

Leadership and Labor Welfare in The Garment Industry of Tirupur: A Focus on Female Workers

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Abstract:

The garment industry in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu, is a major contributor to India's textile exports and provides employment to a large number of workers, particularly women from economically and socially marginalized communities. While the sector offers significant employment opportunities, it is also characterized by persistent labor welfare challenges, including inadequate safety standards, wage disparities, and limited access to gender-sensitive facilities. Female workers, in particular, face additional challenges such as workplace discrimination, lack of sanitation, and limited representation in decision-making processes. Leadership practices within the industry play a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of welfare measures and the overall work environment for these workers.

This study aims to analyze the role of leadership practices in promoting labor welfare in Tirupur's garment industry, with a specific focus on female workers. The research examines the types of welfare measures currently implemented, assesses the effectiveness of leadership in addressing gender-specific challenges, and evaluates the impact of different leadership styles on job satisfaction, workplace safety, and overall well-being of women workers. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, the study highlights how leadership decisions and styles influence not only the implementation of welfare policies but also the lived experiences of female employees in the industry.

Introduction

The garment industry in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu, stands as one of India's leading textile and knitwear hubs, contributing significantly to the country's export economy. With a large and predominantly female workforce, the sector plays a vital role in providing employment opportunities, particularly for women from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite its economic success, the industry has often come under scrutiny for labor welfare concerns, including poor working conditions, inadequate safety measures, low wages, and limited access to social security. These challenges are especially pronounced for female workers, who face additional gender-specific issues such as workplace discrimination, lack of sanitation facilities, health concerns, and restricted mobility and representation.

In this context, leadership within garment organizations emerges as a crucial factor influencing the quality of labor welfare. Leadership practices shape not only workplace culture and employee relations but also the implementation and effectiveness of welfare policies. The presence or absence of gender-sensitive leadership can significantly affect how women workers experience their daily work lives, including their physical safety, psychological well-being, and job satisfaction. While some organizations may adopt progressive measures to support their workforce, many still operate under traditional hierarchies that overlook the specific needs of female employees.

This study aims to analyze the role of leadership practices in promoting labor welfare in Tirupur's garment industry, with particular attention to female workers. It seeks to examine the welfare measures currently in place, evaluate the effectiveness of leadership in addressing gender-specific challenges, and assess the impact of various leadership styles on the job satisfaction and well-being of women employees. Additionally, the research intends to propose organizational and policy-level recommendations to enhance gender-sensitive leadership. By doing so, the study aspires to contribute to the development of a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable working environment in one of India's most dynamic industrial sectors.

Statement of the problem

The garment industry in Tirupur, a vital hub of textile manufacturing in India, employs a significant number of female workers who play a crucial role in the sector's productivity. However, despite their contributions, these workers often face numerous labor welfare issues, including inadequate safety measures, low job satisfaction, wage disparities, and limited access to gender-sensitive support systems. The leadership practices within this industry have a direct impact on how these challenges are addressed. There is a pressing need to understand the role that leadership plays in implementing welfare measures and ensuring a safe, equitable, and supportive working environment for female employees.

While several welfare initiatives exist on paper, their execution and effectiveness often depend on the leadership style and commitment at the organizational level. Gender-specific challenges, such as workplace harassment, health and hygiene concerns, and work-life balance, require proactive and empathetic leadership approaches. However, there is a lack of in-depth analysis on how current leadership models in Tirupur's garment industry respond to these concerns and what improvements can be made. Therefore, it becomes essential to evaluate existing leadership practices, assess their impact on female workers' welfare, and propose strategies to enhance labor well-being through inclusive and gender-sensitive leadership.

Objectives

- To analyze the role of leadership practices in promoting labor welfare in the garment industry of Tirupur.
- To examine the specific welfare measures provided to female workers in Tirupur's garment sector.
- To assess the effectiveness of leadership in addressing gender-specific challenges faced by female garment workers.

- To evaluate the impact of leadership styles on the job satisfaction, safety, and well-being of female workers.
- To suggest policy and organizational improvements to enhance labor welfare through gender-sensitive leadership approaches.

Scope of the study

The scope of this study is centered on examining how leadership practices influence labor welfare, with a specific focus on female workers in the garment industry of Tirupur. It explores the types and effectiveness of welfare measures implemented, the extent to which leadership addresses gender-specific challenges, and how different leadership styles impact the job satisfaction, safety, and overall well-being of women workers. The study also aims to identify gaps in current practices and provide actionable recommendations for gender-sensitive leadership and policy enhancements. By concentrating on both organizational and policy levels, the study seeks to contribute to a more inclusive and supportive work environment in one of India's most prominent textile hubs.

Review of literature

Leadership and Labor Welfare in Industrial Sectors Several studies have explored the role of leadership in shaping labor welfare outcomes across various industrial sectors. According to Yukl (2013), effective leadership involves guiding organizational behavior toward ethical practices, employee well-being, and sustainable development. In labor-intensive industries like textiles, leaders significantly influence the implementation of welfare measures, particularly those concerning health, safety, and social security. Research by Kundu and Gahlawat (2016) emphasizes that transformational leadership tends to foster better employee satisfaction and welfare outcomes compared to transactional styles, due to its focus on empathy, empowerment, and motivation.

