

SAFETY

# Exploring The Psychosocial Wellbeing of Sex Workers & Garments Workers Under Solidarity and Empowerment through Education, Motivation and Awareness (SEEMA) Project

PARTICIPATION

Report on Participatory Action  
Research Study

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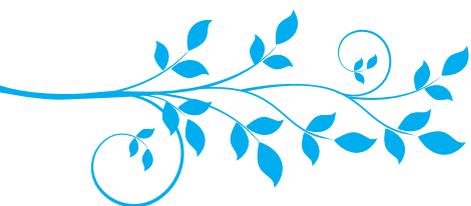
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# INTRODUCTION

Solidarity and Empowerment through Education, Motivation and Awareness (SEEMA) is a project of CARE Bangladesh that aims to contribute to urban poverty reduction in Bangladesh through reducing the social and economic exclusion of the most marginalized women in urban communities and fostering their empowerment. The specific objective of SEEMA is therefore to promote and protect the rights of female Garments Workers (GW) and Sex Workers (SW) through improving their human condition and social position. This project has been designed upon CARE's previous experience from working with garments workers (GW) and sex workers (SW) and as part of CARE's programming framework which is explicitly oriented according to the needs of marginalized women and girls in urban areas.

Women working in garments factories and sex workers face similar underlying causes of poverty such as lack of social capital, education and skills. Both of the Impact Groups (IG) are in a poor bargaining situation and do not have the necessary negotiation skills to demand better wages or access to support services. Structural constraints such as social marginalization and stigma associated with poverty or sex work reinforce their precarious position. Psychosocial support is one of the useful approaches used to help marginalized women improve their conditions. It helps them to acquire knowledge about rights, communication skills, ability to resist violence, awareness about mental well being, ability to work with high concentration and cope with different situations. Since 2012, SEEMA has been addressing the psychosocial issues of the IGs through various activities and tools.

<sup>1</sup>Steinisch, et.al. (2013)

<sup>2</sup>Hoque & Islam, 2003

<sup>3</sup>Brisson, Vézina, & Vinet, 1992

To delve further into the current psychosocial status of the IGs and review ongoing psychosocial awareness activities, a study was conducted based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) with the aim to generate recommendations on making the IGs psychosocially stable to achieve the overall objective of the SEEMA project.

Previous studies have already indicated the adverse psychological impacts on sex workers and garments workers as a result of their work stresses and challenges. In the case of garments workers, high work related demands, abusive language in the workplace, fear of mistakes and poor interpersonal relations were found to be an important contributor of stress and poor health . Mental health among manufacturing workers has also been found to be an important contributor to absenteeism in jobs , with depression and anxiety reported having a higher prevalence among garments workers compared to other workers.

In the case of sex workers, studies have indicated that street based sex workers have more psychological problem compared to other forms of sex workers . Drug addiction among sex workers has been regularly reported by the different researchers all over the world. High levels of interpersonal problems such as lack of social support and submissive gender power have also been reported by studies on drug-using sex workers .

Psychological health of the two Impact Groups is therefore of significant concern and relevance to their overall empowerment and quality of life. This

study provides important insight into the psychosocial conditions of the IGs, attempts to identify some of the root causes of the problems and explores the protective and coping mechanisms used by the IGs in dealing with the problems. The study is also helpful in assessing some of the improvements that have already been achieved through the SEEMA Project's activities with the IGs.

This report is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological constraints impeding the development of sex workers and garments workers and their access to rights and protection. Consequently, through the recommendations generated, it is hoped that programmers and policy makers will be able to effectively ensure their well being.



<sup>4</sup> Weitzer, 2009

<sup>5</sup> Baseman, Ross & Williams, 1999; Inciardi & Surratt, 2001

<sup>6</sup> Gu, et al, 2010





## STUDY OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to generate recommendations for the improvement of the psychosocial status of the Impact Groups (IG). It was thus designed to acquire in-depth knowledge and understanding about the IGs psychosocial status, review existing interventions in improving the psychosocial status of the IGs and, based on its findings, generate recommendations to improve the situation. In order to get a deeper insight into the psychosocial status of the IGs, the study explored the prevalent psychological problems facing them, understanding the correlation between their problems and their existing conditions, identifying the root causes of the problems and exploring the protective and coping mechanisms used by the IGs in dealing with the problems.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative approach was adopted by the study in light of its objectives. The qualitative component, intended to generate knowledge about the current psychosocial state of the IGs, included in-depth interviews (IDI), Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and observation as data collection tool. Additionally, a few semi-formal Key Informant Interviews (KII) with project personnel and desk review of the tools used in psychosocial awareness sessions were also carried out. The Quantitative Component included a questionnaire survey to gain confirmatory findings

regarding the psychosocial aspect of the IGs. The questionnaire survey aimed to acquire information on demographic features, psychosocial problems, coping mechanisms, resources, changes in life circumstances and impact of attachment with EKATA – SEEMA's group-based development approach.

