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**ATTRITION IN GARMENT INDUSTRIES: A STUDY FROM HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PARADIGM**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The current study focuses on attrition rate in the garment industries and the role of Human Resource Managers in combating it. The quest here is to assess the factors that lead to high rates of voluntary employee turnover among the garment industry workers. The study found that multiple factors contributed to employee turnover in different rates in different companies. The effect of turnover was witnessed across the various levels of employees. The major factor perceived to contribute to employee turnover was remuneration, high production expectations and lack of individual respect accorded to the workers in the course of daily working scenarios. The study used primary data collected through a questionnaire administered to 106 employees in garment industries located in Bangalore district*

**KEYWORDS**

attrition, human resource management, garment industries, employee satisfaction.

**INTRODUCTION**

Attrition also called employee turnover is an issue for all organizations and more so for industries which are labour intensive. Garment manufacturing industries that turn clothes in readymade garments are highly labour intensive. The process uses exhaustive manpower across various levels in its manufacturing process. A certain amount of attrition is common to all industries. It becomes problematic only when the attrition rate is more than the industry standards. It is in such cases that the role of the Human resources department becomes very crucial.

The HR department helps to identify the patterns in attrition and do damage control after subjective analysis of the employee's reasons for quitting the job. The insights from data-driven predictive models, used along with effective plans from the HR department for reducing attrition, improving retention, reducing attrition costs can go a long way in mitigating attrition and ensuring that the production is not adversely affected.

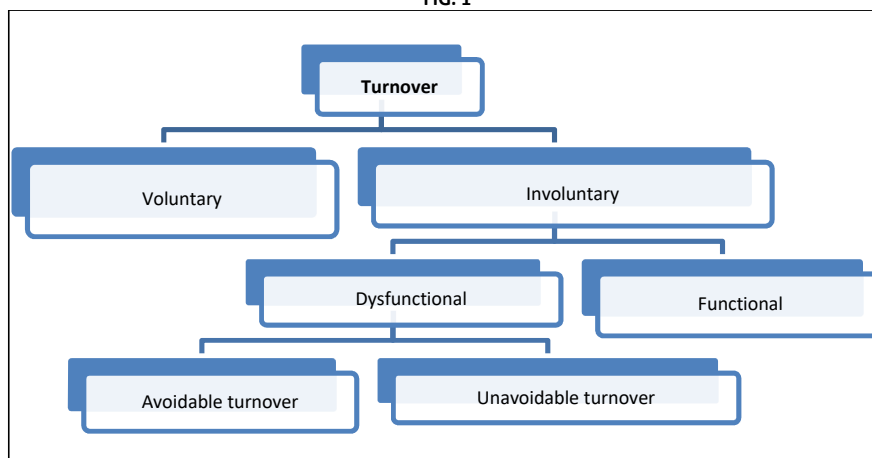
One of the major factors affecting industrial relations and labour efficiency in the instability of the labour force, i.e., changes in its composition. It is a problem in the industrial life of all countries, being wasteful and destructive of the potential manpower of the nation, and a serious obstacle to the complete utilisation of the country's productive forces. The problem of labour instability or more specifically, of labour turnover has attracted serious attention in the current scenario.

**CONCEPTUALIZING LABOUR TURNOVER**

Employee turnover, as defined by Hom and Griffeth (1994), is 'voluntary terminations of members from organizations'. Loquerio et al. (2006) observed that staff turnover is the proportion of staff leaving in a given time period but prior to the anticipated end of their contract. According to Singh et al. (1994), staff turnover is the rate of change in the working staffs of a concern during a defined period. Ivancevich and Glueck (1989) opine that staff turnover is the net result of the exit of some employees and entrance of others to the organization. Kossen (1991) defined turnover as the amount of movement in and out (of employees) in an organization.

Labour turnover has been defined by the American Management Association as "the extent of shift and replacement of labour occurring in the maintenance of the working force." "Labour turnover," according to the Bombay textile labour inquiry committee (10, 37-40), "measures the extent to which old employees leave and new employees enter the service of an industrial organization in a given period." the labour investigation committee which made an intensive survey of a large number of industries in 1944-45 adopted a similar definition.

