



# WORKER VOICES AND WELL-BEING

**JULIE BUNDGAARD, PHD FELLOW**  
University of Southern Denmark (SDU)





## Short introduction

Julie Bundgaard

- 2020-now: SDU, PhD researching well-being of Bangladeshi garment workers
- 2016-2019: Danish ETI, i.e. coordinating project in Myanmar's garment industry (social dialogue and productivity)

Jubu@iti.sdu.dk



## Point of departure:

### Limited voice of workers

- Workers' voices are rarely heard in academic research on working conditions
- Existing narratives often perceive workers as passive objects, rather than change agents
- Studying well-being require research that moves beyond the workplace
- A holistic approach considers well-being in life and at work



# Well-being

A state of an individual's physical, mental, and emotional health and happiness

## **Hedonic well-being:**

pleasure and happiness from satisfying desires and emotions

## **Eudaimonic well-being:**

finding meaning and purpose in life and personal growth

## **Social well-being:**

relationships, social connections, sense of belonging, feeling valued and supported



# Well-being in life and at work

	Hedonic well-being	Eudaimonic well-being	Social well-being
Life well-being	Positive affect Negative affect Life satisfaction	Autonomy Personal growth Purpose in life Self-acceptance	Social acceptance Social integration Positive relations with others
Well-being at work	Job satisfaction Positive/negative affect Organisational commitment	Job involvement Work engagement Meaning at work Calling at work	Relationships with peers and leaders Social support Group cohesion
Flow Intrinsic motivational states			

Figure 3: Hedonic-, eudaimonic-, social well-being in life and at work, from Bellingan et al (2020)

# Two papers

**1. The hopefulness and hardship of Bangladeshi garment workers – a photovoice study**

**2. What (not) to expect from worker interviews during social compliance audits**

# Paper 1. The hopefulness and hardship of Bangladeshi garment workers – a photovoice study

## Research questions:

- What factors influence participants' well-being in life and at work?
- To what extent are social audits capable of capturing factors important to garment workers' well-being?



# Photovoice

- 31 participants documenting their life in photos over 4-week period
- Purpose of the photos: Providing visual representations of their lived realities
- Follow-up interviews after 4 weeks

## Data set:

- 188 photos
- 31 semi-structured interviews





# Analysis

- “Friends and family”: 40 % of all photos

<u>Photo code</u>	<u>No.</u>
Friends and family	76
Physical spaces	32
Self-staging	25
While working	22
While at home	18
Physical fatigue or strain	8
Food	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>

# Photo 122



- " [In the photo is] My son and his friend. My son was really excited because his wish came true"
- "I feel sad because **he doesn't stay with me always, he stays back my hometown.** So I feel really happy when I am able to fulfil his wishes."
- "My son was really happy because we took him to the park, I wanted to capture this moment so I took a photo."



# Photo 110



- "My son picked up lotus flower, so I wanted to show that"
- "It makes me sad that **he tries to help me** with anything that he is capable of. He brought this lotus and told me to cook something with the flower"
- "**That day we had no food, so my son went to get some lotus flowers for me to cook.** He was sweating a lot so I took a photo of him"

# Photo 74



- “[I shared this photo] To show how I take rest after a day’s work”
- “Everyone is lying down on the bench”
- “If I was home then I wouldn’t have had to lie down here like this, so this brings me a little pain.”
- “I took this photo to share my pain with the ones who sees this picture.”



# Findings – hedonic well-being

Hedonic wellbeing		
	Positive factors	Negative factors
<b>At work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a pleasant work environment</li><li>• good rules and regulations</li><li>• timely payment</li><li>• availability of breaks</li><li>• satisfaction with the machines and the fabrics they work with</li><li>• opportunity to get outside for a few minutes during work.</li><li>• Availability of lunch</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Long working hours</li><li>• Lack of breaks</li><li>• Physical discomfort</li><li>• Standing/sitting in same positions</li></ul>
<b>Outside work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holidays</li><li>• Being home</li><li>• Cooking for the family</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Being away from home</li></ul>

# Findings – social well-being

<b>Social well-being</b>		
	<b>Positive factors</b>	<b>Negative factors</b>
<b>At work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Friendly colleagues</li><li>• Good behaviour</li><li>• Understanding of each other's' situation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Negative behaviour by a supervisor</li><li>• Reprimands</li></ul>
<b>Outside work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Family time</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disappointed children</li></ul>



# From eudaimonic well-being to self-efficacy/life agency

Currently I don't have the opportunity to do something good but when the time comes, I want to live a better life.

