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Life after formal employment: A comparative study of female 'garments and textiles' and 'all other' factory' workers in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

This paper compares the post-employment social, political and economic profiles of women previously employed in Sri Lanka's formal manufacturing sector. We surveyed 1031 female respondents, consisting of 775 former garment and textile (G&T) and 256 'all other' ('other') former factory workers. Results showed that women who had worked in G&T factories were significantly more likely to have reported bringing back 'useful' skills and knowledge upon their return home. However, those previously employed in 'other' factories were 1.49 times more likely to report feeling greater acceptance from communities; as well as slightly higher rates of political participation. Regardless of such differences, a significant proportion across both groups shared a sense of self-confidence – even having set up their own businesses or now owning properties since leaving formal employment. Thus, contrary to the negative portrayal of factory work in Sri Lanka and the purported 'plight' of its largely female labor force, our research has found that most women – regardless of prior workplace – had retained and built upon their socio-economic capital across many important aspects of their lives.

Key words: Empowerment, export processing zones, post-employment profile, Sri Lanka, textile and garment industry, women in manufacturing

INTRODUCTION

In order to grow their economies, the Governments of most developing countries adopted approaches typified by 'export-driven industrialisation'. The continued expansion of special Export Processing Zones (EPZs) has occurred over several decades; and by 2006, a total of 3500 EPZs had been established in 130 countries (Milberg and Amengual 2008). Such EPZs are 'statutorily created', used to attract foreign investment; and in exchange, investors receive government-granted fiscal incentives, with access to a cheap and reliable labor force – usually young women (Waters 2013). Consequently, there has been a significant increase in young female employees entering export-oriented manufacturing industries across the developing world. This is despite sustained international concerns about the lack of "decent work" created in the zones for these women; with Sri Lanka's EPZs listed among them (Aggarwal 2005;

Hancock et al. 2015; Milberg and Amengual 2008; Macchiavello et al. 2015; Miles 2016; Waters 2013, 481).

Several longstanding issues that continue to confront female factory workers in Sri Lanka have been well documented. Aside from being exposed to poor working conditions, historically, female factory workers have been disrespected and subjected to derogatory comments, public humiliation, lack of recognition and poor political status (Abeywardene et al. 1994; Athukorala and Jayasuriya 2004; Hancock, et al. 2015). As such, the bulk of discussions on female factory workers in Sri Lanka portray women not as autonomous 'agents of change', but rather as the 'flaccid pawns' of capitalism, with the perceived 'place of women' theoretically grounded in 'neoliberalist' and 'gendered thoughts' (Hancock et al. 2014; Perera-Desilva, 2015).

Our previous study entitled, *'Gender, status and empowerment',* investigated the experiences of women employed in factory work, focusing specifically on female Sri Lankan EPZ workers (Hancock et al. 2014). Contrary to common perception, most respondents reported feeling 'empowered'; revealing that in spite of facing societal and work related negative forces, they saw themselves as active 'agents of change' – with deliberate strategies to empower themselves and their families. However, this was conducted while EPZ workers were still engaged in formal employment (Hancock et al. 2014). As such, although continuing to address the rather poor conditions in which female manufacturing industry workers are employed is indeed warranted, we argue that there is also a need to discuss the goals and lived experiences of Sri Lankan women after they leave formal employment; thereby filling a clear gap in existing knowledge.

Consequently, the current study was conducted with female former factory workers in their respective villages, subsequent to returning home from formal employment. However, it should be noted that while many of our participants had been employed in EPZs across Sri Lanka, around 30% did not work in these zones. Therefore our focus is not solely on the experiences of former EPZs workers and surveys were conducted with Sri Lankan women who had previously worked in garment and textile (G&T) factories as well as 'all other' ('other') factory types, generally – ranging from tea and food production, to toy and rubber manufacturing.

As discussed below, the majority of females employed in EPZs and formal manufacturing (in general), work in G&T factories, with this trend reflected in our sample. Despite the differences in sub-sample sizes, we found that a proportionately similar number of respondents in both cohorts reported bringing back 'useful' skills or knowledge. Overall, the sample showed highly positive post-employment experiences across several other indicators that we believe, have not been adequately captured by previous researchers. Ultimately, such encouraging findings were deemed significant given the often negative portrayal of factory workers and thus, this data forms the theoretical and conceptual basis for this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Export-oriented manufacturing is the mainstay of Sri Lanka's economy. This is particularly attributable to the government incentives to attract investors to the sector; including duty free imports of raw materials and exemption from national foreign exchange controls (see Arunatilake 2012; Agalewatte 2004; Milberg and Amengual 2008). According to Engman and Farole (2012), since 1977, factories in Sri Lanka have sought to create jobs and boost growth in exports and foreign exchange earnings. Manufacturing in Sri Lanka consists mainly of garment and textile (G&T) factories and although other sectors of manufacturing are also represented

nationally, the G&T industry earns the country much more in terms of foreign exchange (Athukorala and Jayasuriya 2004; Hancock et al. 2015).

Despite this, Sri Lanka's G&T factories have long been the center of negative reporting in the media and literature; presented as sites of 'poor' and 'unfair' working conditions. According to Arunatilake (2012), in order to better meet the vicissitudes of the global economy, investors are driven by profit, cost fixing and reduction. Consequently, individual factories operate on output-based systems, where their financial liquidity is invariably dependent on the demand for their goods in the global market. Accordingly, this economic rationalist approach has led to unfair labor relations, as well as the establishment of long working hours and low wages – particularly for G&T factory workers (Fernandez and Sotelo 2013; Sivananthiran 2008).

Since its emergence, Sri Lanka's manufacturing sector has targeted women for employment and has subsequently increased overall female labor force participation rates in the country (Hewamanne 2011). It has been established that 85% of the workforce in the G&T industry are female, many of whom appear unmarried and (or) between 16 and 19 years of age; commonly moving from the rural areas of Sri Lanka to seek economic betterment (Karunaratne and Abayasekara 2013; Perera-Desilva, 2015; Sivananthiran 2008). Gendered explanations dominate debate surrounding the purported socio-economic benefits these (young) female factory workers actually gain from formal employment, balanced against the potentially poor working conditions they experience and (or) dearth in welfare many are exposed to (Macchiavello et al. 2015; Miles 2016).

It was established in 2011 that female workers earn an average monthly salary of approximately 59.5 United States Dollars (USD) and if they worked overtime, received 179.7 USD (Hancock et al. 2011; Hancock, Moore and Middleton 2011). However, G&T industry employees traditionally work 12 hours or more, with shifts only consisting of a 30-minute break and 15-minute tea recess. Moreover, whilst many women are required to work night shifts and overtime they do not necessarily receive the commensurate penalty rates (Perera-Desilva 2015). Regardless of whether income is (considered) low or high, fair or inequitable, the money earned is commonly used to pay for on-going living and family expenses, rather than investing for their future. This suggests that any fiscal benefits from such paid work may be unsustainable upon leaving formal employment.