As Nawaz (2009) indicates that there are two types of employee turnover happen in companies, voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary employee turnover involves employee's intention to quit the job or decide to give resignation from job. It can be due to better opportunity, job dissatisfaction, supervisor's bad behavior, less chances of growth etc. And involuntary employee turnover is that when an organization fires employees by itself. It can be like retirement cases, organization needs to cut cost, restructure or downsizing, low performers firing from the job or dismissals, permanent disability or employee death case etc.

**FIG. 1****FRAMEWORK OF EMPLOYEE TURNOVER**

There are two aspects in the problem of attrition: the proportion of workers who go out of employment during a period of time (separations) and that of the newly enrolled (accessions). There is, however, no unanimity as to what separations and accessions should exactly mean. For example, there is a difference of opinion as to whether the workers who are found to be surplus and are discharged should be taken into account in calculating the turnover rate. The official statistics of labour turnover in the UK and the USA include such discharges and dismissals. On the other hand, professor Sargant Florence says: "It seems fantastic to an economist to lump together cost-saving events under one definition." a recent study of this subject by the Birmingham University also excludes labour losses due to redundancy from the calculation of the labour turnover rate. Workers who leave a concern but return to it after a minimum specified period are considered as

new recruits. The duration of this minimum period naturally differs in different countries. In the United States, old employees who return to a concern after 7 or more consecutive calendar days, authorized or unauthorized absence are considered as "Accessions."

From the point of view of stabilising the labour force, it is not so much the definition of labour turnover as the analysis of the factors responsible for it, which is of significance. Labour turnover must be distinguished on the one hand, from absenteeism, which does not involve any break in the workers employment, and from the wider problem of mobility of labour from one industry to another, in response to changes in the conditions of supply and demand on the other. It is confined to the multilateral changes that take place in the composition of labour in different industries and industrial units, which cannot be attributed to any general shifts in the demand for labour. So far as industry is concerned, the problem posed by the constant shifts of labour is the cost incurred in replacing the employees who leave. Workers who are discharged because there is no work to do, do not give rise to this problem as there is no question of replacement cost in their case. It would, therefore, appear logical that labour losses due to redundancy should be excluded from the computation of labour turnover rates. On the other hand; workers going on leave, authorized or otherwise, do give rise to the problem of turnover and should be taken into account in calculating the incidence of turnover. It would also be more appropriate to approach the problem of labour turnover from the angle of separations than that of accessions. For, all accessions do not involve a turnover of labour. During a boom period, for instance, when new industries are being established and old ones expanded, employment increases. But the accessions thus caused are not in the nature of replacements, and no waste of resources is caused.

Labour turnover is caused by layoff, voluntary resignation, dismissal, retirement or death of workers. A certain minimum turnover is not only inevitable but also necessary, e.g., by retirement and death. For the UK, Prof. Florence calculates that "for men and single women the minimum unavoidable turnover for physical reasons in a manufacturing industry is slightly over 4 per cent per year."

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are two major reasons why turnover is a central issue in the field of HRM across the globe. First, turnover is related to low organizational knowledge, low employee morale, low customer satisfaction, high selection costs, and high training costs (Staw, 1980; Talent Keepers, 2004). Research has also shown that high employee turnover is related to lower organization performance (Glebbeek & Bax, 2004; Huselid, 1995; Phillips, 1996). Second, the decision to turnover is often the final outcome of an individual's experiences in an organization (Hom & Griffeth, 1995).

Accordingly, many studies have used turnover as a criterion to evaluate the effectiveness of various organizational processes, such as selection (Barrick & Zimmerman, 2005; Meglino et al., 2000), training (Glance et al., 1993) and coaching/ mentoring (Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Payne & Huffman, 2005). Thus, understanding the factors that influence turnover gives organizations the opportunity to reduce selection and training costs, increase employee morale and customer satisfaction, and enhance organizational productivity. The study of turnover has a rich theoretical history in which multiple models have been advanced to understand this complex decision (Hom & Griffeth, 1995). Most of these models are based on the premise that if an individual is unhappy with a job and finds another job, s/he is likely to leave the current job (Lee, et al., 2004). Thus, the focus of most turnover models is on job attitudes (job satisfaction or job commitment) as the primary drivers of turnover (e.g. March & Simon, 1958).

