

Workplace Experiences of Garment Workers in Northern Mindanao: Implications for Decent Work and Sustainable Development Goal 8

Lileth O. Ulbeda¹, Roey C. Sumaoy², Stephany A. Hayahay³, Anamie A. Ajon⁴

North Eastern Mindanao State University Cantilan Campus Cantilan, Surigao del Sur, Philippines.

Received: 08 October 2025 Revised: 12 October 2025 Accepted: 15 October 2025 Published: 18 October 2025

Abstract - This study aims to examine the problems encountered by garment workers in Northern Mindanao across eight workplace dimensions: workplace environment, compensation and benefits, job security, skills and training, workload and stress, social and ethical concerns, organizational issues, and client-related challenges. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 100 randomly selected respondents through a validated researcher-developed questionnaire. The results show that workers generally hold positive perceptions of their workplace conditions, with all dimensions rated "Agree." The workplace environment and compensation and benefits obtained the highest mean scores, indicating that safety standards and welfare programs are well-practiced. Conversely, organizational issues and skills and training received lower ratings, highlighting persistent gaps in career advancement, managerial support, and technological upskilling. These findings suggest that while progress has been made toward achieving decent work standards, further improvements in training, management practices, and equitable compensation are necessary to ensure sustainable labor welfare in the region.

Keywords - Garment workers, Workplace environment, Compensation and benefits, Job security, Training, Organizational issues, Decent work.

I. INTRODUCTION

The garment industry is one of the most labor-intensive sectors in the global economy, employing millions of workers in developing countries and serving as a critical engine for industrialization and economic growth. It contributes substantially to export earnings and manufacturing output, forming a central pillar of national development strategies [1]. In spite of these economic gains, the industry remains under the scrutiny because of the unending issues related to labor practises, working conditions and employee welfare. These problems highlight the importance of empirical investigations regarding the lived experiences of the garment workers and the further implication towards work welfare and decent work [2].

Beyond its economic significance, the garment industry holds deep social relevance as a major source of employment for marginalized and low-income groups, particularly women, who constitute the majority of its workforce [3]. However, this feminized workforce tends to be subjected to sex salary differences, reduced unionization, and unstable job conditions that support structural inequalities in the world value chain [4]. According to current research findings, even with the implementation of welfare and compliance measures, a significant number of factories continue to underperform against the International Labour Organization (ILO) standards, and there continue to be multiple shortcomings regarding the health, safety, and social protection systems which impact negatively on job satisfaction and productivity [5].

In the Philippine context, the garment sector occupies an important role in industrial employment yet remains fraught with labor challenges. Studies show that increased minimum wages, despite being a well intended approach, have in some instances led to a decline in employment, and poverty among the vulnerable members of society like the women and the youth [6]. Evidence in the field where garment workers are employed in the ecozone factories of Cavite further demonstrates the precariousness of the situation of the garment workers, such as low compensation, or excessive numbers of work, and inhuman treatment [7]. More recently, policy

reports observe that the increases in wages coupled with global tariff pressures have helped to play a role in the downsizing and contraction of the industry factories [8]. Several studies have documented the challenges and opportunities faced by garment workers. [9] noted that although workplace safety has been enhanced due to international pressure, other problems like physical exhaustion and work-related health hazards have remained. On the same note, [10] established that low pay and unfavorable working condition is a direct cause of poor worker health whereas [11] established that, equitable compensation, as well as organizational support is a very important indicator of productivity and morale in workers. Regardless of these advances in knowledge, there is a lack of empirical studies investigating the combination of various aspects of worker welfare including workplace conditions, pay, and employment security as well as ethics, management behaviors and client-based needs to determine the general worker experiences.

