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Impacts on the Lives and Livelihoods of Factory Workers during COVID-19

A Gender-sensitive Analysis

Roth Vathana and Benghong Siela Bossba

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CDRI

📍 56 Street 315, Tuol Kork
✉ PO Box 622, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
☎ +855 23 881 701/881 916/883 603
@ cdri@cdri.org.kh
🌐 www.cdri.org.kh

Layout: Oum Chantha
Cover designed by: Chhay Monyka
Edited by: Jessica Alice Kalisiak
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Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CSO	Civil society organisation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GDP	Gross domestic production
GFT	Garment, footwear, and travel goods
ILO	International Labour Organization
MLVT	Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

This study analyses the impacts of COVID-19 on the lives and livelihoods of workers in the garment, textile and footwear manufacturing in Cambodia, a sector which employed approximately 800,000 people (80 percent of whom were female) and contributed about 70 percent to the country's annual total export value prior to the pandemic. The analysis examines potential disproportionate effects of the pandemic on women and men, focusing on earnings, consumption and remittances, possible conflicts at home and workplace, mental health, coping strategies and receipts of in-cash and in-kind assistance from the government, development partners and non-governmental organisations. The study uses a dataset of 2,000 workers surveyed by phone between 10 June and 18 July 2021. The phone survey was employed in lieu of the usual face-to-face interviews due to health and administrative restrictions by the government to curb the transmission rate of the infection. The sampling design was a two-stage stratified random sample in which a representative number of factories and workers were randomly chosen in the first and second stage, respectively.

In relation to the economic shock, the results show a significant loss of earnings, mainly wages, before and during COVID-19. The loss ranged between 38.6 and 40.4 percent with an average of 39.5 percent. Female respondents reported a higher loss of earnings than their male counterparts (40.2:36.9 percent). There is no statistically significant impact on the loss of earnings by age group and marital status, indicating that COVID-19 has affected earnings of young or old and single or married workers in equal measure. Nonetheless, the economic impacts were severe among workers who were laid off and suspended with an average loss of wage earnings ranging between 38.8 percent and 58.8 percent. The loss of earnings had spill-over effects on food and non-food consumption and remittances. Both female and male respondents reported reduced food and non-food consumption and smaller remittances to relatives in their hometowns (from USD103 to USD71 for female; from USD109 to USD83 for male). The respondents reported a 35.3 percent reduction in food consumption compared to 48.4 percent in non-food consumption. Female respondents reported a bigger cut in non-food consumption than their male counterparts.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the time spent on domestic and unpaid care work, particularly among women. Household members spent more time at home, including children due to school closures (subsidised by online classes) which contributed to the increase. Female respondents saw a 56.4 percent increase in time taking care of children in comparison to before and during COVID-19 compared to a 38.1 percent rise for male respondents. The results also indicate that very few of the male respondents reported time taking care of children as a reason for the increased time spent on domestic and unpaid care work during COVID-19, implying that childcare is mainly a woman's responsibility. The pandemic also affected mental health and how the respondents viewed lives during the economic hardship. The average score of the WHO-5 well-being indicators was below 50 (47.8), indicating pessimism of economic well-being. The score for male respondents was significantly lower than that of females (29.5:52.5).

The respondents adopted several coping strategies to mitigate the negative shock of COVID-19, the most common three were: i) loans from friends/relatives; ii) reduced food and non-food consumption and, iii) receiving in-cash and in-kind assistance from the government and other non-governmental organisations. Savings were also used, albeit only in 15 percent of cases. There is no statistical difference of the use of coping strategies between female and male respondents surveyed.

The government was quick to provide short-term cash support through its cash transfer program to the workers. Approximately 6 out of 10 respondents (or their household members) reported receiving cash support from the government since March 2020. The average monthly cash receipt was USD43.1 (USD40.6-45.7). There is no difference in the amount of cash assistance received between female and male respondents. That is, females received on average USD43.5 per month compared to USD42.3 for male.

We provide the following policy suggestions to the government and other relevant stakeholders.

- Continued assistance remains necessary to help mitigate the shock, particularly for female workers who have more dependents (children and elders) living in the household or in their hometown. Receiving government assistance was the third most common coping strategy by the surveyed workers, indicating that the assistance could provide immediate relief during the difficult time when other options were limited.
- Financial literacy, particularly on the use of loans and the importance of saving during times of prosperity, should be considered. Although the respondents used savings to mitigate the shock, only a few had the option because the majority of the survey respondents did not save, or insufficiently did so, pre-pandemic. The program should target both females and males.
- Targeting mechanisms should be considered a long-term action plan as it remains challenging to identify beneficiaries for support. The results show that 39.2 percent of the respondents did not receive government support, citing no knowledge of the program.
- Re-skilling and up-skilling should remain a priority for workers in this sector. As shown, the majority of the surveyed workers, currently employed, suspended or terminated, had limited knowledge of the government's existing programs to help them obtain new or better skills. They were also unwilling to invest time and money in the cause.
- Awareness raising among men on the shared responsibility of domestic and unpaid care work (childcare and elders) should be done as most male respondents viewed care work as a women's responsibility.

1. Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) first emerged in late 2019 in China. It spread rapidly across the world; first from Asia to Europe and then globally. Following the declaration as a “global pandemic” by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020, more than two hundred million cases and over four million deaths were reported by September 2021 (WHO 2021).

As part of the effort to slow and contain the spread of the virus, health measures and nonpharmaceutical interventions were implemented. Health measures include wearing masks, sanitizing regularly, and the maintenance of social distance. Nonpharmaceutical interventions consist of restrictions in the form of stay-at-home orders, partial or complete lockdowns, border closures, and other measures. Various studies have shown that these measures were indeed effective in achieving their purpose (Kaimann and Tanneberg 2021; Ouchetto, Drissi Bourhanbour, and Boumhamdi 2020; Pragyana et al. 2020). However, the repercussions of which cannot be ignored. By mid-April 2020, more than 7 billion people around the world had been affected by COVID-19 related internal and external restrictions (United Nations Development Programme 2020). Simulated COVID-19-adjusted Human Development Index was running in minus for the first time since 1990 (UNDP 2020). Unavoidable socio-economic impacts caused by discontinued social gatherings, disruptions in economic activities, and a reduction in consumption remain a concern, especially among developing countries where fragile health systems and poverty were already a challenge even before the pandemic.

COVID-19 has significantly affected the lives and livelihoods of people globally. In 2020, the world gross domestic production (GDP) contracted by 3.4 percent year-on-year (World Bank 2022). Another estimate by OECD (2020), based on sectoral output, showed that most of the G7 economies would experience a reduction in GDP, between 20 to 25 percent, as a result of economy shutdown (OECD 2020). As COVID-19 progresses into an economic crisis, its impact has been uneven depending on the type of industry, region and the ability of the government to intervene. Contact intensive industries have been hit the hardest. For instance, the service sector was preliminarily estimated to experience a 3.9 percent reduction in outputs, followed by manufacturing (3.1 percent) and agriculture (3.0 percent) globally (Maryla, Aaditya, and Dominique van der 2020). ASEAN countries in particular are among those that have seen the most significant reductions in manufacturing outputs and exports (Maryla, Aaditya, and Dominique van der 2020). At the start of 2020, global manufacturing outputs fell by 4.1 percent, with the sharpest decline (11.3 percent) in the last ten years in the second quarter of the year. Aggregated by sub-sector manufacturing, developing economies experienced a decline of 10.7 percent (over 30 percent in the second quarter) in the production of apparel and textiles (UN 2020a; UNIDO 2020b). Asian countries had the largest share (64.7 percent) in global garment exports in 2018 (International Labour Organization 2020d), which proves the significance of this sector in sustaining the economy of these countries. More than 60 million people across the Asia Pacific region were employed in the garment industry and around 35 million of these were female (James, Jason, and Christian 2020a). Therefore, when COVID-19 disrupted the supply chain in this sector, the effects were felt not only by the business operations of these firms but also the millions of workers whose lives and livelihood were dependent on such activities.

In this study, we used phone survey data of 2,000 workers in the garment, footwear and travel goods (GFT) sector in Cambodia to investigate the impacts of COVID-19 on the lives and livelihoods of the workers and their families. Although the effects of the pandemic on households and firms have been extensively studied, analyses of more comprehensive data remain necessary to better understand the impact of the pandemic and provide evidence for

policymaking. An important contribution of this study is the gender-sensitive analysis in order to determine differences in gendered impacts.

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the findings from previous studies to identify knowledge gaps. Section 3 outlines sampling design and sample size. It also summarises how data collection was conducted and the challenges the research team and enumerators faced in collecting the information. Section 4 provides descriptive statistics of socio-economic indicators impacted by the pandemic, whereas Section 5 discusses selected issues that emerge from the findings. Section 6 concludes and suggests policy measures and lessons learnt.

2. Literature review

Since the outbreak, COVID-19 and its impacts on firms' operations as well as the lives and livelihood of the workers in the garment and textile manufacturing sub-sectors have extensively been studied. Some of the main impacts reported by garment manufacturers include the lack of supply and demand, shortage of labour, and compulsory workplace closure (ILO 2020b). Countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar, which are highly dependent on China for raw materials, reported a shortage of such items as a major problem (Shuvro et al. 2020). In addition, order cancellation and deferred payments further degraded the factories' abilities to sustain their business operations and more importantly to pay their workers (Shuvro et al. 2020). Based on a survey with 1,789 firms (of which 29 percent are manufacturing firms) across ASEAN countries and India, it shows that the most common measure that firms adopt to respond to the disrupted supply chain is 'cost reduction and/or optimisation' (Oikawa et al. 2021). Most factories were required to stop operations temporarily to comply with COVID-19 prevention measures. By April 2020, 86 percent of garment workers across the Asia Pacific region lived in countries where mandatory workplace closures were in effect except for essential services (James, Jason, and Christian 2020a). The impacts of which will be felt in the implications on workers' livelihoods. For instance, lay-offs and dismissals were commonly practised. More than 50 percent of surveyed suppliers whose workers mostly reside in China, Bangladesh, Vietnam and India, reported having to lay-off workers, although the proportion of laid-off workers varies (Better Buying Institute 2020). The manufacturing sector is among the top three sectors that have the highest share of job losses in the Philippines (11 percent), Thailand (22 percent), Indonesia (27 percent) and Vietnam (22 percent) (Asian Development Bank 2021a).

Given the scale of the negative impacts, most of the studies which were reviewed report a low level of workers being permanently terminated. Based on a survey conducted with 3,896 female garment workers in Ethiopia, only two percent reported being terminated, although 26 percent were on paid or unpaid leave and 13 percent voluntarily left their jobs (Meyer et al. 2021). Also, most workers who left under voluntary circumstances stated that they would like to return once the situation improves. In central Bangladesh, a phone survey with 1,587 garment sector employees revealed that only 3 percent of workers reported losing their job in the industry, whereas 6 percent left voluntarily (Rabbani, Uckat, and Woodruff 2020). However, the majority of these workers remained economically inactive in June 2020, four months after their job losses in February. The finding in Vietnam shows a different pattern. CARE International in Vietnam (2020) reports that 42.4 percent of their respondents lost their job in the apparel and footwear sector. More than half of these (65.8 percent) were still looking for a job and the rest already found employment in the informal sector.

Through a multi-country quantitative digital survey and interviews with over 1,000 workers in garment supply chain in Ethiopia, Honduras, India, and Myanmar, COVID-19 is found to have

severely degraded workers' labour and living conditions (Lebaron et al. 2021). The workers reported an average income loss of 11 percent, which was mainly driven by a reduction in overtime and working hours. Consequently, people were forced to skip meals and took up second jobs during their spare time. Even more concerning, many have reduced savings and increased debt. The average savings fell drastically from PPP-adjusted USD409 pre-pandemic to USD137, whereas the average level of debt increased by 16 percent. Over 60 percent of workers reported that they had to borrow money during the pandemic. The phone surveys in central Bangladesh revealed similar findings (Rabbani, Uckat, and Woodruff 2020). Due to the temporary closure of the factory, workers reported a reduction in monthly salaries by 47 percent between March and April 2020. Although the salary recovered slightly in May, it did not reach the pre-pandemic level. Following the reduction in income, workers reported a decrease in household food expenditure by 8 percent. Whereas transfers and savings witnessed a bigger reduction by 54 percent and 55 percent, respectively (Rabbani, Uckat, and Woodruff 2020). In Vietnam, such impacts are also reported among 1,280 surveyed workers in the apparel and footwear sector. Approximately 86.9 percent of people experienced reduced working hours and an average of a 22-29 percent income reduction was documented in the first half of 2020 (CARE International in Vietnam 2020). No different from the coping strategies evidenced in other countries, the majority of Vietnamese workers cut spending on food and other essential goods. Moreover, 49.3 percent used their savings and 7.5 percent took loans out.

In Cambodia, previous studies (Ngo et al. 2021; CARE International in Cambodia 2020), have shown similar negative effects of COVID-19 on the lives and livelihoods of workers in garment manufacturing, a sub-sector which employed ~800,000 workers (80 percent of whom were female) and contributed approximately 70 percent to annual total export value prior to the pandemic. Tourism and hospitality, in addition to the garment industry, had been the two most affected sectors (United Nations Industrial Development Organization 2020a). Approximately 81.1 percent of textile, garment and footwear firms expected a decline in revenue, and 67.7 percent had laid off or planned to lay off their workers. Using a survey conducted in June 2020 with 307 female garment workers, CARE International in Cambodia (2020) shows that 39 percent of respondents had experienced suspensions or were laid-off between February and May 2020. The top five impacts reported by these female workers were lack of income or loss of jobs, which resulted in increased anxiety and mental pressure, food insecurity, mobility barriers and an increased burden of unpaid care work. In August 2020, based on a phone survey conducted with 1,525 workers across four sectors, in which 986 were from the garment, footwear and travel goods sector, Ngo et al. (2021) found that over 90 percent of the surveyed workers had experienced job suspension between March and July 2020. However, the majority of the workers from the garment (64 percent) and footwear/travel goods (59 percent) sectors reported being reemployed either by their former employer or at a new workplace. Overall, the workers' salaries had decreased by an average of 14 percent. Despite the report of reduced income, loan payments remain the second largest of workers' personal and household expenses. Reduced expenditure on food and non-food commodities are the most common coping strategy adopted by the workers in the garment and footwear/travel goods industries. Over 90 percent of them also received government suspension allowances, 10 percent received government training and 7 to 9 percent received cash support for poor households (Ngo et al. 2021). The receipt of suspension allowance aligns with the report by the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) claiming that the number of workers who had received wage subsidies exceeded the initial target set in December 2020 by 134 percent (ADB 2021b).

