



Research Article

Ethical Issues in Textile Industry

**M. Jayakumari^{1*}, J. Hayavadana², K. Srinivasulu², Eshwar K Murthy³,
S. Priyanka⁴ and M. Vijayarath⁵**

¹Department of Textiles and Apparel Design, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore-641046, Tamil Nadu, India

²Department of Textile Technology, University College of Technology, Osmania University, Hyderabad-500007, Telangana, India

³Department of Fashion and Apparel Design, Don Bosco Institute of Management Studies and Computer Applications, Bengaluru- 560074, Karnataka

⁴Department of Fashion Designing, Faculty of Science & Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chengalpattu-603203, Chennai, India

⁵Department of Electronics and Communication Engineering, Indra Ganesan College of Engineering, Tiruchirappalli- 620012, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

The textile industry serves as a cornerstone of global commerce, providing essential goods to consumers worldwide. However, its operations are rife with ethical dilemmas that necessitate urgent attention and resolution. This paper delves into the ethical issues prevalent in the textile industry and proposes solutions to mitigate their adverse effects. The textile industry, a cornerstone of global commerce and fashion, holds immense economic significance, providing clothing, fabrics, and textiles to consumers worldwide. However, beneath the surface of its vibrant tapestry lies a complex web of ethical issues that pose significant challenges to the industry's sustainability and integrity. From labour exploitation and environmental degradation to supply chain transparency and animal welfare concerns, ethical dilemmas pervade every aspect of textile production and consumption. This paper delves into the ethical issues prevalent in the textile industry and proposes solutions to mitigate their adverse effects.

Keywords: Environmental Degradation, Ethical Issue, Labour Exploitation, Textile industry.

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INTRODUCTION

The textile industry, a cornerstone of global commerce and fashion, holds immense economic significance, providing clothing, fabrics, and textiles to consumers worldwide [1]. However, beneath the surface of its vibrant tapestry lies a complex web of ethical issues that pose significant challenges to the industry's sustainability and integrity. From labour exploitation and environmental degradation to supply chain transparency and animal welfare concerns, ethical dilemmas pervade every aspect of textile production and consumption [2].

At the heart of these ethical issues is the treatment of workers within the textile industry. In many regions, particularly in

developing countries where labour regulations may be lax, textile workers endure long hours, meager wages, unsafe working conditions, and even child labour. The pursuit of profit often comes at the expense of human dignity, as workers toil in factories and mills, facing exploitation and abuse in pursuit of cheap and fast fashion. Furthermore, the environmental impact of textile production casts a long shadow over the industry's ethical landscape [3]. From the cultivation of cotton and other natural fibers, which deplete water resources and contribute to deforestation, to the chemical-intensive processes of dyeing, finishing, and manufacturing, which pollute air, water, and soil, textile production exacts a heavy toll on the planet [4]. Climate

change, pollution, and resource depletion are just some of the consequences of the industry's unsustainable practices. Supply chain transparency, or rather the lack thereof, compounds these ethical concerns [5]. The complexity and opacity of textile supply chains make it difficult to trace the origin of materials or ensure compliance with ethical standards throughout the production process. Subcontracting to unregulated factories, sourcing materials from unethical suppliers, and turning a blind eye to labour abuses are all too common in an industry where profit often trumps principles. Moreover, the use of animal-derived materials such as wool, silk, and leather raises significant animal welfare concerns [6]. From the controversial practice of mulesing in wool production to the mass slaughter of silkworms for silk extraction, the textile industry's reliance on animal products raises questions about the ethical treatment of animals and the sustainability of such practices [7].