These labor conditions have broader implications for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8), which advocates for inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full employment, and decent work for all. Wage inadequacies, managerial inefficiencies, and unequal application of labor standards remain a problem in the Philippine garment sector and this is slowing down the achievement of these global goals. Given these issues, this paper explores the workplace experiences of garment workers in Northern Mindanao with special emphasis on the major dimensions of compensation, job security, training, workload, workplace environment, ethical practices and management systems. Through such interdependence, the research aims at producing empirical evidence which may be used to inform labor policies, organizational changing policies, and sustainable industrial growth according to the principles of decent work and SDG 8.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the problems encountered by garment workers in Northern Mindanao. A total of 100 respondents participated in the study, selected through random sampling to ensure representativeness of the target population. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire that was subjected to content validation by experts in Garments Technology and language specialists to ensure accuracy, clarity, and relevance of the items. The tool assessed the perception of workers in different dimensions of workplace, such as work environment, pay and benefits, job security, training and skill development, workload and stress, social and ethical issues, organizational problem and client related problems. The data collected was analyzed through the weighted mean in order to obtain the level of congruence on the level of problems encountered by the garment workers. This methodological approach was chosen to obtain reliable quantitative insights into the lived experiences of workers and to provide an empirical basis for understanding patterns within their workplace conditions.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The section of the survey includes the survey results of the issues faced by garment workers in eight major dimensions of the workplace, namely workplace environment, compensation and benefits, job security, skills and training, workload and stress, social and ethical concerns, organizational issues, and client-related challenges.

A. Problems Encountered by the Garments Workers

Table 1. Problems Encountered by the Garments Workers

Statement	WM	Verbal Description
Workplace Environment		
The workspace has proper lighting and ventilation.	4.40	Agree
Safety measures, such as protective equipment, are always observed.	4.40	Agree
Taking regular breaks from repetitive movements helps maintain physical comfort and well-being.	4.00	Agree
Average Weighted Mean	4.27	Agree
Compensation And Benefits		
Wages are sufficient to meet the cost of living and workload demands.	3.90	Agree
Salary distribution is consistent and given on-time.	4.10	Agree

Workers receive benefits such as health insurance or sick leave.	4.60	Strongly Agree
Average Weighted Mean	4.20	Agree
Job Security		
Stable and long-term employment contracts promote security and peace of mind.	4.20	Agree
Supportive work environments and growth opportunities help retain workers and enhance job satisfaction.	3.80	Agree
Expanding opportunities for long-term job stability supports a secure and committed workforce.	4.00	Agree
Average Weighted Mean	4.00	Agree
Skills And Training		
Training programs to enhance skills and techniques are available.	4.10	Agree
Providing training in modern tools and technologies empowers workers to perform efficiently and confidently.	3.70	Agree
Employers has sufficient training for career advancement.	4.00	Agree
Average Weighted Mean	3.93	Agree
Workload And Stress		
Balanced workloads and reasonable hours promote the physical and mental well-being of workers.	3.70	Agree
Supportive approach to achieving production targets fosters a healthy and motivating work environment.	4.20	Agree
Setting realistic deadlines helps prevent burnout and supports sustained productivity.	4.40	Agree
Average Weighted Mean	4.10	Agree
Social And Ethical Concerns		
Promoting equal treatment and opportunities for women fosters a fair and inclusive workplace for all.	4.10	Agree
The workplace upholds ethical standards and ensures that all children are protected from labor.	3.90	Agree
Workers feel appreciated and fairly treated in their roles.	4.00	Agree
Average Weighted Mean	4.00	Agree
Organizational Issue		
Effective management and clear communication foster a supportive and productive work environment.	3.90	Agree
Workers are provided with ample opportunities for career growth and recognition.	3.60	Agree
Supervisors provide strong support and clear guidance to their team.	4.10	Agree
Average Weighted Mean	3.87	Agree
Client-Related Challenges		
Clients have clear expectations that align well with the available resources.	4.10	Agree
Workers regularly receive direct feedback from clients to enhance their performance.	4.30	Agree
Client demands are well-coordinated with production timelines and resource availability.	3.90	Agree
Average Weighted Mean	4.10	Agree
Scale: 4.50-5.00-Strongly Agree 3.50-4.49 -Agree 2.50-3.49-Neutral 1.50-2.49-Disagree 1.00-1.49-Strongly Disagree		

