

Exploring Male Management Attitudes toward Gender Equity in Garment Factories

Prepared by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) | February 2024



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About Us

The International Center for Research for Women (ICRW) is a global research institute, with regional hubs in Washington D.C., United States; New Delhi, India; Kampala, Uganda; and Nairobi, Kenya. Established in 1976, ICRW has set the global agenda for gender equity, inclusion, and shared prosperity with action-oriented research and solutions. Our global experts generate ground-breaking insights and develop gender transformative strategies on topics like economic opportunity and security, health and reproductive rights, gender norms, and climate action.

ICRW Asia works in India and several countries in Asia on a range of issues such as inadequate access to education and livelihoods, adolescent empowerment, gender-based violence (GBV), masculinities, gender inequitable attitudes, HIV, violence against women and girls (VAWG) and women-led climate action.

About Primark

Primark is an international fashion retailer employing more than 80,000 colleagues across 17 countries in Europe and the US. Founded in Ireland in 1969 under the Penneys brand, Primark aims to provide affordable choices for everyone, from great quality everyday essentials to stand-out style across women's, men's and kids, as well as beauty, homeware and accessories. With a focus on creating great retail experiences, Primark has over 440 stores globally and continues to expand with the aim of reaching 530 stores by the end of 2026.

Primark is working to make more sustainable fashion affordable for everyone through its Primark Cares strategy, a multi-year programme that focuses on giving clothing a longer life, protecting life on the planet and supporting the livelihoods of the people who make Primark clothes. As part of this, Primark unveiled nine commitments it is working to achieve by 2030. These commitments include making all of its clothes from recycled or more sustainably sourced materials by 2030, halving carbon emissions across its value chain and pursuing a living wage for workers in its supply chain. More information can be found here: www.primark.com/en-gb/primark-cares.

Authors and Acknowledgments

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The authors would like to share their deepfelt gratitude to the senior leadership of the participating factories and all the research participants who shared their valuable time and rich experiences with us. We thank Matthew Davidson, Vanitha J.C, Ann Sunil, and the wider Primark team for this opportunity to engage with an extremely understudied and vital piece of work. We acknowledge with gratitude our colleagues at ICRW, Lauren Murphy (formerly at ICRW Advisors) for project design, Sakshi Garg for grant management, Monica Bhalla and Meenu for administrative assistance, and Anne McPherson for communication support.

Suggested Citation

Uppal, R., Oguntola, R., and Verma, R. 2024. *Exploring Male Management Attitudes toward Gender Equity in Garment Factories*. New Delhi: International Center for Research on Women.

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Foreword

Ravi Verma – Regional Director, Asia, ICRW (rverma@icrw.org)

For more than 45 years, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) has been at the forefront of identifying and addressing challenges faced by women and girls worldwide. Our research, programs and advocacy have focused extensively on the intersections of women's economic empowerment, sustainable livelihoods, and equitable workplaces for women within both the formal and the informal economy. But in the garment industry, where 80% of garment sector workers are women, a glaring imbalance persists: men dominate leadership and decision-making roles.

This gap highlights the need to engage with men in positions of power to advance gender equality within the factories. While significant efforts have been made to empower women in the garment industry, engaging with male supervisors and managers – the ones with decision-making power – has been largely overlooked. A gender synchronous approach i.e. one that engages with both women and men to achieve gender equity is thus critical for achieving long-term sustainable and transformational change. This research aims to fill this critical knowledge gap by exploring perspectives of male management on gender equity in garment factories, focusing on how they can support women's engagement, participation, and career advancement.

Corporations have an immense responsibility to drive systemic change. By holding their vendors and suppliers accountable and implementing strong gender-responsive supply chain policies and programs, they can create a ripple effect. Primark's commitment to this research is a powerful example and we are grateful for their support in leading this pivotal research. We hope our findings pave the way towards greater engagement with male management and a future where garment factories are truly gender-equitable for all.

Matthew Davidson – Senior Ethical Trade Executive, Primark (madavidson@primark.co.uk)

At Primark, we're committed to supporting the livelihoods of the people who make our products. This includes working with our partners to address barriers to women's workforce participation and progression, such as gender-based violence, unpaid care work, and lack of representation in democratically elected bodies.

Across the countries that we source from, men play a predominant role in managerial and supervisory positions within the garment industry. Mens' views and beliefs around female equality and progression in the workplace are therefore critical to understanding how to help bring about positive change for women.

We commissioned this research with ICRW to help build our understanding of male management attitudes towards women in the workplace, and wider society, and learn how we could better support attitudinal change. Through qualitative research, including focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, ICRW captured and analysed male management attitudes and have developed recommendations on how to progress gender equity in the workplace.

Whilst the research was conducted in India, the findings can potentially shed light on attitudes faced by female workers in other countries in our supply chain given the global prevalence of gender inequity. We aim to use the research, as well as the supporting Conversation Guide tool, to strengthen our gender-transformative programming through a shift in norms and beliefs that can be detrimental to women's participation, progression, and retention within the workplace.

We welcome ICRW's research and hope that this report will be used by others within and beyond the sector to bring about positive change for women working in global supply chains.

Executive Summary

The discourse on gender equity in garment factories has primarily focused on the experiences of the predominantly female workforce worldwide. Limited literature explores the mindset of the largely male management in these factories regarding gender equity norms, especially concerning women in the workplace. Understanding the beliefs of male management is crucial for the success of gender-based programs and worker voice tools. It would also aid in designing targeted interventions, identifying potential barriers, and fostering a workplace culture that promotes inclusivity and equity. This includes gender-transformative approaches addressing traditional gender norms, particularly those related to patriarchal masculinity, in garment factories. With this objective, Primark partnered with ICRW to assess and document the attitudes held by male factory management towards gender equity within the factories in its supply chain in India.

Social norms are all pervasive and permeate into every aspect of an individual's life. The selected themes for the study included themes around women within the workplace and through this, ICRW aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the norms held by male managers on women and gender equity and its manifestations in their attitudes. This approach aligned with the study objectives and provided recommendations proximal to the workplace, within the sphere of influence of brands and factory management. The study focused on four interconnected domains of inquiry: attitudes towards women as co-workers, gender division of labour, gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH), and the creation of gender-equitable workplaces.