In addition to garment work enhancing these women's personal or familial wellbeing at the individual level (albeit, possibly only in the short-term), historical data indicates that garment exports have comprised 53% of Sri Lanka's total export earnings and 5.3% of its Gross Domestic Product (Agalewatte, 2004; Ambagahawatta, 2002; Boyenge, 2007. This is indicative of (young) Sri Lankan women's significant contribution to national economic development, not just their own (families') empowerment. Despite the positive impact these women have had on Sri Lanka's global standing and their apparently high representation in the nation's manufacturing sector, rather than solely an indication of 'progress' towards gender equality, several scholars attribute the persistent poor working conditions evident in the industry, to what they perceive as the clear over-representation and exploitation of female workers in such sectors of formal employment (Hancock et al. 2015; Karunaratne and Abayasekara 2013).

In fact, Perera-Desilva (2015) considers the participation of women in Sri Lankan social, political and cultural arenas as tokenism and 'representation visibility', which she argues is not equal to 'real' power. For the most part, this is because Sri Lanka remains a male-dominant society; with men expected to keep 'watchful eyes' over their 'domestic setting-oriented' sisters and wives. Although Perera-Desilva (2015) also argues that there have been some

improvements – with Sri Lanka having elected the modern world's first female Prime Minister and other important women in positions of power – it gives the erroneous impression that the country's women have broken all the barriers of patriarchy.

Such tokenism is also true of Sri Lanka's manufacturing industry, where the increased representation of female workers has not necessarily translated into good working conditions; nor has it allowed these women to universally exercise power, voice, agency or even their basic rights (Hancock et al. 2015; Perera-Desilva 2015). Female factory workers generally endure sexual harassment, violence and public ridicule for 'stepping out' into society for economic purposes – an action still considered unconventional in Sri Lanka (Perera-Desilva, 2015). They are often mocked and addressed with such sexist and derogatory names as 'garment kaalla' (garment piece), 'Juki kella' (juki girl) or 'Kalape kella' (Zone Girl) (Hancock et al. 2015; Perera-Desilva 2015). G&T workers are disproportionately exposed to societal prejudice in Sri Lanka. There is "a greater likelihood of being subjected to negativity if working in textile and grament factories... textile and garment workers experience poor social status and are often degraded by members of their community because of their work" (Hancock et al. 2015, 69; Hancock et al. 2011; Hancock, Moore and Middleton 2011).

Female factory workers are exposed to further gender-based discrimination, including issues related to health and wellbeing. Some workers are subjected to 'on-the-spot', randomized pregnancy tests. Common in developing nations is that if found to be pregnant, women can either be refused work or have their employment terminated (Ferus-Comelo, 2009). Indeed, Rajalaskshmi (1999) argued that the fear of being found pregnant leads some women to undertake unsafe abortions. Furthermore, female workers are potentially exposed to toxic chemicals and generally poor work environments, but do not necessarily seek medical assistance because of the associated cost of treatment and the fear of losing their job while absent (Hancock et al. 2011; Hancock, Moore and Middleton, 2011; Sivananthiran 2008). Female workers may also receive pay cuts or are dismissed when found by their employers to be tardy, frequent users of the lavatory, 'chatty', refuse more requests for overtime and are 'unable' to meet productivity targets (Cortés 2014; Sivananthiran 2008).

Samarasinghe and Ismail (2000) documented the psychological distress experienced by 1000 female workers employed in the G&T industry. Seeking to provide insights into the potential stressful conditions and psychological manifestations experienced by women, the authors found that living away from home, putrid living conditions, disruption to work and being the 'main' provider of family income, precipitated various psychological reactions among the women. They revealed that high levels of pressure exacerbated individuals' somatic and also depression levels, with some reporting intentions to commit suicide or use illegal substances (Samarasinghe and Ismail 2000). Despite the necessity of accessing/providing professional and individuated health support services having been made apparent almost two decades ago, more recent research has found that the 'need' to seek help continues to remain largely ignored by individuals with poor coping strategies; with services also not widely provided by employers. Arguably, this dearth in access/the provision of services reflects greater national trends, which are complicated by a socio-cultural disdain attached to seeking counseling in Sri Lanka (Chathurika 2015; Perera-Desilva 2015).

Far from "meek and docile", historically, 'working women' have long attempted to take collective action globally (Ferus-Comelo, 2009, 95). However, the existing literature suggests that any union-related activity among female factory workers to address the myriad of issues outlined above has been largely unachievable. Although some employee councils exist across Sri Lanka's manufacturing industry, they do not operate as traditional unionized bodies and

function under the patronage of individual employers (Hancock et al. 2015). Several scholars have argued that manufacturing sector employers in developing nations discourage such industrial employees' collective organizing with pay cuts and demotions (Boyenge 2007; Busser 2005; Ferus-Comelo. 2009; Ranaraja 2013). Others have attributed the lack of – or ineffective functioning of – official unions to the 'gendered expectation' that women (particularly from developing nations) will invariably endure any form of work without complaint; with the young age of most female factory workers (often aged 16 – 19) potentially increasing their submissiveness to employers and to their being more likely to be resigned to operating within poor working and living conditions (Cortés 2014; Hareth 2015; Ferus-Comelo, 2009; Perera-Desilva 2015). Moreover this is potentially compounded by a lack of awareness about potential (health) risks or a dearth in access to alternative – better – employment options (Ferus-Comelo, 2009).

Furthermore, it is clear that related policy reforms have not been universal across Sri Lanka and on-going efforts to improve poor working conditions at the governmental level have not been without challenges (Hancock et al. 2015; Sivananthiran 2008). Encouragingly, some factories do reward hard work and 'look after' their workers (Hancock et al. 2014). Of note is that over the years, Sri Lanka has made efforts to improve working conditions and the rights of female workers in its manufacturing sector, as per International Labor Organization (ILO) laws (Hancock et al. 2015). Together with the 'so-called' standardization of workforce guidelines and evaluation tools, the Sri Lankan government's efforts have led to an overall decline in discriminatory workplace practices.

Despite this, some Sri Lankan 'neo-liberal thinkers' do not subscribe to their government's intervention and regulation in formal manufacturing areas. It has been documented that employers across developing nations require females to operate in conditions that frequently – and blatantly – contradict their rights as workers (Ferus-Comelo 2009). Indeed, sections of the Sri Lankan manufacturing industry continually fail to accept long-standing ILO guidelines that prevent women from working night shifts, forcing them to work long (er) hours; apparently rationalized by their fiscal need for continuous work in order to meet international demands (Hancock et al. 2015). Discouragingly, as a result of such entrenched socio-economic interests and 'neo-liberal agendas', the Sri Lankan government has had limited influence on the 'equitable' operation of EPZs, which were – arguably – developed in order to benefit employers and (foreign) investment over individual workers' wellbeing (Waters 2013).