In addition to the socio-economic impacts on garment workers, mental well-being is also crucial. Meyer et al. (2021) has incorporated a 2-item version of the Patient Health Questionnaire

(PHQ-2) into their study in Ethiopia to detect depressive disorder. The results showed that 24 percent of Ethiopian workers scored equal to or more than 3, meaning that they were likely to suffer from a depressive disorder and should be further evaluated. Garment workers in Jordan were also found to have a high level of distress. By using Distress Questionnaire 5, 52 percent of the surveyed workers were screened for possible mental health issues, and 30 percent were likely to have mental health issues and should be seen by a specialist (BetterWork 2021). Rabbani, Uckat, and Woodruff (2020) also examine the mental well-being of Bangladeshi workers using Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) diagnostic tool and found that nearly 10 percent of the respondents experienced severe anxiety. A similar finding on increased anxiety and mental pressure experienced by female workers (73 percent) is previously reported by CARE International in Cambodia (2020).

Conflicts at home and in the workplace during COVID-19 are also relevant. COVID-19 prevention measures have increased the risk of violence, for instance, through the implementation of movement restrictions and social distancing (Vahedi, Anania, and Kelly 2021; United Nations 2020c; Shruti and Gemma 2020). Such risk has directly transformed into violence against women and girls, as claimed by the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) operating across the regions around the world (Shruti and Gemma 2020). Nguyen et al. (2020) show that garment workers have voiced additional stress from income loss, mobility restrictions and school closures, and all have compounded arguments that could result in violence. In Vietnam, there is evidence that the number of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) victims seeking help from a civil society organization has doubled compared to the same period pre-pandemic (Nguyen et al. 2020). In addition to violence at home, females are disproportionately affected by violence in the workplace. ILO has reported that, during the time of COVID-19, there could be an increased risk for unregulated working conditions and a greater risk of rights violations (ILO 2020a). Workers in Ethiopia, Honduras, India, and Myanmar have reported that they have experienced verbal abuse (35 percent) and threats and/or intimidation (24 percent) in their workplace (Lebaron et al. 2021).

Other issues that are crucial for capturing the gendered impacts of COVID-19 are unpaid care work, gender-based division of household responsibilities and household relations. Even before the pandemic, women spent triple the amount of time than men completing unpaid care and domestic work (United Nations 2020c). This time spent is expected to increase due to school closures, and the overwhelmed healthcare system demands the need for at-home care work of the elderly and the ill. When considering economic value, women's contribution to care work, including unpaid, amounts to USD11 trillion (United Nations 2020c). Being occupied with this responsibility, female workers may be constrained to come back to work, or worse, risk dropping out of the labour force (ILO 2020a).

Household relation is another important aspect to examine. Rabbani, Uckat, and Woodruff (2020) report that there is a difference in decision-making patterns among female Bangladeshi workers by looking at the pre- and post-COVID-19 survey. In the latter, there are more female workers mentioning that they make the decision on their own regarding their working status. Meanwhile, when deciding on large household expenditure and women's mobility, more female workers reported it being a joint decision. A previous study also indicates that there is an existing pattern in Southeast Asian countries in which women tend to have less power in larger decision making (Nguyen et al. 2020). While the joint discussion is generally practised more in Vietnamese families, men still overpowered women in rural and migrant families. In Thailand and Cambodia, economic independence is strongly linked to intra-household decision making. Therefore, it is vital to explore how gendered impacts are exacerbated during the pandemic.

Overall, there are three main messages from the literature we reviewed. First is the impact of COVID-19 on the garment, textile and manufacturing industry's contribution to global, regional and local economic growth, and labour market. Second is the magnitude of the impacts on the lives and livelihood of workers. Third is the evidence of gender-specific impacts and their significant presence in the time of COVID-19. Despite being extensively studied, comprehensive literature with a specific focus on Cambodia remains limited, especially research that can inform policymaking to support recovery and improve the well-being of workers in this sector. Hence, there remains gaps to be filled particularly on more and better primary and secondary data and the understanding of the disproportionate effects of this pandemic on men and women. This is what this study aims to contribute.

3. Sampling method and data collection

We conducted a phone survey with 2,000 workers in garment and textile manufacturing in Phnom Penh and nine additional provinces in Cambodia (refer to Appendix A). The sampling was done in two stages to ensure industry and geographical representation. In the first stage, we determined the target population (factories and workers) and sample size. Using the list of factories registered with MLVT as of November 2020, we stratified types of factories and chose factories which were operating in the garment and textile manufacturing at the time of the survey. The sub-sectors chosen are garment, footwear, printing on clothes, embroidering on clothes, yarn, travel goods and bags, and knitwear. We determined the target samples based on the factory's size (being the number of workers) and location. In the second stage, sample respondents (workers) were randomly selected from the list of suspended workers registered by factories with MLVT since March 2020. The sample chosen was twice as large as the target respondents to address potentially low response rates resulting from using phone calls as the means of data collection. In addition, another 40 percent of the target sample were reserved for replacement. Although the sample was chosen from the list of suspended workers, our sample comprises of those currently working, suspended and laid-off, allowing us to capture the varying degree of impacts among the three affected groups.

The interviews were conducted outside of working hours or during break times. The questionnaire was designed using closed-ended questions and consists of 15 main sections. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Kobo Toolbox was used for data collection. Enumerators were trained for three days on questionnaires and data collection tools. To ensure ethical practices, a phone survey protocol was developed. Prior to the data collection, a pilot test was carried out to understand the challenges and feasibility of the questionnaire. At the early phase of data collection, research supervisors met virtually every morning with the enumerators to ensure the quality of the questionnaires submitted and discuss issues and clarifications that emerged during the interviews.

Participation in the survey was voluntary allowing the respondent to stop the interview at any time. Observation replacement was done under three conditions: refusal to participate in the survey, the contact is unreachable, and the call is ignored after at least six attempts being made in three consecutive days. The fieldwork continued until we reached the desired number of respondents. In total, we reached out to 4,092 individual workers and successfully interviewed 2,000. The phone surveys took 5 weeks, from 10 June to 18 July 2021, to complete due to a low response rate and other difficulties. There were a few challenges reported during the data collection process. Trust and clarity were hard to achieve without face-to-face communication. Thus, enumerators spent more time than usually required explaining and ensuring that respondents were informed about the study and the ethical guidelines upon their participation.

Unstable phone connections and network issues were also reported to significantly disrupt the interviews. In addition, due to the limited time availability of the respondents, many interviews were conducted in the evening and during the weekend. Despite the challenges, the data collection was concluded successfully, although in a few instances the quality of data collected could be affected due to the disruption. The respondents might have provided inaccurate or inconsistent answers in order to conclude the interview faster. To address this, the interviewer was required to double-checked and clarify on answers provided in the case of doubt. A thorough quality check was also necessary to promptly identify any errors that needed to be addressed.

8 out of 10 sample respondents were female with an average age of 32 years—approximately two years older than that of the male respondents. Three quarters of the respondents were married, whereas 20 percent were single. The majority of the married respondents were living with their spouse at the time of the survey, and there was no statistically significant difference between male and female. Refer to Appendix B.

4. Results

4.1. The economic shock

The first effect of the COVID-19 pandemic we are interested in exploring is the loss of earnings¹. The respondents were asked several questions from sources of income they relied upon to understand how COVID-19 had impacted their earnings and employment before and during the pandemic². The data shows that 7 out of 10 interviewed workers were employed at the time of survey, and there is no statistically significant difference of employment status between female and male. Approximately 5.5 percent of the interviewed workers were suspended compared to 16.6 percent who were permanently terminated or resigned. Wage was the main source of income for majority of the interviewed respondents, which had been affected by the pandemic outbreak.

On the loss of earnings, 8 out of 10 interviewed workers reported that their earnings (mainly wage) had reduced before and during COVID-19³. A higher percentage of female respondents reported earnings reductions in comparison to their male counterparts. The respondents were also asked to quantify the earnings loss⁴. The results show that female respondents reported a larger reduction at 40.2 percent in comparison to their male respondents at 36.9 percent (Figure 1) The ANOVA test of mean difference shows a statistical significance at a 1% confidence interval. The earnings loss before and during COVID-19 was also disaggregated by age group to examine whether there is a varying effect among young, adult and older workers. The ANOVA results show that there is no statistically significant difference of average earnings reduction among age group, indicating that the pandemic had impacted young and old workers alike.

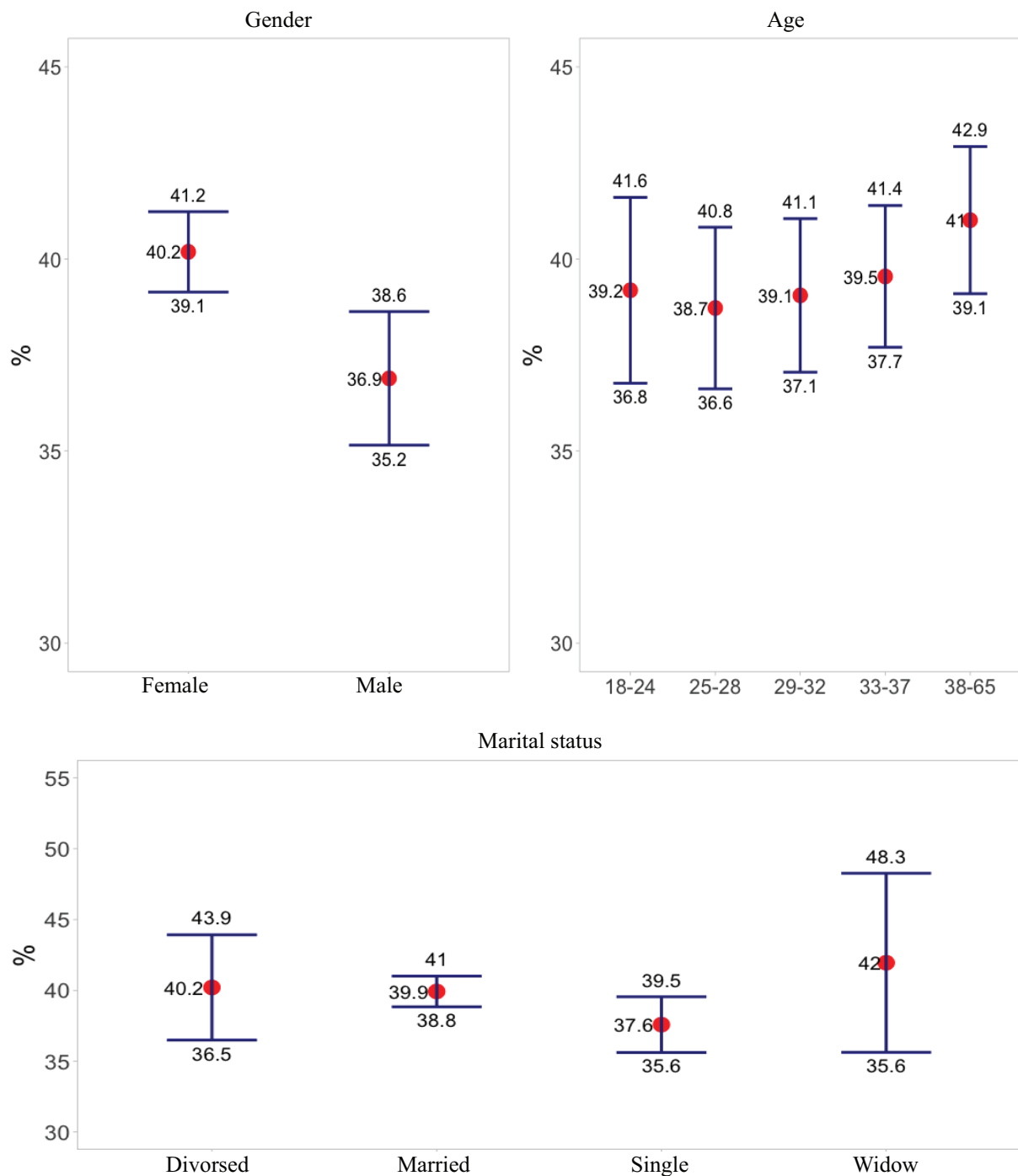
1 We use the term ‘earnings’ as the respondents had other sources of income besides wages, albeit wage earnings accounted for almost 80 percent of the total monthly earnings. Refer to Appendix C for income sources.

2 The loss of income is a self-reported percentage comparing the income before and during COVID-19. There might be issues of accuracy and reliability with self-reported data. To address the issue, we provide the lower and upper bounds at the 95% confidence interval.

3 Before COVID-19 refers to period before March 2020; During COVID-19 refers to period starting from March 2020 until the time of survey, which is June/July 2022

4 On average, the sample respondents who were employed at the time of survey earned USD264 per month, USD257 for female and USD290 for male. The earning difference between female and male respondents is statistically significant at 1% confidence interval.