This research demonstrates the regressive attitudes held by male participants towards women, portraying them as biologically weak and suited for certain roles, often deemed 'easier' work. Perhaps such perceptions stem from the dominance of women in these roles, diminishing their perceived difficulty. Descriptions of women as possessing submissive traits, like patience and softness, reflect ingrained stereotypes. Women are often viewed as working primarily for supplemental income rather than personal interest or ambition. Leadership roles are considered unsuitable for women due to perceived pressure, and the belief is that women themselves tend to avoid these positions. Household responsibilities are seen as a woman's prime duty, while men are associated with providing financial security. Some respondents expressed paternalistic attitudes, with men assuming decision-making responsibilities for female family members. Despite existing evidence, participants believed that sexual harassment/GBVH in factories is a thing of the past, at times attributed to women's actions, misjudgements, or misunderstandings, rarely holding men accountable.

Research in this understudied area underscores the pressing need to address entrenched social stereotypes and norms among male factory management. While it does seem to suggest that this is having a negative impact on women's growth opportunities within the sector, it is still critical to speak to women workers and women management to understand their lived experiences and challenges stemming from these attitudes held by male management. The findings also highlight the urgency of implementing gender and patriarchy training, covering social norms, role stereotyping, and masculinity, to challenge and reshape the beliefs held by male management. This report aims to be a valuable resource for understanding male management attitudes in the garment industry, offering guidance on advancing the discourse on gender norms and equity within factories, indicating the roles various actors can play.

1. Introduction

It is increasingly clear that gender equity is not just a women's issue but rather a societal issue. Engaging men in gender equity programming acknowledges that men benefit from existing gender stereotypes and disparities and that they also have a responsibility to dismantle them. To do so, it is important to understand the stereotypes men hold as well as their beliefs and general attitudes about gender equity.

In the garment and manufacturing industry, an industry that remains dominated by largely female workforce, there is growing evidence that gender inequities remain pervasive¹. Some of these challenges include unsafe working conditions such as long hours and forced overtime, the persistence of gender-based violence and harassment² accompanied by poor, inefficient grievance mechanisms, lack of voice and representation, low wages, and limited career-development opportunities. Even when women perform the same or similar jobs as men or perform work of equal value, they often receive less wages on average than men.³ These disadvantages have only widened the gap in which women are treated differently from men in a way that limits women's opportunities and their levels of participation across different areas of society. These widespread systemic challenges that women face are only worsened when harmful stereotypes about women continue to be reinforced by men in the industry, who often hold higher positions of power as managers and supervisors.

Meaningfully engaging male managers and supervisors as allies not only broadens the conversation around gender equity but also provides an opportunity for men to share their own experiences in a way that offers solutions to address the root causes of gender inequities in factory settings.⁴

With this context, this research set out to assess the attitudes of factory management toward gender equity to better map the invisible but powerful beliefs, held by male managers, that subtly, and unintentionally, create challenges for women in the workplace. This research report commissioned by Primark in partnership with ICRW highlights key findings gathered from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with male managers across four factories in India and seeks to use this as a foundation for understanding some of the attitudes male managers hold and provide guidance on how to engage men to share their perspectives on gender issues, gain more understanding around gender topics, challenge harmful stereotypes, and ultimately promote gender equity in factory settings and beyond.

2. Research Methodology

Findings in this report were based largely upon qualitative data obtained from a mix of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with male management, including managers, in-charges, and supervisors in Primark's supply chain across India.

2.1. Domains of Inquiry

Before conducting one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with male management, ICRW worked with Primark to identify and prioritize key thematic domains of inquiry to guide these conversations. To do this, a quick literature scan was conducted to

¹ ILO, 2019. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/projectdocumentation/wcms_681644.pdf

² Business and Human Rights, 2022. https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/2022_GBVH_Briefing_latvnJb.pdf

³ World Economic Forum, 2023. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf

⁴ ICRW, 2018. https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ICRW_Gender-Equity-and-Male-Engagement_Brief.pdf

understand how masculinity shows up in garment factory settings, general perceptions around gender-based violence and its normalization at work, perceptions around women's roles in society and at work while also leveraging ICRW's existing work on men and masculinities and gender equity in supply chains. This allowed the research team to distil and narrow down the areas of inquiry to four interconnected domains. These four domains served as the basis for developing the questions in the discussion guides to help the team understand and measure different gender attitudes held by men within the workplace. The four themes are as follows:

1. Perceptions about **women as co-workers**: women as colleagues, co-workers, supervisors, managers
2. Beliefs held around **gendered division of labour**: the types of jobs and roles women should or should not hold at work and home.
3. Attitudes on **gender-based violence and harassment** at the workplace
4. Perceptions around **gender-equitable workplaces**: understanding of gender equity, role of men as allies to create gender-equitable policies and practices at work.

2.2. In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Following the selection and prioritization of these four domains of inquiry, ICRW proceeded to conduct one-on-one in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with male management in four factories that were part of Primark's supply chain. All sessions were conducted in Kannada, Tamil, Hindi, and English (as preferred by participants) in person at the various factory sites in October 2023.

Overall, 41 participants took part in the research. ICRW conducted 11 one-on-one interviews and 8 focus group sessions (with an average of 2-4 participants per group) across four factories in India (three in South India and one in North India). Three IDIs were conducted in each factory with male managers, barring one which only had two male managers. Two FGDs were conducted in each factory with male in-charges and supervisors. One-on-one interviews lasted on average for 1 hour while focus group discussions lasted 1-1.5 hours. Since all interviews were conducted in-person, data obtained were recorded largely based on observations and note-taking. For conversations that occurred in Kannada, Tamil, and Hindi, ICRW worked with translators to take notes and translate the transcripts to English for ICRW analysis.

2.3. Data Limitations

In conducting research activities, ICRW made efforts to be as rigorous as possible. However, due to the small number of factories in the sample size, there is a concern about replicability and producing generalizable findings. However, considering that this was a pilot research effort, the aim of the research was not to produce generalizable findings but rather to serve as a foundational basis for understanding what types of attitudes males in varying positions of management hold as it relates to topics around gender equity.