Purposive sampling was used in conducting this study. The qualitative part of the study used data from 18 in-depth interviews where, 9 garments workers and 9 sex workers took part. Additionally 3 focus group discussions were carried out with SWs (1) and GWs (2). Semi formal key informant interviews were conducted with 4 program personnel from SW (2) and GW (2) component. The questionnaire survey was carried out on a sample of 102 members of the IGs of whom 50 were garments workers and 52 were sex workers.





# STUDY FINDINGS

## Sample Characteristics

-  The two IGs markedly differs in terms of literacy.
-  Being the bread earner: Majority of sex workers (67.3%) were found to be the sole bread earner of the family while in 90% of garments workers were found to be sharing the responsibility with family members.
-  94% of garments workers were found to live with families while a significant portion of sex workers (44.2%) were found to live alone.
-  There were no homeless GWs while 34.6% of the SWs were homeless. The homeless SWs used to live on the street or take shelter at the drop in centers during the day time.



## Psychological State of the IGs



Sleep disturbance and helplessness were reported by both SWs and GWs. Both group reported difficulties in accepting their professional identity. Both groups seemed to be stuck in a life where they do not have or cannot think of any alternative. Thoughts of escaping from life have been reported by SWs and GWs as well.



SWs were found constantly vigilant for signs of trouble. They are aware of the risks they face on the street (workplace), nonetheless, they need to go on to earn their livelihood. Fear of being mugged, tortured, gang raped, murdered, incarcerated, humiliated; concern about being noticed by neighbors, relative or family members; worry about future, are only few of their psychological crisis.



Garments workers were mostly occupied about their financial burdens. They also have limited freedom in the factory as well as at home. The seemingly have very limited choice over their work and expenditure. They can change their workplace or factory, however, all of the factories are almost the same. They had to serve the family, often sacrificing their own dreams or wellbeing. Many of them were saddened by their inability to continue their studies.



"When I see girls in school uniform on my way to factory, I feel pain, I could be like them, I could be going to school too."

**GW, Mirpur**



GWs were concerned about their physical safety, risk of accidents, maltreatment by the supervisors, and difficult nature of work management (strictness and monotony). Being powerless they often try to ignore and forget the possibility of accidents, however, they have the fear. Maltreatment by the supervisors in the form of scolding, name calling, threatening of dismissal was commonly reported by the GWs.



Gender discrimination in the workplace was reported by some of the GWs largely in terms of the different treatment for men and women practiced by supervisors and management team.



To find out diagnosable psychological problems and their levels among the impact group members, several instruments were used during questionnaire survey. Two of them assessed the most common psychological problems that are anxiety and depression while the third (SRQ-20 ) assessed psychological morbidity in general sense.



An assessment of anxiety and depression and psychological morbidity among the Impact Groups found all the symptoms more prevalent among sex workers compared to garments workers. One explanation for this can be the socio-demographic characteristics of the impact groups where SWs have more vulnerabilities compared to GWs in terms of being less educated, being the only bread earner in the family, living alone without family support and being homeless.

Feeling lonely was extremely common among the SWs (86.5%). Almost half of the SW respondents reported history of suicide attempts in the past while it was 18% in the GW group. Majority of GW participants reported having someone to extend shoulder in case of trouble.

