

## **Workers' Interviews Report – Fibres and Fabrics International Private Limited, Bangalore**

**Factory Address:** No. 21, E-1,  
II Phase, Peenya Industrial Area,  
Bangalore – 560 058

[**Note:** This company is said to have 6-7 different units and we have come across 3 of them so far. This worker interview report pertains to the washing unit that functions at the above address. We have appended brief notes on the other 2 units at the end of this Report. Worker interviews at these two units are yet to be carried out. The structure of this report follows the pattern of the questionnaire used by the Fair Wear Foundation in its factory audits]

**Date of Incorporation:** 27<sup>th</sup> June 2002 (Proprietary concern, later converted into Private Limited Company)

**Share Holders:** Mr. Anupam Kothari (holding 9,999 shares)  
Mr. Mohammed Ghase (holding 1 share)

**Interviewers:** Mr. Jayaram.

**Date of Interview:** September 12, 2005

**Location of Interview:** Close to Factory gate

**Workers Interviewed:**

<b>Name &amp; Token No.</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Type of Job</b>	<b>No. of years</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Union</b>
xxx (Token No. xxx)	23	Male	Brushing/ Acid wash/ Other wash	3 yrs	Washing	No
xxx (Token No. xxx)	28	Male	-Do-	15 months	Washing	No
xxx (Token No. xxx)	22	Male	-Do-	3 yrs	Washing	No
xxx (Token No. xxx)	26	Male	-Do-	3 yrs	Washing	No

### **I General**

Perhaps because this company has divided various operations among different factory units, and this unit caters to only washing operations, almost the entire workforce is male. There are approximately 2000 workers in this unit in total and 3 shifts are in operation (7 a.m. to 3 p.m., 3 p.m. to 11 p.m., and 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.). Workers were very forthcoming when we spoke to them. Most workers were young men who have migrated very recently (6 months to about 3 years) to the city from rural districts of Karnataka state and also the

neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Workers said that they were working under tremendous pressure due to the very high production targets. They were also dissatisfied with the wages, social security provisions and safety aspects. Non payment of legal overtime wages was another issue. Workers are often not allowed to avail even their legitimate leave. There have been cases of physical attack on workers who protest abuse.

Workers were not issued any identity cards. They also were not given appointment letters. Workers have no information about any codes of labour standards. They are also not aware of any social audit. Wages are slightly higher than the stipulated minimum wages. However, workers who get more than Rs. 2500/- per month are paid only the normal hourly wage as overtime payment instead of the stipulated double rates. Those who earn less than Rs. 2500/- per month are sometimes paid the double rates.

We felt that workers were willing to participate in workers' organizations, though it might take some time for leadership to emerge. Overall, the working conditions and human resources management practices in the unit leaves much to be desired and there are many violations of labour rights, which can be documented as we build better rapport with the workers.

## **II Labour Standards**

### **Is Employment Freely Chosen?**

1. *Do workers feel free to leave this job if they wish?*

There seems to be a preference for workers from rural districts in Karnataka as well as the neighbouring states. Mostly young workers between 20 and 30 years are employed. Workers can leave their job if they wish. However, many workers are arbitrarily terminated without any prior warning or enquiry.

2. *Can workers freely enter and leave the premises? Are guards put in charge of controlling the workers?*

Security guards are posted at the entrance. Workers may enter inside the factory just before the beginning of the shifts. In case workers have to leave or go out during work hours, permission has to be obtained. When workers leave the factory premises, there is a body search.

### **Discrimination in Employment**

3. *Are there discriminated groups and what is the nature of the discrimination?*

There is no discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion and social origin. We do not know whether it is a conscious policy to employ only male workers in this

unit. Workers explained that women may not like to work with hazardous material like acids, dyes and other chemicals.

## **Child Labour**

- 4. Does child labour occur in the factory? What is the background if families put their children to work?*

There are no child workers in the factory. The youngest are about 20 years. Most workers are from rural areas and many of them said that children in their families often are employed in farm work.

## **Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

- 5. What are the views and experiences of the workers with trade unions, both in the factory and in society?*

Workers' said that they felt the need to have workers' unions to address their problems and issues. However, they have only heard about trade unions being the organisation of workers and have no experience in participating in union activities. They were also apprehensive of a backlash from the management in case they join the unions.

- 6. Which trade unions have members in the factory? What is the level of unionization of workers in this factory? If no members, are there trade unions in the region, which would accept the membership of the workers of this factory?*

There are no trade unions in the factory. Workers are vaguely aware of the benefits of unionization. Many workers are willing to associate with unions, but of course with some apprehension. There are unions that we know of who are willing to enroll the workers of this factory as members.

- 7. Are there any other kinds of workers' organization in the factory and is it being used to keep unions out?*

There are no other kinds of workers' organisation in the factory.