Another limitation faced was collecting responses from only one demographic, in this case, only male respondents participated in this study. While this was in alignment with the research goals, the majority of what respondents shared, especially around issues and challenges faced by women, gender-equitable policies, or opportunities available to women could not be corroborated by women workers in the factory. It will be important to gather responses from women as well to get a comprehensive overview and understanding of policies and practices that particularly impact women workers.

Lastly, it is important to note, albeit not a limitation, that the study findings are by no means a commentary on the factory's practices and policies. The objective of the study was not to assess the compliance mechanism or policy measures adopted by the factories. Just as social norms are influenced by and, in turn, influence a variety of institutions such as family, school, neighbourhood, workplace, etc.; so are the attitudes held by people shaped by a multitude of interconnected factors, with the workplace being just one of them. It is pivotal to contextualize the study findings within this background and view it as an expression of the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions held by male managers and supervisors towards gender equity, especially in the workplace.

3. Research Findings and Analysis

Based on qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with male management, including managers, in-charges, and supervisors, the following key findings emerged. This section reflects participants' attitudes and perspectives towards women as co-workers, gender division of labour, gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH), and the creation of gender-equitable workplaces – identified as the four domains of inquiry for this study. It is crucial to note the interconnected nature of these domains; normative and gendered perspectives flow across them, influencing each area. For instance, perceptions regarding the division of labour, specifically women's unpaid and paid work, impact how participants view women in the workplace. The study findings are organized to highlight key attitudes held by participants across these domains. Importantly, the analysis is grounded in the experiences and opinions shared by participants throughout their journey in the garment industry over the past several years, encompassing various workplaces, not limited to their current ones. Notably, there were no discernible differences in opinions between IDI and FGD participants; hence, the results are presented at an aggregate level.

3.1. Key Findings

1. The garment industry is dominated by women due to its low entry requirements e.g. minimal/little education or skills required.

Among the four factories, participants from two factories shared that the male workforce is around 60%, while participants from the other two factories shared that the female workforce is slightly higher, at around 70%. However, one common factor across all participants was that they all agreed that the proportion of women workers has increased over the last one to two decades.

"Initially, we had fewer women, but now more women are joining due to economic reasons. Many women work to contribute to their family income, realizing that one earning is not sufficient." – FGD participant

"I think one thing is education. Because they don't need any biodata or educational certificate to join the industry. Most of them are illiterate." – IDI participant

"Most of the women in the garment industry are rural migrants. They are uneducated and it is better to work here in the garment industry as most places have general shifts which are comfortable for them to work" – IDI participant

The primary reason cited for the increasing number of women joining the garment industry is its accessibility, attributed to minimal educational requirements, perceived ease of work, the perceived safety due to a significant female workforce, and the assurance of a steady

income. Additional factors mentioned included attractive benefits like provident funds, transportation facilities, and low-pressure job environments. Two factors exclusively highlighted for women workers were the appeal of an eight-hour workday, facilitating a better balance between work and household responsibilities, and the need to provide financial support to their families. It was also noted that, over the years, men are leaving the sector in pursuit of better-paying jobs as they bear the responsibility of managing household finances.

“For men, there are other businesses and then other jobs are there. When they come here (garment industry) and have to manage the family, then the salary is not enough. So, they switch to other sectors.” – IDI participant

“Usually, men do not come to work in this field. Almost all the men go elsewhere because the salaries are very low. That will not work out for gents.” – IDI participant

Moreover, some participants pointed out that women might join the sector to earn extra income in case there is no immediate financial need, rather than remaining idle. Conversely, others opined that educated women or those from affluent families would likely choose careers in the government sector or entrepreneurship over the garment industry.

“Why they (women) have to engage in a work, because they are below middle class or below poverty level. If they are good enough in their financial strength, she would never take up the job (in garment industry). Even if I am working in a factory, I will not allow my wife and daughter to come in this job, because I know this is harmful for them.” – IDI participant

Key Insights:

These perceptions suggest that women's employment in the industry is predominantly viewed as a means to supplement family income or as an alternative to boredom. Rarely mentioned are notions of women working out of passion, choice, interest, or independence. Additionally, these perceptions imply a certain stereotyping of women workers in the sector—perceived as uneducated, economically disadvantaged, and compelled to work. This stereotype extends to the industry itself, portraying it as one where educated and affluent women may not want to work. Lastly, it prompts reflection on whether the acceptance of women in paid work stems from a belief in gender equality, recognizing women's independent identity as workers, or if it is merely a matter of convenience, serving as a supplement to family income.

2. High occupational segregation persists with men and women preferring certain job functions because they are “better at them”.

Once in the sector, the perpetuation of stereotypes seems to persist. Women workers were characterized as 'patient,' 'productive,' 'effective,' and 'easy to work with,' in contrast to their male counterparts. Moreover, participants shared that specific role within the garment industry, like thread cutting or checking, are dominated by women due to their perceived qualities of nimbleness, diligence, and patience. Some participants even suggested that these tasks mirror the traditional roles women have performed in their households. One participant highlighted how the patience and organizational skills ingrained in women through household work seamlessly translate into the factory setting.

"Female workers are good in thread cutting, they also have a habit from their home only that's why 90% are ladies there." – FGD participant

"They (women) pick up skills quickly, making them valuable in various roles within the garment industry." – FGD participant

Participants shared that certain functions such as cutting, ironing, packing, and loading are predominantly carried out by men, justified by the perception that women are physically weaker and unable to bear heavy loads, stand for extended periods, or work in prolonged heat. Participants also mentioned that women themselves tend to opt for 'easier' tasks over 'hard' ones.

"Even though they (women) take very soft jobs, like you know checking the fabrics, they cannot move material, as they are very heavy. They (men) are physically you know by birth they get that physical advantage." – IDI participant

"...even if we want to lift this table, we'll call 4 men as opposed to 4 women." – IDI participant

"There are places where ladies can't work. For example, in cutting, ironing, loading etc. We don't make it with those ladies. If it is 5 tons of fabric, it is 5000 kilos. It is difficult for them to handle 5000 kg." – FGD participant

"Women can't do heavy lifting jobs." – FGD participant

Perspectives around gendered occupational segregation were also seen beyond the garment industry. For instance, participants held the belief that although women are capable of driving, they are deemed unsuitable for the transport sector, which entails long hours of travel and vehicle management, particularly in case of breakdowns. The rationale provided centred on the perception that women might struggle with the repair of heavy machinery. This line of reasoning was similarly applied to dismiss the idea of women being car mechanics.

