

Research Article

Current Situation of Working Conditions of Female Workers in Export Processing Zones and Industrial Zones

Dinh Van Chi*

Ho Chi Minh City Cadre Academy, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Abstract

Along with active participation and participation in the struggle of political systems, levels and sectors, especially the role of localities and businesses, up to now the company has developed social housing, has achieved some remarkable results. However, with the current number of completed worker housing of about 2.7 million m², which only accommodates more than 340 workers, the set goal has not been achieved. The reason for not achieving the desired goals is that the mechanisms and policies for developing social housing and housing for workers still have some contents that do not meet practical needs and have not been supplemented or adjusted, timely amendment and completion, such as: participants, beneficiaries, automatic construction investment process, purchase and sale management. The implementation of preferential social housing policies must be done through many steps, so the time to carry out investment procedures is long, the space for innovation and development of social housing is limited as required; The reasonable costs for social housing development have not been calculated correctly or fully. Preferential policies for investors of social housing projects and worker housing are not attractive enough and not realistic enough. On that side, the state budget is still difficult and has not been able to arrange preferential capital for loans for social housing development; There is no mechanism to mobilize reasonable resources to achieve efficiency and system. This article aims to provide a comprehensive and systematic understanding of the current situation of working conditions of female workers in Ho Chi Minh City. The topic of employment conditions of female workers has been studied by many researchers, but certain limitations still exist. In this article, the author pays special attention to the current working conditions of female workers in Ho Chi Minh City. With that goal, it will open up a multi-dimensional view of the problem, thereby contributing to solving the problems that are being posed in practice for the working conditions of female workers in Ho Chi Minh City.

Keywords

Female Workers, Working Conditions, Export Processing Zones, Industrial Zones

1. Introduction

Working conditions of workers, especially for female workers, are now one of the important issues, that have a great influence on the economy and society, specifically the development of a country. If female workers face adverse working conditions, it will cause many impacts on the health

and working ability of female workers. This has an impact not only on female workers themselves, but also on a country's economy. Currently, we are in the career of industrialization and modernization, there are many foreign investors entering Vietnam to establish businesses. However, with poor working

*Corresponding author: 202022709@st.hcmca.edu.vn (Dinh Van Chi)

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conditions, the reproduction of labor will face many difficulties.

Currently, Ho Chi Minh City has formed a system of 17 export processing zones and industrial parks with an area of 3,614.23 hectares. In which, 14 export processing zones and industrial parks have come into operation; 2 industrial parks are implementing infrastructure (Phong Phu Industrial Park and Southeast Industrial Park) and 1 industrial park is under planning (Phu Huu Industrial Park) [1]. The total number of employees in the first quarter of 2021 is 3,822.4 thousand people, especially female employees 1,810.1 thousand people (Department of Statistics: Labor and Employment Survey Report in the first quarter of 2021, 2021). In particular, according to information from the website Hepza (Taking care of cultural and spiritual life for workers in export processing zones and industrial zones in the city), the total number of employees in export processing zones and industrial zones is 274,622 people, of which female employees are 163,688 people (59.6%) [2]. From here, it shows an image of a city with an extremely large number of workers and a high concentration of key labor forces with diverse sectors in the economy. This has contributed to victories in the implementation of the political mission of the whole country. With a high economic growth rate, in terms of scale, the city accounts for only 0.6% of the area and 8.3% of the population but has contributed 22.2% of the gross national product, the added value of services accounts for 33% of the country, the production index of the whole industry increased by an average of 7.7% / year, The agricultural sector develops in the right direction of modern urban agriculture, labor productivity is 3 times higher than the whole country and attracts investment in very large foreign projects (Party Committee of Ho Chi Minh City, Document of the XI Congress of Deputies, term 2020 - 2025, 2020) [3].

According to reports, the document can show that Ho Chi Minh City is currently very developed, and needs a lot of human resources. In order to meet and help the economy grow, the current prerequisite is that working conditions for women workers must be comprehensively met, so that women workers can reproduce labor and bring about a stable and developed economy.

