



BetterWork

Worker Well-being in Jordan's Garment Sector

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International
Labour
Organization





Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	4
Covid-19 and Mental Health.....	6
Data.....	7
Results.....	10
Main Results with WEMWBS.....	10
Controls.....	10
Working Conditions.....	11
Living Conditions.....	13
Personal Factors.....	14
Gender Dynamics in the Workplace.....	16
Resources Used.....	17
Other Measures of Well-being.....	17
Life Satisfaction.....	18
Job Stress.....	19
Feeling unappreciated at work.....	20
Would recommend factory to improve life.....	20
In Results from other surveys	21
Conclusion.....	22



Executive Summary

Mental well-being is central to the lives of all people and is an important determinant of health that needs to be supported across all stages of life. Increasingly, workplaces have come to the forefront of the well-being literature, as most of the world's population spend one-third of their adult life at work. In addition, workplaces are key to well-being and can be a positive source of mental well-being. They provide a source of income, can contribute to a sense of identity, and can offer a place to participate in the community. Supporting mental well-being in the workplace can have direct positive effects not only for workers themselves, but also for employers by increasing productivity and improving the reputation of their work place.

Stakeholders in Jordan's garment sector have acknowledged that worker well-being is a key issue to address, including in the most recent sector-wide collective bargaining agreement. While employers have a mandate to support worker well-being, and the union aspires to do so as well, these actions need further support as well as grounding in data and concrete findings. This report builds on previous research investigating worker well-being in the Jordanian garment industry by adding specific voices and experiences through data gathered in large-scale surveys of workers and managers over the last two years.

Main findings include:

- ◆ There are significant issues with well-being among workers in the sector and the severity varies by gender and nationality;
- ◆ Several working conditions are correlated with mental well-being, including safety in the workplace, verbal abuse and concerns about forced overtime;
- ◆ Financial concerns are linked with well-being – workers who are the main breadwinner for their family have worse well-being, as do workers who have debts or loans;
- ◆ Sexual harassment is correlated with lower well-being, whether the worker has personally experienced the harassment or whether it has happened to a friend or colleague;
- ◆ Trust between workers and their supervisors and between workers and management more broadly is closely linked with worker well-being;
- ◆ Workers most frequently turn to their family and friends for mental and emotional support and the strength of their connections can also have positive feedback on mental well-being.

The main findings point at many ways in which key stakeholders can support the well-being of workers. Increasing compliance with labour laws and supporting decent working conditions support the well-being of workers. Employers can also help identify mental health issues, provide preliminary support, and refer workers to external help. The main findings also point to solutions as well: we can improve the mental well-being of workers by improving working conditions and increasing trust between workers and managers. It is also important to support the resilience of workers at the personal level and to provide community and mental health support directly.



Introduction

The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”¹ Our understanding of mental well-being and mental health is evolving, but experts agree that mental health and mental well-being go beyond an absence of mental health problems. Good mental health and well-being are important to leading healthy and full lives, and it is crucial to support mental well-being to ensure that all people are able to navigate daily challenges and larger upheavals.

Well-being plays an important role in the workplace, and, conversely, the workplace plays an important role in well-being. People with higher levels of well-being can contribute positively to the workplace, and better well-being is linked with higher productivity.² On the other hand, workplaces can be an important source of well-being and can give people a sense of purpose, motivation, and community. However, if workplaces are overly stressful or lack safety measures, they can also lead to worse well-being.

There is significant stigma around mental health and mental well-being in Jordan, and the mental health support system in the country is relatively weak and inaccessible to many. There is a great need to support mental health in Jordan, particularly among the large number of refugees currently living in Jordan.³ Many international organizations focus on the mental health needs of refugees living in Jordan, particularly Syrians. A recent survey from NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions about mental health during the Covid-19 lockdown in April found significant mental well-being issues among the 2,000 Jordanians surveyed.⁴ While 42 per cent of respondents said that they had not felt happy at all in the last two weeks and 37 per cent felt that they needed professional mental support, only 10 per cent of respondents actually sought help.

For workers in the garment sector in Jordan, these issues are compounded. In particular, roughly three quarters of garment sector workers are international migrants, and the mental health system in Jordan is almost entirely inaccessible to these workers due to financial, cultural, and language barriers. For all

1 “Mental health: strengthening our response”, 30 March 2018. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

2 Isham, Amy & Mair, Simon & Jackson, Tim. (2019). Well-being and productivity: a review of the literature. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338899227_Well-being_and_productivity_a_review_of_the_literature

3 For a recent report on mental health needs and services for Syrians and Jordanians, see International Medical Corps, Utilization of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services Among Syrian Refugees and Jordanians. (May 2020). <https://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/utilization-mental-health-and-psycho-social-support-services-among-syrian-refugees-and>

4 “Covid-19 crisis affects Jordanians’ mental health,” Published 2020-08-11, Roya News. <https://en.royanews.tv/news/21796/2020-08-11>. It should be noted that this study was not a random sample but that they did adjust for age, gender, education and geographical area. This survey only covers Jordanians whereas the garment sector is 75 per cent migrant workers.



workers, work in garment factories can be stressful and repetitive and a lack of decent working conditions can lead to the development of mental health problems or exacerbate existing ones.

Mental health has been acknowledged by stakeholders in the garment sector as a key issue to address in the coming years. Mental well-being initially came to the forefront of discussions in a tragic way – starting in 2017, stakeholders in the sector increasingly became aware of cases of worker suicides. In reflections and discussions after these difficult events, the broader issue of worker well-being came to the fore. A specific clause on worker well-being was included in the most recent Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), which stakeholders signed in 2019. This CBA focuses on the physical and mental health of all workers, and includes specific requirements for employers. Employers play a key role in directly and indirectly supporting the mental health needs of their workers. Directly, they can provide initial care that positively address mental health, and they can refer workers to outside specialists as needed. Indirectly, employers create the environment in which workers spend significant amounts of their time. Workplaces can promote well-being: they can give people purpose, make them feel valued and needed, give people opportunities to learn new skills and provide a sense of community. Crucially in the case of the garment sector in Jordan, employers provide living accommodations for 75 per cent of their employees. For these migrant workers, there is no separating “inside” and “outside” of the workplace.