"Car driving both men and women can do but repairing work (mechanic) like changing parts that women can't do because it is physically challenging, similarly truck driving is something which women find difficult to deal with." – FGD participant

Key Insights:

These perceptions indicate that male managers and supervisors in the garment industry view women in an instrumentalist way and place lower economic value to their work. Women are perceived as easier to work with and supervise, but their work in the industry is often undervalued, seen as 'easy' and an 'extension of homework.' Most participants subscribed to the notion that women are 'biologically weak' for certain roles involving heavy machinery or lifting weights, often opting for what is considered the 'easier' task. Perhaps because women are dominating these roles, it is seen as 'easy' as opposed to 'hard' or heavy work done by men and their skills are being undervalued. Interestingly, participants believed that women might struggle with prolonged exposure to heat in an ironing role, yet acknowledged that women predominantly handle cooking at home, which also involves extended exposure to heat. This inconsistency suggests an underlying notion

of 'acceptability' regarding what is deemed suitable for women in paid work and what is not. Lastly, some participants expressed a protective stance, asserting that women should not be engaged in roles involving carrying weight or potentially harmful physical effects. This reveals a protective patriarchy in action, where men assume the role of 'protectors,' diminishing women's agency and placing them in a subordinate position.

3. Women are capable workers but with regards to supervisory roles, they are perceived to likely face more challenges.

The FGD and IDI participants expressed the belief that women make good co-workers due to their higher dexterity, patience, efficiency, attentive listening to supervisors, lower absenteeism, and generally 'soft' nature, making them easier to work with compared to male workers. Notably, participants did not highlight many challenges associated with working alongside women.

"Women workers pay more attention; we don't have to chase them for work. But men need to be chased and have to instruct them 3-4 times." – FGD participant

"Women have a sincere nature and if you make them understand once, they do not make mistakes again and again. Even if you explain it to a man 10 times, he will still commit a mistake." – IDI participant

"Female worker listens and do their jobs easily and sometime male workers due to their personal problems answer back rudely." – FGD participant

When asked about the challenges encountered by women workers, the predominant issues cited were physical health problems, including body aches and period pain. This was closely followed by personal challenges such as caring for children or sick family members, dealing with an alcoholic husband, or facing financial distress. Upon further probing, a few participants mentioned the double burden of work—juggling responsibilities at home and in the factory. Interestingly, some participants noted that men experience heightened pressure in managing both work and family life, being considered the 'backbone' responsible for meeting household financial expenses. Consequently, men sometimes find themselves 'sacrificing' family commitments due to these pressures.

"Sometimes their work is affected due to household issues with husband or children or household chores which mostly women take care of. Most of the women also support their family by contributing apart from their income to pay towards loan repayment." – IDI participant

"The primary challenge is that men can't really attend to affairs at home, because if it's women, with the 8 hours they are done with the job, but with them, they (men) are constantly, even if they (men) are done, they (men) are constantly having to attend calls." – FGD participant

Regarding work-related challenges, the prevailing belief among most participants is that women do not encounter significant issues related to their work. After much probing, only a few mentioned challenges such as prolonged sitting or work pressure. Interestingly, all participants emphasized that women are free to take breaks when not feeling well, with no external pressure to continue working. It's worth noting that, given that the study was commissioned by a buyer (client) for the factory and the interviews were held within the

factory premises, participants may have been inclined to portray a positive image of their factory.

"There is no such tiring work in this industry. Now if you look at these women who are working, do you see tension on the faces of any of the women? See, all of them are working comfortably." – IDI participant

Regarding supervisory or managerial levels, participants shared that the gender proportion is tilted in the favour of men at the moment. They believed that women could become supervisors. However, they also shared that women might not be able to perform these roles due to the nature of the role involving handling calls at odd times, sometimes working beyond eight hours and managing workers. Secondly, they also shared that women may also lack certain personality traits required for this job such as assertiveness and the ability to manage pressure.

"Usually, people at this phase (supervisors) should be more commanding and do groundwork when required. If there is any fault in the machine, men can easily rectify. Women may find it challenging to manage workers and handle machinery-related issues." – FGD participant

"They (men) can quickly drive to places to deal with an emergency, following up outsourcing would require work at night or staying late which might be difficult for women." – IDI participant

"A supervisor's job is a stressful job. Lots of tension." – FGD participant

"The reason why male is seen more at the post of supervisor is they are more suitable in roaming, going in field or here and there more often as compared to women." – IDI participant

Additionally, participants also shared that women themselves tend to avoid taking on supervisory roles due to the aforementioned reasons. They went on to suggest that one way of balancing the proportion at the supervisory level is for women to themselves come forward, show 'ambition' and demand these jobs like men do. Interestingly, according to the participants, when women do become supervisors, they have noticed them facing similar challenges as male supervisors face i.e. pressure of completing deadlines, managing worker absenteeism, and ensuring product quality. Insubordination was not raised as a challenge because the participants believed that in the garment industry, everyone understands and follows the line of authority, so a male worker does listen to a female supervisor.

"Females are shy or hesitate to lead. We males can be little strict and get the job done. Female might feel little awkward in instructing the male workers." – FGD participant

Key Insights:

These perceptions seem to indicate a paradox in the beliefs of male managers and supervisors. While men perceive women's industry work as relatively unburdening, easy and manageable alongside household tasks, they cast doubt on women's ability to handle the pressure of supervisory roles. Secondly, in male-dominated leadership spaces, perceiving women as 'soft' and men as 'assertive' reinforces gender stereotypes, hindering women from being seen as typical leaders due to the association of leadership with

traditionally masculine traits, like 'assertiveness'. Perhaps, it would be important to speak to women supervisors to understand their challenges, what helped them to grow and sustain in the industry.

4. Sexual harassment and GBVH are perceived to be a non-existent issue in factories due to increased awareness and strong compliance policies.