In light of these ethical issues, it is clear that the textile industry stands at a crossroads, facing both unprecedented challenges and opportunities for change [8]. By confronting these ethical dilemmas head-on, embracing sustainable practices, fostering supply chain transparency, and prioritizing the welfare of workers and animals, the industry can chart a path towards a more ethical and sustainable future. The textile industry, like many others, is not immune to ethical issues. Here are some of the most prevalent ones:

Labor Exploitation

One of the most significant ethical issues in the textile industry is the exploitation of workers, particularly in developing countries where labour laws might be lax [9]. This can include long working hours, low wages, unsafe working conditions, and even child labour. Labor exploitation in the textile industry is a widespread and persistent problem, particularly in developing countries where labour regulations may be weak and enforcement is limited. Here are some specific examples of labour exploitation in the textile industry:

Low Wages

Textile workers, especially those in developing countries, often receive wages that are insufficient to meet their basic needs. This is exacerbated by factors such as piece-rate pay systems, which incentivize workers to produce more at the expense of their health and well-being [10].

Long Working Hours

Many textile workers are forced to work long hours, sometimes exceeding legal limits, without appropriate compensation for overtime. This can lead to physical and mental exhaustion, as well as a lack of work-life balance [11].

Unsafe Working Conditions

Textile factories may lack proper safety measures and infrastructure, exposing workers to hazardous chemicals, machinery accidents, and other occupational hazards. Without adequate protection, workers are at risk of injuries and long-term health problems [12].

Child Labor

Despite international conventions and laws prohibiting child labour, it remains prevalent in many parts of the textile industry. Children are often employed in hazardous conditions, deprived of education, and trapped in cycles of poverty [13].

Forced Labor

In some cases, textile workers may be subjected to coercion, threats, or debt bondage, forcing them to work against their will. This modern form of slavery deprives workers of their freedom and basic human rights [14].

Discrimination and Harassment

Discrimination based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, or migrant status is common in the textile industry. Women, in particular, may face gender-based discrimination and harassment in the workplace [15].

Addressing labour exploitation in the textile industry requires concerted efforts from governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and consumers. This includes enforcing labour laws, improving working conditions, promoting fair wages, supporting workers' rights organizations, and increasing transparency in supply chains. Consumers can also play a role by choosing to support brands that prioritize ethical labour practices and holding companies accountable for their social responsibility commitments.

Environmental Impact

Textile production can have a significant environmental footprint, from the use of harmful chemicals in dyeing and finishing processes to the massive amounts of water consumption and pollution caused by textile manufacturing. Ethical concerns arise regarding the industry's contribution to pollution, deforestation (for materials like cotton), and climate change [16].

The environmental impact of the textile industry is significant and spans various stages of production, from raw material extraction to manufacturing, distribution, use, and disposal. Here are some key aspects of the textile industry's environmental impact:

Resource Depletion

The textile industry relies heavily on natural resources such as water, land, and energy. For example, cotton cultivation requires vast amounts of water and agricultural land, often leading to water scarcity and soil degradation in cotton-producing regions [17].

Chemical Pollution

Textile manufacturing involves the use of numerous chemicals, including dyes, bleaches, and finishing agents, many of which are toxic and non-biodegradable. Improper disposal of these chemicals can contaminate waterways, soil, and air, posing risks to human health and ecosystems [18].

Water Consumption and Pollution

Textile production is water-intensive, particularly in processes like dyeing and finishing. Wastewater discharged from textile factories often contains harmful chemicals and dyes, polluting rivers, lakes, and oceans and endangering aquatic life.

Energy Consumption and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Textile manufacturing requires significant amounts of energy, primarily from fossil fuels, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Additionally, transportation and distribution of textile products further add to the industry's carbon footprint.

Waste Generation

The textile industry generates vast amounts of waste at various stages of production, including fabric scraps, packaging materials, and end-of-life garments. Much of this waste ends up in landfills, exacerbating environmental pollution and contributing to resource depletion.

Deforestation

The cultivation of natural fibers such as cotton and wood pulp for textiles can lead to deforestation, habitat loss, and biodiversity decline, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions like the Amazon rainforest.

Microplastic Pollution

Synthetic fibers like polyester release microplastics into the environment during washing, contributing to ocean pollution and posing risks to marine organisms and human health. Addressing the environmental impact of the textile industry requires a multi-faceted approach involving sustainable production practices, resource efficiency, waste reduction, pollution prevention, and the adoption of eco-friendly materials and technologies. Initiatives such as sustainable sourcing of raw materials, water recycling and treatment, energy efficiency measures, circular economy models, and eco-labeling schemes can help mitigate the industry's environmental footprint and promote more sustainable textile production and consumption patterns.