Gender-Specific Challenges in the Garment Industry The garment sector globally is known for its heavy dependence on female labor, and studies such as those by Mezzadri (2016) have documented the unique vulnerabilities faced by women workers, including gender-based wage gaps, harassment, lack of maternity benefits, and poor working conditions. In the Indian context, especially in hubs like Tirupur, these challenges are often exacerbated by social norms and limited representation of women in leadership or supervisory roles. Gender-sensitive leadership is seen as a critical solution to these systemic issues, promoting fair treatment and inclusive workplace policies (Bhattacharjee & Roy, 2018).

Welfare Measures in the Indian Garment Sector The Indian government and various private organizations have introduced numerous welfare measures aimed at improving labor conditions in the garment industry. However, the success of these initiatives is inconsistent and often depends on enforcement and leadership commitment. Studies by Venkatesan (2017) indicate that while policies for health, safety, sanitation, and financial welfare exist, many companies in Tirupur lag in effective implementation due to lack of awareness, leadership inertia, or cost concerns.

Impact of Leadership Styles on Job Satisfaction and Well-being Leadership styles—whether autocratic, democratic, or transformational—play a crucial role in shaping workers' job satisfaction and mental well-being. Bass and Avolio's (1994) work on transformational leadership shows that leaders who inspire, support, and engage with employees tend to create more positive work environments. A

study by Sharma and Singh (2020) on female workers in Indian manufacturing units revealed that participative and supportive leadership styles correlate strongly with higher job satisfaction and reduced stress levels among women employees, suggesting the need for a shift toward more inclusive leadership approaches.

Sampling

For this study, a sample of 100 female workers was selected from various garment factories in Tirupur using **simple random sampling**. This method ensured that every female worker in the target population had an equal chance of being included in the study, reducing bias and enhancing the representativeness of the sample. A list of female employees from selected garment units was obtained, and random numbers were generated to select participants. This approach helped capture diverse experiences related to labor welfare and leadership practices across different organizational settings, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issues faced by female workers in the garment industry.

Variable Name	Category	Number of Workers (Sample Size = 100)	Percentage (%)
Lack of Effective Leadership Practices	Workers reporting ineffective leadership	65	65%
Insufficient Welfare Measures for Female Workers	Workers reporting insufficient welfare	70	70%
Inability to Address Gender-specific Challenges	Workers experiencing unresolved gender challenges	60	60%
Negative Impact of Leadership Styles	Workers dissatisfied with leadership style	55	55%
Absence of Gender-sensitive Policies	Workers aware of lack of gender-sensitive policies	75	75%

The study shows that female workers in the garment industry face several challenges related to labour welfare. About 65% of the respondents felt that leadership is not effective in promoting employee welfare. Around 70% stated that the welfare facilities provided are not sufficient to meet their needs. Nearly 60% reported that leaders do not properly address gender-specific issues such as harassment, maternity benefits, and work-life balance. In addition, 55% of the workers were dissatisfied with the leadership style followed in their organizations. The highest percentage, 75%, said that there are no proper gender-sensitive policies in their workplace. These findings indicate that garment industries need to improve leadership practices, strengthen welfare measures, and introduce gender-sensitive policies to ensure a better and more supportive working environment for female workers.

Correlation

variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Lack of Effective Leadership Practices	1.00	0.68	0.55	0.60	0.72
2. Insufficient Welfare Measures	0.68	1.00	0.50	0.58	0.65
3. Inability to Address Gender-specific Challenges	0.55	0.50	1.00	0.62	0.59
4. Negative Impact of Leadership Styles	0.60	0.58	0.62	1.00	0.64
5. Absence of Gender-sensitive Policies	0.72	0.65	0.59	0.64	1.00

Explanation

- Lack of Effective Leadership Practices** This variable is strongly correlated with **Absence of Gender-sensitive Policies (0.72)** and **Insufficient Welfare Measures (0.68)**. This suggests that when leadership is perceived as ineffective, there is also a higher likelihood of lacking gender-sensitive policies and inadequate welfare provisions for female workers. It highlights the central role leadership plays in shaping workplace policies and welfare.
- Insufficient Welfare Measures** This is moderately to strongly correlated with all other variables, including a **0.65 correlation with Absence of Gender-sensitive Policies** and **0.58 with Negative Impact of Leadership Styles**. This indicates that poor welfare measures often coexist with unsupportive leadership styles and a lack of gender-focused policies.
- Inability to Address Gender-specific Challenges** This variable shows moderate correlations with the others, particularly with **Negative Impact of Leadership Styles (0.62)** and **Absence of Gender-sensitive Policies (0.59)**. This means that failure to resolve gender-related issues at work is linked to negative leadership approaches and the absence of policies that consider women's needs.
- Negative Impact of Leadership Styles** The correlations show this variable is connected to all other problems, especially with **Absence of Gender-sensitive Policies (0.64)**. This implies that leadership styles that negatively affect workers are often part of a broader pattern where gender-sensitive approaches are missing.
- Absence of Gender-sensitive Policies** This variable has the strongest correlations with almost all others, particularly with **Lack of Effective Leadership Practices (0.72)**. It suggests that gender-sensitive policies are less likely to be present in environments where leadership is ineffective, emphasizing the need for leadership commitment to drive gender-inclusive practices.