Most participants perceived that sexual harassment in the garment industry is almost negligible at present. While some shared that it used to exist in the past but mentioned that with brand audits and compliance guidelines, training and awareness sessions, strong HR and committee system and careful screening of individuals for the job, the incidents of GBVH have become almost non-existent. However, some participants believed that GBVH did not exist either in the past or at present. It is also important to note that, when asked about challenges faced by women workers, barring a couple of participants, none reported harassment as a challenge despite existing literature pointing towards prevalence of GBVH within garment factories.

"HR is very strong, things have changed. So, policies have changed, and such [harassment] cases have reduced. Five years back I used to hear a lot of harassment news from production people but now a days, I cannot hear. I only hear about the misbehave or arguments happening between staffs." – IDI participant

"Management is very strong now; the policies are very strong. Now action is taken strictly, and proper investigation is happening to bring out the truth & lie." – IDI participant

"In the garment industry apart from work pressure there is no other harassment. And if something like sexual harassment happens then there are internal committees formed." – FGD participant

Verbal abuse was the most reported form of harassment. After much probing, participants shared about other forms such as teasing, commenting over dress attire, and in some instances, making romantic advances. There was a general hesitation to answer the question on GBVH which indicates a certain discomfort in talking about a sensitive topic. While most participants believe that due to the awareness sessions and trainings, there is an understanding amongst everyone regarding appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, the limited responses during the question on forms of harassment, does indicate, on one hand the hesitancy to speak on a sensitive topic but perhaps on other hand, lack of awareness or critical thinking to identify harassment.

Another concerning belief that emerged was related to the understanding of causal factors of GBVH. Many participants suggested that it is not always men's fault, sometimes it could also be due to women instigating or reporting a false case, or miscommunication between a man and a woman. Only a couple of participants found the challenge to be rooted in mindset, most believed that misunderstanding is a major cause of concern. Participants mentioned that the factory management conducts regular training sessions, maintains a committee for complaint resolution, and assigns a critical role to HR in preventing such incidents.

"When one talks about harassment it may not always be just a man's behaviour issue. Sometimes both parties are at fault. Because sometimes when women say or allege harassment, she might also have some part in it. Most men don't think that they have to harass a woman." – FGD participant

“There are also 10% chance that it (sexual harassment) might be the reverse, or it might be instigated by the women themselves.” – IDI participant

“There could be of course instances that they have not seen or observed, but cases where people might border on something that might seem not appropriate, simply because they might not have even intended to, but because of pressures at home or at workplace.” – FGD participant

Key Insights:

A gendered understanding of GBVH seems to be prevalent among the participants. The complete disregard for sexual harassment in factories is concerning, indicating a lack of critical thinking among male managers, even if there have been no explicit complaints about such behaviour. Reporting such cases are not easy for women. Additionally, men deny harassment exists, citing legal protections, while also placing the responsibility on women to protect themselves through legal means. There also seems to be a reluctance to acknowledge or discuss how men's behaviour towards women may be inappropriate although admittedly not deserving to be labelled as harassment in every instance. Further, it appears that the treatment of women by men within the workplace is not viewed as a potential extension of how they treat women outside the factory or in domestic settings, where such behaviour may be abusive and normalized. National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data indicate a high prevalence of domestic violence across India. While this research did not thoroughly explore this question, it would be valuable to delve into how the "normalized" treatment of women outside of work (e.g., at home and in the community) may or may not influence their treatment within the workplace. There is a pressing need to interview women workers to understand their perceptions and experiences and determine if these align with or diverge from managerial perspectives.

5. Household work is still seen as women's responsibility. There was an awareness that this stems from existing social expectations.

Most participants accepted that household division of labour is gendered. Due to persistence social norms, women are expected to and do majority of household work. However, subsequently varied responses were shared. Some participants believed that with women and men both engaged in paid work activities, they are seeing a shift in the division of unpaid domestic work. In most cases, men do and should participate in household activities. It is important to note that this was articulated largely as ‘supporting’ the women in household chores. Most of the chores that men do include buying groceries, dropping children to school, largely outdoor work. One rationale provided was that women typically do not know how to ride a scooter, so men take on such tasks, while women continue to handle cleaning and cooking responsibilities.

“Traditionally, children are more attached to the mother, because of the way they care. The dynamics are evolving. Even my wife asks me to take rest, as I do lot of work outside physically, but I want to support her. I do outside work like buying things, but she does more work. Women enjoy doing this.” – FGD participant

"The main duty of a man is to work, and work brings salary/income. If you have a housewife, then he should provide for her and in return it is her responsibility to cook and provide food for him. Man plays a very important role because even if his wife doesn't work, he should have the capacity to provide for his wife, his parents, and children. That is why a man will go for higher jobs." – FGD participant

"Female mostly handle kitchen work, and if there is field work, or a bike work, then male can handle that. Like bathing the kids and dropping them at school can be managed by the male and female can take care of cooking part, washing clothes etc" – FGD participant

"At home, usually cooking is taken care of by the wives. We help the kids to get ready and drop them at the school. Cooking is mainly done by females. Outside work is handled by males, like buying groceries, vegetables, etc. " – FGD participant

Some participants held the belief that if a woman is not employed, she should manage the household chores since men would be tired after a day's work and may not be able to contribute. A few participants expressed the notion that women might 'enjoy' doing household chores. Lastly, some participants deemed it 'common sense' that women should primarily handle most of the household work.

"(If woman is not engaged in paid work) Wife only will take care, because husband will finish work and go and will be tired and so cannot manage and so wife will finish all work at home." – FGD participant

Furthermore, a few participants expressed their reluctance to have their wives or daughters work in the garment sector, reflecting a paternalistic attitude. This indicates a scenario where men assume the responsibility of deciding what is deemed 'appropriate or inappropriate' for their female family members.

"If a female has skill, then it is her husband's duty to keep her at home as a housewife or to bring her here to work. It is her husband's job whether he wants her to work and move ahead in life or keep her as a housewife, it is his matter." – IDI participant

Key Insights:

These interviews suggest that men are predominantly perceived as the primary providers, the backbone, of their families, while women are seen as working either in their idle time or as a means to supplement family income. These attitudes underscore the prevalent notion that household work is primarily women's responsibility. Men engaging in household chores is viewed more as a form of 'support' rather than a shared responsibility. Within the framework of patriarchal norms that restrict women's mobility, the division of household responsibilities—men engaged in outdoor work and women in indoor work—serves to intensify and reinforce these restrictive norms surrounding women's mobility. It is also worth noting, however, that there is a practical concern related to women not driving personal vehicles as frequently as men, contributing to these observed patterns.

