective decision making (442 comments – see Table 6) the most commonly cited theme. This figure may actually be higher because it became apparent in the women's comments that a "no" answer may not have meant no decision making, but "no change" to decision making as they had always been involved, even before working. Nevertheless an increase in collective decision making, that is, being consulted by parents or other family members was a significant outcome of this study.

Making a financial contribution to the family was a major factor in explaining this outcome. Many women attributed the increase in decision making to their contribution to the family economy with comments such as (*Yes – since I contribute to the household economy, I am consulted,)* and (*Yes – since I am the major breadwinner they definitely consult me before taking whatever decision).* Other women stated that contributing financially to sibling education in particular, was also a major factor (*I'm being consulted about my younger brother's education and I help them with the tuition fees).* Several women mentioned an increase in decision making in the home due to the death of their father (*Yes – after my father's death I have taken over the responsibilities of the house).*

The qualitative data also showed that birth order, marital status and age are important factors in decision making in the home. If a woman has older siblings, she is less likely to be consulted, even if she is an older woman (*No – my elder sister is consulted on main decisions).* However, brothers are often more likely to be consulted in decision making than sisters despite age (*No- all the decisions are taken by my brother. Even regarding my son, I'm not involved in that process)* In terms of marital status, married women appear to be more involved in decision making than single women. This was particularly apparent in Pallekelle

(Kandy) EPZ. A chi-square test of the total EPZ data revealed a significant relationship between marital status and in-home decision making χ^2 (5, N = 2302) = 54.43, p < .001. Married women indicated they participated more in decision making in the home (69.75%) compared to unmarried women (52.10%)

It is important to note that there was diversity among families of women working in the different EPZ's. Some families appeared more patriarchal than other families. Of the 44.20% of women who stated that they did not participate in home decision making, 86.40% reported that they were never consulted. There were over 250 comments in the qualitative data from women who said they were 'not consulted' or only sometimes consulted (45 comments). Most of the women who were 'not consulted' cited that their parents, particularly fathers made the decisions. One woman from Katunayake commented: *My father makes decisions in our family. I of course get permission before I do anything.* Another woman from Kandy remarked: *No rights to take any decisions inside the home – everybody controls me.* While these results were more common in smaller, more rural EPZ's such as Kandy and Koggala, overall there was a positive shift towards increased decision making in the home as a result of formal employment.

5.4 Increased decision making outside the home

Overall, 37.8 percent of women reported that they participated more in outside decision making (outside of the home) as a result of working. However, caution should be taken in interpreting this figure as there were wide variations between EPZs in how this question was answered, often depending on how the question was interpreted by the women. For example, in Biyagama EPZ, 94% of women cited "no opportunity" as a survey response. Given a lack of elaboration on the '*no opportunity*' response, it is difficult to interpret whether this was due to a lack of time due to long work hours, lack of opportunity, or unwillingness to be involved. In Katunayake, results were also difficult to interpret as 64% of women cited 'no' without giving a reason. However, while the majority of EPZs did show that women have very little outside-decision making roles, almost every woman participating (over 100) in Seethawaka EPZ said 'yes' to outside decision making due to factory management in that EPZ encouraging women to "give their opinions" about decisions in the workplace such as setting target outputs (see Table 6). While 'opinions' are not necessarily decisions, the comments from the women indicated that they felt empowered by being able to have a say in the workplace. Other women (60 comments) reported that they made all their own decisions outside the home indicating increased independence due to working.

Decision making in the workplace was the most common form of outside decision making. Overall there were 46 comments related to the workplace or boarding house representation; 137 comments related to giving ideas and opinions at the factory and 18 comments related to Union involvement. Taking leadership roles or being part of a factory Union or representing a boarding house was empowering for women as evidenced from these comments by women in Katunayake:

'When there is an issue regarding factory workers, I take a stand and I represent our factory workers' (Katunayake garment factory, aged 26)

'We strike and get increments, we get together and demand the factory to provide meals for us and we managed to win those demands' (Katunayake garment factory, aged 30)

For women who did elaborate on why they were not involved in outside decision making, *getting permission* and *informing parents* were common citations. It may also be speculated that non-participation in decisions outside the home is a way for a woman's reputation to be protected given the sometimes negative associations with women working in EPZ's, and cultural norms of women not going out in public unaccompanied. Having to leave the village to commence work in EPZ's, gives women a lot more independence. However many are wary of the negative public opinion of EPZ workers and hence a reluctance perhaps, to become involved in outside decision making.

5.5 Increased participation in community and political activities

Overall, 78.3 percent reported that they did not participate more in the community as a result of their work. Two major responses dominated the data. The first was *'no time'* (376 comments – see Table 6) and the second was *'I used to be involved prior to coming to work in an EPZ'*. The second was not included as a sub-theme as it tended to be a secondary comment to the first comment given but is useful to report on as the majority of women reported prior involvement in community groups (particularly youth society and welfare) and seemed to feel the need for the interviewer to know this. While only 40% of the qualitative data was analysed, both these responses would be representative of the total dataset given their very frequent occurrence.

Community participation is a way of life and an expectation in Sri Lankan culture. Given that the majority of women in our survey and focus groups had no time to participate in the community; our data shows that many women working in EPZs are being denied access to community involvement. While most did not elaborate on *Lack of time*, the assumption would be that working long hours would allow little time for involvement. This would be particularly apparent for the women who reported that they previously participated prior to coming to work at an EPZ (*No time now, I used to be an active member of the Youth Society).* Other women (14% of women in Biyagama EPZ) reported that they did not participate due to discouragement by factory management and some were fearful of harassment if they became involved, particularly in trade unions. There were similar comments from women in Kandy *(if found guilty, we will be sacked)* while in Seethawaka there was no mention of union involvement at all suggesting no opportunity for union involvement at that EPZ. One woman commented:

'No – I am scared to join a trade union because things could become harsh for me from the management' (Biyagama EPZ, garment factory, aged 23)

Thus not being able to participate in the community or in political activities due to working could be considered a form of significant disempowerment and subjugation which is a contradiction to the macro measures used in the GEM, GII and GGGI.

For the minority of women who did report being involved in community or political activities, being involved at work (84 comments) or in their home village organisation (78 comments) were the major means of involvement. This suggests that the women were rarely likely to be involved in the outside community surrounding the EPZ of their work. It has been noted in the literature that factory workers often felt like outsiders in the local community where they work. However, within the factories themselves, there appears to be a 'sense of community' among the women with many willing to donate money to factory charities, pool resources to buy gifts or contribute to worthwhile funds that assist other women and families less fortunate. Others did actively participate in Unions as well as factory committees or sports groups organised by the factory.

Two EPZs stood out in the data concerning village participation and work-related activities. Women working at Seethawaka EPZ reported that the factories ran essay writing, dancing and sporting competitions which were not as common in other EPZs. The Research Assistant noted that this EPZ is relatively new, compared to other zones in Sri Lanka and that the management had undergone modern methods of training, including linking worker morale and welfare with profit. Some managers had organised family days and annual trips for workers. Another interesting anomaly to the data was Koggala EPZ where reported union activity was low, but participation in other community activity was high. A significant portion of the sub-theme "participate in village organisation" came from women working in Koggala EPZ, particularly women's empowerment, human rights and other welfare organisations. However it is not known whether the women were physically involved in the activities or contributed in a monetary way. Despite evidence of the more progressive factories promoting community involvement, the majority of women overall had no time to participate.

