

Factors Influencing Employee Attrition in the Garment Manufacturing Sector: A Comprehensive Study of White House Factory, Chennai

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ABSTRACT

Employee attrition presents a significant challenge, particularly in industries like garment manufacturing, where high turnover disrupts stability and growth. This abstract delves into the complexities of employee attrition within the garment sector, analyzing its causes, impacts, and strategies for mitigation. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights from interviews and surveys among industry professionals. The findings identify key drivers of attrition, such as job dissatisfaction, inadequate compensation, limited career advancement, and difficult working conditions. Additionally, the transient nature of the workforce, marked by temporary contracts and seasonal variations, further intensifies attrition rates. The study also explores effective strategies to retain employees, emphasizing the importance of competitive compensation, professional development opportunities, and creating a positive work environment. By comprehensively understanding the factors contributing to employee turnover, garment industry organizations can implement targeted interventions to improve retention, ultimately enhancing their overall performance and competitive edge in a fast-paced market. This analysis provides valuable insights for leaders seeking to navigate the challenges of employee attrition and develop more resilient, sustainable workforce strategies.

Keywords: attrition, challenge, disrupts, garment manufacturing, growth, stability, turnover.

INTRODUCTION

Employee attrition, or turnover, is a pervasive issue that significantly impacts the operations and profitability of organizations across various industries. The garment manufacturing sector, characterized by its labor-intensive nature and often demanding working conditions, is particularly vulnerable to high attrition rates. This study aims to comprehensively examine the factors influencing employee attrition within the White House factory in Chennai, India, a prominent player in the garment manufacturing industry. The garment sector faces unique challenges in retaining employees, including the transient nature of the workforce, seasonal fluctuations in demand, and the potential for long working hours. These factors, coupled with inadequate compensation, limited career opportunities, and unsatisfactory working conditions, can lead to job dissatisfaction and ultimately, employee turnover.

By delving into the complexities of employee attrition in the garment manufacturing industry, this study seeks to identify the key drivers of turnover, assess their impact on organizational performance, and explore effective strategies for mitigating attrition. A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data, will be employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for garment industry leaders, enabling them to develop targeted interventions to improve employee retention, enhance organizational stability, and maintain a competitive edge in the market. By addressing the underlying causes of attrition, organizations can create a more positive and sustainable work environment that fosters employee engagement and loyalty.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Causes of Employee Attrition in Garment Manufacturing

The garment manufacturing industry is particularly susceptible to high employee turnover rates due to various factors. Mahapatro (2010) identified low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of career growth opportunities as primary drivers of attrition in labor-intensive industries. In the context of

garment manufacturing, Islam et al. (2016) found that job dissatisfaction stemming from inadequate compensation and difficult working conditions significantly contributed to high turnover rates. Expanding on these insights, Anner (2020) highlighted the role of excessive overtime and production pressure in exacerbating worker dissatisfaction and turnover. His study of garment factories in Vietnam and Indonesia revealed that unrealistic production targets often led to forced overtime, contributing to worker burnout and eventual attrition. The transient nature of the workforce in garment manufacturing exacerbates the attrition problem. Sarkar and Kumar (2017) highlighted the prevalence of temporary contracts and seasonal variations in employment as factors that intensify turnover rates. This instability in employment often leads workers to seek more stable opportunities elsewhere, as noted by Hancock et al. (2013) in their meta-analysis of turnover predictors. Additionally, Alamgir and Banerjee (2019) found that gender discrimination and lack of family-friendly policies significantly contributed to female worker attrition in Bangladesh's garment industry. Their study underscored the importance of addressing gender-specific concerns to improve overall retention rates.

Impact of Attrition on Organizational Performance

High employee turnover rates can have severe consequences for garment manufacturing companies. Ton and Huckman (2008) demonstrated that employee turnover negatively affects organizational performance, particularly in settings where human capital is crucial. In the garment industry, where skilled labor is essential for maintaining product quality and meeting production targets, this impact can be particularly pronounced. Building on this, Shen and Zhu (2011) conducted a study on Chinese textile and apparel firms, revealing that high turnover rates led to decreased product quality and increased defect rates. Their findings emphasize the direct link between workforce stability and product outcomes in the garment sector. Moreover, Armstrong (2014) argued that high attrition rates lead to increased recruitment and training costs, loss of institutional knowledge, and reduced productivity. These factors collectively undermine the stability and growth potential of garment manufacturing firms, as corroborated by Katz et al. (2016) in their study of labor dynamics in developing countries' manufacturing sectors. Furthermore, Jalil et al. (2015) examined the ripple effects of high turnover in Malaysian garment factories, finding that it negatively impacted team cohesion and overall organizational culture. Their study highlighted the often-overlooked social and cultural implications of persistent workforce instability.

