



Perspectives on Worker Well-Being: Insights from a Textile Factory in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

This research assesses the well-being of workers within a Textile factory in Tamil Nadu and includes interviews with 25 women workers and 5 executives. Well-being is subsequently characterized in terms of financial security, physical security, social security and emotional security. The research yielded three key themes: incentives to workers like a bonus, a provident fund, and health insurance can help to secure the workers' "stability" on the job; grievance procedures that are accessible to workers that they perceive to be responsive; and a culture where employees are encouraged to participate in exercise, have discounted meals, and have on-site child care. In general the workers indicated they are satisfied with their work, although there are areas of concern such as the cost of transportation, the heat, and shortages of labour. It is the position of management that well-being is an obligation, and well-being is a driver of productivity. In this article, we have called well-being "normal" for a workplace but recommend that corporations establish well-being as a strategy into a corporate strategy; embed well-being into a normal diversity program, create support from managers for well-being programs, and expand programmes for the health of the workforce and child care". In this report we have illustrated how local practices build on global conversations about dignity at work and sustainable working.

Keywords: *Worker well-being; Textile industry; Employee satisfaction; Workplace culture; Incentives; Grievance redressal; Occupational health; Women workers; Tamil Nadu; India*

Introduction

Defining Worker Well-Being

Employee wellbeing is a multidimensional construct involving one's mental, physical, emotional, and economic wellbeing, shaped by both work and external variables (Gallup, 2002). These include occupational, social, economic, physical, and community health, all of which play a huge role in enabling an individual to thrive in both public and private life. Wijngaards (2021) explains that employee

wellbeing involves hedonic (pleasure-seeking) and eudaimonic (meaning-seeking) elements. This gives a wider perspective of how employees view and gain meaning from their job. Furthermore, Jarden et al (2023) have elucidated that employee well-being consists of social and psychological facets. According to them, the index of worker well-being includes the intrinsic motivation, meaningful work, engagement, and high-quality social relationships that characterize the employee's state of well-being. This research is especially important for the view of wellbeing thus posed, because it is not simply the absence of ill health or dependent on measures of productivity, but rather an overall state of being in terms of economic, social, emotional, and physical domains. A comprehensive definition and proper measurement of wellbeing facilitates organisations to design strategies in niche and important areas for enhancing job satisfaction and reducing feelings of burnout, which ultimately strengthen employers with healthy and productive enterprises.

Therefore, worker wellbeing is a complex and a broad construct that integrates subjective feelings of satisfaction and engagement with objective health and social conditions, reflecting the whole worker's experience to both employee fulfilment and organizational effectiveness. This paper accounts for worker's perspectives on their work environment and managerial inputs on the concept of wellbeing. This brief is based on primary research of workers in the textile factory. They included interviews of 25 workers and 5 executives. The objective of this paper is to provide recommendations that will positively impact the discourse on wellbeing.

Understanding Worker Well-Being

Employee wellbeing is perceived as a major factor for the success of an organization and societal progress. With rapid transitions and challenges in the present-day workplace concerning employee health, motivation, and retention, research in worker wellbeing has gained significance. According to a study by Bellet, De Neve, and Ward (2020), it was found that a one-point improvement on a happiness scale from 0 to 10 translates to "an increase in productivity by 12%" in British Telecom employees. This becomes an exemplary demonstration of the strong link that exists between happiness and productivity in workplaces. Drawing from an extensive meta-analysis, Krekel, Ward, and De Neve (2019) report that they found a large, highly significant positive correlation between employees' satisfaction with their organization and employees' productivity and customer loyalty and a highly significant negative correlation with staff turnover, thus confirming that "higher wellbeing at work is positively correlated with more business-unit level profitability."

By neglecting workplace wellbeing, organizations risk rising levels of stress-related absenteeism, low job satisfaction, and losing talent. For an employee to thrive both personally and professionally, employee wellbeing must be embedded into the workplace policies. Academic consensus states that prioritizing worker wellbeing is not only beneficial, but essential for performance, innovation, and resilience in an evolving work landscape.

