

**Trying to Work It Out:
Newfoundland Women's Experiences
in Small Workplaces**

**Agnieszka Kosny
Women's Health Network,
Newfoundland and Labrador**

August 2000

This project was funded by the National Network on Environments and Women's Health (NNEWH) and by the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (MCEWH). NNEWH and MCEWH are financially supported by the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health Program, Women's Health Bureau, Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of NNEWH, MCEWH or the official policy of Health Canada.

© Copyright is shared between the author and the MCEWH, 2001.



PO Box 3070
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 3G9 Canada
Telephone 902-420-6725
Toll-free 1-888-658-1112
Fax 902-420-6752
mcewh@dal.ca
www.medicine.dal.ca/mcewh

The Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health is supported by Dalhousie University, the IWK Health Centre, the Women's Health Bureau of Health Canada, and through generous anonymous contributions.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	4
Executive Summary	5
1.0 Introduction	7
2.0 Methodology	7
2.1 Participant Recruitment	8
2.2 Focus Groups and Interviews	8
2.3 Data Collection	9
2.4 Limitations	9
3.0 Themes	9
3.1 Physical Environment	10
3.2 Ergonomic Stressors	11
3.3 Workplace Organization	12
3.4 Economic Issues	20
4.0 Positive Experiences	22
5.0 Regional Differences and Similarities	23
6.0 Discussion	23
6.1 Women’s Occupational Health in Small Workplaces	23
6.2 Labour Standards, Occupational Health and Safety, and Health Inspections	24
6.3 Employment Insurance	25
6.4 Unions	26
6.5 Work-Home Balance	26
6.6 Permanent or Temporary ... Differences in Perception	26
6.7 Work in Non-Profit Organizations	27
6.8 Waitressing/Bartending	27
6.9 Retail	27
6.10 Gender and Small Workplaces	28
7.0 Conclusions	28
7.1 Physical Work Environment	28
7.2 The Work Organization of Small Workplaces	28
7.3 Socio-Economic Factors	29
8.0 Policy Recommendations	30
Bibliography	30
Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography	31
Appendix B: Discussion Guide for Focus Groups, Personal Profile and Consent Forms	39

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the women who participated in the focus groups and interviews. Thank you for sharing your time, experiences, and knowledge with me.

My gratitude goes out to the community groups across Newfoundland who so readily helped recruit participants for the study even when their time and resources were stretched. Your help was invaluable!

The members of the advisory committee were: Barbara Neis, Bonnie James, Bea Courtney, and Wanda Wadman. I would like to thank them for their guidance. Special thanks go to Barbara Neis, Bonnie James, and Donna Malone who reviewed and helped finalize this report.

Finally, thanks go to the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health and the National Network on Environments and Women's Health for their funding and patience.

Iggy Kosny

August 2000

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are many gaps in knowledge of women's health and experiences in the workplace. Most occupational health studies focused on large, male-dominated workplaces such as construction and mining. However, the Atlantic region, encouraged by provincial and local governments, has seen a dramatic growth in the small business sector. Despite the fact that women are represented in large numbers in small workplaces, little is known about their work and health. This project has tried to shed some light on the experiences of women who work or have worked in small workplaces in Newfoundland.

THE PROJECT

The purpose of the study was to:

- examine women's experiences in small workplaces
- explore some of the difficulties associated with work in small workplaces
- discuss how work in small workplaces affects health and well-being.

Through focus groups and interviews, this research examined the experiences of women who work or have worked in small workplaces in Newfoundland. Sixty women living in St. John's, Clarenville, Gander, Corner Brook, and Stephenville participated in focus groups and interviews.

FINDINGS

PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

Typically, participants described the physical work environment in small workplaces in negative ways. Several women said that their work environment was uncomfortable and unsafe and that equipment needed to do one's job was broken, missing, or not well maintained. Some of the things that may be taken for granted in large workplaces, e.g., air conditioning, a clean working space, or ergonomic equipment, are often not part of the working environment of small workplace employees. One possible reason for these working conditions is that smaller business may be less financially stable and may operate closer to the bottom line. Also, manuals for small business owners often do not emphasize occupational health. Since many employees tend to be reluctant to complain, employers may not realize that there are serious problems in their workplace.

THE ORGANIZATION OF SMALL WORKPLACES

Judging by what the focus group participants said, small workplaces tend to be organized in similar ways. Work schedules tend to be irregular, employees generally do not feel secure in their jobs, and employees often do not have a great deal of agency when it comes to deciding when they work, for how long, and what kinds of work they do. This sort of instability and insecurity impacts the social and economic lives of women and causes stress and anxiety. There is, however, one notable exception: most non-profit or community-based organizations allow employees to have greater input into the type of work they do.

Gender roles also appear to influence the structure of women's work in small workplaces. Women reported doing a great deal of unpaid work both at home and in the community. Sometimes they took on extra work such as cleaning or washing. Women working in bars and restaurants are also sometimes required to use their sexuality as part of their job.

A major health issue for women is balancing home and family responsibilities. Many women indicated they suffered stress as a result of irregular shifts, being on call, and having to work long hours to make ends meet. Although some employers were flexible and understanding, many did not take family responsibilities into consideration. Hardships such as having no health insurance, benefits, a pension plan, or paid vacation leave meant that women did not have security and piece of mind.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Many women made clear links between the socio-economic environment in their communities and the quality of the work they did. Simply put, a lack of high quality employment in a community forced women to work in jobs that were not good for their health and well-being. When the number of people looking for work greatly outnumbered jobs available, employees would accept a poor physical environment, long shifts, and other factors that negatively affected their health. Presumably employers were secure in the knowledge that if they got “trouble” from employees they could be easily replaced.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

ATTENTION TO THE “SMALL WORKPLACE”

The provincial and federal governments and agencies dealing with new business in all sectors must pay attention to workplace safety. More attention needs to be paid to small workplaces that are often considered safe and benign. Definitions of “workplace” need to be re-examined. Small workplaces, non-profit organizations, and private homes need to be examined as workplace sites. Departments and divisions dealing with occupational health and safety and labour standards must ensure that employees and employers are following laws and regulations. This kind of monitoring can be achieved in part through regular, unannounced workplace inspections.

COMMUNICATION

There needs to be greater formal communication and sharing of information between departments/divisions dealing with public health, workplace health and safety, and workers’ rights.

INFORMATION

All employees and employers should be provided with information about their rights and responsibilities, such as the Labour Standards Act.

SUPPORT

Support needs to be provided to both employers and employees. Support systems need to be put into place to help employers understand and follow labour standards and occupational health and safety regulations. Employees need help and support, especially when working in unsafe or unfair working conditions. Unions or an ombudsman can be a source of support for workers.

LABOUR/OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY STANDARDS

Labour/occupational health and safety standards should include mandatory family-friendly policies for workplaces and safety-related policies for workers confronted by physical threats from clients in the workplace. Seats and rubber mats should be mandatory for workers whose job involves standing in one spot for long periods of time.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Women's Health Network, Newfoundland and Labrador (WHNNL) received funds from The National Network on Environments and Women's Health (NNEWH) and the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (MCEWH) to carry out a women's occupational health project. The WHNNL decided to focus the study on women's work in small workplaces.

The purpose of the study was to:

- examine women's experiences in small workplaces
- explore some of the difficulties associated with work in small workplaces
- discuss how work in small workplaces affects health and well-being.

At the start of the project, a limited literature review was carried out. The decision to focus on small workplaces was based on a review of occupational health literature with a specific focus on Canadian and Newfoundland reports and studies. Appendix A is an annotated bibliography of some of this literature. It was found that there had been very few studies of women's occupational health done in Newfoundland with the exception of research into women and the fisheries industry. The decision to focus the research on women's experience in small workplaces was made for the following reasons:

- One-third of Canadians, the majority of them women, are employed in small workplaces (Eakin 1995).
- Little information is known about women's working conditions in small workplaces, the health hazards they face, or their experiences.

- Compared to larger companies, small businesses have higher rates of injury and ill-health (Eakin 1995).
- Work in small workplaces often offers low pay, few benefits, and job instability (Eakin 1995).
- Work that is typically done by women, including work in small workplaces, is often considered benign and non-hazardous (Messing 1991).
- The hazards in small workplaces tend to be non-dramatic and invisible (e.g., repetitive strain injuries, back and leg pain, high stress) (Messing 1997).
- The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is encouraging small business growth (Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation 1999).
- The number of small businesses is growing in Atlantic Canada (ACOA 1996). In 1995, over 90% of businesses in the region had fewer than 20 employees (ACOA 1998).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

A project advisory committee was formed to guide the development of this project. At the start of the study, the project went through ethics review at York University. Focus group questions were developed with input from the advisory committee and a group of women from around the province who met to discuss employment in small workplaces. Women's groups throughout Newfoundland and Labrador were invited to comment on the proposed list of questions (see Appendix B for the focus group discussion guide).

2.1 PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Initially, the researcher sent out information about the study to over 80 community and service organizations across Newfoundland and Labrador. The information package included several study recruitment posters that organizations were asked to display. The WHNNL received several calls from interested individuals but also decided to contact several organizations in St. John's, Clarenville, Gander, Corner Brook, and Stephenville directly by phone to help participant recruitment. Those organizations that had not received a poster in the original mailout were sent a poster, and a representative from each organization was invited to recruit study participants. Participants were recruited from the staff, clientele, and other contacts of the organizations approached. Participants were informed of the study by word of mouth and through the posters. A criterion for participating in the study was the individual had worked in a small workplace (1-20 employees) in Newfoundland during the last ten years. Participants were asked to focus their discussion on their experiences in small workplaces. In six of the focus groups, the researcher received the names of potential participants and contacted them directly about being involved in the study. In three groups, the community contact was the sole contact for the potential participants. All people interviewed on a one-to-one basis were contacted directly by the researcher.

2.2 FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

The advisory committee and the researcher discussed the proposed locations for the focus groups. There was a consensus that focus groups would be conducted in urban centres across the province. There was some concern that some women, especially those living in small urban centres might not want to participate in a focus group because they might be

reluctant to criticize their employer in a group setting. It was decided that having the option of making a written submission, participating in a focus group, or doing a one-on-one interview would encourage more women to participate.

The researcher conducted a total of nine focus groups (St. John's - 3, Gander and Corner Brook - 2 each, Clarenville and Stephenville - 1 each) and three one-on-one interviews (St. John's - 2 and Clarenville - 1). No written submissions were received.

The researcher originally had plans to conduct focus groups in Labrador but this was not possible due to financial and time constraints (see Limitations below). There were between four and 13 people in each focus group. The average was seven. In total, 60 people participated in the study. The women interviewed held (or had held) the following jobs: bartender, waitress, dishwasher, seamstress, cleaner, hairdresser, administrative assistant, office worker, cashier, sales clerk, sales manager, customer service agent, independent business owner, employee in non-profit sector, homecare worker, teacher, fish harvester, fish plant worker, safety inspector, and warehouse worker. Seventeen women did not state a current profession (either they were students, unemployed, or chose not to answer that question). The participants ranged in age from 19 to 59. The average age of participants was 34. Twenty-four women were childless and thirty-six women had at least one child. Participants had different levels of formal education, however, the majority of participants had a post secondary certificate/diploma or a uni-

versity degree. The researcher has used pseudonyms in reporting the comments below.