2. Perspective on Theory

2.1. Look Back at the Views of Previous Authors

The issue of employment conditions of female workers is also mentioned by many studies, the author Ms. Hoang Thi Nga in her thesis labor contract is signed directly (the employee signs directly with the employer) or indirectly (the employee signs through the legal representative the Enterprise Trade Union), as well as policies to ensure occupational safety and health, working time regime,... The author considers this to be one of the factors that make up their seniority and commitment to the company) [4]. Sharing this viewpoint, the

book *Building and Promoting the Role of the Vietnamese Working Class in the Period of Accelerating Industrialization and Modernization of the Country*, shows that the construction and promotion of the role of the Vietnamese working class in the new period should focus on mechanisms, policy, which deals deeply with the sustainability of contracts between businesses and workers. The study *Problems Need to be Concerned Regarding the Life and Employment of Female Migrant Workers at the Construction Site of Himlam Project, Tan Hung Ward, District 7, Ho Chi Minh City*, addressed the issue of contracts with female workers on construction sites, mostly short-term contracts, which also create the mobility of female workers to other industries. There are also dissertation studies on the impact of the global economic crisis on the lives of migrant workers in Bien Hoa 2 Industrial Park - Dong Nai, Ho Chi Minh City; the book *Building and developing the cultural life of the Vietnamese working class: some theoretical and practical issues*; *Master's thesis on Life of migrant workers in Ho Chi Minh City (studied at Le Minh Xuan Industrial Park - Binh Chanh District - Ho Chi Minh City)* Ho Chi Minh City; the book *The psychological transformation and living conditions of workers, officials and laborers of the capital in the process of arrangement and renewal of state-owned enterprises*; The book *Employment, life of employees after the end of employment relations in industrial parks and export processing zones in Vietnam* all mention labor policies and contracts as a requirement for business owners to fulfill mandatory obligations partly with the lives of workers in general and women workers In particular, creating sustainability, stability, attachment and work seniority of female workers to the business. Le Thanh Ha discussed some practical issues related to inadequacies in employment and working conditions of workers in industrial parks and export processing zones. At the same time, it also proposes solutions to solve and overcome limitations and weaknesses in job security and improve the working conditions of workers.

In the doctoral thesis, *Social Linkage of Vietnamese Workers: An overview from Social Linkage studies*; *The article Social Network of Migrant workers in Bien Hoa industrial zone (case study of homestay workers in Long Binh ward, Bien Hoa city, Dong Nai)* all mention working conditions and regimes, Labor policies and contracts as one of the factors that create a sustainable connection between them and the industrial park and consider working conditions and labor regimes, policies and contracts as an important attraction for them.

2.2. Related Concepts

In this topic, there are several concepts that need to be clarified, namely: 1) export processing zones, industrial zones; 2) Women workers; 3) Working conditions of female workers in export processing zones and industrial zones.

Regarding export processing zones and industrial zones: Decree of the Government No. 29/2008/ND-CP dated March 14, 03, 2008 stipulating industrial parks, export processing

zones and economic zones, the concept of industrial parks is understood as follows: “An industrial park is an area with definite geographical boundaries, specializing in the production of industrial goods and the provision of services for industrial production, established under the conditions, order and procedures in this Decree”. Including many different types of export processing zones, supporting industrial parks, eco-industrial parks. Also according to that Decree, “Export processing zone is an industrial park specializing in producing goods for export, providing services for export production and export activities, having definite geographical boundaries, established according to conditions, order and procedures applicable to industrial parks according to the Government's regulations” [5]. Industrial parks and export processing zones are collectively referred to as industrial parks, unless specifically specified. Industrial parks are becoming an attractive environment for foreign investors. In many developed countries around the world, industrial parks have been the key to creating economic breakthroughs and sustainable development links between businesses. This can be considered a model with stable investment attraction and good resistance to socio-economic crises.

Regarding female workers, the term “Worker” in the Oxford dictionary is understood to mean ordinary workers who work at companies with jobs in factories, export processing zones, manual labor and the income they receive every month is average. This work is mostly paid in shifts with low wages. Workers today are mostly migrants from rural to urban or economically developed areas to work [6, 7]. Workers are mainly manual workers and their income is low and prone to exploitation. In the context of workers, modernization and international integration, workers face many problems and they need a lot of support from policies and laws. Or the Vietnamese dictionary “workers are manual laborers, working for wages” [8]. From the above two concepts, it can be understood that workers are those who mainly work by hand, the level of income they receive is based on the working time and output they generate. Currently, in the context of workers, modernization and international integration, the immigration status of workers tends to increase and most of them are female workers, they are highly likely to face many difficulties.

The employment conditions of female workers are clearly expressed through labor contracts, workplace conditions and medical aspects. These have been clearly shown through the Labor Code No. 45/2019/QH14 of the National Assembly [9].