In order to better understand mental well-being in the Jordanian garment sector and the mental health system in Jordan, Better Work Jordan collaborated with researchers in 2019 to examine the needs of workers and identify the gaps in the current support systems. The resulting report identified several gaps in the existing mental health infrastructure, both at the factory level and more broadly in Jordan. The research focused particularly on the mental health needs of migrant workers and identified specific areas where these needs were not being met. In addition, the report took an intersectional approach and looked at the issue through a gender lens in addition to looking at migrant workers.

The researchers theorized that worker mental well-being could be explained by four intersecting factors: working conditions, living conditions, personal factors, and gender dynamics. However, due to limitations in the research design and execution, the researchers were unable to interview or survey workers themselves, so the specific policy proposals and main issue areas could not be validated with the core group of beneficiaries. Better Work commissioned industry-wide surveys to extend this research, adding the voices from workers to the previous findings.

5 Y Kristine Kim, Jingyi Song, et al. Discussion Paper 33: Supporting Mental Well-being of Migrant Garment Workers in Jordan. November 2019. <https://betterwork.org/portfolio/discussion-paper-33-supporting-mental-well-being-of-migrant-garment-workers-in-jordan/>



Covid-19 and Mental Health

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic has worsened mental well-being globally. The uncertainty, fear, instability, and potential loss of livelihood from the pandemic has exacerbated underlying problems. The pandemic has also made it increasingly important to strengthen resilience among people and invest in institutional capacity for health care systems to address mental health needs. Because the pandemic has such a direct impact on mental well-being for so many people, there is also an opportunity at this moment to lower the stigma associated with well-being and mental health problems.

Broadly speaking, Jordan went through three general stages in the pandemic: 1) strict lockdown and limited economic activity - with a limited number of Covid-19 cases, 2) return to semi-normalcy, and 3) community spread and increased infections. In March, the Government of Jordan instituted severe lockdowns and essentially ground the economy to a halt. Government policies changed quickly, and this period was highly uncertain. Factories in the garment sector shut down, and migrant workers had to stay in their dormitories with little to do for extended periods. These policies led to the virtual eradication of Covid-19 in Jordan, and the country entered a second phase of semi-normalcy from roughly June to September. However, starting in September, cases of Covid-19 surged and the government reinstated some lockdown measures with a focused approach. These cases hit garment factories throughout Jordan with now over 1,000 cases reported in 19 factories across the country.

In the last six months, garment workers have faced issues of job insecurity, reduction in hours, shutdowns of factories, and the spread of Covid-19 in dorms and workplaces. All of these can have negative impacts on mental health. In the month of October, there were two reported cases of suicide among garment workers. While it is impossible to draw direct links between Covid-19 or the economic situation and these two tragedies, two instances in one month is nonetheless troubling and places additional urgency to the issue of mental well-being.



Data

The primary source of data comes through three rounds of worker and manager surveys conducted in garment factories in June 2019, December 2019, and July 2020. A large, representative sample of workers was chosen at random for each of the three data collections. Over 1,500 workers were surveyed in each round across almost all factories participating in the Better Work Jordan programme. The sample was stratified to reflect the gender and nationality composition of each factory. All migrant workers filled out the survey outside of the factory on their day off in locations such as the Workers' Centre, union offices, and dormitories. Jordanian workers were surveyed on-site during the workweek. The survey was self-administered through personal cell phones or tablets, with translations into Arabic, Bengali, Hindi, Sinhalese and Nepalese. Workers could listen to a pre-recorded transcript of the survey text for assistance, as needed. Policy briefs with the survey results from each round are available on the Better Work website.⁶

Over 5,000 workers were surveyed over the course of data collection. **Table 1** shows key characteristics of workers in the sample by nationality. The gender and nationality breakdown in the survey closely match the proportion of workers in the garment sector as a whole. Roughly three quarters of workers in the garment industry are women, while 70 per cent of workers are migrants, primarily from Bangladesh. There is variation between the typical profiles of workers from different countries.

Table 1. Worker Characteristics

	TOTAL	JORDAN	BANGLADESH	INDIA	SRI LANKA	NEPAL
N	5,152 ⁷	1,566	2,157	630	476	288
% women	73%	83%	84%	4%	75%	75%
Average age	28	29	26	29	30	26
Highest level of education elementary (5 years) %	21%	9%	35%	17%	5%	22%
Currently married %	48%	33%	56%	62%	49%	39%
Time in factory less than a year %	32%	34%	30%	37%	24%	31%
Work in exporting factory %	75%	50%	88%	74%	89%	96%
Sewing operators %	50%	27%	69%	53%	42%	35%

⁶ A policy brief accompanies each round of data collected. All policy briefs include key information about worker opinions about working conditions, grievance mechanisms, stakeholder engagement, and one additional topic. The first policy brief summarizes the data gathered in June 2019 and focuses on stress in the workplace, see "Better Work Jordan: Worker Voice Survey Results", November 2019. The second policy brief summarizes the data gathered in December 2019 and focuses on third-party audits, see "Better Work Jordan: Worker and Manager Survey Results", June 2020. The third policy brief summarizes the data gathered in July 2020 and focuses on mental well-being, see "Better Work Jordan: Worker and Manager Survey Results", November 2020.

⁷ The total includes workers from Syria (25) and those who selected "Other" when presented with the choices for nationality (10).



The workers' survey includes several questions that address mental well-being. The direct questions addressing mental well-being were added in the latest data collection in July with 1,756 workers. The analysis also pulls from existing questions, and some of the analysis will stretch across previous survey collection to increase the sample size. We chose not to ask about "mental health" or "mental well-being" directly as these are stigmatized topics that different people and cultures understand and acknowledge in different ways. In addition, there is often a taboo around talking about mental health, so direct questions may not produce accurate results.