5.6 Personal Empowerment

While empowerment in general was at the core of our research, and was a common thread across all questions, we asked the women about specific ways in which their salary had allowed them to accumulate capital or empower themselves or their families. All women in the surveys were able to report on ways in which their salary had empowered them, most often in multiple ways. The top three comments (see Table 6) in the survey were Jewellery (502 comments), Furniture/household goods (258 comments) and contributing to sibling education (146 comments). This was representative across all EPZs.

Almost all women reported they had purchased jewellery. Jewellery is significant in Sri Lankan culture as an important dowry item with one Research Assistant reporting that in the first year of their work, many women had invested in "getting the necessary jewellery". Buying furniture and appliances for living away from home as well as assisting families was

very common, including renovating the family home or building a new one. Of interest in the smaller EPZs such as Koggala, Kandy and Wathupitewela, was the empowerment gained from purchasing three-wheelers to hire out for a small sum as well as attending beauty culture, sewing or computer classes held in the local community. Another feature of these smaller EPZs was the use of a woman's salary to obtain basic utilities such as electricity, water supply and telephones to the family home.

As the majority of women spent their salaries on more than one item, this indicates a level of personal empowerment through financial independence, which is reflected in the comment below.

> *'Bought a paddy field. 2 years spending on brother's education. Bought jewellery. Bought furniture for myself, contributed in building our home. Followed a course in beauty culture, helped the family on every occasion'*
> *(Biyagama garment factory, aged 30)*

In support of this finding, the women in focus groups commonly defined empowerment in terms of financial strength or economic independence. One participant from Seethawaka stated: '*it is the financial strength that a person gains as a result of her job'*. Interestingly the women while acknowledging that knowledge was important did not define empowerment in terms of one's education. In fact, for the majority of women from poverty-stricken backgrounds with little education, financial 'strength' was a definite form of empowerment.

5.6.1 Feelings of empowerment

In the focus groups, women were more likely to elaborate on "feelings of empowerment" such as increased status, pride or independence gained from working. Many spoke about how they had overcome hardships such as long work hours, harassment and living away from home, to becoming more self confident, independent and 'strong'.

> *'I have overcome all these fears and make my own decisions and am independent' (Biyagama focus group, aged 21)*

An analysis of narratives in Nvivo revealed a common sub-theme of '*Happy and proud to be earning an income'* (89 comments) and Independence (65 comments).

Other text examples are:

> *'Personally I feel good that I'm Independent and in a position to live on my own' (Biyagama fishing bait factory, aged 21)*

> *'I've felt very proud about working here and earning an income and making a better life for us' (Katunayake garment factory, aged 23)*

> *'Yes – as a result of working in a factory we realise our validity – ability to build up oneself' (Kandy garment factory, aged 21)*

Other minor themes of empowerment were 'Improved Status', and 'Pride in belonging to an EPZ' and 'helping the nation'. One woman remarked '*Our status of the family increased due*

to my job' and another stated '*I think we are the pulse of Sri Lanka. We make a lot of money for the country. We make up most of the working class of the country'*. Although there were not a lot of comments coded to these themes, they were nevertheless reflections of empowerment in both contributing to family and society.

5.7 Reported experience of public humiliation

In the survey and focus groups, we asked women if they had ever been publicly humiliated for being an EPZ worker and the question allowed for comments. Overall 19.3% answered 'yes' to this question but given the sensitivity of the question and lower likelihood of reporting in a survey, we believe the issue was under-reported. Responses from focus groups in particular were a lot more open and pointed to an undercurrent of public humiliation, particularly in the form of humiliating words and comments and sexual harassment. Actual reports of sexual abuse or assault was low but existed nevertheless in a small number of cases.

Some women did not consider sexual harassment as a form of public humiliation, thus interpretation of the question was an issue. For example, several women in Biyagama EPZ reported that they were not publicly humiliated but that sexual harassment was a daily occurrence. The issue of physical and sexual harassment was openly discussed in many of the focus groups. In Katunayake women reported being approached by "zipper men" (Exhibitionists) and in Seethawaka, robberies and being approached by gangs of boys on the way to work was common (*as a whole factory girls are unsafe on the road, due to robberies)* and *(Gangs of boys have made it a habit to joke at garment girls on their way).*

The most common theme in the data was "humiliating comments and remarks" (128 comments – see Table 6). Most often these remarks were made from males in their community, including young men on the way to and from work, from boyfriends, brothers and other family members who considered their work and character of low status (*My boyfriend scolds me always – he asks me to give up my job or he won't marry me)*. Thus public humiliation was related to the status of the women in society and in particular the stereotype of a factory worker being *easily available and easily cheated.*

> *'There are others that cast remarks saying "there goes the Juki piece". Whilst some girls are labelled as "fast numbers" …most often these remarks are made in obscene language' (Biyagama garment factory, focus group, aged 20)*

While the actual reporting of public humiliation was low, this differed between the individual EPZs. For example, in Wathupitewela and Koggala EPZ, very little public humiliation was reported but in Katunayake and Seethawaka, there was a reasonably high level of women reporting public humiliation, mainly in the form of harassment from male youth to and from the workplace. An interesting aspect across all the EPZs however, was the apparent resilience shown by women despite the obvious disempowerment felt. Many spoke of the strategies they had used to overcome their fear and humiliation, such as always travelling in groups, ignoring comments and remarks and being careful not to react or provoke negative behaviour.

In Seethawaka for example, women in focus groups reported that it was important to 'ignore' and 'prevent reaction' to groups of three-wheeler drivers who had made it a habit to gather and watch the factory girls on their way back from work. In Kandy, quite a few women spoke about being humiliated by service providers such as hospitals and government services. One woman stated:

> *'Yes – if we go to get the services from government offices we can't get served easily. They scold us and say we are not educated people' (Kandy garment factory, aged 53)*

Humiliation and harassment using public transport was also a common theme. Perceived lack of respect for factory women in public appears to be related to the change in lifestyle and dress attire of the women working in zones. One woman explained '*People do seem to think you are cheap and try to take advantage. I have also heard of such comments when walking on the road'* and another woman stated that *'people outside the zone consider the people working in the zone to be vulgar and different…we are branded as zone girls'*. A focus group participant explained harassment experienced while taking public transport:

> '*When we travel by bus in Biyagama area the males living in this area, try to harass us sexually. They are of the opinion that we working women must be available for them. I have experienced a lot of harassment by my boarding owners too. They cast humiliating remarks when I go out to do my Trade Union activities' (Biyagama focus group, aged 38)*

41 women reported that they had not experienced public humiliation because their factory provided transport to and from the workplace and were thus not exposed to the outside world. Transport fees were usually deducted from their salaries (*No – company provides transport – deducts Rs231/s per month)*. Provision of private transport may be an important factor for reducing sexual harassment and humiliating remarks at least while travelling to and from work.

5.7.1 Verbal abuse in the workplace

Twenty six point two percent of women reported verbal abuse at work, mostly occurring (95.5%) when they "failed to reach targets *(On occasions I was not able to finish the target I was abused verbally. On such occasions I felt helpless and emotionally affected*), with others reporting verbal abuse for asking to take maternity leave. 95.03 percent of women who reported experiencing verbal abuse were in trainee, low or medium level positions. Of these women 91.64 percent worked in garment factories.