Worker Well-Being in the Indian Context

The contemporary conditions of well-being of workers in India, especially factory workers, have gone through an enormous transformation over the ages. It has been influenced from time to time by changes occurring in social, economic and legislative fronts of the country. It was during the middle part of the 19th century that India saw its initial modern factories, such as the cotton mills of Bombay where hordes of manpower were employed under working conditions of extreme hardship for long hours, child labour, safety and very minimal health provisions in hazardous conditions (Shriney, 2022). The very emergence traces back to the cause of colonisation onto its industrial epoch of India (Shriney, 2022). Such primitive conditions exposed not only global patterns of industrial exploitation but also heralded India's first labour movements dreaming of better rights for persons working in these impersonal surroundings.

The biggest landmark in this respect was the Factories Act of 1948, which enshrined conditions of work time, safety standards, child labour, as well as rest periods, among other things, for these workers. It was one of the watershed events concerning wellbeing statutes of workers in India (Sankhla Consultants, 2025). The Act illustrated the adverse effects of continuous work on psychological and physical welfare of workers and imposed mandatory health and safety provisions, putting a working week at a maximum of 48 hours (Shriney, 2022).

Despite the presence of legal frameworks, there is lack of authority in the informal sector. Employees are subjected to long hours of work without rest. Unorganised sectors do not feature in benefit schemes. Outcomes concerning financial issues and remuneration of Indian factory workers continue to be discriminatory due to cultural and economic factors such as caste and gender discrepancies (Mohan, 2023). Current scholarship underscores the necessity of broad wellbeing interventions-not just safety compliance-which should address psychosocial wellbeing, equitable compensation-and supportive workplace cultures. Understanding the historical trajectory is essential to designing policies that promote healthier and productive factory workforces in India today.

Methodology

Setting

This research was conducted at Victus Apparel Private Limited, a developing garment stitching and export company. The factory in Thekkur began operating 2 years ago. The factory employs over 2,000 individuals and 70% of the workforce consists of women in their 20s to 40s. For most of the workers, this is their first experience in formal employment.

Research Methodology

The primary mode of data collection for this study was in-depth interviews. This method was chosen as it allowed to get a deeper insight into perspectives and narratives of respondents which was guided by an open-ended questionnaire. It also enables follow-up questions and clarification so as to understand nuances of the conversation. It also gave an opportunity to ask participants to elaborate on key points. The same set of questions was used across all interviews to maintain consistency. The sample size consisted of 30 participants, which included 25 workers and 5 members of the management team. All interviews were conducted in Tamil which is the native language of the workers and it was kept anonymous to ensure privacy. This was done to ensure comfort and clarity in communication with the workers.

The sample were all women workers between the ages of 20 and 40, and for most of them, this was their first time working. This reflected the demographic characteristics of the factory workforce. Educational quantification among these workers varied. Some of the workers had completed education up to the 10th or 12th grade but only a few of them held undergraduate degrees. Among the management interviewees, two out of three participants were men which is consistent with the higher representation of male employees in managerial roles. These individuals had typically completed higher education and held bachelor's degrees. All five management personnel were actually working in the Human Resources department and dealt with the workers on a day-to-day basis. They were involved in addressing various grievances made by employees, establishing welfare policies, and increasing workplace efficiency, which made them incredibly relevant and well-informed participants for this research.

Analysis

The aim of this research was to obtain perspectives of workers and management on aspects of well-being. The most obvious approaches that have been observed throwing light on notions of well-being come through policy decisions, theoretical frameworks, research etc. This study focuses on worker perspectives and narratives to bring to the forefront stakeholder discourse. The concept of well-being is constantly being constructed in tandem with demands for rights, opportunities and fair wages. Well-being seems to sit at the interjection of all these and yet holds meaning beyond these. The in-depth interviews that have been collected for this study reveal certain patterns and themes which are being discussed here. Five interviews were conducted with members of the management team. All of them held positions that required regular interaction with factory workers. The management thought worker wellbeing means that the worker feels safe and satisfied in their workplace. They think that worker wellbeing is important to improve productivity and brand reputation in the surrounding community. This helps attract new employees and aligns with the company's ethical commitments.

