**What Causes Poor Health in Female Garment Workers in Cambodia?**

Janet Jansen | Community Legal Education Center

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**Background**

Located in the capital city Phnom Penh, CLEC provides legal services and human rights advocacy to under-represented people in Cambodia.

**CLEC Labor Unit Goals:**
- Ensure wage increase to garment workers
- Connect poor worker health to low wage
- Build evidence to enforce factory compliance

**Cambodia by the Numbers:**
- 15,205,539 total population
  - 2,200,000 in metropolitan Phnom Penh
- Nearly 500,000 garment workers
  - Most are under 25 years of age
  - 90% are female
- Most workers earn $3.22 a day
- 558 factories in Cambodia
  - 394 in Phnom Penh
- 1,222 fainings thus far in 2014

**What I Set out to Do:**
- Experience on-the-ground global public health programming
- Analyze qualitative data collected from female garment workers to assess health issues
- Find causal linkage between low wage and mass fainings in garment factories

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**Process**

**First Stage of Internship: Addressing Organizational Assumptions**
- Completed literature review and annotated bibliography
- Created problem tree to examine the causes and effects
- Determined that while income can impact nutritional status and be linked with the fainings, lack of money was not the sole reason behind the poor health of the workers.

**Initial Problem Tree**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loss of Income for Worker/Loss of Productivity for Factory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mass Faintings in Cambodian Factories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Nutrition in Female Garment Workers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Anemia
- Low Energy
- Low Cognitive Function
- Poor Immune System
- Physical Weakness

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**Second Stage of Internship: Recalibrating Hypothesis and Approach**

The remaining time was dedicated to exploring the causes of poor nutrition and determining plausible occupational and individual health interventions for the garment workers.

- Compiled factory compliance violations
- Conducted key informant interviews with international and national NGOs, government agencies, community cooperatives, and social business investors
- Reviewed brand-initiated life skills education programs (PACE and HERproject)
- Applied the Social Ecological model to understand a garment worker’s connections inside and outside the factory
- Created personal health education topics from knowledge gaps found in interviews and literature

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**Outcomes**

**Challenges:**
- My preceptor was not a Public Health professional, so I networked with local NGOs providing garment worker health programs and emailed professors or FaceTimed peers for advice.
- The project was significantly different than what was proposed, but turned into a rich, multisectoral exploration of a complex issue.
- My internship coincided with two country-wide legal crises; thus, demonstrating first-hand the vulnerabilities of development work and its impact on the Cambodian people.

**Accomplishments:**
- Proposed health-related solutions that were tailored for factories, communities, and individuals
- Piloted nine personal health education sessions at Cambodian Children’s Fund
- Provided revisions to the Memorandum of Understanding presented to brands manufacturing in Cambodia
- Selected to present a poster at the Global Health Symposium at Henry Ford Hospital in October

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**Funding and Contacts**

With the support of the UM Law School’s Program for Law and Development in Cambodia, The University of Michigan President’s Advisory Committee on Labor Standards and Human Rights (CoLSHR) funded my 11-week internship.

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My internship exceeded my professional and personal expectations, and I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to garment worker health issue analysis. Please contact me if you want to learn more about CoLSHR, CLEC, or Cambodia.  jansenjc@umich.edu
Addressing Occupational and Personal Health in Cambodia’s Female Garment Workers
Janet Jansen | University of Michigan | School of Public Health

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**Possible Next Steps:**
- Develop personal health and life skills curriculum targeting 15-25 year-old women
- Establish a coalition to provide comprehensive programming and services to garment workers
- Pursue a research project studying nutrition counseling and wage increase in female garment workers

Limitations:
- Lack of research and available data to guide future projects
- Maintaining relationships with garment workers is difficult due to six-day work week

Funding and Contact
I thank University of Michigan President’s Advisory Committee on Labor Standards and Human Rights for funding my internship and Joel Preston at Community Legal Education Center in Phnom Penh Cambodia for modeling multisectoral collaboration.

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