Instead, we used a validated set of questions that touch on the topic of mental health indirectly. These come from the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), a set of questions developed by researchers in the UK to capture both hedonic well-being (positive feelings) and eudaimonic well-being (having a sense of purpose in life). The WEMWBS is a set of seven questions that ask about various positive feelings in the last two weeks. Workers are asked to say how often they have experienced the positive feeling in the last week, going from "none of the time" (score of 1) to "all of the time" (score of 5). **Table 2** shows the average scores for the seven individual questions.. Workers reported struggling the most with optimism about the future and feeling close to other people.

Table 2. Seven mental well-being questions

QUESTION	SCORE
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	2.9
I've been feeling useful	3.2
I've been feeling relaxed	3.1
I've been dealing with problems well	3.2
I've been thinking clearly	3.3
I've been feeling close to other people	3.0
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	3.3

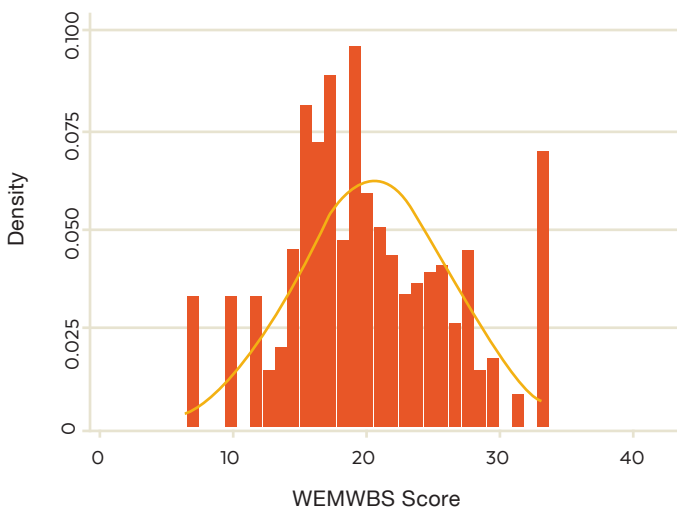
These scores can then be summed and transformed to create a well-being score that combines all seven questions, with a minimum of seven representing the lowest well-being, and a maximum of 35 representing the highest well-being. The average well-being score is 20.9, meaning that the average worker experienced the seven positive feelings "some of the time" in the last two weeks. Workers from Bangladesh, Jordan and India (85% of the sample) answered the WEMWBS questions, but workers from Sri Lanka and Nepal did not.⁸

⁸ The WEMWBS is available in many languages, including Arabic, Bangla and Hindi. These translations are validated and verified through an intensive process, and WEMWBS restricts the use of the survey only to validated translations. For this reason, the seven WEMWBS questions were not translated into Sinhalese and Nepalese and workers from Sri Lanka and Nepal (15 per cent of the sample) did not respond to these questions.



The distribution of final scores on the WEMWBS is roughly normal (Figure 1). The tail ends of the distribution are higher than a normal distribution would predict – these are responses of “all of the time” for all seven questions or “none of the time” for all seven questions. The distribution of responses is within the bounds of the responses from a large-scale survey conducted in the UK and typically used as benchmark for the WEMWBS.

Figure 1. Distribution of WEMWBS Scores



Like any survey tool, the questions in the WEMWBS are an imperfect measurement of well-being, and should be seen as one way to capture well-being. While the seven questions in the WEMWBS give the most comprehensive measure of well-being in the survey, attaching a number to well-being is an imperfect simplification that overlooks many other complicating factors. In particular, the responses on well-being (and throughout the survey) are self-reported, meaning that a workers’ agency, willingness to freely express themselves, and level of comfort may alter their responses and disguise how they actually feel. In addition to the large-scale worker survey, one manager from each factory was surveyed (Table 3). The managers’ survey covers topics ranging from production details and business environment to perceptions of worker concerns. Some factory management was unreachable at the time of the survey.

Table 3. Number of managers surveyed by factory type and data collection

	EXPORTING	SUBCONTRACTING	SATELLITE UNIT
December 2019	40	15	16
July 2020	39	16	16



Results

Results are presented as follows. The bulk on the results come from the WEMWBS survey as these allow for an in-depth exploration of potential correlates with well-being. Next, we seek to answer the question of what resources workers use when they are facing issues with their mental well-being. Finally, we look at alternative measures of well-being in an effort to capture the experiences of Sri Lankan and Nepalese workers, who are not included in the WEMWBS questions, and to control for the effects of Covid-19.

Main Results with WEMWBS

The following analysis draws heavily from prior research on the mental well-being of garment workers in Jordan. We consider four potential determinants of worker well-being: working conditions, living conditions, personal factors, and gender dynamics in the workplace. These four explanations are used to organize the explanatory factors for what could be driving mental well-being. This organization is important because it allows us to think through the different determinants of well-being in a systematic way and to ensure that all possible angles of the question are explored. Explanatory factors are limited to the questions asked in the survey – for each explanatory factor there are missing components that are not measured in the survey but may be important for determining well-being.

To determine if an explanatory factor is correlated with well-being, we ran regressions with all significant controls. Regression results are not reported here but are summarized and shown graphically to illustrate the general approach. The observed outcomes are correlations and we cannot make causal statements about them. For instance, just because workers who have low well-being scores also report safety concerns does not mean that they have low well-being because they have safety concerns. In addition, the analysis does not allow us to make any statements about the relative importance of these factors, other than to say that they are all important through some channels.

Controls

There are significant differences in well-being among groups of workers by different demographic characteristics, including nationality and gender. There are also differences in well-being depending on the workers' job in the factory, how long they have worked in the factory, and what type of factory it is. All of these factors are significantly correlated with well-being, and they are used throughout the analysis as controls so we know that the correlations observed between well-being and explanatory variables of interest are not due to demographics characteristics or other aspects of the workers' job in the factory. Age, education, and marital status are not correlated with well-being and are not used as controls in most of the regressions.