Figure 1: Loss of earnings before and during COVID-19



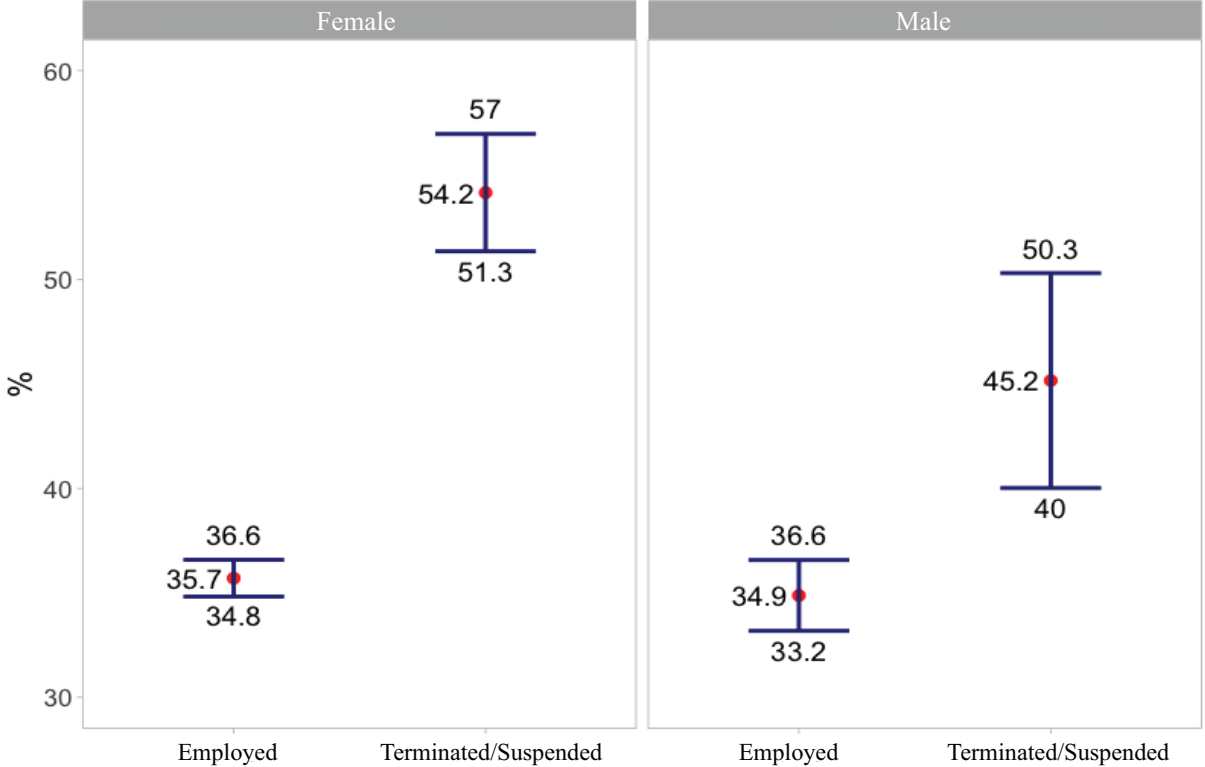
Note: the figure presents an average loss of earnings (red point) before and during COVID-19 and the lower and upper bounds at the 95% confidence interval. Outliers were included in the calculation of the mean figure as the inclusion does not affect the estimate compared to without outliers. We also excluded 9 observations with no responses from the calculation, resulting in a total of 1,590 observations (80 percent are female).

Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

The highest loss of wage earnings was observed among workers who were permanently terminated/resigned or suspended, and females who were laid off were the most affected in terms of income (Figure 2). While the loss of wage earnings averaged 35.5 percent before and during COVID-19 among workers who were employed at the time of the survey, the

permanently terminated/resigned or suspended respondents saw their wages reduced by 55.8 percent and 43 percent, respectively. The loss of earnings among female respondents who were terminated/resigned or suspended averaged 54.2 percent compared to 45.2 for males. The difference is statistically significant at a 1% confidence interval.

Figure 2: Loss of earnings before and during COVID-19 by gender and employment status

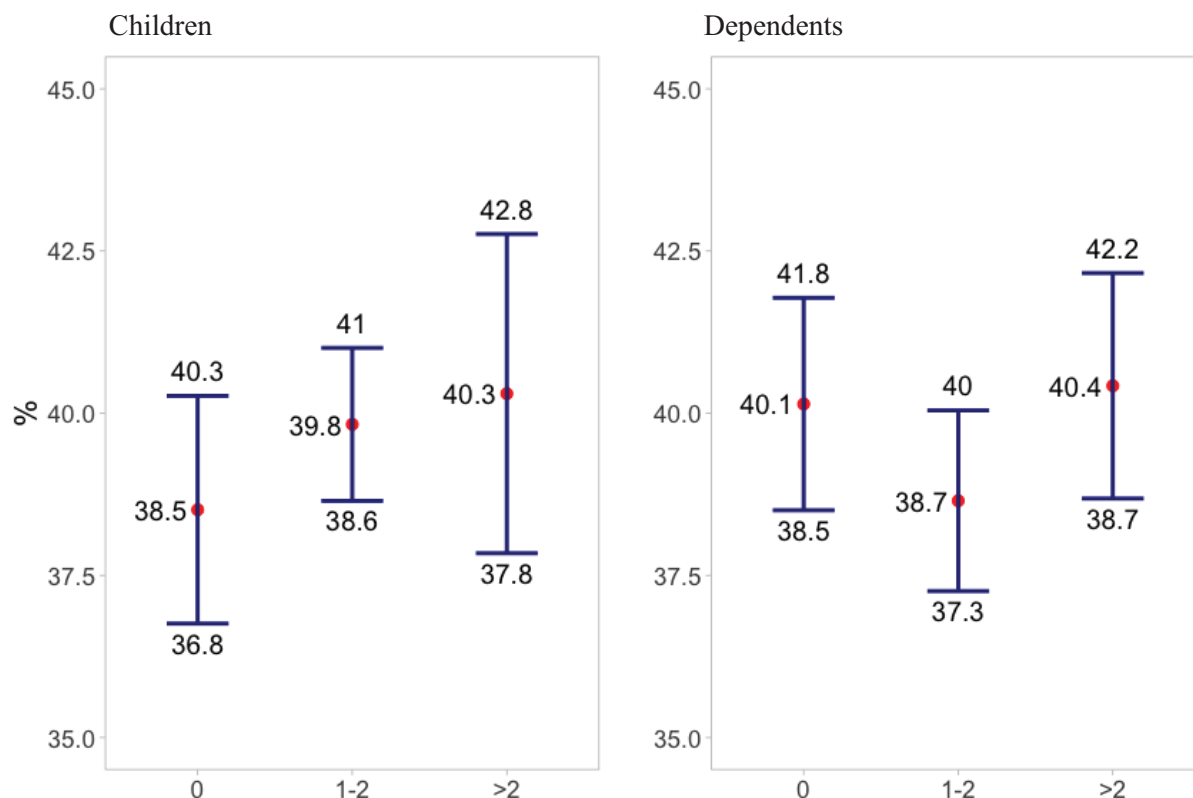


Note: the figure presents an average loss of earnings (red point) before and during COVID-19 by gender and employment status at the time of survey. The figure also presents lower and upper bounds at the 95% confidence interval. Outliers were included in the calculation of the mean as the inclusion does not affect the estimate compared to without outliers. The total observations are 1,581. Observations by gender and employment status are above 100, except for male respondents who reported being terminated or suspended which is 61. Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

We further examine the negative impact of COVID-19 on income loss in terms of the number of children and dependents, an indicator of poverty, by comparing the loss of households with no children/dependent, few children/dependents (1-2) and many children/dependents (more than 2). The results indicate that respondents who have many children reported bigger income loss compared to those with no or few children (Figure 3). The difference, nonetheless, is not statistically significant.

Female respondents with children or dependents reported a larger income loss compared to their male counterparts with children (Figure 4). It should also be noted that the intensity of income loss increased with the number of children among female respondents. Nonetheless, The ANOVA results show no statistical significance of the difference.

Figure 3: Loss of earnings before and during COVID-19 by the number of children and dependents

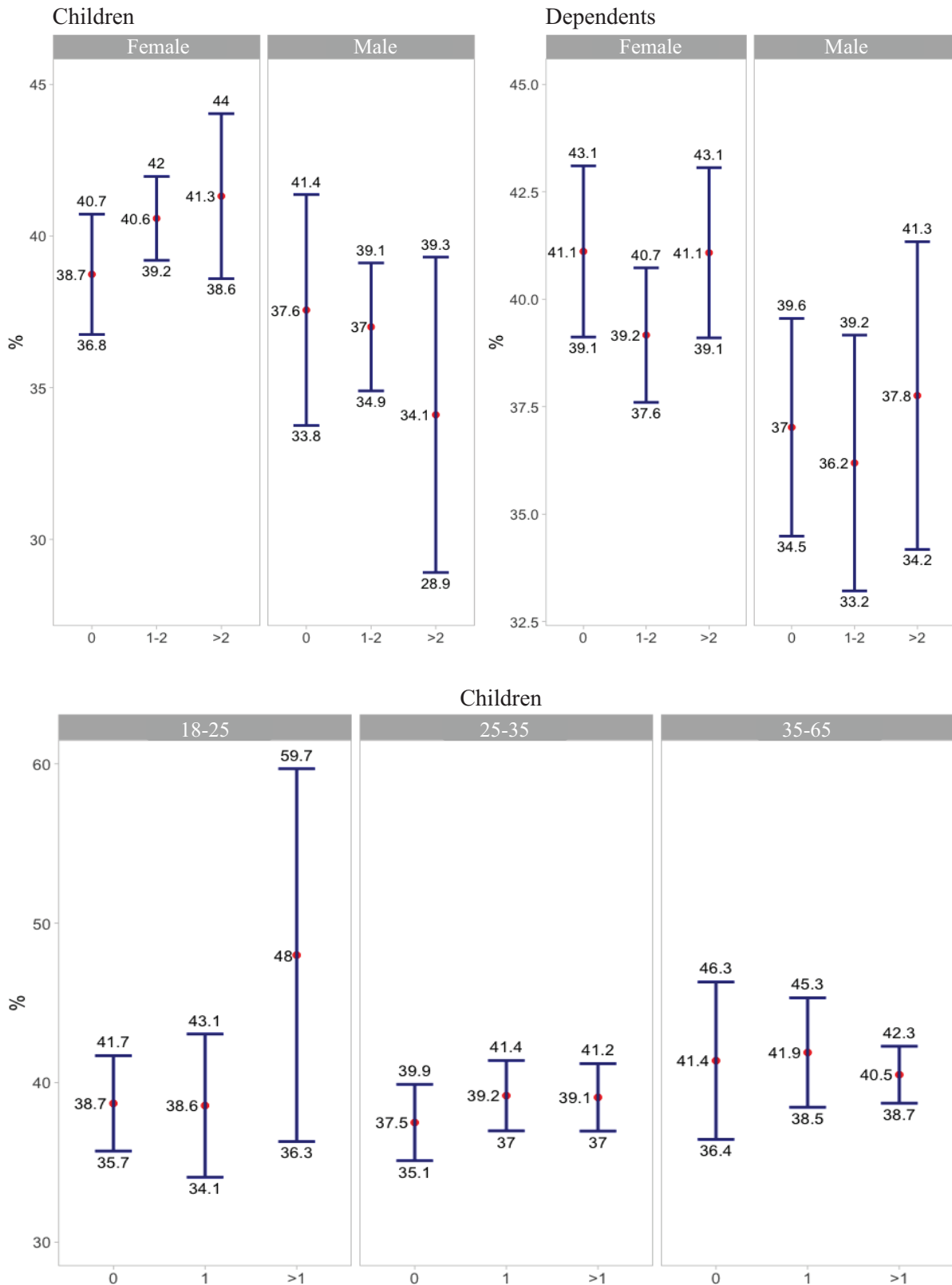


Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

The loss of earnings had negative spill-over effects on consumption and remittances. We asked the sample respondents how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted their food and non-food consumption as well as the frequency and amounts that they remitted to their family members in their hometown. It is almost customary for workers in garment and textile manufacturing to remit to relatives. Studies suggest that approximately 90% of Cambodian garment factory workers send monthly remittance payments home to their families (Kang and Liv 2009; Aree and Sirinan 2009). The results indicate reduced consumption even though it is not as significant as one might hypothesise. That is, about 34.7 percent of the respondents reported reduced consumption since the pandemic outbreak, compared to 36.2 percent of unchanged consumption expenditure and 29.1 percent of increased consumption.

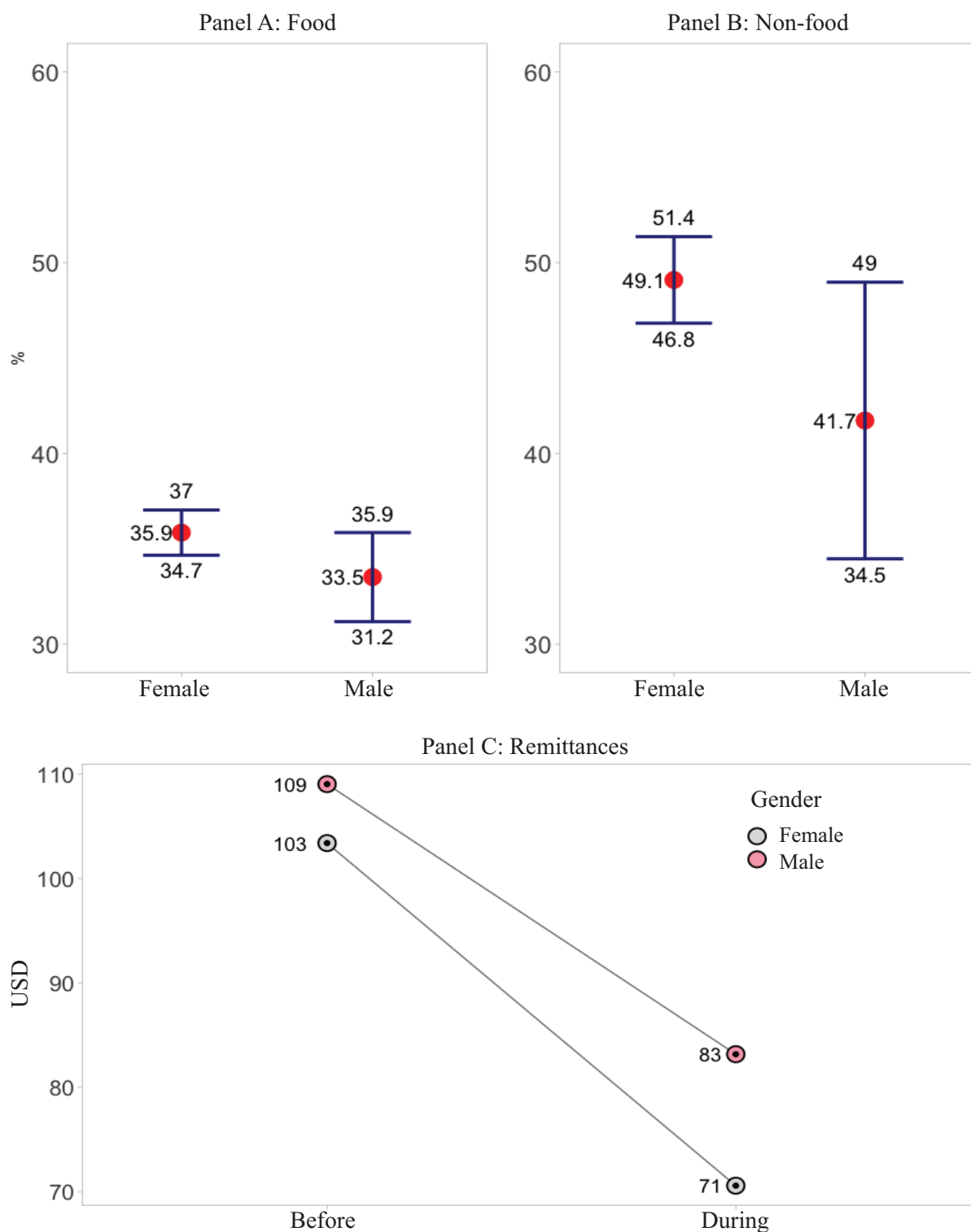
Panel A of Figure 5 shows the level of reduced food consumption reported by female and male respondents who said that COVID-19 had a negative impact on their consumption. Female respondents reported a bigger reduction in consumption, particularly for non-food items compared to that of their male counterparts (49.1 percent versus 41.7 percent) (Panel B). The data also shows a decrease in remittances, declining by 31.1 percent before and during COVID-19 to USD71 for female and 23.8 percent to USD83 for male (Panel C).