The discussions above, present the 'typical' poor working conditions that female factory workers are exposed to in the developing world. However, it is important to state there are indications that despite being exposed to potentially negative conditions in the short-term, the longer-term outcomes of females are still largely positive. Traditionally, most women in developing countries like Sri Lanka only work in the manufacturing industry for a couple of years before returning to their villages – with this trend seeming to continue into recent times (Ferus-Comelo 2009; Perera-Desilva, 2015). Our prior research has found that the income earned while temporarily employed in Sri Lanka's manufacturing industry has allowed some individuals among this cohort to set up their own small businesses buy properties and start families (Hancock et al. 2011). Indeed, we have previously argued that women's on-going acceptance of non-permanent and low-paid positions, together with the survival of harsh working conditions in the EPZs, appears based on a strategy to improve their (family's) socio-economic standing and ensure future security (Hancock *et al.* 2015).

Although the lived-experiences and intentions of Sri Lanka's female factory workers during their time in formal employment have been well-documented, our suppositions about their

post-employment outcomes and continued empowerment remain largely anecdotal. At this time there appears to be no definitive study researching the post-formal employment achievements and well-being of female, former factory workers in Sri Lanka. Consequently, the subject of what happens to these 'working women' when they return to their respective homes (communities) after leaving seemingly 'harmful' working environments is what this paper now seeks to explore and address

METHOD

This investigation into former factory workers was not a direct follow-up study *per se*, but rather the 'spiritual successor' to our prior research exploring the plans and achievements of female, EPZ workers (see Hancock et al. 2011). We again sought to adequately capture the 'lived experiences' of over 2000 'working women' *vis-a-vis* methodological triangulation – combining quantitative, qualitative and observational data to ensure our findings were valid and reliable. However, it should be noted that at the time of analyzing results for this paper, data collection (surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups) and analysis was still on-going; and so, the discussion section below is based on extensive quantitative analyses that reflect half of the final survey sample. For a full description of the aims, sampling frames, methods, as well as findings from our complete study, please refer to the final research report and policy paper (Hancock, Adusei-Asante and Georgiou 2017a; 2017b).

The aim of our study was to investigate the extent a cross-section of women had built upon the foundations of financial and social capital accrued during their (relatively) short times in Sri Lanka's manufacturing industry. Of specific interest was to determine if the type of factory work previously undertaken by these individuals, had any long-term influences on their post-employment choices, achievements and experiences. We also sought to explore the impact that the familial and community contexts they returned to may have had on their continued empowerment – or indeed, feelings of disempowerment – as former factory workers.

Edith Cowan University's (ECU's) Ethics Committee granted approval for this research in late 2012. After receiving extensive training, several female Sri Lankan Research Assistants (RAs) administered surveys in Sri Lanka between 2013 and 2015. The RAs were fluent in English and Sinhalese, but also received guidance from the Principal Investigator, The Centre for Women's Research, Sri Lanka (CENWOR) Research Director and Project Manager in matters relating to ethical conduct and research methods. Maximum efforts were made to avoid interference with prospective survey participants' work or family duties. Participants were informed about the research goals and assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Respondents completed a 34-item, 10-page questionnaire which was translated to Sinhalese and back to English using the process of *Back Translation*. We employed a cross-sectional survey design that combined mostly closed questions with several open-ended items; each data-set formed part of subsequent quantitative and (or) qualitative inquiry. Specifically, the survey instrument sought data on the prior-employment and post-employment profiles of women who had previously worked in Sri Lanka's manufacturing industry. The questionnaire requested data on the respondents' former economic engagement; the type of factory worked in; their length of service and their prior role. Subsequent sections elicited demographic data; age, marital status, and (highest) educational level. This paper focuses on information collated about our samples' current economic activity and ownership status; exploring a range of personal and social experiences related to what these women had achieved after leaving formal employment, particularly in terms of their socio-economic and political activities.

Eligibility for survey participation was restricted to women who had been employed in the formal manufacturing sector in the three years prior to data collection. We aimed to recruit a theoretically representative range of 'working women' that reflected both the urban and rural communities of Sri Lanka. As such, we selected former manufacturing industry (factory) workers using quasi-random and non-random methods. Individuals were mainly recruited *via* a mix of purposive[1]; theoretical[2]; convenience[3]; snow-balling[4]; and self-selection[5] sampling.

With the help of Sri Lankan field researchers, key stakeholders and (or) service providers, respondents were largely identified through snowballing techniques; whereby local community members, representatives and experts acted as 'gate-keepers', systematically directed us to prospective participants. However, we were somewhat limited by time (financial constraints) and whether members of this largely 'hidden population' from targeted locales could be identified (by RAs or informants) – with location choices compounded by the number of prospective respondents that agreed to take part in the study from each region. At the time of analysis for this paper, the total sample comprised 1031 women from several rural and urban regions across the nation (see Table 1).

Table 1
Number of participants by location (N = 1,031)

Location	Classification	Number of Women	Percentage of Total Sample
Ambilipitya	Rural	164	15.9%
Colombo	Rural	176	17.1%
Galle	Rural	129	12.5%
Gampaha	Urban	179	17.4%
Kaluthara	Urban	99	9.6%
Kandy	Rural	100	9.7%
Kurunegala	Urban	90	8.7%
Monaragala	Rural	8	0.8%
Rathnapura	Urban	86	8.3%

Our sample comprised a majority of female, former garment and textile (G&T) (n = 775), with the rest comprised of 'all other' ('other') factory workers (n = 256). Survey data was quantitatively analyzed using SPSS Statistics 20.0 (the Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Through complex comparative analyses, we investigated potential differences and similarities between these two groups in terms of their demographics (see Table 2 below) and outcomes post-work. Of particular salience was the extent their prior-work experiences might be related

[1] Purposive Sampling – Approaching women that may be unidentifiable through more random or formal means (such as the census), with many female, former factory workers actually part of a 'hidden population' (See Georgiou, 2015; Tranter, 2010)

[2] Theoretical Sampling – Specifically targeting women, family members or key informants considered 'experts' because of their direct personal/professional experience of 'working women' and their (post) factory work/life (see Georgiou, 2015; Walliman, 2004)

[3] Convenience Sampling – Additional eligible respondents approached directly who had not previously been aware of our study; possibly identified by RAs and (or) during community consultation (see Georgiou, 2015; Tranter, 2010; Walliman, 2004).

[4] Snowball Sampling – Contacting local gatekeepers for access to prospective respondents and information about the study, spread informally *via* word-of-mouth among participants or community members (see Georgiou, 2015; Tranter, 2010; Walliman, 2004)

[5] Self-Selection Sampling – Those eligible respondents that may have approached us or the RAs/elected to take part in our study after having heard about it (see Georgiou, 2015; Tranter, 2010)

to these cohorts' decisions to leave former factory work; their treatment in society given their prior employment (as well as acceptance from family members or in their community); individuals' levels of socio-economic or political engagement; and other personal achievements upon returning home.