The differences in well-being scores by gender and nationality are somewhat complex and do not match perfectly with our prior assumptions. The research conducted by SIPA proposed that migrant workers and women would have the most issues with well-being, but this not necessarily the case. There is no statistically significant difference in well-being between Jordanian workers and migrant workers, but this obscures the fact that Bangladeshi workers tend to have higher well-being scores than Jordanians, while Indian workers have lower well-being scores. In addition, gender variation in well-being depends on the nationality. Sometimes women have higher reported well-being, as is the case for Bangladeshi workers, and sometimes men have higher reported well-being, as is the case for Jordanian workers (**Table 4**). Particularly when comparing across groups of workers from different nationalities, it is crucial to take into account possible cultural differences and the fact the scores are self-reported.

Table 4. WEMWBS by gender and nationality

	WOMEN	MEN
Jordan	20.8	22.1
Bangladesh	22.0	20.2
India	NA	17.7

How long the worker has been on the job is strongly correlated with their well-being score – workers on the job for less than six months have by far the lowest well-being. Results for different types of factory go against the assumptions – our survey shows that workers in subcontracting factories have better mental health than workers in exporting factories. Subcontracting factories are generally known to have worse working conditions because orders are often not as stable and there is less oversight from international buyers. This result is stronger when controlling for nationality, meaning that it is not driven by nationality. Some jobs in the factory are also more likely to have workers with better well-being than others. The positions of ironing and helper tend to have the lowest well-being scores, while finishing, cutting, packing and quality control have the highest well-being scores.

Working Conditions

Many working conditions captured in worker opinions in the survey are correlated with mental well-being as measured by the WEMWBS. The following workplace conditions are correlated with mental well-being in the direction that we expect from prior research:

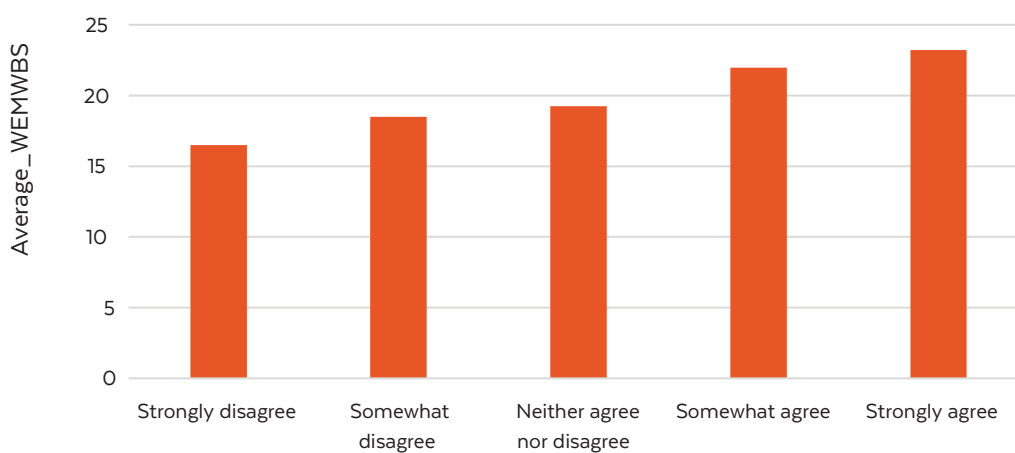
- ◆ **Safety concerns.** Workers who have concerns about the potential for accidents or injury in the factory tend to have lower well-being scores.
- ◆ **Some working time concerns.** Specifically, workers who are concerned with forced overtime and inability to pursue outside obligations because of their working hours tend to have lower well-being scores.



- ◆ **Verbal abuse.** Workers who say that they or their co-workers have concerns with shouting or vulgar language tend to have lower well-being scores.
- ◆ **Un-met expectations of working conditions.** Well-being is worse for workers who say that working conditions are worse than they had expected before beginning work in the factory.
- ◆ **Mutual trust with management.** Well-being is better among workers who think there is mutual trust between management and workers in the factory, and worse among workers who do not think there is mutual trust.

The aspects of working conditions that are correlated with higher levels of well-being can be fit into some general buckets. The first three aspects (safety, working time and verbal abuse) are all basic workplace standards that need to be met. In particular, feeling safe is a basic human need that needs to be fulfilled in order to pursue other goals. Workers who experience verbal abuse or see that their colleagues are verbally abused may have lower self-esteem or may feel resentment towards supervisors and management. This is closely linked to the question of whether or not there is mutual trust between workers and managers. The average WEMWBS score is nearly seven points higher for those workers who strongly agree that there is mutual trust with management compared to those who strongly disagree (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2. Is there mutual trust between workers and management in this factory?



Prior research theorized that unmet expectations about working conditions would be particularly stressing for workers, especially for migrant workers, who travel to an unknown country and may not know what to expect. However, we find that Jordanian workers are the most likely to say that working conditions are worse than they expected (17 per cent), while only five per cent of migrant workers thought that working conditions were worse than they had expected.



On the other hand, we do not find evidence that the following workplace conditions are correlated with mental well-being:

- ◆ **Hours.** Total hours of work per week is not correlated with the WEMWBS.
- ◆ **Some working time concerns.** Working time concerns such as “work leaves me exhausted” and “Need to work during my break time” are not correlated with well-being.

However, lack of correlation does not necessarily mean that these aspects of working conditions are not related, it simply means that we cannot find evidence that they are related in our sample. The measurement of hours of work may be particularly affected by the timing of data collection during Covid-19. Working hours decreased by six hours per week on average in the July data collection compared to previous data collection as factory management decreased the amount of available overtime work due to lower production needs with Covid-19. Because the WEMWBS is only available with the lower hours of work, we may not find significant correlation because hours were temporarily lower in this period. In addition, while more working time can be a burden on workers and cause stress and health issues, the financial incentives from working overtime may counteract these problems for some workers.

