



BetterWork

Better Work Jordan: Worker Voice Survey Results

POLICY
BRIEF

NOVEMBER 2019



International
Labour
Organization



Introduction

For the last ten years, Better Work Jordan has worked to improve labour conditions and business competitiveness in the Jordanian garment sector. To achieve these objectives, the programme engages tripartite national stakeholders – the government, workers’ and employers’ organizations – and delivers in-factory services, comprised of assessments, trainings, and advisory visits. Better Work Jordan also engages international stakeholders (including buyers and governments) and facilitates dialogue at the factory and sectoral level. The Jordanian garment sector has grown substantially over this time and the Better Work program now covers over 65,000 workers. Better Work Jordan has established deep and effective working relationships with national stakeholders, working collaboratively to build their capacity to deliver an increasing proportion of the in-factory services of the Better Work model. The sector has progressed substantially, achieving greater compliance with labour standards, growing its export footprint, and increasing institutional capacity of national stakeholders.

Better Work Jordan has consistently invested in research to measure effects of the programme, which has involved collecting survey data directly from workers and managers to triangulate the programme’s own compliance data. Tufts University led this research and data gathering from 2010-2015 and they identified a positive causal impact of Better Work programs across multiple countries.¹ In 2019, the programme relaunched surveys among workers and managers to gather information on current conditions and experiences in the participating factories. Over the course of four weeks, a team of enumerators collected survey results from over 1700 workers across 77 factories, or roughly 3 percent of the garment sector workforce. The survey questions were designed to inform future studies on the impact of Better Work and to provide up-to-date information on worker opinions. The survey gathered data on demographic information, working conditions, factors for business competitiveness, engagement with national stakeholders, and life for workers outside the factory.

This brief summarizes the responses from the survey implemented in June 2019, with a focus on

the visibility and role of national stakeholders in the factory setting. Better Work is working to build the capacity of national stakeholders and it is important to assess their readiness for fulfilling their mandates. Future iterations of similar data collection will also be summarized and used to track progress over time.

Current survey results show that while workers say that they are aware of the Jordanian labour law and of the sector-wide collective bargaining agreement, few workers say that they are comfortable approaching the key stakeholders when they have a problem in the workplace. As part of Better Work Jordan’s sustainability efforts, tripartite partners should become more visible and readily accessible at the workplace to ensure that they are effectively advocating for and protecting workers’ rights.

Findings

Better Work Jordan works closely with the tripartite national stakeholders representing the government, employers and workers. Throughout the survey, workers and managers were asked about their familiarity with organizations representing these actors. In particular, this brief focuses on perceptions of the interactions with the government, represented by the Ministry of Labour, and the national union. The General Trade Union of Workers in Textile, Garment, and Clothing Industries has been operating in the sector for over 50 years and played a principal role in negotiating the sector-wide collective bargaining agreement. Workers were also asked about their familiarity with the bipartite committee. These are factory level committees with equal numbers of workers and managers, and they provide a formal channel for resolving workplace issues.

Each of these entities has a different role in the factories, and Better Work Jordan looks to build their capacity to sustain compliance with labour standards and competitiveness in the garment sector. Stakeholder engagement with workers is made more complicated by the fact that migrant workers who come on short-term contracts (2-3 years) make up the majority of the workforce, which makes training and institutional knowledge building much more difficult.