Second reason is that human resources are the backbone of an organization (Gerhart & Milkovich 1990, Pfeffer 1998). Moreover, the continuing prosperity of a firm is likely to be enhanced by employees who hold attitudes, value and expectations that are closely aligned with the corporate vision (Borman & Motwidlo, 1993; Cable & Parsons, 2001; Feldman, 2003; Spector, 1997). It implies that hiring capable people is an attractive point of departure in the process, but building and sustaining a committed workforce is more likely to be facilitated by the employment of sophisticated HRM infrastructure (Schuler & Jackson 1987, Beechler et al., 1993).

Arguably, HRM policies and practices can be strategically designed and installed to promote desirable employee outcomes, which include the enhancement of the in-role and extra-role behaviors of employees. Yet, despite such costly investments, corporations are continually searching for techniques to improve and cement the linkage between employees and their organizations. With proper implementation, these techniques often facilitate a more committed workforce. Since turnover warrants heavy replacements and training expenses, organizations are now recognizing employee retention as an important issue that merits strategic attention (Glen, 2006).

Empirical studies (e.g. Harris, 2000; Kinnear & Sutherland, 2000; Maertz & Griffeth, 2004; Meudell & Rodham, 1998) have explained that factors such as competitive salary, friendly working environment, healthy interpersonal relationships and job security were frequently cited by employees as key motivational variables that influenced their retention in the organizations.

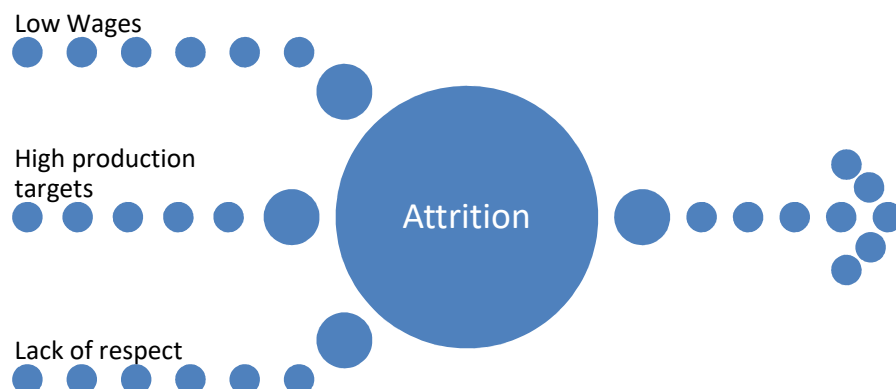
## INCIDENCE OF LABOUR TURNOVER

Generally, the extent of turnover depends upon the Type of persons employed (their sex, length of service, skill, etc.), the location of factories and the attitude of management towards workers. It varies from industry to industry, the variations reflecting differences in the scope for movement within an industry rather than in the nature of the work done. The average size of firms and the degree of concentration or localisation of industry influence the worker's chances of finding alternative employment.

## CAUSES OF LABOUR TURNOVER

Resignation, dismissal and discharge account for a large proportion of the high labour turnover in India. Dissatisfaction with working conditions, insufficient wages, sickness, family circumstances, distance of the place of work and last, but not the least, exodus to villages during the agricultural season, are the main reasons for workers to give up their jobs. In fact, in a number of industries like mining, plantations, cotton textiles (except in Bombay), jute mills and in some of the unorganised industries like rice milling, mica splitting, etc., employment is considered by the workers as a subsidiary occupation. As compared with the turnover caused by voluntary resignations, that resulting from dismissal and discharge is of minor importance. Apart from the objective factors responsible for labour turnover, there is also the cast; of the mentally unsettled, a small class probably, who find it difficult to settle down to any one job for long.

FIG. 2



### DISADVANTAGES OF HIGH TURNOVER

A high rate of turnover is harmful to the efficiency of workers as well as to the quality and quantity of production. It is Moreover a serious obstacle to the complete utilisation of a country's human and material resources, although with our vast mass of unemployed and under-employed l a b o u r e r s, the national loss due to this source belongs to the second order of smallness. Extensive changes in the composition of labour, however, make it difficult to establish contacts between the employer and the employee and to build up a sense of co-operation between them.

The cost to the employer of constant changes in his labour force, involving the employment of new men, is represented by reduced production, greater wastage, and less careful handling of machinery. From the point of view of the worker, frequent changes in the place of employment, in the long run, affect his skill and efficiency and deprive him of the advantages which continued employment brings. The cost to the community is reflected in the loss of productive labour power and increase in costs of production due to the employment of less efficient labour.