In terms of workplace environment and safety, the respondents rated this factor positively with an average weighted mean of 4.27 (Agree). The most rated ones were good lighting and ventilation and safety like protective equipment (M = 4.40) and lowest ranking was to take regular breaks of monotonous movements (M = 4.00). This implies that despite the realization that workers can observe the existence of safety measures, there

are still rest and ergonomic issues. This is in line with a systematic review by [12] which established that the prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders or pains and occupational fatigue is common among textile and garment workers because of poor workstation ergonomics and repetitive tasks. Such results indicate that safety in the workplace can be much more than compliance and that this program can be offered in terms of structured rest and ergonomic interventions to guarantee long-term productivity and worker health. The dimension had an average mean of 4.20 (Agree) in regards to compensation and benefits. The greatest mean ($M = 4.60$) was obtained with respect to the access to benefits like health insurance or sick leaves whereas the lowest ($M = 3.90$) was on wage sufficiency. This trend shows that the benefit systems are properly implemented but there is still the issue of wage adequacy. According to [13] wage stagnation is one of the main issues in the garment sector in Asia although the productivity increases and the standards of compliance with benefits are improving. Likewise [14] discovered that poor pay in the factories has led to the stress and risk of health among the workers. In this way, the enhancement of compensation systems will be aimed at the changes in the living wage, as well as benefits that will be used to attain decent and equitable compensation. In terms of job security, the results yielded an average weighted mean of 4.00 (Agree). The most significant agreement was on the fact that stable and long-term employment contract offers a feeling of security ($M = 4.20$), whereas the lowest score ($M = 3.80$) was on growth opportunities. This implies that job tenure is quite stable though the professional progress is forbidden. As noted in [15] workers are limited in career development opportunities and this limits their motivation and retention in the garment industries. The benefit of employment stability in combination with skill-building opportunity to boost job satisfaction and productivity was also discovered by [11] as well. This emphasizes the need to incorporate long term career constructs within factory management structures.

In terms of skills and training, the factor obtained an average mean of 3.93 (Agree). Availability of training programs ($M = 4.10$) was rated the highest and the training in modern tools and technologies ($M = 3.70$) as the lowest. These findings mean that although there is the basic training, the exposure to modern and digital tools is not enough. The same outcomes of [5] showed that garment factories tend to train only to meet the operational requirements and focus little on technological advances and innovations. Improving the continuous learning programmes and implementing digital manufacturing skills would improve the productivity and competitiveness of the workers.

In terms of workload and stress, the respondents registered an average weighted mean of 4.10 (Agree). The score with high ($M = 4.40$) score was realistic deadlines, and the lowest ($M = 3.70$) was balanced workloads. It means that despite the fact that the time management practices are becoming better, there is still unequal distribution of tasks. This is in line with the fact that overproduction goals particularly among the female workforce is a defining factor of stress and diminished job satisfaction [16]. Therefore, participatory workload planning is beneficial to be encouraged and reduce stress to improve well-being.

In terms of social and ethical concerns, the respondents registered an average weighted mean of 4.00 (Agree), indicating that ethical standards and social inclusiveness are generally upheld in the garment industry in Northern Mindanao. The best rated indicator was the promotion of equal treatment and opportunities of women ($M = 4.10$), and slightly lower was the upholding of ethical standards and protection of children against labor ($M = 3.90$). It implies that employees feel that their companies are mostly on track in terms of gender equality principles and ethical standards but further enhancement is required to facilitate inclusiveness and guarantee that ethical standards are constantly observed at all production facilities.

In terms of organizational issues, the results indicated the lowest overall mean of 3.87 (Agree). Supervisory support and clear guidance had the highest mean ratings of 4.10 and the lowest mean rating of 3.6, respectively. This demonstrates that there is good management communication but few opportunities of advancement. They established that poor recognition systems and short promotion channels are some of the causes of demotivation among factory workers [17]. Motivation and retention can be increased through strengthening of leadership practices and performance-based advancement. In terms of client-related challenges, the factor recorded an average mean of 4.10 (Agree). The greatest mean ($M = 4.30$) was the one that related to getting feedback on the product by clients, and the least ($M = 3.90$) one was on coordination of client demands with resources. This

implies that communication with clients would be effective but at times production expectations are higher than the capacity to produce. It imply that more decent work standards should be therefore achieved by improving the alignment of the production capacity and the client expectations.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that garment workers in Northern Mindanao generally hold positive perceptions of their workplace conditions, as reflected by overall "Agree" ratings across all eight dimensions. Among these, the workplace environment and compensation and benefits obtained the highest means, indicating that safety standards and employee welfare programs are relatively well-practiced. However, the reduction in organizational concerns and skills and training also indicate ongoing vacuity of career progress, management and technological retraining. These results indicate that, although the industry has been making some gains towards meeting the standards of decent work, there is still a need to work hard to increase training opportunities, adequate remuneration, and the existence of participatory management systems to increase worker satisfaction, as well as to encourage long-term labor sustainability.