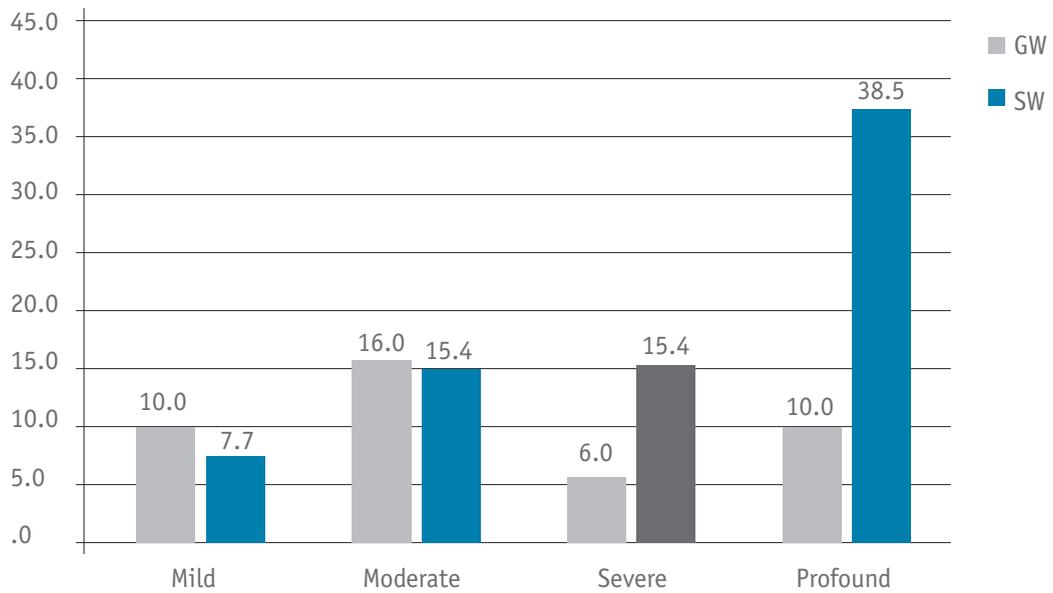


The study found serious concern regarding the possibility of diagnosable psychological problems among both groups. 88.5% of the SWs had possible psychological morbidity. A high portion (76.9%) of SWs had anxiety disorder and almost half of them had depression above cut off value. Although the percentage of GWs having psychological problems in general psychiatric morbidity, anxiety disorder and depression was comparatively lower than SWs, these were indeed very high except for depression.

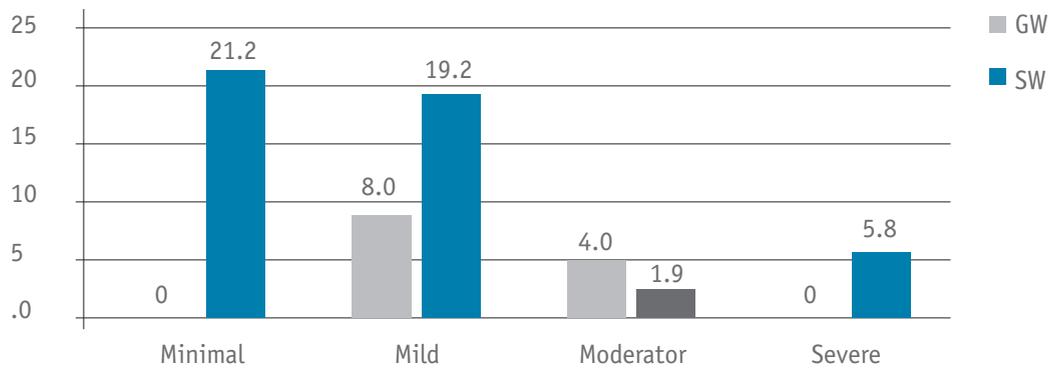
Boys are privileged, they can take break to go to the rooftops for smoking, they can go home once their tasks at hand are finished; where as we are not allowed to take break. Even if we finish our designated task, they [supervisors] don't allow us to leave, they just give us more work."

**GW, Mirpur**





**Figure 1. Distribution of GWs and SWs according to different severity level of anxiety.**



**Figure 2. Distribution of GWs and SWs according to different severity level of depression based on the percentage of depression cases**

## Relating IG specific psychosocial scenario with psychological problems

SWs are more prone to developing psychological problems compared to the GWs. This is understandable from the psychosocial and socio-demographic contextual data. The SWs commonly had lower education level, homelessness, loneliness, and insecurity at workplace all of which can act as contributors to mental health problems.

Comparative study on how the two groups differ from the general population found that GWs had significantly lower mean score on depression compared to general population sample (62.9 vs. 77.3). It is difficult to explain why the GWs has lower rate of depression compared to general population especially because of the high rates of depression reported among industry workers in studies conducted abroad (Charoenpaitoon, et al., 2012). One reason for lower depression among the GWs can be the EKATA center's activity. As mentioned earlier, the GWs were found to be more engaged in different activities of the EKATA centres compared to SWs. Hopelessness is a common reason for depression, and it was found that enrollment in the EKATA has significantly increase garments workers' hopefulness about future.



## Root causes of the psychological problems



**Improved workplace:** Both SW and GW reported improved workplace scenario in recent times compared to what they have endured, observed or heard about in the past four to six years back.



**Less harassment from law enforcers:** SWs in particular reported fewer incidences of harassment from law enforcing agencies compared to past. They attribute this to improved communication between their organization (Durjoy, EKATA) and the law enforcing agencies. They themselves often assert their right to maintain their earning without creating public nuisance. Almost all of them reported their unity and will power to be useful in giving them the bargaining power with the customer in deciding place and type of sexual activity which has been reflected in the following quotation.



**Vulnerability to local gangsters and robbers:** However, this unity does not protect them all the time, especially when it come to the local gangsters and robbers. SWs are vulnerable to attacks on their way back home alone from the street and often lose the night's earning to muggers.



"I do not go to their place, none of us do this now. When a customer comes to me and I insist on going to my place they go to other girls and when they also refuse, he returns to me and agrees."

**Street Based SW, Mirpur**





**Current Psychosocial Stressors among GWs and SWs:** The presence of psychosocial stressors were found prevalent in the life of most members of the IGs. *Difficulties in relationship* (e.g., with partner, family members) have been highly reported by both SWs and GWs as current source of stress.



**Societal perception of the garments workers:** GWs reported a recent change in the societal perception of the garments workers. Compared to past when GWs were perceived as bad women, the people now often accept them as hardworking and struggling women.