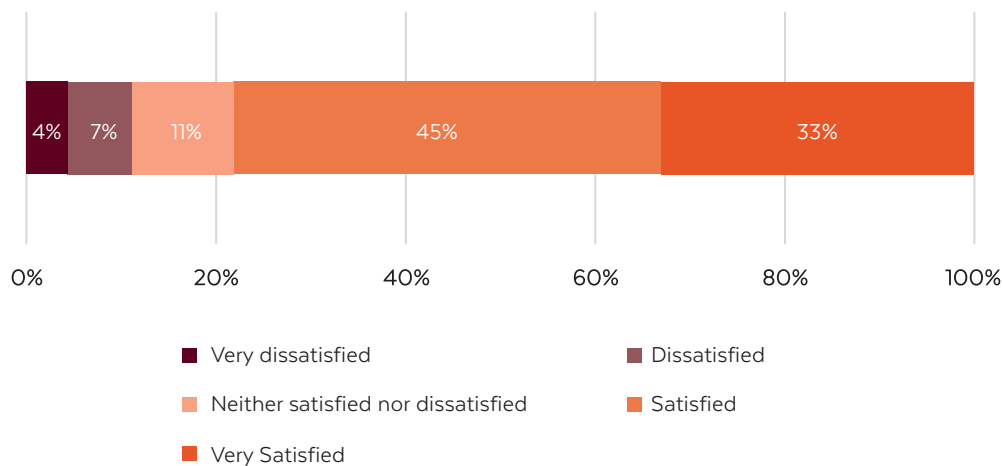
¹ Brown et al., “The Impact of Better Work,” Tufts Labor Lab: 2016.

Workers' Perspective on Grievance Mechanism and Stakeholders

Most workers report that they are satisfied with the opportunities to voice grievances, with over 75% of workers reporting that they are satisfied or very satisfied (Figure 1). Migrant workers reported

slightly higher satisfaction with opportunities to voice grievances than Jordanians, and women and men reported similar levels of satisfaction. Despite these positive headline results, on specific questions about actions taken in response to concerns, workers oftentimes do not take any actions.

Figure 1: Are you satisfied with the available opportunities to place your complaints or grievances at the workplace?



Workers were also asked about who they would feel comfortable going to if they had a problem at work (Table 1). (Workers were able to choose as many options as they wanted). The vast majority of workers are comfortable going to someone within their own factory when they have a workplace problem. The top answer choice was “my supervisor” with over half of workers reporting that they would feel comfortable going to their supervisor if they had a problem at work. The next most popular answer choices were “my coworkers”, “HR manager” and “general manager” with roughly 15 percent of workers reporting comfort with each. Eight percent of workers reported that they would feel comfortable going to the bipartite committee. In contrast, very few workers reported that they would feel comfortable going to the union or the Ministry of Labour if they had a workplace problem (two percent of workers reported comfort with each).

Table 1: If you were having a problem at work, for example with your pay, working time, work safety, or treatment at work, who would you feel comfortable going to for help? (Choose all that apply)

n=1,730	
My supervisor	928
My co-workers	278
General manager	240
No one	237
Human resources manager	219
A PICC or bipartite committee member	139
A trade union representative	42
Ministry of Labour office	37
Other	26