Using N-Vivo, as part of our larger study, a thematic analysis of survey, in-depth interview and focus group responses was undertaken simultaneously – with the techniques and avenues of inquiry identified, discussed in greater detail throughout our final report (see Hancock et al., 2017b). Although this qualitative data was generalized and did not directly compare G&T and 'other' workers *per se*, a few points of salience from our greater study have been included to add further context to our quantitative results below. However, given the sheer amount of statistical information presented here, it was deemed beyond the scope of this paper to include a comprehensive discussion of all (sub) themes identified in our project. Moreover the large scale nature of our present sample enabled us to make evidence-based claims based on these statistics, with the rich amount of information collated pertaining to respondents' lived-experiences also largely supported by existing literary sources – with the perceptions outlined below, thereby considered transferable to the larger Sri Lankan population of female(former) factory workers.

Table 2
Demographics among Former Garment and Textile (G&T) and 'All Other' ('Other') Factory Workers

Variable	G&T (n = 775)	'Other' (n = 426)
Ethnicity*		
Singhalese	97.4%	99.2%
Tamil	1.3%	––
Miscellaneous	0.3%	––
Mean age	**38.23 (*SD* = 10.34)**	**45.16 (*SD* = 12.39)**
Distribution of age		
20 – 29	20.8%	10.6%
30 – 39	40.8%	24.3%
40 – 49	22.4%	29.0%
50 – 59	12.5%	21.6%
60+	3.5%	14.5%
Marital status*		
Married	87.9%	83.7%
Widowed	1.8%	7.4%
Separated /Divorced	0.8%	1.6%
Defacto	0.1%	–
Unmarried	8.8%	7.0%
Children? (yes)*	79.9%	85.5%
Education*		
Tertiary	0.5%	2.0%
A-levels	16.4%	8.6%
O-levels	42.2%	31.6%
Incomplete	39.1%	57.0%

Length worked		
0 – 4	37.1%	32.5%
5 – 9	44.2%	36.5%
10 – 14	11.9%	16.9%
15 – 19	4.6%	5.9%
20+	2.2%	8.2%
Mean (years)	6.54 (*SD* =4.15)	8.26 (*SD* = 6.51)
Skill level*		
Basic	18.6%	69.5%
Mid	60.8%	19.5%
Higher	0.9%	2.3%
Supervisory	17.9%	7.0%
Managerial	0.6%	0.4%

Notes. *Does not equate to 100% due to missing responses

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Reasons for Leaving Prior-Formal Employment

Table 3 shows the reasons why our cohort of female, former garment and textile (G&T) and 'all other' ('other') factory workers left formal employment. A high rate of respondents reported leaving the manufacturing industry because of competing family commitments, which is potentially indicative of the high number of women who were married and (or) had children at the time of the survey (see Table 2). Regardless, the data indicates that our cross-section valued family commitments over their continued labor force participation; a finding that resonates with Sri Lankan women's general conformity to the country's gendered social norms (Cortes 2014; Perera-Desilva 2015).

The historical place of women in Sri Lanka has been as the 'keepers of culture' in their families and communities, rather than respected for their economic contributions (Lynch, 2007; Thennakoon & Rajapakse, 2007). Therefore it may not have been possible – or indeed desirable – for these women to completely remove themselves from such 'gendered roles'; as evidenced by them entering into traditional marriages, choosing to have children or undertaking care-giving duties. Qualitative findings from the larger study continually showed how individuals attempted to balance their new roles as 'working women' with those responsibilities associated with domestic/community life (see Hancock, Adusei-Asante and Georgiou 2017a; 2017b). Indeed they were often expected to continue earning, with former factory workers using their accrued wealth (income/savings), skills and social capital within these 'gender normative' frameworks, effectively reframing their identities and the more 'traditional' situations in which they lived or worked. This thereby led to their personal sense of empowerment and them increasing the autonomy of choice experienced by others, often resuming family life as the 'breadwinners' or 'decision-makers' in families or communities; and acting as role models for other women in their home villages, who may have been considering entering formal employment.

Interestingly, further comparisons found that a similar – albeit far smaller – proportion among both cohorts nominated distance between work and home; feelings of dislike or frustration towards their workplace/employer; an intention to find other, even better, employment; and because of factory closure, as reasons for their withdrawal. However, they differed significantly across several key variables. Pearson's chi-square test of contingencies demonstrated associations found between the type of factory previously worked in and reasons for leaving. Women who had worked in G&T factories were almost twice as likely (1.81) to have left formal

manufacturing for marriage[6], while women who worked in the 'other' factories were 5.1 times more likely to report leaving because of retirement.[7] This could be attributed to their 'older' age profile (see Table 2). Respondents representing 'other' factories were also 3 times more likely to cite 'health concerns' as reason for their exit from the manufacturing industry.

Arguably, this last finding was somewhat unexpected given that G&T work (ostensibly) is typified by manual labor and therefore, an arguably higher propensity for injury or ill-health. Coupled with the traditionally negative reputation attached to work conditions in the G&T industry (see Fernandez and Sotelo 2013; Ferus-Comelo 2009; Hancock et al. 2011; Sivananthiran 2007), such trends indicate that Sri Lanka's formal manufacturing sector is potentially improving in-line with international standards (see Hancock et al. 2015). It may be assumed that employment undertaken by 'other' workers across multiple workplace conditions – ranging from tea and food production, to toy and rubber manufacturing – was possibly more physically demanding overall than G&T work.

Moreover, the higher age demographic among women from 'other' factories may be attributable to their reported 'ill-health'. It has long been perceived that as individuals' age, so their propensity for developing physical health concerns or sustaining workplace injuries increases and their mental ability may also decline (Harper 2006; Per Capita 2014; Smith, Smith and Smith 2010). At the time of data collection, the G&T cohort was much 'younger' than the group of 'other' workers surveyed; thereby reflecting our past studies that found G&T EPZs were overrepresented by 'younger' workers when compared to their contemporaries in 'other' types of EPZs within Sri Lanka (Hancock et al. 2015) – as well as the generally 'older' demographics of G&T (factory) workers, when compared to those representing 'other' sectors of manufacturing throughout other developing nations (Ferus-Comelo, 2009).

Therefore, it could be assumed that our cohort of 'other' former factory workers may have been 'older' and thus subject to age-related physical (mental) issues or greater work-related harm; thereby necessitating their withdrawal from these prior workplaces. Indeed, the fact that 'other' factory workers were more likely to have 'retired' is also somewhat indicative of their higher age profile (see Table 2). Together, these findings indicate that the higher age demographic, trends for 'retirement' and more varied work may have accounted for this disparity in health between the cohorts and thus, such pressures or physical stressors were related to decisions about leaving. As such, age is an important variable that requires further exploration in relation the work/life choices available to 'working women' in Sri lanka.