*Workplace harassment* was high among both GW and SW participants. They feel more confident about their rights in workplace but the dire need to maintain the job still force them to accept violation of their rights in workplace (see the quotation below).

However, they reported to have some of these situations taken cared by the EKATA staffs. When they fail to raise their own voice, in their workplace, they express and share those concerns with the EKATA staffs

who often visit the Garments factories and talk with the management to solve the issues.



Workload was also a big concern for the GW participants, while for SWs social humiliation and concern about future was major source of stress. The recent changes in minimum wage have been reported to go against the GWs benefit. Their target (number of task per shift) has been raised, they have to work longer hours most of which are not counted as overtime. On average they work for 64 hours per week with a range of minimum 42 hours to maximum 90 hours. Their working hours contain minimal amount of insufficient breaks. Research conducted all over the world reported damaging outcome of overwork on mental as well as physical health among the garments workers Such negative outcome included burnout, hypertension, neck pain, muscle pain etc. (see Nieuwenhuijsen, Bruinvels, & Frings-Dresen, 2010; Wang, Rempel, Harrison, Chan & Ritz, 2007). Similarly, a good number of participants in the present study also reported feeling tired, headache, burning sensation and many other somatic symptoms.

"After taking a month off, I was bound to go back to street to earn money and these muggers took all my earning on the very first night. I feel like my life is worthless. How will I buy milk for my child?"

**Street Based SW, Jatrabari**

"Who wants to risk her job by protesting for others?"

**GW**



**Table 7. Current psycho-social stressors among GWs and SWs.**

		GW		SW	
		N	%	N	%
Financial problem	Self Report	8	16.0	21	40.4
	Probed Report	17	34.0	13	25.0
	No	25	50.0	18	34.6
Physical problem	Self Report	4	8.0	8	15.4
	Probed Report	16	32.0	12	23.1
	No	30	60.0	32	61.5
Extreme workload	Self Report	13	26.0	1	1.9
	Probed Report	19	38.0	18	34.6
	No	18	36.0	33	63.5
Social discrimination or humiliation	Self Report	0	0.0	16	30.8
	Probed Report	9	18.0	23	44.2
	No	41	82.0	13	25.0
Workplace harassment (Supervisor)	Self Report	11	22.0	-	-
	Probed Report	22	44.0	-	-
	No	17	34.0	-	-
Workplace harassment (Factory owner )	Self Report	2	4.0	-	-
	Probed Report	7	14.0	-	-
	No	41	82.0	-	-
Harassment by local gangsters	Self Report	5	10.0	11	21.2
	Probed Report	9	18.0	23	44.2
	No	36	72.0	18	34.6
Workplace harassment (Customers)	Self Report	-	-	16	30.8
	Probed Report	-	-	22	42.3
	No	-	-	14	26.9
Workplace harassment (Law enforcing agencies)	Self Report	-	-	15	28.8
	Probed Report	-	-	20	38.5
	No	-	-	17	32.7
Current crisis in the family	Self Report	10	20.0	12	23.1
	Probed Report	10	20.0	6	11.5
	No	30	60.0	34	65.4

\* Self report= Participant reported this of her own;

\*\*Probed response= Participant reported this when the interviewer asked if they have this

## Protective Factors And Coping Mechanisms



Commonly reported coping mechanisms for both SWs and GWs included sharing with peers in EKATA centers, seeking solitude, avoidance of memories and situations, crying, problem solving, engaging in pleasurable activities (e.g., listening to music), and concentrating on the hope for future. Support from the peers at time of difficulties was acknowledged. All the GWs and a few of the SWs had been living in touch with family and reported support from husband and other family members. Going out, wearing makeup, watching TV, listening to music etc. were reported as sources of happiness.



Consorting to addictive substances such as alcohol, cannabis and Ya-ba (a mixed methamphetamine) was a unique coping strategy for SWs. None of the GWs reported using such substances to as a way of coping.



Brainstorming alone and praying to God were the most commonly used coping mechanism among both GWs and SWs (Table 8). Use of drugs was almost entirely found among the SW sample, which is in line with the findings from previous studies (Baseman, Ross & Williams, 1999; Inciardi & Surratt, 2001).



"I have bought an mp3 player, I also have music in my mobile phone, when I feel bad I just plug in the earphone."

