

# The Health and Economic Benefits of Investing in a Menstrual Health Programme in the Workplace



Source: Good Business Lab

## A Case Study on the Implementation of Project Pravah at Shahi Exports

### At a glance

This case study highlights the key outcomes of Shahi Exports' menstrual health activity in the workplace, while making the case for additional investments in other factories through using the UNFPA Return-on-Investment Tool (ROI-T).

Key outcomes:

- **22%** increase in the use of sanitary pads.
- **15%** decrease in women feeling unwell during the menstrual cycle.
- **21%** estimated reduction in absenteeism.
- Estimated **USD 2.90 return** for every USD 1 invested in the provision of sanitary pads in the workplace.

### Background

The garment and textile sectors employ millions of women worldwide, and a significant share of manufacturing takes place in factories and companies across Asia. In the broader Asia-Pacific region, many of these women face multiple vulnerabilities, such as low income and education, poor access to social sector programmes<sup>[1]</sup>, and they are often migrants subject to poor working conditions<sup>[2]</sup>.

The [UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office \(APRO\) Workplace Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights \(SRHR\) programme](#), as part of the [UNFPA Coalition for Reproductive Justice in Business](#), aims to demonstrate to businesses and private sector stakeholders the positive health and economic returns of investing in the access to and provision of SRHR services for employees.

The [UNFPA Return-on-Investment Tool \(ROI-T\)](#) was developed by UNFPA APRO, in collaboration with [Good Business Lab](#), to support businesses to meaningfully contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of their employees by demonstrating the economic and financial impacts and sustainability of implementing SRHR programmes in the workplace.

Learn more about the [UNFPA ROI-T](#)



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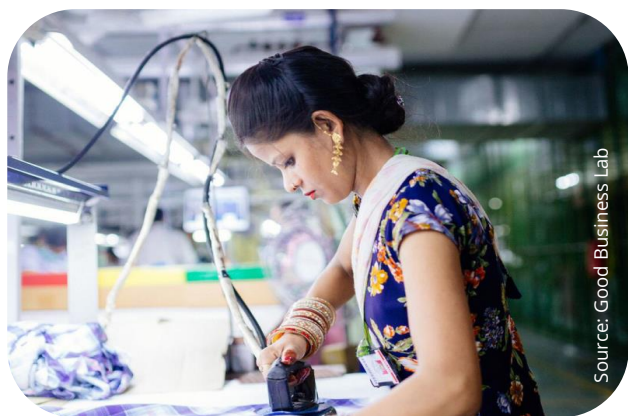
This Case Study seeks to present a relevant business case using real administrative data from a large-scale labour-intensive garment company, building on learnings from already implemented activities, to expand access to voluntary SRHR services in the workplace by demonstrating workforce health improvements and firm-level productivity benefits to factory owners and brands.

## Addressing menstrual health in a factory setting in India

[Shahi Exports \(Shahi\)](#) was established in 1974 and is currently India's largest apparel manufacturer and exporter with more than 50 manufacturing facilities across nine Indian states with a diverse workforce of around 100,000 people.

Shahi employs more than 70,000 skilled women across its factories and corporate headquarters, establishing the company as one of the largest private employers of women in India, and over the last 50 years has developed numerous programmes to support women workers.

Despite the legal mandate requiring every factory in India to maintain a dispensary stocked with sanitary pads<sup>[3]</sup>, a surprising finding emerged from one factory boasting over 3,000 women workers: only 200 sanitary pads were used per month. This significant discrepancy led Shahi to question how effectively the more than 70,000 women across their factories managed their menstrual health.



A worker working at a Shahi factory

In 2018, a comprehensive effort to understand the needs of women working in the National Capital Region (NCR) factories led to Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with over 150 participants. Insights from the FGDs concluded that, amongst women workers:



**60%**

*used cloth instead of sanitary pads*



**40%**

*did not use sanitary pads because they found these expensive*



**65%**

*said they would use sanitary pads if these were cheaper*

## Project Pravah

To address this issue, Shahi developed the Project Pravah, which entailed two key menstrual health components:

- 1. Access.** The primary goal of Project Pravah was to offer affordable and high-quality sanitary pads. Biometric-enabled vending machines were strategically placed in female toilets, providing highly subsidised sanitary pads, and integrated into payroll, simplifying the process of salary deduction.
- 2. Awareness.** A Training of Trainers (ToT) guided session was facilitated, followed by specialised training for supervisors (many of whom are men) and their spouses, strategically designed to broaden their understanding. Having these training sessions for these stakeholders helped break the taboo around accessing menstrual health services. Sensitisation sessions were conducted for the medical team and HR department to ensure a comprehensive grasp of pivotal issues, alongside other initiatives.

