



Examining the Double Burden: Work-Life Challenges of Women in Sri Lanka's Koggala Export processing Zone

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Abstract

This study explores the dual burden faced by women working as machine operators in the Koggala Export Processing (EPZ) in Sri Lanka, who balance paid employment with unpaid domestic responsibilities. Drawing on Marxist feminist theory and a work-life balance framework, the research explores how structural inequalities, workplace exploitation and patriarchal norms impact women to create a double burden which affects women's well-being. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, data was gathered through online semi-structured interviews with women machine operators, their spouses, and human resource and social service officers. The findings reveal that the double burden depends on fixed and inflexible work schedules, insufficient childcare facilities, low wages and limited spousal support and social service increase the challenges faced at work in EPZs. While past literature highlights the significant gender disparities in leadership, unfair treatment and workplace exploitation, the study was not found any notable information on gender base harassment, inequalities, and discrimination within the industry. Despite some workplace welfare measures, significant policy and structural gaps persist. The study emphasizes the need for integrated reforms including flexible work arrangements, equitable labour laws for women workers in state and private sector, subsidized childcare and strengthened public-private and public- public partnerships to facilitate working women as a stakeholder approach who driven by the Sri Lankan government, CSR initiatives, private sector companies, international agencies like ILO, WORLD bank and NGOs . These changes are essential to minimize the dual burden and enhance the well-being of women machine operators in Sri Lanka's EPZs.

Key words

Dual burden, work-life balance, women garment workers, Special Economic Zones, Sri Lanka, Marxist feminism, gender roles, labour laws.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
IDD	International Direct Dialing
WHO	World Health Organization
BOI	Board of Investment
NGO	Non-Government Organization
HR	Human Resource
ILO	International Labour Organization
IFC	International Finance Corporation
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
EU	European Union
GSP+	Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

The policy reforms towards economic liberalization in the late 1970s in Sri Lanka shifted the economy from import substitution oriented industrialization to export-oriented industrialization (Arunatilake, 2012 in Hancock, 2015). Due to deteriorating trade from the 1950's, Sri Lanka embarked on a path to industrialization (Kelegama, 2007 in Hancock, 2009). These industries based on light manufacturing industries like garments, food processing specially tea and coconut based products, rubber and plastic products, This created more employment opportunities for younger women in tourism and labor-intensive manufacturing industries, such as those in Export Processing Zones (¹EPZs), agriculture, and factory work (Arunatilake, 2012 in Hancock, 2015). While industrial work was initially male- dominated, the increment of EPZs motivated women to join the industries, who were seen as more suitable for this type of job and often accepted low wages². Most men in Sri Lanka were engaged agricultural related activities, particularly on plantations. However, after the happening of civil war in 1983, many of men joined the military services and women prominent in the garment industry. Being less likely to take part in collective action or turn down repetitive and low-paid jobs, women are exploited as an inexpensive and passive workforce (Sivananthiran, 2007 in Hancock, 2015).

A large part of manufacturing in Sri Lanka is promoted via industrial zones which act as important centers where groups of industries are located. EPZs are largely female- dominated work places especially rife with gender-inequality and poor working conditions (Engman et al., 2007; Sivananthiran, 2007, Hancock et al., 2011b in Hancock, 2015). The majority of EPZs do not provide their female staff with adequate income or support; employees are forced to live in squalor, work long hours - without access to child care or aid during pregnancy – with many potentially dealing with sexual and (or) physical abuse (Engman et al., 2007 in Hancock, 2015). This has been the case ever since the 1970s and remains largely the case today, despite some policy reforms.

In the garment industry in Sri Lanka 70% of the employees are women (Weerakkody, 2022). According to the department of Census and Statistic,

¹ EPZs specifically focus on manufactured goods that are largely aimed for export markets. EPZ objectives are to create new jobs, boost growth in trade, exports, and foreign exchange earnings, facilitate economic diversification and industrialization, and provide access to foreign technology and management expertise. They provide a functional advantage to investors seeking to capitalize on the economies of scale that a geographic concentration of production and manufacturing may bring to a trade region (Hancock, 2015).

² Young and poor women in Mexico are used as a convenient labour force both willing to adjust to the demand of 10 hour per week and low wages that is 1.46 times lower than that of their male counterparts(fashionstudiesjournal.com). Because their employment conditions are unstable and their work is considered second class and of little economic value, women are viewed as unskilled, weak, and temporary workers and are often exploited by companies that prefer to hire them as they can be paid lower wages than men(fashionstudiesjournal.com).

2024 the 274,127 of total workers work in the textile and garment industry. This is frequently explained by their perceived capacity to adjust to the working environment, decreased vulnerability to union activity, and lower salary demands in comparison to male employees. But from the viewpoint of the women who work in these factories, this "easy management" is a kind of structural oppression (Weerakkody, 2022).

Social assumptions frequently put an extra burden on women being the primary domestic care provider in addition to work (Bianchi et al., 2000 in Aliyev, 2023). Historically women act as an agent of primary domestic care provider, however in modern era they are playing dual role as a domestic care provider and work. In the Sri Lankan context, most of the women in garment factories make an exclusive effort to become successful in their lives with successful family life and those women workers try to make their children educated (Weerakkody, 2022). Those who are from villages manage their wage by minimizing non-essential expenses and sending their wages to their siblings for educational purposes and their parents (Weerakkody, 2022).

The work life balance of workers is one of the major areas, which must be taken care of for women well-being, and the well-being of their children. Work-life balance could be stated as the reflection of a person's orientation on their range of roles, along with consideration for other social actors implicated in such roles (Tausig & Fenwick, 2001 in Gangwani. et al, (2020)). A suitable work life balance strategy reduce physical and mental health issues and elevates job satisfaction of the employee along with increasing productivity and health care issues for the employer (Gangwani. et al, (2020) in Thompson, Andreassi, & Prottas, (2003). This situation may change over time, as many factories now start to offer a range of welfare facilities. This can be further discussed and can be explore through participant's responses in subsequent section.

Koggala Export Processing Zone is one key manufacturing area, situated outside Colombo with more than 20 industries. Further in Sri Lanka, there are mainly 3 EPZs: Katunayake, Biyagama, and Koggala. Since then, the country has established 15 EPZs (Verité Research, 2024). Beyond these are several export processing zones located outside Colombo such as Horana, Kandy Mirigama, Malwatte, Mawathagama, Polgahawela, Seethwaka, Bingiria and Wathupitiwala. The economy of Sri Lanka heavily depends on the garment manufacturing industry and contributes to the national income, employment rate, foreign exchange, direct investments, etc. According to the central bank report, Sri Lanka year 2024, 5061 million USD income achieved by the textile and garment industry and this is 39.6% of total export of the respective year. Engman and Farole (2012) reported that EPZs normally offer an advantage to investors compared to the domestic market by creating scale incentives; "allowing for a combination of duty-free imports of raw materials, intermediate goods, and capital goods as well as streamlined and on- site customs services".

The study on dual burden experienced by working women in Koggala export processing zone is linked to the broader discourse on rural development. Because most of workers come from surrounding villages, such as Habaraduwa, Imaduwa, Weligama, Koggala, Dikkumbura, and Akuressa, while the industrial establishments themselves are situated within a rural setting. Employment opportunities generated by the EPZ have introduced new income opportunities, skill development and potential empowerment. Moreover, the presence of the EPZ has contributed to stimulating local-economies and fostering in infrastructure development within the rural communities. Therefore, by examining the work life challenges encountered by the women in this context, the study not only underscores the positive contributions of industrial employment to the rural development but also provide significance insights in to the social economic transformation occurring in the surrounding rural communities.

The study focuses on women employees involved with machine operations in textile industries. These operations include fabric cutting, sewing stitching and quality control of the product to ensure the smooth operations in the industry. Women machinists in Koggala EPZ, faced dual burden which is made worse by gender inequity, patriarchal norms, and lack of workplace support. However, the previous studies don't show the combined effects of stress from the home and the workplace. Therefore, this study emphasizes the necessity of exploring the causes behind this burden, and how women manage it. Further, the findings of the study will be helpful to promote gender equality and enhance their well-being, considering the lack of efficient legal and structural solutions to these challenges.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the double burden of women workers working in EPZ in Sri Lanka focusing on the challenges they face at home and at the workplace. While the study based on the experience of women machine operators in Koggala, the study seeks to identify structural practices that are common across EPZs in Sri Lanka.

This study seek to understand how well current workplace laws and social welfare initiatives promote women's work-life balance and general well-being in order to identify policy gaps and suggest structural and regulatory reforms that advance gender equality, enhance working conditions, and the overall quality of life for female employees in EPZ.

To achieve this aim, the following research questions will be addressed.

- How does the dual burden of unpaid domestic work and paid employment manifest for women machine operators in Sri Lanka, Koggala Export Processing Zone.

- To what extent are existing workplace regulations and social welfare programs supportive of the well-being and work-life balance of female EPZ employees?
- What are the feasible structural and state policy changes to improve their well-being and support gender equity within the global garment industry?

2. Theory

The dual burden that women garment workers in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) endure is explained extensively in this chapter. It appears at the problems of industrial labour, household duties, and structural disparities from a Marxist feminist perspective and uses work-life balance as a framework to seek improvements.

2.1 The Garment/Apparel sector and women's work

For many years before 1977, the Sri Lankan apparel industry was shaped by an interventionist trade policy based on locally woven textiles for local use, but the industry remained nascent (Athukorala and Ekanayake 2018 in Ruwanpura 2022). All of that changed with the open economic policies that came with subsidies and tax incentives, orienting the industry away from woven textiles and towards clothing manufacturing for exports (Ruwanpura 2022). The advent of free market policies led the establishment of the first Free Trade Zone (FTZ) as Katunayake in the late 1970s and attracted Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Ruwanpura 2022). Over time, the FTZ became focused on manufacturing goods specially for export orient sector like garments and term EPZ became more widely used. While ETZs encompassed with activities including trade storage and services, EPZs are more narrowly focused on export- oriented manufacturing, export performance requirements and the regulation.

Trading via East Asian intermediaries characterized the first phase for foreign operated Sri Lankan apparel firms. By the mid- 1980s, this reliance on intermediaries receded, as international buying offices based in the West, often with direct links to retailers, moved to the country to create a permanent presence (Athukorala and Ekanayake 2018 in Ruwanpura, 2022). Together with these transformations, several local firms also set up production facilities and some initiatives started as collaborative joint venture operations, while others matured from being local manufacturers to having a global presence (Ruwanpura 2022).

More than 250 apparel factories have developed in Sri Lanka's garment sector with private ownership by domestic and international investors, in both EPZs and village areas (Samarakoon et al., 2022 in Weerakkody 2023). The factories in EPZs focused on export- oriented market and village- level factories focused more likely on both domestic market and international market. Some reputed garment factories have established village level branches to ensure easy access to female work force. Sri Lanka exports clothing, including streetwear, lingerie, swimwear, athletic, uniforms, and children's clothing.