Living Conditions

Evidence available from current surveys suggests that living conditions as reported by workers are not correlated with their reported well-being. This counters our assumptions and previous research showing that housing and living conditions are very important for mental well-being. The current survey tool may be limited in its ability to capture the state of living conditions. Across the board, workers report high levels of satisfaction with the conditions in factory dorms, when we know from experience that there are many issues in the dormitories. One explanation is that most workers report that living conditions in the factory dorms were better than they expected – perhaps this is a sign that workers come in with very low expectations of living conditions, and they are satisfied because these expectations are met. Expectations of living conditions are not correlated with well-being.

However, we do find evidence that the quality and quantity of the food provided by the factory is related to well-being.

- ◆ **Food satisfaction.** Workers who are more satisfied with the quality of the food in the factory have higher levels of mental well-being.
- ◆ **Hunger.** Workers who are never uncomfortably hungry have higher well-being scores, while workers who are often uncomfortably hungry during the day or are too hungry to sleep at night have lower well-being scores.

Both dormitories and food merit further study and research, as they are very important to the lived experiences of workers, particularly migrant workers, who are dependent on the factory for accommodation and food. In the future, non-compliance data from assessment visits about dormitories and food can be used to explore this topic further.



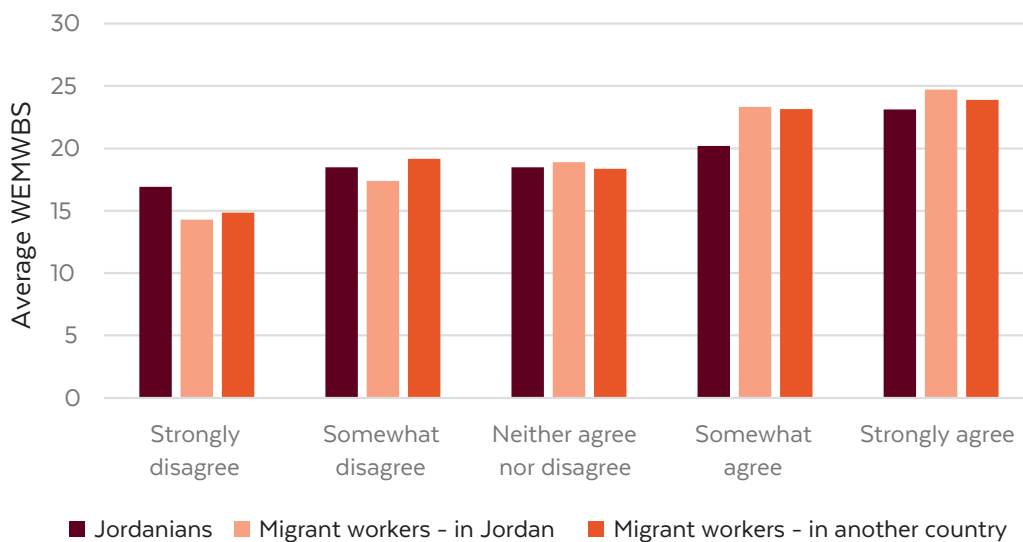
Personal Factors

Many personal factors can affect an individual's well-being, and the majority of these are difficult to capture in survey data. For instance, it is unethical and impractical to ask probing questions in a large-scale anonymous survey about an individual's personal or family history of mental health issues, specific stressors in their family lives, and past traumas. However, we are able to capture connectivity, financial pressures, and some broad personal and health factors.

Connectivity

How happy the worker is with their friendships and relationships is highly correlated with mental health. This applies for Jordanian workers and migrant workers who were asked slightly different questions about their relationships. Migrant workers were asked the question in two parts to separate the effects of relationships with friends and family from their home countries with their relationships in Jordan. Both show a similar correlation with well-being – well-being scores are higher when people report that they are content with their friendships and relationships (**Figure 3**).

Figure 3. I am content with my relationships



On the other hand, there is no correlation between whether the worker speaks the same language as their direct supervisor and their well-being. Initially, we theorized that this would matter because it would make people feel more isolated in the factory and less able to voice their concerns if they did not speak the same language as their supervisor. However, most workers do indeed speak the same language as their supervisor either fluently or at a basic level, and we find no evidence of a correlation between language barriers and well-being among the small percentage of workers who do not speak the same language as their supervisor.



Financial Pressures

Financial pressures and obligations can cause stress and lead to worse well-being. Workers in garment factories often face financial pressures – particularly migrant workers who work long hours to send as much money as possible home to their families. Several measures of financial pressure are correlated with well-being, but some are not. The following are correlated in the direction we expect:

- ◆ **Pay.** Higher monthly pay is correlated with higher levels of well-being.
- ◆ **Main breadwinner.** People who are the main breadwinners in their family also tend to have lower mental well-being scores.
- ◆ **Debt and loans.** Workers with debt and loans have lower well-being scores, especially if they have concerns about those debts and loans.

We do not find any evidence of correlation between the following and the WEMWBS score:

- ◆ **Amount of money sent home.** The amount of money workers send home each month is not correlated with their well-being.
- ◆ **Decision-making.** There are no statistically significant correlations between well-being and who decides how remittances sent home are spent.
- ◆ **Savings.** There is no observed correlation between having savings and the well-being score.

Workers tend to have worse well-being if they are the main breadwinner in their family, and better well-being if they earn more money, but there is no correlation between mental health and the amount of money that the worker sends home. The results on debt and savings merit further analysis – while debt and loans are negatively correlated with well-being, there is no significant correlation with savings. Previous research on the links between debt, saving, and mental well-being have found that these are both important factors in determining well-being.⁹

Other Personal Factors

Other personal factors beyond connectivity and financial obligations are hard to measure and for the most part are not included in the survey. The handful of questions that do address other personal factors are not correlated with mental well-being in a clear way. For instance, the presence of children is not correlated with well-being, but theory does not give us a clear prior on how the presence of children would be correlated with well-being – we would want to know more about the children and the relationship between the respondent and their children. Workers are asked about how they would rate their personal health and the health of their children, but because the responses are very positive across the board, there is very little possibility to find correlations between self-reported health and well-being as measured by the WEMWBS.

