

**HERproject  
Pakistan**

Participating  
company: Levis  
Strauss & Co.

Key industries:  
Textiles, Apparel,  
Home goods

# Female Factory Workers' Health Needs Assessment: Pakistan

July 2010

## Country Context

Women comprise a majority of the workforce in labor-intensive manufacturing industries such as apparel, textiles and home goods sectors in Pakistan. The average female worker's age is 20 years and a majority of them are unmarried. Women workers generally leave their jobs at the time of marriage it is uncommon to delay the first pregnancy. Female workers face a significant double burden of work and home activities, as well as long commutes to and from work, as they often live with parents or their husbands' families.

### Pre-natal care

In factory in Pakistan, 30 percent of the women were unaware about the need for Tetanus Toxoid Immunization during pregnancy

## Key health issues for women workers in Pakistan<sup>1</sup>

The major issues affecting women workers health in Pakistan include:

- » **Domestic violence:** Death by fires, honor killings and acid attacks are just a few kinds of violence faced by many women in Pakistan. Female workers in factories are also affected to a certain degree as the society is a male dominant one and many men in Pakistan believe they have proprietary rights over women.
- » **Family planning:** According to the [Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey, 2006-2007](#) only 29.6 percent of women nationally use contraceptives. Nearly three quarters of women interviewed (of 356 women) in HERproject factories had never seen a condom. Lack of knowledge and difficulty in accessing contraceptives very often leads to unsafe abortions among female factory workers.
- » **Health-related rights:** Women are unaware of their basic rights such as the right to be assigned easier duties during pregnancy, right to maternity leave and on-site factory child care facilities, and nursing breaks.
- » **HIV/AIDS:** In HERproject factories, women interviewed had limited knowledge of AIDS, and many had never heard of HIV/AIDS. Generally, women feel the disease is not relevant to them.
- » **Malnutrition:** Women are unaware of their nutritional needs and often neglect their diet, sometimes sacrificing their daily caloric and nutritional intake for other family members. In many parts of South Asia, meals are first served to male members and children and women eat after they have finished.
- » **Personal and menstrual hygiene:** Women generally heed to popular myths related to personal hygiene during menstruation such as not using the toilet and washing irregularly. This leads to frequent discomfort and can cause

<sup>1</sup> Note: This information is based on Health Needs Assessments conducted in participating HERproject factories in Pakistan by Aga Khan University and Aahung and and by BSR's report, [Women's General & Reproductive Health in Global Supply Chains](#), October 2006

## Business impacts of investing in women workers' health

HERproject is currently being implemented in 4 factories in Pakistan. Initial results show the following business impacts in the participating factories of Levis Strauss & Co.

- » 72 percent of women workers had difficulties in achieving production targets during their menstrual periods. A 25 percent reduction in poor concentration, 28 percent less absenteeism related to menstruation and 33 percent less difficulty in meeting production targets were reported;
- » Overall, across 4 factories, absenteeism was reported as 11 percent lower;
- » Initial Return on Investment analysis has confirmed that women in one of the factories worked an average of 2.5 more hours per month during the project

infections which affect their productivity during work. Not a single worker used sanitary napkins before HERproject's awareness raising sessions in a participating factory. In addition, 36 percent of women in the same factory reported missing work due to painful periods.

- » **Pre- and post-natal and care:** Female workers are often unaware of the need for pre-natal care, wholesome nutritious food during pregnancy and post-natal check ups. For example, in two HERproject factories, women workers' knowledge of the pre-natal Tetanus Toxoid Immunization grew from 30 percent to 86 percent after the health awareness training modules.

## General health care facilities in factories

National law prescribes that factories over 500 workers need to have access to a full-time trained medical staff such as a nurse. Some factories have visiting doctors who visit the factory once a week. In-house factory health facilities tend to be extremely basic and most factories do not have refrigeration facilities to store injections.

## External health care facilities

Over 90% of health care is provided by the private sector in Pakistan. Public sector hospitals provide both curative and preventative services, however low public expenditure on health<sup>2</sup> has created extremely low quality of services.

Women workers cited the unprofessional work ethic of medical personnel in public hospitals as a deterrent from seeking medical services there. Although female factory workers cannot afford regular care in private hospitals, some female factory workers reported using private services for pre- and post-natal care and delivery.

## BSR's partner organizations for HERproject

BSR has two local partners implementing HERproject in Pakistan—**Aga Khan University** and **Aahung**.

- » **Aga Khan University's** Department of Community Health Science is a well known public health educational institution in the country and works in three major areas—teaching, delivering health services and research. The Reproductive Health Division of the CHS Department focuses on research and teaching related to Reproductive Health issues pertinent to those in Pakistan. CHS has developed successful models in urban and rural settings in Pakistan that emphasize empowerment—building on the strengths of communities.
- » **Aahung** is a leading authority in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Karachi, Pakistan. Aahung's main objective is to increase and improve sexual and reproductive health programs in collaboration with the public and private sector in Pakistan.

## Other organizations in and around Karachi which work on women's health issues

- » **Aurat Foundation**
- » **Family Planning Association of Pakistan**
- » **Green Star Social Marketing**
- » **HANDS** (Health and Nutrition Development Society)
- » **Ipas** (Protecting women's health and advancing women's reproductive rights)

<sup>2</sup> General government expenditure as percentage of total health expenditure is 30%: WHO, World Health Statistics 2010. <http://www.who.int/whosis/whostat/2010/en/index.html>

- » [Marie Stopes Society](#)
- » [PAVHNA](#) (Pakistan Voluntary Health and Nutrition Association)
- » [Shirkatgah](#)