Figure 4: Loss of earnings before and during COVID-19 by the number of children, gender and age group



Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

Figure 5: Reduced consumption and remittances before and during COVID-19



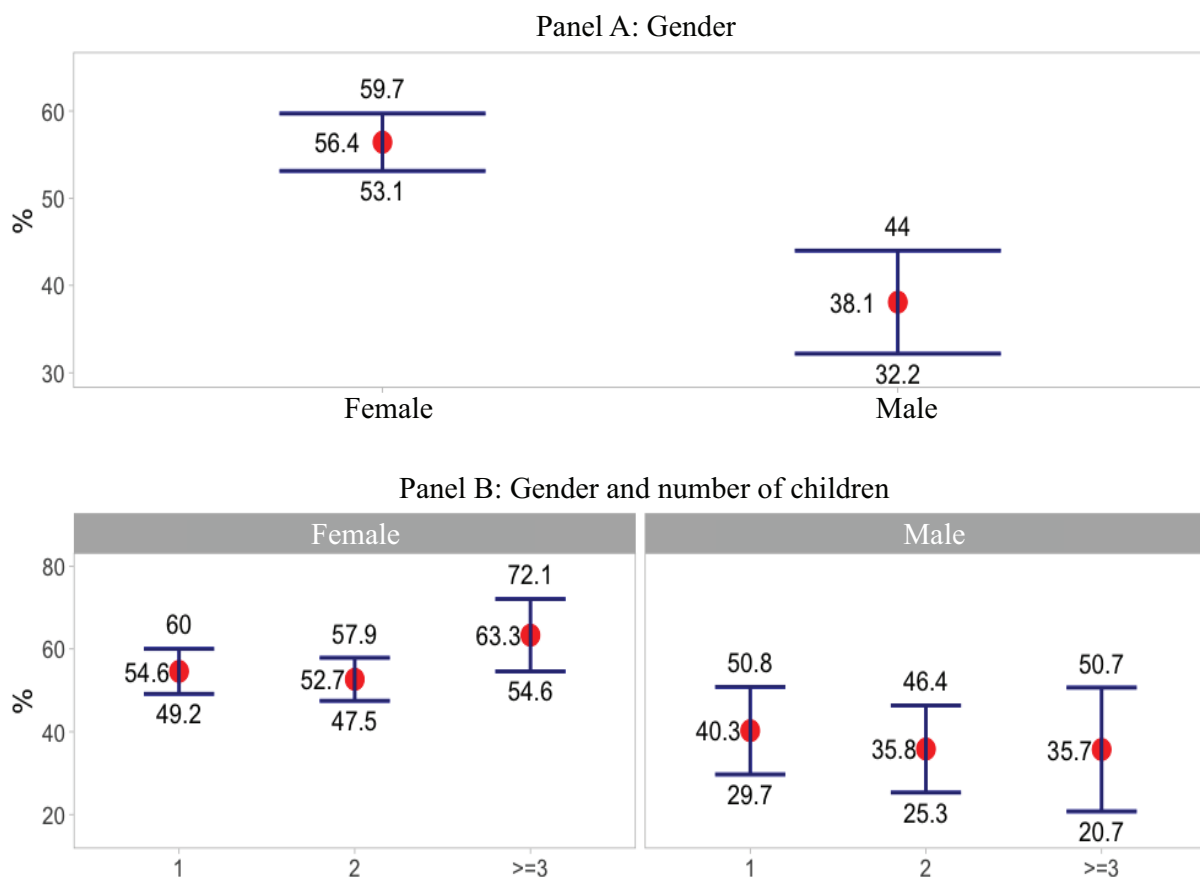
Note: the figure presents the average reduction in food and non-food consumption (red point in panels A and B) before and during COVID-19 and the lower and upper bounds at the 95% confidence interval. On remittances, the respondents were asked the frequency of remitting. The average amount presented includes that sent of various frequencies. Among the respondents who sent remittances, 80 percent reported sending monthly, implying that the average amount could be indicative of monthly amounts. We also excluded potential outliers from the mean calculation using the Box-and-Whisker method. That is, 7 observations were excluded from the before-COVID-19 remittances, whereas 34 observations were excluded from the during-COVID-19 figures. Thus, the total observations were 1,023.

Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

4.2. Household chores and domestic violence

The COVID-19 pandemic could increase the time spent on domestic and unpaid care work due to various reasons. Our survey data shows that there had been an increase in time spent on domestic and unpaid care work among both female and male respondents. Nonetheless, female respondents reported a bigger increase in time spent on household chores than their male counterparts, with an average increase of 56.4 percent before and during COVID-19 among females compared to 38.1 percent among male (Figure 6). As shown in the same figure, the number of children contributed positively to childcare, particularly among female respondents.

Figure 6: Average increase in time taking care of children during COVID-19



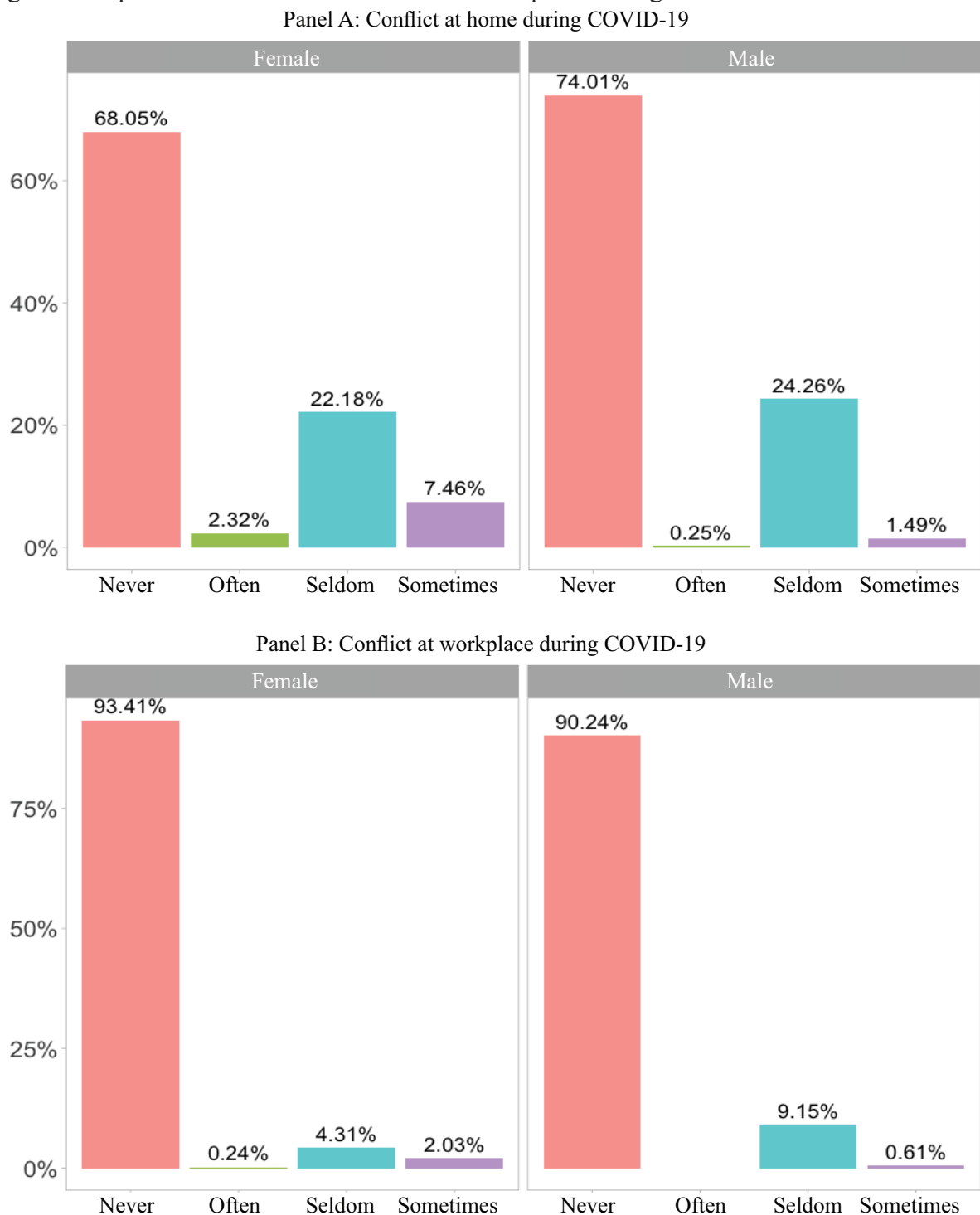
Note: the figure presents an average increase in time spent taking care of children (red point) before and during COVID-19 and the lower and upper bounds at the 95% confidence interval.

Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

We asked the respondents possible reasons of the increased time on domestic and unpaid care work. The results show that 5 out of 10 interviewed workers said they had more time due to work suspension/termination explaining the increased time on household chores. Another reason was that other household members spent more time at home during the pandemic. Taking care of children staying at home due to school closure or online classes is another reason particularly among female respondents. None of the male respondents reported taking care of children as the reason of increased time spent on domestic work, indicating that looking after the children is mainly an unpaid care work for females.

We also investigate the likelihood of conflicts which could have occurred during this time of health and economic crises. Two of the relevant GBV indicators are conflict at home and the workplace. The results indicate the existence of conflict occurring mainly at home during COVID-19 (Figure 7). Panel A of Figure 7 shows that 32 percent of female respondents reported the occurrence of conflict at home at varying frequencies compared to 26 percent of male respondents. The majority of respondents reported almost no conflict at the workplace during COVID-19.

Figure 7: Experience of conflicts at home and workplace during COVID-19

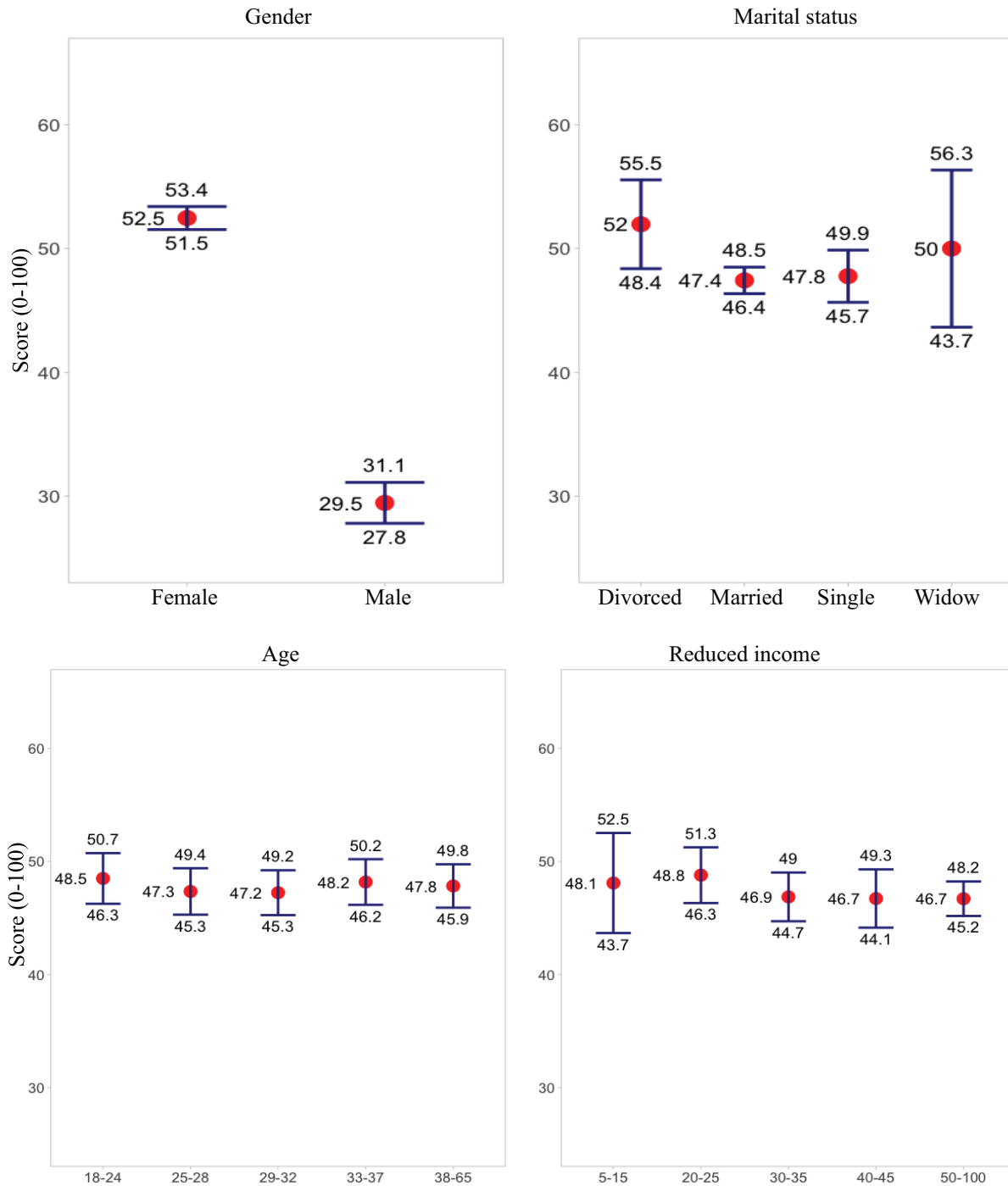


Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

4.3. Mental health

We adapted the WHO-5 well-being indicators to examine how optimistic (or pessimistic) the respondents were during this difficult time. The method involves ranking five statements from 0 (at no time) to 5 (all the time)—over the past 2 weeks, for example, I have felt cheerful and in good spirits; I have felt calm and relaxed; I have felt active and vigorous; I woke up feeling fresh and rested; my daily life has been filled with things that interest me. The raw score ranges from 0 to 25 which is multiplied by 4 to obtain the final converted figure which ranges from 0 (the worst well-being) to 100 (the best well-being).

