

BSR | her  
+project

LEVI STRAUSS  
FOUNDATION

# HERproject: Health Enables Returns

The Business Returns from Women's Health Programs

Racheal Yeager, BSR

August 2011



[www.herproject.org](http://www.herproject.org)

## About this Report

The data in this study was produced in partnership with Meridian Group International, implementing partner of the Extending Service Delivery (ESD) project, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded initiative active from June 2005 to June 2011. HERproject implementing partners, Center for Development Services (CDS) in Egypt and Aga Khan University (AKU) in Pakistan, obtained the data used. The Levi Strauss Foundation (LSF) provided support for the HERproject program and portions of the Return on Investment (ROI) studies in both countries.

David Wofford, Shawn MacDonald, and Shannon Pryor of ESD; Daniel Lee of Levi Strauss Foundation; and Chad Bolick and Peder Michael Pruzan-Jorgensen of BSR contributed to this report.

### **About HERproject**

Launched in 2007, BSR's HERproject links multi-national companies and their factories to local NGOs to create sustainable workplace programs that increase women's health awareness. Working with our global network of partners, BSR also demonstrates ROI for factory-based women's health programs. Current participating companies include Abercrombie & Fitch, Clarks, Columbia Sportswear, Hewlett-Packard, J.Crew, Levi Strauss & Co., Li & Fung, Marks & Spencer, Microsoft, Nordstrom, Primark, Talbots, and Timberland.

HERproject is active in Bangladesh, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, and Vietnam. HERproject is generously supported by the Levi Strauss Foundation and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Visit [www.herproject.org](http://www.herproject.org) for more information.

### **About Levi Strauss Foundation**

Established in 1952, the Levi Strauss Foundation drives pioneering social change by funding community programs that advance justice and provide opportunities for disadvantaged people. Its global philanthropy is grounded in the enduring values of Levi Strauss & Co.: originality, integrity, empathy, and courage.

Levi Strauss & Co., is one of the world's largest apparel companies and the leader in jeanswear, marketing its products under the Levi's®, Dockers®, and dENiZEN™ brands.

The Levi Strauss Foundation supports the company's commitment to responsible sourcing by partnering with non-profit organizations that advance the rights and well-being of apparel workers in places where its products are made. Since 1999, the Levi Strauss Foundation has invested more than US\$8 million in programs that have benefited more than 1 million workers in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, paying special attention to the needs of women in apparel factory settings.

### **About BSR**

A leader in corporate responsibility since 1992, BSR works with its global network of more than 250 member companies to develop sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration. With offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR uses its expertise in the environment, human rights, economic development, and governance and accountability to guide global companies toward creating a just and sustainable world. Visit [www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org) for more information.

# Contents

## **Letter from the Levi Strauss Foundation**

## **Introduction**

### **1 A Business-relevant Factory Program to Address Women’s Health**

Study findings

Why does HERproject work?

Working in the business environment: Design factors

### **2 HERproject ROI: The Business Case for Women’s Health Programs in Factories**

### **3 Case Study: Ismailia Factory, Egypt**

Health impacts

Business impacts

### **4 Challenges: Obtaining Accurate and Complete Data**

### **5 Measuring ROI in Factories**

## **Conclusion**

What you can do

## Letter from the Levi Strauss Foundation

Since 2007, Levi Strauss & Co., and the Levi Strauss Foundation have proudly supported and participated in the HERproject. We have funded factory-level women's health programs in China, Egypt, India, and Pakistan, and have provided support for the ROI studies at the heart of this report.

HERproject has been an invaluable partner in our efforts to advance the rights and well-being of workers in the apparel and textile industries. Since 1999, the Levi Strauss Foundation's Worker Rights program has invested more than US\$8 million in improving the lives of factory workers, with a focus on the women who make up the majority of garment workers. More than 1 million workers in 16 countries have benefited from the Worker Rights program, which:

- » Educates workers and factory management on labor rights and responsibilities;
- » Improves the health of workers (including hygiene, reproductive health, and HIV/AIDS);
- » Provides financial and savings education and opportunities for workers; and
- » Protects and promotes labor laws by supporting factory-level dispute resolution mechanisms, legal aid, and arbitration channels.

Thanks to HERproject, we have witnessed significant improvements in health and overall satisfaction among women workers and their male colleagues in our participating supplier factories. Furthermore, the ROI studies indicate that families and communities also benefit from what women workers learn through HERproject.