The project was piloted in two factories in the Delhi – NCR region, benefitting 800 women workers.

The following outcomes were observed after implementing Project Pravah programmes:

## Impacts

**22% more women** using sanitary pads

**24 p.p. more women** 'strongly agreeing' that the company cares about them

**23 p.p. less women** using cloth scraps

**15% less women** feeling 'no good' during their menstrual cycle

**2 out of 3** women utilised the available sanitary pads' dispenser

**4 out of 5** women found the training provided helpful

## ROI-T projection: the case for scaling-up sanitary pads provision

UNFPA ROI-T is an evidence-based calculator tool which allows companies to dynamically create, compare and organise Return-on-Investment (ROI) projections on [selected SRHR activities](#) to make informed decisions in an interactive workspace with real-time updates and results. One of the activities available in the ROI-T is the provision of sanitary pads in the workplace.

Building on the existing implemented activities in two of Shahi's factories, a business case was developed to estimate the ROI of implementing a similar activity in another one of Shahi's factories.

The existence of an Organisational Development team within Shahi made data collection for the ROI-T projections easier, given that the data needed to input in the ROI-T was already being documented by the company and that different departments already worked collaboratively to provide inputs on different aspects of workers' health and wellbeing.

The programme's cost was straightforward to determine since it had already been implemented in two other factories. The company subsidised the sanitary pad for 47.36% of its costs.

The overall investment cost was ₹62,34,600 (approx. USD 7.5k) which covered the biometric sanitary pad vending machine, the training sessions, and the subsidised sanitary pads.

The ROI-T estimated return was then calculated considering the existing evidence regarding the implementation of similar programmes in the workplace, which has demonstrated a reduction in absenteeism of 21% linked to such programmes.

**The estimated ROI for the provision of subsidised sanitary pads in the selected additional factory would be USD 2.90 for every USD 1.00 invested**, which could be also considered the monetization of the impacts from Project Pravah.

### Impact of the programme

Absenteeism

**21%**  
reduction

### Outcomes

Annual Cost of Programme	USD 8.51k
Annual Savings from Programme	USD 24.69k

### Projected ROI USD 2.90

For every USD 1 invested

## Considerations for implementation

While the ROI-T projects positive results from implementing a Sanitary Pads programme at one more of Shahi's factories, the following aspects

must be accounted for as the intervention is projected for other factories and replicated on the ground.

1. **Technological literacy.** Using sanitary pad vending machines may present a learning curve for female garment workers. The training sessions will help in bridging this technological gap.
2. **Sanitary Pad quality.** It is important to check the sanitary pads' quality. A decline in quality can lead to distrust in the system and reduced intervention uptake.
3. **Temporary factory closures.** Previous programmes have shown that a temporary shutdown of the service (e.g. pandemics) might result in a drop-down in the utilisation rate. Contingencies should be put in place to ensure the uninterrupted availability of the pads and to ensure habit forming.
4. **Financial integration.** A seamless integration into the worker's payroll system will ensure easy pad access on any given day. HR, IT, Accounts, and Finance teams must be looped in from the start of intervention planning to execute this successfully.



Source: Shahi Exports

A worker collecting and paying for a sanitary pad in one of Shahi's factories

## Conclusion

This case study highlights the successful implementation of Project Pravah at Shahi Exports, focusing on menstrual health for its predominantly female workforce. The initiative not only provided high-quality, affordable sanitary pads but also effectively increased awareness through comprehensive training programs.

**The observed outcomes - increased usage of sanitary pads, decreased reliance on less hygienic alternatives like cloth, and enhanced perceptions of employer care - illustrate the tangible benefits of the programme.** These improvements have fostered a healthier work environment and demonstrated potential economic returns through reduced absenteeism.

**For every dollar invested, the program has the potential to return approximately USD 2.90, underscoring the financial viability of investing in employee health and wellbeing.**

Case studies like these demonstrate the ROI-T's ability to showcase the substantial returns of investing in women's health. Organisations are often sceptical about the influence of such programs on their daily operations. The ROI-T, in this context, is instrumental in highlighting key performance indicators that contribute to business success, providing organisations with a compelling rationale for investing in such programmes.

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