*SW, Mirpur*



		GW		SW	
		N	%	N	%
Consult others	Self Report*	3	6.0	3	5.8
	Probed Report**	36	72.0	27	51.9
	No	11	22.0	22	42.3
Brainstorm alone	Self Report	4	8.0	2	3.8
	Probed Report	45	90.0	47	90.4
	No	1	2.0	3	5.8
Use past experience	Self Report	1	2.0	1	1.9
	Probed Report	45	90.0	41	78.8
	No	4	8.0	10	19.2
Pray to God	Self Report	1	2.0	4	7.7
	Probed Report	46	92.0	46	88.5
	No	3	6.0	2	3.8
Share with others	Self Report	8	16.0	10	19.2
	Probed Report	33	66.0	34	65.4
	No	9	18.0	8	15.4
Cry alone	Self Report	7	14.0	11	21.2
	Probed Report	29	58.0	33	63.5
	No	14	28.0	8	15.4
Seek solitude	Self Report	8	16.0	17	32.7
	Probed Report	35	70.0	29	55.8
	No	7	14.0	6	11.5

		GW		SW	
		N	%	N	%
Try to forget	Self Report	1	2.0	1	1.9
	Probed Report	43	86.0	44	84.6
	No	6	12.0	7	13.5
Accept fate	Self Report	1	2.0	0	0.0
	Probed Report	31	62.0	37	71.2
	No	18	36.0	15	28.8
Concentrate into pleasurable activities	Self Report	5	10.0	7	13.5
	Probed Report	37	74.0	31	59.6
	No	8	16.0	14	26.9
Use drugs	Self Report	0	0.0	4	7.7
	Probed Report	1	2.0	10	19.2
	No	49	98.0	38	73.1
Self harm (slashing arm, body etc.)	Self Report	0	0.0	2	3.8
	Probed Report	3	6.0	6	11.5
	No	47	94.0	44	84.6

\* Self report = Participant reported this of her own;

\*\*Probed response= Participant reported this when the interviewer asked if they have this



The most common protective factors for both GWs and SWs were relation with others, courage and self confidence, hope for future, and work and income (Table 9).



While unity among peers was prominent protective factors among the GWs, more than 53% SW rejected this. Although the SWs shared unity amongst each other, many of them did not consider this to be a protective factor. The reason may be rooted in their mistrust towards each other.



**Table 9. Presence of protective factors among GWs and SWs.**

		GW		SW	
		N	%	N	%
Relation with others	Self Report*	2	4.1	5	10.2
	Probed Report**	42	85.7	27	55.1
	No	5	10.2	17	34.7
Support from others	Self Report	4	8.2	1	2.0
	Probed Report	37	75.5	26	53.1
	No	8	16.3	22	44.9
Engagement in	Self Report	1	2.0	0	0.0
	Probed Report	38	77.6	28	57.1
	No	10	20.4	21	42.9
Hope for better future	Self Report	2	4.1	3	6.1
	Probed Report	37	75.5	33	67.3
	No	10	20.4	13	26.5
Savings	Self Report	1	2.0	1	2.0
	Probed Report	24	49.0	25	51.0
	No	24	49.0	23	46.9
Work and income	Self Report	3	6.1	2	4.1
	Probed Report	40	81.6	37	75.5
	No	6	12.2	10	20.4
Unity among peers	Self Report	1	2.1	1	2.0
	Probed Report	30	62.5	22	44.9
	No	17	35.4	26	53.1
Courage and self confidence	Self Report	5	10.2	2	4.1
	Probed Report	35	71.4	38	77.6
	No	9	18.4	9	18.4

\* Self report = Participant reported this of her own;

\*\*Probed response = Participant reported this when the interviewer asked if they have this





# IMPACT OF EKATA CENTERS ON IGS LIFE AND WELLBEING

While the IG's attention in the GW centers were on skill learning, at the SW centers it was on the scope of sharing, discussion or receiving direct support. The difference between two groups is reflected in their interaction with each other, participation in the activities, and engagement with the centre session facilitators. Some outcomes of participating in EKATA activities as reported by the IGs are as follows:

-  Better control of emotional state has been reported by the SWs as well as the GWs.
-  Awareness about rights and legal aspects has been reported most commonly by the GWs as impact of EKATA centers in their lives.
-  Acquiring knowledge and skills on functional literacy, conflict resolution, anger management and communication was also reported by the GWs.



With myriad of activities conducted and supports provided to the IGs through the EKATA centers, it is difficult pinpoint the impact of a specific activity on them. An overall assessment on different indicators was carried out which found that GWs have significantly improved on all the 18 indicators while the SWs received significant improvement on 10 of the indicators. In terms of the impact of psychosocial awareness session the following results can be connected with the sessions: conflict resolution skill had an average increase of 14.8% for GWs and 8.27% for SWs. In capacity to control anger, the GWs improved 18.90 % while the SWs improved 10.82%. Communication skills had average impact of 19.64% among GWs but non-significant 5.83% for SWs. GWs developed an average 24.90 % in their skills to manage stress, while for SWs it was 9.79%.