The bulk of the workforce in the sector is made up of female employees, who are mostly employed in lower- level positions on manufacturing floors (Gunatilaka, 2019; Jayawardena, 2014; Lynch, 1999; Madurawala, 2017;

Seneviratne, 2011 in Samarakoon et al., 2022). According to the literature on female floor employees in the Sri Lankan clothing sector, impoverished, rural, and rural migrants. (Hewamanne, 2003 in Weerakkody 2023)2023). Ruwanpura 2022 was mentioned that Sri Lankan labourers were highly educated, there were higher social development levels within the country and baseline was different when compare the other developing countries. With just-in-time production or lean manufacturing becoming the industrial norm with begins the EPZs, Goger (2013) in Wickramasingha (2024) explains how it has created an extremely competitive atmosphere with a fast-paced and highly stressful production regime. In addition to the absence of leave and holidays, workers have less time for breaks, visit doctors, and recover and recuperate when sick. Even within factory medical facilities, Ruwanpura (2017) in Wickramasingha (2024) found that workers' ability to access treatment in the factory clinic depends on successful negotiation with gatekeepers against whom workers are hierarchically positioned.

Moreover, recurrent overtime encroaches on the time workers have for resting, preparing evening meals for their families, and other daily domestic work (Wickramasingha 2024). The garment sector, often characterized as feminist labour, heavily relies on women workers. Working conditions in this sector frequently fall short of ILO standards (Velasco, et al 2024). Since late 1980s the Sri Lankan government passed decrees which ranged from minimum wages and zero tolerance of child labour to the provision of locker rooms and appropriate toilet ratios, all of which was monitored by three bodies - the Board of Investment, labour department and zonal authorities (Ruwanpura 2022). With already high labour standards, Sri Lanka then became one of the first countries to adopt the ethical codes initiated by leading garment firms in the 1990s (Ruwanpura 2016 in Wickramasingha 2024). In this context, it is widely recognized that the overall workplace standards in the Sri Lankan apparel industry are better compared to other apparel producing countries globally (Wijayasiri and Dissanayake 2009 in Wickramasingha 2024).In India, the young workers face severe challenges due to poor occupational health standards and inadequate access to healthcare, exacerbating the already harsh conditions (Velasco, et al 2024). Female workers in the leather and garment sectors in Vietnam suffer from various health issues, including diseases affecting bones, joints, nervous systems, and respiratory systems, due to poor working conditions. The Vietnam Labour Union Law of 2012 permits the formation of unions; however, these unions are under the control of the Communist Party of Vietnam, which limits their independence and potentially affects their effectiveness in advocating for workers' rights(Velasco, et al 2024). In Nepal there are also no fixed or flexible working hours, highlighting the instability and lack of security in their employment(Velasco, et al 2024).

Having a good reputation for decent work and strong labour laws does not, however, necessarily mean decent work on the Sri Lankan shop floors. In particular, low wages, long working hours, discrimination in many aspects including gender, ethnicity, and formal and informal work arrangement, and the absence of meaningful forms of representation at the workplace afflict the

industry (Gunawardana 2007, 2016; Ruwanpura 2016, 2022a; Hewamanne 2017, 2021 in Wickramasingha 2024). The wages are not sufficient to meet the economic requirements, despite the long working hours and exploitative conditions faced by women machine operators in Nepal, female workers are paid on a piece-rate basis without guaranteed minimum wages or benefits, such as security funds and insurance (Velasco, et al 2024). Like in the global industry, the Sri Lankan apparel industry too is characterized by target oriented, fast-paced working conditions that exploit women's labour for low wages (De Neve 2009; Ruwanpura 2012, 2016; Carswell and De Neve 2013; Goger 2014; Gunawardana 2014; Hewamanne 2016; Saxena 2020 in Wickramasingha 2024).

Workers seldom make a living wage, and the increments of the Wages Board³ rarely keep pace with the inflation rate (Ruwanpura 2012, 2022a in Wickramasingha 2024). In Sri Lanka, wage board is composed of the commissioner of labour, representative of employers and workers (trade union) in the respective industry both men and women are eligible for the appointment (Lawnet.gov.lk. 2025).

Since overtime is a necessity for workers to earn a higher wage packet, national labour regulations are changed in the EPZs to allow extended work hours (Ruwanpura 2016 in Wickramasingha 2024). Thus, Sri Lankan factories too demand maximum output for minimum wages, contrary to the claims of exceptional labour standards maintained by the Sri Lankan apparel industry (Hewamanne 2016 in Wickramasingha 2024). Based on Wickramasingha and Coe (2021), labour regimes refer to the system through which work is organized, managed experienced and shaped by the relation between workers, employers, the national government and global actors including powerful buyers in export markets and their respective governments. Labour regime theory is not only about how labour is controlled but also how workers exercise their agency, negotiation and collective actions across dispersed institutions and markets. However, in Global Production Networks (GPNs), labour regimes help to explain why working conditions can differ between two or more countries even though they produce same international bands. Factors like local laws, government policies, labour movements and the influence of global civil society all contribute to shaping these labour regimes.

³ The wage board for the garment manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka was established in September 2006. It is responsible for setting up the regulation for minimum wages, overtime pay and holiday entitlements for workers in the garment industry. It ensures fair wages and better working conditions for garment workers (Department of Labour, 2025).

2.5 Marxist feminist theory explaining the dual burden of women garment workers

Karl Marx, a German Philosopher, analyzed the social structure of capitalism which was supposed to apply to all workers. This can be used in any society with a system that exploits workers by prioritizing profit over their well-being. According to his theory of struggle between classes, capitalists (owners) maximize profits by paying workers minimal wages and obtaining as much labour as possible from them. In any society where workers including women in Export Processing Zones (EPZs) face exploitation, low pay, long hours, and unfavorable working conditions, this concept is extremely significant. Large multinational companies look for inexpensive labour in these areas, putting production goals ahead of worker rights, much like Marx outlined in industrial capitalism.

Marx's approach aids in the analysis of how modern capitalism still oppress workers, particularly women, who are also responsible for performing unpaid domestic duties. Marxist ideas are expanded upon by feminist scholars, who emphasize how patriarchy and capitalism work together to increase exploitation and place a double burden on women. Federici (2004) highlighted that women were the initial victims of capitalist development since capitalist accumulation initially targeted their bodies, time, and labour power. It can also be applied to women workers in Sri Lanka's export processing zone since the companies looking for cheap labour or the production. Women are vital for capitalism not only because of their unpaid work but also because they are vital too, because they support biological and social reproduction to build up the next generation of workers, ensuring the system continuous. Social reproduction refers the system that are necessary to maintain and support human life specially specially cooking, cleaning raising children and caring elders. These unpaid responsibilities mostly done by the women and that means not only the factory job but also household system also involve the capitalist system.

If the husbands fall into hard times, the housewives can do work at home or take a temporary job to earn extra money. If the husbands' wages fall lower than the minimum requirements to feed their families, the housewives can work in factories or shops (Dang and Webuke 2022). In the Sri Lankan context, most of the women in these garments take an exclusive effort to become a success in their lives with successful family life and these women workers try to provide education for their children (Amin et al, 1998). Therefore, it can be seen that several women in the Koggala area and surrounding rural village have applied for machinist positions in the Koggala Export Processing Zone (EPZ). Women's increased responsibility for supporting their households financially has resulted in a significant change in family dynamics. Therefore, I hope to find out the reason, why women employees join EPZ as machine operators. Nevertheless, this additional duty can frequently result in women bearing a "double burden," managing paid employment and domestic responsibilities, negatively impacting their well-being. Many women still face difficulties

balancing several tasks, motivated by their great desire to ensure the welfare of their families and family members. Therefore, my goal is to investigate the long-term goals that drive these women, specifically how their desires for economic growth, family stability, or children's education relate to their endurance in such difficult work situations. Gaining a better understanding of these objectives will help to understand how these women manage their challenges and balance their responsibilities.

2.5.1 Burden of the industrial working conditions

Apparel industries share a pyramidal structure favoring subcontracting and typified by poor worker conditions and (or) rights (Ferus-Comello, 2006 in Hancock, 2015). Outsourcing practices in foreign countries are effective in reducing costs by instituting precarious working conditions and exploiting local workers vis-a-vis long hours and low wages, thereby increasing the company's profitability whilst reducing employment and fair labour relations (Hancock, 2015)

Moreover, females spend a disproportionate amount of time working compared to men (representing three quarters of all hours worked), whilst only accruing 10% of accumulated salaries world-wide (Morris, 2013 in Hancock, 2015). Morris (2013) in Hancock (2015) argued that an increased focus on women and reducing gender inequity at a global level was warranted, given that females represent half of the world population but only own 1% of land around the world and are prone to disenfranchisement, illiteracy or poverty and exposed to physical and sexual mistreatment. In addition to being already at a disadvantage due to their "gender," they also face entrenchment from exploitative employers, which is made worse by their historically low socioeconomic status in Sri Lanka and around the world. (Arunatilake, 2012; Fernandez & Sotelo Valencia, 2013; Ferus-Comelo, 2006; Lynch, 2007).

Marxist and Socialist feminists argue that male-dominated public and private authorities prioritize their interests rather than women's (Dang and Webuke 2022). Considering, top-rung, skilled jobs on the shop floor of the industry, such as factory manager, production manager, production executive, and quality controller/quality assurance executive, are predominantly held by men (Jayawardena & Dhammika, (2017). Therefore, men generally hold higher positions in the organizational hierarchy in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), whereas women are usually assigned to lower-level roles. This gender disparity is evident in decision-making positions, where males are in charge and women have little chance to assume leadership roles. Due to established gender disadvantages in the workplace, women must navigate unfair treatment, exploitation, and limited professional advancement while balancing work. Therefore, I hope to find out, how traditional gender expectation shape their experiences at work. And hope to discover what difficulties they face trying to balance this situation.

Marx said this is simply the form that exploitation takes in capitalism. The unpaid surplus labour women have no choice but to do in the home is exploited

labour. Whether it is husbands, or men in general, or both capitalists and men who exploit domestic labour (Fakier,2020). Direct and indirect forms of exploitation are experienced by female workers in the Koggala Export Processing Zone (EPZ). The "double shift" that these women experience is working in factories under harsh conditions for less pay, which benefits foreign markets and factory owners, while still performing unpaid household duties at home. According to Federici 2020, Women's labour is essential to the capitalist economy, lowering the total cost of labour production. However, the state and employers bear less of the financial burden of providing social services like affordable daycare due to women's unpaid domestic work, which absorbs these additional responsibilities without payment. Their exploitation is thus highlighted by the fact that both their paid and unpaid labour support the capitalist system by offering dependable and affordable labour. Therefore, it is expected to find out the women workers' perception on policies and regulations that need to be implement in the future to improve the work-life balance and gender equity withing the globalized garment industry, where labour conditions are shaped by international supply chains.

