

Project title: Working Conditions, Stress and Health Among Low Wage Workers in Seattle

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Abstract

Introduction: Low-wage workers face exposure to traditional occupational hazards, however, may have fewer organizational, economic and social resources to modify the health impacts of these exposures. The interplay of work-related and non-work psychosocial stressors and the impact of these spheres on occupational health have rarely been explored. Given the impending changes in the minimum wage in Seattle, we are uniquely poised to assess how conditions associated with low wage work may be altered with a rising wage over the next few years.

Approach to the work: We will enroll 200 low wage workers to assess work and non-work related exposures, stress and health. Subjects will be recruited through the Fair Work Collaboration; an umbrella group made up of 12 community based organizations representing different populations of vulnerable workers. A questionnaire will assess workplace physical exposures and psychosocial stressors, perceived stress, injury experience and general health, as well as important demographic and social determinants of health. For a subgroup of 50 workers, we will also collect biomarkers of stress: hair cortisol and Epstein Barr Virus assayed from blood spots. Analysis will initially focus on descriptive results, characterizing the work conditions, stress and health status of this population, but will also explore associations between work-related stressors and injury and health outcomes, while controlling for non-work stressors and conditions.

Expected results/outputs: We will produce a non-scientific summary of our findings to be shared with our community partners and at least one peer-reviewed article describing the associations between working conditions, non-work stressors and injury and health. Lastly, this research will support application for a larger study on health and low wage work and will provide valuable experience in recruiting this difficult to reach population.

Applicability to MA/AF mission: Low wage workers face myriad occupational hazards but are rarely studied as a group. By addressing the conditions faced at work, while incorporating non-work psychosocial stressors, this research will provide a better understanding of the driving forces behind workplace injury and poor health among low-wage workers and guide effective prevention strategies among this population.