Levi Strauss & Co., has committed to renew its Terms of Engagement to improve the lives of workers by partnering with suppliers on programs that align with the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDG). No doubt, HERproject is an exemplary factory-based model that contributes in the realization of two key MDG goals: improving maternal health and achieving gender equality.

This ROI study provides further evidence that the results of investing in improving workers' lives can be measured in terms of absenteeism, turnover, and other indicators. We hope that this proves to other suppliers that implementing these programs is not just the right thing to do, but that it also yields compelling returns on the factory floor.

We see HERproject as a true sustainable growth story. It is a business plan and an investment plan that works for people and business.

We invite you to join BSR and the Levi Strauss Foundation in supporting women's health through HERproject and workplace women's health programs.

Sincerely,



Daniel Jae-Won Lee  
Executive Director, Levi Strauss Foundation

## Introduction

HERproject health needs assessments ([www.herproject.org/resources](http://www.herproject.org/resources)) have demonstrated that women's health remains a critical area of investment for international companies and their supplier partners. This study seeks to provide a clear business case for such investments.

Why does the business case matter? Most of all, it matters because it helps make women matter—to their supervisors, to their peers, and to themselves. If money is saved through the betterment of women's lives, and we're able to prove those savings over time, such findings should create a ripple effect to encourage investments in women's health along global supply chains around the world.

In pursuit of these objectives, this study attempts to examine three main research questions:

1. If a factory implements a health education program and improves on-site health services, will there be a return on investment (ROI to the factory in terms of increased productivity, better use of existing resources, and improved worker morale and management relations?
2. Is the factory an effective venue for expanding women's health services, including access to family planning information and services, and improving health behaviors?
3. Will the factory maintain or expand the program, if there is evidence of increased productivity or improved health services and behaviors?

Our research finds the answer to be “yes” to the first two questions. On the third question regarding sustainability, time will tell, but signs are encouraging for three of the four participating factories in this study—all of whom have maintained some program activities.

We believe this study lays the foundation to establish women's health as a mainstream investment area for manufacturing companies, and an increasingly common expectation of international buyers. We also hope that, based on findings from this study and more than 80 other factory-based programs, we can make HERproject a global standard for workplace women's health programs by providing methodologies, materials, and referrals to NGO experts.

Such investments should be encouraged and supported by buyers. Ultimately, basic women's health investments should be incorporated within labor rights expectations as a right to health with a direct relevance to employee performance and well-being.

The study includes an introduction to the HERproject model, study findings, and program design factors for operating in the factory workplace; a presentation of the ROI findings; an in-depth factory case study; a how-to guide for conducting ROI studies; and a conclusion with recommended next steps.

We hope this study will lead to many more HERproject factory programs, and to increased investment in women's health by stakeholders around the world.



## A Business-Relevant Factory Program to Address Women's Health

Through our workplace programs, HERproject has demonstrated the power of basic health information and services to transform individual lives, workplaces, and communities. HERproject also represents a compelling model of public-private partnership where companies pay locally based costs of program implementation. Participating companies include Abercrombie & Fitch, Columbia Sportswear, Hewlett-Packard, J. Crew, Levi Strauss & Co., Li & Fung, Marks & Spencer, Microsoft, Nordstrom, Primark, Talbots, and Timberland.

HERproject programs are 12-18 months in length and delivered via a peer education methodology. Activities include baseline health needs and impact assessments in every factory, as well as training events and techniques tailored to individual factory needs.

HERproject typically trains factory workers, line supervisors, clinic nurses, and human resources staff. HERproject curriculum is tailored to each factory based on identified needs, but generally comprises hygiene, menstrual hygiene, reproductive health, female anatomy, infectious diseases, sexually transmitted infections, maternal health, family planning, and harassment and abuse. Some factories incorporate discussions about ergonomics, workplace safety, and mental health. Many factory programs also include efforts to link improvements in awareness with health services, whether by improving factory-based clinics or creating links with government hospitals and private women's clinics.