The ILO and IFC's Better Work programme is launching an ambitious intervention in Sri Lanka, with the support of the European Union. The shared goal is to strengthen the apparel industry recovering from the pandemic and work toward a future of increased resilience, efficiency, and sustainability. The Better Work team will closely collaborate on the initiative with national partners – government, employers, workers, and their organizations. Building upon the experiences with the Academy and on its global expertise, the Better Work programme will support national constituents in Sri Lanka to promote international labour standards and promote more effective partnerships and sound industrial relations(International Labour Organization 2022). This program intervention on occupational safety and health, in the context of COVID-19 management and recovery, including using risk assessments, strengthening management systems, conducting leadership training and training of trainers, and awareness campaigns promoting improved mental health and well-being. Gender, Diversity and Inclusion, including leadership skills training and career development for women workers, implementation of the ILO C190 toolkit addressing harassment and violence in the workplace, and facilitating access to pregnancy-related healthcare, childcare and maternity protection. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), including leadership and financial literacy training for SME management, implementation of a factory improvement toolkit including management systems and productivity interventions, and increasing visibility to supply chain partners. Better Work is a partnership between the UN's International Labour Organization and the International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group. On-the-ground in 12 countries across three continents, Better Work brings diverse groups together governments, global brands, factory owners, and unions and workers to improve working conditions in the garment industry and make the sector more competitive (International Labour Organization 2022). The ILO out lines several key criteria to protect women workers, including right of equal

pay, non-discrimination, maternity protection, freedom of association, safe and harassment free workplace.

Although Sri Lanka currently practises EU's GSP+ trade scheme and it offers a special incentive for developing countries to promote sustainable development and good governance. To qualify to this scheme countries must need to effectively implement 27 international conventions including human rights, labour rights, good governance and environmental protection. The EU grants duty free access to European market for over two-third of the tariff lines. On their exports. EU GSP+ aims to support economic growth of the country while encouraging strong legal and institutional reforms in beneficiary countries (Europa. EU 2025)

Further, European Parliament has consistently called for more corporate accountability and mandatory due diligence legislation. The Commission proposal introduced on 23 February 2022 complements other existing and upcoming legislative acts, such as the deforestation regulation, conflict minerals regulation and regulation prohibiting products made with forced labour by adopting this legislation, Parliament is responding to citizens' expectations concerning sustainable consumption as expressed in proposal 5(13), strengthening the ethical dimension of trade as expressed in proposals 19(2) and 19(3) and the sustainable growth model as expressed in proposal 11(1) and 11(8) of the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Therefore, the Sri Lankan government more focus on this international supply chain legislation since Europe is one of significant important market for Sri Lankan apparels (European Parliament 2024).

2.5.2 The domestic workload: Patriarchal norms and women's responsibilities at home

Working women around the globe face the challenge of balancing the responsibilities and commitments assigned to their traditional roles as providers at home and formal job requirements at the workplace (Gunatilaka, 2019). The literature on gender-role attitudes explains that women's participation in the workforce is more acceptable than changes in the household division of labour, according to Gunatilaka, (2019) in Kane and Sanchez (1994). Traditional gender norms at home are still hard to change, despite society's growing acceptance of women working. Even when working full-time, women are still expected to take care of the most of household duties even if they are now encouraged to pursue a career. A continuing imbalance in the division of labour is highlighted by the fact that men are not held to the same standards for household duties. Working women find this difficult since they must balance managing their jobs and domestic duties, which can have a detrimental impact on their well-being.

Walby (1989) also stated that patriarchy is a system of social control and practices, where men dominate and exploit women. In a patriarchal society, the

economic and household systems often allow men to make decisions without considering women's voices. This leads to inequalities in decision-making because women can't make independent decisions about what they do at home or at work. Regardless of their work status, women in Sri Lanka are expected to handle household duties due to cultural norms, which furthers their exploitation under patriarchal and capitalist systems. I hope to find out, how conventional gender norms influence their professional experiences and the challenges they encounter.

The socialist feminists argued for social wages to bridge the divide between paid productive work and unpaid reproductive labour (Dang and Webuke 2022). Both globally and domestically, there is a growing effort to address these inequalities via legislation on equal pay, maternity leave and support for child-care. International Labour Organization (ILO) also describe decent work that align with social wages like adequate income support, protection of workers against the effects of illness, disease and injury arising out of his employment, the protection of children (Deranty and MacMillan 2012). This argument provides a theoretical framework to analyse how unpaid women can be valued as social wages, including in Sri Lanka's current socioeconomic structure. The majority of EPZs do not provide their female staff with adequate income or support; employees are forced to live in squalor and work long hours - without access to daycare or aid during pregnancy with many potentially dealing with sexual and (or) physical abuse (Engman et al 2007). In Sri Lanka, the state provides very little assistance for childcare, which puts additional strain on working women. Many families find it challenging to balance work and care giving obligations due to the high cost of childcare. Because mothers are more likely to take on unpaid care giving duties while balancing employment, the absence of support for accessible, reasonably priced daycare and the restricted possibilities for maternity leave frequently perpetuate traditional gender roles. When considering the public sector, it is also given only three days of paternity leave for the birth of each child, as per government regulations. In Sri Lanka, it is a good idea to divide the caring responsibilities equally between mothers and fathers. Therefore, social wages like childcare and eldercare support, housing support, retirement benefits, flexible working policies, paid maternity leaves, and transport subsidies could be particularly positively impact for the women in EPZ, Sri Lanka. It can determine how family members such as spouses and kids can help women be recognized and valued for their roles and how this affects how women view themselves.

As Armstrong (2020) put it, the social wage sought to give material value to reproductive labour. Applying this concept to Koggala EPZ women workers would require recognizing the importance of their unpaid domestic labour on balance with their paid employment. By making their efforts both within and outside the home visible and appreciated, a social wage or other supportive measures could help reduce the financial and personal burden of these dual jobs.

Another approach related to the value of reproduction labour : In the late 1930s, Mary Inman argued that reproductive labour should be recognized as

productive work (Inman, 1940 in Dang and Webuke, 2022). According to Inman, these works sustain families and workers, which increases the economy and they deserve value and appreciation. Therefore, by facilitating some of the strains associated with managing paid employment and household duties, such policies may assist women in Koggala EPZ to attain a better work-life balance. Policies that help, such as paid parental leave, reasonably priced childcare, or social wages, would be strengthened if women's labour were acknowledged as productive.

The theory shows how crucial gender equality is to the division of work. By fostering the acknowledgment of reproductive labour, we can promote a more equal distribution of domestic duties between men and women. Furthermore, recognizing and valuing reproductive labour can improve women's well-being. By addressing the challenges, they face in balancing paid work with household duties, we can create an environment that supports their physical and mental health, ultimately benefiting both the workers and their families.

2.6 A work life balance framework

The developed work-life balance framework provides a lens to analyse the dual burden faced by women machine operators in Sri Lanka's EPZ, Koggala. This framework was developed using Marxist and socialist feminist perspectives particularly referencing the works of Federici (2020) and Fakier (2020), who highlights the women exploitation as paid and unpaid labour. It aims to look in to how structural inequalities and workplace conditions and cultural norms impact women's experience in EPZs Finally It aims to understand what policy changes are required to improve work life balance and gender equity.

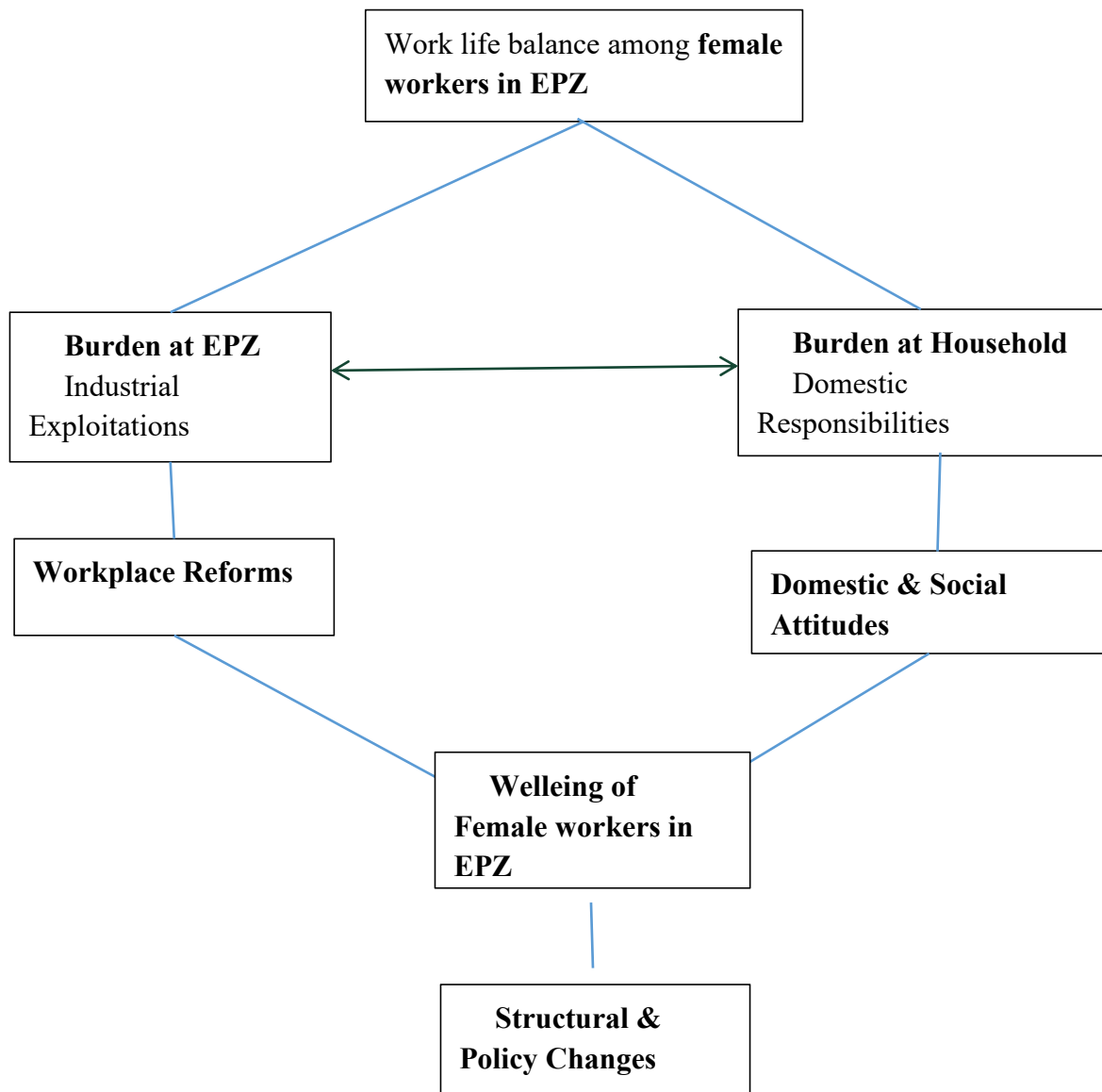


Figure 1: Work life balance framework

Women workers in EPZ are facing a dual burden of paid industrial work and unpaid domestic responsibilities. It is significantly impacting their well-being. To address these issues, workplace reforms are necessary to reduce economic exploitation by ensuring fair wages, flexible working hours, avoid long working hours, ensuring job security and accommodate care giving and childcare needs. Simultaneously, domestic and social reforms are essential to alleviate household burden such as promoting shares family responsibilities and facilitate affordable childcare and eldercare services. Further for sustainable long-term solutions, structural and policy intervention are essential. Legal policies ensuring gender equity in wages, parental leaves both father and

mother, workspace safety and counselling are vital to make a supportive environment for female workers.