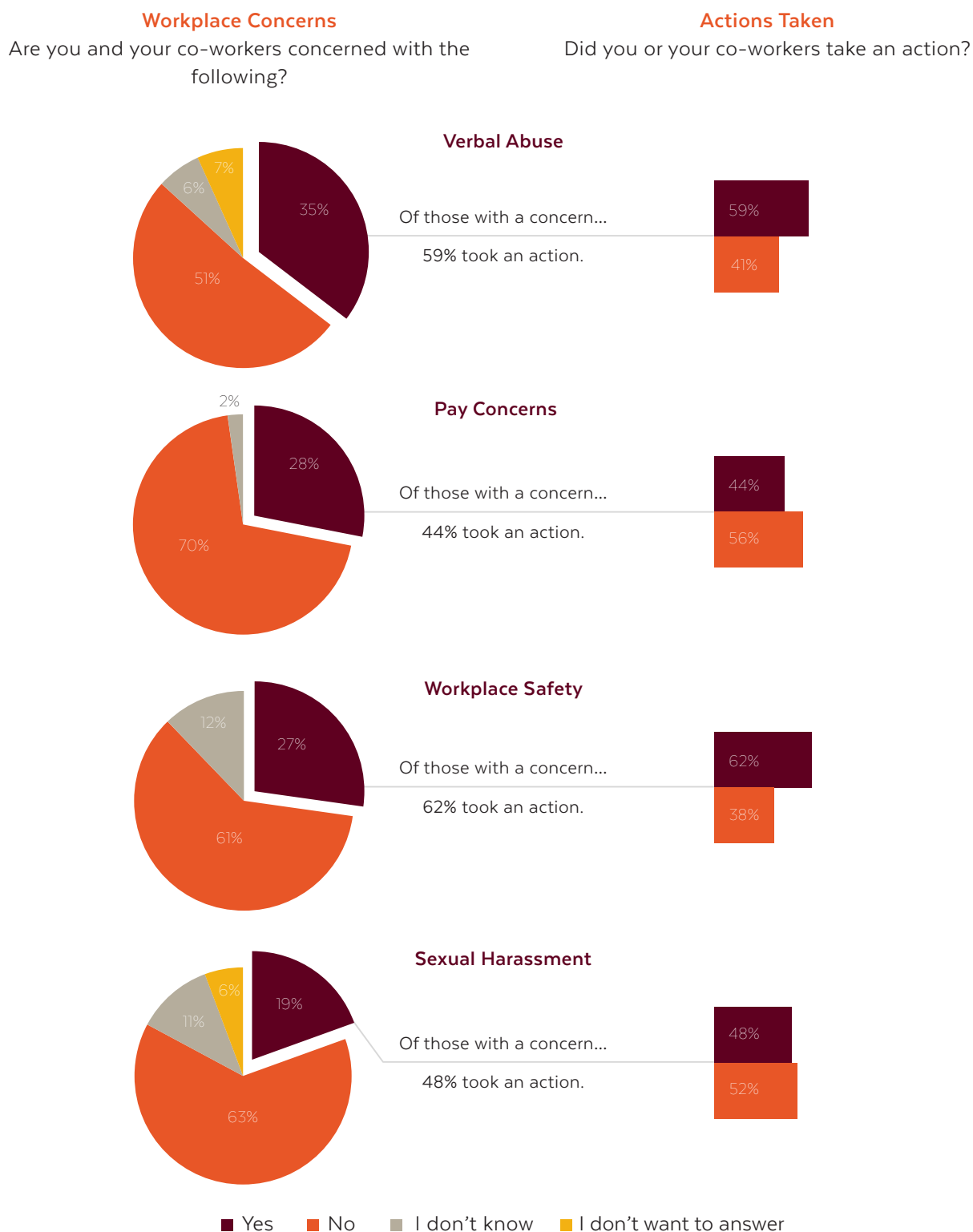
Future surveys will continue to track this topic, possibly with further questions on whether workers' concerns were adequately addressed, and if so, which entity was the most successful in addressing concerns.

Workplace Concerns and Actions Taken

In addition to general questions about grievance mechanisms and stakeholder knowledge, workers were also asked about specific concerns that they or their co-workers had with working conditions.

They were then asked a follow up question about actions taken in response to these concerns (Figure 2). Workers either chose “No action” or chose all applicable actions ranging from discussing the problem with co-workers to causing a strike.

Figure 2: Workplace Concerns and Actions Taken



The top workplace concern was verbal abuse, with 35 percent of workers reporting concerns with verbal abuse. An additional 12 percent of workers said that they didn't know or didn't want to answer the question. This is a high incidence of verbal abuse and is an area of significant concern. Additionally, workers had pay and workplace safety concerns, with just under 30% of workers reporting that they had concerns with pay or workplace safety.

Around 20 percent of workers reported concerns with sexual harassment, with an additional 17 percent reporting that they don't know or don't want to answer. The prevalence of sexual harassment can be difficult to measure – Better Work has recognized the limits of detecting the issue during regular compliance assessments, for example. Moreover, it is a sensitive topic and workers may have varied understanding of the concept: the international standard of sexual harassment includes verbal and cyber harassment, but many workers may only think about physical harassment. In addition, workers might have different thresholds for behaviour they believe is worth reporting. Nevertheless, confidential surveys

asking about sexual harassment are an important tool for identifying and triangulating information on the issue. Better Work Jordan continues to hone its approach to identifying and addressing this form of harassment at work.

