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# OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY

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## Para-counsellors: The soldiers in resolving women mental health problems

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**Statement of the Problem:** The normal life a Bangladeshi women garment worker starts at 4am, cooks food in the common kitchen available for 4-5 families, goes to work at 7am, and has a longer work day till 7 pm, then is back to take care of her family and goes to bed between 10-11pm. She has no time of her own, a victim of violence and abuse both in the factory and work, no one to share her pain.

**Methodology & Theoretical Orientation:** A lot of mental distress affect their work life, productivity and end up having a poor-quality life. There should be structures within the factory to address this issue. The management should start realizing that when psychosocial challenges and issues go unaddressed, they impact worker's effectiveness in the work place. Fourteen welfare officers, who are the first contact point for workers in factory, were trained and mentored by certified trainers in counselling; and, 14 trained para-counsellors were institutionalized inside factory from December 2016.

**Findings:** Interestingly, women workers are visiting the counselling center in the factory, on being referred by the para-counsellors. The latest record collected as of 5<sup>th</sup> Jan 2017 reflects, 3 women came with anxiety and one of them had 4 sessions with the counsellor for mental relief; 3 women reported work stress and took 3 separate counselling sessions, others include conflict with supervisor, family conflict, financial crisis, relationship issue and the resulted anxiety.

**Conclusion & Significance:** The incidence report within this short duration of less than a month itself is the evidence for counselling need and the vacuum in services. Still, in a factory where 600+ workers are employed this number is just minimal, and the para-professionals have an important role to play to facilitate the workers in identifying such mental health issues and referring them to the counselors.

### Biography

Farhtheeba Rahat Khan is a Development Professional with experience backed up by private sector interventions and development sector working realities and challenges. As the Lead of 'Private Sector Health project', she undertook studies to understand private sector healthcare market dynamics and simultaneously worked on the policy front with Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and its directorates in addressing the supply side issues of healthcare market. She has provided technical assistance for formulation of policy framework, guidelines and accreditation systems in the health training, and emphasized on avenues for women employment in the health sector. Currently, she is the Team Leader for the 'Working with Women' project implemented by SNV, where she is facilitating interventions in garment factories, following a gender sensitive and gender-specific approach to ensure equity in healthcare service provision for female garment workers.

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