Strategies for Mitigating Attrition

Research suggests several effective strategies for reducing employee attrition in the garment manufacturing sector. Guo et al. (2019) found that implementing competitive compensation packages and providing opportunities for skill development significantly improved employee retention rates in Chinese garment factories. Expanding on compensation strategies, Raj-Reichert (2020) explored the effectiveness of living wage initiatives in reducing turnover in Southeast Asian garment factories. Her findings suggested that while wage increases alone were not sufficient, they formed a crucial part of comprehensive retention strategies. Creating a positive work environment is another crucial factor in reducing turnover. Locke et al. (2017) demonstrated that improving workplace conditions, including safety measures and ergonomic considerations, led to increased job satisfaction and lower attrition rates in Bangladeshi garment factories. Building on this, Huq et al. (2014) investigated the impact of participatory management practices on worker retention in Indian garment factories. Their study found that involving workers in decision-making processes and problem-solving initiatives significantly increased job satisfaction and reduced turnover intentions. Haar et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of work-life balance initiatives in reducing turnover intentions across various industries, including manufacturing. This suggests that garment manufacturers could benefit from implementing flexible working arrangements where feasible. Additionally, Croucher et al. (2013) explored the role of training and development programs in reducing attrition in the UK textile and clothing sector. Their research indicated that companies investing in continuous learning and skill enhancement for their workforce experienced lower turnover rates and improved employee commitment. Kaur and Dulloo (2023) found low salary one of the reasons for moonlighting among employees.

While various studies have explored individual factors contributing to employee attrition in the garment manufacturing sector, there is a lack of comprehensive research that integrates all these factors into a holistic model. The abstract proposes a mixed-methods approach that could address this gap by combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights, potentially providing a more nuanced understanding of how different factors interact and influence attrition rates. While there are studies on garment manufacturing in various countries, there's a lack of comparative research that accounts for regional and cultural differences. The abstract's focus on a specific factory (White House factory in Chennai, India) could contribute to filling this gap by providing in-depth, context-specific insights that can be compared with studies from other regions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. This design allows for a comprehensive understanding of employee attrition in the garment manufacturing sector, addressing the complex interplay of factors identified in the literature review. A structured questionnaire will be developed to collect data on factors contributing to employee attrition, job satisfaction, and retention. The questionnaire will use Likert scales and multiple-choice questions to gather data on key variables such as compensation satisfaction, working conditions, career advancement opportunities, and intention to leave. The target population is employees at the White House garment manufacturing factory in Chennai, India. A representative sample of at least 200 employees, ensuring representation across different departments, job levels, and tenure is targeted. The stratified random sampling method is employed to ensure representation of different employee segments. Use of statistical software, SPSS is used for data analysis. For qualitative analysis, in-depth Interviews are also conducted with 20-25 participants, including current employees at different levels (10-12), former employees who have left the company (5-6) and HR managers and supervisors (5-7).

Research Model

A research model that visualizes the relationships between the key variables identified in the study is presented in Fig. 1.