"Now I can control my anger, if I could do it two years back, I would have my husband and daughter with me"

*SW, Mirpur*

"Still I like to attend class at EKATA because here the books contain many thing related to my work at garments which were not in the standard books"

*GW, Mirpur*



**Table 10. Probable Impact of EKATA based on current and pre-EKATA (retrospective) measures of different psychosocial variables.**

		Overall			
		M	SD	t	df
1	Mental strength	7.78	32.23	2.40*	98
2	Capacity to control anger	14.90	29.63	5.00**	98
3	Conflict resolution skill	11.53	25.78	4.43**	97
4	Communication skill	12.88	25.96	4.91**	97
5	Stress management skill	17.58	24.59	7.04**	96
6	Awareness about rights	23.21	23.45	9.80**	97
7	Courage to speak out about rights	17.46	27.53	6.31**	98
8	Self confidence	12.41	25.74	4.80**	98
9	Hopeful about future	15.51	30.72	5.02**	98
10	Unity among peers	12.32	20.98	5.78**	96
11	Good terms with peers	10.26	19.53	5.12**	94
12	Faith on peers regarding their support in need	13.20	23.33	5.54**	95
13	Satisfaction with quality of life	7.66	28.03	2.71**	97
14	Knowledge improve quality of life	28.85	25.13	11.30**	96
15	Acceptance of occupational identity	14.61	28.49	5.03**	95
16	Good terms with family members	1.09	25.22	0.43	96
17	Overall satisfaction about life	8.23	29.89	2.74**	98
18	Satisfaction with religious activity	5.42	25.15	2.11*	95

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ ; Both indicates significant change

	GW				SW			
	M	SD	t	df	M	SD	t	df
	17.14	26.73	4.49**	48	1.40	34.70	0.29	49
	18.90	29.73	4.49**	49	10.82	29.27	2.59*	48
	14.80	23.25	4.45**	48	8.27	27.94	2.07*	48
	19.64	22.55	6.16**	49	5.83	27.59	1.47	47
	24.90	21.91	8.04**	49	9.79	25.11	2.67**	46
	26.10	21.63	8.53**	49	20.21	25.09	5.58**	47
	21.48	24.16	6.29**	49	13.37	30.30	3.09**	48
	16.18	21.12	5.42**	49	8.57	29.46	2.04*	48
	23.80	24.40	6.90**	49	7.04	34.26	1.44	48
	17.50	22.07	5.49**	47	7.24	18.71	2.71**	48
	13.96	16.21	5.97**	47	6.49	21.97	2.03*	46
	19.36	20.10	6.60**	46	7.29	24.84	2.05*	48
	17.00	20.73	5.80**	49	2.06	31.37	0.46	47
	27.24	21.99	8.67**	48	30.48	28.13	7.51**	47
	23.72	25.40	6.40**	46	5.88	28.80	1.43	48
	4.48	13.57	2.33*	49	7.02	32.58	1.48	46
	13.90	24.73	3.97**	49	2.45	33.65	0.51	48
	10.71	19.63	3.82**	48	0.11	29.03	0.03	46





## DISCUSSIONS WITH EKATA PROJECT PERSONNEL

Several semi-formal key informant interviews were conducted with project personnel of EKATA which revealed the following:

### Sample Characteristics

Project personnel of GW component suggested extreme workload, financial crisis in the family, divorce and separation, lack of communication skill as the underlying reason for psychological problem among GWs. Their eagerness towards learning and getting a platform for friendly sharing was reported to be the most important reason for attending the EKATA centers.

EKATA has been said to impact their life by increasing their awareness of rights, helping them open up their feeling with group members and thus ensuring reception of support from other members.

## Crisis and Change among Garments Workers

Project personnel for SW component reported enhanced cohesion among the member SWs due to their participation in EKATA centers. SWs were said to be engaged in quarrel and fight, non-responding and poor listeners when the project started, which has become rare in recent times due to their participation in EKATA activities. Multilevel victimization was suggested to occur in the life of SWs as common phenomenon. Increased house rent by the landlord, torture by the customers, harassment by gangsters and law enforcing agencies, hostile perception and comments from the general public were suggested as only a small portion of such victimization. Psychological problems such as agitation were said to be emerging from these life stressors.

Apart from enhancing cohesion among members, EKATA has also said to increase their awareness and attitude towards savings. The project personnel reported their engagement is advocacy activities in helping establishment and preservation of rights of the SWs. The SWs were said to acquire the ability to bargain better with the customers and to protest assertively with the police. They were said to become more assertive in verbalizing their needs compared to pre EKATA period.



## Review of the Psychosocial Awareness Tools

Review of the five psychosocial awareness tools was conceptually conducted and backed by observation and interviews with the IGs. Additionally, two psychosocial awareness sessions and one group counseling sessions were also observed to facilitate understanding. It was noted that the tools have been developed with grounding in the philosophy of action research. They have also been designed in a bottom-up manner which is more sensitive and

fitting to the user's needs. It also allows integration of locally developed and practiced concepts into the planning of intervention which makes it more responsive to the target group. The participatory approach of finding solutions to problems facing the IGs used by the tool was also appreciated and the following recommendations have been made in consideration of the challenges associated with this approach:



This approach often requires elaborate preparation and training. The facilitator needs to be well trained in identifying healthy and unhealthy solutions practiced by the participants before s/he can endorse or appreciate those in the session.



Time management is a challenging aspect of participatory facilitation. To run these sessions, the facilitators may require in depth training and regular troubleshooting support.