Further public private partnership can play a key role in can play a key role in facilitating childcare centers and health care facilities within the EPZ. This may help to reduce both financial and emotional stress on working women. By addressing these challenges, the work life balance frame- work aims to enhance the well-being of female workers. Finally, this framework advocate for a more balance and equitable environment for women workers in both paid and unpaid roles.

3 Methodology

The methodology section outlines the systematic approach employed to examine the research problem, concentrating on the experiences and perspectives of women machine operators in the Koggala Export Processing Zone (EPZ) concerning work-life balance and the dual obligations of factory employment and domestic responsibilities.

3.1. Research Design

Creswell & Creswell, (2018), discuss the process of selection of a research approach to suit a specific research problem. According to the authors research approaches are plans and processes that cover steps from research problem to detailed data collection, analysis and interpretation methods. The choice of research design depends on the questions asked, the personal experiences of the researcher and the audience of the research is conducted for (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The study utilizes a qualitative research design, which is ideal for in-depth exploration of personal experiences, perspectives, and social phenomena (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). By allowing participants to tell their stories in their own terms and emphasizing the social and cultural factors that shaped their experiences, this approach promotes an open-ended, qualitative research study.

Understanding the core of the participants lived experiences is the goal of a phenomenological method within the qualitative design (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). This study is an appropriate match for phenomenology since it seeks to examine how people view and understand their work-life balance and manage the conflicting demands of both home life and factory job. By concentrating on the experiences of the participants, the study seeks to identify changes, difficulties, and coping mechanisms that are embedded in the EPZ's.

3.2. Methods

Qualitative researchers commonly collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, or interviewing participants. According to Cresswell & Cresswell (2018), interviews are the most common approach used in qualitative research. Interviews can be conducted in person or telephone, making them suitable when researcher directly cannot participate as an observer, and it is suitable to over the line of questioning. Since I was residing in Sweden during the time of the study and could not directly observe the participants, video interviews were chosen as primary method of data collection. Face to face interview is more effective to build better connection it allows to interviewers to observe body languages of the participants. In contrast video interviews were had issues with poor connection and also understand the body language of the participants.

Semi-structured interviews follow a list of subjects with predetermined language and order, they provide the interviewer the freedom to modify the questions and order according to the discussion, frequently incorporating follow-up questions (Robson & McCartan, 2016). According Cresswell & Cresswell (2018), the Sample size depends on the qualitative design being used (e.g., ethnography, case study). The authors explained that many qualitative research studies phenomenology involves a range of 3–10; grounded theory, 20–30; ethnography examines one single culture-sharing group with numerous artifacts, interviews, and observations; and case studies include about four to five cases. Therefore, in depth semi-structured interviews (Appendix 1) were conducted with 10 female workers in Koggala EPZ to gain insights into their personal experiences. The interviews were conducted remotely due to geographical constraints.

Interviews were conducted with two husbands whose spouses are employed in an Export Processing Zone (EPZ), development officer in the Department of Social Service who is responsible for the area Officer of the Human Resource department works at Koggala EPZ. One of my colleagues of the National apprentice and industrial training authority facilitate to select suitable participants and arranged the technical part of the interviews. He has arranged all the interviews by visiting participants residence and act as a research assistant. As he is already living in the area, his involvement was particularly effective in building trust between myself and participants. I have conducted nine interviews with audio recordings and three interviews with written notes. Development officer of the department of social service was contacted with the support of director, department of social service, Sri Lanka and the interview was conducted directly by me.

Reference to Robson & McCarton (2016), long questions can confuse the interviewee, as they may only remember and respond to part of the question. Therefore, It was avoided the double-barrelled questions, which combine multiple issues and will broke down them into simpler, separate questions to avoid doubt. Questions involving unfamiliar terms can confuse participants, so using simple, clear language is important, Robson & McCarton (2016). So, I have applied those principles when conducting interviews with participants. Sinhalese language was used for the interviews and simple forms of scientific terms were used for the better understanding. The audio data were manually transcribed and record kept as separate document per each interview.

3.2.1. Participant Selection

The study employed both purposive and snowball sampling technique. Purposive sampling facilitates the selection of participants based on specific criteria align with the research objectives. According to Patton. (2015), this method is suitable for qualitative research because it allows the researcher to target participants who have direct and meaningful insights in to the research problem.

For the study, two large companies in the Koggala Export Processing Zone (EPZ) were selected. These factories were selected because they employ a significant number of women and are relevant to the apparel industry, which is well-known for employing a significant number of female machine operators. Therefore, the sites and individuals were identified purposefully for the study. The interviews were conducted outside the factories, so there were no issues in contacting participants at their workplace. Since the machine operator did not have enough time to converse during working hours, this approach was more practical. Many of factory workers of those two factories lived in surrounding villages, which meant that accessibility was easy. Cresswell & Cresswell (2018) explain the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question.

Based on that, only women machine operators who are currently employed as machine operators were selected, as the study focuses on the gendered nature of work-life balance. Further i selected women who have more than one year experience as machine operator to ensure that the participants have enough familiarity with the work environment. I have selected women who got married and having children to explore the impact of domestic obligations on work life balance. After the first set of participants is identified through purposive sampling, the study employs a snowball sampling technique to find out additional participants. Patton (1990) noted that the researcher identifies one case of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich. Therefore, I used existing participants to recommend other women machine operators who meet the study criteria and are willing to share their experiences.

Because of its strategic importance in Sri Lanka's apparel industry and the high proportion of women working there, the Koggala EPZ was chosen as the study location. Geographically, the Koggala EPZ is located between the important settlements in Sri Lanka's Southern Province. These nearby communities are where most of the female employees in the EPZ come from Habaraduwa, Imaduwa, Koggala and Waligama. Because there are few other economic options and the possibility of steady income, women from these regions are usually enticed to work in the EPZ. However, there are significant work-life balance issues associated with working in clothing manufacturing. Majority of female employee originally come from nearby village areas. Therefore. The women workers in EPZ Koggala are experienced both dual burden of household and the industry. Traditional domestic duties like childcare and household administration add to the rigorous nature of factory employment, which is marked by long working hours, production objectives, and regimented working conditions.

3.2.2. Background of the participants

The women machine operators interviewed in the study originally come from rural communities in Sri Lanka's Southern Province, including villages such as Habaraduwa, Imaduwa, Akuressa and surrounding areas close to Koggala EPZ. These areas characterized by agrarian economics specially tea plantations and scarce formal employment opportunities. Many participants migrated from their hereditary villages to work in EPZ because of marriage, and some are originally live nearby rural households. Demographically, participants are aged 23 to 45, married with 1 to 3 children, and often live with their parents. Their partners typically work in informal sectors like three-wheel drivers, masons, welders or low paying government jobs. Two husbands of women machine operators' were interviewed. One of them do a government job for living and other one is a taxi driver. Human resource officer of one factory (shift 10 to 12 hours) was interviewed. She has more than five years' experience in the field of human resource management. Development officer of department of social services was interviewed to gather information on existing social services and future suggestions.

3.2.3 Koggala export processing zone

The introduction of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) was a new concept, new policy and new experience in Sri Lanka four decades ago. They are multifaceted which changed the socioeconomic environment in the Sri Lankan community. The main objective of the establishment of an EPZ is to promote industrial development under an export-oriented strategy. The generation of employment in EPZs has contributed as the main source of economic development in the regions (Perera 2019). Many employers daily come from rural communities surrounding Habaraduwa, Ahangama, Imaduwa, Weligama, Koggala, Unawatuna, and Midigama.

The Koggala Export Processing Zone is situated around 133 kilometers from Colombo in the Southern Province's Galle District, Habaraduwa Divisional Secretariat. The 227-acre zone, of which 113 acres are classified as an industrial sector, was created in 1991. With two entry points to the Southern Expressway and a proximity of only 1.5 hours to the Hambantota International Seaport, it specializes in serving as a bonded area for Core activities. With 13,160 workers (9,579 women and 3,581 men), the zone offers standard infrastructure such as bus and rail transportation, a dry port for importing and exporting goods, and access to asphalt concrete roads.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Creswell and Creswell (2018), discuss the importance of addressing ethical considerations throughout the research process, especially before conducting research, at the beginning of the study, when collecting data, analyzing reporting, sorting, and sharing data. The author emphasizes the responsibility of researchers to protect participants' thoughts. It is essential to identify a research problem that is crucial to the participants being studied and has broader significance to them beyond the researcher's interest. I also agree with that because it is needed to address or give solutions for real problems of the people while achieving the researcher's academic development. Referring to Creswell, it was selected the participants who voluntarily participate to the study. Avoid deceiving participants, they need to know that, they are actively participating in a research study. As suggested by Robson & Colin (2002), participants were aware before taking the interview and took consent of recording interviews who voluntarily participate to the study. Ethical consideration during online interviews also focuses on informed consent, anonymous participation and confidentiality as in traditional research. Special care is needed to protect identities and secure store digital data (Rodham and Gavin 2006). Currently, I used password protection to secure stored interview data. Actions were taken to get anonymous information while ensuring the security of participants identities and data. Further, as an interviewer I have given fair treatment for all participants without considering their social status, wealth and power by using standardized questions, neutral language and respectful tone. All respect and value were given to the participants and their perception. Hence, they would feel more comfortable and honest with questions those provided. This was expected to have a strong positive impact on the reliability of the outcomes of the research.