### Study Findings

This study includes data from HERproject programs at four factories. The factories are located in Port Said, Egypt; Ismailia, Egypt; and two in Karachi, Pakistan. All four of the factory programs demonstrated that HERproject represents an effective mechanism for increasing female factory workers' awareness of general and reproductive health. In particular, the peer education methodology used in **HERproject proved effective in improving knowledge, increasing use of clinic services, and improving workers' hygiene and**



*Dr. Mervat Nessiem of CDS speaks with HERproject peer educators at factory in Port Said, Egypt.*

### Lessons Learned:

- » Program success is dependent upon the successful engagement of line supervisors on the factory floor.
- » Each Factory should outline commitment to women's health at the beginning and revisit at the end of the program; NGO or other implementing body should work with the factory to outline a sustainability vision built around the business case.
- » Factory should identify key performance indicators (KPIs) together with implementing NGO and buyer (as relevant) to promote factory ownership; this can be incorporated within a co-signed memorandum of understanding (MOU).

**other behaviors.** For example, the percentage of women responding that family planning was “good for the health of the mother” increased from 47 to 97 percent in the Port Said factory, and from 65 to 83 percent in the Ismailia factory. Knowledge of family planning methods also significantly increased in both factories.

From a health needs perspective, the study found that **menstruation causes significant health issues for female factory workers**, including monthly effects on absenteeism, early leave, and production errors. Other significant health needs included personal hygiene, proper use of family planning products, nutrition, and pre-and post-natal care.

For meeting the needs of workers, the study found that, at many factories, **nurses represent untapped resources** for expanded services—particularly for family planning and reproductive health. Nurses also can take on leadership of the peer education program. HERproject provides an “on-the-job opportunity to learn about health,” said the nurse in one Karachi factory. This nurse now dispenses three packets of oral contraceptives, 50 condoms, and one hormonal injection each month; previously none of these products were available in the factory clinic.

By increasing worker awareness and improving factory clinic staff capacity, **HERproject was found to increase worker use of factory clinics and worker satisfaction with clinics.** About 74 percent of female workers in the Karachi factory, compared with 34 percent in baseline, said they went to the factory clinic for consultation when they felt ill.

### Why does HERproject work?

HERproject success can be attributed to its cost-conscious design in conjunction with a worker-oriented and worker-driven program format.

HERproject serves as a program for women’s empowerment, not just women’s health. Many participating women workers have limited education and professional skills, yet HERproject positions them as health ambassadors to their peers. Women workers and clinic staff feel empowered by the program, and share information quickly through existing communication channels. Peer educators are quick to emphasize simple solutions to common health problems,



*HERproject peer educators meet with AKU at a factory in Karachi, Pakistan.*

leading to widespread health behavior changes. Most notably, HERproject encourages peer educators and clinic staff to find a sense of purpose in their new roles. Women participating in HERproject say the experience has made them feel like they are making meaningful contributions to the workplace; a reality that inspires increased job

satisfaction. These changes are extremely powerful, particularly in cultural and professional contexts where women rarely are given opportunities to lead.

HERproject also attaches positive association to the workplace as a safe place for addressing important personal topics, such as women's health. In countries such as Egypt and Pakistan, this can be a powerful addition to women's lives, increasing female employee satisfaction overall.

### Working in the Business Environment: Design Factors

The HERproject program design supports our commitment to create efficient, sustainable, and replicable programs that deliver benefits to workers and management alike. The approach is designed to contribute to, rather than reduce, business efficiencies. Building on lessons learned in the programs in this study as well as others, HERproject methodology has been modified over time to better respond to the constraints of the factory workplace. This section explores common challenges and HERproject program design solutions.

#### Common Challenges

- » Time limitations and availability of workers for trainings
- » Gaining mid-level management buy-in and commitment to the program
- » Difficulty of measuring short-term benefits
- » Deadline pressures and financial constraints on factory
- » Uneven participation or turnover among Peer Health Educators (PHEs)
- » Low education of PHEs
- » Lack of understanding of factory setting by NGO
- » Loss of buyer support if sourcing from factory stops
- » External issues: political, security, other

#### Program Design Innovations

##### **Create a project team:**

Project team should have representation from human resources, production, factory clinic, and union (if relevant). Members of the project team should take clear roles in HERproject, and these roles should be communicated clearly to senior management.

##### **Engage middle management early:**

HERproject recommends that partners conduct a middle management training near the start of each program. This introduces the business-case argument and the program implementation schedule, and provides supervisors with an opportunity to voice concerns and needs.

##### **Select peer educators with care:**

We recommend involving line management and nurses in selecting peer educators; this ensures that each department has at least one peer educator. Criteria for peer educators should include personal characteristics as well as tenure with factory.