The women in focus groups also discussed the issue of '*being scolded'* on a regular basis at work and episodes of unfair treatment and favouritism among supervisors. '*Telling tales*' was encouraged and could mean better work conditions for some at the expense of others. The women also spoke about the difficulty in being able to 'speak up' about unfair treatment as they were more likely to be penalised or have their jobs suspended.

> *'The management always use non-decent words to address girls. Thus the girls are almost depressed within the workplace. One girl came for treatment after getting hit on her ear by her manager' (Seethawaka garment factory, aged 23)*

The cases reported show that women working in EPZs are particularly vulnerable to abuse and harassment in the workplace and community due to their low status in society, labour conditions, adoption of city culture and living arrangements outside the "norm" for Sri Lankan women. This is likely to improve slowly over time but not without a significant shift in public opinion (particularly from males) and societal treatment of women working in factories.

5.8 Social inclusion and exclusion

Of all the open-ended questions, this one generated the most narratives, and supports the need for obtaining rich qualitative data for describing the experiences of women. Participants were asked whether 'as a result of working in factories, they felt increased social inclusion in Sri Lanka such as being included in social, cultural, religious and political processes'. Overall, 56.0 percent of women, n = 1289, answered 'yes' to increased social inclusion since working in the EPZ, with 44.48 percent reporting either "no" or "no difference" in social inclusion (this figure does not equate to 100 percent as 12 women who reported social inclusion also reported "no difference". Many of the women who reported "no difference" in social inclusion (123 comments) explained that the reason for this was their lack of time to interact with their home community.

Due to the cost, distance and time needed to return home, which was usually only once every two to three months, most prefer to spend time with close family and relatives when they return home and therefore their opportunities to interact with the wider community is limited (*No difference – I go home once in 2 months – no time to interact with the village community. I spend time with immediate family members only).* Also to note, several women mentioned that they disliked travelling home to their village due to sexual harassment on buses:

> *'I go home once in a way and on these days I have encountered a lot of sexual harassment from men both young and old. They lean on me thrusting on to me especially in crowded buses. These are very humiliating and powerless situations' (Biyagama focus group, aged 22)*

All the major themes in this study including participation in community, decision making, public humiliation, social inclusion and exclusion and empowerment are not separate entities but all interact and affect women's experiences. Different levels of social inclusion in the data seem to be the result of women's overall experiences. At the lowest level are women who feel no inclusion at all from family, village or general society and tended to be more vulnerable and more likely to feel isolated and depressed. Once a woman feels a sense of empowerment from her work and gains respect and support from family, social inclusion and general wellbeing appears to become more positive. Once there is support and respect from family as well as the village there is a further increase in social inclusion. However, the overall data shows very little inclusion at the general societal level, where the overall opinion towards factory women in society is low. The next section describes these levels of inclusion and exclusion in more detail.

5.8.1 Family and village inclusion

As can be seen in Table 6, 38.28 percent, 'feel respected by family and village' was a major theme on social inclusion with 267 comments. The opinion of the local village and family, particularly regarding '*Respect'*, was important to women and whether they felt socially included. Not bringing shame to the family and having a good reputation is important in Sri Lankan culture and is linked to social inclusion at the family and village level in our data. One woman stated:

> *'Yes – the villagers respect me because I look after the family. Also I have not changed because I started working. I still dress the way I used to before going to the zones' (Biyagama garment factory, aged 22)*

This supports our 2006 data where it was found that women are more likely to feel empowered at the family and village level as a result of working and are more likely to be subjugated at the societal level (Hancock, 2006a). In a small number of narratives, the type of EPZ was linked to social inclusion. The stigma of being a 'garment girl' in comparison to working in other types of factories has been noted in the literature. A few of the women in our data who worked in security, transformer, toy or jewellery factories considered themselves to be more educated and skilled than those working in garment factories (*My job is a well respected one. I behave in a very respectful manner unlike the garment girls. So our family and village know that I'm doing a responsible security job, so I feel I'm socially included)* and; *(Since I'm not in a garment factory, my family don't mind).* Our quantitative data does not support this societal 'myth' that garment workers are less educated than factory workers. Our data shows that 92.53% of garment workers had complete O-level education compared to 92.18% of factory workers. Furthermore 36.17% of garment workers had completed A-level education compared to 40.90% of factory workers and finally 1.7% of garment workers had incomplete O-level education compared to 0.94% of factory workers. These figures indicate that the idea that factory workers are more educated than garment workers is a "myth" amongst the Sri Lankan population.

Several factors in the data were linked to increased respect and social inclusion at the family and village level. One of the major factors was being an economic asset to the family and village. Most of the women hail from poor families, and as the majority of women send money home to their families, they have gained respect and status. However, as mentioned by a Research Assistant in Seethawaka, the women themselves often have very little money to live on a daily basis and when most of their salary is sent home, many owe debts to local shopkeepers in the EPZ and have little left over for food and board. In a small number of narratives, increased inclusion and respect in the village was related to the women being able to find employment for other women in the village (*Yes – I feel that I am an important person in the village as everyone talks to me and wants to know of job vacancies in the zone)* and *(Yes – after employment my social inclusion has increased. I have helped other villagers to find employment).* This again points out the significance of women's employment to the family economy.

Another major factor linked to increased social inclusion was the gaining of skills and knowledge and improved attitudes (53 comments). This was particularly apparent in Koggala and Kandy EPZ. Comments included better attitudes such as savings habits, tolerance of other communities, time management, hard work; as well as particular skills gained either while working or undertaking additional courses; such as sewing, embroidery, computer assembly and beauty culture.

5.8.2 Societal inclusion (general society)

Focus group participants in Seethwawaka EPZ mentioned that while they were accepted in their local communities, when they tried to mix with people of a higher social rank, they felt rejected. The Research Assistants concluded that social inclusion at the family and village level was only apparent among the lower social classes but *"in reality, they were mostly marginalised by other upper social classes"*. This was a similar sentiment across the other EPZ's as well. Thus social class/caste in Sri Lankan society may be an important factor in the social inclusion of factory workers who are considered to be of low status compared to public service workers.

The number of women who mentioned that they felt more social inclusion at the societal level was quite small. Some women mentioned 'other people' in general so it is also difficult to ascertain whether they are talking about people in general or from their home village. Those women reporting increased inclusion at the societal level felt that attitude about EPZ's were improving over time or changing for the better. One woman reported:

> *'Yes I feel included in the society, because unlike those days we don't hear unwelcoming comments when we travel in public transport. So I think a whole new positive attitude has developed towards us'* (Katunayake Garment factory, aged 30)

Although small, it appears there is some positive sentiment among some women that over time, attitudes towards EPZ workers has improved. There were 37 comments related to "respect now more than the early days" which reflects this finding.

5.8.3 Exclusion at the family and village level

Exclusion at the family and village level was minor compared to at the societal level, but was nevertheless disempowering for women. When the women did not feel included it was generally because the village opinion of women working in EPZ's was negative (74 comments). Many women reported that they did not tell villagers that they worked in an EPZ because of the '*wrong impression'* of EPZ workers (*We tell people that we work in the city but we don't tell them that we work in the zone. People will have a bad impression about us if we say we work here)*. Others mentioned that despite negative opinion of the village, they still had family support or were proud of their independence and hoped that village opinion would change with time.