Figure 8: WHO-5 well-being



Note: the figure presents average WHO-5 well-being indicators and the lower and upper bounds at the 95% confidence interval. Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

The results show that the WHO-5 score averaged 47.8 with a 95% confidence interval of lower and upper bounds of 46.9 and 48.7 (Figure 8). Male respondents reported a significantly lower score on average (29) than their female counterparts (52), potentially indicating that men might feel more stressed and pessimistic about their life and livelihood during the pandemic. There is no statistically significant difference across marital status, age and level of earnings loss. When disaggregated into these groups, regardless of gender, the average WHO-5 well-being score was below 50. In Europe, the national average score was relatively higher, ranging from the lowest of 56 (Greece) to the highest of 65 (Denmark), based on a survey conducted in April 2020 (Eurofound 2020).

Table 1: Mental health and its correlates

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	WHO-5 well-being score (level)			
	all sample		sub-sample of reduced income	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	23.037*** (1.041)		21.912*** (1.060)	21.426*** (1.173)
Dependents (>2)	-1.934* (1.150)		-1.904* (1.151)	-1.003 (1.277)
Employed		1.621 (1.121)	2.003** (1.021)	2.793** (1.107)
Reduced income		-2.568** (1.148)	-2.744*** (1.043)	
Reduced food consumption		-7.946*** (1.068)	-5.956*** (0.976)	-5.616*** (1.046)
Cash receipts from the government		4.850*** (1.220)	1.345 (1.122)	1.818 (1.196)
Controls for other variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	30.902*** (1.459)	55.039*** (1.627)	36.102*** (2.079)	32.496*** (2.189)
Observations	2,000	2,000	2,000	1,590
R ²	0.201	0.060	0.230	0.222
Adjusted R ²	0.198	0.057	0.224	0.214
Residual Std. Error	18.577 (df = 1991)	20.147 (df = 1991)	18.271 (df = 1983)	17.994 (df = 1574)
F Statistic	62.663*** (df = 8; 1991)	16.001*** (df = 8; 1991)	37.083*** (df = 16; 1983)	29.894*** (df = 15; 1574)

Note: Only estimates with p-value of 10% or lower are reported here.

Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

We further examine factors affecting mental health during the pandemic by regressing the WHO-5 score on a range of household-level socio-economic characteristics. As shown in Table 1, female respondents reported a relatively better state of mental health compared their male counterparts, corroborating the previous results from the WHO-5 well-being test. Similar results, where female reported better mental well-being than male, were found among respondents reporting a loss of income. The results also indicate a negative association between mental health and the number of dependents (children and elderly) the respondents need to take care of, particularly among those who had 2 or more dependents compared to those who had

none or less than 2. The results further indicate that a reduction of income and subsequently consumption could lead to lower state of mental health.

4.4. Coping strategy

The ability to adapt to the shock caused by this public health crisis and the economic consequences of various administrative restrictions to curb mass infection was crucial for the workers. Thus, understanding what tools they used to mitigate the shock is of policy relevance. We examine a range of tools the sample respondents used in response to the shock. The results show that the interviewed workers who had been negatively impacted by the pandemic employed a range of strategies to cope with the shock (Table 2). Indeed, the top 3 most used strategies were loans from friends/relatives, reduced food consumption and assistance from the government mainly through a cash transfer program and additional allowances provided specifically for garment and textile workers. Savings were also employed as a coping strategy even though only 15.4 percent of the respondents were able to utilize this strategy. Disaggregated by gender, the results indicate no statistically significant difference of the use of coping strategies. Loans from friends/relatives, reduced food consumption and assistance from the government remain as crucial strategies for female as for male respondents.

Table 2: Coping strategy

	Percent of cases							
	All sample	Gender		Income reduction		Number of children		
		Female	Male	<= 30%	>30%	No children	Few children	Many children
Loans from friends/relatives	52.4	52.7	51.1	51.6	52.1	46.9	53.2	59.7
Reduced food consumption	45.8	48.3	36.1	48.2	50.5	46.9	45.1	47.3
Assistance from the government	45.3	44.3	49.2	47.0	45.2	47.1	45.3	41.8
Reduced non-food consumption	32.8	37.8	13.4	36.4	35.9	34.5	31.6	34.8
Sales of assets (agriculture and non-agriculture)	27.4	30.1	16.8	25.8	35.9	21.1	31.2	21.9
Credited purchases	23.8	29.8	0.6	25.4	21.7	19.4	24.3	30.3
Assistance from NGOs/private individuals	15.8	19.8	0.3	16.8	16.0	15.1	16.0	15.9
Savings	15.4	17.2	8.7	14.0	16.0	17.9	14.5	14.9
Assistance from friends/relatives	10.4	10.9	8.4	12.2	10.3	12.7	9.9	8.0
Delayed payment obligations	6.4	7.4	2.5	7.0	7.2	5.5	6.3	9.0
Loans from MFIs/Banks	5.2	6.1	1.9	4.7	5.2	4.5	4.7	9.0
Additional income-generating activities	4.7	4.4	6.2	3.9	5.7	3.2	5.5	4.0
Advanced sales of harvests	2.4	2.9	0.3	1.3	3.7	1.5	2.8	2.0
Salary advances	0.7	0.9	0.0	0.7	0.8	0.2	0.8	1.5
Increased child work in household chores	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.5

Note: the figure is sorted by all sample. No children (0), few children (1-2), many children (>2).

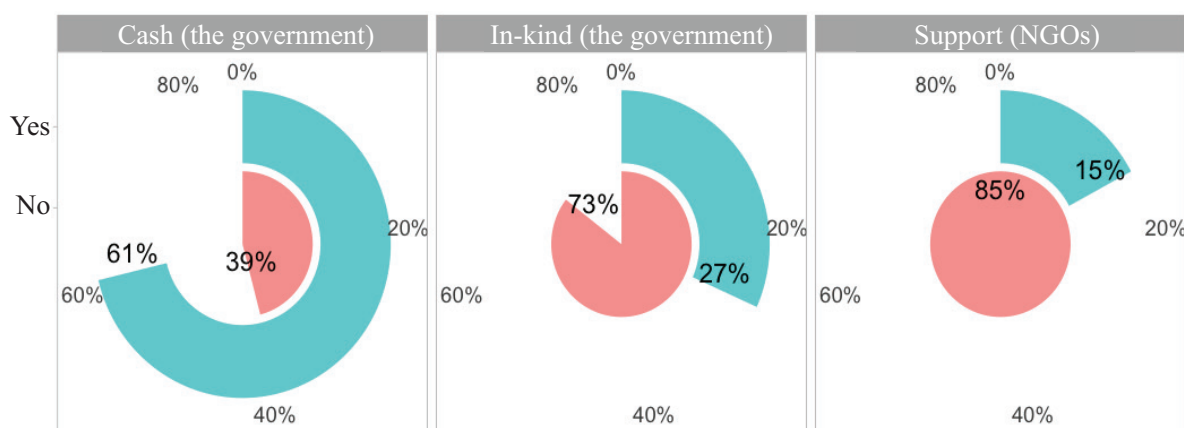
Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

We examine the coping strategies further by the level of income reduction and number of children. This is because the respondents might adapt different measures given their circumstances and household characteristics. As shown in Table 2, borrowings from friends/relatives remained the most popular means of addressing the shock regardless of whether the respondents faced a large reduction in income or had many children. Reduced food consumption was the second most adopted strategy, followed by receiving assistance from the government and reducing non-food consumption. There was also an indication of selling productive assets such as gold and silver, particularly among the sample respondents who faced a relatively large income reduction (30 percent or more) since the pandemic.

4.5. Government assistance

The government has been active since the outbreak taking various health and economic measures and helping to mitigate the shock particularly for the poor and vulnerable. The survey data shows that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviewed workers received assistance from various sources including the government, NGOs and development partners and private individuals (Figure 9). The data also indicates that assistance from the government was one of the crucial sources of relief during this difficult time. The majority of the interviewed workers (6 out of 10) reported receiving assistance provided by the government—mainly the cash handouts as part of the money transfer program. The government also provided in-kind support (e.g., rice bag and other necessities particularly during the lockdown).

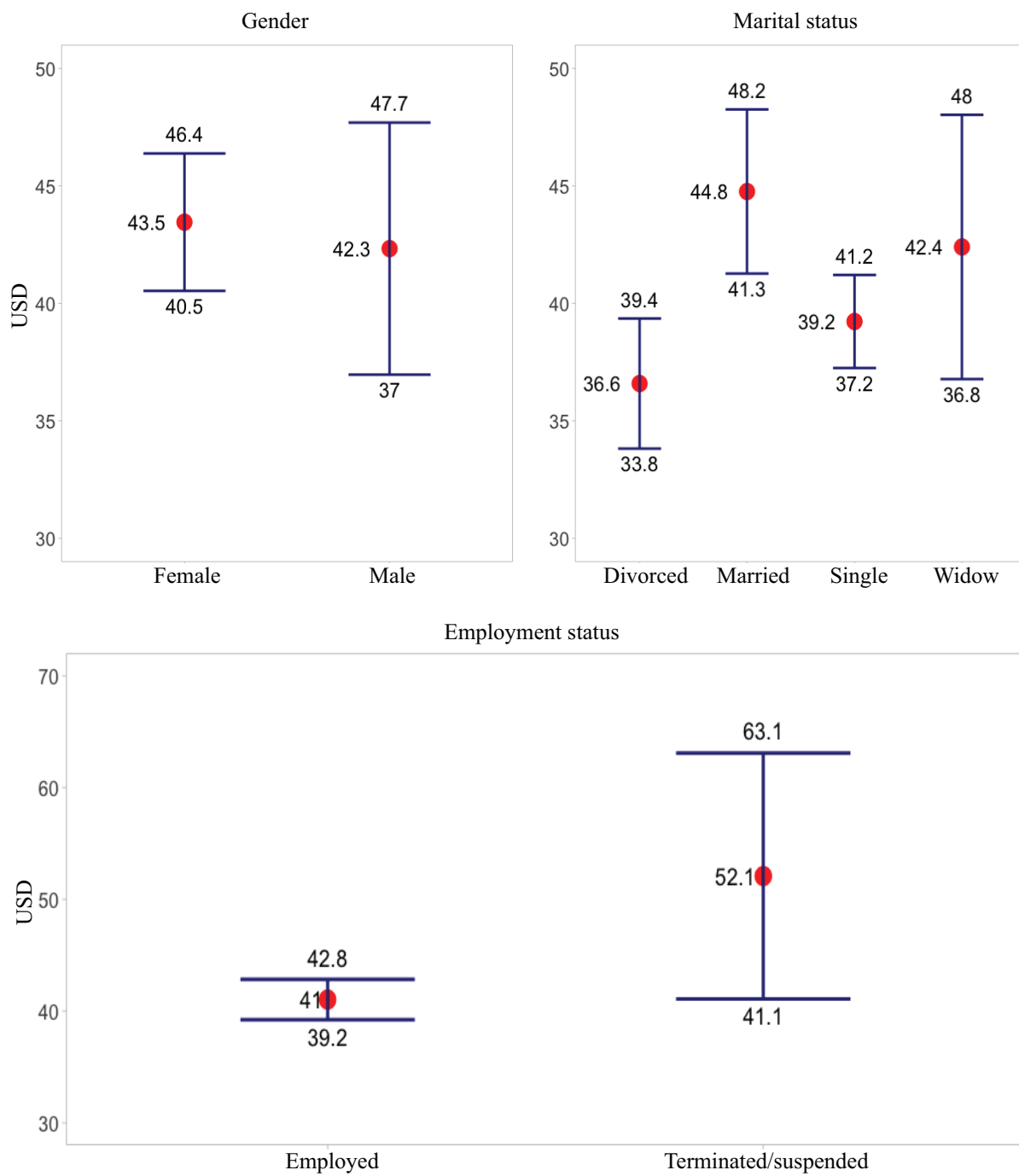
Figure 9: Receipts of assistance



Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

Non-governmental organisations and development partners also played a role in providing relief to the affected and vulnerable. We asked the respondents who received cash support from the government the amount that they obtained. The interviewed workers received an average of USD43 per month (Figure 10). There is no statistically significant difference of the monthly receipt between female and male respondents (USD43.5 per month for female, USD42.3 per month for male). Married respondents received a relatively high monthly handout, followed by widows.

Figure 10: Monthly cash receipt from the government’s assistance program



Note: the figure presents average monthly cash receipt (red point) from the government and the lower and upper bounds at the 95% confidence interval.

Source: Authors’ calculation using the survey data.

5. Discussion

Our findings show that the impacts of COVID-19 on the lives and livelihoods of workers in the garment and textile manufacturing sector are far-reaching and multi-faceted. The loss of wage earnings was observed among female, male, married, single, young and old. This was attributable to factory closures because of decreased orders, supply chain disruptions and compulsory workplace restrictions affecting operations and production. This resulted in lay-offs, suspensions and underemployment. The socio-economic impacts were severe among workers who were laid off and suspended. The respondents who were employed at the time of the survey observed a 34 percent reduction in hours of paid employment before and during COVID-19 (33.2 percent for female and 36.5 percent for male). The economy experienced a decline in 2020 and slower growth in 2021 due to the pandemic. Garment exports to major market destinations declined by 7.0 percent year-on-year to USD9.9 billion in 2020⁵. Investment in the garment sector was also impacted since the outbreak first began and continuing as the infection continues to spread. That is, investment growth in the garment sector slowed to 10 percent in 2020 compared to 22.7 percent in 2019. The investment further declined by 23.2 percent to USD194 million in 2021 (MEF 2021).