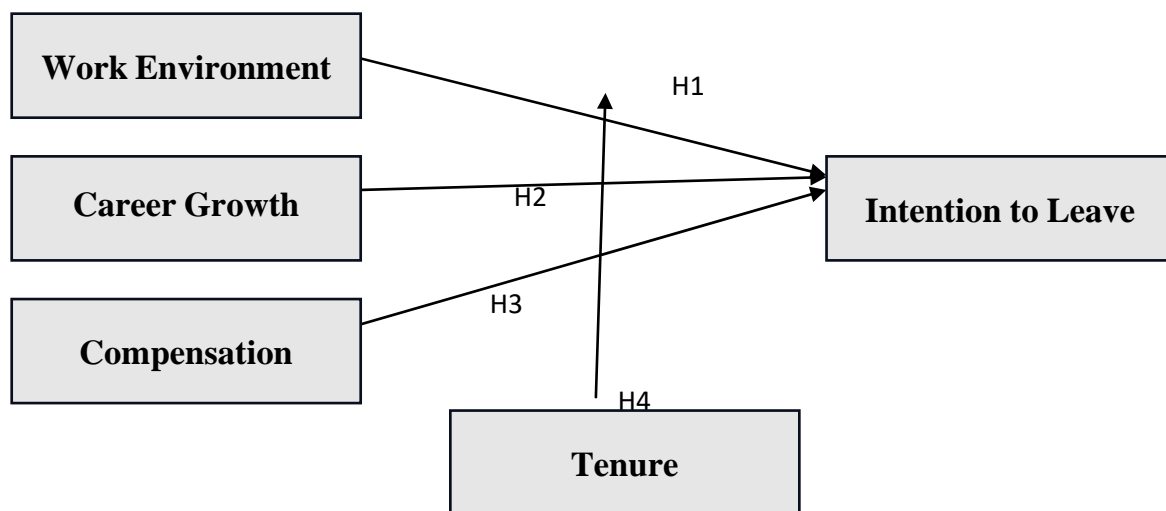


Fig. 1: Research Model: developed for the study

Independent Variables of the study are Work Environment, Career Growth and Compensation. These three factors are identified through the factor analysis and correspond to the main categories of attrition factors. Dependent Variable of the study is Intention to Leave. This is the primary outcome variable that the study aims to predict and understand. Moderating Variable identified is Tenure. The analysis revealed that tenure has a negative relationship with intention to leave, suggesting it may moderate the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable.

Hypothesized Relationships

H1: Work Environment is negatively related to Intention to Leave

H2: Career Growth is negatively related to Intention to Leave

H3: Compensation is negatively related to Intention to Leave

H4: Tenure moderates relationships between the independent variables and Intention to Leave

This research model suggests the following propositions

1. A poor work environment (including issues like poor working conditions and work-life balance problems) increases employees' intention to leave.
2. Limited career growth opportunities (including lack of advancement and inadequate training) increase employees' intention to leave.
3. Inadequate compensation increases employees' intention to leave.
4. The effect of these factors on intention to leave may be weaker for employees with longer tenure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study surveyed 200 employees from the White House garment manufacturing factory in Chennai, India. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	112	56%
	Female	88	44%
Age	18-25	64	32%
	26-35	82	41%
	36-45	42	21%
	46 and above	12	6%
Tenure	Less than 1 year	54	27%
	1-3 years	78	39%
	3-5 years	46	23%
	More than 5 years	22	11%
Employment Status	Permanent	132	66%
	Temporary/Contract	68	34%

The demographic data reveals a relatively young workforce, with 73% of employees under the age of 35. The high proportion of employees with less than 3 years of tenure (66%) suggests a potential issue with long-term retention.

Factors Contributing to Attrition

Respondents were asked to rate various factors contributing to job dissatisfaction and potential attrition on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Table 2 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for each factor.

Table 2. Factors Contributing to Job Dissatisfaction and Attrition

Factor	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Inadequate compensation	4.2	0.8
Limited career advancement	3.9	0.9
Poor working conditions	3.7	1.1
Lack of motivation	3.2	0.88
Lack of job security	3.5	1.2
Work-life balance issues	3.4	1.0
Insufficient recognition	3.5	1.1
Inadequate training opportunities	3.2	0.9
Poor relationship with supervisor	2.8	1.3

The results indicate that inadequate compensation is the most significant factor contributing to job dissatisfaction ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.8$), followed by limited career advancement opportunities ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.9$) and poor working conditions ($M = 3.7$, $SD = 1.1$).

Factor Analysis

To further investigate the underlying structure of the factors contributing to attrition, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using principal component analysis with varimax rotation. The analysis revealed three main factors, which collectively explained 72.3% of the total variance. Table 3 presents the factor loadings after rotation.

Table 3. Factor Analysis Results

Item	Factor 1 Work Environment	Factor 2 Career Growth	Factor 3 Compensation
Poor working conditions	0.85		
Work-life balance issues	0.79		

Poor relationship with supervisor	0.72		
Limited career advancement		0.88	
Inadequate training opportunities		0.84	
Insufficient recognition		0.75	
Inadequate compensation			0.91
Lack of job security			0.86
Lack of motivation			0.78

The factor analysis conducted on the attrition factors supports and refines our initial findings, grouping the various contributors to employee turnover into three main categories: Work Environment, Career Growth, and Compensation. This analysis provides a more structured understanding of the underlying dimensions influencing attrition in the White House garment manufacturing factory.