I don't have ability or education to do so I don't want to try

I have no plan because human life is very uncertain.

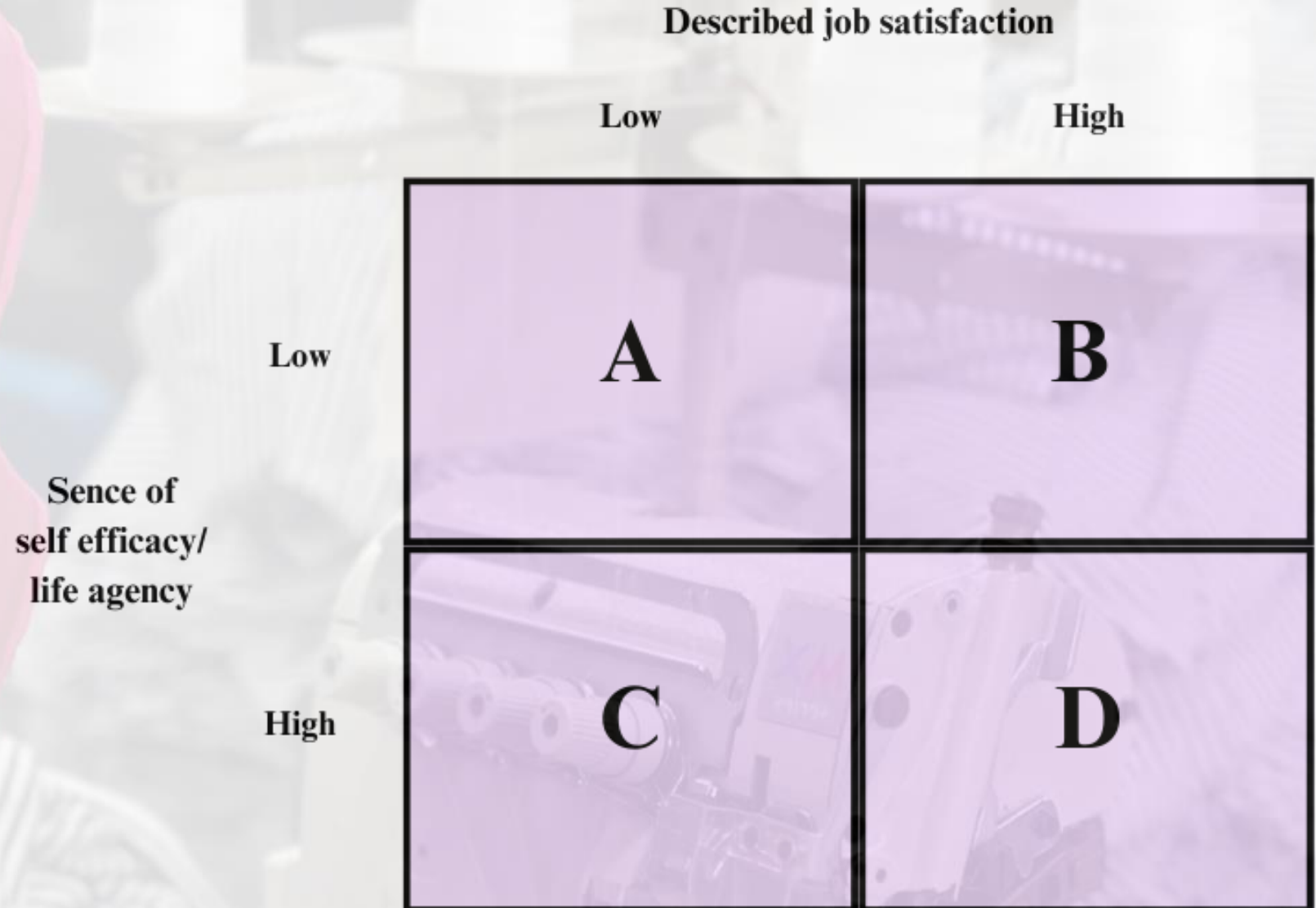
Q: What is your dream job?