The pandemic had generally disproportionate effects on women and men in terms of earnings, consumption, remittances, and domestic and unpaid care works. That is, female respondents observed a bigger reduction in wage earnings, decreased their consumption of food and non-food items as well as sent smaller remittance payments to their family members. COVID-19 also increased the time spent by women on domestic and unpaid care work, particularly taking care of children and elders, who were at home due to the lockdowns and school closures. The increase was partly attributable to the fact that the majority of male respondents viewed such work as women's responsibilities. The economic hardship also affected individuals' perception about lives and well-being. They were mostly pessimistic about the economic status and the pressure to cope. The stress could also lead to conflicts at home even though our findings do not indicate a high prevalence of these incidences.

Relying on loans from relatives/friends and reducing food and non-food consumption were the most common coping strategies. The hardship was also partially dealt with using receipts of in-cash and in-kind support by the government and other non-governmental organisations. The government was quick to initiate the relief program of cash transfers and the affected workers in garment manufacturing were among the prioritised groups to receive assistance⁶. The transfers accounted for 15 percent of the total monthly wage earnings (or 22.6 percent of the monthly minimum wage of USD190 in 2021), 16.7 percent for female and 14.6 percent for male. The workers who were laid off received bigger monetary assistance payments of USD55 per month (28.9 percent of the monthly minimum wage) compared to USD43.8 for suspended workers and USD41 for those employed at the time of the survey. This is indicative that the most affected were being targeted for support.

In February, MLVT issued a notification detailing procedures to request assistance for workers affected by COVID-19 in the textile, garment, travel goods and footwear sector. The assistance included a monthly wage subsidy, amounting to 40 percent of the minimum wage, paid by factories to those who were suspended (MLVT 2020a). The amount was later

5 On average, the sample respondents who were employed at the time of survey earned USD264 per month, USD257 for female and USD290 for male. The earning difference between female and male respondents is statistically significant at 1% confidence interval.

6 This was linked to a broader expansionary fiscal policy implemented by the government to help households and firms mitigate the shock.

decreased to USD70 per month, of which USD40 was covered by the government (MLVT 2020b). The government also subsidised factory's contributory payments to social security funds for the suspended workers who registered. In addition to cash support, MLVT further encouraged skills training for the suspended and unemployed by providing short training programs for free with a monthly incentive of USD50 (MLVT 2020c). The training courses aimed to equip workers with skills in demanded sectors and to increase their relevance in the labour market. Awareness of the training courses among workers, nonetheless, remained low. Our survey results, for instance, show that 26.5 percent of the respondents were aware of the skills training provided by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic—29.2 percent for women and 15.6 percent for men. When asked about the access to skills training, 25.2 percent said they attended the training but the majority (60.3 percent) cited that it was not necessary to obtain the skills⁷. As the community outbreak intensified in February 2021 causing partial lockdown across the country, the government issued a decision to implement a one-time post-lockdown cash transfer of USD40 to the workers in the textile, garment, travel goods and footwear sectors who resided in the locked-down areas or had been infected by COVID-19 (Ministry of Economy and Finance 2021).

Beside these sector-specific measures, the workers and their families were entitled to a separate monthly household cash transfer if the household members held an IDPoor card or other equivalent social protection card (Royal Government of Cambodia 2020). This is under the Cash Transfer Program for the Poor and Vulnerable Households during COVID-19. The program has become a primary mechanism for administering COVID-19 social assistance and has been developed into an on-demand mechanism. Based on the Inter-Ministerial Prakas 370, with the possession of these cards, pregnant women and women with children under two years old are further supported throughout their pregnancy and postpartum period with a total cash support amounting to a minimum of USD190. Women who are not identified vulnerable and in poor families could alternatively be entitled to such support through the healthcare scheme covered by NSSF based on the actual cost of the service.

The government has been applauded for the timeliness of the intervention even though the cash transfer might be small and the coverage could be increased (Nuppun Research and Consulting 2021b; 2021a). Between March 2020 and February 2022, the government has spent around USD592 million under its COVID-19 cash transfer programs (General Secretariat for the National Social Protection Council 2022). Similar interventions were observed in other countries and regions. Across the Asia Pacific region, new social protection initiatives such as benefits for workers and poor/vulnerable populations, and wage subsidies are among the most commonly adopted measures (ILO 2020c). These measures partly contribute to income/job protection, addressing unemployment and other issues including health, food and nutrition. Garment workers were among the target groups. For instance, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, all have implemented wage subsidy programs for affected garment workers using either contributory or non-contributory schemes (James, Jason, and Christian 2020b). In Southeast Asia, the fiscal package introduced to help impacted businesses and households during COVID-19 had amounted to 3.5 percent of GDP (United Nations 2020b). Nine out of 11 nations in this region have allocated the stimulus package to support households and firms to address employment issues.

⁷ Refer to Appendix D for specific skills received and wanted by the surveyed workers in response to COVID-19.

Another concerning issue as a result of the pandemic is households' over-indebtedness. As shown, borrowings from friends/relatives, MFIs and other financial institutions were among the most common coping strategies by the respondents. This is consistent with increased loan disbursement during the difficult time when households and firms needed to demand cash flow to stay afloat. The National Bank of Cambodia has also implemented a range of monetary policy measures including restructuring loans, lowering reserve requirement ratios, reducing the minimum interest rate on liquidity providing collateralised operation (LPCO), and requesting financial institutions to postpone dividend payment to shareholders. The reliance on loans during this difficult time could also be linked to the level of financial literacy in loan usage and the ability to mobilise savings. Although the surveyed workers tapped into their savings, only ~15 percent of the respondents could do so. There have been programs aiming at increasing financial literacy, particularly among females and female entrepreneurs. The Ministry of Women's Affairs, the National Bank of Cambodia and Visa have just concluded a program on "Promoting Financial Literacy for Women and Women Entrepreneur" (Ministry of Women's Affairs, National Bank of Cambodia, and VISA 2022).

6. Conclusions and policy implications

This study uses a phone survey of 2,000 workers in the garment, textile and footwear manufacturing sector conducted between 10 June and 18 July 2021 to investigate the gender-based impacts of COVID-19 on the lives and livelihoods of workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show that COVID-19 had negatively impacted the lives and livelihoods of the workers. Some of the effects include loss of wage earnings, reduced food and non-food consumption, reduced remittances, increased domestic and unpaid care work, particularly for women, and increased stress and conflict at home. COVID-19 also had disproportionate effects on women and men. Female respondents reported a bigger loss of wage earnings compared to their male counterparts. The women surveyed also bore more domestic and unpaid care work than men. The respondents adapted a range of coping strategies to mitigate the shock, the three most common of which were loans from friends/relatives, reduced consumption, and in-cash and in-kind receipts from the government and other non-governmental organisations.

We suggest the following policies based on the findings from this study.

- Continue the cash support as it could help the workers cope with the economic hardship and uncertainties as the repercussions of the pandemic are likely to continue. Although this study did not investigate the effectiveness and efficiency of the related cash transfer programs implemented by the government since the outbreak of the pandemic, we show that the third most common coping strategy among the surveyed workers was cash support from the government. This implies that the support could provide immediate relief when all other alternatives are limited. The support and its implementation through a gender lens are also recommended as women were impacted more than men, particularly on the economic and domestic and unpaid care work fronts.
- Consider improving the targeting mechanism with a long-term action plan as it remains challenging to identify beneficiaries for support. The results show that 39.2 percent of the respondents did not receive government support even though they were eligible. The main reason reported was unawareness of the program and lack of knowledge on how to apply.

- Increase financial literacy and awareness particularly on the use of loans and the importance of savings during times of normality. Although the respondents used savings to mitigate the shock, only a few had the option because many did not save, or insufficiently did so. The program should be made available to both females and males to optimise the impact.
- Continue the re-skilling and up-skilling programs for workers in this sector. As shown, the knowledge of surveyed workers—currently employed, suspended or terminated—was poor in relation to existing government programs to help them obtain new or better skills. They were also unwilling to invest time and money for the cause, viewing new and improved skills as unnecessary to perform their current job.
- Raise awareness among men on the shared responsibility of domestic and unpaid care work (childcare and elders) as the majority of male respondents viewed care work as solely women’s responsibility.

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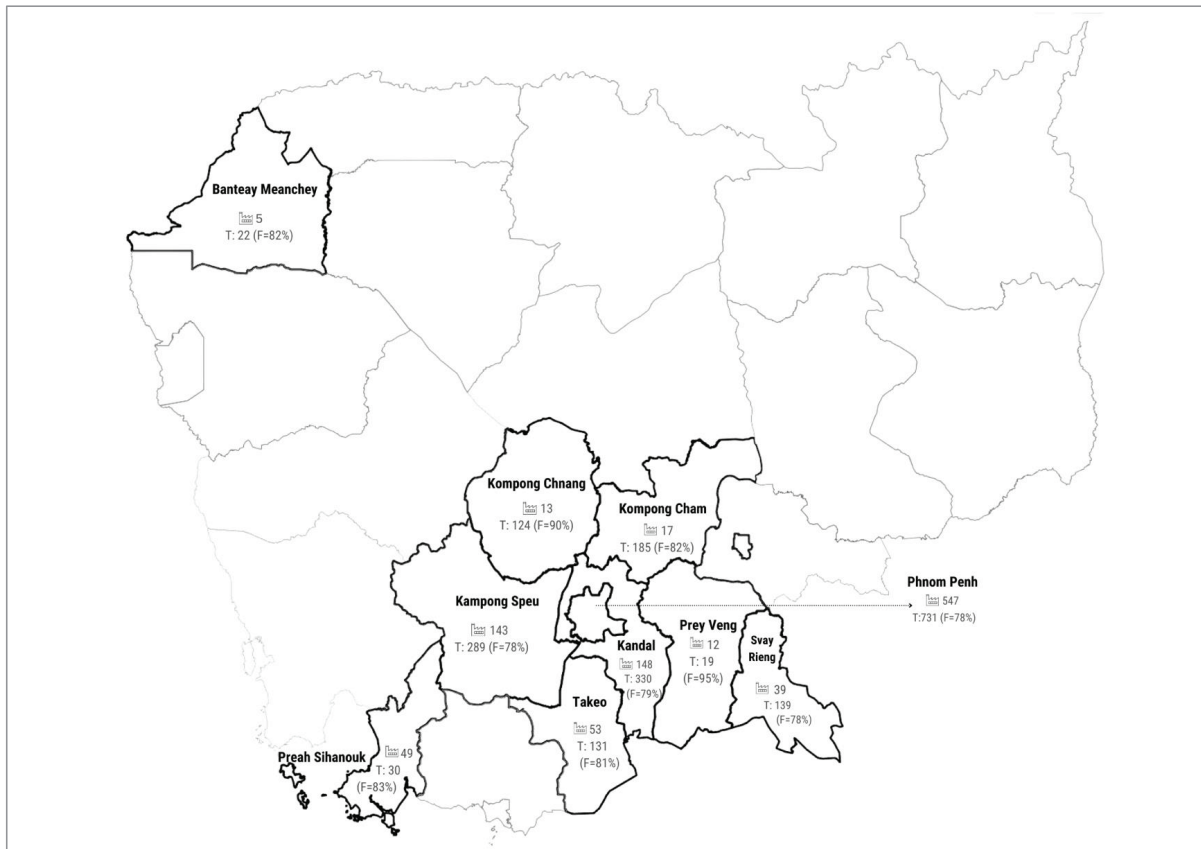
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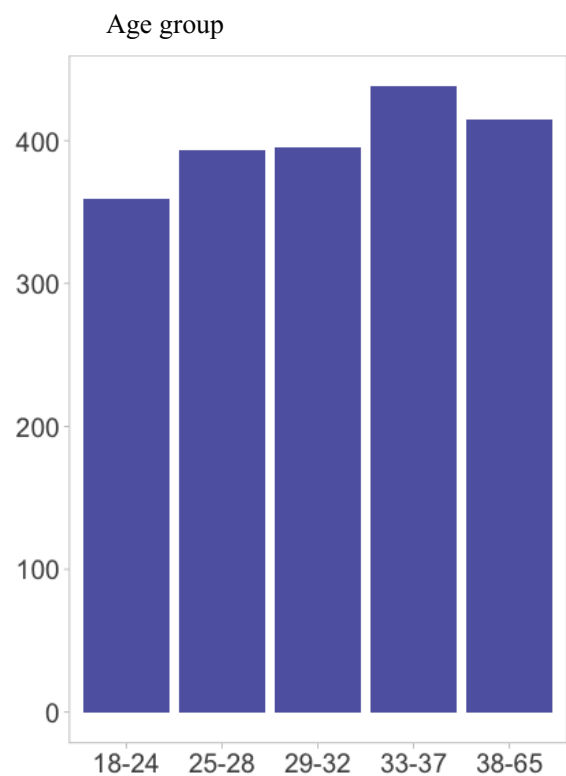
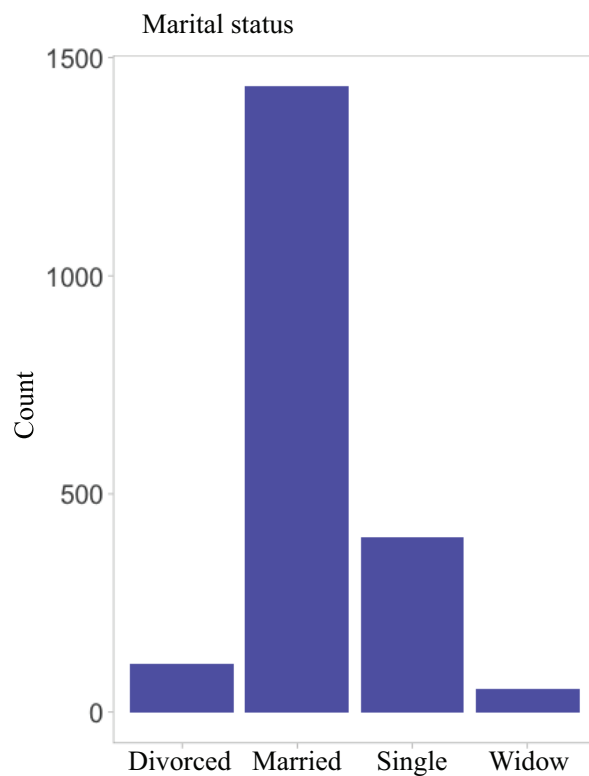
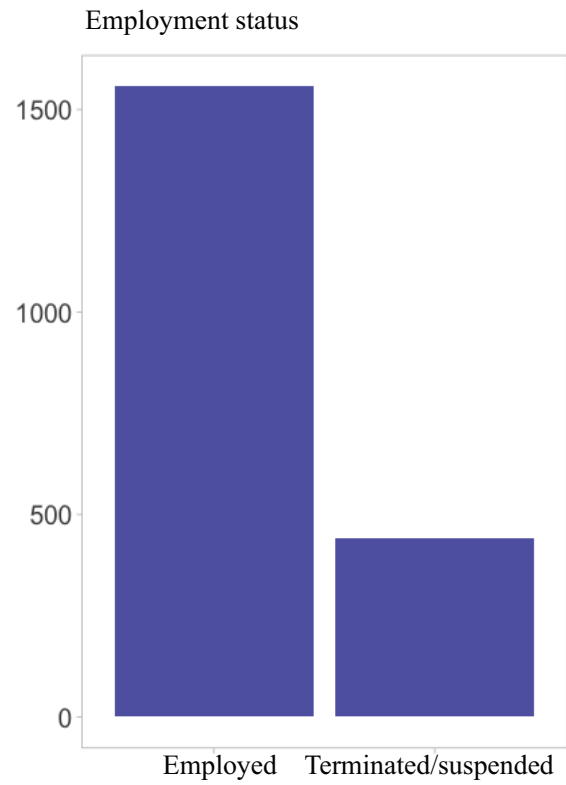
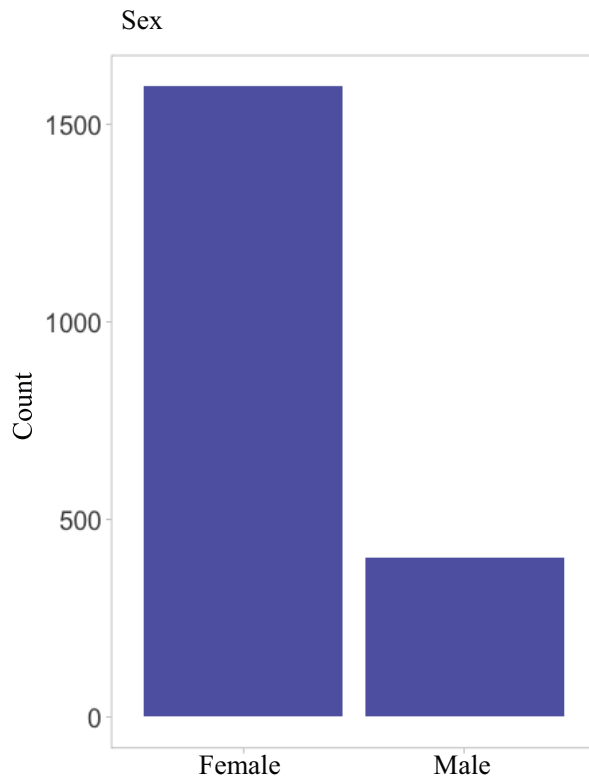
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Appendix A: Sample distribution and geographical coverage of the sample factories