[6] $\chi^2(1, N = 1030) = 12.58, p < .001$
[7] $\chi^2(1, N = 1030) = 19.22, p < .001$

Table 3
Reasons for Leaving Formal Manufacturing among Former G&T and 'Other' Factory Workers

Reason for leaving	G&T (n = 775)	'Other' (n = 256)
Family commitments	**32.5%**	**31.3%**
Care for grand/children	50.6% [a]	40.5% [a]
Because of pregnancy	24.1% [a]	27.0% [a]
Health reasons	**5.0%**	**16.4%**
Distance	**4.3%**	**6.6%**
Dislike/frustration	**5.5%**	**4.3%**
For other/better employment	**6.2%**	**4.3%**
For marriage	**34.1%**	**22.3%**
Other reasons	**22.1%**	**21.9%**
Retirement	6.0% [b]	28.6% [b]
Factory closure	33.1% [b]	28.6% [b]

Main uses of earnings from formal manufacturing

When employed as factory workers, individuals demonstrated great autonomy of choice in their use of earnings, clearly electing to allocate the bulk of income to several major areas of spending. As reflected in previous studies (see Hancock et al. 2011; Hancock, Moore and Middleton 2011; Perera-Desilva 2015), a majority of women used earnings for living expenses both on themselves and family while employed; with a substantial (albeit lower) proportion from each cohort continuing to do so post-employment. Encouragingly, a reasonably high proportion also saved their earnings or placed money into a fixed-deposit account for their personal use, prior to leaving factory work; and when compared to other uses of earnings post-employment, this prioritisation towards 'saving' for themselves in 'formal' banking institutions remained evident, thus demonstrating their continued economic independence – albeit at a lower rate.

Further, there was an approximate 20% difference between the two groups in terms of earnings spent on jewellery; with higher rates of spending among the G&T cohort on jewellery, both prior to and subsequent to leaving the manufacturing industry (see below). Prior research indicated that this may have been a way of funding marriage, with jewellery used for a dowry[8] (Hancock et al. 2011). This supposition is complemented by the fact more G&T workers exited their former workplaces in order to get married (see Table 3), with their younger age (see Table 2) a potential influencing factor in this trend; further evidenced by the amount spent on dowries being considerably higher (almost double) than their 'other' counterparts. Past research has shown this to be an important objective for many female EPZ workers; and although potentially indicative of their adherence to societal expectations to get married, it was further evidence of their ability to achieve personal goals and so feel empowered (Hancock et al. 2011).

[8] Dowry – "An amount of property or money brought by a bride to her husband n their marriage" (Oxford Dictionaries 2018 NP).

Furthermore, an argument long espoused in the literature has been that jewellery is also used across developing nations as an 'investment' in later life – "to be sold during times of personal or familial financial downturn" (Fernando 1986a; 1986b; Hancock 2017a; 2017b 39; Pasricha 2013; Samath 2000). As such, rather than solely representing these individuals' seeming acquiescence to traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms by entering into marriage, the buying of jewellery among our cohort was thereby indicative of their capacity for long-term planning and economic independence. Such 'informal' saving behaviors perhaps acted as a supplement for investments in 'formal' savings, which had declined in use post-employment; thereby ensuring their own (family's) continued socio-economic empowerment.

Indeed, overall findings suggest that the women sampled spent or saved money 'when they had it' and that this was largely on themselves when working, thereby demonstrating their autonomy while previously employed in factory work. However, as shown in Tables 4 and 5, they may not have retained regular access to money (savings) subsequent to their withdrawal from formal employment, with clear declines in the proportion of spending across all variables; and was perhaps due to just over half of all respondents not being currently engaged in paid employment. Moreover, the targets of spending (be it on themselves or family members), as well as the use of such earnings, were less defined – whereby income appeared to be more 'spread out' across all variables and slightly more, family-oriented (see below). This may have been attributable to the fact the bulk of women were married, cared for (grand) children (see Table 2) and (or) reported that their houses, businesses or agricultural land was joint-owned with spouses/family (see Table 6); suggesting that they now made 'collective' decisions, rather than 'individual' choices.

Indeed, substantive analysis revealed that G&T workers consistently allocated the greatest proportion of their earnings (savings) towards their families, rather than themselves, across a range of purposes. This included familial living expenses; buying (building) a family house; purchasing a vehicle for the family; investing in their family's education and health; as well as undertaking house renovations whilst previously engaged in factory work and upon returning home. Furthermore, there appeared to be a shift from greater self-spending during their time in formal employment, to allocating proportionately more funds towards procuring land for family use, familial leisure activities and obtaining house-hold goods for family members, post-employment.

Additional descriptive analyses showed that largely family-oriented spending behaviors were similarly evident among those from 'other' factories. A greater proportion bought land for family members than for themselves while employed; and like their G&T counterparts, shifted from greater self-spending during their time in factory work, to allocating greater funds towards family members post-employment across some variables. These included, setting up an economic venture; as well as assisting with a dowry; spending on leisure activities; investing in skill-development; and buying house-hold items. Such trends among both cohorts undoubtedly emanates from the 'value' Sri Lankan women place on familial and community ties and but also further reflected in the societal expectations placed on women (Hancock et al. 2011; Hareth 2015).

However, further comparisons of self-spending against the use of earnings on family identified several complexities in terms of their 'targets' of spending. Indeed, more detailed statistical analyses using Pearson's chi-square test of contingencies, revealed that compared to those who worked in 'other' factories, G&T workers were 1.5 times more likely to report using earnings

for their own living expenses[9] while working in formal manufacturing. As alluded to above, these women were also 2.13 times more likely to buy jewellery[10] and 1.89 times more likely to buy household items for themselves[11] (rather than on families) compared to their 'other' counterparts.

In fact, 'other' workers were 1.75 times likely to allocate money towards household items for family[12] while employed. This trend in familial spending continued subsequent to returning home. In comparison to G&T workers, they were found to be 1.86 times more likely to use earnings for their family's living expenses[13]; 2.28 times more likely to use money to educate their family[14]; and 1.85 times more likely to spend on families' household items after working[15] in 'other' factories. Given the demographic similarities – in terms of their marriage profiles and presence of children (see Table 2) – as well as a shared commitment to family having led most to leave formal employment (Table 3), it is unclear why there was such a difference between these cohorts' with respect to the apparent 'individual focus' of former G&T factory workers and 'collective focus' of former 'other' factory workers. This requires further investigation which is beyond the scope of this paper (see Hancock et al., 2017b for a detailed discussion on targets of spending).