R: We are women. What can be our dream?

Q: How long do you see yourself working in X factory?

R: For however long I am destined to.

Findings:  
Self-efficacy, life  
agency and job  
satisfaction



Findings:  
Self-efficacy, life  
agency and job  
satisfaction

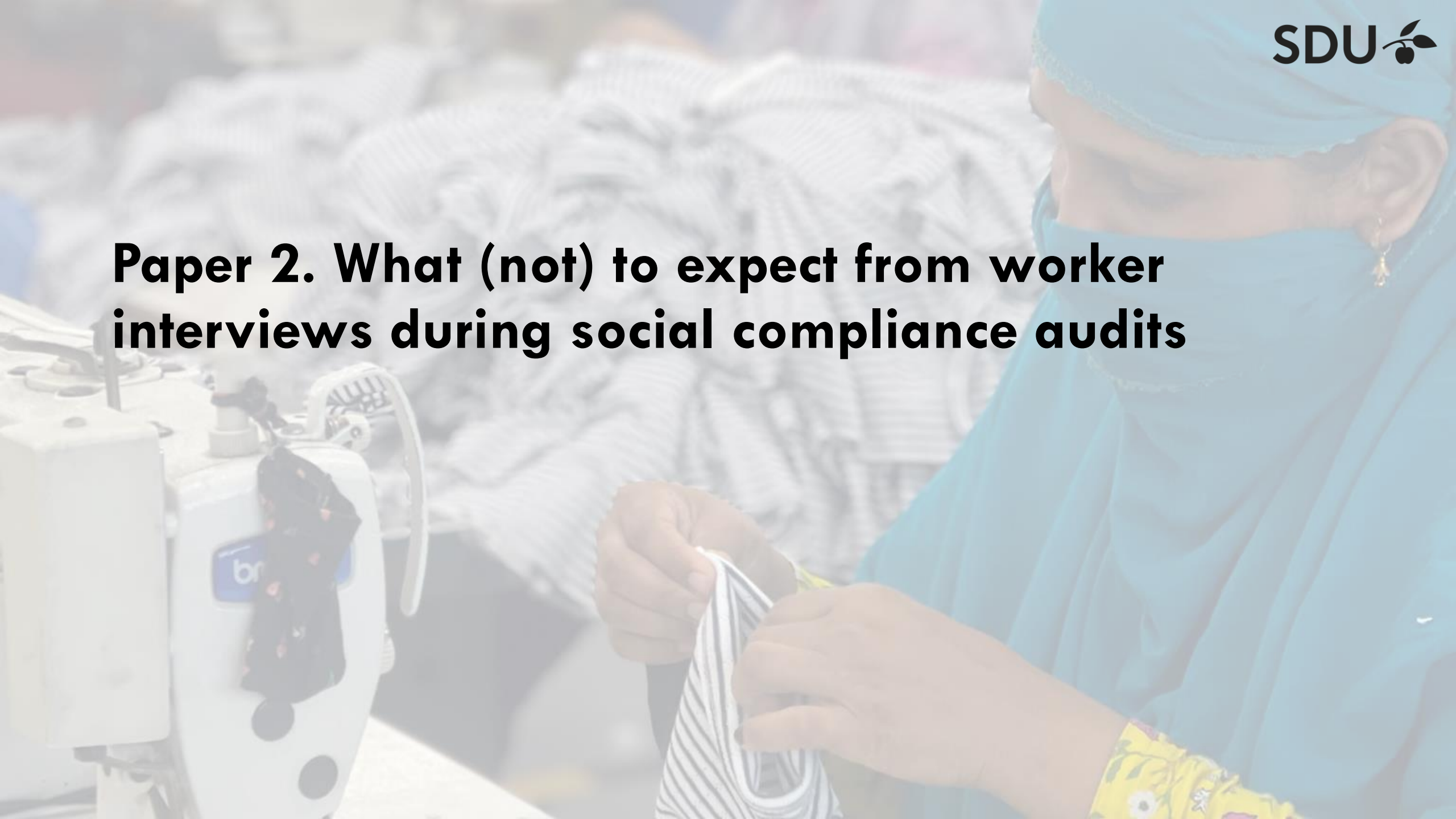
		Described job satisfaction	
		Low	High
Sense of self efficacy/ life agency	Low	<b>A</b> 3 (9,5 %)	<b>B</b> 17 (55 %)
	High	<b>C</b> 4 (13 %)	<b>D</b> 7 (22,5 %)