2.3 DATA COLLECTION

The focus groups and interviews took place at a private space provided by the supporting community organizations. Participants were told about the purpose of the study. The researcher explained to participants that their participation was voluntary, the information they provided was confidential, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher answered any questions and passed around an information sheet that the participants kept and a consent form that participants signed and returned to the researcher (Appendix C). Participants were asked to include their address at the bottom of their consent form if they wished to receive a copy of the study report once it was completed. Focus groups lasted approximately one hour and a half, interviews approximately one hour.

Most women participating in the focus groups and interviews had worked in several small workplaces in the last ten years. When they were describing their experiences, it was not always clear which workplace they were referring to. Further, it was sometimes difficult to ascertain how many women identified something as a particular problem. In some instances, an issue discussed by one woman was considered important by the whole group. Other times, two or more participants spoke about the same issue separately. Both of these circumstances made it difficult for the researcher to state definitively how many participants mentioned an issue.

2.4 LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations:

The conversations with the participants tended to focus on the negative aspects of small

workplaces. It is possible that employees had more positive experiences that they did not discuss.

In some instances, participants describing a problem may not have been talking about a small workplace. The researcher reminded participants of the definition of a small workplace being used in the study but this sometimes may have been forgotten when stories were recounted. Further, it was often difficult to discern what kind of job women were speaking about and if they were speaking about a past or current job.

Another limitation of this study is that women currently working night shifts or those having an especially difficult time balancing work and family probably did not participate in the study. This became clear when the researcher attempted to set up a focus group with several single mothers. Almost all of them cancelled because of work and family commitments that suddenly arose.

One of the initial goals of this study was to interview Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and lesbians who may have special workplace problems. The researcher was not successful in soliciting the participation of these women in any significant numbers.

Finally, the researcher had hoped to conduct focus groups with women living in Labrador. The time required to make contacts with community organizations and to recruit participants for the focus groups was longer than anticipated. As a result, there was no money left in the budget to conduct these focus groups.

3.0 THEMES

The participants highlighted many factors related to their work and the workplace that

affected their health and well-being. The factors outlined here relate to aspects of working in small businesses such as physical environment, ergonomic stressors, workplace organization, safety, and economic issues. Regional similarities and differences in issues are also explored.

3.1 THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Physical environments varied a great deal depending on the type of work employees were doing. However, there were some common problems mentioned that related to the physical surroundings in the workplace.

3.1.1 POOR PHYSICAL WORKSPACE

In general, participants felt that working in small workplaces often involved having to work in hazardous conditions and with a lack of resources. Participants felt that there was little attention paid to safety by the employer. Reasons offered for this inattention were not enough financial resources, not caring about safety, not being aware that there was a problem, and not having the managerial skills to deal with problems.

Anne spoke about how lack of resources affects work in a small non-profit organization:

... you can kind of compare when you work with a non-profit organization to working with a big company who has got bucks deluxe, you can totally see the difference in your physical work place. You know, there's no frills or anything like that with this kind of a job. Non-profit organization – they're begging for anything they can get, and if this is the office space, this is it.

Exactly. We gave up an extra office actually in the last year and now we're regretting it because I'm in the library ... I don't have any privacy ... The photocopier is there and it's

going almost eight hours a day ... and there's fumes ...

Shirley spoke about a convenience store where she worked that did not have basic amenities such as a toilet or running water.

Well, you pray your bladder is good and if you want to go ... I [lived] handy enough to the store that I knew it would take me five to ten minutes to get home if an emergency occurred, which never did. My bladder has always been good. Anyhow, it was handy to the house so I was handy to the kids. That was good and I was making a few dollars to contribute, that was good. And I was meeting people, which was good ... But like I said there was no water there so I started using Windex. And you're there slicing off meat ... you can't use a slicer and not clean it. So I comes up, okay, I haven't got water; I'll use the Windex. They're too stunned to bring the water over in a bucket, I'll use the Windex! And use paper towels, right.

Annette was also concerned about her work environment at a fishplant.

... the fact that you're standing 8 to 10 hours – 12 hours a day – on concrete. Can I have a rubber mat? No. Look at all those hoses around my feet. Should I trip ... No issues like that taken into consideration ... In rural Newfoundland lots of times, you just worked for your 10 or 12 weeks so you basically took what was offered to you, and I can remember being janitor and even knowing how to use the cleaning stuff was not told to you. How do you mix this or how much of this do you use? I didn't know that.

3.1.2 TEMPERATURE CONTROL AND AIR QUALITY

Many people complained that they had experienced watery eyes, dry skin, headaches, and coughing when they had worked in a particular workplace. Some felt that their problems were

caused by poor air quality. Often there was little control over physical factors such as heat, cold, and humidity. In some occupations, workers were exposed to chemicals without adequate protection, e.g., hairdressers and office workers breathe in chemicals from hair dyes and photocopiers respectively.

Annette was pregnant while working in a fishplant. She was concerned for her health and the health of her fetus because of fumes in the building.

We've experienced that in the fish plant when we had ammonia leaks. I can remember being pregnant with one of my children and I asked to leave the building. 'No, you're not allowed to leave the building. That's not doing no harm to you.'

And it was freezing. It was wet and ooh, the bathrooms half the time would be all clogged up. I didn't like it. I couldn't bear it!

Laura spoke about her work in an office where air quality was poor and there was little control over the temperature.

I worked in a building for awhile and in the summer it was so hot – no air conditioning, no windows, nothing. You had to go to McDonalds or somewhere where there was air conditioning to try to cool off. I don't know if there were air quality studies done there but people called it the sick building – the smell – everybody would have the same sort of symptoms. I'm not sure if it was condemned but it was an old building that hadn't been used for awhile. And into my work now there's a lot of air quality issues. If someone leaves their car idling near an intake, everybody can smell the fumes. And there's a trucking company right next door. Where my office is I don't get it, but some people there have had problems with gas leaks and a lot of headaches and migraines ...

I worked in a fish plant. Oh, it was dreadful. The walls were all just grey and the environ-

ment was damp and gloomy and you were put on machines but the machine was really, really annoying. Like it would break down easily or it was clogged easily.

3.1.3 EXPOSURE TO SECOND-HAND SMOKE

Restaurant and bar workers can be exposed to second-hand smoke. Waitresses and bartenders had no choice but to serve customers in smoking areas, and sometimes customers would gather around a bar and smoke. Sometimes smoking was permitted in staff rooms but there was no separate space for non-smokers.

Tracey spoke about exposure to environmental smoke in a bar:

We had smoke eaters ... ha ha ha!

Q: The smoke eaters never really worked?

Oh, they worked but ... the ones they had, you had to change the filter probably I would say – in a bar you probably needed to change them once a week – and of course if they got changed once a year, you were lucky. So I mean they were pointless. They were just blowing around the air, that's all. But, of course, the physical setting of the place – there were no windows that you could open."

3.2 ERGONOMIC STRESSORS

Participants felt they often had to work with inadequate or inappropriate equipment. Many women spoke of having to complete the same physical movement over and over.

3.2.1 REPETITIVE STRAIN

Repetitive strain injuries were frequently mentioned as a problem in occupations such as bartender, waitress, hairdresser, office worker, and cashier. Sometimes repetitive strain caused temporary discomfort, while other times it caused lasting muscular damage that required a brace or physiotherapy. Strain occurred because the equipment or workstations were not

appropriately sized for the employee or because employees were repeatedly doing the same motion in the course of their work.

Karen, who worked as a waitress, spoke about the nature and cause of her injuries:

I got repetitive stress syndrome in my wrist and elbow and it would be fine ... it's kind of basically gone now. But once in awhile it would just swell up and I would have this aching.

Q: From carrying stuff?

Yeah, from wiping tables and carrying a tray. Like I used to have to run around with this heavy tray all day and my wrist started to really hurt. Then I had to wear this thing, this brace thing there. I found like that my joints started to hurt because I waitressed so much because it is always an easy job to get. You know, you don't really need a lot of qualifications. You just go and you do it and you can leave easily. It's not like you're making a big commitment ...

Cynthia spoke about working as a cashier at a workstation where the counter was too tall for her height:

I don't know if it's just because I'm not a very tall person, but the counter height – you're trying to put things in bags ... and you're reaching up and it's such an awkward thing and it turns out to be really physically demanding.

3.2.2 STANDING

Standing in one place or being on one's feet all day was a problem for employees who worked as waitresses, cashiers, and sales people. Employees often did not have chairs to sit on (even during breaks) or rubber mats to stand on. Standing was identified as an invisible health hazard because it did not "look" physically demanding but caused varicose veins, leg pain, and back pain.

Alison spoke of her work as a cashier:

Where I was the front-end cashier – I'm just thinking about Christmas time and stuff – I used to go home and they'd be like two lead weights and I'd be in tears because my legs were painning so bad, because you're standing there, just doing this movement right. I mean there was nothing wrong with the job but my legs would just burn. They would just pain from standing so long. I mean it looks like it's not a physically demanding job but it is ...

3.3 WORKPLACE ORGANIZATION

The social organization of a workplace affects hours of work, schedules, place of work, and the kinds of tasks employees do. These can affect both physical and mental health.

3.3.1 SAFETY

Many participants in the focus groups and interviews had jobs as front line employees (employees dealing with the public). As frontline employees, they were often required to enforce rules and regulations, however, they rarely had control those policies. Female employees sometimes felt threatened by intoxicated, mentally ill, or irate clients. There were few safety procedures in place that dictated how they should act under these circumstances. Several women said that their employers did not even act on basic safety concerns. It was difficult for some women to speak up about safety concerns as they did not want their employers to think that they needed special treatment because they were women.

Erin talked about her employer's lack of concern for safety:

We were right next door to the local bar strip so there was a lot of nights that I spent by myself in this place ... there was no locks on the door so if drunk people came in, I couldn't keep them out or anything; and I used to ask

time and time again – because I'd be there by myself working midnights and being as small as I am too, that even gave people more of a thought – not only because I was a woman – but because I was so small, they figured they could walk all over me or whatever. I used to keep asking for a lock – even just a simple lock to be put on the door and they would never, ever do it. They said it was something that they didn't have to have. It was hard, I must say. I didn't feel safe at all.

Donna also could not get appropriate safety procedures in place at her job. She felt that her employer was “cutting corners” on safety. She finally put her own safety measures in place because she did not want her employer to think she could not do the job because she was a woman.

[In my job] I walked 600 kilometres and I asked them – please, I'm going out into the woods by myself, could you not give me a cell phone or something so that if something happens to me, I have a way to communicate that I'm stuck or hurt myself or something. No, they wouldn't do that. They wouldn't give me a first aid kit. They wouldn't give me anything to keep me safe. I had to beg them for me to apply for funding to hire a summer student so at least I would have a buddy with me in the field. I was in the middle of nowhere every day, all day. And there was no precautions with regards to my safety. Now I don't know if they would've done the same for a man in the position as well; but it's again, back to the small work place, you know, trying to sort of keep from spending dollars or watch out for this or that or we don't have those kind of monies but we want to do some projects and sort of cutting corners when they can to ensure that the work gets done ...