Supply Chain Transparency

Many textile companies have complex and opaque supply chains, making it difficult to trace the origin of materials or ensure that ethical practices are being followed at every stage of production. Lack of transparency can lead to issues such as subcontracting to unregulated factories or sourcing materials from unethical suppliers [19-20].

Supply chain transparency in the textile industry refers to the visibility and accountability of the various stages involved in the production of textiles, from raw material sourcing to manufacturing, distribution, and retail. Lack of transparency in the textile supply chain can lead to a range of ethical and sustainability issues, including labour exploitation, environmental degradation, and human rights violations. Here are some key aspects of supply chain transparency in the textile industry and why it's important:

Traceability

Transparency enables companies to trace the origins of raw materials, such as cotton, wool, or synthetic fibers, back to their source. This helps identify potential risks such as child labour, forced labour, or environmental abuses in the supply chain.

Supplier Disclosure

Transparent supply chains involve disclosing information about suppliers and subcontractors involved in textile production. This allows for better oversight and accountability, ensuring that ethical and environmental standards are upheld throughout the supply chain.

Compliance and Auditing

Transparent supply chains facilitate compliance with labour laws, environmental regulations, and international standards such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Regular auditing and monitoring of suppliers help identify non-compliance and drive improvements.

Risk Management

Transparency enables companies to assess and mitigate risks related to labour rights, environmental impact, and social issues within their supply chain. Identifying high-risk areas allows for targeted interventions and capacity-building initiatives to address vulnerabilities and improve working conditions.

Stakeholder Engagement

Transparent supply chains encourage dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders, including workers, local communities, NGOs, and consumers. Engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes fosters trust, promotes accountability, and facilitates the exchange of best practices and knowledge-sharing.

Consumer Awareness

Increasingly, consumers are demanding transparency and accountability from brands regarding their supply chain practices. Providing transparent information about sourcing, production, and ethical standards builds consumer trust and loyalty, driving demand for sustainable and responsibly-produced textiles.

To achieve greater supply chain transparency in the textile industry, companies can implement various strategies, including supplier codes of conduct, third-party certification schemes, supply chain mapping tools, collaboration platforms, and technology solutions such as blockchain and RFID (Radio-Frequency Identification) tracking. Regulatory frameworks, industry initiatives, and multi-stakeholder partnerships also play a crucial role in promoting transparency and driving positive change across the textile supply chain.

Animal Welfare

In the case of materials like wool, silk, and leather, there are concerns about the ethical treatment of animals in the supply chain. This includes issues such as overcrowding, inhumane slaughter practices, and the use of painful procedures like mulesing in sheep farming. Animal welfare in the textile industry is an important ethical consideration, particularly in relation to the use of animal-derived materials such as wool, silk, and leather [21-23]. Here are some key aspects of animal welfare in the textile industry:

Wool Production

Sheep are the primary source of wool used in textiles. Concerns related to sheep welfare include practices such as mulesing, which involves removing strips of skin from the sheep's hindquarters to prevent flystrike. While mulesing is intended to prevent a painful condition, it has raised ethical concerns about animal cruelty. Additionally, the treatment of sheep during shearing and transportation is important for their welfare.

Silk Production

Silk is produced by silkworms, primarily the domesticated *Bombyx mori* species. The traditional method of silk production involves boiling the silkworm cocoons alive to extract the silk fibers, which raises ethical questions about animal suffering. Alternative methods such as peace silk, which allows the silkworms to emerge from the cocoon naturally before harvesting the silk, are considered more humane.

Leather Production

Leather is derived from animal hides, typically from cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs. Ethical concerns in leather production include the treatment of animals on farms and during transportation, as well as the use of chemicals in the tanning process, which can be harmful to both the environment and workers' health.

Exotic Animal Skins

The use of exotic animal skins such as crocodile, snake, and ostrich raises additional animal welfare and conservation concerns. The farming and hunting of exotic animals for their skins can involve inhumane treatment, habitat destruction, and threats to endangered species.