Table 4
Use of Earnings among Former G&T Factory Workers (n = 775)

	Target While employed		Target After employment	
Use of earnings	**Self**	**Family**	**Self**	**Family**
Living expenses	77.8%	82.2%	23.7%	28.5%
Savings/Fixed deposit in a bank	43.1%	3.4%	14.7%	3.2%
Buy land	3.6%	1.7%	0.9%	1.4%
Set up economic venture	1.2%	0.3%	4.1%	3.0%
Buy/build a house	8.4%	9.3%	4.3%	5.7%
Buy a vehicle	1.8%	2.1%	1.5%	3.5%
Education	3.4%	23.1%	0.9%	9.3%
Dowry	31.2%	1.2%	1.7%	0.4%
Jewellery	75.0%	6.7%	7.5%	2.2%
Health issues	21.4%	25.0%	7.2%	9.3%
Leisure activities	24.0%	11.5%	1.3%	4.0%
Skill development	3.1%	1.8%	1.4%	0.1%
Renovated house	5.5%	10.2%	2.2%	5.8%
Bought household items	49.8%	29.8%	12.4%	18.3%
Other	3.0%	2.2%	2.2%	1.3%

[9] χ^2 (1, N = 1031) = 6.53, p = .011
[10] χ^2 (1, N = 1031) = 34.93, p < .001
[11] χ^2(1, N = 1031) = 18.45, p < .001
[12] χ^2(1, N = 1031) = 14.20, p < .001
[13] χ2(1, N = 1031) = 17.49, p < .001
[14] χ^2(1, N = 1031) = 29.69, p < .001
[15] χ^2(1, N = 1031) = 13.95, p < .001

Table 5
Use of Earnings among 'Other' Factory Workers (n = 256)

	While employed		After employment	
Use of earnings	**Self**	**Family**	**Self**	**Family**
Living expenses	69.9%	85.2%	24.6%	42.6%
Savings/Fixed deposit in a bank	35.9%	3.9%	9.8%	3.1%
Buy land	0.8%	1.2%	0.8%	0
Set up economic venture	1.6%	0	0.8%	1.2%
Buy/build a house	7.0%	14.1%	4.7%	5.1%
Buy a vehicle	1.2%	1.6%	1.2%	2.0%
Education	3.1%	40.6%	0.8%	18.4%
Dowry	17.6%	1.6%	0.4%	2.0%
Jewellery	55.5%	5.9%	4.7%	3.9%
Health issues	22.7%	23.0%	9.8%	7.4%
Leisure activities	9.4%	7.0%	0.4%	2.0%
Skill development	2.3%	2.0%	0.8%	1.2%
Renovated house	3.5%	9.4%	0.8%	5.1%
Bought household items	34.4%	42.6%	12.9%	29.3%
Other	2.0%	5.1%	1.6%	2.0%

Post-Employment economic profile

As seen in Table 6, approximately half of all women sampled reported their current engagement in economic activities; with the majority, self-employed. Despite this encouraging finding, it would appear that slightly more former 'G&T' factory workers cited their engagement in formal employment and were also less likely to be working in casual, contractual and agricultural roles when compared to their counterparts; thus suggesting these former 'other' factory workers had attained less secure employment after leaving the manufacturing industry. Perhaps further indicative of this trend was the fact that although our sub-samples currently worked similar average weekly hours, data also revealed that former G&T[16] factory workers earned significantly higher average monthly earnings than their contemporaries from 'other' factories[17].

Despite this apparent economic divide, there remained many statistical similarities between these sub-samples in terms of their rates of business, home and agricultural land ownership. In fact, according to Pearson's chi-square test of contingencies there were no clear associations between the type of factory they worked in and current economic engagement or their ownership rates. Few reported having their own business; but of those who did, most reported

[16] (*M* = 12,576.LKR, *Mdn* = 10,000LKR, *SD* = 11570.24LKR*)*
[17] (*M* = 10,179.41LKR, *Mdn* = 8,000.00LKR, *SD* = 7,870.60LKR), $t(466) = 2.10$, $p = .036$.

sole ownership (representing 67% and 61.9% of former G&T and 'other' workers respectively). However, this level of independence was not reflected for home and agricultural land ownership.

Over a third of women advised that although they owned their own home, the rates of joint home ownership – particularly with male spouses or parents – were comparatively high across both groups. This may be linked to Sri Lanka's patriarchal culture, compounded by the possibility that much of our sample came from more traditional (rural or village) backgrounds – perhaps typified by male dominated households. Although beyond the scope of this paper, such regional comparisons were explored in the final analysis (see Hancock, Adusei-Asante and Georgiou, 2017a; 2017b). Interestingly, fewer 'other' factory workers co-owned a house with their spouse (approximately 15% points less than G&T workers), but more frequently owned land with extended family (siblings). This is potentially linked to the fact these respondents spent their earnings on families across several more dimensions than those representing G&T factories, particularly post-employment (see Tables 4 and 5).

Rates of agricultural land ownership were less than one-fifth across both groups; with slightly higher numbers of 'other' factory workers owning agricultural land, possibly indicative of the greater frequency of current agricultural workers among this sub-sample (see above). However, very few women cited sole ownership of agricultural land ownership, which again, as with home ownership, contrasted with the comparatively high number of female sole business owners. Moreover, with whom this land was jointly owned varied considerably between the two cohorts. The majority of those who had worked in the G&T industry owned land with their husbands (42.1%), while most from 'other' factories co-owned land with siblings (46.7%). Ostensibly, these figures likely account for there being more 'spousal' partnerships within this sub-cohort of G&T respondents. Indeed, such trends may be further linked to the finding that many (more) women previously employed in G&T manufacturing reported 'marriage' as a reason they left employment compared to respondents representing the 'other' cohort. .

Although somewhat encouraging that G&T factory workers and those previously employed in 'other' factories owned businesses, homes or land, overall ownership rates remained statistically small upon returning home. Findings also suggested that regardless of their former workplace, most among our sample remained largely dependent (or at least co-dependent) on others in procuring businesses, housing and agricultural land. In particular, our findings potentially indicate the extent Sri Lankan husbands and family members (in general) have control over their wives' or relatives' behavior and are an area for further exploration in comparison to other developing (developed) countries.

There was little difference between the two groups in terms of 'loan taking behavior', including when they were taken and whether loans were settled at the time of data collection. However, a slightly higher proportion of former 'other' workers had taken loans (around 35% compared to approximately 29%). Indeed, analyses using Pearson's chi-square test of contingencies found that those previously employed in 'other' factories were 1.34 times more likely to have done so than females representing G&T manufacturing. This may have been potentially related to their current work status.

Data indicated less of a propensity to save income both during and after their prior factory work *see Tables 4 and 5) among 'other' factory workers; moreover this cohort also reported lower income levels upon returning home than their G&T counterparts (see Table 6). This lack of finances and (or) savings, may be attributed to fewer having been engaged in formal employment at the time of data collection when compared to former G&T workers – with those

former 'other' factory workers who were currently employed, more highly represented in casual, contractual or agricultural employment. This may have truncated their choices about taking loans. Ultimately, this lack in finances and (or) job security may have necessitated their greater use of loans, perhaps as a form of private 'welfare assistance'.