3.5. Data analysis

Thematic analyzes were used to analyze the data because it is suitable to analyse live experience and challenges of the participants. Thematic analysis involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Cresswell, 2018). The thematic analysis of qualitative data identified several key themes, which are known as (1) economic exploitation (2) Unpaid domestic responsibilities (3) Patriarchy (4) work- place improvements (5) domestic and social attitudes reforms (6) well-being and (7) structural and policy reforms.

Then transcribed date segmented according to research objectives and divided responses based on each question for ease of review using excel work sheet. As mention by Cresswell & Cresswell (2018), ``winnowing'' the data is important to focus on the most relevant information to focus, ensuring the rich and meaningful analysis.

Then data were coded align with the research objectives by highlighting using different colour for separate codes and same colour for the same codes. Data coding process help to narrow down the findings. Finally, themes were developed using the finalized codes with reference to the research objectives. Based on the developed themes, reflection was made to accomplish the research objective.

4 Results and discussion

The study investigates the dual burden experienced by women machine operators in the Koggala EPZ in Sri Lanka, focusing on intersecting insistence of paid industrial labour and unpaid domestic responsibilities. Interviews with women machine operators revealed themes which align with theoretical perspectives on exploitation, gender inequality, and the undervalued unpaid domestic duties.

According to the background information of the interviews, the economic crisis in 2022 have had a significant impact on Sri Lankan families in recent years, making it harder for men, who are typically viewed as the main breadwinners to provide for basic family necessities. The rising costs of food, clothing, medicine, transportation, and particularly educational expenses like school-age children's tuition fees have put pressure on families' financial capacity. Poverty, falling living cost, and insufficient spouses' income obligates these women seek to factory works. Key expenses include, food and clothing, health care, transportation and children's education (private tuition).

4.1 Industrial works

This chapter explained the participants responses on industrial exploitation experience with the industry. The physically demand nature in the garment industry came up constantly as a serious issue in the interviews. Most respondents reported working 8 to 12 hours shifts, often standing their entire working day. In both day and night shifts the factory provides transport services for workers and offers breakfast. Working in a standing posture at sewing machines. The efficiency of the output depend on the production target and style being manufactured. When new style is introduced, it often increases the stress, as workers must quickly adapt. Although there are no strict restrictions on using rest rooms and toilets, it can be disrupting the production process and reduce the line performance. Therefore, workers strictly focus on the workflow other than their basic needs. Therefore, women machine operators continuously work until lunch, Factory provides free lunch and once the shift ends, transport is arranged to the workers' home.

A participant mention that,

*I have work 10 to 12 hours every day with minimal break
and we must stand all day with no opportunity to sit, and its
leading to severe leg, back pain and fatigue in long term
25.02.2025*

While many respondents mentioned that they were receiving basic salary around LKR 25,000- 28,000 (84-94 USD), and this was often supplemented by attendance allowance and incentives based on the production target. Participants mention that they receive nearly LKR 10,000 (33.54 USD) for target allowance and LKR 5000 (16.77 USD) for attendance allowance. However, the structure of these incentives, especially attendance allowance, often penalized workers for minor absence of other coworkers. They didn't mention the actual values. According to the given values, predicted total monthly salary ranged LKR 40,000-45,000 (134- 151 USD). As mentioned by participant,

I am a member of a line. 12 workers are working in a line. Our attendance allowance is reduced if anyone in the line coworkers take leave, even when not our fault and target incentives are reduced or the same despite increasing targets and work pressure 25.02.2025

Federici (2004), have emphasized that underestimate the labour by conceptualizing production as the only measure of the worth, overlooking both the physical value and wants of the worker. Hence this structure discourages women machine operators from taking leaves and further make stress and fatigue.

Participants highlighted differences in access to leave benefit, particularly in equivalence to public sector standards. The social service officer also highlighted the point of not having equal maternity leave benefit for the EPZ women as government employee. This reveals a fault finding gap in the labour protection offered to the EPZ women workers.

A participant mention that,

When I was pregnant, I am entitled for the fully paid 84 days maternity leave while public sector workers entitled to both full and half paid maternity leave. If we did not report after having 84 days leaves, the administration terminates us. However, they give two hours breast feeding break until kid turns year one. I appreciate it. Because of that I worked six hours shift per day until my kid turns one 26.02.2025

However, consider the public sector employees are entitled to 84 days of fully paid maternity leaves and 84 days of half paid leaves in Sri Lanka. Additionally, employees can request unpaid leave if needed after the paid leave period. Private sector women employee has the same rights, however, informal sector like garment sector, often have limited maternity leave benefit. In Sri Lanka, there is currently no legal provision mandating paternity leave for private-sector employees, although some private companies may offer limited paternity leave as part of their own policies.

Therefore, participants propose to have an equal right to the women workers in the garment industry as women employees on the public sector.

However, participant further mention that,

When I was pregnant, factory allow me to have free foods at any time from the factory, they took special care of me and when it turns month seven the transfer me to the quality division. I was assigned for an easy tasks with sitting option 26.02.2025

In case of EPZ workers in Koggala, the administration gives special attention to the pregnant labour, however it seems lack of state support and regulatory inadvertence when allocating equal labour rights to the women workers in Sri Lanka.

Based on the interview data, the patriarchal structure endures across multiple view of participant's domestic lives and the factor work, although their evidence varies. While no bald or systematic gender discrimination and harassment was reported at the factories, male dominance in leadership positions still exist. However considerable number of women workers also work in upper hierarchical positions.

One women worker said,

We are working in machine operator category, there are few male workers who work as machine operators and related positions. Even though men are mostly in higher partitions, we are treated equally when distributing work and wages 25. 02. 2025

Therefore, the decision making at higher organizational level is significantly male driven, though daily operations between genders are mostly equitable. Dang and Webuke. 2022, argued that male dominated public private authorities prioritize their interest and decisions rather than voice working women. This is quite tally with the decision- making power of the of the upper hierarchical level in the factories of EPZ Koggala. However, gender inequalities among same and related job categories does not exist.

Gender discrimination and harassment were minimal at the workplace level, significantly due to strict human resource policy and active intervention of Human Resource (HR) department against verbal conflicts. Based on Human resource manager interview and all participants, physical harassment were not reported. However still verbal reprimands linked to performance target were common, although not specifically gendered.

A participant mention that,

I work nearly five years in this factory, but I have never experienced any physical harassment either me or other female

worker based on gender. But some time verbal pressure happens when target is not met. However, HR department always takes measures to address it with discussing production department
27.02,2025

The officer at the human resource department mentioned that,

As an organization, we have very strict policies against physical harassment and culturally such behaviour is not accepted. I can confidently say that no incidents of physical harassment have been reported so far''. but verbal pressure can occur specially when production targets are missed, but we closely monitor these situations and interfere to avoid or control them 22.02.2025

Further the HR officer mentioned that,

We run regular awareness program, and anonymous suggestions boxes were installed in the rest rooms and hold monthly employee council meeting to encourage open communication. If any serious complaint, specially about physical harassment, leads to immediate termination of the offender 22.02.2025

According to the HR officer, while the company maintains a policy of equal opportunity, it is recognized that female carrier advancement tends to be slower compared to the male counterparts. This variant is attribute larger due to cultural expectations and pressure associated with performance- based target rather than to any formal restrictions against women. Despite women machine operators being required to encounter the same production standards as men, there remains noticeable absence of gender sensitive support system, especially provisions for menstrual brakes or flexible working hours for mothers. Because the structural production operations largely controlled by the production supervisors and managers and it is further complicated to introduce such supportive system by HR department.

4.2 Domestic works

This chapter focuses on participants responses about their household duties, highlighting how the pressure of both factory works, and household duties are interconnected their work pressure and stresses. The participants systematically revealed that women machine operators face a dual burden, long working hours in the factor, followed by primary household chores. The responses shows that the experience of balancing domestic responsibilities along with factory job

varies among women workers, heavily depend on the level of spousal support and family support.

One participant describes her daily routing and said,

I wake up 4 am in the morning and cooking and clean home and get ready to the morning shift, during the night shift she said, I prepare food in advance when I have work at night and clean home and garden with support of my husband 03.03.2025

However, she acknowledges her husband's contribution to manage household chores,

I manage my home well because my husband's support and the help of my children 03.03.2025

She accented her husband's role further,

My husband is highly supportive, he helps with cooking and other chores like cleaning, laundry, children's schooling 03.03.2025

Although, she did not report receiving direct verbal appreciation, however she mentions that,

There is no verbal appreciation , but their support is always presented 27.03.2025

It is highlighted that while the dual burden exists, its intensity level and emotional damage can be avoided when significant family support is present.

However, the several interviewees reported a lack of support at home specially from husband, even after full shift at work, they were expected to cook, clean, washing clothes, child and elder care. Husbands often did not participate significantly in domestic labour reward traditional gender norms.

A participant mention that,

I wake up around 4 am in the morning to cook clean and prepare the children for schooling before going to work. After returning home from the day or night shift, I restart householdchores 27.032025

Another participant mentioned that,

Even with the full work load at the factory, no domestic support from spouse or other family members of the husband's side 03.03. 2025

It seems that, she does not have adequate community support from her husband, her parents or husband's relatives. Further she said, "my husband only helps with school transport because his job as a three-wheeler driver is flexible".

As mentioned in Gunatilaka, (2019) and Kane and Sanchez (1994), gender-role attitudes explain that women's participation in the workforce is more acceptable than changes in the household division of labour. Majority of the husbands of the participants support for household responsibilities while others are neglected. Traditional gender role attitudes believe that men should work outside and women need to take responsibility in household. Therefore, according to the participants' reply it appears that still part of the society believes and practices the traditional gender roles. However, most respondents and their spouses believe and practice modern gender role attitudes that both men and women can share household responsibilities and both can have careers.

A husband of one of the women workers responded that,

Me and my wife both are doing job and having two kids. We get up together and cook together in the morning and I help her to house cleaning, laundry and other household activities. In modern society we can't expect all the household duties from women. Because we both are doing great effort to balance the family economy for sake of our kids. We manage household chores and the job by mutual understanding 03.03.2025

His wife (participant) also agreed with him,

I have worked in the garment industry for thirteen years, including both day and night shifts. I could not come so far without having his help. While I was working, he took full responsibility for the household and our children, including their schoolwork's 03.03.2025.