Other forms of exclusion were related to the perceived lower status of EPZ jobs (*No – my parents never liked me to do this job since I have passed my A levels they wanted me to do a better job)*. Public service work was much more admired. Other women explained that their parents were unhappy about them working in an EPZ because they would prefer them to

study. There were also comments related to villagers sceptical about a woman's character and disapproval of the way they had embraced city culture and dress. One woman stated:

> *'People in the village have this attitude that we wear trousers now and that we are urbanised and do not consider us to suit their 'culture' anymore'*
> *(Katunayake garment factory, aged 26)*

> *'If I wear a "mod" dress I am made to feel uncomfortable in the village. I am not free to wear what I like in the village because the villagers pass remarks saying "that's the one that went to Colombo". This applies only to women but the men are not criticized no matter what they wear and how much they change their attire'*
> *(Biyagama Sails factory, focus group, aged 20).*

Working in the zone affected marriage proposals with some women being rejected by males and the parents of the male for being a "garment worker" *(They are of the opinion that all women working in the zone have bad character and have had 100 boyfriends*). The theme of "bad character" for a garment worker appears to be widespread with many women feeling frustrated at being labelled for the 'misbehaviour' of a few women in the industry.

Thus the negative opinion of family and villages towards EPZ workers undermines women's empowerment and sense of belonging in their local community. In contrast, women who felt respect and support from their local community were likely to experience greater empowerment.

5.8.4 Exclusion at the societal level

For those women who felt inclusion at the village level, many reported exclusion at the societal level or from the general public (160 comments). This example from one woman is representative of many other similar comments:

> *'Within my family and village of course I'm respected and honoured. But I know that the public doesn't have a favourable opinion about us. We are treated as* ***garment objects*** *in society especially in public places such as on buses'*
> *(Katunayake garment factory, aged 23)*

One of the major frustrations for women across all EPZ's was the overall negative opinion of women factory workers in society, due to widespread stereotyping. One participant explained it as like *"killing the bug that bit you and the one that did not"*. The women in one focus group reported that incidents such as births out of wedlock and illegal abortions are common in EPZ's but then the media generalises to all EPZ women, hence the negative societal reputation. While these incidents also occurred in other professions, they were less likely to be reported in the media. Many women in the surveys also expressed the disempowerment felt by the 'generalisation' applied to them due to the misbehaviour of a few. There was also a general sentiment among women in the surveys that "social inclusion depended on a girls behaviour" and that if they behaved well they would be included. Others were saddened by the lack of recognition of their contribution to the economy (*What hurts more is that being a contributor to the economy of the country and not being recognised is a terrible feeling*). Table 7 describes some example narratives from the EPZ's, depicting negative public opinion of women factory workers.

Table 7: Examples of narratives from women describing social exclusion at the societal level

A lot of people consider us to be *whores* and therefore we don't have much of a good kind of inclusion and are rather branded as *trash (Katunayake Machinery factory, aged 25)*
In our villages we are respected but not by the general public. We are referred to as 'Objects' in the Katunayake FTZ and by the public sometimes *(Katunayake Machinery factory, aged 32)*

People outside the zone consider the people working in the zone to be *vulgar and different.* So I feel that they do not treat us like normal working class people – we are branded as *'zone girls' (Katunayake garment factory, aged 30)*
Even the boarding owners think ill of us. They don't realise that they make their living from our boarding fees. Even the way we dress is ridiculed and humiliating remarks are passed *(Biyagama garment factory, aged 30)*

We workers are not recognised in Biyagama area however much we try to win their acceptance. Maybe this is because some women workers misbehave and misuse their freedom so all of us are labelled as "bad women" (*Biyagama porcelain and sails factory, aged 22*)
If we go to get services from government offices we can't get their services easily. They scold us and say we are not educated people *(Kandy garment factory, aged 53)*
Nobody would like to marry me. All have refused because I am a garment factory worker *(Kandy garment factory , aged 27)*
I went to a blood donation camp – they refused because they suspect me sometime will get HIV – I heard about that and frustrated (*Kandy garment factory, aged 26)*
Some people say garment girls are spoiled and thus not worth to associate with *(Seethawaka garment factory, aged 18)*
Some of my friends don't invite me to their parties. They say I am not involved in a respectable job. (*Koggala garment factory, aged 23)*

Once I went to my son's school to attend a meeting. One parent nominated me as a member of school development committee but another parent said they can't allow because I am working in a garment factory. *(Koggala garment factory, aged 42)*

When we go to a community well and want to utilise community services, we have to wait till the residents in the area finish bathing and washing *(Wathupitewela garment factory, aged 30)*

Many rumours and gossip tend to spread if we are seen talking to a male or seen with a man *(Wathupitewela garment factory, aged 20)*

Source: 2007-2009 questionnaire and focus groups

As shown in Table 7, the women feeling social exclusion from all EPZs were quite forthright in the labels they used to describe the perceived public opinion of them. There is a general feeling that the women felt these labels to be an unfair portrayal of women working in the EPZs. However overall, despite exclusion, support from family and the personal and economic benefits from working appear to outweigh the general public opinion and the women have expressed remarkable resilience. Even so, societal level exclusion or lack of recognition remains one of the most important and serious forces faced by young Sri Lankan women working in factories, a major threat to empowerment.

6. FINDINGS PART THREE - Attitudes and Perceptions of Stake Holders

6.0 Methodology

At the beginning of the study, it was decided to interview 22 key informants representing policy makers, government officials, factory managers and officials of non-governmental organisations who are working with female factory workers in EPZs. Later on, trade union representatives were included in the list as they play a major role in the area of workers' rights. Therefore 22 key informants participated in the study. Thirteen of them (59%) were women.

The Project Manager, CENWOR, conducted the key informant interviews from August to November 2010. After identifying the key informants, their consent to participate in the study was obtained. The interviews were conducted in the interviewee's office room at a convenient time for them, using guide lines prepared for the study. It took nearly 45 minutes, on average, to complete an interview. Some of the interviews were conducted in English, and in the case of others, the interviews were conducted in Sinhalese and responses were translated into English.

6.0.1 Background of Participants

The 22 stake holders participated in the study were grouped according to their job: (i) policy makers, (ii) government officials, (iii) factory managers, (iv) trade union representatives and (v) officials of non-governmental organizations (See Appendix 3).

6.0.2 Attitudes and Perceptions of Stake Holders

The views expressed by the stake holders were categorised under four main themes after data analysis:

(A) Status and empowerment at the personal level as a result of factory work
(B) Status and empowerment at the family level as a result of factory work
(C) Status and empowerment at the work place as a result of factory work
(D) Status and empowerment at the societal level as a result of factory work

6.1 Status and empowerment at the personal level as a result of factory work

Changes at the personal level of female factory workers were analysed under five main themes: (i) economic conditions, (ii) decision making, (iii) new knowledge, (iv) new skills and (v) life style.

6.1.1 Economic condition

- Female factory workers have access to and control over their financial resources.
- They are no longer dependents of their families.
- They have a stable source of income unlike in seasonal occupations.
- Good opportunities for employment, especially for rural women from agricultural and fishing communities with lower levels of education.
- Garment factories give a basic salary that is higher than the 'minimum wage'.