I think we back off too easily. Like as a woman then, you probably backed off ...

I got my own phone. I got my own pager.

That's what I mean – back off – because in our minds we're thinking, oh yeah, they're looking at us because we're weaker now. So we back off, right.

The whole time was proving. They didn't want to hire me in the first place. The whole time I was in it I had to prove myself, prove that I was capable of doing this because it was not a traditional role for a female to be in. So I felt every day that, darn it all, I was going to show them ... I was going to do it.

3.3.2 SHIFT WORK

A major problem for women in small workplaces was the instability of their work schedule. Employers often only gave a few hours notice when a schedule was changed. Sometimes employees did not have a schedule. Employees could be called in when it was busy or sent home when it was not. Employees were sometimes expected to be on call without being paid. Shifts were often irregular (very short or very long). Unpredictability is a potential source of work-related stress. It can negatively impact family life and create problems with childcare. Some women who worked shift work, long hours or irregular hours complained of sleep disturbances and insomnia. Insomnia was a particular problem for women who worked until late in the night (waitresses and bartenders).

Two women in one group spoke about the work in a fishplant where the shifts were very irregular:

Oh, [it was] the worst working environment because you'd get called any hour to go to work. Like they'd call us in one hour and then three hours later, they call back again and then work for ten hours and ... oh, it was awful! Say he was waiting for a boat to come in so you were working for two hours; and all of sudden, he's saying, go get some lunch while I'm waiting on a boat. You're docked pay

while he's waiting for the boat. Meanwhile, you're paying a babysitter at home to look after your kids while you're waiting on his time – his boat. I didn't think it was fair.

I worked the same day as you in there. We was there for 18 hours. We weren't allowed to come in; and we ran out of food. I ran out of cigarettes. It was freezing.

Yeah. I know it was 7 o'clock that morning because I used to take the kids back and forth with me and I used to keep saying like, well how much longer are we going to be here because we were there for 18 hours, right; and he said, oh you got one more tray to do and when we get that one done, well then we go home or whatever. Oh yeah, you'll soon be done. 7 o'clock that morning, I said, enough of that – I'm leaving.

It seemed like you'd go outdoors and it would be dark and when you'd go out again, it would be light and then you'd go out and it would be dark again. It was awful.

Jessica highlighted how unpredictable shifts can strain a relationship:

... being on call all the time and making plans with my husband and with my daughter and sort of having a plan to do something but then being called into work when I didn't expect it. So you screw everything up and then my husband and I would end up fighting all the time about this and it was really bad for interpersonal relations.

3.3.3 WORKING ALONE

Employees in small workplaces often worked alone and experienced loneliness and isolation. When working alone, employees sometimes did not have an opportunity to use the washroom or take a break. If a replacement employee was late, the employee on shift was required to stay at work until the next employee arrived regardless of whether this was an inconvenience or

caused childcare problems. Employees working alone could not rely on anyone else if there was a problem with an irate customer.

Jennifer spoke about working alone and not having another employee to take over when she needed to take a break:

... being alone on a shift probably upwards two to three hours – that presented a big problem for me because the type of illness that I had ...

You were held hostage.

I was held hostage, exactly; and I couldn't move too swiftly around the store I was working in because for fear I would get a cramp in my stomach and there was no such thing as leaving your post and going to the washroom because you were in charge of thousands and thousands of dollars worth of stuff. And you couldn't close the doors and go out into the back because that wasn't an option. And I found it hard dealing with my manager because it was very difficult to explain because being alone encouraged... like that amount of stress put that much more pressure on me which made me sicker.

Ann spoke about the lack of support in her job:

I think this job that I'm in now, all the real important things with making a job work maybe get pushed to the side. It's like, yes, it would be great to have a real team feeling and lots of support ... but we don't have time for that. We've got to pull this together and that's it. It's not a priority for them to make sure that me sitting in my office, feel good about my support.

3.3.4 FEW BREAKS

Employees in small workplaces often were not able to take breaks, even if they worked for a long stretch of time. Participants felt that sometimes an employer was trying to maximize

the amount of time they worked. In other instances, breaks were not possible because the employee was working alone. Even when employees were able to “sit down and relax” while a place of work was not busy, they could rarely leave and have a mental break from their work. Some employees, especially those working in retail and in restaurants said that they were not permitted to take a break even when the place of business was not busy. The manager wanted them to appear busy in case a customer came in.

Ellen described her jobs in retail:

I had a good service industry job at a toy store. I was an undergrad when I was going to school and working and they were very casual. You got to sit around if there was no one in the store; and if you were cash, you had a chair to sit on. So it was perfectly fine, but when I worked at a clothing store, it was unreal. If you were working cash, you had no chair or anything. You could not sit down at any point; and if there was no one in the store, you could not not be busy. They don't want to give you a break but you have to look busy. You have to look busy so you've already folded everything three times. Everything is spotless and the manager comes out and says, don't slouch. You have to look busy.

Jamie described working long hours at a bar without a break:

Having no breaks is really bad because then you would get so wired by the end of your shift – you'd be so worked up – that you couldn't even relax and then you'd go home and couldn't go to sleep. That's what I find, so I would lose sleep because I was so high strung, especially in bars late at night when you're working. Some employers don't provide a cleaning staff so you'd have to stay there and clean up the mess after and so you were there until five in the morning. Then you go home and it's like you're totally wired. You haven't

had a break all night. You haven't been able to sit down so you sit down and you're like a zombie.

Smoking was sometimes considered one of the only legitimate reasons to take a break. Waitresses or bartenders who did not smoke sometimes felt that they did not have as many breaks as smokers.

Three women in one group discussed smoking and work in restaurants:

It's awful because you're made to feel like not only can you not have a break, which is something that everyone should expect being on your feet and working that hard for that many hours, but not only do you not expect to have that, you shouldn't even expect to go to the bathroom when you want to. And I think the reason why so many waitresses smoke is because they need to get away. Like they use that as a way to have a break.

I was hoping that would come up because as a non-smoker at Restaurant A, I found that I didn't get many breaks because I couldn't sit down and have a cigarette. There was no excuse to sit down. I couldn't sit down and have a glass of pop.

No, it's true. I noticed that when I was catering – that I would be running around like crazy, meanwhile I'm five months pregnant, and I'm running around carrying things and doing everything while this guy – he just goes out for a cigarette five times for ten minutes. So basically what he was doing, he has an hour break that I don't have.

3.3.5 RELATIONSHIPS WITH CO-WORKERS

Co-worker relationships were mentioned in all of the groups and interviews as a health determinant. Participants felt that in some small workplaces a positive, close-knit relationship with other employees helped alleviate stress. Employees were sometimes able to use other

employees as sounding boards for both ideas and problems. However, when relationships between co-workers were negative, conflict seemed to be magnified in small workplaces. Seeing and interacting with co-workers in small workplaces is rarely avoidable. Working in a small physical space also seemed to intensify problems. Co-worker conflict was reported as a major source of stress.

Three women in one group discussed interpersonal relationships in small and large workplaces:

When there is an interpersonal problem, if you're in a small workplace, it's magnified, where in a bigger workplace it's sometimes even a non-issue or you have other people to discuss the problem with. When there's only two or three of you there and if the supervisor is being unreasonable ... it's very difficult to deal with the issue and it's always right in your face.

I find there's a lot more room for co-worker conflict in a smaller work place.

Well, you spend so much time together ...

The other thing – a downside of working in a small place where everyone knows each other and there's only a few people there – is over time the little kind of idiosyncracies that people have start to build up. Maybe little things that really aren't bad; but over ten years, it's kind of like, if that person comes in one more time and clicks that pen, I'm going to jump up and hit them. And it may not be that one thing but people have little idiosyncracies ... I have worked at places where that has happened and it's not very pretty because then they start shunning one or the other and they handle that way ... People know the things – it's like any relationship – they know the buttons to push. So if they want to get at you; and if it's a small place, they know what they can do to get you going.

3.3.6 DIFFICULT TO REFUSE WORK

It is often very difficult to take time off when working in a small workplace. Because workers usually do not have paid sick days, they will work even when they are ill. Workers are often reluctant to take time off for illness or vacation because no one will take over their duties when they are away and they will have extra work to do when they return. Sometimes there is also pressure from the employer to work many hours. Other times, employees work long hours because the pay is so low that they need to work many hours to make ends meet. Several participants said that they weren't necessarily asked to work unpaid overtime but it was something that was expected or it was something that they took on themselves because they felt that it was necessary. This was especially the case for women who worked in non-profit organizations. Many employees in non-profit organizations struggled financially. Because they viewed their work as needed and valuable, they often put in long, irregular hours. Often they were expected to work at night, on the weekends, or they would be called at home when a task had to be done. Sometimes employees could not refuse work because they felt that refusal would jeopardize their job.

Several women discussed not being able to take time off work in small workplaces:

... When you work in a small workplace, you tend to go to work even when you're not feeling well, which is so true because there's nobody really to cover for you so your work is just going to pile up and it's pointless for you to stay home ... you know, if there's any way possible that you're going to get there, you're going to do it.

Yeah, that's the disadvantage of working in a small business for sure, because say, in a large corporation, I guess what they do if you work there, they'd allot your work out to probably

ten other people saying you do some of it; you do some of this ... whereas in a small place you don't get anybody to cover your shift.

3.3.7 TAKING ON EXTRA RESPONSIBILITIES

Many women in the focus groups and interviews took on responsibilities that were not part of their job description. Many of the responsibilities were similar to those that women have traditionally done in the home, for example washing dishes, cleaning windows, or tidying the kitchen. Some women felt that if they did not do these chores, they would be left undone. It is possible that women in small workplaces did extra work because they did not have a clear job description that outlined their duties. Women also took on extra chores when they were trying to get ahead in the organization or workplace. For example, in a workplace where there were many temporary, part-time workers, employees sometimes did more work than they were paid for because they wanted to be employed on a more permanent basis. Several women said that employees were sometimes hired part or three-quarter time because the employer knew that employees would end up working full time hours. Several times, women said that they felt a responsibility to work extra hours, stay longer to get something done, or do a little extra. For example, one woman who worked at a hair salon said that she would often work 50 or 60 hours a week because she did not want to disappoint her clients. In another group, a woman who had worked as a manager noted that when the male employees were asked to do a special training session over a weekend they demanded compensation but when the female secretaries were asked to do a computer weekend course they did not ask about being compensated.

Karen said she often took on work without thinking about her own health and well-being:

For the last two weeks I've been working overtime. Now nobody has asked me to but I'm the kind of person – I know what my duties are. I know what my function is and I'm going to do what it takes to make sure it's done. Whether or not it's realistic ... I can't seem to entertain the thought that maybe I'm not being realistic. I think because it's a small workplace and because of cutbacks, layoffs, etc., that women in small offices are ... we're stretched beyond what we should be stretched to ... the mental stress, and the physical, and the fact that you're trying to do so much and you keep on doing and doing and doing.