In case of childcare support, primarily it comes from extended family specially from women worker's mother or relatives. One participant said that,

It is very helpful of having my mother in the household and she helps me most in childcare while I am having my job. Further she said that my husband's support during weekdays is limited because of his long hour travelling, but he supports me a lot in week ends 05.03.2025

Because of not having structured full time childcare in the area and limited spousal support, mother's role is crucial, because she not only handles raising and caring for grandchildren but also support for cooking and other household chores and providing emotional support. This type of family support structure,

plays a significant role in reducing the dual burden many working women experience. The findings emphasized that, even though verbal appreciation within the family is minimal. The consistent and shared support create a better environment where the working women experience support and appreciation. Inman, 1940 in Dang and Webuke, 2022 argued that productive labour should be recognized as productive work by giving value and appreciation. Sharing household activities and emotional support of the family could be strengthen the recognition of the EPZ women workers in household. However, based on some participants experiences, exemplify that the dual burden is both physical and emotional, starting to feeling of fatigue and emotional stress among women workers.

Although women machine operators in EPZ appear to succeed a level of freedom through their carrier in wage labour, they continue to be subjected to the form of exploitation in considerable extent, consistent with the critiques drawn by Marxist feminist theory.

According to some women employees, a power imbalance continues to overhead. In some cases, household decisions are shared but prioritize the husband decision, or husband ultimately takes the final decision despite the discussion, this is signifying the enduring influence of patriarchal norm (Walby, 1989).

A participant mention that,

At home we talk about the problems and decision together, but honesty most of the time, it is my husband's opinion that decide things. Even after discussing, he usually makes the final decision 26.02.2025

Majority of women participants mentioned that equitable partnership characterized by mutual and shared household chores. Further, the participants described that household decisions are generally made in collaboration with their husbands and it is indicating shared approach to decision making within the family.

She described that,

At home, my husband and I generally make decision together. We sit down and talk about things and problems specially it comes to important matters like finances or the children's education. I do feel included in the discussion, and my opinions are respected most of the time 03.03.2025

In terms of economic dependence, most women entered the workforce due to financial necessity, driven by inadequate or unstable male incomes. Some women especially those with supportive husbands, emphasized their job as a means of enhance family well-being, while others were forced into bread winning roles due to husbands' addictions, unemployment or low earnings.

A women participant emphasized that,

I decided to take this job after discussing with my husband, because his government salary just was not enough to cover all our family expenses. Especially with the children growing up, their education has become a major cost. Tuition es, school supplies everything keeps getting more expensive. We tried to manage with his income along for a while, but it just was not possible. Ever month we felt it like a struggle and debt, and we kept falling short. Because of that I decided to take the job as a machine operator. Because my kids' education and their future very important to me 26.02.2025

Cultural gender roles continue burden to women workers in EPZ Koggala in some extend, however the individual experience vary within the participants. Even when workplace gender policies are fair, at home women often bear the burden of domestic chores, creating a hidden workload that celebrate fatigue and reduce well-being. This tally with Fedirici (2004) and Fakier (2020) arguments that capitalism heavily defends unpaid domestic labour which is essential for the functioning off the capitalist economy. However, according to the study it depends on the attitudes and behaviour of the partners of the respective women and totally can not apply with the Sri Lankan society.

The social service officer emphasizes that,

Cultural norms and traditional gender role expectation still operate in the society, but the extend of severity defend on the attitudes and behaviour of their partners. Many of partners in modern society understand the burden of women and they share household chores while both are doing jobs. However, even women are employed outside the home often struggle to achieve real independence. As strong social expectations still limit their ability to make independent choices 26.02.2015

While it comes out that society has decrease some extend in traditional gender roles particularly with increasing female participation in education and workforce, these changes are not consistent across all social groups. A significant portion of population continuous to maintain and practice traditional gender norms, particular in decision making and as household labour. This indicates that while progress has been made with traditional gender norms, deeply rooted cultural expectations associate with gender roles persist in many segments of the society.

4.4 Workplace improvements

Following structured results and discussion section based on the detailed interview data focuses on the theme of workplace reforms which generated by the data analysis. Flexible work arrangements, parental support policies, anti-exploitation measures and skill development were generated by the given data of the participants. The workers in two factories were interviewed during the studies. According to the data received, one factory has 8 hours normal shift and 10 hours shift for over time. The other factory reported 10 hours normal shift and 12 hours for over time. A major concern expressed by participants was the rigidity of the work schedules, particularly for mothers. Women called for reduced working hours by eliminating of mandatory night shifts and more predictable scheduling, especially for those with childcare responsibility.

One participant of factory which have 8 to 10 hours shift said that,

As a worker, we are always asked to submit our leave request and personal plans at the begins of each month. Based on that the factory tries to create a somewhat flexible schedule for us. They also inform us about overtime in advance to plan our daily routing in advance. So, it makes things bit easier
27.02.2025

This also related to workplace reforms since it motivates worker participation and transparency when arranging work schedules. By allowing workers to submit personal plans at the start of the month and informing them to overtime in advance, the factory support to maintain better work life balance.

One participant mentioned that several women are forced to quit due to the incompatibility of current shift system with childcare duties. Another participant noted,

The 8 hours shift makes it manageable, but over time still disrupts our routines 27.02.2025

The other factory which has 10 hours shift, the participant said that,

Although the 10 hours fixed shift was seen as manageable, but mandatory overtime up to 12 hours per day was inflexible and exhausting 26.02.2025

It appears that, based on the management of each factory controlled the working shift and other facilities. Therefore, considerable state intervention is necessary to establish an equitable system across factories in the EPZ Koggala. Inflexible Scheduling proportionate impact working women due to established gender roles assigning them primary responsibility for unpaid productive

labour (Fedirici, 2012). The lack of flexible arrangements strengthens structural inequalities that devalue women's domestic labour.

The participants appreciated the lighter the shift during pregnancy and availability of emergency leave at that time. And they voice that, the lack of part time roles or flexible entry or exit further restrict the participation of mothers and care takers in the EPZ work force.

There are lot of welfare support available in the factor throughout the year. Specially occasionally ceremonies, counselling programs awareness programs were conducted with the support of state officers and the NGO's. However, the workers have limited access to these activities due to high target based workload.

Across the interviews date, the absence of workplace childcare facilities was a significant was a significant obstacle to uninterrupted employment in EPZ. While some factories once offered daycare, man have discontinued this service, because of protection concerns, lack of trust and logistical arrangement (e.g. day care starts at 8.00am while factory starts 6. 30 or 7.00am). One respondent mentioned that ''If my mother was not helping me with childcare, I would have to quit this job''.

Though the 84 days full paid maternity leave and 2 hours breastfeeding breaks were appreciated by participants, they mention that these measures are not enough.

One participant mention that,

I don't have my mother to help me when i had my kid, so it was hard to manage the job after having my baby. I even thought to quit because managing everything felt impossible, and my husband's income alone was not enough for the living expenses. But finally, I decided to pay one of our neighbour to look after my child while I am at work 06.03.2025

Further she mentioned that,

We could not send him to a day care centre until he turns one, and even then, there is no proper full day childcare centre around the area. And the childcare cost is high too. I paid nearly a quarter of my salary for childcare since I have no other option 06.03.2025

The women participant requested government supported childcare, subsidized childcare service. A few participants suggested aligning factory schedule with childcare hours to prevent mothers from being quit the job. Instance, the HR officer acknowledged that orienting factory work schedules along with childcare hours is currently unfeasible due to production driven nature of

operations. Consequently, workers are expected to manage these challenges independently.

Interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with current attendance and incentive systems, specially the line-based model that penalizes individuals for group absence. According to the participants, the said this approach was seen as demotivating and unfair for who have good attendance percentage. A participant explained,

Even if I come every day, if someone else on my line is absent, I lost some amount of m attendance allowance
26.02.2025

They were repeated requested individual based attendance allowance, more transparent incentive systems, and revised leave policies, particularly more than 14 days of leave per year without salary deductions.

There were repeated requests for individual based attendance allowances, more transparent incentive systems, and revised leave policies, particularly the need for more than 14 days of leave without salary deductions. Despite some issues being discussed in employee councils, many workers felt their voices were not sufficiently heard, noting that only one person represents everyone, and follow-up on suggestions was inconsistent.

One participant mentioned that,

I have worked 13 years in the same factory. The factor supports us during hard times. If a worker's parents or in-laws pass away, they give 75000 LKR. For serious illness like cancer or surgeries we can get up to 20 lakhs. And if a worker dies, all the employees donate one day's salary to help the family
03.03.2025

While factories provide life support in emergencies and allow advance planning for over time and leave in some factories, the system is not constant with every factory in the EPZ Koggala. It is dependant on the top management of the respective factory. However still their concern remains over wage stagnation, exploitative production target and the lack of systematic responds to workers problems.

Very few respondents mentioned access to formal training or carrier development. There is no proper upward pathway to promotion and skill development was reported and they mainly focus on immediate labour needs rather than long term growth. However, some factories support further education, and a few participants have been promoted from machine operators to instructor, or supervisor positions. According to the participants, gender based biased was not reported within the promotion process.

The interview data indicated a need for structured skill development initiatives and career mobility programs, particularly for women aiming to move beyond the machine operator roles. Career mobility programs help workers, especially women move from basic roles like sewing machine operators to positions like supervisor, team leader, HR assistant. This kind of program offers skill training, leadership training and some certifications to improve job satisfaction. One participant mentioned that participation in monthly audits and small adjustment to workflow, shows potential for participant improvement, though not formalized as training.

4.5 Domestic and social attitudes reforms

The following section based on the participants responses based on the codes of redefining gender roles, community education and social norms, and recognition of unpaid labour.

Participants reflected a broad range of household gender dynamics, from traditional division of labour to modern gender roles illustrate the more equitable partnerships. While some women shared decision making with their husbands, they often remained the primary person responsible for household responsibilities. A participant mentioned that,

We both decide things together, but when it comes to cleaning, cooking, looking after the kids, it is me who does everything 26.02.2025

Majority of respondent noted that, they have more supportive partners who support to the household and shared responsibilities. One of among them emphasized that,

In our home, we share duties equally. My husband helps me with cooking cleaning and looking after the kids. I feel lucky because I know most of my friends do not get that kind of support. For them, after coming from work, it is like another shift start at home. My husband always say, responsibilities should be shared. I believe that it is the measurement of the mutual respect and partnership of each other. If both are working, then both should do the housework too, that is how it should be. But still part of the society expects women to do everything, even if she tired or sick or having a job. That need to be change 03.03.2025

Marx said this simply the form that exploitation takes in capitalism. Whether it's husbands, or men in general, or both capitalist and men who exploit domestic labour (Fakier, 2020). However, this concept not fully tally with the Sri Lankan society. This concept partially deep rooted in the society however it is highly based on the personal attitudes of the partner.

These narratives emphasize how established traditional gender roles continue to define women's responsibilities at home. Even as workplace identities shift due to gender equity, domestic expectations remain proportionately towards women. Respondents emphasized the need for cultural reform, encourage men to engage equal in domestic labour. While some progress is evident, systematic transformation is still in its advance stages.