Finally the majority of women (approximately 60% across both groups) reported receiving an Employees' Provided Fund (EPF[18]) and (or) Employees' Trust Fund (ETF[19]). However, there was a clear association between having received a gratuity[20] and the type of factory previously worked in[21]; with the odds ratio demonstrating that those who worked in G&T factories were 1.48 times more likely to have received gratuity than women from 'other' factories. The reason for this is unclear, but may be related to their having been engaged in factory work for longer (on average) and thus eligible for such payments; with qualitative findings from the greater study suggesting that some women elected not to receive employee pensions, further compounding their rates of access to these funds (see Hanock, Adusei-Asante and Georgiou, 2017b).

[18] EPF - A contributory social security scheme that can be accessed upon withdrawing from work (due to business closure, for retirement or after marriage) or while employed/in relation to a home loan (Employees' Provident Fund ND; Salary.lk, 2015)

[19] ETF – A non-contributory benefit to employees, accessible after leaving employment at any age (due to business closure, for retirement or after marriage) or every five years while still working (Employees' Trust Fund Board ND; Salary.lk 2015)

[20] Gratuity - A benefit for workers who remained employed with their employer for at least five years (Salary.lk 2015)

[21] $\chi 2(1, N = 1026) = 7.49, p = .02$

Table 6
Post-Employment Profile for Former G&T and 'Other' Factory Workers

Variable	G&T (n = 775)	'Other' (n = 256)
Current engagement in economic activity? (yes)*	**50.5%**	**48.4%**
Engaged in:		
Formal employment	34.0% [a]	20.2% [a]
Self-employment	37.9% [a]	33.1% [a]
Casual employment	9.2% [a]	23.4% [a]
Subcontract	3.3% [a]	4.8% [a]
Farming	8.2% [a]	15.3% [a]
Animal husbandry	0.3% [a]	0.8% [a]
Other	7.2% [a]	2.4% [a]
Have own business? (yes)	**14.2%**	**10.9%**
Joint (yes)	33.0%	38.1%
Mean current monthly income if engaged in economic activity	**12,576.26LKR (*Mdn* = 10,000; *SD* = 11570.24)**	**10,179.41 (*Mdn* = 8,000.00; *SD* = 7,870.60)**
Mean current weekly hours worked	**40.77 (*SD* = 16.74)**	**40.13 (*SD* = 15.51)**
Own house? (yes)*	**32.9%**	**38.3%**
Joint ownership (yes)	*42.5%*	*39.3%*
With:		
Husband	77.3%	62.5%
Parents	6.8%	6.3%
Siblings	11.4%	18.8%
Family unit	2.3%	3.1%
Offspring	2.3%	9.4%
Own agricultural land? (yes)*	**15.2%**	**18.0%**
Joint ownership (yes)	*64.9%*	*60.9%*
With:		
Husband	42.1% [c]	20.0% [c]
Parent/s	15.8% [c]	26.7% [c]
Sibling	28.9% [c]	46.7% [c]
Family unit	5.3% [c]	6.7% [c]
Other	7.9% [c]	–
Loans (yes)*	**28.9%**	**35.5%**
Of those:		
Before working	0.5%	1.1%
While working	27.1%	21.3%
After leaving	25.3%	32.6%
Present	47.1%	44.9%
Settled (yes)	38.7%	35.6%
Employee's provided *fund	**60.4%**	**60.2%**
Employee's trust fund*	**66.3%**	**60.5%**
Gratuity*	**48.8%**	**39.1%**

Notes. *Does not equate to 100% due to missing responses
[a] Percentage of those engaged in current economic activity.
[b] Percentage of those who own a house
[c] Percentage of those who own agricultural land

Factory type and its association with outcome measures

Table 7 presents data concerned with several social, economic and political outcome measures relating to 'empowerment'. As seen below, few respondents experienced deleterious events as a result of their prior work, whether in terms of public humiliation or exposure to negative social attitudes. Indeed, most cited feeling more accepted by – and as having more decision making power in – their families. Self-confidence was almost universal, with a clear majority of women in both groups believing themselves to be socio-economically stronger than other females who did/had not worked in formal manufacturing. However, their level of acceptance and engagement at the community level – along with political participation – was relatively lower amongst both cohorts.

A clear reason for this dearth in extra-familial engagement was not apparent from our present statistical analysis. However, it was observed during subsequent qualitative analyses, that many women were generally unable to balance local community or cultural activities with other paid work (familial) responsibilities, post-employment; some appeared unaware of political processes, except their ability to vote; but most, were simply disenchanted with politics/politicians overall and thus made an autonomous decision not to become involved with governmental/civic processes (see Hancock 2017a; 2017b for a complete overview of these findings and the wider implications for Sri Lanka). Despite such caveats, overall, our 'descriptive' findings indicated the importance of female engagement in formal employment for achieving a sense of personal empowerment among Sri Lankan women.

However, a series of Pearson's chi-square test of contingencies evaluated whether factory type was statistically associated with the above outcome measures. There were no statistically different associations between prior 'G&T' or 'other' factory work in terms self-confidence, exposure to negative social attitudes, decision-making power in families/communities or community participation. However, there was an association between factory type and feelings of acceptance in their community[22]. The odds ratio demonstrated that those who worked in 'other' factories were 1.49 times more likely to report feeling accepted; which may have been linked to them also being 1.62 times more likely to engage in political activities[23] after leaving factory work. According to Hancock et al. (2011, 11) female factory workers that experience familial (community) "support" and "respect", report a higher sense of "wellbeing".

Furthermore, given that those in the 'other' factory cohort allocated more earnings towards family members during their time in formal employment and upon their return home, these respondents benefited by being more accepted (by their family and community), with this also reflected in terms of access to greater (local) community level and political participation. Our past research (see Hancock et al. 2011), coupled with subsequent quantitative and qualitative analysis as part of our current larger study (see Hancock, 2017b), has continually indicated that the acquisition of (monetary) capital among Sri Lankan female factory workers is linked to achieving personal-level empowerment and fostered greater familial (social) respect; particularly when spent on others' personal or socio-economic development; with expenditure also related an individuals' greater feelings of inclusion – albeit mainly at the familial or local levels.

Furthermore, the odds ratio found that females from 'other' factories were 2.11 times more likely to perceive themselves as economically stronger than women of their own generation

[22] $\chi 2(1, N = 1024) = 6.4, p = .01$
[23] $\chi 2(1, N = 1030) = 5.09, p = .024$

who were never employed in formal manufacturing[24]. Compared to former G&T workers, they were also 1.50 times more likely to report having a better social status than women not affiliated with Sri Lanka's manufacturing industry[25]. This is interesting and potentially paradoxical given the clear (objective) economic divide between our cohorts - with respondents previously employed in 'other' factories reporting an overall lower earning capacity and less likely to own businesses than former G&T workers (see above).

However, this perhaps reflects the fact that traditionally, G&T work has – and female EPZ or factory workers (in general), as well as garment factory working conditions have – been viewed negatively when compared to 'other' types of manufacturing – or other professions – in Sri Lankan society and other developing nations (see Fernandez and Sotelo 2013; Ferus-Comelo 2009; Hancock 2006; Hancock et al. 2015; Hancock et al. 2011; Hancock, Moore and Middleton 2011; Lynch 2007; Sivananthiran 2007; Perera-Desilva 2015). This thereby adds a subjective element to respondents' reported experiences. Indeed, analyses found those who worked in G&T factories were 1.83 times more likely to report experiencing humiliation while working in their prior job, than those previously employed in 'other' factories[26].