### MEASURES FOR REDUCING TURNOVER

Labour is critical to the sector's current competitiveness and long-term viability. Workers' skill levels, productivity and motivation, the industry's ability to attract and retain the right quantity and quality of workers, domestic labour laws and regulations and workers' living conditions and costs in urban areas, are all critical in the context of a continuously changing economic environment. In South Asia and other emerging economies, where low-cost labour is essential for industry competitiveness, the garment industry has been subject to various allegations of labour abuse, including long hours, forced overtime and low wages. In light of these factors, there have been many state- and non-state initiatives to try to ensure sound labour and other practices in the sector whilst maintaining its international competitiveness.

That the turnover of labour in India is very high in a number of industries is well recognised but the economic loss which it involves is not so well appreciated. The need for reducing this loss as much as possible and of improving industrial relations is urgent. Although the causes of the high degree of labour instability in the country are known in a general way, for adopting effective measures against it, more definite information is necessary regarding the extent of labour turnover in each industrial unit and of its incidence in terms of age group, sex, earnings, length of service, etc. Collection of this information on a scientific basis raises some technical problems, which can be easily solved. But until these data are available, remedies can be discussed only in general terms.

Since labour turnover is likely to be high due to the presence of "floating" workers who are unable to settle down to one job for long and new employees in the first few weeks or months, the responsibility of the management would be "first to pick people who will be able to settle down, and secondly, to ensure that the atmosphere in the unit where, the employee works gives an encouragement to stay." payment of bonus

### METHODOLOGY

The study applied a two-phase methodology, to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative survey gathered information from current and former garment sector workers.

A survey was done of garment workers working in factories in the Mysore road and Peenya garment manufacturing centres in Bangalore. The survey was administered through a structured questionnaire. The analysis of the survey data formed the main source of primary information for the study. In addition, various discussions with union activists around issues of productivity, labour turnover, and factory structuring of production were also used in the study. The study incorporated discussions with garment manufacturers and representatives of major brands in its analysis. It also utilised various secondary information sources for understanding the impact of the economic downturn on the garment sector. Given the relatively small sample size, responses of men and women were not disaggregated in the analysis.

### LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

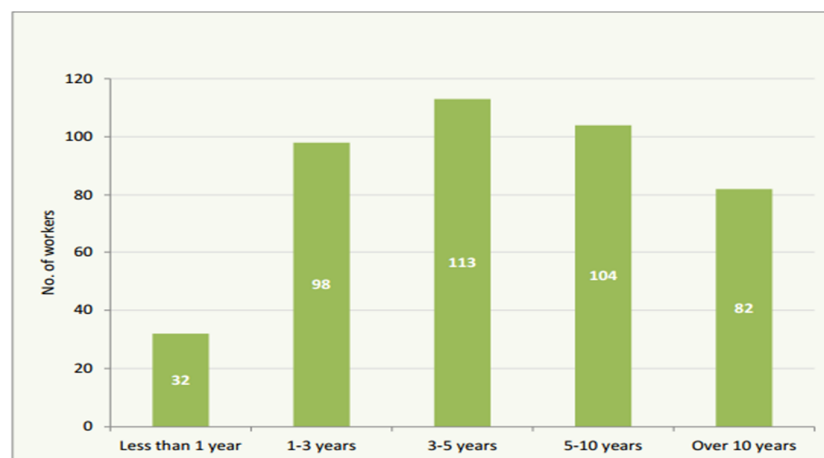
The sample was not drawn randomly, either at the factory or the worker level, so the data cannot be extrapolated beyond the individuals and factories covered, and certainly cannot be deemed representative of the garment industry in India as a whole. Nonetheless, they are believed to give a reasonable indication of practices and issues in the workplaces covered.

### SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

The areas covered in Bangalore were: Peenya, Hosur road, Mysore road and Doddabalapur.

FIG. 3

Number of years worked in the garment sector



A total of 106 workers were drawn from 36 factories, with employment ranging from 250 workers to 3600 workers. The average factory strength was around 1360 workers. As per the estimate of workers, around 85 percent of workers in the factories were women.

Figure 1 gives the age profile of the sample. The average age of workers in the sample was 26 years. 90 of the workers (85%) were women. There were 72 tailors and 34 helpers in the sample. This roughly corresponds to the industry composition of the workforce.