Thereby, the author gives the general concept of the working conditions of female workers in export processing zones and industrial zones. The working conditions of female workers are a term used to refer to the factors that revolve around the workplace or the working environment of female workers. In other words, this is the most basic component, playing an important role in the life of female workers. The employment conditions of female workers are divided into 3 basic elements for the authors to measure

experimentally with indicators: the 1st component/ The labor contract of the female worker, this is the element that talks about the types of contracts that women workers can sign when working, including i) Indefinite-term contract, ii) Definite-term contract, iii) No contract; The 2nd component/ Workplace conditions of female workers include: i) Living conditions at the workplace, ii) Working equipment, iii) Equipment for female workers; The 3rd component/ Insurance regime, these are types of insurance for female workers in the working process to ensure the safety of the employees themselves, including: i) Social insurance, ii) Health insurance, iii) Accident insurance [10].

2.3. Research Methodology

The author used quantitative methods combined with qualitative methods and conducted interviews and questionnaires. The study carried out the questionnaire survey method described as follows:

- (1) Regarding the sample selection process: the author selects a non-probability sample of 450 female workers in export processing zones and industrial zones. The research team selected 03 industrial parks and 3 export processing zones in Ho Chi Minh City.
- (2) Regarding the design, the questionnaire consists of two parts, part one: Respondent characteristic information; Part two: Information on working conditions of female workers in export processing zones and industrial zones in Ho Chi Minh City today.
- (3) Respondents to the questionnaire: To ensure the accuracy of the information, these respondents are female workers in export processing zones and industrial zones in Ho Chi Minh City today.
- (4) Processing of survey results: After the survey, the questionnaires are checked, encrypted, cleaned, data entered, and processed according to the requirements of the topic on SPSS software version 20.0.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Research Results on the Status of Working Conditions

3.1.1. Labor Contract of Female Workers

Women workers are increasing, especially in the context of industrialization and modernization, with the number of female workers focusing on Ho Chi Minh City has gradually increased over time. To protect the rights of female workers, companies will sign labor contracts with employees and ensure stability for the majority of workers. Labor contracts of female workers manifest themselves in many social groups, including the group of jobs undertaken.

When learning about social groups, the group of work being held with Significant = 0.001 in Table 1 shows that there

are differences between the groups of work undertaken. In indicator 1/ Indefinite-term contracts, departmental employees and technical workers have an average rate of 72.05%, higher than unskilled workers accounting for only 65.7%. According to the current trend, companies always recruit female workers who sign indefinite-term contracts.

For indefinite contracts, there will be no time binding, and

when female workers work unprofessionally and without quality, the company will reject them. Particularly for technical workers, this is a job with high requirements for professional knowledge as well as skilled skills. Therefore, the majority of female workers working as technical workers have an indefinite-term contract rate.

Table 1. Labor contract of female workers with current company.

Labor contract of female worker with current company	The current job female workers are holding							
	Departmental staff		Technical workers		Unskilled labor		Sum	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Indefinite-term contract	66	70.2	17	73.9	209	65.7	292	67.1
Definite-term contract	16	17.0	0	.0	46	14.5	62	14.3
The contract has a term of 1 to 3 years	10	10.6	0	.0	31	9.7	41	9.4
Contracts with quarterly terms	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0
Seasonal (job-based) contracts	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0	0	.0
1-year long-term contract	2	2.1	6	26.1	21	6.6	29	6.7
Short-term contract from 3 - 6 months	0	.0	0	.0	11	3.5	11	2.5
Sum	94	100.0	23	100.0	318	100.0	435	100.0
Significant = 0.001								

(Source: Survey of the topic)

Through the above analysis, we can see that most female workers sign labor contracts with the company for an indefinite time. This is in line with the current law in society, although female workers have differences in the type of work undertaken or seniority, they still recognize the rights and benefits when signing indefinite-term contracts. But with the above data, it also shows the tendency of companies to sign contracts, companies now choose indefinite-term contracts mainly because they need someone to work and can do the job well. When female workers don't do their jobs well, they get rid of them.

3.1.2. Closed Insurance

When signing labor contracts with corporate enterprises, female workers will have guaranteed insurance. Currently, for insurance there is diversity and abundance, which type of insurance is suitable for the needs, labor contracts of women workers and to understand this issue, the author has deeply researched the types of insurance paid by women workers.