9 See Tay, Louis & Batz-Barbarich, Cassandra & Parrigon, Scott & Kuykendall, Lauren. (2016). Debt and Subjective Well-being: The Other Side of the Income-Happiness Coin. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. 18. 10.1007/s10902-016-9758-5 and Martin KD, Hill RP. Saving and Well-Being at the Base of the Pyramid: Implications for Transformative Financial Services Delivery. *Journal of Service Research*. 2015;18(3):405-421. doi:10.1177/1094670514563496



Gender Dynamics in the Workplace

Negative gender dynamics in the workplace may lead to worse mental well-being for workers, both male and female, as they may feel trapped in the gendered expectations of their environment. Particularly on the factory floor, women tend to be in lower paid positions, and men tend to be in higher paid ones. In addition, both men and women can be the victims of sexual harassment or gender-based violence. Gender dynamics cut through the explanatory factors listed above as gender is always used as a control in the analysis, as are jobs in the factory. However, there are two aspects of gender dynamics in the workplace that we can separately explore with the survey data: the gender dynamics between workers and supervisors, and sexual harassment.

Supervisor Gender

On the surface, it appears that workers with male supervisors have lower levels of mental health, but this finding is less significant when other controls are added and may be spurious. Male workers are more likely to have male supervisors and they tend to have lower levels of mental health, which partly explains the finding about male supervisors. Sixty-seven per cent of male workers have male supervisors, compared to 47 per cent of female workers. Male workers with male supervisors do tend to have worse mental health than male workers with female supervisors. There is no difference among female workers.

Sexual Harassment

Workers with sexual harassment concerns or who have experienced quid-pro-quo sexual harassment have worse mental health. Sexual harassment concerns have a strong negative correlation with mental well-being and they remain highly significant with controls added. Personal experiences of quid-pro-quo sexual harassment are also highly correlated, with very low well-being reported by workers who said they were propositioned or pressured into a sexual act in return for a favour or to avoid punishment (**Table 5**).

Table 5. Sexual Harassment and Well-being

AVERAGE WEMWBS	SH IS A CONCERN	EXPERIENCED QPQ SH
Yes	18.4	15.9
No	21.8	21.7



Resources Used

There is a well-documented gap in the mental health support system in Jordan, and this is particularly true for migrant workers who are isolated in industrial zones and who may not speak the same language as the doctors and mental health professionals (under Jordanian labour law, medical professions are 'closed occupations' in which only Jordanians can be hired). This survey does not go into the full intricacies of the mental health support system, either regionally or at the factory level. It does shed some light, however, on the basics of what people do when they are facing a problem in their personal life.

Evidence from the survey shows that most workers talk to their family and friends when they are facing stress or an issue in their personal lives (**Table 6**). Some workers also go to their dorm supervisors when they have a problem. Seeing a social worker is relatively rare, with only four per cent of workers affirming they have done so, but somewhat higher than expected given the limited number of social workers and the stigma associated with seeking help. Worryingly, nearly one in five respondents say that they would not go to anybody if they were facing an issue in their personal lives.

These responses are highly correlated with well-being, particularly among those workers who say that they would not go to anybody when they are facing personal stress. The average WEMWBS for workers who would not speak to anyone when they are facing personal stress or an issue in their lives is 17.6, four points lower than workers who speak to their family or friends.

Table 6. Resources used if facing a personal problem

	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS ¹⁰	AVERAGE WEMWBS
No one	19%	17.6
My friends or family	60%	21.6
My dorm supervisor	16%	23
A social worker	4%	21
Other	4%	20.8

Other Measures of Well-being

There are many ways to capture worker well-being, and workers were asked several additional questions to capture different aspects of well-being in addition to the seven core questions in the WEMWBS. There are four potential other measures of well-being in the workers' survey: life satisfaction, job stress, feeling

¹⁰ Respondents were instructed to check all of the choices that apply so percentages may sum to more than 100%.



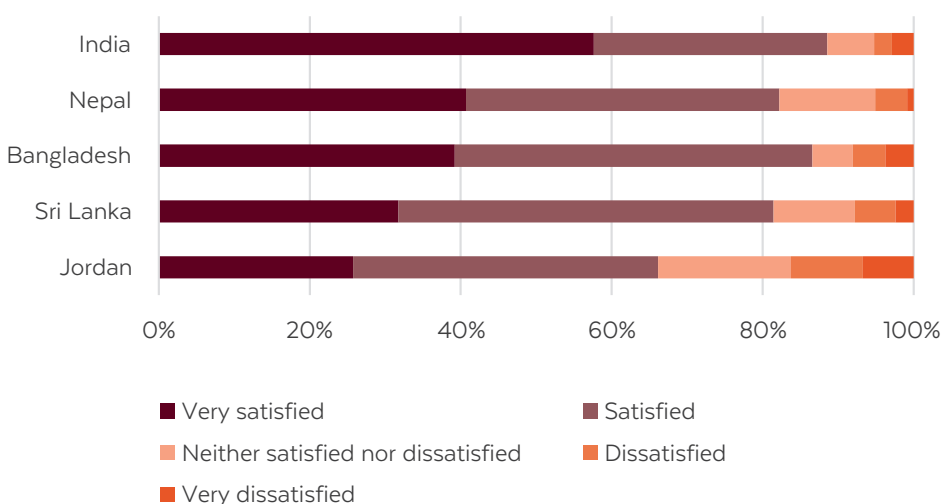
appreciated at work, and whether the respondent would recommend working in their factory. These alternative measures allow us to better understand the state of mental health from different angles, give us a window into the mental well-being of Nepalese and Sri Lankan workers, and may provide some indication of the effect of Covid-19 on mental well-being. Comparing results in July with previously collected data may give us some indication on the impact of Covid-19 but these results are likely to be muted. The Covid-19 situation was relatively stable in Jordan in July as this was after strict government-imposed lockdowns but before cases spread widely in the fall.