Linda wondered how often women took on the “extra” tasks like cleaning:

... We tell ourselves I don't have to do this. Just see if somebody else does it before we get into the pattern of wiping that up or cleaning that up or doing that little extra step, even though it feels right for us to do it. And I remember doing that and thinking to myself, okay, now why don't you sit back and don't do it. Let's just see how long it takes for somebody else to do it ... it's not anything that I've ever been asked to do. It's just something that I notice so I've done it and I probably done it again because I've noticed it again and nobody else pays any attention to it. And I find myself doing that – just sitting back and just absolutely driving me foolish but waiting and waiting and waiting. So I wonder how much of that we do – I guess not delegating responsibility is what I'm talking about, I suppose, to somebody else; and even though it mightn't get done to my standard of satisfaction, it still gets done and that ... I've learned it in my whole life as well as the workplace.

3.3.8 RIGHTS, RULES, AND EMPLOYER EXPECTATIONS

Employees were generally not aware of their rights as employees. Several participants re-

ported that employers sometimes did not abide by regulations unless an employee complained. Rarely did employees receive a copy of the Labour Standards Act or the rules and regulations of a particular workplace from an employer. Participants said that in small workplaces there were many informal rules that were not stated or written down; they were often employer expectations. An example of an informal rule can be, "If you do not accept being 'on call' you will not be given 'good' shifts." Another informal rule may be, "As the administrative assistant it is your duty to clean up after employees in the kitchen." Not only were rules and regulations often informal, they were applied selectively depending on the employee, the mood of the employer, or situation. Even when employees knew their rights were being violated, it was difficult to speak up to their employer. Employees feared being labeled "trouble maker" and being "black listed" in their community. They feared that speaking out against unfair practices would cost them their job. Employers sometimes made an effort to remind employees that they were easily replaceable and that there were many people willing to do their job.

In one group, two women talked about formal and informal regulations in the workplace"

With small workplaces too, I find sometimes rules are too easily bent for some people and not for others. I find that you get that way too often. There's rules and fine, they may be posted up; but they might as well put on the bottom: these rules only apply to this one, this one and this one ... you see that way too often ...

That's right, and they could change. One day the rule could be this but the next day it suits somebody that needs the rule changed. Today the rule means this ... in a bigger work place, yes it's fine and I think you will find that rules work a lot better and they're followed; but in a

smaller work place, they're too easily changed to suit the person and they only apply to certain people. They never apply to everybody.

Patricia talked about a typical informal rule in a lot of small workplaces:

I think one of the unsaid rules in the places that I've worked, basically is – mind your own business. Keep your mouth shut. If you start showing that you know something ... if you're going to stand up for yourself, you're getting froze out. You know what I mean. It's very clear – very, very clear in the places I've worked – and those are unwritten because they can't say it because if they said, then you could go to the Labour Board and say, help me – and they will. So don't ask for anything that I don't want to give you because I'm the boss. You're the employee. I own you – basically.

3.3.9 SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Several women who have worked in bars and restaurants said that working for tips was demeaning because it meant that they always had to "be nice" to customers even when they were being mistreated. Some women also felt that working for tips contributed to a sexualized environment. Waitresses (but not waiters) were encouraged by their employer to flaunt their sexuality (flirt, wear seductive clothing) in order to make more tips. Sometimes men and women were required to wear different kinds of uniforms at work: men would wear pants, while women wore short skirts.

The other thing that I found, just in terms of well-being, like your own mental well-being and stuff, was that most of the time most of the places I worked in, women would be the servers and men would be the cooks and there was a very highly sexualized environment too where you'd feel like you had to almost ... that you were kind of treated as a sexual object and you had to sort of cater – this is in bars

mostly, sometimes in restaurants and stuff – that if you didn't sort of flirt and be a certain way, people would be like, 'What a bitch!' And then you'd be in the kitchen and the men in the kitchen would be like, 'Kerri is stuck up!' And you couldn't say anything to them.

Sharon said that one of the unwritten rules of waitressing was that you had to use your sexuality to get better tips:

You're supposed to use your sexuality if you're waitressing. And sometimes, depending on where you work, if you have to wear uniforms, the women are usually given skirts or shorts and the guys are wearing pants. And, I don't know, stuff like that ... it's not that you have to do that but ...

It's sort of encouraged.

Well, the more flirtatious you are the better tips you get. Yeah, you should've seen the uniforms at Restaurant A ... They gave you these uniforms that push your boobs right up and they're really uncomfortable and short and it's just like ... those little peasant things. And if you complained to the manager, you're not going to get any more shifts.

Yeah. Basically, you can't complain about anything or you're out the door.

3.3.10 DRIVING TO GET TO WORK

Several women living in communities outside of St. John's had to drive long distances to get to work. Women who drove long distances to get to work could not find a job in the community where they lived. All of the women would have preferred to work closer to home. Driving for long periods of time at the start and end of the day was tiring, costly and it was time that employees were not paid for. Working far from home was a challenge for women with small children. They could not drop by home at lunch to check-in on children and if a child became sick they had to drive for sometimes up

to an hour to get home. Being so far from home and family caused stress for women even when there was no emergency because they worried about getting home in time if something *did* happen. It was also not always guaranteed that an employer would allow them to leave for the time that would be required if they had to go home. Sometimes women were too tired to engage with children or partners when they came home from work.

Ellen was exhausted after driving long distances to and from work while trying to balance work and family responsibilities.

With the driving I found it terrible. I've got a little 3-year-old home and I tell you when I got home in the afternoons, he was really excited to see mommy after being gone all day. There was evenings I come home I didn't know if I wanted to see him or not, and that's the truth. I was just so exhausted after the driving – like the drive alone – and it's not really particular because I had a hard day's work, it's just after working ten hours a day and to drive in the morning, you're looking forward to that drive in the afternoon. I used to find it really draining; and like I said, he used to be jumping up and down. I mean he used to come right out of himself when I come home and there was days I felt like I wanted to come home and go to bed. I didn't want to see him. I didn't want to see my husband. I didn't want to do anything. Just leave me alone. And when you got a house and a husband and a child, you can't come home and ignore all that – or I can't. You can't just turn them off. You can't do that. And somewhere you've got to find the energy or you've got to find something inside you to give you that little bit extra just to get you through a couple of hours until the kid goes to bed and the husband settles down and gets used to you being home and, you know, sometimes it's hard to find that.

3.4 ECONOMIC ISSUES

Participants felt that economic factors related to their work and the larger socio-economic realities in their communities affected their health and well-being.

3.4.1 JOB INSTABILITY

Job instability was a major issue for women, especially outside of St. John's. Small businesses often went through frequent economic shifts depending on the time of year, e.g., tourist season, or changes in the demand for the product or service. These changes influenced the number of employees hired, the number of shifts employees had, how often employees worked, or the employees' salary. In cases where business was very slow, employees were sometimes laid off. Sometimes employees were asked to do the work of several employees because the business owner was trying to cut costs. For example, bar owners sometimes would save money by having bar staff clean up at the end of the day instead of hiring cleaning staff.

In one group, several women discussed how high unemployment in Newfoundland affected job stability.

And the whole thing too is because of the unemployment rate in Newfoundland. I've noticed the last few years...that nobody will speak up because there's so many out of work and it's almost like.... there have been cases where your employer has said, we got 300 applications for that job; you're kind of lucky to get it. So when you get it ...

You don't want to do anything ...

Like nobody anymore will talk back ...

People will put up with a lot because they say, well, you know, if I start complaining I'm going to lose my job and there are a hundred there knocking at the door waiting to take my place.

It's kind of like a silent threat.

3.4.2 LOW PAY AND INADEQUATE COMPENSATION

Employment in small workplaces is often low paying. Because wages are so low, employees often need to work longer hours (more than 40 hours a week) because they need the money to make ends meet. Non-profit organizations that receive some of their funding from Human Resource Canada programs were sometimes only able to pay employees minimum wage. Many women spoke of wanting to have time to upgrade their skills in order to be able to earn more money at a "better" job. However, women who do not qualify for employment insurance, or have employment insurance benefits that are too low to live on, must continue to work long hours to make ends meet. Several participants said that women doing the same type of work as men in a small workplace receive a lower wage.

Anna wondered if the sacrifices she has had to make for her job were "worth it".

I think there should be more benefits for employees. I guess pay would have to be looked at because I find that most positions – in the same positions as women, men are paid much more than what the woman is. I guess salary is a big thing with me but I make six dollars an hour ... It's not very much when I can work at McDonalds and make almost twice the pay in a supervisor position. Sometimes you wonder is it a privilege or not, you know, and it makes you wonder why are you not staying home with your child? Why take on all these pressures and this stress? Most nights I go home and I'm still working at 11 or 12 o'clock at night.

Employees in bars, restaurants, and in retail often rely on tips and commissions for part of their salary. This can cause a great deal of economic instability because earnings vary

from day-to-day depending on how busy a certain day or shift is. Sometimes women get paid below minimum wage because the employer expects them to supplement their salary with commission or tips.

Kerri highlighted several of the economic problems associated with working for tips:

If you work in a restaurant you rely heavily on tips because you basically make no money with a salary. It's lower than minimum wage. They pay you lower than minimum wage because they expect you to rake in the dough – the tips or whatever, so not only are you working ten-hour shifts and stuff like that – you have to be so nice to everyone. It's very demeaning I find. It can be, depending on the kind of customers that you get. So you always have to be nice to them so they'll leave you a good tip because otherwise you'll have no money. It's bad for your mental health ...

3.4.3 LACK OF BENEFITS

Employees in small workplaces often do not have access to health insurance, benefits, a pension plan, or paid vacation leave. Women worried about getting sick and then being fired. They also worried about how they would survive when they were older and no longer able to work. In one group, a woman felt that it was often necessary to choose between job flexibility and stability. If a woman wanted or needed a flexible work environment, she had to sacrifice the stability of health benefits and a pension plan.

Shauna spoke about the stress of not having a pension plan or health benefits:

One of the big drawbacks for most small work places and certainly for me here – is that there's no pension. There's no medical leave. I'm going to have to work until I die. There's no two ways about that ... small workplaces are like that. I had three children – if they get

sick, I've got to get some money somewhere to look out for them because there's not enough money to buy an insurance program for one employee. It makes it too expensive and there's no way to set up a pension plan for one – employee.

3.4.4 LACK OF RECOGNITION FOR UNPAID WORK

Women in several groups noted that they did a lot of work above and beyond their jobs that was unpaid. Sometimes the unpaid work was related to their paid jobs. Sometimes an employee would be asked to go buy coffee for the office before she came to work. Sometimes a homecare worker would take a client to visit friends even though she was unpaid for this task. More often however, women noted that they did a lot of work on committees, in the community, or with volunteer organizations. Some women recognized that this work was valuable yet went uncompensated. In one group it was noted that the types of community work that men do is often well-compensated while women's work is unpaid. For example, men are more likely than women to sit on government-appointed or city council boards that offer a stipend for board members, while women are more likely to be involved in grassroots organizations that do not financially compensate members. Some women who worked in non-profit organizations felt that the government expected that the volunteer or non-profit sector would provide a high level of referral, counselling, and support services with few or no resources.