6. There is a widespread general perception among male factory management that the garment industry is a gender-equal sector.

The prevailing sentiment among participants was that in the past, gender-based discrimination was more prevalent, but positive changes have occurred with higher education levels and increased awareness. There was a unanimous consensus that gender equality is both desirable and necessary, emphasizing the importance of treating men and women equally. All participants expressed the belief that men should respect women and treat them fairly.

"The respect for women has to be given. We cannot discriminate. We have to give them the space to express themselves. Freedom of expression is very important. Freedom of association is very important." – IDI participant

Participants expressed a belief that the garment industry is a gender-equal workplace. However, this understanding of equality often stemmed from numerical equality—highlighting the substantial presence of women workforce in the industry. They frequently cited the industry's perceived safety for women due to their significant proportion in the workforce. Further probing revealed that some participants equated equality with fair treatment in terms of pay, opportunities, training, and the ability to take leave. For others, gender equality at the workplace was characterized by the absence of favouritism, emphasizing equal treatment for both men and women, with promotions based solely on merit.

"Men or women, there is no partiality or difference. Men or women, we are all equal. We balance it correctly. We give importance to all, whether men or women there is no partiality. They are treated equally." – FGD participant

"Apart from [menstrual support benefits like pads], there is no other benefit [for women] because all are equal" – IDI participant

"You consider that men and women have equal share. That is, you are thinking on a foreign level rather than an Indian level. Indian means different while foreign means thinking of men and women as equals. But the primary (gender) roles within our culture have not reached that level yet. It will reach that level soon. We are still developing our education system to reach that range." – FGD participant

Through these conversations, a narrower understanding of gender equality in the workplace emerges often driven by numerical equality or the absence of favouritism as perceived markers of equity.

Key Insights:

These prevalent perceptions suggest a lack of awareness regarding systemic barriers that impact women in the workplace. Some participants mentioned equal pay or opportunity as indicators of gender equality, yet the disparity in women's representation in supervisory or managerial roles compared to their significant numbers at the worker level was not recognized as an area for improvement or an issue of inequity. This oversight indicates a failure to acknowledge that the predominance of men in managerial and senior roles, leading to higher salaries, signifies a gender pay gap resulting from vertical role segregation.

Viewing promotions as solely merit-based and expecting women to express interest in senior roles reflects a limited understanding of systemic barriers, shifting the focus to individual actions rather than creating an enabling environment for women to thrive. A concerning trend is evident where most participants believe that gender equality has already been achieved within the garment industry, dismissing the need for further changes.

4. Recommendations

The findings from this research highlight that there remains widespread gender-unequal attitudes and beliefs that men in management positions carry, which can influence their decision-making when it comes to how they interact with and provide support for the women in their workforce. Furthermore, it is important to note that these attitudes and beliefs are extensions of harmful gender norms and stereotypes that are deeply entrenched across many societies of the world, particularly in patriarchal societies where male authority is prioritized and prejudice and discrimination towards women occurs based on their gender. Thus, it is important to note that changing some of these individual attitudes and beliefs that stem from larger societal biases will require a mix of actors and interventions to drive change.

This section of the report offers a set of recommendations for key stakeholders including brands, factory management, and research organizations on how to accelerate change to disrupt some of these attitudes and beliefs.

4.1. For Brands:

- Develop a long-term gender-responsive strategy that centres on behavioural, and mindset change activities and programming to engage suppliers and factory management. This can include providing training on gender topics, especially around role stereotyping, social norms, gendered division of labour, and gender equity.
- Use positive messaging that promotes men as agents of change instead of “shaming and blaming” them: Messages are most effective when they encourage and inspire men, rather than castigate them for men’s bad behaviour and for the negative effects of patriarchy. These messages are most transformative when men have opportunities to also reflect on how messages apply to their own lives and acknowledge and take responsibility for their own gendered behaviours.
- Avoid a zero-sum game but set realistic expectations. Emphasizing the benefits of gender equity and non-violence for men is an essential programmatic strategy, as is moving away from a viewpoint in which either men or women can hold power. However, the reality is that men benefit from these power imbalances and such benefits will diminish as patriarchal structures are reformed. Many men are likely to experience this as a loss of power and preparing them for an adjustment (while simultaneously preparing women and program implementers for potential backlash) is an important element of moving beyond their initial discomfort into truly equitable and non-violent relationships.
- Identify opportunities to work with factory management to speak to and understand challenges women face related to their professional advancement within factories.
- Identify key gender KPIs and offer incentives to factories to motivate action on meeting these KPIs and targets.

- Continuously review supplier code of conduct and supplier standards to emphasize commitment to gender equity and zero-tolerance of sexual harassment and GBVH.
- Provide helpful resource guides to help dispel harmful gender stereotypes pervasive in the garment industry.
- Collaborate with other brands, NGOs, industry bodies to holistically address and fund work on norm change especially within communities where these harmful gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched. Develop partnerships with local NGOs and feminist-led advocacy groups and set joint priorities and commitments / targets on gender equity.
- The absence of any difference between IDI and FGD responses suggest that individual opinions are nurtured and supported by group norms and vice versa. Research on norms suggest that often group norms determine what individuals tend to adhere to. Therefore, any programmatic intervention must try to address both the individual attitudes and also group-held norms about women.