1. **Work Environment:** This factor encompasses elements related to the physical and social aspects of the workplace: Poor working conditions (factor loading: 0.85), Work-life balance issues (factor loading: 0.79), Poor relationship with supervisor (factor loading: 0.72). The high factor loadings for poor working conditions and work-life balance issues align with our qualitative findings, where employees frequently mentioned challenges with the physical work environment and difficulties balancing work and personal life. The inclusion of supervisor relationships in this factor suggests that these elements are perceived as integral parts of the overall work environment.
2. **Career growth:** This factor groups elements related to professional development and advancement: Limited career advancement opportunities (factor loading: 0.88), Inadequate training opportunities (factor loading: 0.84), Insufficient recognition (0.75). The high factor loadings for all the three components indicate a strong interrelation between career advancement, training opportunities and insufficient recognition. This aligns with our earlier findings and supports the literature emphasizing the importance of clear career progression paths and skill development in employee retention (Guo et al., 2019; Croucher et al., 2013).
3. **Compensation:** This factor primarily relates to financial rewards: Inadequate compensation (factor loading: 0.91), Lack of Job Security (factor loading: 0.86), and lack of job motivation (factor loading: 0.78). The very high factor loading for inadequate compensation, lack of job security and lack of motivation underscores its critical role in employee attrition, confirming our initial identification of this as the most significant factor. This aligns with both our quantitative and qualitative findings, as well as previous research highlighting the importance of competitive wages in the garment manufacturing sector (Mahapatro, 2010; Islam et al., 2016).

Intention to Leave

Employees were asked about their intention to leave the organization within the next 12 months. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Intention to Leave Within 12 Months

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Highly likely	42	21%
Somewhat likely	68	34%
Neutral	46	23%
Somewhat unlikely	28	14%
Highly unlikely	16	8%

The data reveals that 55% of employees are either highly likely or somewhat likely to leave the organization within the next 12 months, indicating a significant attrition risk.

Correlation Analysis

To examine the relationship between the identified factors and intention to leave, a correlation analysis was conducted. Table 5 presents the correlation matrix.

H1: Work Environment is negatively related to Intention to Leave

H2: Career Growth is negatively related to Intention to Leave

H3: Compensation is negatively related to Intention to Leave

H4: Tenure moderates relationships between the independent variables and Intention to Leave

Table 5. Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intention to Leave	1.00				
2. Work Environment Factor	0.48*	1.00			
3. Career Growth Factor	0.56*	0.35*	1.00		
4. Compensation Factor	0.62*	0.29*	0.42*	1.00	
5. Tenure	-0.31*	-0.18*	-0.24*	-0.15*	1.00

The correlation analysis reveals significant positive relationships between all three factors and intention to leave, with the Compensation Factor showing the strongest correlation ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, H1, H2 and H3 are rejected. Interestingly, tenure shows a negative correlation with intention to leave ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that employees with longer tenure are less likely to leave.

Multiple Regression Analysis

To further investigate the predictive power of these factors on intention to leave, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sign.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	1.24	0.18		6.89	0.001
Work Environment Factor	0.32	0.07	0.26	4.57	0.001
Career Growth Factor	0.39	0.08	0.31	4.88	0.001
Compensation Factor	0.45	0.07	0.38	6.43	0.001
Tenure	-0.15	0.04	-0.19	-3.75	0.001

a. Dependent Variable: Intention to Leave

$R^2 = 0.53$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.52$, $F(4, 195) = 55.12$, $p < 0.001$

The regression model explains 53% of the variance in intention to leave ($R^2 = 0.53$, $F(4, 195) = 55.12$, $p < 0.001$). All predictors significantly contributed to the model. Based on the multiple regression output tables of factors influencing intention to leave, following equation can drive:

$$M(Y) = 1.24 + 0.32(\text{Work Environment}) + 0.39(\text{Career Growth}) + 0.45(\text{Compensation})$$

The Compensation Factor emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), followed by the Career Growth Factor ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$) and the Work Environment Factor ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$). Tenure had a negative relationship with intention to leave ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the findings from the correlation analysis.

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative component of the study, consisting of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, provided rich insights into the factors contributing to attrition and potential retention strategies.

Key Themes Emerging from Qualitative Data

- Compensation and Benefits:** Consistent with the quantitative findings, many employees expressed dissatisfaction with their current compensation. A production worker stated, "The salary is not enough to cover our basic needs, especially with the rising cost of living in Chennai."
- Career Growth:** Employees frequently mentioned the lack of clear career progression paths. An interviewee with 3 years of experience noted, "I don't see any opportunity for promotion or skill development here. It feels like I'm stuck in the same position."
- Working Conditions:** Several employees highlighted issues with the physical work environment, including poor ventilation and ergonomic concerns. A focus group participant mentioned, "The factory gets very hot during summer months, and it affects our productivity and health."
- Job Insecurity:** Temporary and contract workers expressed significant concerns about job security. One contract worker stated, "I never know if my contract will be renewed. This uncertainty makes it difficult to plan for the future."
- Work-Life Balance:** Many employees, particularly those with families, mentioned challenges in maintaining a work-life balance due to long working hours and occasional mandatory overtime.

Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data to identify recurring patterns and themes. The analysis revealed five main themes, which closely aligned with the quantitative findings:

1. Financial Strain and Compensation Inadequacy
2. Career Stagnation and Skill Development Barriers
3. Challenging Work Environment and Physical Discomfort
4. Employment Uncertainty and Contract Anxiety
5. Work-Life Imbalance and Time Pressure

These themes provide a deeper understanding of the employee experiences and perceptions that contribute to attrition intentions.

DISCUSSION

The demographic profile reveals a young workforce with high turnover in the first three years of employment. Inadequate compensation, limited career advancement, and poor working conditions are the top three factors contributing to job dissatisfaction and attrition. Factor analysis grouped attrition factors into three main categories: Work Environment, Career Growth, and Compensation. 55% of employees indicated a likelihood of leaving the organization within the next 12 months. Correlation analysis showed significant positive relationships between all identified factors and intention to leave, with compensation having the strongest correlation. Multiple regression analysis revealed that the Compensation Factor is the strongest predictor of intention to leave, followed by Career Growth and Work Environment factors. Tenure has a negative relationship with intention to leave, suggesting that longer-serving employees are less likely to leave. Qualitative findings corroborated the quantitative results and provided deeper insights into employee experiences and perceptions. The findings from both quantitative and qualitative components of the study reveal a complex interplay of factors contributing to employee attrition at the White House garment manufacturing factory.

1. Compensation as a Primary Driver of Attrition

The quantitative data clearly identifies inadequate compensation as the most significant factor contributing to job dissatisfaction and potential attrition. This aligns with previous research by Mahapatro (2010) and Islam et al. (2016), who identified low wages as a primary driver of attrition in labor-intensive industries. The qualitative insights further reinforce this finding, with employees expressing concerns about meeting basic needs with their current salaries.

2. Career Advancement and Skill Development

Limited career advancement opportunities emerged as the second most significant factor in the quantitative analysis and was a recurring theme in the qualitative data. This finding supports the work of Guo et al. (2019), who found that providing opportunities for skill development significantly improved employee retention rates in Chinese garment factories. The lack of clear career progression paths and limited training opportunities appear to be significant contributors to attrition intentions.

3. Working Conditions and Work-Life Balance

Poor working conditions, particularly related to the physical work environment, were highlighted in both quantitative and qualitative findings. This aligns with the research of Locke et al. (2017), who demonstrated that improving workplace conditions led to increased job satisfaction and lower attrition rates in Bangladeshi garment factories. Additionally, the challenges in maintaining work-life balance, especially due to long working hours, support the findings of Haar et al. (2019) on the importance of work-life balance initiatives in reducing turnover intentions.

4. Job Insecurity and the Transient Workforce

The high proportion of temporary and contract workers (34%) and their expressed concerns about job security align with the observations of Sarkar and Kumar (2017) regarding the prevalence of temporary contracts in the garment industry. This job insecurity appears to be a significant factor contributing to the transient nature of the workforce and high attrition rates.

Implications and Recommendations for Retention Strategies

Based on the findings, several targeted interventions can be recommended to improve employee retention:

1. **Competitive Compensation Packages:** Develop and implement competitive compensation structures that align with industry standards and address the rising cost of living in Chennai. Consider performance-based incentives and benefits packages to enhance overall compensation.
2. **Career Development Programs:** Establish clear career progression paths and invest in comprehensive skill development programs. This could include mentorship initiatives, cross-functional training, and leadership development opportunities.

3. **Improve Working Conditions:** Prioritize improvements in the physical work environment, addressing issues such as ventilation, ergonomics, and overall workplace safety. This may require capital investments but can lead to increased productivity and reduced attrition in the long term.
4. **Work-Life Balance Initiatives:** Implement policies that promote better work-life balance, such as flexible working hours where feasible, and ensure compliance with labor laws regarding overtime and rest periods.
5. **Job Security Measures:** Review the current employment structure and consider transitioning more workers to permanent positions. For temporary workers, provide clear communication about contract terms and potential pathways to permanent employment.
6. **Targeted Retention Strategies:** Develop retention strategies specifically tailored to employees in their first three years of employment, as this group appears to be at the highest risk of attrition.
7. **Regular Feedback Mechanisms:** Implement regular employee feedback systems to continuously monitor job satisfaction and address emerging issues proactively.

By addressing these key areas, the White House garment manufacturing factory has the potential to significantly reduce attrition rates, improve employee satisfaction, and ultimately enhance overall organizational performance. These findings and recommendations may also be applicable to other companies in the garment manufacturing sector facing similar challenges.

Future research could focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of implemented retention strategies and comparative analyses across different regions to account for cultural and economic variations in attrition patterns.

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