When considering the age group in Table 2, with Significant = 0.000, it was shown that there were differences be-

tween age groups in terms of insurance use by female workers. In indicator 3/ Close both, the group (19 - 40) years old accounted for 88.9%, higher than the group (41 - 52) age was 81.5% and for this indicator, the selection rate of female workers was also at the highest level of 88.1% compared to the other 2 indicators. Currently, the awareness level of female workers is increasing, not to mention that companies also have trade unions to support workers. Therefore, employees are always equipped with skills and knowledge to protect the rights and interests of individuals very well. In the process of working, it will be inevitable that harmful risks such as illness, injury during work, or exposure to chemicals. Participating in both types of insurance will help ensure the safety of workers and with the support of employee insurance, it will reduce the economic burden on workers. In addition, employees are compulsory to participate in social insurance contributions, while people can also participate in social insurance voluntarily and enjoy special benefits from social insurance regimes. Participating in insurance when working is to ensure social security towards fairness, equality and a happy life for employees.

Table 2. Types of insurance women workers are paying by age group.

Current form of insurance for female workers	Age group							
	Group (19 - 30) years old		Group (31 - 40) years old		Group (41 - 52) years old		Sum	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pay health insurance	6	3.2	10	4.9	10	18.5	26	5.8
Social insurance contributions	18	9.7	9	4.4	0	.0	27	6.1
Close both	161	87.0	187	90.8	44	81.5	392	88.1
Sum	185	100.0	206	100.0	54	100.0	445	100.0
Significant = 0.000								

(Source: Survey of the topic)

In general, the use of insurance by female workers is increasing, insurance participants will enjoy the benefits of subsidies to ensure replacement, compensating for the financial shortfall for participants and their families when facing risks in life. The situation of participating in insurance is increasingly widespread and this is in line with the current inevitable law, society is always developing human life is always paying more attention. Participating in insurance forms such as health insurance or social insurance will ensure social security, and people's lives are improving and increasing [11, 12].

3.1.3. Equipment at the Company of Female Workers

Currently, in companies ensure the safety of workers and as well as fulfill obligations when signing contracts, companies will equip safety equipment. Safety equipment at the company is of high importance, this is also a concerned by the State and has clear regulations, the equipment at the company of female workers is show through the group of work undertaken as follows:

Table 3. Equipment at the company of female workers according to the job undertaken.

Equipment at the company of female workers	The current job female workers are holding							
	Departmental staff		Technical workers		Unskilled labor		Sum	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Goggles	68	75.6	13	56.5	222	67.9	303	68.9
Noise-canceling plugs (buttons worn to the ears)	53	58.9	13	56.5	180	55.0	246	55.9
Work mask gloves	74	82.2	12	52.2	194	59.3	280	63.6
Protective clothing	62	68.9	12	52.2	170	52.0	244	55.5
There are no of the above items	5	5.6	12	52.2	58	17.7	75	17.0
Sum	90	100.0	23	100.0	327	100.0	440	100.0
Sigfinicant = 0.000								

(Source: Survey of the topic)

When considering the group of work undertaken, with Significant = 0.000, there is a difference in the equipment at the female worker's company. In indicator 4/ Protective

clothing, the group of departmental employees accounted for the highest proportion of 68.9%, technical workers accounted for 52.2%, and finally unskilled workers with the rate of

52.0%. Based on this data, it can be explained that the equipping of female workers with protective equipment in the working environment will be based on the qualifications of female workers. If a female worker takes on the job of a departmental employee, the level of education will definitely be high. They will understand the rights and benefits that they should receive. Therefore, the rate of being equipped with protective clothing for female workers will be high compared to female workers working in other positions. To prove this explanation, in the education level group, there are Significant = 0.000 that have grounds to prove that there is a difference in protective equipment at the female worker's company. In indicator 4/ Protective clothing, high school level or below accounts for 50.4%, lower than college or university level 75.9%. For female workers with a high school degree or below, because they do not understand the rights they should have and the harmful effects of chemicals or harmful sources at the company, they do not receive protective equipment. The above data is concrete proof of the problem of female workers without protective equipment. Some companies will rely on female workers not having a good awareness of protective equipment and thereby also abandoning equipment. But we

forget that with the working environment, exposure to equipment and chemicals will affect the physical and mental health of female workers. In order to ensure the issue of protective equipment, it is necessary to have strict supervision of enterprises, protective clothing and personal protective equipment are the responsibility of employers to employees in accordance with the law (Circular 25/2022 Civil Code dated 30/11/2022) stipulating the regime of providing fish protection equipment multiplication in labor) [13].