A comprehensive guideline needs to be developed for the facilitators so that such sessions can be conducted in an accurate and uniform manner. It would be particularly helpful for them considering the various academic and socio-economic background from which they have emerged. The guideline should add focus on "how to do" in addition to the already contained "what to do" of the specific psychosocial

awareness session. Such a guideline might be also be helpful for the facilitator to carry out self guided troubleshooting of their own facilitation.



Principles of "adult learning" needs to be incorporated in the facilitation of the psychosocial awareness session. This principle suggests a learner centered approach where the learner finds it is self directed, interest or goal oriented, linked with experience and is respectful towards them. Also part of adult learning is the understanding of rationale (purpose & logic) of the awareness session. The brief rationale that is given is inadequate. The rationale should be given in a way fitting to the participant group. A portion of the session time should be dedicated to discuss applicability of the session in their real life. The difficulties faced by the participants should also be addressed before expecting them to practice the learning in real life.

## Specific observation on each of the Psychosocial Awareness Tools



**Anger control:** This is an important and widely used tool. Both GWs and SWs reported using the skills learned through anger control session in their daily life. The idea of using metaphor (flower pot) seems helpful. However, the way it should be incorporated in the session needs to be clarified further. A detailed guideline can be of great help in this regard. Careful planning is required to make sure that sufficient time is allocated for discussing the healthy ways of controlling anger.



**Relaxation:** Relaxation has a broad beneficial effect on many psycho-social difficulties and due to this property, it is often called behavioral aspirin. Deep breathing exercise which is very useful has been incorporated in the session. However, in addition to breathing relaxation, progressive muscular relaxation can be included in this tool. Both SWs and GWs have reported somatic problems (e.g., pain, sleep disturbance) for which muscular relaxation works very well. The technique suggested by Jacobson (1929) has been revised many times and has emerged into several forms involving 10 to 20 steps. Choosing any one of such forms would be beneficial. Muscular relaxation usually takes around 30 to 40 minutes to demonstrate and practice.

In spite of the wide range of possible benefit, relaxation did not seem to be widely practiced by the IGs in their practical life. One of the participants stated during interview,

"We don't have the time to practice this"

GW, Tejgaon

She attributed the difficulties to lack of time, stress and tiredness as the reason behind not practicing relations. However, the fact is, relaxation exercise is targeted to deal with stress and tiredness and only requires a small amount of time.

It seems essential for the facilitator to place extra effort in explaining the rationale for relaxation and in exploring the difficulties faced by the IGs in practicing relaxation. Brief discussion on how to address those difficulties can be useful for the IGs.





**Communication tool:** A major portion of the activities in this tool are focused on the understanding of the concept of communication. These activities include small group drawing activity; reflection to the large group; lecture, drawing and participatory discussion on meaning, cycle and types of communication. Although such awareness are important prerequisites that prepares a person to develop effective communication skills, such preoperational part should not overshadow the actual purpose of active skills building in communicating.

During the discussion with project personnel, it was revealed that there were only two parts that directly relates to active skill buildup. The first one was the brief lecture on the verbal and non-verbal components of effective communication and second was the role-play on four types of communication. However, the way the role-play was said to be carried out needs to be reconsidered. It would be better if the participants can decide and play the roles of their own based on their understanding of type of communication rather than just following instruction of the facilitator on what to say in each role under the bus-stand situation.



**Conflict resolution:** This awareness tool seemed to be well designed. It was focused and concise. It contained active problem solving strategy involving understating of problem (i.e., conflict), the causes and alternative solutions. It would be great for the facilitators if the ladder presented in the tool is typed instead of the difficult to read scanned version.



**Stress management:** This tool helped participants focus on their existing adaptive coping in resolving stressful situation which is a very basic yet powerful strategy. It is powerful because the participants can readily adopt the technique as it comes from their peers who have been practicing these techniques. However, detailed discussion on the experience of success and difficulties of practicing specific coping or solution should be carried out in the session. Such discussion may help the participants to be prepared in dealing with failure of a specific technique and in trying an alternative technique if needed.



**Group counseling:** In light of the present study findings where 46% garments workers and 88.5% sex workers has been found having psychological problems, group counseling is essential for the IGs. Although it known that individual one to one counseling have higher efficacy in dealing with psychological problem, group counseling is a viable option considering the large number of women in need of support. It is good that some individuals also receive individual counseling based on the severity of problem.

It would be best if weekly group counseling session can be organized for the participants in need. Group counseling can be used to linkup the learning from psychosocial awareness session into regular practice into the IGs life circumstances. An overall general positive feeling towards group counseling has been observed among both groups indicating its acceptance in the community. Psychological counseling work best when the participants feel the need.





## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the psychological problems faced by two most vulnerable groups of women, the garments workers and sex workers. Adopting a mixed method approach, it explored the psychosocial factors and their contributors among the life of GWs and SWs. It also assessed the impact of psychosocial activities of SEEMA project on their lives. With the objective to generate recommendation for improving psychosocial state of these women, the study embarked qualitative exploration followed by a quantitative questionnaire survey.