Encouragingly, the majority of women in the G&T and 'other' groups (96.3% and 90.6% respectively), reported attaining useful skills and knowledge from their previous manufacturing work experience. However, it should be noted that the odds ratio revealed those who worked in G&T factories were 2.38 times more likely to report bringing back useful skill and knowledge compared to those from 'other' factories (with clear associations identified *via* Pearson's chi-square test of contingencies[27]). Arguably, their propensity for more secure (formal) employment, self-employment, (sole) business ownership and higher income work, may be extrinsically related to the significantly higher proportion of former G&T workers having believed they had brought back 'useful' skill and knowledge.

Such self-belief and (or) actual transferable experience may have increased their (perceived) viability or capabilities and options available for their continued socio-economic engagement. Therefore, this slightly higher reported rate of 'useful skills' among former G&T workers possibly reflects their having obtained 'better' (or more 'secure') work than their 'other' counterparts subsequent to returning home. Regardless, contrary to prevalent views in the literature that have long argued females experience only 'exploitation' in any 'women's work' undertaken – but particularly factory work and especially amongst G&T factories (see Hancock et al. 2015; Karunaratne and Abayasekara 2013; Perera-Desilva (2015) – in the case of this study, our statistical findings show that these women may have actually learned transferable skills. We maintain that such learning potentially helped almost half of our sample attain some form of work upon returning home; with this being a clear indication of their socio-economic empowerment.

Ultimately, regardless of factory type, the majority of respondents expressed positive socio-economic and personal outcomes upon returning to villages, with any negative experiences statistically minor. This indicated that the 'act of working' might have been more important to their accruement of economic capital and (subsequent) development of social capital, than their previous affiliation with G&T manufacturing or any 'other' factory type. This is similar to arguments made in our prior research into EPZs, whereby female Sri Lankan factory workers'

[24] $\chi^2(1, N = 1018) = 6.13, p = .013$
[25] $\chi^2(1, N = 1010) = 4.10, p = .043$
[26] $\chi^2(1, N = 1010) = 4.10, p = .04$
[27] $\chi 2(1, N = 1025) = 8.58, p = .003$

sector of employment was found to be 'less important' than the fact individuals we surveyed had engaged in formal employment and (or) had access to a regular income (Hancock et al. 2015).

Table 7
Outcome Variables among G&T Workers (n = 775) and for Workers in 'Other' Factories (n = 256)

Variable	Women who worked in G&T factories (n = 775)	Women working in 'other' factories (n = 256)
Brought back skills and knowledge gained from formal employment that has been useful? * (yes)	96.3%	90.6%
Feel more accepted by family? * (yes)	81.8%	82.8%
Have more decision making power in the family? * (yes)	67.1%	68.8%
Feel more accepted in your community? * (yes)	61.3%	70.7%
Have more decision making power in the community? * (yes)	27.2%	25.4%
Participate more than earlier in community activities?*(yes)	42.3%	47.7%
Participate more than earlier in political activities?* (yes)	9.4%	14.5%
Having worked in formal manufacturing industry, do you feel more self-confident?*(yes)	96.9%	98.8%
Were you ever humiliated in public, in your community or society when you were working in the manufacturing industry? * (yes)	9.9%	5.5%
Experience any negative social attitudes when you first returned home?* (yes)	13.3%	11.7%
Economically stronger than women of your own generation who were never employed in a manufacturing industry?* (yes)	88.6%	93.4%
Better social status than women of your own generation who were never employed in a manufacturing industry?* (yes)	78.3%	83.2%

Notes. *Does not equate to 100% due to missing responses

CONCLUSION

This paper compared the post-employment (socio-economic) profiles of women who had previously worked in Sri Lanka's garment and textile (G&T) factory with 'all other' (other) manufacturing sectors. An impetus for this present study was the seemingly consistent negative portrayal of (former) female factory workers' experiences in Sri Lanka's

manufacturing sector and the greater developing world. Moreover, despite the plethora of previous research having informed our understanding of Sri Lankan working women while engaged in formal employment, there appears to remain a significant gap in the existing literature relating to the actual post-employment outcomes and profiles women after leaving factory work, upon returning to their respective (home) villages or communities.

Ultimately, the majority of respondents representing both groups expressed positive personal outcomes across many dimensions upon their return home. The large majority had improved many important socio-economic aspects of their lives. A significant proportion of the women we sampled felt more confident and socially 'better off' than other women; having also set up their own businesses and (or) now owned properties – whilst still continuing to live as wives, mothers and care-givers. Although it is concerning that only less than half the proportion of respondents from G&T and 'other' factories were continuing to invest money into 'formal' savings (fixed deposit) accounts at the time of survey dissemination; when coupled with the fact that women had also used 'informal' savings mechanisms (such as procuring jewellery), these findings indicate that our cohort of former factory workers were not only able to provide financially for daily expenses, but also chose to invest in their future – both during their time in formal employment and subsequent to returning home, albeit perhaps with less disposable income and (or) secure paid work.

Overall, this sample of over 1000 Sri Lankan women appeared to be both empowered and disempowered by their experiences in the manufacturing sector. Although our findings were somewhat congruous with seminal literary sources, which supported the existence of negative societal associations with female labor force engagement across Sri Lanka – particularly across EPZs and in the G&T industry when compared to 'other' types of factory work or formal employment in general – there were some significant caveats to consider. While women who worked in 'other' factories believed that they were more socio-economically empowered and (subjectively) felt greater community acceptance subsequent to their return home, when compared to the G&T cohort; the majority of those who worked in the G&T industry were (objectively) better off in terms of representation in formal employment, current income level and business ownership arrangements than the women that worked in 'other' factories.

We also found that 'age' and length of time in employment, potentially played a key role in the post-employment chocies, decisions and experiences of the female, former factory workers sampled and so, such factors should form new avenues of inquiry for future research into Sri Lankan 'working women' . Although beyond the scope of this paper, given that the Sri Lankan Government is actively trying to implement ILO guidelines to improve the conditions of female factory workers – albeit with apparently limited success in EPZs – it is anticipated that our findings could be used to contextualize workplace policy discussions. While not condoning the potentially deleterious environments in which many Sri Lanka females are engaged, contrary to them being projected as powerless and weak, our study has shown that even in seemingly disempowering situations, these women are able to negotiate challenging economic, social and political conditions. Nevertheless, continued rigorous exploration into the lived-experiences and personal outcomes of individuals who work across the manufacturing sector in the Global South, especially in garments and textiles, remains warranted – particularly studies that offer more in-depth (qualitative) insight into their reasoning and (or) other socio-cultural barriers to their autonomy of choice.

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