##### **Design training session to maximize stability and impact:**

HERproject originally used a methodology based on a 2-3 day initial training and two half day refresher trainings. Now, to address peer educator turnover and low education levels of workers, most partners parcel the curriculum over six 2-3 hour sessions held every other month, with bi-monthly refresher trainings.

##### **Integrate with existing systems:**

We work to combine HERproject with existing training programs or health programs for efficiency and sustainability.

##### **Use creative information sharing:**

Peer educators pass on information during scheduled small-group training sessions, new worker orientations, and during work, lunch, and travel to and from the factory.

**Allow flexible training schedules:** Line managers and HR staff work with peer educators and clinic nurses to avoid costly disruptions in production. For example, at one factory in India, workers are taken for trainings during "style changes," when the production process shifts from one garment to another.



## HERproject ROI: The Business Case for Women's Health Programs in Factories

The study found quantifiable business benefits in the form of reduced worker absenteeism and reduced early leave requests, reduced staff attrition, and reduced "error rates," or mistakes made in manufactured garments. No significant differences were observed in results from factories in Egypt and Pakistan, although data quality varied between individual factories.

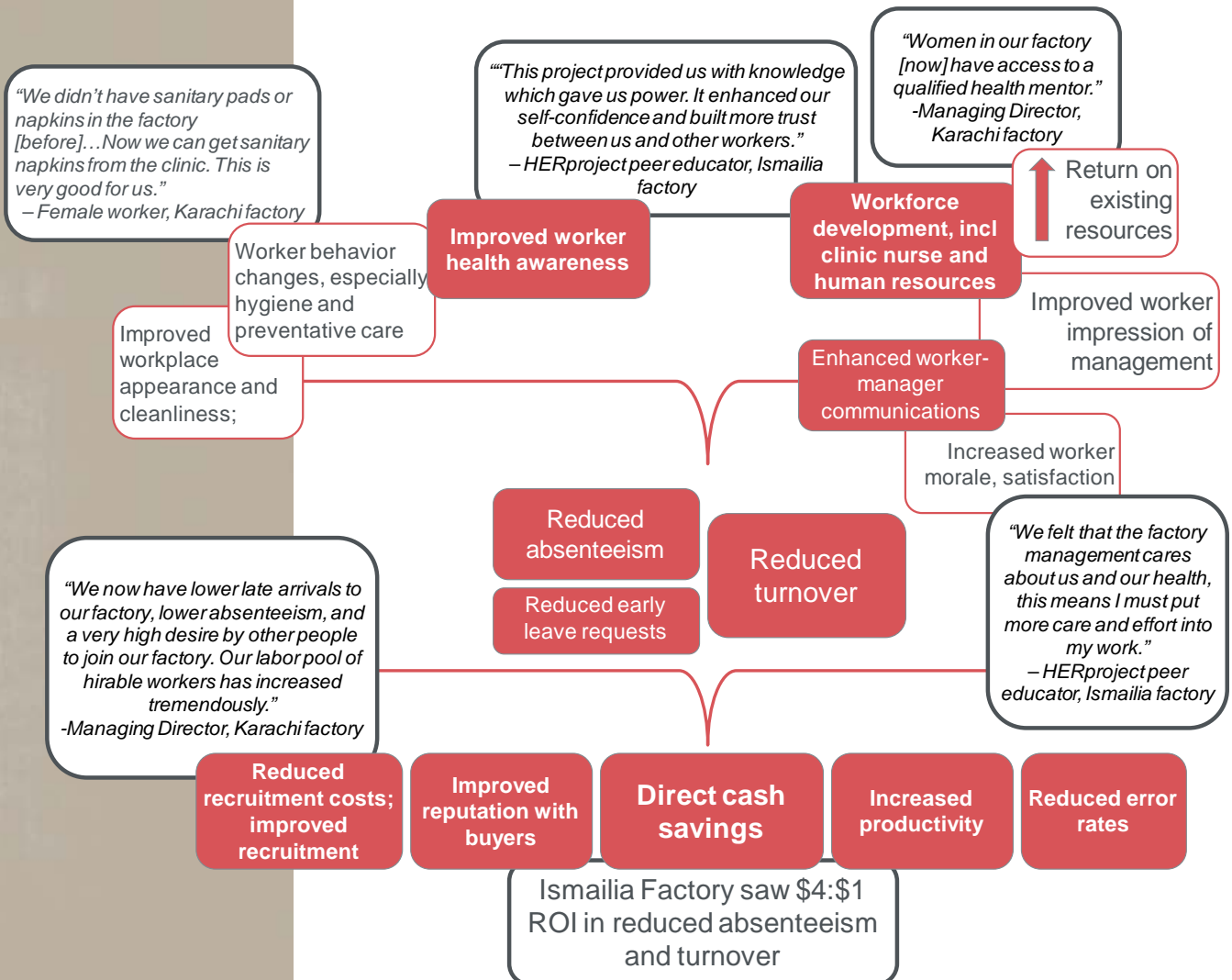
Managers in most factories felt that non-quantifiable benefits of HERproject initiatives were even more important. Management reported workforce development benefits; enhanced utilization of existing resources such as facility nurses; improved worker satisfaction with management; improved worker health behavior; reduced recruitment costs; and improved reputation with factory clients—international "buyers" who purchase the factory's manufactured goods.