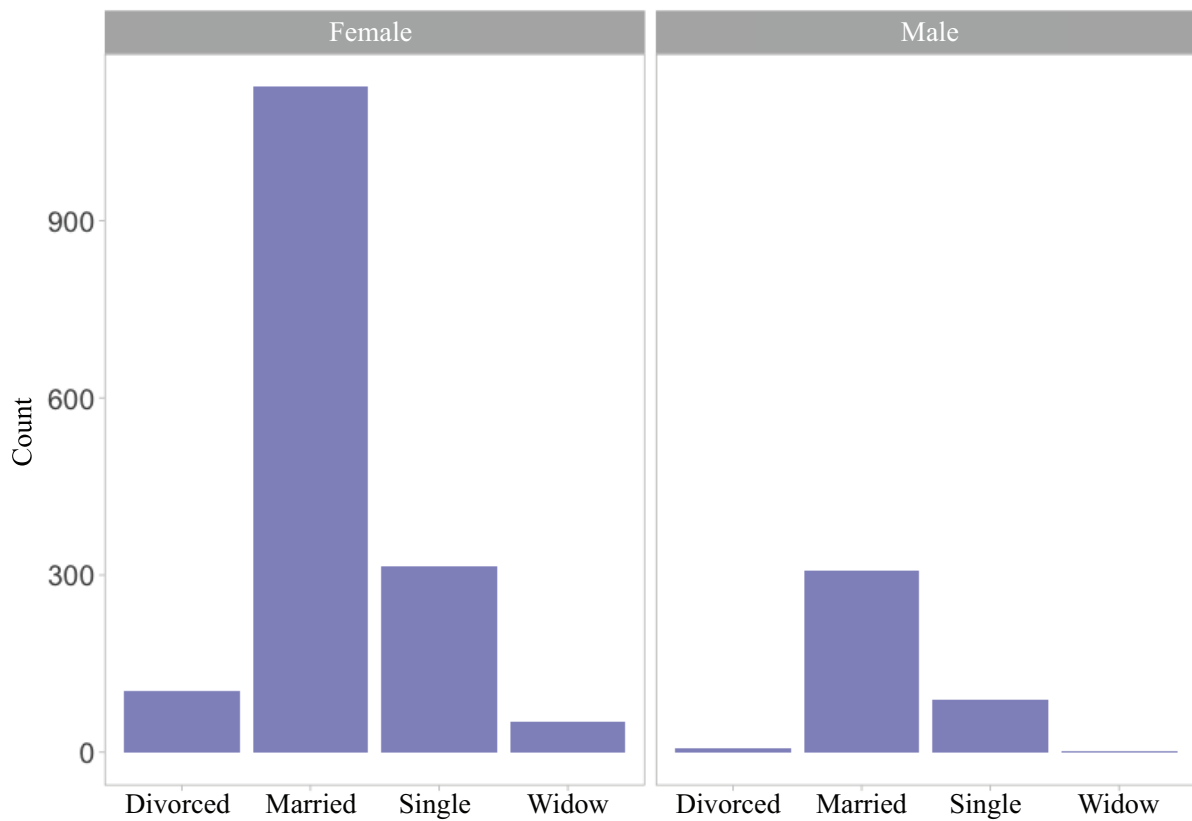
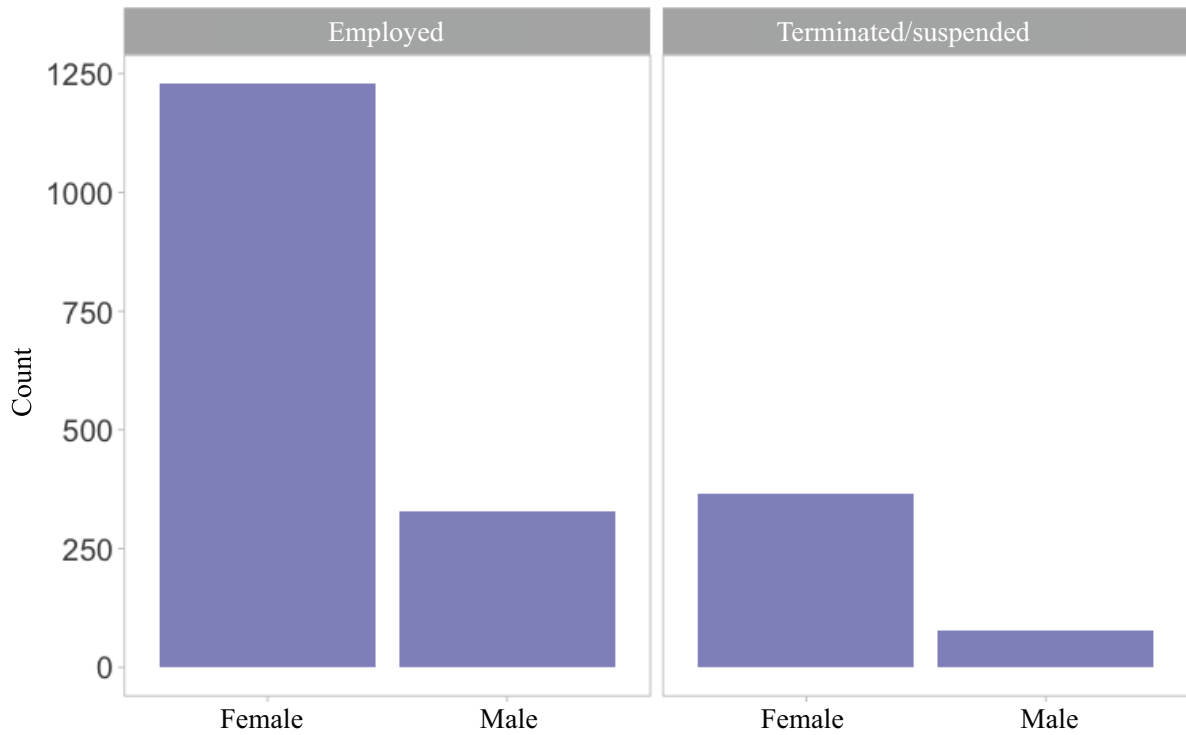


Note: (🏭) refers to the number of factories located in geographical coverage of our survey; it, however, does not represent the sample factory. (T) refers to total surveyed respondents. (F) indicates percentage of female respondents to total respondents.

Appendix B: Sample characteristics



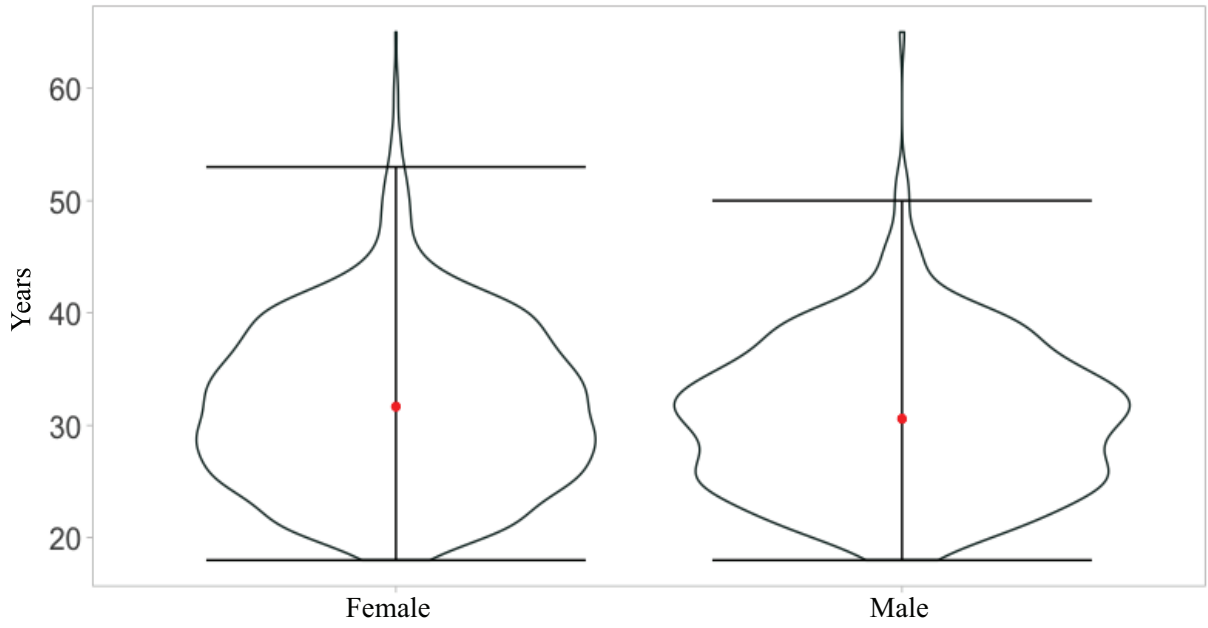
Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data



