

Promoting Occupational Health and Safety Among Nail Salon Technicians: Peer Health Worker led Training Workshops

Queen West - Central Toronto Community Health Centre

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 and precarious workers.

Methods: Can peer-to-peer training help prevent occupational disease? As part of its Healthy Nail Technicians Project, the Queen West - Central Toronto Community Health Centre (Queen West) recruited and trained four nail technicians from the Chinese community as Peer Health Workers (PHWs). The PHWs delivered seven workshops to 25 nail salon owners and technicians across Toronto. Workshops covered topics such as chemicals, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), hand washing and hand creams. Through pre- and post-workshop surveys, we then evaluated the workshops on how effective they were in improving skin care and reducing the risks of occupational skin disease.

Implications (see findings on right): These findings show a positive trend in attitudes and behaviors, highlighting peer-to-peer training as an intervention that could be promising for hard-to-reach worker populations such as nail technicians. However, further research using a larger sample size and longer follow-up is required to determine if these changes are significant and sustainable.

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Findings:

Participants rated the workshops very positively. They felt:

- The topics were relevant and the content was easy to understand
- The training helped them better understand the chemicals used at work and how to protect their hands
- The most valuable information was about how to protect and care for their hands (i.e. how to choose gloves; how to take off the gloves correctly; how to wash hands correctly; and how to protect themselves and clients from chemicals)

Many participants were keen to learn:

- More than three-quarters of participants said they would like to learn about protecting themselves at work.
- Almost one-third of participants said they would like more training and information.

The training changed participants' attitudes and behaviour. After the training, participants were more likely to:

- Say that wearing cotton gloves was important.
- Report using protective gloves and cotton gloves in the last two weeks. The median response changed from "Most of the time" to "All of the time".
- Report using hand cream 10+ times per day. However their attitudes about the importance of using hand cream stayed relatively the same.