### HERproject creates a multiplier effect, generating numerous quantitative and qualitative business benefits.

- » Quantitative evidence consists of absenteeism, turnover and error Rates; Three out of the four factories experienced reductions in absenteeism and turnover by female workers.
- » This study found that softer, often non-quantifiable business benefits matter to management as much or more than quantitative measures.

Improvements in women's health are money-savers for factory owners.

HERproject is measuring how, in quantitative and qualitative terms.



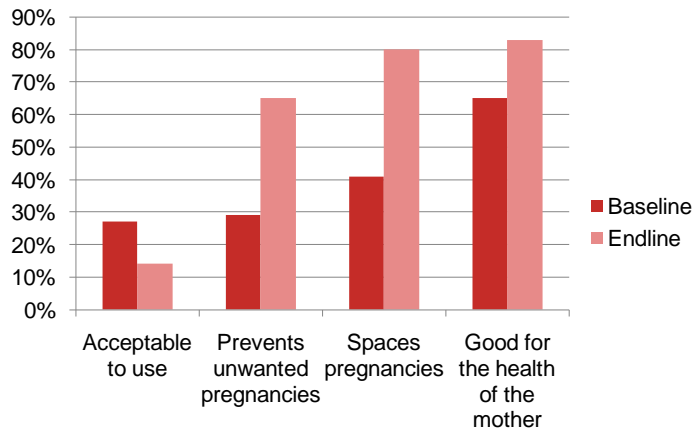
## Case Study: Ismailia Factory, Egypt

HERproject delivered both health and business impacts in the factory.

### Health Impacts

Women workers' health awareness increased on key training topics including personal and menstrual hygiene, nutrition, family planning, sexually transmitted infections, and pre- and post-natal care. Some knowledge changes are highlighted below, together with female worker testimonials about how the changes affected them:

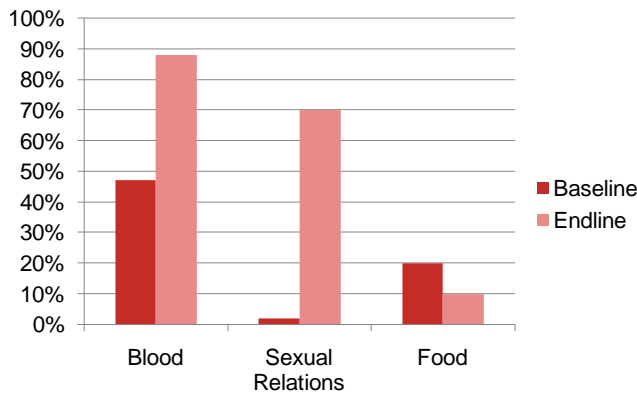
#### Opinion on Family Planning



*"I learned about all family planning methods: the IUD, pills, injections, implants, and the male condom. This is very important for when I get married."*

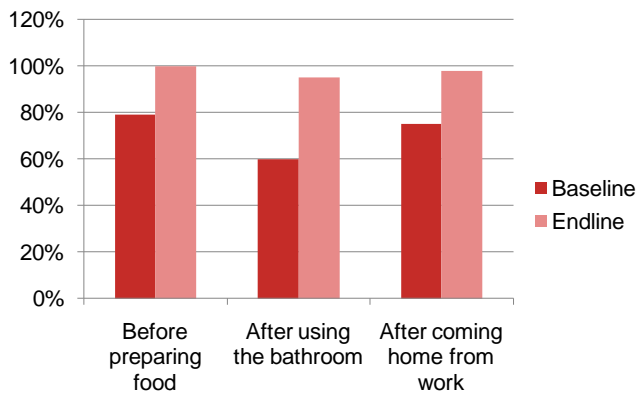
*"Now I do not drink tea directly after meals as it hinders the absorption of iron. I told my family to do so as well."*