V. REFERENCES

1. M. Parpiani, "Made in South Asia: Centering Labor in Textile and Garment Manufacturing Work, 1970s to 2020s," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, pp. 198–205, vol. 107, 2024. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
2. R. F. Syed and R. Karim, "Labor Welfare Policy, Practices, and Deficiencies with the ILO: Evidence from the Garment Industry of Bangladesh," *Labor History*, pp. 339–355, vol. 66, no. 3, 2025. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
3. N. Sharmin and D. Khanam, "Role of Readymade Garment Sector in Changing the Livelihood Pattern of Rural Women: An Analysis of Garment Workers in Bangladesh," *IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences*, pp. 27–36, vol. 5, no. 11, 2017. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
4. J. Jenkins, "Struggle in the Garment Sector," *Theory & Struggle*, 2020. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
5. M. Raisul Islam, M. Tofayel Hossain, S. K. Mallik, and M. Abeedur Rahman, "Bangladeshi Garment Industry Welfare Policies and Employee Satisfaction: An Empirical Study," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, pp. 334–346, vol. 9, no. 15, 2025. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
6. V. B. Paqueo, A. J. Orbeta, and L. A. Lanzona, "The Impact of Legal Minimum Wages on Employment, Income, and Poverty Incidence in the Philippines," *Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS)*, Quezon City, 2016. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
7. B.B. Velasco, "Dynamics of Union Organizing in Three Garment Factories in the Cavite Ecozone," *Philippine Journal of Labor and Industrial Relations*, pp. 121–157, vol. 39, 2023. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
8. BusinessMirror, "Garments sector: Pay hike, tariffs spell 'perfect storm'," *BusinessMirror*, 2025. Online: <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2025/09/05/garments-sector-pay-hike-tariffs-spell-perfect-storm/>
9. R. Prentice, G. De Neve, A. Mezzadri, and K. N. Ruwanpura, "Health and Safety in Garment Workers' Lives: Setting a New Research Agenda," *Geoforum*, pp. 157–160, vol. 88, 2018. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
10. H. Kabir, M. Maple, M. S. Islam, and K. Usher, "A Qualitative Study of the Working Conditions in the Readymade Garment Industry and the Impact on Workers' Health and Wellbeing," *Environmental and Occupational Health Practice*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2022. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
11. M. S. Ullah, M. R. Islam, M. R. Amin, et al., "The Effects of Compensation, Organizational Commitment, and Job Satisfaction on Work Productivity: Evidence from Readymade Garments Industry in an Emerging Economy," *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, vol. 8, no. 13, pp. 84–94, 2024. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
12. R. K. Seidu, E. A. Ofori, B. Eghan, G. K. Fobiri, A. O. Afriyie, and R. Acquaye, "A Systematic Review of Work-Related Health Problems of Factory Workers in the Textile and Fashion Industry," *Journal of Occupational Health*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2024. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
13. Intenational Labour Organization, 2015. Online: <https://www.ilo.org/publications/employment-wages-and-working-conditions-asias-garment-sector-finding-new>
14. D. Yuan, M. A. I. Gazi, M. A. Rahman, B. K. Dhar, and M. A. Rahaman, "Occupational Stress and Health Risk of Employees Working in the Garments Sector of Bangladesh: An Empirical Study," *Frontiers in Public Health*, vol. 10, 2022. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
15. P. Thwin et al., "Impact of Career Advancement on Employee Retention," 2023. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
16. L. Sharma and M. Srivastava, "A Scale to Measure Organizational Stress among Women Workers in the Garment Industry," *European Journal of Training and Development*, 2022. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)
17. V. Beloor and C. J. Swamy, "A Study on Job Satisfaction and Employee Welfare in Garment Industries," 2020. [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Link](#)