- 8. Whom does the management contact if they would like to have consultations /negotiations with shop floor workers?*

Workers said that the management never consults them on any issues. The production manager talks to the supervisors when there are any issues. Likewise, it is only the production manager that workers approach for any issues.

- 9. Is there a collective bargaining agreement?*

There is no collective bargaining agreement in the factory and the workers have no awareness or information about collective bargaining, its process or its benefits.

### **Payment of a Living Wage**

*10. Are minimum wages paid? Are workers issued pay slips? Does the wage cover their basic needs including of their family?*

As stated earlier, wages are marginally higher than stipulated minimum wages. However, we are not sure whether the social security contributions from the workers are deducted from their wages as required legally. It is possible that workers might be considered as 'Casual Labourers'. Workers complain that wages are cut for absence without explaining the basis for such deductions.

Workers say that the wages do not cover the basic needs of their family. As most of the workers leave their family behind in their villages they have to send money home for their upkeep.

### **Working Hours**

*11. What are the normal working hours, normal working week, holidays? Is this documented?*

The normal working hours are eight with a working week of six days with Sunday as a holiday. The unit works in 3 shifts as mentioned earlier. Workers cannot avail of their legitimate leave days as of right. Sometimes, there is overtime work even on holidays.

*12. How often does overtime occur in this factory? Is it paid at a premium rate?*

Due to high turnover of workers there is always a slack in production and therefore most workers work overtime. Overtime work hours are recorded improperly and many workers feel that they are being shortchanged in this respect. One trick the company plays is to include overtime payments in the wage slip showing as if it is 'production incentive'. As stated, workers whose wages are above Rs. 2500 a month are paid only at the normal hourly rate for overtime work and those below are eligible for double the hourly wage. However, this is only a notion and workers do not get paid properly for overtime work.

*13. How free are workers to not accept OT? Has there to be a permit or negotiation to allow OT?*

Workers have no freedom to refuse to work overtime. On no occasion does negotiation take place before overtime work is imposed.

## Health and Safety

14. Is there a system for consulting workers on safety and health matters?

There has been no occasion on which workers were consulted on safety and health matters.

15. Do workers experience any health problems because of their work? If so, which and what could be the cause?

Workers complained of many problems, which in their opinion was due to the nature of their work.

- Many workers experienced lack of appetite, according to them due to inhalation of fumes from acids and dyes. Most of the young men look undernourished and anemic.
- Eyes often became watery.
- Frequent headaches.
- Exhaustion and back pain.

16. Are appropriate personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves provided?

Gloves and masks are distributed to workers.

17. Have there been problems with physical abuse, physical punishment or harassment and what has been done about it?

Workers have many complaints in relation to abuse, punishment and harassment. No complaints procedure exists in cases of such experiences.

- If workers absent themselves without permission, they are abused and sometimes turned out of the factory. This has resulted in high turnover of workers.
- The production manager and supervisors use abusive language against workers.
- Some workers have been physically assaulted by the supervisors and production managers mainly when they protest abusive language or question their high-handed behaviour.
- In the third week of August 2005, two workers, xxx and xxx in the brushing department, were assaulted by the production manager Mr.

Ramesh Chauhan after which both the workers were turned out of the factory.

### **Legally Binding Employment Relation**

*18. What kind of labour relation do workers have with the company? Is there a written contract?*

There are no written contracts between the management and workers. There are no appointment letters. The workers' claim over employment is very fragile and they can be turned out of employment as the will of the management.

### **Notes:**

The labour condition in this factory has some unique features. First of all, almost the entire workforce is male. They are all between the age group of 20 and 30 and we surmise that these young people take up this work mainly because they have come from rural areas and do not know other alternatives like becoming tailors etc. As they get wiser in the city they leave the factory leading to high turnover. Most of these young men look undernourished and sickly. Because of the utter lack of awareness of their labour rights, they are easily victimized and cheated outright of their wages, overtime payments, leave facilities. They are at tremendous risk in handling the hazardous chemicals and we have strong suspicion that there are long term consequences to the health of these young men who are often the sole bread-winners of their families. This factory is able to violate labour laws and regulations only because the workers are not unionized and are not able to represent their issues to the labour authorities. This situation can change and workers may have no other option but to act collectively.

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Unit 2: Jeans Knitwear Pvt. Ltd, No. 26 A, Peenya Industrial Area, Bangalore – 560 058. The main activities here are sampling, finishing, and packing. Approximately 500 workers are employed out of whom about 60% are women. Here also neither appointment letters nor identity cards are issued. No canteen or crèche for children of female workers.

Unit 3: Jeans Knitwear Pvt. Ltd., No. 485/2, 4<sup>th</sup> phase, 13<sup>th</sup> Cross, Peenya Industrial Area, Bangalore – 560 058. Excellent modern factor building became operational only about 9 months back. Employs about 500 workers. No appointment letter, no identity card, no overtime payments. Saving grace is that the management provides transport.  
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