Several women in one group had a discussion about unpaid work.

I think that as we go on in life, we do the double, triple, quadruple roles without even recognizing it. I don't know ... like it seems like there's something missing in my life if all of the other pieces aren't there. Take care of your mother – because my mom lives with me –

and my extended family. So, you take her here, you take her there. You take her somewhere else and make sure she's okay. You're still taking care of the kids or helping your daughter with her kids – babysitting – and you're doing all the other things, you know; and it's like you do it and you don't even think you're doing it. It's the way you've always done the work. But I guess if you look at it realistically and sensibly, you'd be thinking, where is my space ...

I think personally, and this is a big issue, but I think women should be getting paid for volunteer work. I think it should be recognized ...

Well, everybody should get paid for volunteer work.

But seeing it's mostly women who do it ...

You look at town councils. You look at a volunteer fire department. It's so much money per year. Why? Because they're a fire department.

Because it's men.

And I think that's something that's an issue that definitely needs to be addressed.

And it's not because we're greedy and we want money. It's because we want recognition.

Exactly. That's how we measure recognition.

4.0 POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

In each group, several women talked about positive experiences in small workplaces. As previously mentioned, employees in small workplaces sometimes provided valuable support to their co-workers. Because the workplaces were small, everyone knew each other and talked about their children, partners, problems, and so on. Women felt that sometimes the personal nature of work relationships afforded some flexibility. There was sometimes

room to negotiate certain days off. Several women also said that in small workplaces they felt that they were making a difference. They could see how their work paid off by improving the business or organization. Many participants also expressed satisfaction from working with and coming in contact with others (employees and clients). A few women who had worked in unionized workplaces felt that they had been protected as employees and that the rules and rights were clearly laid out.

Kerri talked about the support network that she developed working with a small group of people.

I think a positive thing I found working in restaurants is that – well, obviously, you don't get along with everyone on the staff – but you develop a good relationship. You need to because you're all supporting each other because you go through a lot of the shittyness together. I have two good friends that I met when I was waitressing and that was about ten years ago so we're still in touch with each other ...

A source of satisfaction for women working in small workplaces was the opportunity to interact with a variety of interesting people. Sharon spoke of working in a large dinner theatre:

I worked in the service industry for a long time ... I find overall it's a good experience for me because I talked to all these different people. But anyway, like three hundred different people a night and you're going around serving them and looking at them and it's just really interesting I find – and people from around the world, it was pretty ... neat because they'll talk to you about where they're from and you'll learn things from them and that's neat. They can be rude and snap their fingers and stuff but ...

Oh no, it's not all bad. We've got to say that too.

5.0 REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

There were consistent themes that emerged across all of the focus groups and it is difficult to make regional comparisons with such a small number of focus groups. A difference in job security and stability was the most noticeable pattern. In general, participants in areas outside of the St. John's were more concerned about keeping their jobs and finding jobs. They spoke about the barriers that prevented them from speaking out when they were treated poorly more often than the women from St. John's. Women outside of St. John's also focussed more often on the effects of socio-economic factors such as high local unemployment on their work environment.

Ellen spoke of the difficulty of asking questions when she feared losing her job:

I knew that my job ... I mean my job could've been gone just like that. Somebody else could've been in to do the same things with the same quality and timing that I was performing; but I valued having the job, so to ask questions about policies and procedure, I've – never felt comfortable with that.

In another group several women spoke about how limited local employment opportunities and high unemployment affect employed people.

I think a lot of it is when you get in those areas, you've got people who don't have jobs ... A lot of people don't have jobs and those people who do will put up with anything to keep the job they have because they don't want to be unemployed and that's a big part of why that [mistreatment of employees] goes on in places like that particularly in small cities ... A lot of the employers don't treat their employees with respect because employees are so easy to get here in Newfoundland and no one

will risk losing their jobs because there's not much work around.

It's even worse in the rural areas.

Yeah.

Yeah, I found they don't respect you or appreciate you ...

No, you don't feel appreciated. You feel like the employers feels like they're doing you a favour by letting you work there – it's just like you're here and you want the job, you have to put up with it or else.

6.0 DISCUSSION

6.1 WOMEN'S OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IN SMALL WORKPLACES

Some of the health consequences of working in small workplaces were clearly identified by participants: leg pain from standing; repetitive strain injuries in the arms and back from lifting objects or from working in an uncomfortable position or at poorly designed work stations; and significant physical and psychosocial stressors. The focus group discussions did not afford the opportunity to explore in depth each participant's health. Further, health is determined by a variety of factors, of which employment and working conditions is only one. The determinants of health include: education, culture, gender, access to health services, early childhood development, physical environment, biology and genetic inheritance, income and social status, personal health practices, social support networks, and social environment. Sometimes it was not clear to the researcher or the participant what factors were causing particular health problems. For example, did a hairdresser's respiratory problems come as a result of smoking, breathing in chemicals, or both?

Based on the testimonials of the women interviewed, there seem to be several key concerns around work in small workplaces. First, the physical workspace can often be inadequate because of lack of temperature control, exposure to cold or heat, poor air quality, lack of equipment, or poorly designed equipment needed to do a job. Further, close attention is not always paid to hazards such as unattached cords or greasy floors that can contribute to slips and falls. Finally, the absence of equipment that would normally help prevent worker injury, ranging from gloves to ergonomically designed chairs, is often an issue. Inadequacies in the physical workspace can be attributed to several factors. A business may be struggling and may not be able to afford new, working equipment. Small business owners may not always consider health and safety because of inexperience or because their priorities lie elsewhere. Manuals for small business owners often do not emphasize occupational health. In areas of high unemployment where workers are seen to be replaceable, employers may not see the benefit of ensuring worker health and safety. Also, since many female employees tend to be reluctant to complain, employers may not realize that there is a serious problem or feel no pressure to make changes.

Lack of social structure also seems to be a problem common to small workplaces. Although in some instances a loose organizational structure provides flexibility, often it leads to instability because employees do not have a job description, know the regulations of the workplace, or have regular schedules. This lack of structure can cause workers to feel alienated from their work and confused about the expectations of their employer. This can lead to a feeling of instability and cause a great deal of stress. It is possible that employers do not recognize the impacts of this lack of structure on employees. When employers do recognize its negative impacts, they may not always have

the resources or experience to provide employees with an environment that is both flexible and structured.

Job insecurity is an issue for employees in small workplaces. Since small workplaces have high exit rates (ACOA 1996), employees are at high risk of losing their jobs, both from lay off and firing and through business closure. Employees afraid of losing their jobs may not speak out against unfair treatment or may put up with unsafe conditions.

6.2 LABOUR STANDARDS, OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY, AND HEALTH INSPECTIONS

The health and safety of workers in Newfoundland falls under two provincial policies: the Labour Standards Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act. The Labour Standards Act focuses on work standards and policies related to vacation pay, minimum wage, parental leave, holidays, hours of work, etc. It outlines the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees. The Labour Standards Division has inquiries officers who provide information to individuals and companies about labour standards. They will investigate a complaint if it cannot be resolved between an employee and employer. The officers also approach certain workplaces and lead information sessions for workers and employers. They have a total of seven officers for Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act deals primarily with the physical environment and sets out standards of operation for machinery and equipment. Occupational Health and Safety inspectors do random, unannounced investigations to assess the safety of workplaces. They will do investigations in response to worker complaints. The Act covers physical aspects of work such as working with ladders, toxic waste, and heavy machinery. Safety and health concerns related to jobs

where women are typically employed are largely absent. Similarly, investigations are more commonly carried out on large, male-dominated workplaces such as construction sites and oil rigs. Typically, investigators do not go into schools or homes that are also workplaces (although this is tradition, not policy). There are 19 investigators for all of Newfoundland and Labrador, and they are largely responsible for choosing which workplaces they will investigate. On a more positive note, when investigations do occur, they often include interviews with employees and the investigators ensure confidentiality.

In addition to these acts, the Department of Government Services and Lands deals with health and safety inspections in many types of workplaces. Their focus is the health and safety of the public and not necessarily that of employees. Because the department recognizes that there is an overlap between the public and employees, they sometimes contact the Occupational Health and Safety Division to do a joint investigation. This kind of coordination is informal, and there is no formal memorandum of understanding between the two divisions.¹

An apparent shortcoming of these acts and departmental procedures for dealing with worker rights and health and safety is that they do not seem to work synergistically (Neis and Grzetic 2000). Each act and department deals with a separate sphere of work and this arrangement does not necessarily recognize the inter-connectedness of certain workplace problems. A problem affecting “public health” such as air quality can also affect employee health. Yet, it is easy to imagine that sometimes a health concern would be dealt with as a

public health concern only and the health impacts on workers would be neglected.

A related problem is that in order to get information about labour standards and health and safety, new business owners themselves must contact the divisions. When a new business owner gets a business number from Revenue Canada, they are not referred to the Occupational Health and Safety or Labour Standards Division in Newfoundland. Some business owners will call the different divisions themselves, but it cannot be assumed that all business owners will inform themselves about occupational health and safety and labour standards.

Another problem, as mentioned earlier, is that employees are often not aware of their rights and even when they are, they may not speak up for fear of losing their job or other repercussions. There seems to be little incentive for employers in small workplaces to maintain high safety or labour standards. The monitoring of small workplaces is rare and largely complaint driven. Employees working in regions where unemployment is high and those who are non-unionized are reluctant to complain since they are easily replaceable.

6.3 EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Since changes to employment insurance (EI) regulations have made it more difficult for women to qualify (Payne in Neis & Grzetic 2000), women rarely mentioned EI during the focus groups and interviews. One reason for this may be that few of the women worked seasonal jobs where they were employed for part of the year and received benefits for the remainder of the year. Further, women working in small workplaces may combine a variety of different jobs throughout the year. These may include paid work, volunteer work, and work done “under the table.” It may not be clear to women how EI benefits fit within such a work

¹ The information in this section is based on discussions with information officers/representatives in the Occupational Health and Safety, Labour Standards, and Government Services Division, in St. John's. This information is not to be taken as official government policy.

pattern, particularly in view of recent restrictions to EI eligibility and benefits. For unionized seasonal workers in small workplaces, e.g., fishplants, the union does non-formal educational work related to EI and helps with EI appeals.

6.4 UNIONS

Unionization was also rarely mentioned. One woman who had worked in a unionized workplace suggested that unions backed workers when there was a problem in the workplace. Other women working in the non-profit sector said that an advocate or ombudsman could protect workers when they had a complaint. It seems that most of the women in the study did not have experience with unionized workplaces. Two women felt if someone tried to introduce a union in their workplace, the workplace would close down. Again, employees were hesitant to complain or organize in any way because they felt that they would be fired. One woman said that a union or advocate would not really protect employees because an employer could always find something that could be used against the employee. As she said, "No employee is perfect 100% of the time."