Life Satisfaction

We do not find any statistically significant correlation between life satisfaction and well-being as measured by the WEMWBS. Workers were asked, “In general, how satisfied are you with your current life” and given answer choices ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. These responses tend to elicit positive responses – here we find that 80 per cent of workers indicate that they are satisfied or very satisfied with their life. This question has been used in past well-being research, and was used in Better Work factories in Vietnam with similar results – 73 per cent of workers in BWV factories indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with their current life.¹¹

The responses on life satisfaction by nationality help to explain some of the lack of correlation between life satisfaction and well-being on the surface. Indian workers have low well-being on average but report the highest life satisfaction of all groups of workers, while Jordanian workers are the most likely to say they are “very dissatisfied” with their life despite high well-being scores (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Self-reported life satisfaction by nationality



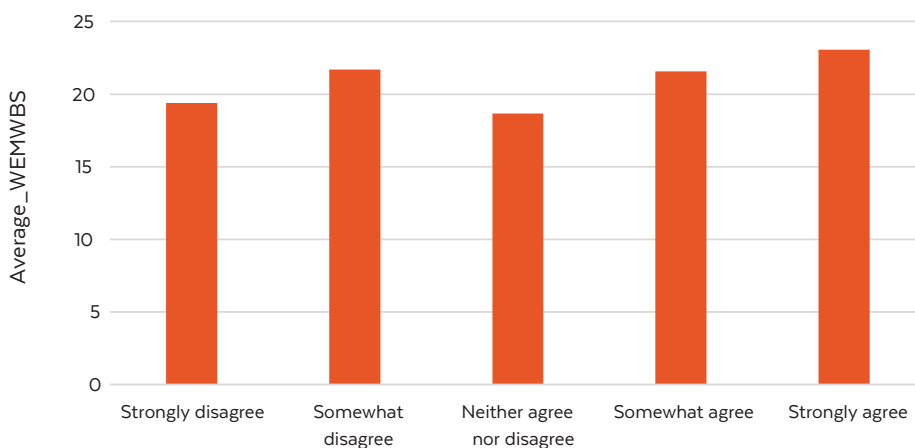
¹¹ Adler, Brown, Dehejia, Domat and Robertson. (2017). *Asian Development Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 65-87. “Do Factory Managers Know What Workers Want? Manager-Worker Information Asymmetries and Pareto Optimal Human Resource Management Policies.”



Job Stress

Job stress is only loosely correlated with the WEMWBS – while there is a statistically significant difference in well-being between low and high job stress, the steps in between are less clear-cut (**Figure 5**). Workers are asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, “The stress associated with my job is acceptable”. This means that workers who strongly disagree with this statement are facing very high levels of stress. While some stress is normal in any workplace, and can even be conducive to higher productivity, prolonged periods of stress can have negative effects. The results seem to capture both angles of job stress – that when it is very high it is bad, and that at low levels it does not make a big difference.

Figure 5. The stress associated with my job is acceptable



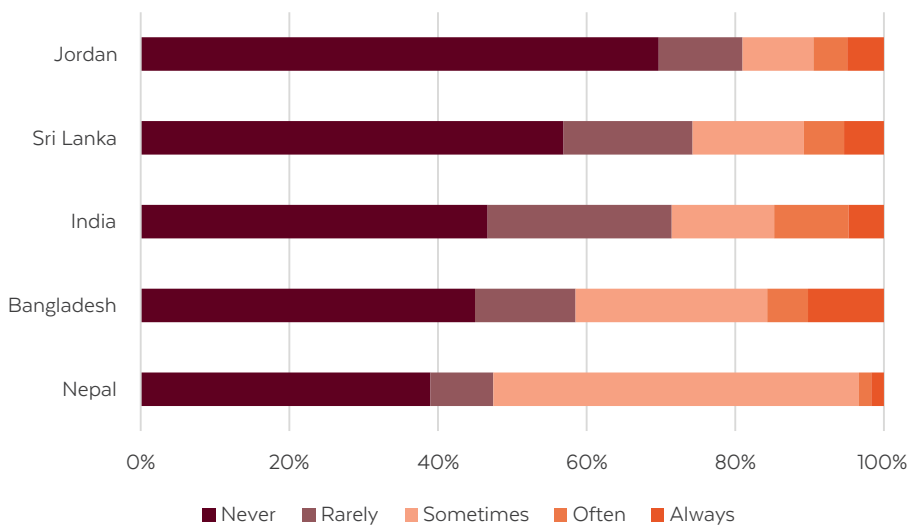
Job stress, in turn, is highly correlated with job in the factory, hours of work, and length of time in the factory. Job stress is highest for jobs that are more technically difficult and potentially dangerous: job stress is by far the highest for dyeing, followed by cutting and ironing. New arrivals to the factory report the highest job stress, with lower levels of job stress reported once workers have been at the factory for more than a year. In addition, Indian, Bangladeshi and Nepalese workers report the highest job stress of all nationalities, with Sri Lankan and Jordanian workers reporting relatively low job stress. There is no significant change in job stress across rounds of data collection so we cannot come to any conclusions about the effects of Covid-19 on job stress.



Feeling unappreciated at work

Feeling unappreciated at work is loosely correlated with the WEMWBS score – workers who report “never” feeling unimportant or unappreciated in the workplace have significantly higher levels of well-being than workers who report that they “rarely,” “sometimes” or “always” feel that way. There is significant variation in these responses by nationality, with the vast majority of Jordanian workers reporting that they feel appreciated at work while at the other end most Nepali workers do not feel appreciated at work (**Figure 6**). There is no significant change in feelings of appreciation at work across rounds of data collection so there are no differences to even potentially attribute to Covid-19.

Figure 6. How often do you feel unappreciated at work?