3.2. Discussion

In export processing zones and industrial parks, there has also been improvement and shown interest in female workers. However, there are still some issues that annoy female workers. This is inevitable when export processing zones and industrial parks now receive a large number of female workers and the working environment is also different. The problems that make female workers uncomfortable are specifically manifested through the group of work undertaken as follows:

Table 4. Working conditions that make female workers feel uncomfortable and anxious.

Working conditions make female workers feel uncomfortable and anxious	The current job female workers are holding							
	Departmental staff		Technical workers		Unskilled labor		Sum	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Workplace noise status	34	52.3	16	69.6	143	49.8	193	51.5
Workplace temperature status	16	24.6	12	52.2	154	53.7	182	48.5
Hazardous waste (chemicals...) in the workplace Conditions of smoke, dust, odors in the workplace	14	21.5	4	17.4	90	31.4	108	28.8
Hazardous waste (chemicals...) in the workplace	10	15.4	6	26.1	66	23.0	82	21.9
Intensity of labor during the week	8	12.3	4	17.4	44	15.3	56	14.9
Labor time of the week	4	6.2	6	26.1	39	13.6	49	13.1
The degree of danger, risk and labor accident	3	4.6	1	4.3	41	14.3	45	12.0
Distance is not guaranteed, the possibility of Covid-19 infection	26	40.0	3	13.0	92	32.1	121	32.3
Sum	65	100.0	23	100.0	287	100.0	375	100.0
Significant = 0.000								

(Source: Survey of the topic)

Considering the group of jobs undertaken, with Significant = 0.000 has shown grounds to prove that there are differences in working conditions that make female workers feel uncomfortable and anxious. Specifically, in indicator 7/ The level of danger, risk and labor accident, departmental em-

ployees accounted for 4.6%, technical workers accounted for 4.3% and the highest was unskilled workers accounted for 14.3%. Based on the survey results, it can be see that the level of danger, risk and labor accident is the issue that employees who are undertaking unskilled labor work are most concerned

about. Every job will have certain risks, but when comparing between the three jobs, it can be seen that unskilled labor is the most dangerous job. There is the highest risk of exposure to chemicals and other bacteria, so female workers working in these conditions will feel anxious.

From the above results, it can be seen that women workers working in export processing zones and industrial zones are highly affected by noise and temperature. Working in this environment for a long time will cause health effects on workers, not to mention other harmful factors. Facing this problem, the trade unions in export processing zones and industrial zones need to come up with the most specific solutions to solve this problem.

4. Conclusion

Through learning about working conditions for female workers, the author conducted research and asked a lot of questions to draw conclusions in the most comprehensive way. From the initial research and analysis, it can be seen that the life of female workers in industrial parks and export processing zones is very well guaranteed. The author has applied methods such as analysis, and commenting through the collected data, from which the problem can be viewed in the most objective way and in many different aspects.

Specifically, in the hypothesis, the research team raised the question of how the life of female workers in industrial parks and export processing zones in Ho Chi Minh City is taking place based on working conditions for female workers. In the process of research, the study found that the lives of female workers have been and are being met very well [14]. All the benefits that female workers deserve, businesses also provide, for example, social insurance, at enterprises that always comply with regulations, when female workers quit their jobs before and after giving birth for 6 months, they will still receive a salary according to the social insurance regime. Or when working, female workers will still be equipped with equipment to ensure safety when working. To promote the development of the economy, it is necessary to start from ensuring policies and regimes for workers. When rights and benefits are guaranteed, workers will work and produce the best products and there will be no protests for rights. From the above, it can be seen that the life of female workers is very well guaranteed, this transformation is thanks to the development and operation of society, this development has led to many things and the ultimate goal is to meet people's lives in the best way [15].

However, there are still outstanding cases of female workers who have not been fully met their rights in industrial parks and export processing zones. Specifically, when surveying the reasons why female workers work overtime, there are still 10.3% of female workers working under compulsion. The life of female workers in industrial parks and export processing zones will not be able to meet comprehensively

when there is still a working part with compulsion from the company. For this problem, we need solutions on the part of businesses and workers. If working with the spirit of compulsion for a long time, workers will have protests and damages not only on the part of workers but also on the whole business.

Author Contributions

Dinh Van Chi is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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