4.2. For Factory Management

- Create safe open forum spaces for women workers to discuss their needs and challenges through informal and semi-structured conversations. Identify male gender champions within management to promote conversation. When using a gender-synchronized approach, it is important to provide safe spaces for discussion. Talking about gender and questioning masculinities may be new and uncomfortable. Program participants need to feel that they can safely discuss gender norms and reflect on the ways in which patriarchy may be playing out in their own lives.
- Group-based reflection and dialogue on what a more gender-equitable workplace could look like. Male and female participants have an opportunity to reflect on gender and violence in their communities. They also reflect on the gendered division of labour at home, impacting women's opportunities at the workplace. They are also encouraged to imagine what a more equitable and non-violent community would look like.
- Formation of male peer groups to continue to think about gender equity and positive masculinity in the workplace:
 - Nurture male peer groups that reinforce positive masculinities. Men may face social repercussions for transgressing gender norms, either in their personal lives or by other men when speaking out against violence. Male peer groups that share values of positive, non-violent masculinities can support and validate men in these experiences and can make feelings of loss of power easier to accept as gender relationships become more equitable.
 - As men witness their peers adopting more gender-equitable beliefs and behaviours and see resulting improvements in household economic situations and relationships, they are motivated to question traditional gender norms and create a more equitable environment within their household.
- Consider group-based education programming. Group-based gender education programs that facilitate individual reflection on harmful gender norms and behaviours have created significant changes in male attitudes about violence. These programs typically focus on deconstructing "toxic masculinities" and reconstructing "positive

masculinities.” This includes programs that work with perpetrators of violence and those that aim to prevent GBV by encouraging men to reflect on the gendered causes of stress and anger in their lives and non-violent ways to cope with those stresses.

- Ensure that training is provided to all staff on anti-sexual harassment policy including procedures for reporting and investigation. Ensure that real-life, contextualized examples of harassment, whistleblowing, safeguards, and consequences are provided to avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding.
- Strengthen grievance reporting channels to ensure clear, confidential, and effective reporting mechanisms are accessible to all staff.
- Prioritize gender-inclusive succession planning and/or professional development, including clearly outlining steps and skills needed to take on leadership roles. Encourage women to step forward for leadership roles through peer-learning and role-model effect.
- Re-examine promotion structures and procedures to create an enabling environment that ensures that managers, supervisors, and in-charges are empowered to support women to take on leadership roles.
- Promote policies that will allow women to enter, sustain, and progress in the labour force to help shift institutional structures of patriarchy more effectively. Specifically, men can advocate for women worker’s rights such as equitable hiring, pay, working conditions, and promotions.
- Institutionalize and promote gender progressive and equitable policies such as paternity leave. This will help in challenging the notion that childcare is solely women’s ‘duty’ and will also provide men time to spend with their children early in their life.

4.3. For Research Organizations

- Conduct deeper research with men to understand prevalence and variations in their attitudes and its roots in social norms.
- Conduct research with women supervisors to understand their lived experiences and document successful stories to serve as inspirational case studies and role models for other women reluctant to step into these roles.
- Work with both men and women together and separately. Consider the sex-segregation of groups as a strategic tool rather than an assumption that single-sex or mixed-sex groups are better. Additionally, do not assume that only male facilitators can work with men.
- Develop adapted gender-responsive worker voice/well-being survey to understand challenges and norms held by women as workers, as household members, and as community members.
- Create a compendium of best practices that are evidence-based solutions for shifting workplace norms and advancing gender equity.

- Build evidence to push for national policies that encourage equitable parenting. In addition to workplace policies, national policies can set a standard for maternity and paternity leave. This not only ensures that parents have sufficient time with their children early in life, but it also establishes an understanding that the state values men's and women's contributions to parenting.

5. Conclusion

The discourse on gender equity in the global garment industry traditionally revolves around the experiences of its predominantly female workforce. This study brings to light the often-overlooked perspectives of male management towards gender equity. The collaboration between Primark and ICRW aimed to contribute to the body of knowledge in this understudied area—the attitudes of male factory management towards gender equity in the garment industry. The research exposes regressive attitudes held by male management in the industry, reinforcing stereotypes that portray women as biologically weak and suited for 'easier' roles. The concept of women and work is rooted in the idea of supplemental income rather than women's own passion or independence. Household work is primarily viewed as a woman's domain, with men providing 'support' if the woman is engaged in paid work, contrasting paid work as a male domain. The study lays the groundwork for more comprehensive research to understand the prevalence and variations in these attitudes and their roots in social norms. The study emphasizes the urgent need to challenge these ingrained beliefs. Addressing entrenched social stereotypes among male factory management is crucial for dismantling barriers to women's growth opportunities. The study recommends targeted initiatives, including gender and patriarchy training, to reshape attitudes and foster gender equity, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and equitable garment industry. This report serves as a valuable resource for advancing the discourse on gender norms and equity within factories, providing insights for collaborative solutions within the garment sector.

Annex 1: IDI Guide

Engaging Men in Factories for Gender Equity

In-depth Interview Guide for Factory Management

Part A: Perceptions about Being a Manager/Supervisor

[Interviewer introduces] I'd like to learn more about what it's like to be a manager/supervisor at this factory. I'm interested to learn what your job entails, positive things about the job, and challenges you face in your job.

1. To start, please share a little bit about yourself. (**PROBE:** work experience, position in the factory, duration of work within this factory)
2. Please share with us a little bit about your roles and responsibilities at your current position. **PROBE on:**
 - a. How many people do you directly oversee? About how many are men and how many are women? If there are more men supervisors, what could be the reason for more men supervisors in the garment industry?
 - b. What are the most important responsibilities of a manager at your level?
 - c. Did you receive any leadership/management training or preparation before taking on this role?
3. What makes your job enjoyable?
4. What are your biggest challenges as a manager/supervisor in this factory?
5. What could be changed that would make it easier or less stressful to perform your job?

Part B: Perceptions about Gender Differences at Work

[Interviewer introduces] We are trying to learn more about the experiences of women and men at the workplace and how those experiences might differ. These next few questions ask your opinion on the topic.

6. How has your experience been of working with women workers in the factory?
7. What according to you are the challenges faced by women at work within **the garment industry in general** (**PROBE:** *competing work-home responsibilities, harassment and violence, long working hours, physical strain, limited growth opportunities, skills, any differences from the challenges faced by men etc.*)
 - a. What do those challenges look like in **this particular factory**? Can you give some examples? (**PROBE:** *travel, pregnancy and childcare, harassment, workload, skills, leaves, and other benefits, etc.*)
 - b. What do you think this factory could do more or better to address some of the challenges that persist for women?
 - c. What support do you/does the factory need to help address some of these challenges?
8. **For Managers:** In case there are both men and women supervisors in the factory, is there any difference in your experience of working with male supervisors and female supervisors? (*probe: process of choosing a supervisor, difference in leadership styles,*

achieving production targets, etc.) Any specific challenge faced working with male supervisors and female supervisors?

