

Occupational health and safety training for garment workers

Date: 24/06/2018

Number of workers: 35

Resource person: Dr. Sylvia Karpagam, Public Health Doctor & Researcher

Yeshodha, a committee member of the Garment labour union introduced the resource person - Dr. Sylvia Karpagam and welcomed the participants to the training.

Dr. Sylvi started the training by sharing that being healthy did not mean only physical health but also included the mental health aspect which majority of the people tend to ignore. She then explained that Occupational health deals with all aspects of health and safety in the workplace and has a strong focus on primary prevention of hazards. The health of the workers had several determinants, including risk factors at the workplace leading to cancers, accidents, musculoskeletal diseases, respiratory diseases, hearing loss, circulatory diseases, stress related disorders and communicable diseases and others.

She asked the workers to list down the common health issues experienced by them regularly. The workers listed out some of the health issues like back pain, headache, dust allergy, menstrual problems, white discharge, piles, urinal infections etc., Dr. Sylvia explained the reasons of facing these issues. She mentioned the reason for back pain would be due to them sitting for long hours in the same position without any movement, headache was due to continuously look into the needle, dust allergy as quality masks were not provided by the factory etc., She later asked the workers about their routine food habits. This included their intake of vegetables and fruits. Workers mentioned that they brought any vegetables that were found at a cheap price from the vendors near the factory. This included lentils, greens, rice and sometimes ragi (millet). The workers mentioned they consumed meat or eggs once a week. The vegetables and fruits consumed regularly by the workers were prioritized in a chart and then explained how a few of them could actually prevent some of the occupational health issues.

Dr. Sylvia mentioned the importance of including all vegetables in their routine food intake. Some workers mentioned that while stitching a particular cloth in their factory there was more dust and hence the management gave them jaggery and onion to consume after work. This they mentioned helped in clearing the dust from their lungs. The resource person told the participants that preventing these issues by providing masks were better than using remedies after the dust was inhaled by the workers.

The workers were asked to convey to their respective factory management that preventing some issues would be a better way to take care of the health of workers. These could be having protective masks to avoid any kind of allergies, adjustable chairs that could avoid back pain, take sufficient water and toilet breaks that could avoid dehydration and urinal infection. Workers were asked to consume food rich in vitamin C and fibre as a part in daily routine. The workers were also suggested to take care of their mental health and speak about their personal issues to the union in case they needed help or any counselling.

Dr. Sylvia spoke to the workers regarding Personal hygiene. This could be having a bath regularly, washing hands before eating or cooking and keeping a clean environment at home. Since majority of workers were women she emphasised that it was very important to maintain hygiene during their menstrual cycle. She also asked the workers to take time off for some kind of physical activity that they could follow regularly.

Feedback from workers:

1. Saritha, garment worker: “The meeting was very much useful to know about occupational health issues and some methods to prevent them”.
2. Lakshamma, garment worker: “I usually get the issues but did not know the exact reason for the issues. I work for whole day in the factory without taking toilet breaks and breaks to drink water. The training helped me understand the cause of my problem. I will ask the supervisor for breaks so that it can prevent some of my health issues”.