#### Transmission of Hepatitis C



*"Hepatitis C is very common in our village. I learned that it is blood-borne and it could be transmitted sexually. I taught many of my colleagues and neighbors how to protect themselves and about the use of condoms."*

#### Hand Washing Practices



*"The topic that benefited me the most was menstrual hygiene and how to overcome menstrual pain. I used those methods and I felt that the pain was reduced instantly. I used to take permission for leave, this is not happening anymore."*

### Ismailia Factory Information:

HERproject launched May 2009

14 Production Lines

500,000 pieces of product per month

Workers: 2,600

### Female Workers: 1,150

- » 73% under the age of 25
- » 34 women trained as peer educators

Salary: 400-600 Egyptian Pounds (US\$70-\$100)

One health clinic with full time nurse and nurse assistant, and visiting doctor two times

*“I am here nine years. We have seen a lot of things and nothing works. This is what I can tell you: Nothing makes an effect on them like that [HERproject]...I honestly didn’t think about health education for workers before...It’s the first time for me also. I learned from the PHEs.”*  
 – Compliance Manager

Not only did overall health knowledge increase, but workers also implemented health behavior changes. About **82** percent of workers took actions to improve their health based on information received from peer educators:

- » 55 percent improved personal hygiene practices
- » 38 percent improved menstrual hygiene
- » 38 percent improved nutrition
- » 7 percent began using family planning or changed family planning methods

### Business Impacts

HERproject was found to deliver an ROI of US\$4:\$1 in the Ismailia factory in the form of reduced absenteeism and turnover rates (detailed in the table below). Beyond this return, however, management underscored further multiplier effects. According to a compliance manager: “If you control absenteeism, you control turnover: New workers who come to work regularly are less likely to quit in the first year.” Absenteeism also affects productivity because it takes workers longer to improve skills, making them slower and more prone to errors. Error rates were not included in the ROI calculation, although management said they felt errors had decreased as a result of HERproject. This factory produces 23,000 pieces per day, and each error prevented represents a savings of US\$10—if tracked, error rate reductions could account for significant additional savings.

Management also cited additional, non-quantifiable business benefits. For starters, the program helped improve the capacity of the on-site factory nurse, who previously had a limited relationship with the workers. Management also viewed HERproject broadly as a tool for work force development. To support this objective, management integrated HERproject into the factory’s new worker orientation. From a reputational perspective, management said other buyer clients had taken notice of HERproject during visits or audits. Finally, management noticed small changes in worker cleanliness and hygiene, and in the cleanliness of bathrooms, which were noted as significant workplace improvements.

### Return-on-Investment Calculation

	Absenteeism	Turnover	ROI	Calculations/Explanation
Number of women workers (reduction)	1,083	982	N/A	Represents a reduction from 19% absenteeism to 10.7% and reduction from 14.5% turnover to 8.1% among female workers.
Cost per worker	\$28	\$100	N/A	Determined by factory
Overall savings from reductions	\$30,324	\$98,200	N/A	Reductions multiplied by cost per worker
Number of women workers discounted against men’s rate	934	629	N/A	Represents a calculation of women’s absenteeism and turnover rates adjusting for the men’s reduction to account for factors that would affect both men and women equally.
Savings at 100% discounted rate	\$26,152	\$62,900	7.4-1	Assumes 100% causation from HERproject (unlikely)
Savings at 75% level	\$19,614	\$47,175	5.6-1	Assumes 75% causation from HERproject
Savings at 50% level	\$13,076	\$31,450	3.7-1	Assumes 50% causation from HERproject
Savings at 25% level	\$6,538	\$15,725	1.9-1	Assumes 25% causation from HERproject
Savings at 10% level	\$2,615	\$6,290	0.74-1	Assumes 10% causation from HERproject (unlikely)

## Challenge: Obtaining accurate and complete data

### Success Factors

- » **Trust** – Researchers must establish trust with workers and management to obtain accurate data.
- » **Access** – The data required is confidential, thus access will be through relevant factory management.
- » **Knowledge of factory setting** – Vocabulary used in factories will vary by country and industry, but some familiarity is required. Management will be able and more willing to help if you “speak their language.”
- » **Data analytics software** – This will assist in determining direct or indirect correlations between sets of data.
- » **Collect “soft” data to inform hard data** -- There may be a local or otherwise specific explanation for spiked absenteeism at key points during the year and these should be factored in to analysis as outliers.