On average, workers with a concern took an action (or spoke to someone about it) half of the time. This ranged from 40% of the time for pay concerns, to over 60% of the time for OSH concerns. The most common actions taken were speaking to co-workers or speaking to the supervisor/manager. Very few people said that they would take their concern to the Union or the ministry of labour. Some people said that they would approach the bipartite committee, although this was quite low compared to the dominant actions of speaking to co-workers or supervisors. Very few workers considered quitting or striking in response to concerns. One noteworthy exception is that one in five workers who took an action in response to pay concerns reported that they considered quitting. Of these 50 workers who considered quitting over pay concerns, 32 reported that they did not have enough money to meet their needs.

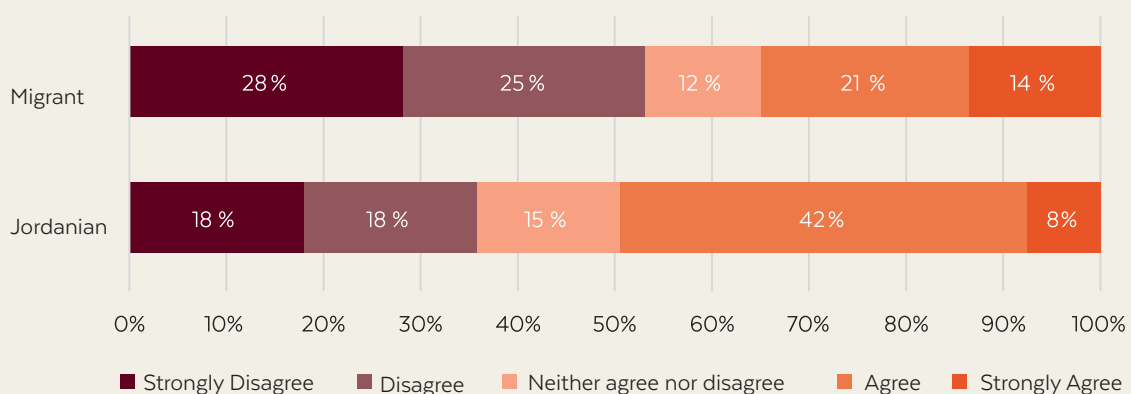
IN FOCUS: STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Stress is a major issue of concern in garment factories as workers work long hours and perform repetitive tasks with very few breaks. Oftentimes, supervisors pressure workers to meet production targets, and this may cause stress depending on the tactics used. Workplace stress can contribute to mental health problems and adversely affect worker productivity.

Workers were asked about their stress levels at work and the responses varied greatly. Workers were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, "The stress associated with my job is acceptable." Nearly

half of workers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (they found the stress associated with their job to be unacceptable), while 40 percent of workers agreed or strongly agreed. Men and women report very similar levels of stress, and there is no statistically significant difference between them. Compared to Jordanians, a higher percentage of migrant workers report that the stress associated with their job is unacceptable, and of these, the highest percentage of Bangladeshi workers report unacceptable stress. Higher stress levels are correlated with longer working hours (as reported by workers). In terms of the effects of stress, workers who report that the level of stress is unacceptable are less likely to recommend that family or friends work in the same factory as them.