- Allowances and bonuses are available.
- Earnings may not be adequate in the context of the high cost of living.
- Their economic conditions have improved compared with their situation in the past.
- Factories provide meals and free accommodation, thus workers can use their earnings to cover other expenses.
- They have short term plans.
- They work for 5 to 10 years, collect the gratuity, ETF, EPF and other monetary benefits.
- They use their savings as their 'dowry'. Some women use the money to buy land or renovate or build their houses. There are loan schemes available for workers.
- They have the power to decide on the use of their earnings.
- They automatically acquire the habit of saving in bank accounts in their name.
- Most of the women also use informal saving mechanisms.
- Most of the women use such investments as their 'dowry'.
- Pregnant women have minimal capacity to save as they have more expenses.
- They also invest in jewellery.
- Some women have requested loans from the Employees Trust Fund (ETF) to renovate their houses or to buy a piece of land.

Workers have to face many difficulties although their economic situation has improved. In view of the present high costs of living workers try to earn as much as possible. They undertake overtime, come to work every day to get the attendance bonus even though they are sick, take minimum time for lunch and tea to get production incentives – e.g. normally 30 minutes are given for lunch but they finish it within 10 minutes. Consequently their health deteriorates. A recent survey has revealed that 66% of factory women workers are suffering from anaemia.

> *Citing a survey conducted by the Health and Safety Division of the government's Labour Department, said 66 percent of garment factory girls, ages 18-28, have anaemia. "They cook a scrap meal in the night and then leave the remnants for the morning. They would not even know what a balanced diet is," said Marcus, joint secretary of the Free Trade Zone and General Service Employees' Union, adding that these women are the next generation of mothers* (Association for Women's Rights in Development, 2009).

Some diseases surface after they go back to their villages. The factory women have savings but these savings are not sufficient to address their health problems.

6.1.2 Decision making

The factory women make their own decisions as they live far away from their homes. They have gained that power mainly because of their economic resources. They make their own decisions regarding their boarding places, meals, clothes and even about their marriage partners.

6.1.3 New knowledge

The majority of factory women are educated at least up to G.C.E. Ordinary level. There are women who have been successful at the G.C.E. Advanced level. This situation is a result of the free education opportunities available in the country. The women have been empowered as a consequence of their new access to knowledge. They have the opportunity to participate in a variety of training programmes which discuss different issues. The Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs, the Department of Labour, BOI, Police, and NGOs working in the area carry out such programmes. Induction training programmes include courses such as factory life, labour rights, labour laws, gender, threats, safety, first aid, health habits, relationships, sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptive methods, and social issues. The Ministry has conducted awareness programmes on nutritious diets, the importance of a balanced diet and how to get such meals. The Department of Labour conduct awareness programmes on labour rights. Trade unions are conducting awareness programmes on labour rights, payments / salaries, overtime, safety, maternity leave, nursing intervals, other benefits, and human trafficking.

The women previously knew only about their village and the villagers but because of the exposure to a new and wider society, now they know about city life, and even about other countries in the world. Women working for a Japanese based company are sent to Japan for training therefore they get the opportunity to know the culture of another country. Similarly, Japanese workers too, come to their factory and work with them.

The level of knowledge or information of women has been improved, although not all workers had the same level of awareness.

> *"Recently, four women came to see the Minister of Labour and they have been referred to me. The problem was that the services of those women had been terminated. Therefore they wanted to get their gratuity and other benefits. One woman explained that the management has forced them to sign a resignation letter. That woman has asked other workers not to sign the letter. She was aware of their benefits such as gratuity, EPF, ETF, and other worker rights. She said that according to the act the management cannot do a thing like that and it is illegal. I was very happy to see that they were aware of their worker rights". (A representative of the Department of Labour)*

Though there are many positive features, there are negative features too. The factory women have not been exposed to some important topics when they were in the village and that knowledge is very important for them to live in a complex society in the city. The knowledge of many of these women, specifically young women, on reproductive health is very poor. Therefore it is necessary to conduct awareness programmes on topics related to reproductive health. Another gap is that most of the factories do not like to release all the workers to participate in awareness programmes. Therefore it is very difficult to provide knowledge to all the women and a new strategy needs to be identified to cover the entire population of workers.

6.1.4 New skills

The Department of Labour conducts self employment training programmes such as in dress making at their hostels in Katunayake with the hope that these women can start a self employment enterprise when they go back to the villages. The Department of Labour, Trade

Unions, some NGOs and some factories conduct vocational training programmes such as in sewing, cookery, beauty culture, housekeeping, making of accessories and English language classes. In their village they would be engaged in their parent's traditional occupations such as farming or fishing. The skills they get benefit them, such as ability to work as a team, leadership qualities, organising skills, and problem solving skills. At one factory they follow the 5S concept and that helps the workers to organise their day to day lives productively.

It is uncommon for women to invest their own money for educational purposes as they have little free time due to long working hours and limited savings. However, a few women factory workers are investing in their education such as on external degrees and health care. In contrast, men tend not to invest in their education.

6.1.5 Life style

Lifestyles of the female factory workers have changed with economic power and exposure to a new society. Highlighted are both positive changes in many women and some negative changes in a fewer number of women.

They have had exposure to a larger society with a variety of people from different parts of the country. They have made new friends and are a part of new social networks. They have acquired social skills. The women had more choices in finding a suitable partner as they are exposed to a larger society. In that context, it is a relief for their parents. They had developed self confidence with their new social experiences.

The women have the opportunity to learn how to cope with risk factors prevailing in the society and to be safe. The awareness programmes conducted on sexual harassment and other gender based issues have given them useful information, survival skills and confidence. Most of the time women move around in groups. The reported incidents of sexual harassment have declined.

Another positive change in their lives is that they get the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the use of modern equipment and household appliances. With experience, they know the new products in the market; they know how to select good shops and good products in the market, and even how to bargain. The hostels maintained by the Ministry are equipped with facilities such as modern bathrooms and toilets; however, women do not like to stay in these hostels due to strict rules. Their leadership qualities have improved. They know how to move in the larger society and when they go back to their villages they can perform better as a result of their experience of city life.

One of the negative features associated with women working in zones is poor living conditions especially in the private boarding places. Problems associated with their boarding places were low levels of facilities, poor sanitary conditions specially toilets and bathing facilities, no privacy, no security, and conflicts with roommates. There is no mechanism to monitor the conditions of private boarding and lodging. Fungal infections can be seen among some female factory workers. Factory managers are concerned to find out where their employees reside and always try to direct them to boarding places offering fairly good living conditions. To address this issue, factories have started to provide accommodation facilities and at present there are three hostels for their workers and 300 workers are benefitting. A second negative feature is that there is no one to talk to or discuss or get advice regarding

their personal problems. Most of the time female workers hesitate to raise their voices against discrimination or unfair treatment.

There is a risk in travelling after night work as in some areas there are no street lights. It is a risk to their lives too. There are safety problems and there are incidences of harassment while walking on streets. The local government authority in that area has been directed to install street lights. The majority of factories provide transport facilities, but not all.

Most of the women have good financial management skills; however, these women are vulnerable to marketing propaganda. Markets in the Katunayake area are filled with fancy items and women are easily deceived by vendors who sell poor quality materials. The women do spend a lot on mobile phones. Some spend more on communication than on food and clothes. There is a need for awareness programmes on 'how to use money productively or prioritising their needs effectively' as most of women spend their little earnings unnecessarily.