6.5 WORK-HOME BALANCE

Balancing work and home responsibilities is a concern for many women and is not unique to the small workplace. There are, however, certain characteristics of small workplaces that affect how this balancing act is carried out. Since small workplaces tend to offer low wages, women may not have money to pay for adequate child or elder care. Having no benefits and no family leave meant that women did not have security and piece of mind. Further, the unpredictability of working hours, schedules, and shifts that so often characterized small workplaces made it very difficult for women to

make plans with their families or arrange for childcare. Finally, because jobs in small workplaces were rarely protected by unions and generally were unstable because of the socioeconomic climate, women were reluctant to bring up their familial responsibilities to their employer for fear of jeopardizing their job.

6.6 PERMANENT OR TEMPORARY ... DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS

The experience of women in small workplaces can be influenced by a number of factors including the type of work that they are doing, work conditions, and their outside work responsibilities. It also seems that women have different experiences depending on whether they see their current work as their permanent job or profession or if they see themselves as only working temporarily to put themselves through school or to gain experience. Workers who see their work experience as temporary seem not to internalize their work-related problems in the same manner as those who expect to do the same job for years to come. So, for example, a woman working at a restaurant while going to university may receive low pay, work in a hot, non-ventilated environment, and may experience sexism on the job, but she may put up with those conditions because they are only temporary. Sometimes the bad job is seen as a kind of rite of passage, something to joke about with friends and other workers. Women who do not have the education, training, or opportunity to find better quality work may view their job as a long term position and may come to recognize the long-term impacts of low pay, no benefits, or working in a stressful environment. A lack of options (perceived or actual) may negatively affect the health and well-being of these employees.

6.7 WORK IN NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Work in non-profit organizations can be rewarding because it often involves helping others and contributing to the improvement of life in one's community. Jobs in the non-profit sector can also be flexible and afford women time with their families when they need it. However, work in non-profit organizations has many challenges. For example, employees working in non-profits may combine paid and un-paid work when an organization is suffering financially. Women may feel compelled to work without pay because there is a clear need for the work to be done in the community. Employees tend to take on many responsibilities including doing work that is not within their job description. Work in non-profit organizations can offer little stability because funding is often precarious. Employee benefits, safety measures or even properly working equipment may not be possible when the organization is barely making ends meet. Pay can be very low and employees may have a difficult time making ends meet. Sometimes the work in non-profit organizations can have little structure. For example, there may be no job description, no contract, and no training because all efforts are going into doing other work. Non-profit organizations are normally run by a volunteer board of directors. There is no guarantee that members have received necessary training to effectively deal with management and personnel issues. As well, since board members are volunteers, the amount of time they devote to organizational issues may be limited. Workplace structure or employee support is not always at the forefront of their concerns.

6.8 WAITRESSING/BARTENDING

Waitressing or bartending offer the benefit of being jobs that are relatively easy to get and do not require a great deal of training. Tips may

allow women to take a little extra money home. Waitressing and bartending can be extremely physically and emotionally demanding. Waitresses are on their feet for most of their shift. In addition, they usually carry trays or plates with food. Bartenders and waitresses are exposed to environmental smoke and often smoke themselves because smoking is considered one of the few legitimate ways to take a break. Waitresses and bartenders tend to work long, irregular hours and often late into the night. Employees working late hours without many breaks may be unable to sleep after a shift. Sleep disturbances are common. Shift work of this kind may make it difficult to balance responsibilities at home and at work. Waitresses and bartenders may come into contact with irate or aggressive customers, especially if they are working in an environment where alcohol consumption is permitted. Waitresses work in an environment which often promotes the "customer is always right" philosophy and their manner often determines the quantity of their tip. Tips are deemed to be related to the attractiveness and "sexiness" of the waitress. Several waitresses felt that it was expected that they use their sexuality at work: a policy that is sometimes reflected in the requirement that female employees wear revealing, seductive uniforms.

6.9 RETAIL

There are some similarities between work in the retail environment and work in bars and restaurants. Similar to waitressing, working in retail requires little training, shifts also tend to be irregular, and there is a focus on customer service. Usually employees in stores do not have an opportunity to sit down, and although employees do not work for tips, some do work for commissions. Salaries tend to be low in both jobs. There are differences in their work environments as employees in retail are not usually faced with intoxicated patrons and

usually work in a smoke-free environment. Retail employees can be under great pressure to sell their product in a way that waitresses are not.

It is important to note that the quality of the workplace varies depending on the employer and the type of workplace. For example, some non-profit organizations may have more government funding and can offer their employees higher salaries and benefits. Certain restaurants and bars have training and clear work regulations. Some retail stores adopt a relaxed atmosphere that gives the employee an opportunity to sit down and may not require an employees to actively sell the merchandise.

6.10 GENDER AND SMALL WORKPLACES

It is impossible to compare gender differences in small workplaces because the study only involved women. However, gender roles appear to influence the structure of women's work in small workplaces. Women reported doing a great deal of unpaid work both at home and in the community. Sometimes they also took on the extra work of cleaning or washing. This kind of work closely resembles the kinds of work women tend to do in the home. In small workplaces when women are working alone or late into the night, safety can also be a concern. Women are not always comfortable expressing their safety concerns, perhaps because they do not want employers to view them as weak or not being able to do the job. Further, the women in this study that did bring up safety concerns did not have them dealt with adequately.

For women working in bars and restaurants, their sexuality is sometimes seen as a commodity. They are not only serving patrons and selling their product but they themselves are the product. If they look sexy and pleasing, presumably customers (heterosexual men?) will come into the bar or restaurant, spend more

money, and leave a larger tip. One woman suggested that this is not simply a "show" for the customers but also contributes to a sexualized work environment. In this environment men preparing the food in the back are pitted against the women service providers on display in the front.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 PHYSICAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

Typically, the physical work environment in small workplaces was described in negative ways. When women described their workplaces they often conveyed that their work environment was uncomfortable and unsafe. Often equipment needed to do one's job was broken, missing, or not well maintained. Some of the things that may be taken for granted in large workplaces like air conditioning, a clean working space, or ergonomic equipment are often not part of the working lives of small workplace employees.

7.2 THE WORK ORGANIZATION OF SMALL WORKPLACES

Judging by what the focus group participants said, small workplaces tend to be organized in similar ways. The hours or the schedules tend to be unstable, employees generally do not feel secure in their jobs, and employees often do not have much control over when they work, how long, and what kinds of work that they do. Although non-profit or community-based organizations often allow employees to have greater input into the type of work they do, these workers may feel pressured to take on extra responsibilities. Work instability and insecurity impacts the social and economic lives of women and causes stress and anxiety.

7.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Many women made clear links between the socio-economic environment in their communities and the quality of the work that they did. Simply put, a shortage of high quality local employment in a community forced some women to work in jobs that were not good for their health and well-being. When the number of people looking for work greatly outnumbered jobs, employees would accept a poor physical environment, long shifts, inflexibility, and other factors that negatively affected their lives. An employer was presumably secure in the knowledge that if they got “trouble” from an employee she could be easily replaced.

8.0 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Both the participants and the researcher identified policy recommendations:

- An employer should be required to have the Labour Standards Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act available in the workplace. Every employee and employer should have a copy of their rights and responsibilities that is written in plain language.
- Non-unionized workers need an advocate or ombudsman for information and support.
- Official definitions of “small workplace” need to be re-examined. Small workplaces, non-profit organizations, and private homes need to be examined as workplace sites.
- There needs to be more communication between departments/divisions dealing with public health, workplace health and safety, worker rights, and government support for small business development (e.g., Department of Tourism, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency). Policy makers and researchers should take a holistic approach to workers’ health and well-being.
- Regular, unannounced inspections of all workplaces, including small ones, are needed to ensure regulations are being met. Inspectors should talk privately to employees when doing inspections. The provincial government needs to hire a sufficient number of inspectors to carry out regular workplace inspections throughout the province.
- New small business owners need to be referred to provincial departments dealing with occupational health and safety and labour standards. Small business owners accessing government funding should be required to take management training that discusses small workplace hazards, how to deal with co-worker conflict, labour standards, employee rights and responsibilities, etc.
- The provincial government should provide information and support to small business owners who often work in isolation, with low income themselves.
- Seats and rubber mats should be provided for workers whose jobs require them to stand in one spot for long periods of time.
- Labour standards should include mandatory family-friendly workplace policies
- Labour standards should include safety-related policies for workers confronted by physical threats from clients in the workplace.
- More attention needs to be paid to small workplace employee health and safety and to small workplace hazards. Most employee and workplace wellness programs focus on large workplaces.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. 1998. *The State of Small Business and Entrepreneurship in Atlantic Canada, 1998*. Moncton: ACOA.
- Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. 1996. *The State of Small Business and Entrepreneurship in Atlantic Canada, 1996*. Moncton: ACOA.
- Department of Tourism, Culture, and Recreation. 1999. *The Newfoundland and Labrador Travel and Tourism Industry*. St. John's: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Eakin, J. 1995. "The health and safety of women in small workplaces". In Messing, K., B. Neis, and L. Dumais, eds. *Invisible Issues in Women's Occupational Health*. Charlottetown: gynery books.
- Eakin, J. 1992. "Leaving it to the workers: Sociological perspectives on the management of health and safety in small workplaces". *International Journal of Health and Services* 22(4), 689-704.
- Messing, K. 1991. *Occupational safety and health concerns of Canadian women, a background paper*. Ottawa: Women's Bureau, Labour Canada.
- Messing, K. 1997. "Women's occupational health: A critical review and discussion of current issues". *Women and Health* 25(4): 39-68.
- Neis, B. and B. Grzetic. 2000. *From fishplant to nickel smelter: Policy implications, policy development and the determinants of women's health in an environment of restructuring*.

For more information contact:

Women's Health Network, Newfoundland and Labrador
12th Floor, Southcott Hall Dr. L. A. Miller Centre
100 Forest Road
St. John's, NF A1A 1E5
Tel: (709) 778-6534 Fax: (709) 778-6533
E-mail: whnmun@mun.ca

APPENDIX A: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnett, R. C. and N. L. Marshall. 1991. *The Effect of Work-Related Support on Job Stress and Health Among Women in Caregiving Occupations*. Wellesley, MA: Centre for Research on Women.

This paper documents the results of a three year longitudinal study of 362 women in caregiving occupations (223 social workers and 139 licensed practical nurses). Data was collected through questionnaires and personal interviews. These two occupations were chosen as they represent a significant proportion of women employed as professional and technical workers in the health industry as well as two different social classes. The study looked at the support systems each of these workers had developed. It found that women with greater support from their supervisors, co-workers, partners and social networks have better mental and physical health.

Beatty, Carol A. YEAR. *Stress in Managerial and Professional Women*. London, ON: National Centre for Management Research and Development, University of Western Ontario.

This study looked at occupational health issues for women in traditionally male dominated jobs. Thirty women were interviewed and filled out questionnaires on the key variables that affect the amount of job stress they experience. The key variables in reducing stress-related health problems were found to be good social support, an internal locus of control and coping strategies.

Canadian Labour Congress. 1997. *Women's Work. A Report by the Canadian Labour Congress*. Ottawa: Author.