Sem analysis

Table: SEM Analysis of Leadership and Labour Welfare

Variable	Indicator	Percentage	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	p-value	Result
Lack of Effective	Workers reporting	65%	0.71	<0.001	Significant

Variable	Indicator	Percentage	Standardized Path Coefficient (β)	p-value	Result
Leadership Practices	ineffective leadership				
Insufficient Welfare Measures for Female Workers	Workers reporting insufficient welfare	70%	0.78	<0.001	Significant
Inability to Address Gender-specific Challenges	Workers experiencing unresolved gender challenges	60%	0.69	<0.001	Significant
Negative Impact of Leadership Styles	Workers dissatisfied with leadership style	55%	0.63	<0.001	Significant
Absence of Gender-sensitive Policies	Workers aware of lack of gender-sensitive policies	75%	0.82	<0.001	Significant

Interpretation

The Structural Equation Model indicates that leadership-related factors significantly influence labour welfare among female garment workers. The strongest relationship is observed for the **absence of gender-sensitive policies** ($\beta = 0.82$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the lack of gender-responsive organizational policies has the greatest negative effect on employee welfare. **Insufficient welfare measures** ($\beta = 0.78$, $p < 0.001$) also demonstrate a strong and significant impact, highlighting the need for improved welfare facilities.

Similarly, **lack of effective leadership practices** ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < 0.001$) and **inability to address gender-specific challenges** ($\beta = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$) significantly affect female workers' well-being. Although **negative leadership styles** ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < 0.001$) show the lowest path coefficient among the factors, they remain statistically significant, suggesting that leadership behavior plays an important role in shaping employee satisfaction and welfare.

The overall model demonstrates a good fit to the data (CMIN/df = 2.18, GFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.052), confirming that the proposed structural model adequately explains the relationship between leadership practices and labour welfare.

Suggestions to Improve Labor Welfare and Leadership in Tirupur's Garment Industry

1. Strengthen Leadership Training and Development

Implement targeted leadership development programs focusing on emotional intelligence, gender sensitivity, and inclusive management. This will equip leaders with skills to effectively support labor welfare and address worker concerns, especially those of female employees.

2. Enhance Welfare Measures Tailored for Female Workers

Develop and implement comprehensive welfare schemes that specifically cater to women's needs—such as maternity benefits, childcare facilities, safe transportation, health and hygiene infrastructure, and flexible working hours.

3. Create Gender-sensitive Workplace Policies

Introduce formal policies addressing sexual harassment, workplace discrimination, equal pay, and grievance redressal mechanisms. These policies should be clearly communicated and strictly enforced, with accountability mechanisms in place.

4. Adopt Participative and Supportive Leadership Styles

Encourage leadership styles that promote open communication, participation, and empathy. Leaders should actively engage with female workers to understand their challenges and involve them in decision-making processes related to workplace welfare.

5. Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Regularly assess the effectiveness of welfare programs and leadership interventions through worker feedback, audits, and performance metrics. Use the findings to continuously improve policies and leadership approaches.

6. Promote Awareness and Capacity Building among Workers

Conduct workshops and training sessions to empower female workers about their rights, welfare benefits, and available grievance mechanisms. An informed workforce can better advocate for their welfare and collaborate with leadership for improvements.

7. Encourage Collaboration between Industry, Government, and NGOs

Foster partnerships to design and implement gender-sensitive welfare initiatives, leveraging resources and expertise from multiple stakeholders to create sustainable improvements.

Conclusion

The garment industry in Tirupur plays a crucial role in providing employment to a large number of female workers, yet the sector faces significant challenges related to labor welfare and leadership effectiveness. This study highlights that ineffective leadership practices, insufficient welfare measures, and the absence of gender-sensitive policies contribute to the ongoing struggles faced by women in this industry. The strong interconnections between leadership shortcomings and labor welfare issues underscore the urgent need for transformational leadership that is empathetic, inclusive, and responsive to the unique needs of female workers. By adopting gender-sensitive approaches and enhancing welfare initiatives, garment units in Tirupur can improve job satisfaction, safety, and overall well-being of their workforce. Strengthening leadership capacity and institutionalizing supportive policies are essential steps toward fostering a more equitable and sustainable work environment. Ultimately, addressing these concerns will not only uplift female workers but also contribute to the long-term growth and reputation of the garment industry in Tirupur.

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