Other consequences have been the negative experiences at the hands of men relating to love affairs or relationships, sexual harassment or abortions. They get involved in relationships very easily due to peer pressure, stress at the work place, no entertainment, no parents or anyone to guide them. Most of the time these women have been cheated by married men. Sometimes they may have to go to the village with a child but without a husband. In such occasions their social status deteriorates and they may be excluded from the society/community. Complaints of such incidences were less now and if the police get a complaint they do their best to resolve the issue. Most of the time, the perpetuators are not permanent residents of the EPZ area.

> *"One young woman was referred to the counselling service of the Department of Labour by the factory. She was in a depressed situation. She had a relationship with a man and they had been living together for some time. Then the woman became pregnant and the man disappeared. When she searched for him she found that he was a married man. The factory also was very sympathetic and has referred her to our service as she was one of the best workers in that factory". (A representative of the Department of Labour).*

Some factories have professional counsellors to help women in such situations and they also get involved with solving family problems. Women with unacceptable behaviour are not an asset either to the factory or their family or community. Such negative incidences were associated with only a small number of women, but when outsiders talk about such incidences they genaralise it to cover the entire female work force and that creates a bad image for women. Such incidences were less compared to the past as most of these women have learnt from past experiences.

The other negative behaviour is seen in a few women who have taken to prostitution and commercial sex work. Commercial sex workers find accommodation in boarding places to engage in their occupation. Outsiders think that they are factory workers engaged in commercial sex work. Sometimes these sex workers encourage factory women to join them.

In the case of most women when they go back to their villages after marriage, there are no jobs for them and as a result, their economic status, social status, and mental health declines. Without a good husband the situation can get worse.

6.2 Status and empowerment at the family level as a result of factory work

There is recognition and acceptance of the women factory workers by the immediate family. These women help their parents and family members by sending a part of their earnings. The money sent to their families is used chiefly to cover the day to day expenses of the family members, for the education of younger siblings, medicine for sick parents, and to buy a piece of land, build a house or renovate their house. In some situations, not only the immediate family members, but the extended family members such as grandparents, aunts also depend on these factory women. Therefore there is a high degree of acceptance. In some families these women get more acceptance than their fathers as in some cases the woman working in the factory is the breadwinner of the family. Where the woman or wife is the stable income earner in the family and the husband is engaged in casual work, she has more economic power within the family. This economic power and social exposure enables these women to participate more in decision making processes in their homes. In most factories they organise family get-togethers in their factory once a year and this also helps to increase the level of acceptance by family members.

6.3 Status and empowerment at the work place as a result of factory work

The women have been empowered at the workplace as team workers, and as trained and productive workers. More efficient and productive women get the opportunity to work as team leaders and thereby acquire leadership qualities and opportunity to participate in decision making at the factory at lower levels. Women workers more trustworthy than their male counterparts, for example, men workers try to steal factory goods but women do not do so. In a good working environment, workers are doing their job happily, the management treats them well, and workers can discuss their problems if any, with the management. The women are exposed to new technologies such as computers as they are working in highly mechanised, modern working environments, and in some factories there are opportunities available for foreign training.

There are many societies operating in factories to enhance talents such as sports societies and women participate actively. Some factories organise a sports day once a year, while at some factories there are libraries to improve the reading habits of workers. There are also opportunities such as publishing poems, rhymes, stories in a journal to improve their literary skills and creativity, and some conduct a singing competition for workers and have provided attractive cash prizes for winners.

> *"There was a musical band (eastern music) with a team of 30 in one factory and it has been initiated by the factory management. They practice during free hours. We invited them to perform at an event organized by the Department of Labour to commemorate International Women's Day. They performed well. There are sports clubs or sports societies in some factories too. I believe that factories organize such activities to attract workers. However, they benefit both parties". (A representative of the Department of Labour)*

The women produce only a part of a garment in a factory, therefore they do not acquire the skills required to make a garment and they are not adequately equipped to access other sewing related jobs. Thus, they can be isolated or unemployed when they go back to their villages. As a solution to this issue, the Ministry conducted vocational training programmes

for women as an alternative income generating activity. However the participation of women was minimal as they did not get much free time due to their long working hours.

There are few opportunities for upward career mobility for the majority of these women. As a consequence some women are working as machine operators for many years. However a small percentage of women have the opportunity to move upward as line leaders, section leaders, and supervisors and they have access to limited decision making power. Sometimes all the supervisors in the factory are women. Another negative feature attached with these factory women is that after their marriage they have to stop working and go back to the village if the husband is living in the village.

Though there are trade unions in some factories, the active participation of women in such activities is at a very low level. This could be a negative characteristic as these women are not participating in the available collective bargaining mechanisms. Not only in EPZs but at the macro level too, the participation of women in trade union activities has declined in the country.

> *"I met a woman working in a factory in an EPZ who is a member of a trade union. She works hard. However her husband is not aware of her trade union activities as she has not told him. She said that her husband does not allow her to participate in extra activities. Therefore she does all the trade union activities during her office hours". (A representative of the Department of Labour)*

However there are a few women who engage in trade union activities and they work hard. Some women are in decision making positions too. Though they are not active in union activities, these women participate in the Workers' Council and in one case 85% of members of the Council were women. However, when there are elections to elect leaders, men get more votes. The trade unions have organised many women workers, and once they were organised they tended to be more powerful. However, they have not enrolled the majority of workers, although, if organised, they would have a powerful voice in the factory. For example, it is illegal to employ a female worker after 10.00pm without their consent, but many factories do this.

There is a trend of horizontal mobility, moving from factory to factory, looking for more benefits. However, there is a decline in the migration of women to EPZs. One of the reasons for this is that they were given less over time work due to decline in production, resulting in less 'take home' salaries that were inadequate to cope with the increasing costs of living. There should be counsellors in every factory to help these women when they are in difficult situations. At present, there are counsellors in some factories.

6.4 Status and empowerment at the societal level as a result of factory work

Regarding the status and empowerment of women at the societal level, the responses given by the respondents were analysed under three main themes: (i) participation of women in community and in political activities, (ii) acceptance from the village, and (iii) perceptions of the general public.

6.4.1 Participation of women in community and in political activities

Participation of these women in community and political activities is rare as there is no interest in participating in such activities among women or men. Most women do not vote even though they get leave for this purpose. However, the women participate in religious activities and they participate in community activities if they get an opportunity.

If there are community activities organised by the factory, then women participate in such activities, for example, in cleaning in hospitals, cleaning the city, helping victims in disaster situations and in projects under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme.

Time and distance were identified as barriers to participation in village activities. Some women workers were members of village societies such as the Death Donation Society and temple societies. The factory women are more capable and have more leadership qualities than the women in their villages and therefore when they go back to their villages, there is more opportunity for them to participate in community or political activities at the village level. However, these women workers are not considered as a part of the community around the Zone and therefore there is little opportunity for them to participate in community activities while they are working in factories.

6.4.2 Acceptance from the village

Acceptance from the villagers depends mostly on the behaviour of the individual and the type of job. These women are accepted increasingly with the improvement in their economic condition and personality. Even the temple and villagers respect them more as they look after their families. Social recognition attached to different occupations is different. For instance, teachers and nurses get more recognition than a machine operator. That social stigma persists although at the same time society respects the factory workers for their economic and social empowerment. However, it is difficult for the workers to receive recognition due to lack of communication with and distance from their villages.