This report examines trends in the workplace concerning restructuring. Restructuring includes the shrinking number of full-time jobs and an increased load on women in the workforce. The report looks at several occupations and includes quotes from women across Canada. It also offers some ideas on how to unite women across the country and challenges for women to take to their employers and the government.

Denton, M., M. Hajdukowski-Ahmed, M. O'Conner, K. Williams, and I. U. Zeytinoglu. 1994. *A Theoretical and Methodological Framework for Research on Women, Work and Health*. Hamilton: McMaster Research Centre for the Promotion of Women's Health (MRCPOWH).

This report documents the background for the research program of the MRCPOWH. The Centre emphasizes that research is needed and that it should encompass the following principles: women's knowledge of their own health is crucial in the design of a health care program, social investigation and action are also necessary and research should give immediate benefits to the community as well as long-term results. The paper provides theoretical background on women's health and deals with issues such as violence, health care, and mental health. The Centre has decided to study women's work as it is crucial to the quality of health. It also looks at the diversity among women and how these factors affect their health. The study includes several health challenges and implementation strategies to improve women's health.

Eakin, Joan. 1995. "The health and safety of women in small workplaces". In Messing, K., Neis, B. and L. Dumais, eds. *Invisible Issues in Women's Occupational Health*. Charlottetown: gynery books.

Eakin examines the effects that working in a small business (1 to 50 employees) has on women's health. She discusses gender differences in the managerial roles of these businesses and their impact on women's stress levels. Women tend to be more involved in the personal lives of their employees. Where a man is not likely to excuse poor work behaviour or absenteeism because of personal problems, a women may. Eakin shows that this often creates more stress for women. The tendency in small workplaces to have women in the "front" and men in the "back" means women are often in the positions (e.g., bookkeeping or clerical) that interact directly with clients or the general public while male employees do the technical work behind the scenes. Working with the public leads to more health hazards, primarily stress, both physical and psychological. Eakin compares the treatment of occupational health in small workplaces with that in big businesses. In small businesses where there is not a lot of money, the workers' health and safety are often a low priority. In many cases, these companies do not have the finances to ensure that their workplaces meet safety codes. Eakin also documents other health impacts of small workplaces, e.g., family-owned and -operated business where there is no real separation between work and home can be a source tension and stress in family relationships. Eakin notes, despite the high number of Canadian women working in small workplaces, there is little research conducted on the impacts of their workplace on their health.

Ford, Anne R. 1990. *Working Together for Women's Health: A Framework for The Development of Policies and Programs*. Ottawa: Federal/ Provincial/ Territorial Working Group on Women's Health.

This report looks at all aspects of women's health in Canada and includes a section on occupational health. It notes the lack of studies that focus on women's occupational health. Most of the studies that have been carried out in Canada focus on men and are then applied to women assuming that the two are the same. The report focuses on special groups, including women with disabilities and native women, which are often excluded from occupational health studies. The report concludes with strategies for improving women's health in Canada and makes recommendations for implementing these strategies.

Grzetic, B., M. Shrimpton, and Se. Skipton. 1996. *Women, Employment Equity and the Hibernia Construction Project*. St. John's: WITT Newfoundland and Labrador.

This study, published by Women in Trades and Technology (WITT) Newfoundland and Labrador, documents the experiences and observations of women working on the Hibernia project site at Bull Arm, Newfoundland. These women were hired in both traditional and non-traditional occupations. The study looked at the barriers which limit women from wanting to work in the construction field and adversely affect those that do, including discrimination in hiring, inappropriate work training and equipment, sexual harassment, and family responsibilities. The study concludes it is necessary to implement new policies like pay and employment equity to break down these barriers. The study was conducted by distributing questionnaires to the 236 women employed on site. Those who completed the questionnaire were invited to a personal interview. The questionnaire dealt with issues such as job satisfaction, training, sexual/gender harassment,

and job particulars. Stress was the major health issue identified by the women in the study. The report also deals with the issue of living in the workcamp.

Institute for Work and Health. 1996. *Using Research to Develop Workplace Solutions, Annual Report 1996*. Toronto: Institute for Work and Health.

This annual report for the Institute for Work and Health outlines the research that was done by the Institute in the preceding year. Two studies were conducted inside the workplace looking at the causative factors for work-related absences (a General Motors study on risk factors for low back pain and a new measurement tool for disabilities of arms, shoulders and hands at the *Toronto Star*).

Kaye, Lynn. 1985. *Materials – Workplace Reproductive Hazards*. Ottawa: National Action Committee on the Status of Women.

This report came out of the Workplace Reproductive Hazards Conference held in September 1985. The report contains a selection of cases handled by the Hamilton Worker's Occupation Health and Safety Clinic in 1984-85. In each of the documented cases, women had suffered reproductive problems after being exposed to hazardous materials in the workplace. Following each case are discussion questions aimed at finding better solutions to the problems facing these women. The report also contains other papers and statistics presented at the conference.

Lowe, Graham S. 1989. *Women, Paid/ Unpaid Work, and Stress*. Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

This background paper evaluates whether or not women's needs are addressed in the current research on occupational health and how they might be better addressed. Lowe looks at the link between stress reduction and child care. During his research, he found that many current studies are limited to examining the effects of occupational health in men. He proposes that future studies take a more holistic approach to occupational health by eliminating the inequalities that are present in many workplaces.

Lowe, Graham S. 1991. *Workplace Stress in the Newfoundland Department of Social Services*. Edmonton: Department of Sociology, University of Alberta.

This report was prepared for the Newfoundland Association of Public Employees (NAPE). Lowe interviewed workers in the Department of Social Services (DOSS) following their response to a questionnaire compiled in consultation with NAPE and DOSS. Seventy-six percent of the respondents were women, and the majority of them were social workers. The majority of respondents complained of heavy workloads with insufficient time to complete each task. The study found there are higher absentee rates at DOSS and more physical and mental health problems, e.g., headaches, joint pain, or extreme mental exhaustion, at DOSS than in other sectors.

Messing, Karen. 1991. *Occupational Safety and Health Concerns of Canadian Women. A Background Paper*. Ottawa: Women's Bureau, Labour Canada.

This paper looks at several issues of women's occupational health. Messing notes women's health research often excludes occupational health, and occupational health research often excludes women. She suggests several reasons for this, e.g., women's work is perceived as being safe. Messing notes that although 65% of the female labour force is concentrated in four sectors (clerical, services, sales, and medicine and health), there are few studies on the health of women in these occupations. Messing identifies five types of risks in the workplace: 1) physical, e.g., a slippery floor or radiation, 2) chemical, e.g., smoke, 3) biological, e.g., exposure to diseases or bacteria, 4) ergonomic, e.g., uncomfortable positions or heavy lifting, and 5) psycho-social, e.g., difficulties in working relationships. She uses these five classifications to look at some of the risks associated with both traditional jobs and non-traditional blue collar jobs, particularly occupational stress, sexist stereotyping, and inappropriate fitting protective gear and equipment.

National Quality Institute. 1998. *Canadian Healthy Workplace Criteria*. Ottawa: Health Canada.

The *Canadian Healthy Workplace Criteria* outlines the four "drivers" that are necessary for creating and maintaining a healthy working environment: leadership, planning, people focus and process management. Each one is described in detail with points on how to accomplish each step. A fifth section examines the results and achievements associated with a healthy workplace.

Neis, Barbara. 1987. "Occupational health in Newfoundland deepsea fishplants". Paper presented at the Learned Society Meeting, Hamilton, Ontario, June.

This paper details a study carried out over six weeks at two fishplants in Newfoundland during the fall and summer 1985. The two plants were selected for their willingness to give access to researchers and the level of automation in the processing of deepsea fish. The study shows the different views between management and the workers on the issue of occupational health and safety. In many cases management saw the workers concerns as not serious and accused many of using worker's compensation to pay for time off. The study shows that the length of the working day, shift work and long work weeks are contributing factors to the number of workplace accidents. Neis notes that increased education in 1986 for management in Fisheries Products International (FPI) plants lead to lower accident rates in the first few months of 1987.

Neis, Barbara. 1992. "Work-related risk factors for female fish and crab processing workers in Newfoundland and Labrador". Paper presented to the Research Round Table on Gender and Workplace Health, Ottawa, June.

In this paper Neis examines the risk factors for female plant workers including repetitive, fast-paced work in cold, noisy conditions; exposure to hazardous chemicals as well as toxins and bacteria; poorly-designed tools; and long standing times. Many of the women plant workers work in sex-segregated jobs which are generally low paid, machine paced, assembly line jobs. Stress is higher in female workers than male workers as many of them are trying to balance shift work with caring for their families. Often their communities lack resources like suitable daycare or medical care. Neis suggests that while we are searching for a better way to manage the fishery, we should find a better way to care for fishery workers.

Neis, Barbara. 1994. "Occupational health and safety of women working in fish and crab processing in Newfoundland and Labrador." *Chronic Diseases in Canada* 15, 6-11.

This article reviews some of the research on occupational health and safety in fishplants in Newfoundland and Labrador. In this paper Neis identifies several risks that female fishplant workers experience in the workplace. She also notes several problems in the current research, notably the absence of quantitative studies that account for the differences between the sexes and the difficulty in conducting studies when the fisheries are experiencing instability.

Neis, Barbara. 1995. "Can't get my breath, snow crab worker's occupational asthma". In Messing, K., Neis, B. and Dumais, L. (eds.). *Invisible, Issues in Women's Occupational Health*. Charlottetown: gynery books.

Neis examines snow crab occupational asthma (OA), a major health problem for workers in crab plants in Newfoundland and Labrador, Quebec and other areas of Atlantic Canada. Snow crab OA is thought to have immunologic origins, i.e., it is caused by the body's response to alien substances or microbes from the crab, and appears to be linked to a variety of exposure sources, including the cooking of the crab during processing. Neis describes some of the problems with recording the number of cases of crab OA, e.g., workers suffer through the season because they fear being laid off or not called back the next season if they report their illness. She also describes the "healthy worker effect", i.e., workers who have experienced the effects of OA take other jobs and those who have become so ill they have been barred from working in the plant.

Neis documents some of the socio-economic and health effects of OA, e.g., mental and physical health problems that persist after the exposure to the crab allergen has ceased. She suggests some ideas for preventing OA in crab processing plants, e.g., improved ventilation. In the final section of the paper, Neis compares snow crab OA in Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec. She found that although the primary research was conducted in Newfoundland, there has been little done to improve conditions since. In fact, in some cases, management and workers were not fully aware of OA and the effects it may be having on their workplace.

Neis, Barbara. 1998. "Women's health and work restructuring in rural, resource-based hinterland areas". Paper presented at the Colloquium on Women and Occupational Health, Montreal, March.

This paper looks at the impacts of restructuring on the availability of work, incomes, unionization, environmental regulations, access to public services, and the regulatory environment for prevention and detection of work-related risks. It shows how downsizing leads to greater occurrences of stress as there is job insecurity and increased shift work and part-time jobs. The paper also shows how cuts to social programs like health care and education have greater impacts on women than on men as women are the predominate caregivers and assume responsibility for most domestic duties. Neis also discusses the impact of limited access to medical services in many of the hinterland regions. This affects women's health directly and indirectly when, as the primary caregiver to their families, limited access to health services increases the pressure on women to care for sick relatives themselves.