It also improves worker attrition which reduces training and recruitment costs. Therefore, there is a focus on the idea of ensuring wellbeing and taking active steps towards achieving it. The following themes emerged at the core of what constituted wellbeing in this particular factory.

Incentives

Worker's motivation forms an important and even central focus of industry initiative and policy. Motivation has been associated with production and efficiency. Another important aspect that motivation also measures is well-being. Incentives have, on the other hand, been considered as essential components of motivational assets. The way incentives get designed and conceptualised make it a measure of well-being too. It is therefore an important and recurring theme in worker's narratives. Of the conducted interviews, all the members have made use of the production incentive, attendance bonus, Provident Fund and ESI. Workers feel that the production incentive improves teamwork among the members as the whole line of workers have to work together to make the finished product and everyone gets the incentive. The attendance bonus motivates the workers to come to work regularly. Workers report an increase of up to 25% of their income with the bonuses. The additional income is used by some people to fund their children's education.

Workers are also happy with the provident fund and ESI policies given by the government and enforced by the company. The workers report that as their earnings are low it is very difficult for them to save money. The PF allows the employer to save some amount of the employee's income while matching the same amount. This will act as savings for the employees and can be used in the future. Even though PF reduces the employee's income the employees report that they appreciate it. Some of the employees report that this scheme was not there in their previous company. Contributions of funds from both the employer and employee contribute to the ESI. It works as a health insurance scheme that the employees can use for Medicare. All the employees report that they are satisfied with the incentives provided. Management believes the current incentive structure, including health insurance and retirement benefits, meets workers' needs and requires no significant changes. The payroll executive particularly emphasized the importance of clearly communicating how these financial incentives function and benefit workers over time. Clearly, financial stability is a large component of wellbeing which in the form of incentives, assists workers in catering to their priorities of home and family.

Grievance Redressal

For grievance redressal, 93% of the workers report that they are aware of a feedback mechanism. The grievance reporting mechanisms are a feedback form or a phone number that the employees can call and voice their concerns. Employees can also directly approach the HR or the management to resolve

their problems. From the survey 66.6% workers report using these feedback mechanisms and the rest of the employees don't have any grievances. 93% of workers also feel that the management is responsive to their concerns.

Almost all of the workers report that the HR and management are very approachable and they feel comfortable bringing their grievances to them. Some of the employees also report that Victus has a better grievance redressal mechanism than their previous workplace. Most of the workers also report that even if their complaints are not resolved they still get a response from the management explaining why their grievance cannot be addressed. Some of the grievances that have been solved is an addition of a bike parking space, additional tea break and hike in salaries.

Management affirmed that worker complaints are reviewed regularly and, where possible, resolved promptly. In cases where immediate solutions are not feasible, workers are informed of the reasons and offered alternative responses. Members of the management team expressed that they strive to remain approachable and consider it their responsibility to support underperforming workers, thereby fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.

Work Culture

Overall, most workers report being motivated in their workspace. This stems from the praises they receive from the managers when they have produced a lot. The three teams that have produced the most get gifts at the end of the month, this fosters a sense of healthy competition and allows them to be motivated in the workspace. As part of the typical workday most workers say that they exercise after they come to the office. The factory provides them with guidance and plays a video so all the worker's exercise. This contributes positively to their health and most workers say that this was not there in their previous workplace. Moreover, the workers have access to nutritious food at a subsidised price. Most of the women also report that Victus does not have gender discrimination or harassment. Working moms also have access to daycare where they can leave their children while they are working. Most of the women are in their 20's and 30's and this is the first time they are working so they do not have any other firm to compare. But overall, most women feel that Victus is better than their previous workplace.

However sometimes people also complain of heat and bad ventilation. Workers also feel that there is a shortage of manpower which leads to the workers working harder. One of the main concerns of most employees is the transportation fees, to travel to the office. But overall, most people report being happy in the factory. Management personnel described their responsibilities towards worker wellbeing as drafting and implementing policies that improve wellbeing, receiving and addressing complaints, motivating employees, and ensuring that workers understand the policies intended for their benefit. Their responses aligned with the workers. For instance, while workers appreciated the company's safety measures and absence of discrimination, management also stated that the workplace was perceived as secure and inclusive. Additionally, management was aware that one of the main concerns of the workers were the high transportation costs. This shows that the management is aware of the problems faced by the workers. The training officer elaborated that new employees are thoroughly oriented regarding the company's vision, mission, values, and expectations, which helps foster clarity and comfort among newly recruited workers.