There is a certain level of acceptance from the rural community because of their economic empowerment, and exposure to and capacity to cope with city life. When recruiting new workers, factory managers request existing employees to recommend candidates and they introduce their relatives and friends from their village. This also ensures recognition for these women as they are helping other villagers to find employment, and at the same time, the villagers join them as there is trust and a positive image of these workers.

The villagers get other benefits because of the workers. There is a CSR project called ‘water is our life’. Under that project, each year, the factory requests workers who have problems in their villages relating to access to safe water to forward their problem to the management. Action is taken to solve the problem in one village per year.

6.4.3 Perceptions of the general public

Female factory workers in EPZs, still do not have a good public image. However, the situation has improved. The present situation is much better than 10 to15 years ago. At present the public perceive EPZs as economic centres contributing to the economic development of the country. These Zones increase the economic power of workers, especially women workers, and benefits ultimately go to the village. Some factories have their sister factories in rural areas too. Therefore attitudes are changing from negative to positive. In the

early days, people thought that EPZs have only garment factories, but they are now aware that there are factories producing different items in a Zone, therefore, the concept of 'garment objects' has declined.

In the late 1970s, the Greater Colombo Economic Commission was established in Sri Lanka by the government with the mission to bring investors to government and to create employment opportunities. The investors were expected to bring in foreign exchange, put up factories and manufacture products for export markets. This policy worked well. However, over the years with the increase of the number of factories in zones, the size of the labour force, especially in the garment industry, expanded tremendously. A large number of rural women came to work in the Zones. However, infrastructure facilities outside the zone such as hostels and transport were not adequate to accommodate the influx of migrant workers. On the other hand, organised groups sometimes with political backing and organised thugs and criminals exploited the situation of women who came to the city from rural areas. At the end of the day, the blame came to the industry or investors. The public view was that the investors should provide accommodation or transport. Some factories provided these facilities. The responsibility of investors is to create safe jobs and to bring foreign exchange. At that time, the media also wrongly interpreted this situation and incidents that were published created a bad image of the factory women. Looking after the security and living conditions of factory women outside the factory is the responsibility of the social system and legal authorities in the country. There are instances of exploitation of women financially or sexually. Controlling such situations is beyond the investor's capacity even though they are concerned about the situation. The State has the responsibility to maintain law and order and from the investors' point of view, there are so many legal and social obligations they have to fulfil while making profits in a very competitive international market.

The public still had the perception that EPZs are places where employment is provided for less educated, less privileged, rural workers and some people label these women as 'garment objects' or 'garment girls'. EPZs are places giving accommodation to people who cannot find any other job, income, any other social status, or when there is no other alternative to look after their families. Some people still think that they can have sexual relations with these women easily. In the early days, women were reluctant to say that they are factory workers in zones as it was considered to be degrading, especially when they are looking for a partner for their marriage. Pregnant working mothers of EPZs presenting at a medical clinic do not like to mention their job title as a 'garment worker' or as an 'EPZ worker' in their clinic card. They prefer to write it as a machine operator. However, the situation has improved considerably.

With their new freedom and very little knowledge of reproductive health issues, these young women got into relationships with men and as a result they had to face many problems. The female labour force was nearly 85 percent in the zones (BOI, 2010). Therefore men are drawn to these places to find partners. Some were genuine and some not. Therefore, these young, inexperienced women were involved in relationships and some had to face socially unacceptable results or outcomes. The media also highlighted these incidents and magnified them even though the numbers of such incidents were limited.

It is creditable for women with low educational qualifications and low socio economic backgrounds to earn independently and to look after their families. The majority of these women are young and most of them are soon after their school education.

> *"I have experienced that in the month of December the numbers of women in the Biyagama hostel which is managed by the Ministry are increasing as the girls are coming to work in factories just after appearing at the G.C.E. Ordinary Level exam. They have come to work even before the release of their results mainly due to poverty in their families. Therefore we should appreciate their efforts". (Representative of the Ministry)*

However, at present, the state, politicians, and media have publicized the fact that these factory women contributed to the economic development of the country. The Department of Labour, when commemorating the International Women's Day, give priority to factory women and give awards to the best performers. They have developed video clips also to show the public the importance of the contribution of these women to the development of the country. Media also give publicity to such events. It was highlighted that the media should be more responsible in their reporting as this is one of the main industries in the country. However trade unions and some NGOs are not satisfied with the actions taken by the state, politicians, and media to uplift the situation of factory women and expect more action from them.

For a country like Sri Lanka, it is better to develop the garment industry rather than sending our women to work overseas as unskilled labour. The factories have improved and are providing better working conditions. The future strategy should be to move factories to more rural areas. Then women can go to work while staying with their family members in their own residences. They can get a fairly good salary while getting transport and free meals and acceptance will be greater. A recommendation is for partnerships with employers with common goals and mutual benefit to all the parties involved.

6.5 Conclusion

In general, based on the views expressed by the stakeholders who participated in the study, it is clear that there is social inclusion of the factory women. However, the extent to which they have been empowered is identified differently by different stake holders. There is economic empowerment with access to and control of financial resources. Their decision making power has increased at the personal and family level and with some women at the factory level. They have been empowered by gaining new knowledge and skills. Their social empowerment has been improved with their mobility, exposure, life style, and acceptance from the immediate family and the village. However, the fact that there are no avenues of upward career mobility for the majority of women workers, the monotony and the lack of creativity in the work and the social stigma attached to them are the main negative features attached to their occupations. If all the parties in this sector work together such negative features can be minimised. The findings in Part Three of this report show clear links to the findings in Part One and Part Two, and in this sense create empirical data that can indeed be triangulated and from which strong generalisations can be drawn.

7.0 EMPOWERMENT – Policy Issues for Consideration

The data presented in Parts 1, 2 and 3 of this report are a combination of quantitative and qualitative data and provide empirical and 'generalisable' results that are valid and rigorous. The remarkable ways in which major findings and themes identified in the 1st stage of data analysis were replicated in each proceeding part of the data analysis was remarkable. This in turn provided 'triangulation' which was noteworthy and testament to the methodology and diligence of the research team. As a result, we argue that international aid agencies should consider deeper engagement with social research and the constant movement in the discourses *vis-a-vis* gender and empowerment. Specifically gender-specific staff within these organisations should attempt to integrate and engage with research such as this. In terms of constructing meaning around gender and empowerment, gender mainstreaming has been used by most development agencies in recent times; however this approach alone is inadequate to ensure that the complexities of women's lived experiences are understood, acknowledged and addressed. Simply mainstreaming gender into programs and polices is not enough. Further research and collaboration is required between international aid agencies, academic institutions, INGOs and women in developing nations. The women sampled in this research show clearly the need for more intensive research to ensure more and varied voices are heard.

One common policy response to gender equality and the influence of gender inequality measures is gender mainstreaming. This has become the overarching gender policy of many development agencies and has merit. It is however problematic to simply use gender mainstreaming as a policy initiative. This is because the notion of mainstreaming 'institutionalises' gender into all programs, regardless of rationale or reason; it also creates a vision of women as a target for aid, rather than active agents and in many developing nations mainstreaming gender as policy will exacerbate notions that women are powerless victims. Moreover, based on the experience of this research team, mainstreaming gender into developing nation institutions that are under-pinned by patriarchy will not be effective as only tokenistic support will be adopted. In our research, patriarchal structures and influences were evident at all levels of government and tended to be more extreme in rural locations, the locations where gender mainstreaming is often targeted. It is critical that these issues are considered in future discussion of gender and empowerment and the future development and implementation of gender-based policy, discourse and programs.