The interview data reveals a gradual, though uneven transformation in societal attitudes toward female garment workers. While historical stigma surrounding garment sector jobs persists, there are clew of increased recognition and appreciation specially since it bears significant economic contribution to the country.

One participant shared,

Things have improved a little now. Society to is slowly starting to see us as valuable because we ring foreign money into the country. The are beginning to understand that we are also strong part of the economy, not just women doing sewing jobs. But still some people judge us just because of the uniform or where we work, but that need to change more. But now we are not connected with the society so much because the factory provides free transportation, they pick up from our home and then drop after the work 25.02.2025

This response exemplifies a dual reality, one as there is growing societal awareness of the role of garment workers play in national development, particularly earners of foreign exchange to Sri Lanka's economy. This developed perception is helping to shift garment work from traditionally low status occupation to a more respected and recognized profession. On the other hand, deep rooted societal hierarchies and biases remain in some extend. Judgement based on uniform or workplace and the type of occupation reflects how occupational identity still shapes societal recognition. These stigmas can contribute to inner shame, reducing self-esteem and lack of community level respect particularly for rural women machine operators in EPZ Koggala.

The findings suggested that social recognition is improving, but more systematic efforts are needed. According to the social service officer, awareness campaigns, media presentations and education interventions could help destruct class and gender based occupational stigma. Recognizing garment workers as skilled contributors to the economy, rather than low status labour, is essential for promoting self-respect and equity.

4.6 Wellbeing of women workers

The well-being of women machine operators in EPZ Koggala emerges as an issue shaped by a combination of workplace demands, domestic pressure and systematic gaps in institutional support. The following section explores a code related to overall well-being of the women machine operators which has been developed from the interview data. There were four interconnected aspects were developed during the analysis as mental health, physical health, economic stability and social support networks. These aspects were identified based on what participants shared during the interviews. The emerged aspects important for understanding the participants daily experiences and overall, well-being.

Many participants highlighted chronic emotional stress caused by the dual burden of factor work and domestic responsibilities. Women with unsupported or abusive partners face increase mental health risks. While counselling services available in factories, they are often described as ineffective or inaccessible. One worker explained that,

*factory counselling is available, but it is not enough.
Because some women hiding their family matters and stresses
due to shy or most of the time, they do not have enough time to
discuss them, because of the target-based production system
26.02.2025*

Due to long working hours. Most workers are unable to attend scheduled counselling session conducted by the factor and state officers. Moreover, some respondents were unaware of existing services, propose a lack of communication or outreach by management and social services. The participants requested active mental health outreach and government supported interventions, particularly for women in crisis. While a few women reported low stress due to supportive home environment and shorter shifts (8 hours) in some factories, the majority described emotional strain linked to workload, unsupported household, economic problems and poor mental health infrastructure.

Women machine operators consistently reported physical exhaustion due to prolonged standing, repetitive tasks, and inadequate rest. While factories provide clinics, nurses and health check-ups (e.g. eye clinics, general screening), many find these insufficient due to less accessibility. Because most workers concentrate with the target-based production and neglect the health checkups. However, most of participants appreciated the health clinics specially 'Suwanari Clinic' which investigate the womb cancers. Although few participants appreciated their factories for robust health services such as regular doctor visit and medical reimbursements, others expected more concern about the lack of ergonomic reforms, especially for aging workers, pregnant women or those with chronic health issues.

The data shows that financial insecurity remains widespread among women machine operators. While some women, especially those with supportive

partners felt relatively stable. However, most workers reported that their wages do not cover essential expenses like food, clothing, tuition fees, transport some time childcare and medicine. A common concern was the dependence on attendance allowance and incentives. One participant said,

Despite hard work, income is not sufficient due to unfair attendance allowance and limited incentives. While the expected target increased, target-based incentives remain stagnant or devalued 25.02.2025

Another participant emphasized that,

For me, managing the income is okay because my family size is small. But I know many others who have more children, sometime less income from husband, really struggle with the finance. I think social service should give more help depending on how big the family. Also it is unfair garment workers like us do not get a government financial welfare. We work hard too, but we're neglected of the support systems that others get 03.03.2025

Many workers are excluded from state financial aid programs such as "Aswasuma", due to their formal employment status. Respondents emphasized for revised eligibility criteria that reflect actual economic need, rather than employment type.

Social support structure particularly for childcare is either informal or absent. Few childcare centers operate under the control of government, but no day care facility provided. Workers often rely on family or neighbour, but this support is fragile and inconsistent. One participant expressed concern about her mother, who currently helps with childcare, potential leaving in the future to back home, creating a significant support vacuum. According to the respondents, there is a strong sense of unfair treatment by the state, particularly regarding the exclusion of garment workers from government financial aid programs.

Social service officer also mentions about the social safety nets,

Right now, the "Aswasuma" financial support is very limited and only available to those who meet very strict eligibility criteria. Most working women do not have access to a broad social safety nets, which leave them vulnerable, especially those in the EPZs. There is no proper system in place to support women working in EPZ Koggala who carried out by social service department, and only real help available for disabled individuals come from a few NGO partnerships, which are also quite limited 26.02.2025

Participants emphasized that government programs should recognize and support working women by offering subsidized day care and fair access to social protection.

4.7 Structural policy reforms

Based on both workplace reforms and domestic and social attitudes reforms following structural policy reforms were built. Participants consistently emphasized the need for stronger labour law enforcement, particularly regarding fair wages, working hours, and leave entitlements. While current labour laws offer 84 days of full paid maternity leave, participants emphasized that the lack of half paid or extended options for working women in private sector compared to public sector benefits. There were consistently requested for revising leave policies to prevent salary cuts during emergencies and increase the number of leave per year.

Women workers, particularly those in EPZs, highlight the absence of flexible scheduling and job protection for mothers. Many machine operators experienced production pressure and rigid shift requirement. These structural issues contribute to ongoing inequality and job insecurity. Although regulatory inspections for health and safety are in place (e.g. water safety, accidents), participants reveal that worker centered welfare monitoring is minimal. As an example, though health care facility and counselling facility available, women machine operators have less opportunity access them due to target based system. One participant said that,

We do have weekly checkups. Some clinics and even counselling programs, which is good. The management does not really stop us from getting them. But honestly, we do not have enough time to attend them because of the target. Also, some ground level supervisors do not seem happy when we step away from work even if they do not say it directly. But we can feel it in their attitudes. It makes us uncomfortable to leave work even for health programs. Therefore, they suggested that continuous monitoring by HR department and communication and collaboration of the production and HR department is necessary to success of that kind of welfare programs 26.02.2025

Additionally, garment workers are currently excluded from state welfare programs Such as "Aswasuma". Participants noticed this highly unfair and discriminatory. They strongly recommended removing employment-based disqualification and requested to have a fair inclusion of especially private sector workers in state support programs. Hence participants criticized the limited access and narrow eligibility of state financial aid programs due to occupational exclusions.

There was widespread demand for revised welfare eligibility criteria, particularly to support vulnerable women in low-income or unstable employment.

One participant mention that,

I have two kids, and it is difficult to manage everything especially with childcare and family economy. My husband is struggle with addiction, so he does not bring much income or support. Because of these reasons I applied for the government aid, but they did not approve it just because I work as a sewing machine operator. It is unfair 26.02.2025

Participants also emphasized the need of government funded, full day care services, rather than current half day preschool system mostly operate by the private sector. And hose half day preschool system does not meet the needs of full-time working mothers like machine operators in EPZs. There were also requested equitable subsidies, such as school aids regardless of whether the child attend large or small school.

A participant said that,

Government now giving school aids for children. But according to the eligibility criteria, it is received the schools who are having children less than 300. The eligibility criteria are highly unfair. So, our kids not eligible to that. Government needs to give equal treatment for all kids and the country 27.02.2025

The social service officer also highlighted that,

Childcare must be recognized as a right, not a privilege. It is a fundamental necessity that directly impact women's ability to participate in the work force. As a social service officer, I emphasize that the government has a responsibility to ensure accessible, affordable childcare service as a core part of their development strategy. Government can get support from local social funding initiatives, NGOs, International funds like World bank, UN institutes to establish such child care system in Sri Lanka. It will be helpful to empower working women in whole country and machine operators in EPZ and promoting well-being of the women workers 26.02.2025

Cross sector collaboration between employers and social service agencies is essential to address the challenges faced by women machine operator in EPZ Koggala, overall, all women workers in vulnerable employment sectors. Effective partnerships can facilitate access to critical support services such as

childcare, counselling and other welfare assistance those helps reduce pressure of dual burden and improve well-being of the working women.

One participant makes valuable suggestion on this regard,

Right now, things in my own life are okay. I have some stability. But I see so many other women, my colleagues around me struggling without support, that is why I speak up, I really believe we need proper change in the current system, so that no woman worker is left alone or unsupported 03.03.2025

A social service officer emphasized that the lack of effective collaboration between public- public and public-private sectors significantly contributes to the escalating dual burden faced by women working in EPZs. This dual burden refers to the pressure of balancing both paid work and unpaid domestic responsibilities without adequate institutional support.

The Social service officer further emphasized that,

To really support working women either EPZ or other institutes, different government department like Department of labour, social service, education and women and child affairs need to work together. But right now, there is not enough collaboration between them and because of that the assistant or support does not reach the people who need help. Also, if the government and factories worked together more it would make a big motivation to escalating dual burden of women machine operators. But sadly, those kinds of partnership are still very limited. Because of that many women are forced to manage problems by their own on depend on family or neighbour and become mentally and physically exhausted 26.02.2025

Therefore, the study suggested better public-public and public-private partnership to escalating pressure of dual burden of women sawing machine operators in EPZ Koggala.

5. Conclusion

This thesis examined the dual burden of women machine operators in the EPZ Koggala, Sri Lanka, with a focus on their dual burden of paid industrial labour and unpaid domestic responsibilities. Marxist feminist theory as a critical lens and work life balance framework were used to analyse research findings to reveal how capitalist and patriarchal structures intersect to shape the exploitation and marginalization of women workers in EPZ Koggala both in factory and the household. As is clear from the literature across several decades of scholarship, women workers in the EPZs continue to face a dual burden with serious negative effects on their well-being. In the below I first respond to each of my research questions and the overall aim, followed by reflections on theoretical contributions and suggested policy reforms. Finally, I provide some suggestions for future research.

Despite contributing to the country labour force, women continue to perform as unpaid domestic labour, which remains culturally normalized and unappreciated. While some participants reported shared household responsibilities and decision making, some others experienced ongoing traditional gender role expectations, economic dependency, power imbalance within the household. These findings reflect the still existence patriarchal norms, which continue the women independence, physical and mental well-being and reinforced the economic vulnerability.

