

Partnering to Highlight Working Conditions of Immigrant Workers

"I have experienced discrimination from other workers [Americans] who say why immigrants get the jobs when Americans need it the most. I don't like working here anymore; I am worried about my health because I still have the pain."

-Production Worker

The Challenge

New Hampshire has been experiencing an increase in its immigrant population, but little information is available on their work-related health issues. Immigrant workers are at risk from occupational hazards because they are more likely to be employed in high-risk jobs or in workplaces where hazards are not adequately controlled. In addition, economic insecurity and fear of losing a job, lack of knowledge about occupational risks and safety standards, and workplace discrimination can contribute to health disparities.

The Response

The NH Occupational Health Surveillance Program, in collaboration with the New Hampshire Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health, surveyed immigrants at ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes about exposures to hazards in the workplace, discrimination at work, knowledge of workers' compensation, injury experience at work, and access to healthcare.

Of 366 completed surveys, 229 respondents were currently working in the U.S. The most commonly reported job/industry categories were factory, cleaning, food service, farming, services, construction, and retail. Thirteen percent of respondents noted they had been injured at work; 69% reported that they always or sometimes maintained tiring or painful positions at work. Sixty-two percent of all 366 respondents were not aware of workers' compensation.

The Impact

Publication of survey findings prompted local and national media attention. Its results were used in presentations and other reports, including a state Health and Equity Report Card offering the first "baseline" report of health disparities in NH. The data will also support NH Health & Equity Partnership's ongoing efforts to implement the national standards for collecting race, ethnicity, and language in key state administrative data sets. This targeted survey contributed to an improved understanding of the work experiences of immigrants. Knowledge about the occupational health experience of this population informs prevention, intervention, and policy strategies to protect the health of working people in NH.

For more information, visit the NH occupational health surveillance program:

<http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/dphs/hsdm/ohs/index.htm>

A report on the survey is available at:

www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/hsdm/ohs/documents/ohsimmigrant2013.pdf