

Learning package: Garment factories

Garment factory infirmaries: offering workers quality-assured reproductive health services

With tailored quality improvement plans, garment factory infirmaries are offering accessible basic reproductive health services and referrals to garment factory workers.

For busy garment factory workers, who spend long hours on the production line up to six days a week, on-site factory infirmaries provide conveniently-located, basic first aid and healthcare services. Because the garment industry workforce is predominantly comprised of women of reproductive age, factory infirmaries also have the potential to provide valuable reproductive, maternal and newborn health (RMNH) information, referrals and short-term family planning methods (i.e. contraceptive pills, injectables, and condoms).

To expand workers' access to these services, Partnering to Save Lives (PSL) introduced quality improvement activities within 13 garment factory infirmaries. Early assessments found that the quality of care was variable among infirmaries, and many lacked adequate equipment, supplies and numbers of trained staff to offer relevant services to factory workers. To overcome these challenges, PSL developed tailored action plans for each infirmary to address issues identified during their initial assessment, followed by liaison with the infirmary and factory managers to implement improvements. Common action items included introducing infection control procedures, refreshing out-of-date medications and improving client record-keeping practices.

PSL also trained infirmary staff to provide comprehensive family planning counselling, short-term methods, and referrals for other services. Infirmary staff participated in regular follow-up quality improvement visits, at which PSL monitored their progress against their action plans and provided further coaching and guidance as needed.

By the end of the project, nine out of 13 infirmaries had achieved a quality score of 80% or more, the benchmark set in line with the Marie Stopes Quality Assurance Framework for a safe and acceptable standard of care. Garment factory workers' satisfaction with the services provided increased to 95%, up from 81% at baseline.

Key results as of January 2018:

- 13,116** short-term family planning services provided to workers
- 10,819** other sexual and reproductive health services provided
- 443** workers referred for other RMNH services
- 291** unintended pregnancies averted*
- 85** unsafe abortions prevented*

*Impact estimates derived from the Marie Stopes International Impact 2 calculator



Credit: Marie Stopes International Cambodia

“The infirmary is better than before. When we ask for medicine, they give it to us quickly. Their service is good.”

Garment factory worker

Lessons learned

Improving the quality of services provided by garment factory infirmaries was challenging and depended heavily on the support and motivation of factory management and infirmary providers themselves.

The following lessons were derived from the process:

- Quality improvement activities should align to relevant national standards, in this case the National Family Planning Guidelines, which establish requirements for comprehensive counselling that provide a clear framework for training and service provision.
- Infirmary providers sometimes require additional support and guidance in between quality improvement visits. At these times, PSL invited infirmary providers to call Marie Stopes International Cambodia’s Contact Centre with their questions to speak to a trained midwife. Linking infirmary providers with an existing call centre was a useful strategy for offering continuous support to providers that drew upon existing resources.
- Continuous opportunities for training and quality improvement coaching were necessary to build the skills of infirmary service providers and reinforce new knowledge. It is also important to accommodate high staff turnover rates in infirmaries and ensure that there is always at least one trained staff member rostered on duty.
- Garment factory workers did not have a lot of time to spare during their work day and they sometimes came to the infirmary with the expectation that they will receive a quick service. This limited infirmary providers’ ability to provide comprehensive family planning counselling (i.e. explaining different contraceptive options, which is important for ensuring clients’ informed choice). The provision of complete and comprehensive family planning counselling is an ongoing quality improvement priority in a number of infirmaries.
- Some infirmaries lacked space with sufficient privacy to provide potentially sensitive services such as family planning, which influenced workers to use

external providers for RMNH services. The PSL endline survey showed that just 4.6% of workers who used the infirmary in the preceding 12 months did so for RMNH services. (The majority of cases were for minor health issues, such as headaches and dizziness, and injuries.)

Recommendations

Garment factories must maintain a focus on continued quality improvement in infirmaries, both for their workers, and to meet the requirements of the National Guidelines for Establishment of Enterprise Infirmary. For future programming, PSL recommends to:

- Provide regular training and coaching opportunities to infirmary staff, particularly when there is staff turnover.
- Foster client-centred care models that put workers’ needs first. Establish and use private spaces for RMNH consultations where possible. Provide attitudes training to infirmary staff, alongside clinical skills training. With high populations of young and unmarried women among garment factory workers, it is important that infirmary providers can offer inclusive, non-judgemental care to these women.
- Engage with factory management to build commitment and internal systems to maintain infirmary quality improvement activities independently. Advocate for factory resources and budget to be allocated to support activities for workers’ well-being.

Credit: CARE



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Partnering to Save Lives



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