It was also observed that effort is made to understand and, when possible, minimize those factors that may have caused the worker to leave. Overall, interviews suggest that management emphasizes worker wellbeing, views an open-door policy and grievance mechanism as part of the satisfaction process, and often takes worker feedback into consideration when developing policies.

Policy Recommendations

Integrate Worker Wellbeing into the Company's Framework

Embedding worker well-being into the central corporate strategy is fundamental to cultivating an organizational culture of productivity and health. According to Bhoir, Monika, and Vinita Sinha (2024), wellbeing must be treated as a core value rather than a supplementary aspect. Therefore, it is imperative for leadership to embed wellness goals into the vision and policy statement, with necessary resources and incentives being aligned toward those goals. The organisation can achieve this through effective communication of the importance of wellbeing and incorporating wellbeing metrics into the performance metrics. The organisation needs to allocate a specific budget for wellbeing initiatives. Creating a committee that ensures well-being considerations are integrated into human resource policies, business processes, and CSR programs may also prove valuable for organizations. Regular training for management and executives in the areas of employee well-being, and on being role models for supportive organizational practices in the workplace, is necessary.

Diverse and Inclusive Programs

Comprehensive wellbeing programs include mental, physical, financial, and social health elements and show best results when tailored to the diverse needs of the workforce. This is specifically relevant to textile manufacturing units which majorly employ employees from different parts of India with different ages, genders, and cultures. According to the Weziak-Bialowolska et al (2023) study, adapting interventions to suit the specific cultural and social contexts of a given workforce has shown to markedly increase participation and outcomes of well-being programs, indicated by the analysis of multi-dimensional aspects of well-being differentials among factory workers. To enhance inclusivity, needs assessments could be conducted via anonymous surveys or focus groups. Factories must also provide programs such as fitness literacy and planning, mental health services and social support groups. Factories must also ensure that materials presented for communication are culturally sensitive and offered in multiple languages to address the needs of a diverse work.

Improved Managerial Support

Research by Coppens et al (2023) indicates that managers need to believe about mental health intervention for wellbeing before it bleeds into the employees. Moreover, they have to be trained in the policies and interventions by giving practical information. Executives must induce talks regarding wellbeing and establish guiding techniques toward appropriate support resources for employees. Coppens et al (2023) say that this makes workers more likely to use wellbeing programs and less likely to have negative views about worker wellbeing. Support from management is important for changing how employees and workplaces feel about mental health. According to the research by Ashley Wu et al (2021) it is necessary for employers to provide mental health services for low or free of cost and educate leaders to tailor their management style to the needs of employees to bridge the gap between employee mental health needs and available resources. Most employees will not openly express their concerns regarding mental ailments, thereby placing the responsibility on the leaders to model desired behaviors and provide support services addressing the stressors experienced in the workplace and any psychological impediments to both individual and team well-being. Implementation, is therefore successful if it includes a set of structured, skill-based training interventions for managers, along with a live coaching component. It is essential for managers to possess practical tools, including detailed checklists and conversation guides, to effectively identify and address wellbeing concerns during routine one-on-one check-ins with employees.

Health and Wellbeing

Factory workers carry a high risk for the development of musculoskeletal disorders and tension, due to repetitive physical tasks carried out over extended durations. In 2025, Irem Medeni et al. conducted a cross-sectional study in textile factories and concluded that workers are subjected to heat, dust, and chemicals that induce fatigue, and hearing- and eye-related issues. This implies that health concerns are acute among textile workers, and employers must take visible, measurable actions to alleviate them. Seidu et al. (2024), conducted an empirical review of work-related health problems among textile and fashion industry factory workers. The findings of their investigation suggest that the utilization of personal protective equipment (PPE) coverings and the implementation of breaks can significantly reduce physical strain and tension. Enforcing mandatory 10- to 15-minute pauses every two hours can be an effective strategy for alleviating muscle tension and enhancing blood circulation. The industry must further provide areas for light stretching and mobility exercises to be performed. These exercises could include guided programs or training materials. The industry could also consider flexible scheduling options such as variable start and end times, shift swapping, or compressed workweeks. This would allow for production to continue while simultaneously reducing fatigue. There should be training sessions for workers on good postures, the need for breaks, and self-care approaches which will empower them to take responsibility for their own health.