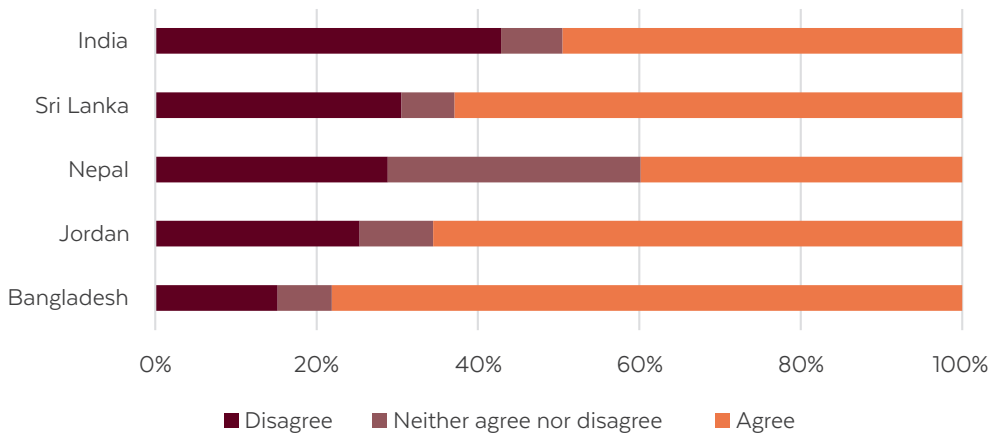
Would recommend factory to improve life

Well-being as measured by the WEMWBS is higher for workers the more strongly they agree with the statement “if a friend or family member like me wanted to improve their life, I would recommend this factory”. While the question about whether workers would recommend their factory to families and friends is not directly about mental well-being, it does capture whether workers think that their current job has improved their life or not.

While the majority of workers do think that they would recommend a job in their factory (65 per cent), there is significant variation in responses by nationality (**Figure 7**). Indian workers are the most likely to disagree, and Bangladeshi workers are the most likely to agree. Nepalese workers are divided on this question with many workers choosing “Neither agree nor disagree”. Women are more likely than men to say that they would recommend the factory – 71 per cent of women versus 57 per cent of men. There was no change in the responses to this question in the July data collection, so there are no differences to attribute to effects from Covid-19.



Figure 7. I would recommend this factory to a family or friend that wanted to improve their life



Results from other surveys

Better Work Jordan has also conducted several other informal surveys, which give additional insight into the well-being of workers at different stages in the Covid-19 pandemic:

- ◆ From semi-structured worker phone calls conducted by BWJ and the Trade Union during the lockdowns in March, April and May, mental stress came up as a key worker concern. These workers persistently expressed concerns about mental stress.¹²
- ◆ In phone calls conducted in October since the surge of Covid-19 cases in Jordan, over 70 per cent of workers surveyed said that they or their family members had experienced greater mental stress since the onset of Covid-19..

During the surveys conducted in July, managers were asked about their perception of worker concerns around mental stress. Over half of managers surveyed said that mental stress was not a concern for the workers in their factory (**Table 7**). This shows a significant gap with the responses from workers, but also may be reflective of a broader reluctance to admit to issues on the part of factory-management. Across nine different topics of possible worker concerns, on average half of factory management said that each topic was not a concern for workers in their factory.

Table 7. Manager perceptions of worker mental stress

MANAGER PERCEPTION OF WORKER CONCERNS WITH MENTAL STRESS

Not a concern	59%
Low concern	29%
Moderate concern	6%
Serious concern	6%

¹² COVID-19: Garment worker perspectives in Jordan. May 2020. Better Work Jordan. Policy Brief. <https://betterwork.org/portfolio/covid-19-garment-worker-perspectives-in-jordan/>



Conclusion

The findings in this report take us a step closer to understanding the current state and determinants of mental well-being among workers in the garment sector. This report draws from previous analysis of the situation in the garment sector in Jordan and complements it with analysis from a large-scale worker survey. While unable to establish causality, the findings nonetheless highlight key correlations and demonstrate the need and opportunity to support the mental well-being of workers in the sector.

Key findings and recommendations include:

1. Working conditions and mental well-being go hand in hand, especially given the nature of the working relationship of migrant workers in Jordan. The current research shows workers' mental well-being can be supported by:
 - ◆ Eliminating verbal abuse
 - ◆ Eliminating sexual harassment
 - ◆ Ensuring the basic safety needs in the workplace need are met
2. Workers' mental well-being is shaped by their interpersonal relationships. Worker connectedness should be supported at multiple levels:
 - ◆ Between workers and their family and friends at home
 - ◆ Between workers and their friends in Jordan, particularly co-workers
 - ◆ Between workers and supervisors
 - ◆ Between workers and management

Several of the factors that this research demonstrates are positively correlated with mental well-being, including eliminating discrimination and harassment at work, ensuring safe workplaces and building mutual trust and communication, have long been recognized as key elements of decent working conditions. Better Work Jordan will continue to support industry stakeholders to achieve these improved working conditions that can reinforce better mental well-being.

In addition, there are key steps that stakeholders can take to promote mental well-being directly. There is an immediate and urgent need for further support for mental health services across the industry.



Some potential interventions to address these issues are peer-to-peer support networks, mental health first aid training for peer supporters and managers, training for managers on identifying mental health problems and handling conversations with workers, and awareness campaigns that focus on 'speaking up' and seeking support. In addition, suicide prevention hotlines and other suicide prevention programs could provide support to workers in their most vulnerable moments.

Better Work Jordan is currently designing training modules for both workers and middle management on mental well-being to address many of the challenges discussed above. The content of this training is heavily influenced by the findings in this report, and a training-of-trainers component will be available to expand the reach of the training so that employers and union officials can potentially deliver the training themselves. Finally, Better Work seeks to continue generating knowledge that can support various efforts to promote mental well-being. We plan to support further policy-relevant research using advanced quantitative analysis or in-depth focus group discussions to generate greater understanding of mental well-being and its determinants in the context of the garment sector. In the meantime, we have added evidence that decent working conditions are also correlated with higher levels of worker well-being, both of which are fundamental goals of all stakeholders and the Better Work Jordan programme.



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