

Promoting Occupational Health and Safety Among Nail Salon Technicians: A Needs Assessment

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Issue: Nail technicians may be at increased risk for a variety of work-related diseases including skin disease, respiratory illness, musculoskeletal disorders, cancer, reproductive issues and infections. Compounds associated with these health problems (e.g. toluene, methyl methacrylate and volatile organic compounds) may be found in Toronto nail salons. A large proportion of Toronto nail technicians are immigrant women.

Methods: What concerns do Toronto nail technicians have about their own health? What barriers to better health are nail technicians facing, and what kinds of resources do they think could be helpful? For this needs assessment, the Queen West Central Toronto Community Health Centre (QWCTCHC) and the Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease (CREOD) interviewed five Chinese immigrant women in the nail salon industry in central Toronto.

Implications (see findings on right): Health promotion efforts with a focus on pregnancy may be most engaging for female nail technicians.

The lack of awareness and on-the-job education for occupational disease prevention highlights the importance of existing nail salon outreach work by the QWCTCHC. The formalized training sessions should continue to be offered as well as increased engagement of the owners.

The existing print resources on nail salon workplace health can be improved to be more useful to the Chinese immigrant women nail technician population in Toronto. Resources should inspire awareness on workplace health risks, but not in a fear-mongering way. Rather, they should highlight the possibility of being able to work as a healthy nail technician, and empower nail technicians to take control of their workplace health.

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Findings:

When it comes to their health, nail technicians are most worried about:

- Workplace chemical exposures related to hypersensitivity and pregnancy. Pregnancy issues were a common thread among the participants interviewed.
- Musculoskeletal disorders related to ergonomics.
- Communicable diseases associated with cleanliness of equipment.

Overall, the women spoke of their health concerns with a significant sense of fear and uncertainty.

Barriers to addressing these concerns include:

- A lack of knowledge on self-protection. Many of the women had little to no on-the-job training on workplace health measures.
- The desire to keep their job. The job market is seen to be scarce, especially for immigrants with minimal English skills.
- The nature of nail salon work. E.g. as nail work is meticulous, nail technicians may feel hindered by wearing gloves.
- The status quo at work. Some feel that health symptoms are a normal part of the job.
- Fear or indebtedness to the owner.
- Internalization of hardship, characteristic of Chinese culture.

Resources that nail technicians would find helpful should be:

- Presented in print format
- Simple to understand
- Reliable
- Visually pleasing
- Written in Traditional Chinese