For Supervisors: As there are both men and women workers in the factory, in your experience, what are the similarities and differences in working with men and women workers within the factory?

9. Have you noticed **any differences in how women and men are treated** at the factory workplace. **PROBE on:**
 - a. Opportunity to be trained in new tasks?
 - b. Opportunity to be promoted into higher level positions? Is there **any competition among men and women** that you have noticed?
 - c. Requesting leave and taking time off the line (e.g., take annual leave, sick leave)?
 - d. Disciplines for tardiness or unplanned or unauthorized absence?
 - e. Types of contracts given to certain roles in the factory?
 - f. **How much** is paid to women and men for comparable work (e.g., similar levels of responsibility, same level of effort required, equally complex tasks) and **how** they get paid (e.g., hourly, piece-rate, salary)?
 - g. Determining working hours, shift assignments, or overtime?
 - h. Respect shown toward men and women in the workplace?
 - i. Health and safety at work, including transit to and from work?

Part C: Perceptions around gender norms and workplace violence

[Interviewer introduces] As you know, this research also wants to understand more specifically about engagement and experience including challenges faced by women in the workplace, in this regard we wanted to understand your opinion on the following questions.

10. What are your thoughts on the role of women in the garment manufacturing industry? (**PROBE** on gendered division of labour, the types of roles and positions women hold and why, treated with respect)
11. Existing evidence has shown that harassment and abuse against women is quite widespread in factories.
 - a. What according to you constitutes harassment at the workplace? (**PROBE:** verbal abuse, sexual harassment, physical violence, mental harassment, etc.)
 - b. What is your opinion about it, not specific to this factory, but about workplace violence against women in general? Have you observed any changing trends over the years in incidents of workplace violence?
 - c. Do you think people have a common understanding of what sexual harassment is or what behaviours are considered to be sexual harassment? Why or why not?
 - d. What do you think can be done to address this? What role can be played by the factories in this regard? (**PROBE:** role in awareness, prevention, creating & implementing policies, etc.)

Part D: Gender-equitable workspaces

12. When you hear the term or phrase gender equality or gender equity, what comes to your mind?
13. What do you think makes a workplace gender-equitable or gender equal? What would be its key characteristics?

14. In your opinion, who do you think are the key stakeholders/decision-makers to help create a gender-equitable workspace? (**PROBE:** factor management, brands, supervisors, workers, men's, and women's role etc.)
15. What role can each of the mentioned stakeholder play to advocate for gender equality and create a gender-equitable workspace?

Part E: Closing

16. Is there anything else you would like to talk about before we conclude this discussion?

Annex 2: FGD Guide

Engaging Men in Factories for Gender Equity

Focus Group Discussion Guide for Factory Management

Part A: Perceptions about Being a Manager or Supervisor

17. To start, please share a little bit about yourself. (**PROBE:** work experience, position in the factory, duration of work within this factory)
18. What are the responsibilities of a manager/supervisor?
19. What are the kind of skill training a manager or supervisor receives before taking on this role or during their job?
20. How many managers and supervisors are male and female in the factory? (**PROBE:** If more male managers and supervisors, what are the reasons behind lesser number of women in these roles?)
21. What are the challenges faced by managers/supervisors?

Part B: Perceptions about Gender Differences at Work

22. What are your thoughts on the role of women in the garment manufacturing industry? (**PROBE** on gendered division of labour, the types of roles and positions women hold and why)
23. What according to you are the challenges faced by women at work within the garment industry in general? (**PROBE:** competing work-home responsibilities, role of men in household work, harassment and violence, long working hours, physical strain, limited growth opportunities, skills, any differences from the challenges faced by men, etc.)
 - a. What do those challenges look like in this particular factory? Can you give some examples? (**PROBE:** travel, pregnancy and childcare, harassment, workload, skills, leaves, and other benefits, etc.)
 - b. What role can the factory play to address some of the challenges that persist for women?
24. What are the challenges faced by women supervisors within the garment industry?
25. Are there any differences in how women and men are treated in the workplace?
PROBE for example:
 - a. Opportunity to be trained in new tasks?
 - b. Opportunity to be promoted into higher level positions?
 - c. Types of contracts given to certain roles in the factory?
 - d. How much is paid to women and men for the same work or how their pay is determined (i.e., hourly, piece rate, salary)?
 - e. Respect shown toward men and women in the workplace?
 - f. Health and safety at work, including transit to and from work and in dormitories?
26. What are the challenges in supervising women and men? Are there any differences in challenges related to supervising women or men? If yes, what are those? (**PROBE:** perspectives around women as supervisors)

27. Are there certain supervisory approaches or techniques that seem to work better for women or men? If yes, tell me more about those. What makes them necessary and how have they worked?

Part C: Perceptions around gender norms and workplace violence

28. Existing evidence has shown that harassment and abuse against women is quite widespread in factories.
- e. What characterizes workplace violence against women in general? Are there any changing trends over the years in incidents of workplace violence?
 - f. What constitutes harassment at the workplace? (**PROBE:** verbal abuse, sexual harassment, physical violence, mental harassment, etc.)
 - g. Within the factory, is there a common understanding of what sexual harassment is or what behaviours are considered to be sexual harassment? Why or why not?
 - h. Within the factory, if a woman worker wants to make a complaint related to harassment, what are the processes and steps she has to follow?
 - i. What needs to be done to address harassment and violence against women within workplace? What role can be played by the factories in this regard? (**PROBE:** role in awareness, prevention, creating & implementing policies, etc.)

Part D: Gender-equitable workspaces

29. What are the key markers of gender equality or gender equity?
30. What are the key characteristics of a gender-equitable workplace?
31. Who are the key stakeholders/decision-makers to help create a gender-equitable workspace? (**PROBE:** factor management, brands, supervisors, workers, men's, and women's role etc.)
32. What role can each of the mentioned stakeholders play to advocate for gender equality and create a gender-equitable workspace?

Part E: Closing

Is there anything else you would like to talk about before we conclude this discussion?