Down and Feathers

Down and feathers, often used as insulation in clothing and bedding, are typically obtained from ducks and geese. Ethical considerations in down production include concerns about live-plucking and force-feeding practices, as well as ensuring humane treatment throughout the birds' lives.

- To address animal welfare concerns in the textile industry, companies can adopt various strategies, including:
- Implementing animal welfare standards and certification schemes that ensure humane treatment throughout the supply chain.
- Sourcing materials from suppliers that adhere to recognized animal welfare guidelines and best practices.
- Supporting initiatives to develop alternative materials that mimic the properties of animal-derived fibers without causing harm to animals.
- Engaging with stakeholders, including animal welfare organizations, suppliers, and consumers, to promote transparency and accountability in the use of animal-derived materials.
- Investing in research and innovation to develop more sustainable and ethical alternatives to traditional animal-derived fibers and materials.
- By prioritizing animal welfare in their supply chains, textile companies can demonstrate their commitment to ethical and

responsible business practices while meeting the growing demand for cruelty-free and sustainable products.

Worker Health and Safety

Textile manufacturing processes can expose workers to hazardous chemicals and unsafe working conditions, leading to long-term health problems or accidents. Ensuring proper safety measures and providing a healthy work environment is an ethical responsibility of textile companies. Worker health and safety in the textile industry is a critical aspect of ethical and responsible business practices. Textile manufacturing processes can pose various risks to workers, including exposure to hazardous chemicals, machinery accidents, ergonomic hazards, and workplace-related illnesses [24-26]. Here are some key considerations for ensuring worker health and safety in the textile industry:

Hazardous Chemicals

Textile manufacturing involves the use of numerous chemicals in processes such as dyeing, printing, and finishing. Workers may be exposed to these chemicals through inhalation, skin contact, or ingestion, leading to acute and chronic health effects. Implementing proper chemical management practices, such as substituting hazardous chemicals with safer alternatives, providing adequate ventilation, and offering personal protective equipment (PPE), is essential to minimize exposure risks.

Machinery Safety

Textile factories are equipped with various types of machinery and equipment, including spinning machines, weaving looms, and sewing machines. Improper use of machinery, lack of maintenance, and inadequate training can increase the risk of accidents, such as entanglement, crush injuries, and amputations. Ensuring that machinery is properly guarded, maintained, and operated by trained personnel is essential for preventing workplace accidents and injuries.

Ergonomic Hazards

Textile workers often perform repetitive tasks, such as sewing or cutting fabric, which can lead to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) such as carpal tunnel syndrome and back injuries. Designing ergonomic workstations, providing ergonomic tools and equipment, and implementing rotation and rest breaks can help reduce the risk of MSDs and improve worker comfort and productivity.

Noise and Vibration

Textile manufacturing processes can generate high levels of noise and vibration, which can have adverse effects on workers' hearing and overall health. Implementing noise control measures, such as soundproofing and ear protection, and minimizing exposure to vibrating equipment can help prevent hearing loss and other related health issues.

Workplace Safety Culture

Promoting a culture of safety and awareness among workers, supervisors, and management is essential for preventing accidents and injuries in the textile industry. Providing comprehensive safety training, encouraging reporting of

hazards and near-misses, and fostering open communication channels can help create a safer work environment for all employees.

Healthcare and Wellness Programs

Providing access to healthcare services, including occupational health screenings and treatment for work-related illnesses and injuries, is important for supporting the well-being of textile workers. Additionally, offering wellness programs, such as health education, counseling, and ergonomic assessments, can help improve overall worker health and productivity. Ensuring worker health and safety in the textile industry requires a collaborative effort among employers, workers, government agencies, and other stakeholders. By prioritizing occupational health and safety measures, textile companies can protect the well-being of their employees and demonstrate their commitment to ethical and responsible business practices.