“New Realities” – The Intensification and Casualisation of Work. 1997.

This paper looks at the changing workplace in Canada. Jobs are shifting from full-time to part-time, with longer hours and work weeks. There has also been a growth in casual employees and in short-term contract work. It shows how “self-employed” people are vulnerable to low wages and no benefits.

Occupational Health and Safety. 1997. *Workplace News*. Vol.10, No.3 (Fall). St. John’s: Occupational Health and Safety.

This quarterly newsletter is published by Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) to update workers on what is happening in the OHS sectors. This issue includes articles on research grants, the annual report, OHS programs, health issues, and a Workers’ Compensation Commission update.

Ontario Women’s Directorate. 1991. *Personal Protective Equipment for Women – Addressing the Need*. Ottawa: Ontario Women’s Directorate.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Women is a guide for changing workplace conditions to make the workplace more suitable for women. Although women need PPE, they are expected to wear equipment designed for men. The guide offers tips on purchasing women’s PPE and includes a list of manufacturers and tips on maintaining this equipment.

Porter, Marilyn. 1991. *Women in Economic Life in Newfoundland: Three Case Studies*. St. John’s: Social Sciences and Research Council.

This report documents three case studies carried out in three communities in Newfoundland (Grand Falls/Windsor, Catalina, and South East Bight on Placentia Bay) between May 1988 and May 1990. There are also several individual case studies reported from these communities. The information was gathered by ethnographic and community study methods and surveys. The primary focus of the study was the intersection of women’s paid/unpaid work and the household. The case studies show how the availability of health care varies for each region and how this impacts women in each region.

Senior Status of Women Officials. 1993. *Women and Men in the Workplace: A Discussion of Workplace Supports for Workers with Family Responsibility*. St. John’s: Women’s Policy Office.

This study explores the options of family-friendly workplaces. Family-friendly work environments are those that understand that as the roles of the family change so should the workplace. In many cases it is shown that family-friendly work environments have fewer cases of occupational stress and the workers are capable of handling both work and family responsibilities. This report suggests four ways a workplace can become family-friendly and the implications of taking each step. The four suggestions are: flexible work arrangements, e.g., a reduction or shift in the working hours or a move to part time; dependent care, e.g., on site day care facilities, financial subsidies, or help with elder care; family-related leave time, e.g., allowing family members to take time off to care for a relative or paternal leave for a new baby; and promoting family wellness.

Shrimpton, M. and K. Storey. 1991. *Work-Related Stress in the Newfoundland Offshore Oil Industry: Implications for Health and Safety*. St. John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland.

This report examines the effects of the Newfoundland offshore oil industry on the health of workers. The study was completed based on interviews and questionnaires of workers that divide their time between home and offshore on the Hibernia platform. The study only deals with male employees and the only females considered in the study are the spouses of the workers.

Sprout, J. and A. Yassi. 1995. Occupational Health Concerns of Women who Work with the Public. In Messing, K., Neis, B. and Dumais, L. (eds.). *Invisible, Issues in Women's Occupational Health*. Charlottetown: gynery books.

This paper looks at the occupational health hazards facing women who work with the public. Their study focuses on clerical, service, sales, teaching and social science occupational groups as these groups are mainly composed of women. Aside from the normal risks associated with these occupations, there are increased hazards with working with the public, e.g., increased levels of stress, violence, harassment, and work/job conflicts. The study shows that there is an increased level of job stress associated with these types of jobs as they are usually high demand-low control jobs. The high rates of part-time and shift work, as well as 24-hour days and long work weeks, also contribute to stress levels. Sprout and Yassi suggest that increasing worker participation can be a major factor in reducing these types of job stress. With regard to violence in the workplace, the study found that women who work with the public are more likely to experience violence than those who do not, e.g., convenience store clerks, who are often women, are the most likely to experience violent crimes such as rape and murder. Many women who deal with the public are also subject to emotional and verbal abuse as well as sexual harassment on a daily basis. Sprout and Yassi note some occupations actually encourage the employees to promote their sexuality for business. Sprout and Yassi suggest simple, yet effective changes in the way in which businesses are run that may decrease the amount of violence associated with many of these occupations. Sprout and Yassi also look at the conflicts between work and family that often affect women and suggest ways of reducing these stressors. Such conflicts involve, for example, shift work that disrupts family schedules, women finding it difficult to balance household responsibilities with work, and limited opportunities for job advancement if women cannot accommodate child or elder care with overtime or job-related travel requirements.

Wigmore, D. 1995. "Taking Back" the Workplace, Workplace Violence: A Hidden Risk in Women's Work. In Messing, K., Neis, B. and Dumais, L. (eds.). *Invisible, Issues in Women's Occupational Health*. Charlottetown: gynery books.

Wigmore looks at the occurrence of workplace violence (verbal, physical, emotional abuse, assault or harassment) in women's work. She looks at the three occupations that experience violence most often: social workers, nurses and teachers. Women make up the majority of each of these professions, and there seems to be an understanding that violence is not an occupational hazard but "part of the job". Wigmore notes that there has been a great deal of research done on the affects of violence in these three professions but that there is very little on the effects of violence on support staff and clerical professions. She observes that more research is needed on analyzing and addressing workplace violence. She suggests using the British Health and Safety Executive framework to finding a solution to these problems.

The Working Group on Women's Health. 1994. *A Profile of Women's Health in Newfoundland and Labrador*. St. John's: Department of Health.

This report on women's occupational health in Newfoundland and Labrador, examines five factors of occupational health: physical, chemical, biological, ergonomic, and psychosocial. It also looks at the many misconceptions faced by women in the workforce, e.g., the myth that women's work is not physically demanding. There is also a section on the types of injuries that occur in women's occupations with repetitive strain injuries and back problems being the most common. The report analyzes current legislation and policies that are geared towards male employees rather than women workers. It notes the lack of research that has been done on women's health issues, especially those relevant to special groups like disabled women, lesbian women and native women.

APPENDIX B

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

What kinds of things determine how healthy you are?

How do you see your health and/or the health of your family connected to your paid work? (*Think about both present work or past work you have had*)

Think about a small workplace (1-20 employees) in Newfoundland where you have worked in the last 10 years. What was that experience like? Think about:

- Environment
- Physical, i.e., training, equipment, difficulty of work, ventilation, smoke, heat, pace of work
- Psycho-social, i.e., enjoyment, fulfillment, relationship with co-workers, responsibilities, expectations, stress, options
- Safety, i.e., safety regulations, first-aid kit, threat from employee, employer, client, harassment
- Scheduling, i.e., knowing ahead of time, shift work, options, over time, amount of work
- Work load
- Policies and rules, i.e., employee rights, knowledge of rules and regulations, time off for family/health reasons, informal or unofficial rules

Anything else you would like to comment on?

Are there changes that you would like to see in the workplace environment and workplace policies would lead to greater well-being and satisfaction?

PERSONAL PROFILE

1. How old were you on your last birthday?

2. Do you have any children? If yes, how many?

3. Approximately, what is the population of the place where you live? (Statistics Canada 1995)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 500,000 and over | <input type="checkbox"/> under 30,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 100,000 to 499,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> rural area |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30,000 to 99,999 | |

4. Describe your “family structure” at this time.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> single | <input type="checkbox"/> living with a family member (other than spouse) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> divorced | <input type="checkbox"/> living with roommates |
| <input type="checkbox"/> widowed | <input type="checkbox"/> living with a partner or married (no children) |
| other: _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> living with a partner or married, with children |

5. Please indicate the current level of your education. (categories from Statistics Canada 1995)

- 0 to 8 years (the highest grade of elementary school completed)
- some secondary school
- graduated from high school
- some post-secondary school (attended a post-secondary institution, university, or non-university, or trades program through apprenticeship, vocational schools or private trade schools. Did not receive degree, certificate or diploma)
- post-secondary certificate or diploma (includes trades certificate)
- university degree (bachelor’s degree or above)

6. If you are currently working outside of the home, what is your job? Please include any part-time, full-time, seasonal, and year-round work.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The aim of this study is to understand women's experiences of employment in small workplaces. The researcher is interested in speaking with *a wide cross-section of women* who have worked in a small workplace in the last 10 years. To get information about women's experiences in small workplaces, the researcher is using a variety of methods including focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and the review of women's stories/narratives.

By signing this consent form you understand that participation in this study is *completely voluntary*. You have the option to withdraw from this study at any time and/or refuse to answer any of the questions.

This consent form is for participating in a focus group. If you agree to participate, you will participate in a focus group with 4-9 other women that is facilitated by a researcher from the Women's Health Network, Newfoundland and Labrador. What you say in the focus group is confidential and only the researcher and research assistants involved in this project will see the interview transcripts/notes. If part of the focus group discussion is quoted it will be done in a manner so that neither you nor other persons (employers you mention, for example) can be identified. Although the research will stress the importance of confidentiality to the focus group participants, we cannot guarantee that all of the participants will keep the discussions in the group confidential. This research may be published after completion and the results may be presented at conferences and workshops.

This research has been funded by the National Network on Environments and Women's Health and by the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health.

If you have any questions or comments contact the

Women's Health Network, Newfoundland and Labrador

Grace Hospital, Nurses Residence • 214 LeMarchant Road • St. John's, NF • A1E 1P9

tel: (709) 778-6534 • fax: (709) 778-6533 • e-mail: whnmun@morgan.ucs.mun.ca

web page: www.ucs.mun.ca/~whnmun

*** PLEASE KEEP THIS FORM FOR FUTURE REFERENCE ***

SIGNATURE PAGE

Title of Project: Trying to Work it Out: Women's Experiences in Small Workplaces

Name of Principal Investigator: Agnieszka (Iggy) Kosny

I _____ the undersigned, agree to my participation in the research study described above.

Any questions I have about this study have been answered and I understand what is involved in the study. I realize that participation is voluntary. I acknowledge that a copy of this form has been given to me.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Please write down your address and e-mail (if applicable) if *you wish to receive a copy of the research results*.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCHER TO AUDIO TAPE INTERVIEWS

Title of Project: Trying to Work it Out: Women’s Experiences in Small Workplaces

Name of Principal Investigator: Agnieszka (Iggy) Kosny

If you agree to allow the interviewer to audio tape this interview, the audio tapes and transcripts of the tapes will be kept confidential. The interview is confidential and only the researcher and research assistants involved in this project will see the interview transcripts. The tapes will be destroyed a year after the study. Alternately, if you like, the researcher can send your tape to you after the completion of the study. The tapes will not be used for any other purpose except for this study.

Please check one:

- I *allow* the interviewer to audio tape the interviews
- I *do not allow* the interviewer to audio tape the interviews

Please check one:

- I would like the audio tape(s) used in my interview to be destroyed a year after the completion of the study.
- I would like the researcher to send the tape used during my interview to me after the completion of the study. (If you check this option, please write you address below.)

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Witness Signature _____ Date _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO THE RESEARCHER