



Impact of precarious work on neighborhood health

Concept mapping by a community-academic partnership

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What is the issue?

Work is recognized as a determinant for health and wellbeing of workers and their families. Healthy work is defined as productive employment with opportunities for growth, a living wage, benefits, job security, health and safety protections, respectful treatment, and representation and communication between workers and their employers. Community supports needed for healthy work include access to quality housing, schooling, affordable healthcare, healthy job opportunities and affordable transportation. However, social and structural forces such as immigration policies and systemic racism create patterns of advantage or disadvantage in families and communities. Low wage jobs are associated with employment insecurity and limited workplace rights. Employment with the characteristics of instability—part time, temporary—low wages, lack of benefits including paid sick leave, and high hazards is known as “precarious employment” and has been increasingly recognized as detrimental to health and wellbeing¹. The impact of precarious employment at a neighborhood level is often overlooked.

It is vital to understand the mechanisms by which work influences neighborhood health in order to create effective community-level interventions.

What was done?

Over a series of five months, community residents engaged with academic partners in a process known as concept mapping (CM) to document community residents’ perceptions of precarious work and to determine the pathways and barriers to healthy work in Greater Lawndale. CM gives weight to every participant’s voice to help generate ideas and explore the relationship between these ideas. During this three-stage process, residents engaged in CM to:



1
Identify
issues that influence their health



2
Categorize
the issues



3
Rate
issues in terms of prevalence and impact

Who created this research brief?

The Greater Lawndale Healthy Work project is a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project with North Lawndale and Little Village (together forming the Greater Lawndale area) and the University of Illinois Chicago Center for Healthy Work, a Center of Excellence for Total Worker Health.

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How was it done?

Between January to May of 2017, 294 Greater Lawndale residents came together to share their knowledge and ideas about the ways that work impacts their health. Residents engaged with CM in a variety of settings, including churches, laundromats and community centers.

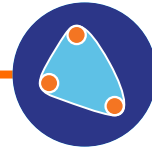
BRAINSTORMING

Residents were asked to respond to the following statement: "When I think of my work situation, or people who live in my community in similar work situations, one-way work impacts our health (good or bad) is ____." Community residents and academic partners condensed the 259 responses into a list of 55 separate statements.



SORTING AND RATING

Community residents sorted the 55 statements into groups or themes that made sense to them. Then they rated the statements on a) how prevalent the issues are in their community and (b) the impact of these issues on their health.



CLUSTER MAP

A data analysis was conducted using Concept Systems GlobalMax© which uses statistical methods and graphics to display findings. A "cluster map" is generated that locates similar ideas together and allows for a focused discussion about whether participants (community members) agree with the groupings. The 55 statements were grouped into 11 clusters, which were then grouped into four separate themes.

What was found?

The data analysis was interpreted by community and academic researchers to contain four overall themes:

HEALTHY		<h3>Healthy Aspects of Work</h3> <p>The components of work that improve their mental and physical health, including flexible work hours, decent wages, and supportive co-workers and management.</p>
		<h3>Systemic and Structural Inequities</h3> <p>Relates to the impact of broader economic, political and social forces on employment and health, such as racism and immigration policies.</p>
UNHEALTHY		<h3>Lack of Control/Exploitation</h3> <p>Relates to the power dynamics between employers and workers. Examples include discrimination and harassment at work; violations of workers' rights, such as not being provided safety gear; and violation of human rights, such as limited or no access to restrooms or water while on the job.</p>
		<h3>Psychological and Physical Stress</h3> <p>Stress was widespread across the clusters and described as an exposure, outcome and a cause of unhealthy work, demonstrating its pervasiveness in the community's perception. Working too many hours, not getting enough sleep and physical pain from strenuous work are examples of physical stress that were identified by participants. The psychological stress includes struggling to find and keep work, as well as working too many hours to afford the most basic needs--food, medication and housing.</p>

What does this mean and for whom?



CM is a qualitative tool that community-academic research partnerships can use to get a deeper understanding of how communities perceive existing barriers to health, thereby grounding the research in residents' lived experiences. CM allows for the voices of the community to drive the process of identifying problems and potential solutions. CM can be used to complement and enrich other methods in community-based participatory research such as interviews and focus groups. The findings provide critical insight into community perceptions of the mechanisms by which work influences health, serving as a basis for interventions to promote worker and community health.