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Appendix 1: Project Questionnaire

Gender empowerment measure: research on social empowerment among Sri Lankan EPZ workers

Notes to RA – while many of these questions relate to the participant's current position, their past histories and experiences in previous factories (if applicable) can be captured – however the overarching aim of the research is to capture a picture of women as labour and pathways to empowerment to in turn inform policy.

Dear Participant

We are conducting research that focuses on the issue of gender empowerment and the ways in which factory women may or may not be socially empowered as a result of factory work in Sri Lanka. The research is being conducted as part of an independent study designed by the Centre for Social Research at Edith Cowan University and funded by the Australian government to provide new and alternate ways to understand gender empowerment. The research is being coordinated in Sri Lanka by CENWOR (Centre for Women's Research) with the approval of the Sri Lankan Board of Investment (BOI). The questionnaire will take about 30 minutes to complete. Your answers will be anonymous and confidential and cannot be linked to you, or your village or factory, in any way. You may withdraw from the questionnaire at any stage if you wish. The results of the research will also be 'blind and anonymous'.

Would you like to go ahead and complete the questionnaire? _____

1) What EPZ do you currently work in? _____

2) What type of factory? (garments, textiles etc) _____

3) How long have you worked in any factory? (years only) _____

4) What is your age? _____

5) What is your marital status? _____

6) What is your education level? _____

7) What is your job title or level? _____

8) Have you ever been promoted? _____

(if yes, from what position or level to? _____)

9) What is you usual monthly salary? (not including overtime) _____

10) How many hours do you work in a normal week? _____

11) Do you normally work overtime? _____

(if yes, how many hours per week do you normally work on overtime? _____

How much extra pay do you get as a result per month? _____)

12) Have you ever experienced verbal abuse from your managers? _____

13) Have you ever experienced physical abuse from managers? _____

14) Have you ever experienced sexual harassment at work? _____

15) Have you ever been humiliated in public, in your community or society for being an EPZ worker? (if yes, explain) _____

16) What is your mother's education level? _____

17) Does your mother work? _____

(if yes, what type of work? _____

How much does she earn per month? _____)

18) What is your father's monthly income? _____

19) What is the proportion of your monthly salary to your family's total income? (including husband) _____

20) Do you regularly send money to your family each month? _____

(if yes, how much per month? _____)

21) Do you save your salary in your own bank account each month? _____

(if yes, how much usually per month do you save? _____)

22) In what ways has your salary allowed you to accumulate capital or buy a house or similar or empower yourself or your family? (please explain below)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

23) As a result of working do you participate more in community and/or political activities?

(if yes, explain)

_____

_____

_____

_____

24) As a result of working do you participate more in decision making processes within the home? _____

(if yes, explain)

_____

_____

25) As a result of working do you participate more in decision making processes outside the home? _____

(if yes, explain)

_____

_____

_____

26) Do you feel as a result of working in factories that you have experienced increased social inclusion in Sri Lanka, IE, being included in social, cultural, religious and political processes? _____

(if yes, explain)

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Appendix 2: Focus Group Questions

Gender empowerment measure: research on social empowerment among Sri Lankan EPZ workers

Dear Participant

We are conducting research that focuses on the issue of gender empowerment and the ways in which factory women may or may not be socially empowered as a result of factory work in Sri Lanka. The research is being conducted as part of an independent study designed by the Centre for Social Research at Edith Cowan University and funded by the Australian government to provide new and alternate ways to understand gender empowerment. The research is being coordinated in Sri Lanka by CENWOR (Centre for Women's Research) with the approval of the Sri Lankan Board of Investment (BOI).The focus group will take about 30 minutes to complete. Your answers will be anonymous and confidential and cannot be linked to you, or your village or factory, in any way. You may withdraw from the focus group at any stage if you wish. The results of the research will also be 'blind and anonymous'. Would you like to go ahead and complete the focus group? ……

Focus group Guidelines (RA may write more if required, do this on the back of the form)

1) How do you think female EPZ workers are thought of in Sri Lanka?

2) In what ways have you been empowered as a result of factory work?

3) In what ways have you been disempowered as a result of factory work?

4) How would you measure women's empowerment if you had the choice?

5) Tell us some of the things that you have been able to achieve for yourself with your salary?

6) Tell us some of the things you have been able to achieve in your home or community as a result of experiencing full time work and a salary?

7) Have you been able to convert your economic roles and status (wages, experience in work, promotion, savings etc) into social capital? (acceptance in society, community and family and involvement in decision making processes at all levels) (yes or no please explain)

8) In what ways has your salary allowed you to accumulate capital or buy a house or similar or empower your family? (please explain below)

9) As a result of working do you participate more in community and political activities?
_____
(if yes, explain)

10) As a result of working do you participate more in decision making processes outside the home? _____
(if yes, explain)

11) Do you feel as a result of working in factories that you have experienced increased social inclusion in Sri Lanka, ie, being included in social, cultural and political processes?
_____ (if yes, explain)

12) As a result of factory employment what type of important skills have you developed?

(if yes, explain)

Thank you for participating in this focus group

Appendix 3. List of Key Informants who Participated in the Study

Policy Makers			
1	The Secretary, Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs		Female
2	Additional Commissioner General of Labour, Department of Labour		Female
3	Director (Industrial Relations), Board of Investment of Sri Lanka		Male
4	The Secretary General, Joint Apparel Association Forum		Male
Government Officials			
5	Commissioner of Labour, Women and Children's Affairs Division, Department of Labour		Female
6	Labour Officer, Women and Children's Affairs Division, Department of Labour		Female
7	Woman Sub Inspector (WSI), Police Station, Katunayake		Female
8	Medical Doctor, MOH Office, Katunayake EPZ		Male
Factory Managers			
9	Manager HR, Micheal Angelo Footwear Pvt. Ltd., Phase III, Katunayake EPZ		Female
10	Manager (Personnel and Systems Engineering), General Affairs Department, FDK Lanka Pvt. Ltd. Phase II, Katunayake EPZ		Male
11	Manager (Human Resources), Global Sports Lanka Pvt. Ltd, Phase II, Katunayake EPZ		Female
12	Senior Production Manager, Smart Shirts (Lanka) Ltd., Phase I, Katunayake EPZ		Male
13	Manager (Human Resources), Brandix Intimate Apparel Ltd., Katunayaka EPZ		Male
14	Manager (Human Resources and Administration), MAS Active Shadowline Pvt. Ltd., Phase II, Katunayaka EPZ		Male
Trade Union Representatives			
15	Joint Secretary, Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union		Male
16	Deputy Secretary General, National Workers Congress (NWC)		Male
NGOs Representatives / Civil Society Representatives			
17	Joint Coordinator, Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR)	Policy oriented and action oriented research	Female
18	Secretary, Women's Centre		Female
19	Programme Coordinator, *Da Bindu* Collective		Female
20	Director, Stand Up	Activists	Female
21	Coordinator, *Shramabimani Kendraya*		Female
22	Coordinator, *Jana Setha*		Female