Generally speaking, it can be challenging to obtain the right data from individual factories, and the information-gathering process behind this study was no exception. Researchers on this project failed to obtain data from one factory in Pakistan, and received incomplete data from two additional factories (one in Pakistan and one in Egypt). Only one factory was able to provide the full range of data required to conduct accurate ROI analysis, and that facility still did not provide data on error rate changes. Despite the limited supply of data (and subsequent inability to conduct quantifiable ROI in some cases), the study was able to identify clear business benefits in two of the three factories where limited data was provided.

Internal and external challenges exist to obtaining accurate and complete data.

External challenges include expected or unexpected events that can impact data accuracy. For example, Chinese New Year in China and Ramadan in Muslim-majority countries represent cultural holidays that often are followed by large-scale turnover largely unrelated to employee satisfaction. Unexpected external events can include security challenges or civil disturbances such as those caused by terrorist violence in Pakistan or the recent populist uprising in Egypt; incidents of this nature may prevent workers getting to work or may contribute to worker turnover in other ways. For example, Karachi experienced frequent and irregular civil disturbances throughout the city before and during the study timeframe, which rendered baseline and endline comparisons of productivity much less useful.

Internal challenges come as a result of several factors. A lack of trust, for example, may cause factory management to feel uncomfortable providing accurate or complete data to an external party. This study encountered significant challenges in obtaining cost data such as the valuation of workers’ time or error rates. Some factories may consider this type of data proprietary, as it informs the prices they quote to customers. Addressing internal challenges related to trust are best mediated through ongoing management engagement at both senior and middle levels.

Another internal challenge could be a lack of reliable data due to inadequate data tracking systems, incomplete data, or other issues. As was the case for this study in Pakistan, some records may be paper-based and therefore too costly to share externally because of the resulting administrative burden.

Finally, it is important that researchers develop the required vocabulary and/or knowledge relevant for the factory setting in a given country. If the researcher is unable to understand basic reference points, he or she will fall short of obtaining relevant data.

Researchers should also take care to distance themselves from the buyer, and sign qualified non-disclosure agreements with factories if required. Researchers also should make clear the difference between data collection and a compliance audit. Finally, in anticipation of potential challenges, it is suggested that a researcher select one additional sample factory beyond what is required.



## Measuring ROI in Factories

A researcher or factory employee should look for specific data types and data collection methods when trying to measure ROI from factory-based programs. Some suggestions are detailed below. HERproject Toolkit: Measuring ROI in Factories ([http://herproject.org/downloads/BSR\\_HERproject\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://herproject.org/downloads/BSR_HERproject_Toolkit.pdf)) has more detailed information on the HERproject ROI measurement methodology.

### 1. Identify data to collect:

Data Point	Data specification requirement	Best practice
<b>Absenteeism rates</b>	Specify gender	Specify job role Specify absenteeism reason
<b>Early leave rates</b>	Specify gender	Specify job role Specify early leave reason
<b>Turnover rate</b>	Specify gender	Specify reason for leaving Specify job role
<b>Error rate</b>	Specify gender	Examine error patterns

### 2. Attach value to data. These numbers will be factory specific and will change according to productivity, size of factory, and availability of workers in the area. Some example cost samples are below:

- **US\$30 per worker per day or partial day absent** = Productivity, efficiency, and replacement coverage costs
- **US\$100 per new worker replacement** = Recruitment, training, error, and efficiency costs
- **US\$10 per error or piece damaged** = Loss, quality control, and correction costs

### 3. Determine cost of program implementation

### 4. Pull recommended data samples, collected monthly:

- Baseline sample = 1 year prior minimum, suggest 2 years for greater accuracy
- Endline sample = Program implementation period

### 5. Analyze data:

- Create average rates for male workers and female workers (separately) on data pools available for: (1) baseline year and (2) end-line year
- Determine number of workers (separate men and women) represented by averages
- Discount number of women workers counted against men's rate (note: men are serving as the control group)
- Multiply discounted number of women workers against determined values (step 2)
- Compare in ratio to determined program cost (step 3)
- Repeat multiplication at 75 percent causation; 50 percent causation; 25 percent causation; and 10 percent causation to account for external or other causalities. To do this, multiply the percentage rates against the discounted number of women workers in four additional and separate calculations. See **Ismailia Factory case study** in the preceding section for a detailed table.