FIG. 4

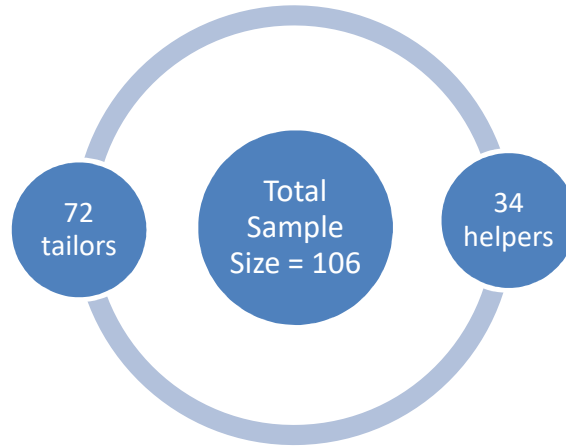
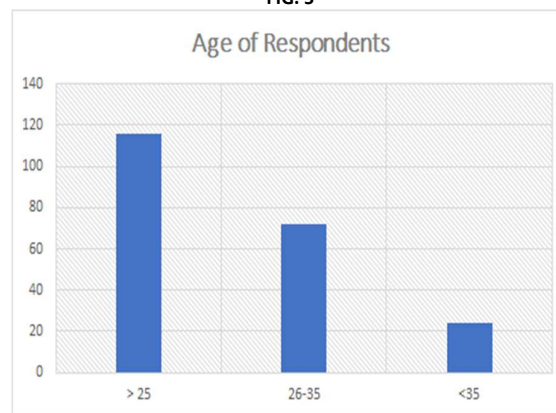


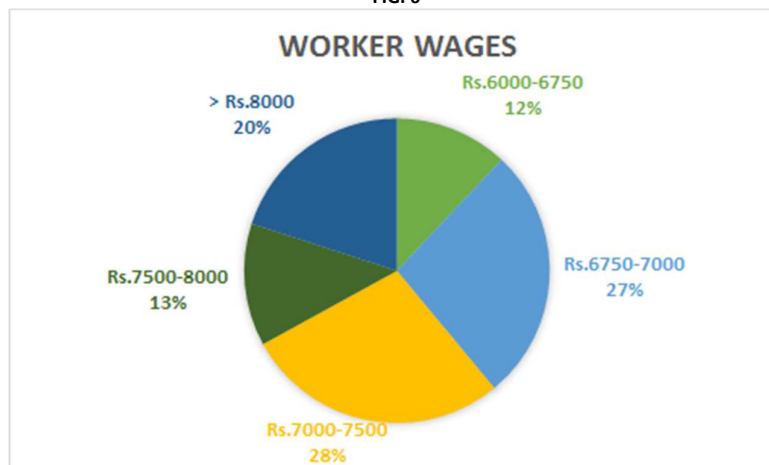
FIG. 5



**WAGES OF WORKERS**

Wages in the garment sector are very low. The statutory minimum wages in Bangalore are around 20% lower than minimum wages in Delhi and 35% lower than Mumbai wages in the garments industry. Demand for a higher wage has been a longstanding issue in the sector. GATWU has since 2007 actively campaigned for a minimum wage of Rs.200 per day in the sector.

FIG. 6



**PRODUCTIVITY**

Along with wages, productivity is the other burning issue for workers in the garments sector. High productivity norms are linked to forced (and often unpaid) overtime work to meet norms. Supervisory harassment on the shop floor is primarily for meeting very high production targets. In the present survey, 39 workers (38% of sample) reported production norms of more than 75 pieces per hour. This is repetitive work at the rate of more than one piece per minute. This is high by any standards. Two years ago workers reported targets of sixty pieces per hour as high. There would now be technological aids to help push up production. With all that the productivity standards are high. On the question of increased targets, 53% of the respondents said that targets had been revised up by the management in the last one year. 50% said that they had to work beyond the eight hour norm to complete the targeted production. 75% said that they had to face the burden of supervisors shouting at them. It is not surprising in the circumstances that labour turnover in garment factories (as obtained from ESI data, and confirmed in interviews with management) range around 100% per annum.