Grievance Redressal

When workers are involved in making decisions about job design, assignment of tasks and wellbeing programs, it leads to improved effectiveness of programs and worker engagement. Evidence from Achutya Adhvaru and Jing Cai (2025) confirm that giving workers better access to the opportunity to express their concerns improves job satisfaction and in some cases satisfaction led to increased productivity and retention. From a practical sense, worker committees with representatives of employees that have direct engagement with management also present the opportunity to establish health, safety and workload policies. The structures to grievance redressal process can help management acquire feedback and suggestions for action from its workers while gaining trust and transparency in the process. As highlighted in the research from Harvard Kennedy School, "an effective grievance procedure is an important first and absolutely essential step to establishing a workable dispute management system," also was highlighted by the workers in regard to how they wanted to be involved in the grievance treatment process (Rees 2008). The opportunity for grievance systems is also significant given they allow workers to raise grievances based on violation of rights as a first layer of entry to deal with those at the enterprise in a timely, fair and low cost way (Rees 2008). The establishment of grievance redressal systems allows management to obtain feedback and actionable proposals from the workers. Management must share clear rationales and outcomes for decisions to build trust and maintain cooperation.

Provision of On-site Crèche Facilities

Women make up a significant proportion of the textile workforce, and the lack of childcare options often acts as a barrier to their employment. Having an on-site crèche allows mothers to work without concern for the safety of their children. These facilities can be low-cost if existing rooms are equipped with basic furniture, books, toys, and other amenities. Employing a caretaker to oversee the children and providing essential nutrition (milk, meals, and snacks) can greatly improve the inclusivity of the workplace. This initiative not only supports gender equity but also improves worker attrition and satisfaction. Research by MAS Kreedha Al Safi-Madaba (2017) indicates that working moms are drawing a new demographic of candidates who previously would not have contemplated paid employment prior to the establishment of childcare help. The company's daycare facility offers hygienic and secure environments for children and accommodates breastfeeding moms, therefore decreasing absenteeism and enhancing productivity. Although initially hesitant, once women saw the center's benefits, their positive

feedback increased demand and retention significantly. Similarly, a World Bank project highlights that when women working in the textile industries have the confidence in the expertise of the caregiver and the safety and knowledge the children can receive from the centre they feel more confident to resume their careers.

Conclusion

This study gathers perceptions of well-being from employees of a garment factory in Tamil Nadu (Victus Dyeings) highlighting the importance of keeping employees at the centre of this dialogue. The emerging discourse on well-being attempts at defining its variables, relying on both policy perspectives and theoretical shifts, yet remains elusive. The responses sought reveal that workers remain focused on tangible measurable criteria that according to them ensures a certain well-being- financial stability, incentives, grievance redressal etc. These criteria influence their notions of satisfaction, happiness and growth. The findings align with broader shifts in theory, underlying advocacy for integrated models of well-being that align measurable indices with subjective experiences. The research also reinforces the steps that a local business has undertaken to move in this direction, focusing upon integration of well-being as core industry policy. In this context, it is important to take into account these small scale developments happening locally and regionally and provide them with support and incentives. A regional perspective on how a small business has actively sought to create a conducive work environment contributes to the ongoing discourse where well-being has become a central component of policy and practice. This also reflects institutional and cultural changes that are underway, reimagining work not just in terms of livelihood and survival but as a dynamic space for dignity and growth and where well-being is not a mere discretionary tool but a strategic goal. To conclude this report, a few proposals for policy reform that would engage and create a more holistic and inclusive approach for mainstreaming worker well-being within organizational frameworks are provided.

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