# Conclusions

- Perceived self-efficacy and life-agency related to financial stress and hardship
- Combination of expressed high job satisfaction and low self-efficacy suggests acceptance and gratitude of circumstances rather than an absence of challenges
- Photovoice has proved essential in unravelling participants' thoughts and emotions about their daily lives

## **Paper 2. What (not) to expect from worker interviews during social compliance audits**



# In-depth interviews

- 40 interviewees (in-depth interviews)
- 29 offsite / 11 onsite
- 35 female / 5 male
- Average age: 24,5

Case factory	Empl. yees	No. Of interviews	Type of interview	Gender	Age	Committee membership	
1	6700	8	Offsite	Female	23	Compliance- and safety committee	
				Female	31		
				Female	21		
				Female	23		
				Female	24		
			Onsite	Female	21		
				Male	21		
				N/A	19		
2	900	7	Offsite	Female	28		
				Female	28		
				Female	23		
				Female	29		
				Female	35		
			Onsite	Female	38		
				Female	N/A		
3	850	6	Offsite	Female	19		
				Female	24		
				Female	32		
				Female	28		PC committee
				Female	22		
				Female	25		
4	2400	6	Offsite	Female	27	Safety committee VP + first aid committee	
				Female	26		
				Female	22		
			Onsite	Female	24		
				Male	32		PC committee
				Female	24		Safety committee
5	2500	6	Offsite	Female	21	Safety committee	
				Female	26	PC committee	
				Female	18		
				Female	26		
			Onsite	Female	26	Safety committee	
				Female	N/A	PC committee	
6	1100	3	Offsite	Female	19	Safety committee vice chair	
			Onsite	Female	23		
7	2700	1	Onsite	Female	N/A		
				Male	50+		
8	2500	2	Onsite	Male	23		
				Female	26		
9	8500	1	Onsite	Male	31		
Total		40					



# Findings

## 1. Workers' descriptions of audits

<b>1</b>	<b>Audits resemble window dressing</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Good audits = more orders</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Audits are beneficial for workers</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Audits do not effect change</b>

# Findings

## 2. Pain and physical fatigue

- Several participants suffer from neck-, back-, and foot pain
- “Only solution is to quit”
- Workers place little responsibility to factory management to remediate their challenges, though they do identify their pains as being work-related.
- Reflect ergonomic risks we observe in several case factories

# Findings

## 3. Safety vs. health knowledge

- Workers show awareness about safety- and emergency procedures and protocols
- A gap in the knowledge related to ergonomic considerations, physical strain
- No lingo to express improvements to their pain, and “auditors do not ask about these [health issues] things”
- Reflect audit guidelines, where safety is highly prioritised, while ergonomics is not mentioned in audit reports from the 9 case factories



# Findings

## 4. Onsite vs. offsite

- Among offsite interviewees, 65% report significant chronic or milder acute pain
- Among onsite interviewees, 27% report milder pain → minimise issue by pointing to themselves as the issue – thereby separating from work-related issues to personal issues
- No difference in answers related to safety

# Combined conclusions

- Social audits are not equipped to capture the lived experiences of workers, incl. physical- and mental health
- Workers have been educated in safety, not physical- and mental health
- Current understandings of workers' incentives and disincentives during audit interviews are too simple
- Workers' voices are critical for identifying the roots of social compliance
- Worker-centric research methodologies provide platforms for workers to express their lived realities

# Recommendations for future social audits

- Encompass a more holistic understanding of workers' well-being
- Include ergonomic risks and mental health and considerations to audit guidelines
- Efficacy of onsite vs. offsite interviews varies, indicating a need for more nuanced approaches to capture lived realities



**Thank you!**  
**Questions?**

**Julie Bundgaard, PhD Fellow**  
University of Southern Denmark (SDU)  
[Jubu@iti.sdu.dk](mailto:Jubu@iti.sdu.dk)