The in-depth interview, focus group discussions, observations, and key informant interviews conducted as part of qualitative exploration shed lights on several psycho-social aspect of these women's life. Based on these findings, a questionnaire was devised and used along with existing tools to measure psycho-social aspects. A high rate of psycho-physiological symptoms among both GWs and SWs were found by the study. Assessment of diagnosable psychological problems also revealed a high rate of possible psychological morbidity among GWs (46%) and SWs (88.5%). Rate of anxiety was also very high. However, depression among GWs (12%) was very little compared to SWs (48%). Comparison with general

population revealed significantly higher rate of anxiety among GWs and SWs. Depression was also significantly higher among the SWs, but the GWs scored significantly lower on the depression scale. Workplace harassment by the supervisors was the most commonly reported current life stressor among the garments workers. Social humiliation was the most commonly reported psychosocial stressor for the sex workers. Praying to God was the most commonly reported coping mechanism for both GWs and SWs. Apart from that, 27% of the sex workers reported using drugs as a coping mechanism while only 2% GWs reported so. Relation with others was the most common protective factors for GWs while courage and self confidence was the most commonly reported resource among the SWs.

The impact of EKATA center activity was assessed comparing current vs. 2 years retrospective rating (i.e., rating of how they were 2 years back). Knowledge regarding ways to improve quality of life was the most highly impacted area for the IGs combined as well as separately for GWs and SWs. GWs improved significantly in all the 18 indicators while for the SWs significant improvement was seen only on 10 indicators (See Table 10).



## Recommended actions



The five areas (in five tools) of awareness session are a good choice for helping the IGs taking better mental health care for themselves. These can be helpful for most of the psycho-social stressors they have been suffering from (see Table 7). One additional tool - "alternative thinking" - can be considered for inclusion. This is a simple tool that many of the interview participants seem to be already using with positive outcome.



Through interviews with the IGs it was clear that a number of them know and use the tools. However, a number of participants seemed to understand the tools but did not use them. It is well known that learning in the training session and applying the learning in the real life settings are two different things. Such translation often requires concentrated effort and use of higher order cognitive functioning. Although it was observed that the facilitation of the tools incorporates real life examples and issues, some participants may still need extensive support. Some link-up sessions can be organized for these members to help them associate the session-learning with their own life circumstances more effectively. Such linkup sessions can include problem solving of the barriers associated with utilization of the learning.



Choice of areas (i.e. the five tools) for awareness session is appreciable. The presentation of content can be revised. The facilitators of the sessions are provided with a brief sketch of the content of each tool. To help uniformity of awareness session facilitation, revision of the tool contents can be considered. Additionally, a manual can be prepared for the facilitators on details about conducting specific psychosocial awareness session using the tools.



Occasional group troubleshooting sessions need to be organized for the facilitators of psychosocial awareness session.



During the interviews many participants (especially in the SW component) had difficulties in remembering the tool contents. It may be due to their memory difficulties or due to their difficulties in identifying the specific content from the plethora of other contents (e.g., literacy, rights awareness, etc.) delivered to them. The most troubling possibility could be that the psychosocial sessions are not carried out regularly or are carried out in an inappropriate way (not going through full details or doing it in a non-participatory method) that it failed to register an impact in their mind. One of the key informant also reported instances where psychosocial awareness sessions were not conducted regularly. Further exploration of this can be made to check if it is the case and measures should be taken accordingly.





In general the GWs seemed more interested in visiting the EKATA centers compared to the SWs. The GWs seemed to visit the centre through their own interest to attend the sessions and acquiring the learning. In every visit almost all the GWs were found engaged with their notebooks and textbooks. On the contrary SWs seemed to attend the sessions because someone (FF, PF) asked them to do so. However, during the interview the SWs clearly mention that they like to attend the centers. They view the centre more as a place to gather and engage in chitchat rather than a learning point. Although having EKATA as a place to gather and share feelings is also very important for the wellbeing and group development of the IGs, opportunities to learn skills should also be focused on. To receive most benefit from EKATA centre, the SWs need to view it as an opportunity not as an obligation. A detailed exploration of the possible reason and solution can be carried out to address the issue. Such exploration may include problem specific FGDs with the SWs and panel discussion and expert opinion of the field facilitators and other program personnel.



Content and manner of conducting group counseling was far from ideal and need to be revised. The counselors' knowledge and confidence seemed alright, spending some time on planning and reorganizing group counseling session can bring much better outcome. Counselor's workload management plan should be considered in this respect.



It is almost impossible to provide mental health support to all the members of EKATA by one psychologist/counselor, especially considering the huge portion of the IG members needing mental health support (see table 4). However, the workload may not be used as a shield to justify deterioration in quality of group counseling. Recruitment of more counseling psychologist or clinical psychologists is necessary.



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