

Literature review on garment sweatshops essay



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“ Garment Sweatshops in El Salvador” A great number of large companies located in the United States and parts Europe hire subcontractors in third world countries, like El Salvador to manufacture their apparel, which go for sale at very high prices. Most of these factories where the labor is being done are located in so called free-trade zones. The renters of these factories do not have to pay taxes except for the export tariffs, which are quite low because of the product that is being exported. The majority of workers found in sweatshops are women between the age of eighteen and thirty, who come from low-income families.

These women are working long shifts and are being under paid and their working conditions are horrible. Therefore, the question remains as to why are sweatshops still in business even after the various information published about the harm they are to helpless women. Many scholars claim that the companies are not aware of the mistreatment to the employees and blame the subcontractors, others blame it on globalization. Yet there are many that claim that the working conditions have gotten better thanks to the unions formed to protect the rights of workers.

There have been various cases in El Salvador where women have been hospitalized because of the working conditions in these factories. In her essay, “ The Ideal Sweatshop? Gender and Transnational Protest”, Ethel Brooks analyzes the hardships women have had to deal with in the past years while they worked under horrible conditions. She gave a perfect example of a sweatshop factory back in November 1997, DINDEX that was located in one of the free-trade zones in San Salvador that produced garments for local and international markets.

This factory mainly employed women, and there were more than 200 of them. One morning a couple of women just having awful symptoms of dizziness, nausea and eventually suffered from fainting spells and convulsions. There were various factors that the hospital considered, it was well known that these were poisoned and it was either from the synthetic they worked with, the drinking water supply, or the carbon monoxide expelled into the air by the machines in the factory. Later throughout the day more women kept having the same symptoms were hospitalized, and this kept happening throughout the day.

Eventually the rest of the workers panicked and rushed out of the factory. Brooks explained the scene as complete chaos, " The streets around the factory were filled with ambulances and women running in all directions away from the factory". Muriel Cooper presents a more personal account about a young woman that dealt with the torture of working in a sweatshop. Judith Viera, a young 18 year old woman explained her experience from working at a Taiwanese owned factory, Mandarin International in San Marcos, El Salvador.

She explained how women were forced to be on birth control and were limited to their restrooms breaks. Viera mentioned that the restrooms were far from disgusting and there were only about five toilets for about 500 employees, which broke a law that states there should be at least 25 for every 100 workers. There were guards in the gated entrances that demanded to see the specific identifications to enter and exit, and were very rude and disrespectful at that.

The factory was gated and if there was a fire and any type of emergency it would have been very difficult for the workers to exit. Viera did not fail to mention that the garments they made were for various big companies located in the United States like Gap, JC Penny and Bauer. They would not receive an hourly wage but would only get paid per item they made, which made their earnings non sufficient. If anyone dared to speak up or make a complaint about the dangerous work environments or low wage they would immediately be fired.

Many people feared that the most, because they depended on their jobs to support their families. Robert Ross, the author of " Slaves To Fashion" gives more accounts of young people working and being humiliated day to day. Many of these big factories hired searchers to make sure that the workers would not steal any of the merchandise, a young woman explained to Ross, " They line us up and make us pill down our pants or pull up our skirts before we leave to make sure we haven't on an extra pair of panties".

Ross was startled and confused as to why these people would deal with so much humiliation and it was a man that came up to him to explain that they had no other choice, " they want to rise from misery to poverty", which is a very eye opening statement. Through his research Ross found that the minimum wage does not provide a decent standard of living for the worker and family. To make situations worse many of these large sweatshops that support child labor, making underage children work up to 60 hours a week, which is to extreme. 4 Those that do decide to speak up about the mistreatment get fired right away.

Theodore H. Moran explains in one of his excerpts how an employer locked out workers without giving them their wages and replaced them immediately after finding out about their participation in an organized union. As these issues have come up to the open there have been many people that are trying to help the situation. Labor unions have been organized to make sure that workers are not being overworked and are being paid properly. With the help of these unions many sweatshops have been shut down like DINDEX and the Mandarin Factory has been renamed to Charter and is under new management.

Charter claims that they have improved the work environment, “ they have coffee breaks and lunch on an outdoor terrace cafeteria. Bathrooms are unlocked, the factory is breezy and clean, and employees can complain to a board of independent monitors if they feel abused”, but some workers still complain that the work days are too long and their wages are not enough. 5
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