### Other relevant data:

- » Factory nurse(s) and doctor(s) salaries
- » Other factory clinic costs
- » Worker health insurance costs
- » Other worker health costs
- » Worker training program costs

## How to Join HERproject

Thirteen companies currently participate in HERproject, and we are always accepting new participants. New participation is currently closed to BSR member companies.

Participation costs vary from US\$5,000-\$7,000 per factory per year. These costs cover the local implementation costs of our NGO partners.

Contact  
[getinvolved@herproject.org](mailto:getinvolved@herproject.org)  
for more information.

## Conclusion: How to Get Involved

The evidence gathered and presented in this study, as well as HERproject's experience working in more than 80 factories globally, is intended to lay a foundation to establish women's health as a mainstream investment area for manufacturing companies and an increasingly common expectation of international buyers. We hope that we can help make this a reality by offering HERproject as a global standard, and providing methodologies and tools for scale and replication.

BSR, the Levi Strauss Foundation, and others will partner in this objective in 2012 and beyond. LSF's recent commitment to work with suppliers to support the MDGs will provide an important platform for integrating women's health on the factory floor and taking programs like HERproject to scale.

We are eager to engage other multi-national companies in these objectives. Advocacy and collaboration with local government ministries, labor unions, manufacturing associations, and other key local stakeholders also will be required to elevate attention to women workers' health and design local programs and policies to meet the needs HERproject has identified across multiple geographies. HERproject is committed to supporting such advocacy efforts with our public and private sector partners.

### What you can do

Based on our collective experiences and growing expertise, we developed six major recommendations to help companies and their suppliers better address women's health challenges in the workplace. As this study demonstrates, addressing these challenges can reduce absenteeism and turnover, improve worker morale and worker-management relations, and boost productivity and production quality. Specifically, we recommend companies and their suppliers:

1. Learn about women's health issues in the supply chain, and share the business case for improving them with new and existing suppliers;
2. Partner with suppliers to provide women's health education in factories through programs like HERproject;
3. Incorporate women's health and hygiene into auditing protocols;
4. Encourage suppliers' formation of health committees with participation by female workers, human resources, and clinic staff;
5. Encourage equal representation of women in human-resources and clinic-staff positions to support female workers; and,
6. Explore with suppliers options for offering women's health-related benefits, services, or products within the factory. Sample offerings could include providing hot meals and nutritional supplements, providing women's health products in the factory clinic, and establishing women's health service partnerships with local clinics or hospitals.

### COMMUNICATING WITH SUPPLIERS

A significant component of achieving one or more of the objectives above is communicating with suppliers about women's health investments.

This study or its executive summary can be shared with suppliers to help support these conversations. Some key messages worth emphasizing with suppliers are outlined below.

### Successful implementation of programs like HERproject can:

- » Improve customer relations by demonstrating commitment to worker well-being;
- » Increase recognition by local stakeholders, including government and civil society, as well as customers;
- » Provide insight into worker needs and worker population trends through health needs assessments conducted by HERproject and similar programs;
- » Deliver financial benefits such as reduced absenteeism, error rates, and worker turnover;
- » Enhance HR systems and improve key personnel through participation in worker education and empowerment programs;
- » Improve employee relations and increase loyalty and satisfaction by demonstrating a concern for human health and well-being, and by allowing workers to take on leadership role in program implementation; and,
- » Maximize the role of clinic nurses by expanding their involvement in worker counseling, awareness-raising, and health services provision or referrals.

HERproject health needs assessments ([www.herproject.org/resources](http://www.herproject.org/resources)) have demonstrated that women's health remains a critical area of investment for international companies and their supplier partners.

BSR and the Levi Strauss Foundation are proud to partner on HERproject, and along with other participating companies (<http://herproject.org/about/partners-and-funders>), we hope to help meet these needs by improving women's health awareness and access to services through cost-effective workplace programs.

We hope others will join us to continue to advance women's health in workplaces around the world.