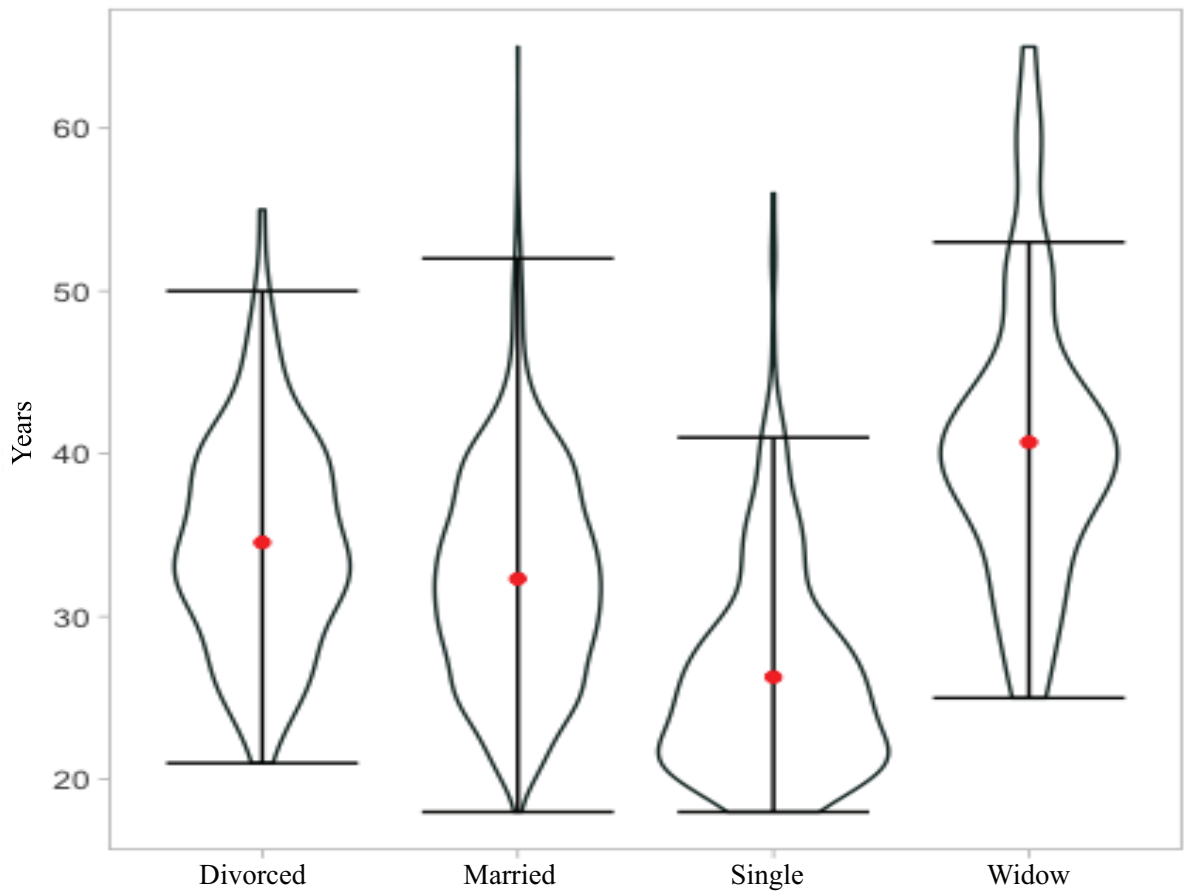
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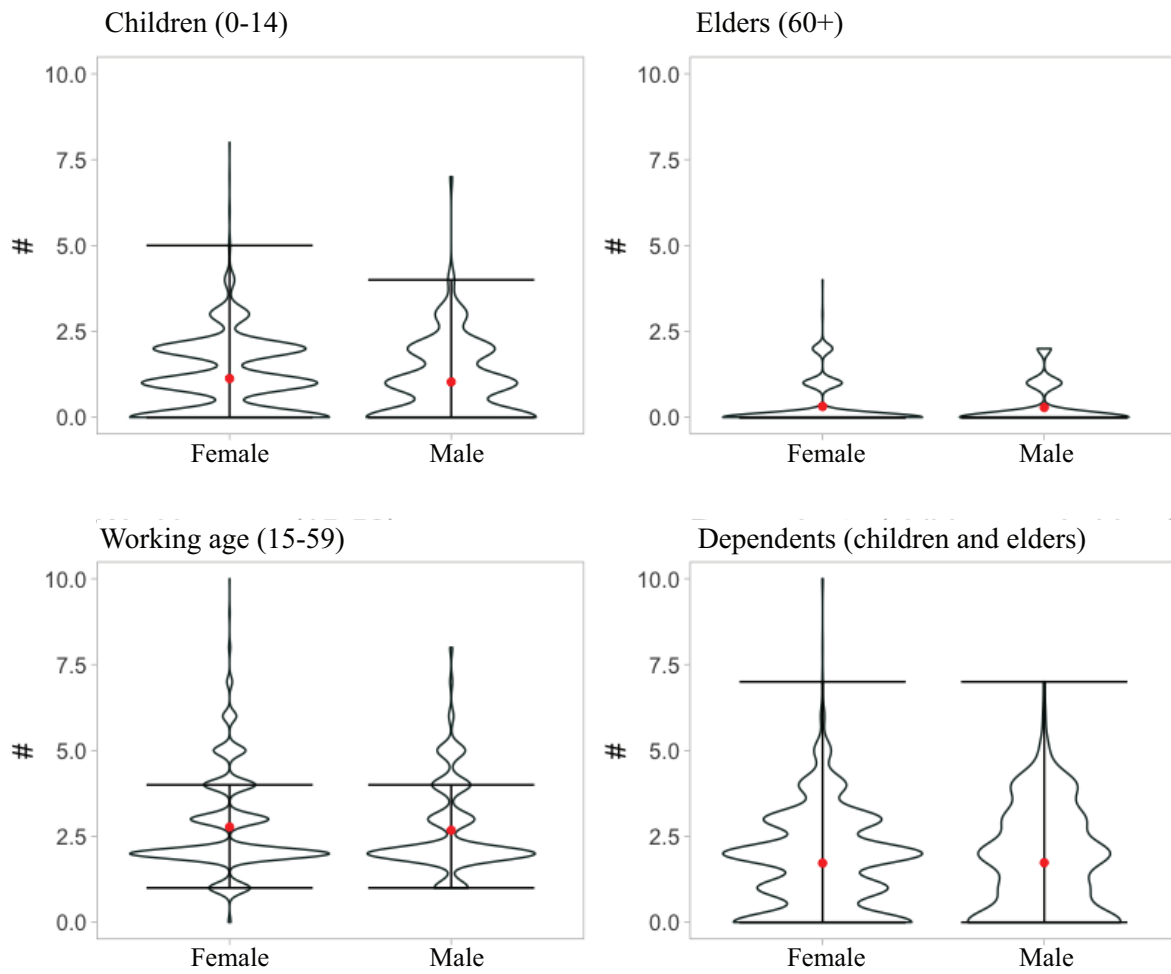
Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data

Age by gender



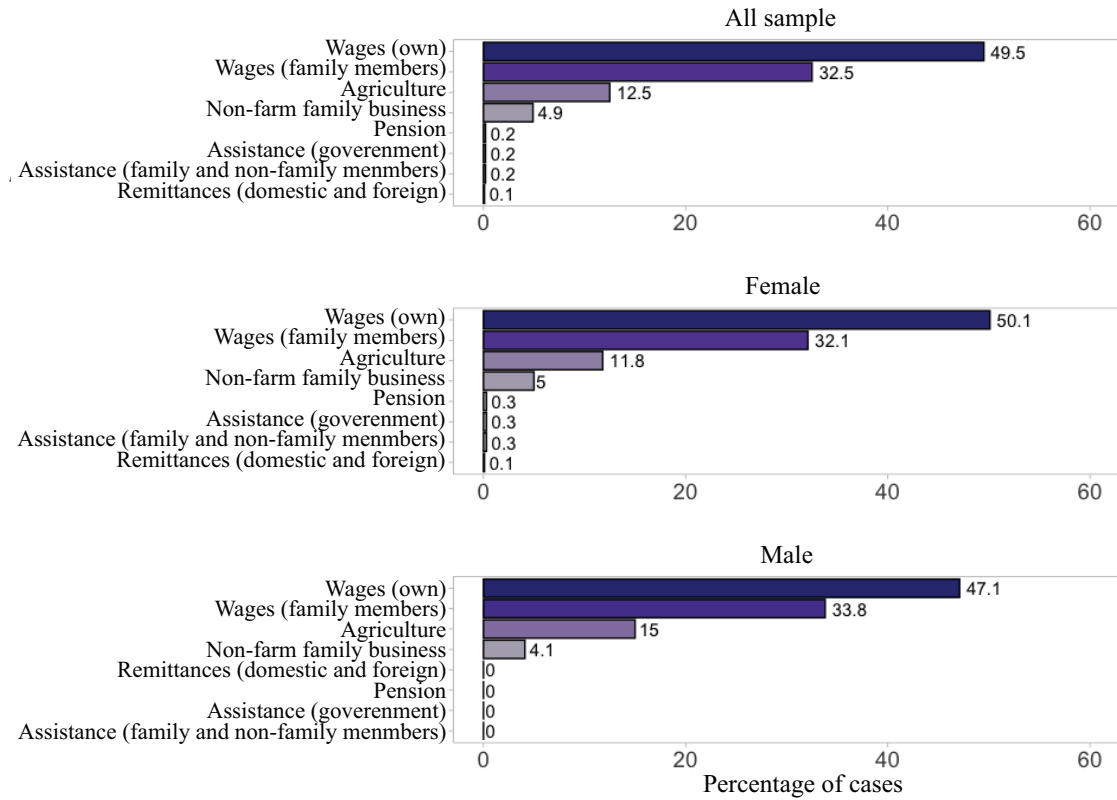
Age by marital status





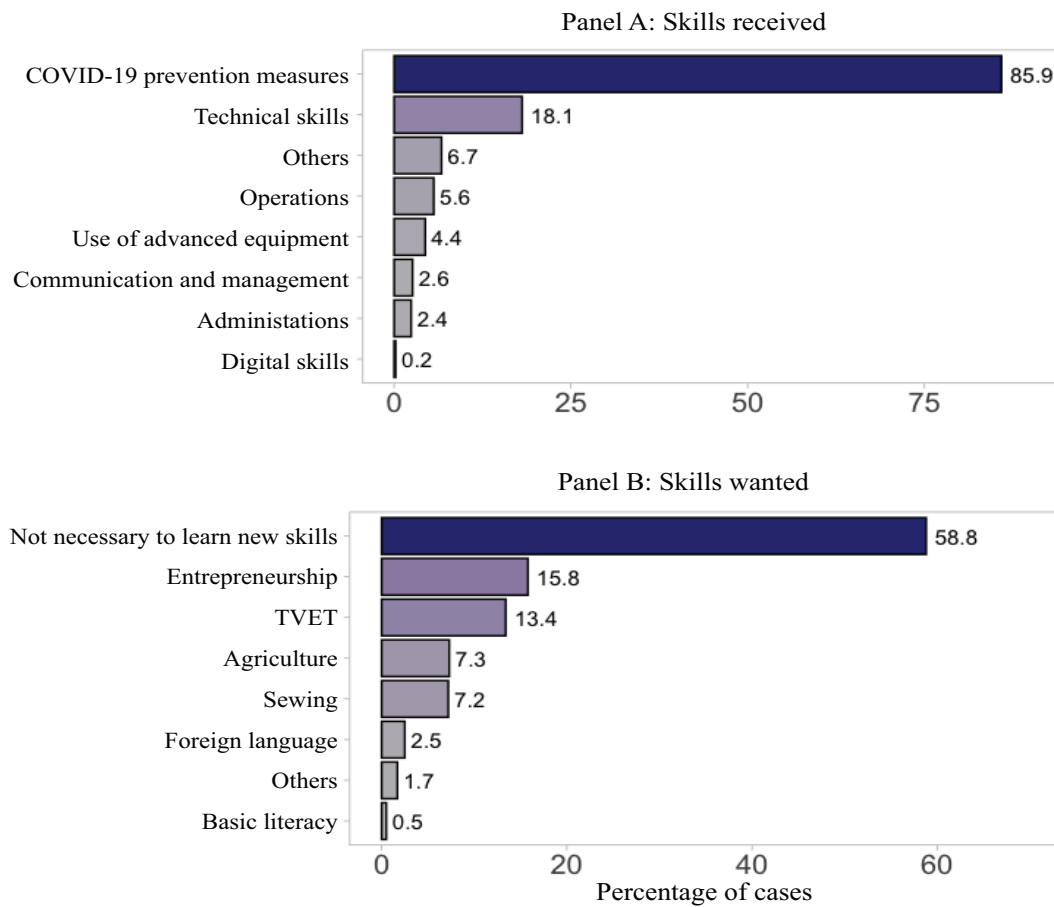
Source: Authors' calculation

Appendix C: Sources of income



Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

Appendix D: Skills training in responses to COVID-19



Source: Authors' calculation using the survey data.

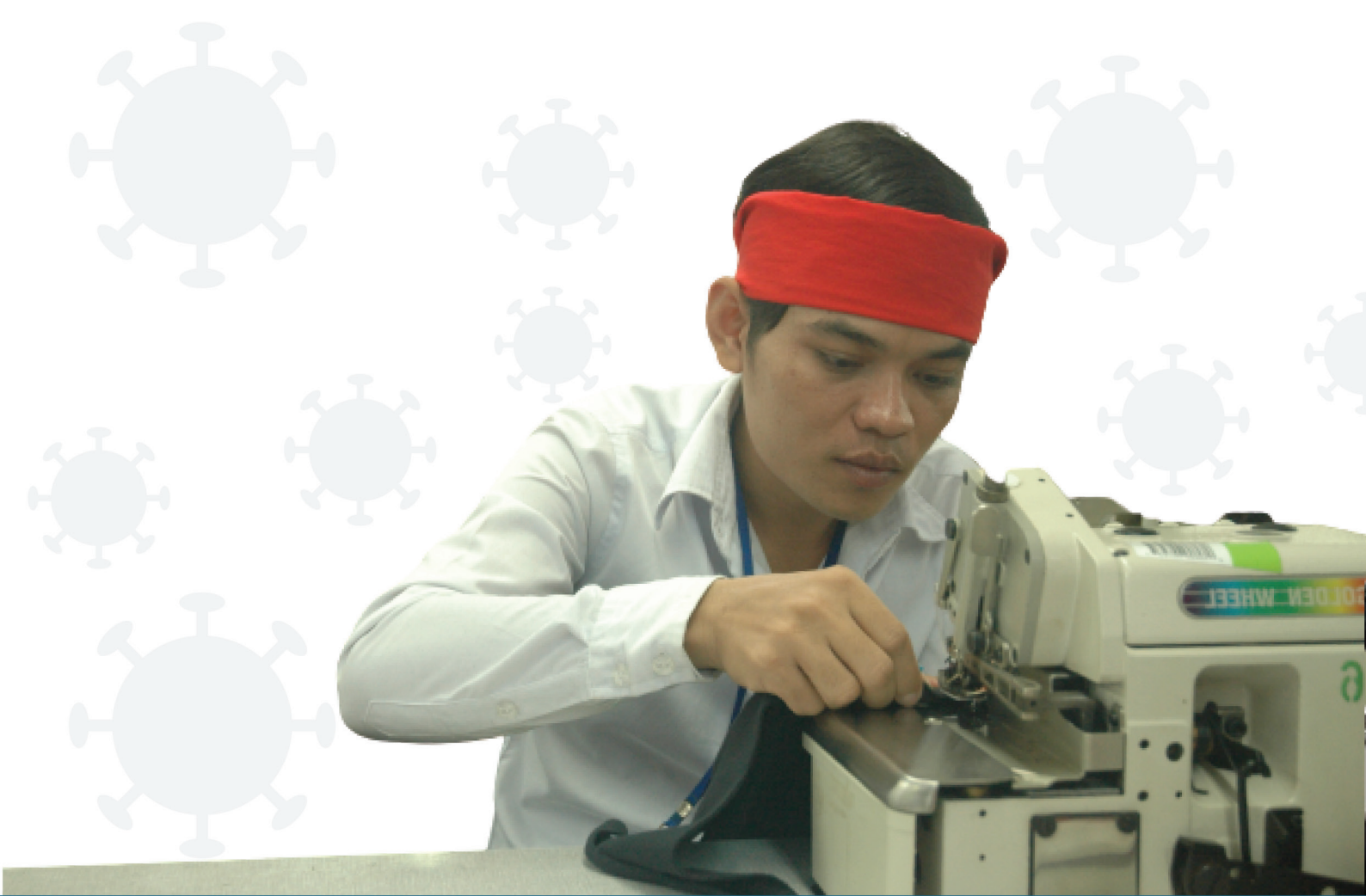
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