Waste Management

The textile industry generates a significant amount of waste, including fabric scraps, wastewater, and packaging materials. Proper waste management practices, such as recycling and reducing waste generation, are essential to minimize the industry's environmental impact. Waste management in the textile industry is crucial for reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainability throughout the production process. Textile manufacturing generates various types of waste, including fabric scraps, packaging materials, wastewater, and end-of-life products [27-28]. Here are some key aspects of waste management in the textile industry:

Waste Reduction and Prevention

The first step in effective waste management is to minimize waste generation at the source. Textile companies can implement strategies such as optimizing production processes to reduce material waste, improving cutting efficiency to minimize fabric scraps, and adopting lean manufacturing principles to eliminate unnecessary steps in the production process.

Reuse and Recycling

Textile waste that cannot be prevented should be reused or recycled whenever possible. Fabric scraps can be collected and repurposed into new products or used as raw material for other industries, such as insulation or padding. Additionally, recycling programs can be implemented to collect and process end-of-life textiles, such as clothing and household textiles, into new fibers or materials.

Wastewater Treatment

Textile manufacturing processes, particularly dyeing and finishing, generate wastewater that may contain harmful chemicals and pollutants. Proper wastewater treatment is essential to remove contaminants and minimize environmental impact. Treatment methods may include physical, chemical, and biological processes to remove solids, organic matter, and hazardous substances before discharge.

Energy Recovery

Some textile waste, such as fabric scraps and organic residues from wastewater treatment, can be converted into energy

through processes such as incineration or anaerobic digestion. Energy recovery from waste can help reduce reliance on fossil fuels and minimize greenhouse gas emissions associated with waste disposal.

Landfill Management

Despite efforts to reduce, reuse, and recycle textile waste, some waste may still end up in landfills. Textile companies can minimize the environmental impact of landfill disposal by implementing waste segregation and sorting practices to divert recyclable materials from landfill disposal and by exploring alternative waste disposal options, such as waste-to-energy facilities or engineered landfill designs to minimize leachate and methane emissions.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

Textile manufacturers can take responsibility for the end-of-life management of their products through extended producer responsibility programs. This may involve implementing take-back schemes, providing recycling infrastructure, or funding waste management initiatives to ensure that products are properly managed and recycled at the end of their useful life. By implementing comprehensive waste management strategies, textile companies can minimize environmental impact, conserve resources, and promote a more sustainable and circular economy within the industry. Additionally, collaboration with stakeholders such as governments, NGOs, and consumers is essential to drive collective action and achieve meaningful progress in waste reduction and recycling efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the textile industry faces multifaceted ethical challenges that demand concerted action from stakeholders across the supply chain. By prioritizing labour rights, environmental sustainability, supply chain transparency, and animal welfare, the industry can navigate these challenges while fostering a more ethical and responsible future. Labour exploitation stands as a pervasive concern, particularly in developing nations where lax regulations enable the exploitation of workers. From long working hours and low wages to unsafe conditions and child labour, the industry's workforce faces myriad challenges. Addressing these issues requires robust enforcement of labour laws, along with improved transparency and accountability throughout the supply chain. Environmental degradation emerges as another pressing ethical quandary. Textile production exacts a heavy toll on the environment, from resource depletion and chemical pollution to water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Adopting sustainable production practices, investing in eco-friendly technologies, and promoting circular economy principles are essential steps toward minimizing the industry's ecological footprint. Supply chain transparency remains a critical aspect of ethical textile manufacturing. Opaque supply chains foster exploitation and unethical practices, making traceability and accountability imperative. Through the implementation of supply chain mapping, supplier disclosure, and compliance auditing, companies can ensure adherence to ethical standards and promote fair labour practices. Furthermore, animal welfare emerges as a significant

ethical concern, particularly concerning the use of animal-derived materials like wool, silk, and leather. Upholding humane treatment standards and supporting alternative materials that mitigate animal suffering are essential for aligning textile production with ethical principles. Addressing these ethical issues requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including governments, corporations, consumers, and advocacy groups. Efforts such as implementing and enforcing labour regulations, promoting sustainable production practices, increasing supply chain transparency, and supporting ethical sourcing initiatives can help mitigate these challenges in the textile industry.

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