In conclusion, while some social change and incremental progress has been made in the society and the workplace to address gender-based challenges, still some extend of the system remains the dual burden happen due to rooted capitalist and patriarchal system. The participants, strongly emphasize incitement this structural support and while focused on the aim and research questions of the study following outcome were generated.

- Navigate the dual burden of domestic work and paid employment

Women machine operators manage their dual duties through personal resilience, family and neighbour's assistance and sacrifices. Long shifts (8-12 hours), sometime inflexible schedules and physical fatigue due to working posture of the factory works intersect with the culturally assigned domestic duties. While family support alleviates some pressure, still patriarchal norms often strengthen unequal divisions of labour.

- Existing workplace regulations and social welfare support to work life balance and well being

Strict day and night shift structure, limited access of formal childcare, lack of part time work, absence of systematic promotion pathways further reinforces the acceleration the dual burden faced by women workers in EPZ. However, no

noticeable gender based or any harassment. Existing policies including 84 days of paid maternity leaves and breastfeeding accommodations are progressive. Key findings highlight that while some factories in EPZ Koggala have implemented advanced reforms, such as pregnancy accommodations, paid maternity leave, emergency leaves, the overall commitment is inconsistent and depend on individual management of the respective factory. Production driven incentive system penalize workers for collective absenteeism and prioritize the work efficiency over well-being. Social financial support like "Aswasuma" exclude EPZ employees due their formal employment status. Systematic gaps such as inaccessible available mental health services, stagnant wages and incentives and inadequate underline the failure to address current measures of control inequalities.

- Feasible structural and policy chances to improve well-being and support gender equity withing global garment industry.

The following recommendations emerged during the study.

Workplace reforms- The study findings highlight standardize flexible schedules, ergonomics working posture, individual bases attendance incentives and pathway to carrier advancement. The companies and employer could workplace reforms to solve these issues and able to get investment of Cooperate Social Responsibility (CSR⁴) initiatives for establish childcare system in the workplace.

Social support systems- Government funded childcare system align with factory shifts and inclusion of EPZ workers in state welfare programs. Sri Lankan government could act as a primary driver of public childcare subsidies.

Legal and cultural interventions- strengthen enforcement labour laws like equal accessibility, parental leave and public private partnerships to expand services and public awareness to recognized women garment workers withing the society and the family. Strengthen collaboration between employers, government agencies, ILO and NGOs to promote gender sensitive work environment. Although factories offer some emergency support and welfare services, the lack of public -public and private- public partnership leaves many working women without the structural support they need.

Global accountability - The study revealed that importance of adapting multinational companies and local owners to adhere ethical sourcing, fair wages,

⁴ Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is renowned and known concept in the world wide organizations. The concept of CSR is used in Sri Lanka, although it is considered as only philanthropic. Sri Lankan companies, like most companies in other Asian countries, regard CSR simply as being about charitable activities and providing financial assistance to various altruistic causes. However, the true concept of CSR is accepted as that stated in the recently released ISO 26000 Standard on Social Responsibility, as organizational governance, human rights, labour practices, the environment, fair operating practices, and also given consumer issues, with some attention to community involvement and development aspects (Tilakasiri 2013).

non- discrimination, maternity protection, and safety conditions, safe and harassment free workplace since Sri Lanka follow- up the global standards. UN agencies, ILO and World bank like international actors could assist to the local institutions to adapt global standards.

While systematic gender inequalities were not identified within the study and the incremental improvements exist, systematic inequalities persist due to capitalist exploitation and patriarchal structure. The study strongly emphasizes incentive structural support, by the employers and the government institutes those responsible for the women workers who are embarrassed due to dual burden and induce well-being and ultimately it will result a huge transformation of the society and also it strengthen the global recognition within the global supply chain.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions for Female workers at EPZ.

1. Background Information

Can you tell about yourself (Age , marital status, children, family)

How long have you been work in EPZ, Koggala?

What is the reason to choose this kind of job?

Can you explain about your current job role and responsibilities?

2. Dual Burden - paid and unpaid work

Can you describe your typical day look like in factory and household?

How do you manage your household chores along with your job?

Do you receive some help from family(children, husband, relatives)? Do they appreciate you?

How do eldercare and childcare responsibility affect your ability to work?

What strategies do you use to coping with stress from of balancing household and work?

Do you feel any pressure to prioritize family obligations over the job?

Do you feel you need further support from your family, workplace workplace and or the social service providers?

3. Workplace conditions and challenges(economic exploitation)

How would you describe the working conditions at your job (working hours, workload, wages, benefits)? Do you think the wages and rewards are enough for your family needs?

What kind of support (maternity leave, flexible working hours, daycare facilities) does your workplace provide for women workers?

How do workplace policies impact your ability to balance work and home responsibilities?

Have you request any support from the workplace and how they address your issues?

(Economic need, wage increment, life support)

4. Patriarchy

Have you experienced any gender-based discrimination or harassment at work?

Do you feel that male workers receive better opportunities or treatment compared to female workers? (wages, rewards, decision making) Can you share examples?

How cultural and traditional expectations affect the assigning tasks and treated in workplace?

How traditional gender expectations affect when assigning, performing household chores and decision making?

5. Structural and Policy change need to achieve well being

What changes would you recommend helping women better manage their obligations to their families and their jobs?

Have you ever taken part in conversations on enhancing workplace regulations? Why not?

Which societal or governmental initiatives would help you achieve a better work-life balance?

Do you believe that women's expectations in society need to change? In what ways, if any?

Do you think those structural policy and societal change would be affect to manage the work life challenges of the women workers and improvement of well- being ?

(Mental and physical health, fair wages, equal treatment, social support)

Interview questions for husbands of women workers.

1. Background Information

Tell me about yourself. (Age, profession, and level of schooling)

Do you have kids and how long have you been married?

What is the primary source of income for your family?

Why did you decide to send your wife to work at EPZ in Koggala?

Does your spouse make a financial contribution to the costs of the household?

2. Perception on women's work

How do you feel about your wife being employed at the EPZ?

Should women work outside the home, in your opinion? Why not?

What financial effects has your wife's work had on your family?

Do you believe that women have decent possibilities to work at the EPZ? Why not?

Do you know how hard a woman works at EPZ? Have you ever heard about your wife's mental and physical health after work?

Has she ever told you about the discrimination that occurs there? If yes what is your action?

3. Household responsibilities and gender roles

How do you and your wife divide up the domestic chores?
 Do you assist with childcare, cleaning, and cooking? If so, how frequently?
 Why not, if not?
 Has the management of household duties changed since your wife began working? How?
 Do you think that balancing responsibilities at home and at work is the main challenge of your wife?
 Do you believe that women need more facilities on maternity leave, flexible work schedules, and childcare in the workplace?
 Should males handle more household chores while their women are at work, in your opinion?
 Have you ever shown her gratitude? If so, how often?

4. Social and structural support

Do you think working women receive adequate help from the government or their employers? What needs improvement, in your opinion?
 What kind of government regulations or societal changes would help to manage their personal life, what is your opinion?
 Do you think that society need to change their attitudes and expectations towards the gender roles?

Interview questions for Human Resource officer.

1. Workplace policies

Can you describe your role and responsibilities as an HR manager in this factory?
 What are the key workplace policies to support employees, especially for female workers?
 What types of leave are provided to female employees, any special treatment for working mothers and how accessible are they?
 Are there any childcare or family support programs available for female workers?

2. Work environment and gender equity

What is the gender distribution in your factory?
 Are women mostly employed in lower-level positions?
 Do you ever notice any specific challenges faced by women machine operators than male workers in the workplace?
 What kind of system and actions have you taken to workplace harassment discrimination and any gender- based violence?

Do you think gender norms influence the career progression of the women employee specially machine operators?

3. Work life balance and well being

How does the company support female workers in balancing their job responsibilities with domestic duties?

Have you received complaints from female employees about workplace challenges?

If so, what are the most common concerns?

Can you explain, how does the company address workplace stress, long working hours, or excessive workloads?

Are there any program available to maintain mental health and well-being of women employees?

4. Structural and policy changes

Do you believe that the current company's policies and labour laws are adequate to support female employees? Why not?

What adjustments do you believe need to improve the welfare of female employees?

Do you think government officials and EPZ management need to address in enhancing working conditions for women?

What are the main obstacles to putting in place workplace rules that are more gender-sensitive? As your view.

Interview questions for social service development officer.

1. Role and responsibilities

As a Social Service Development Officer, what are your duties and responsibilities?

How does your department assist female employees in the EPZ, especially those who have to balance work and home duties?

What social welfare programs are available to women employed in the EPZ?

Have you ever connected with government agencies, labour unions, and factory management to support employees?

2. Challenges faced by women employers- paid and unpaid duties

According to your view, which social and economic issues are most prevalent among female employees in the EPZ?

Have you seen instances of harassment, gender discrimination, or job exploitation? How are these situations handled, if at all?

What influence do societal and cultural standards have on how female employees manage their professional and personal lives?

What effects does unpaid domestic work have on these women's health and productivity at work?

How the dual burden effect to the well- being of women?

3. Social welfare programs

What government or NGO programs exist to help female workers to access healthcare, childcare, or financial support?

Are there any motivations to improve working conditions, leave policies or flexibility of working hours?

Do you think, the current workplace welfare programs already address their needs or why not?

Are there any ongoing efforts by the social service department to improve housing, transportation, or childcare facilities for women in the EPZ?

4. Structural and policy changes

Which existing policy loopholes have the greatest impact on female employees in EPZs?

How can social protections for female workers be improved by collaboration between the public and private sectors?

What suggestions would you make to enhance the well-being and support of women in the EPZ?

Appendix 2

List of Interviewees

No	Interviewees identifier s	Date of interview	Sex & age	Working years	Level of education	No of kids
01	Women machine operator	25.02.2025	Female 37	5	Advanced level	2
02	Women machine operator	25.02.2025	Female 30	3	Advanced level	2
03	Women machine operator	25.02.2025	Female 29	3	Graduate - reading	1
04	Women machine operator	26.02.2025	Female 40	6	Advanced level	2
05	Women machine operator	26.02.2025	Female 42	6.5	Advanced level	2
06	Women machine operator	27.02.2025	Female 45	18	Ordinary level	2
07	Women machine operator	27.02.2025	Female 21	3	Ordinary level	1
08	Women machine operator	03.03.2025	Female 35	6	Advanced level	2
09	Women machine operator	03.03.2025	Female 25	6	Advanced level	1
10	Women machine operator	03.03.2025	Female 25	2.5	Graduate - reading	-
11	Husband of machine operator	03.03.2025	Male 47	-	Ordinary level	2
12	Husband of	27.02.2025	Male 29	-	Advanced level	1

14	Social service officer	26.02.2025	Female 45	15	Graduate	2
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