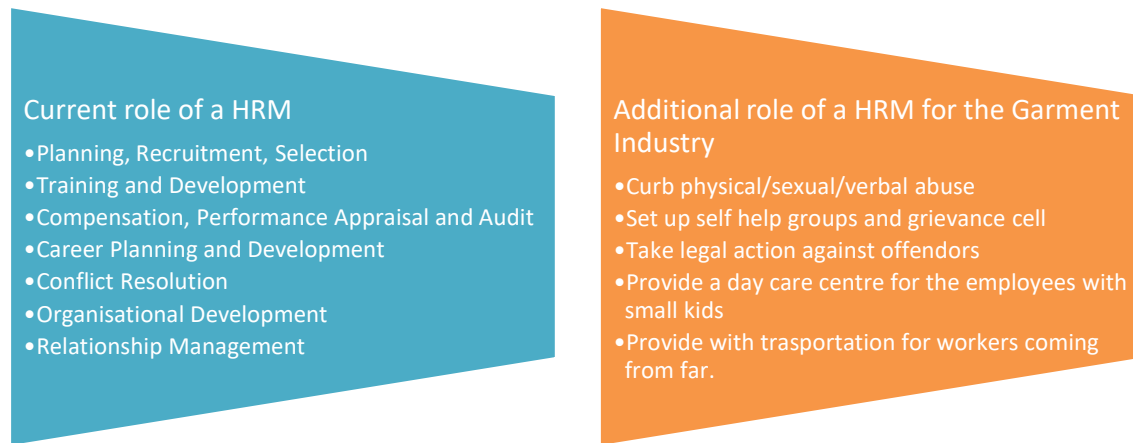
Perhaps the most telling question regarding workers' overall perception of their work was the very last one in the questionnaire – "would you want your child to work in the garment industry?" The answer was a resounding "no" (88% of current workers and 86% of former workers). Among both groups, the predominant reason given was that they had higher educational aspirations for their child/children, followed by the poor wages and working conditions in the sector. Six former workers cited "lack of respect" as a reason.

### ROLE OF A HR IN REDUCING ATTRITION

Along with the already defined roles that a HRM must carry out, a few more things can be undertaken proactively which still falls under the capacity of a HR. These extra activities are especially required in a Garment Industry as the dynamics are different when compared to other Industries. According to CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy), the industry provides employment to about 15 million people, of which almost 90 per cent are women. Most of the garment-making units belong to the unorganised sector. Hardly 15-20 per cent of the units fall under the organised sector. Labour legislations, legal measures, and Minimum Wages Act are applicable only to a small section of the industry coming under the organised sector. Given the huge number of women employed in this Industry, it makes sense to have the HR's role defined to suit the women employees. If women leaving their jobs in this industry can be taken care of, then automatically the attrition rate will drop. Some of the provisions that should be made for the employees in this industry are:

- The HRM should hire a qualified woman as a supervisor instead of a male. This way the sexual abuse can be brought down and it gives the women confidence to work without the worry of being abused physically.
- A separate male supervisor can handle the male employees under him.
- Have a functional Grievance cell in each unit.
- Have Women Self help groups to handle their finances and this also helps in good bonding of the employees.
- Health care facilities should be provided.
- Provide decent wages that will motivate the employees to work.

FIG. 7



### CONCLUSION

In a volatile labour turnover environment, the role of an effective and efficient HR department cannot be undermined. The ever expanding sea of data, collected from people and systems, becomes valuable only with the insights provided from the predictive analytics of the HR team. By forecasting what is about to happen so that a firm can respond appropriately to stay on the most accurate, safe, repeatable and profitable course becomes feasible.

Overall, based on the analysis of patterns of attrition from a HR perspective projects, the picture that emerges is of a workforce, comprising both women and men, which enters and remains in the garment sector largely because of the perceived lack of better income-earning alternatives. Despite a rather high level of dissatisfaction with the pay, working conditions and production targets, workers tend to stay in the sector for quite a long time, most between 3 and 10 years, generally changing factories at least once during this period. Once working, they experience virtually zero job mobility, and often think of leaving. They tend not to enjoy good relations with their managers. Among those who say they "like" the work – who still represent the majority of current workers, but a minority of former workers - the reasons mostly concern the non-wage aspects, such as proximity to home and good benefits and amenities. But a significant minority do not like working in the sector and almost everyone pronounces that they would not wish their children to take up this kind of work, and aspires to better work for the next generation.

Major changes cannot be brought about by the HRM alone. Big decisions should be taken by the respective Government where they make a rule that the big brands which get their clothes manufactured and the suppliers for the big brands join hands and take onus on themselves to provide humane working conditions, nutritious food and decent wages for the garment employees.

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