Figure 5: The stress associated with my job is acceptable

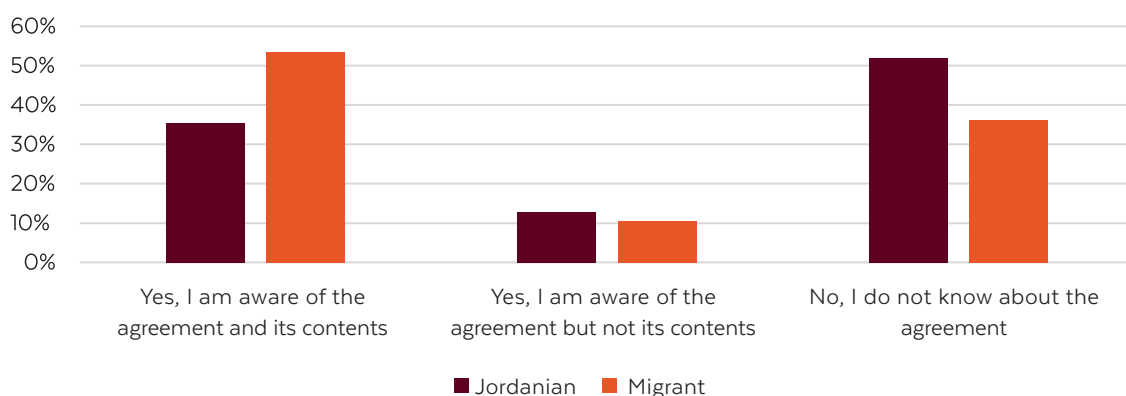


Awareness of Collective Bargaining Agreement and Labour Law

Over half of the workers reported that they were familiar with the Collective Bargaining Agreement although some of those workers were not aware of the specific contents of the agreement. The union is

responsible for negotiating the CBA and for informing workers about its contents. There is no statistically significant difference between women and men and their awareness of the agreement. However, migrant workers are more likely than Jordanians to report awareness of the agreement, which is surprising given the language barriers (Figure 3).

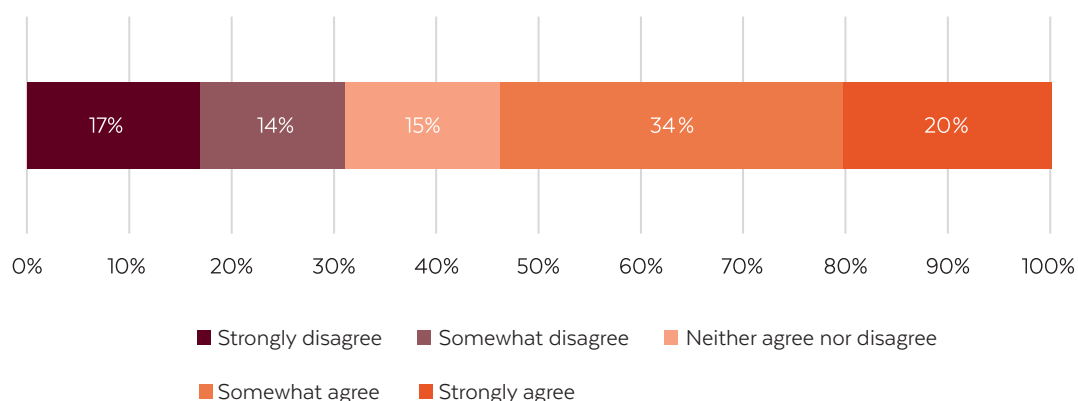
Figure 3: Are you aware of the sector-wide CBA for the garment sector in Jordan?



Similarly, over half of workers reported that they were familiar with the Jordanian labour law and how it affected them (Figure 4). A higher percentage of women reported knowledge of the law than men,

and the most knowledgeable nationalities were Jordanians and Sri Lankans. Only around 35% of Indian and Nepali workers reported that they were familiar with the law.

Figure 4: I have sufficient knowledge about the Labour Law in Jordan and how it affects my job and working conditions.



Next Steps

The findings summarized in this brief, as well as additional information available from the survey, will complement the Better Work Jordan annual report by providing worker feedback on issues that are not measured or are under-reported during regular assessments. Building the capacity of national stakeholders is an important goal for Better Work Jordan and this data shows that there is room for increased stakeholder engagement with workers. Better Work Jordan is working directly with stakeholders on increasing their ability to engage with

workers—for example, by supporting the union and Ministry of Labour in engaging with migrant workers, and we hope to see these positive changes reflected in future survey responses.

Better Work Jordan intends to survey workers again in the month of December and will use the results from this survey to further validate results and to start exploring possible trends in the data. Better Work is conducting similar surveys in other Better Work participating countries and the results from all of these surveys will be used to inform work going forward. Additional surveys may be administered in Jordan in 2020.



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