

# **Occupational Health of Women in Non-Standard Employment**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This report examines factors affecting the occupational health of women in non-standard employment. The objectives are to analyze how part-time and casual jobs, and other workplace factors, affect work-related stress for female workers, and how that stress affects their physical and emotional health, and their workplace. Our analysis is done through data collected from unionized and non-unionized workers employed in the retail trade sector. Findings show fatigue, exhaustion, the inability to sleep through the night, and feeling irritable and tense are common symptoms of stress for female non-standard workers. Sources of the stress included irregular work schedules and the unpredictability of non-standard hours, the inability to gain seniority in part-time and casual jobs, having a part-time employment contract but working close to full-time hours (without benefits), the expectation to work weekend and evening shifts, as well as the low wages and benefits in non-standard jobs. The lack of management support, not being respected for being a non-standard worker, their female gender and age all contributed to stress. As a result of the stress, musculoskeletal disorders, migraines and headaches affected these women, and their sense of self-esteem, motivation and morale diminished. Increased absenteeism, turnover and workplace conflict, along with lowered job satisfaction and decreased workplace morale were common organizational effects of stress. We provide recommendations for policy makers, management and unions to reduce factors affecting work-related stress for women in non-standard jobs.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

EIA	<i>Employment Insurance Act</i>
ILO	International Labour Organization
MSD	Musculoskeletal disorders
OESA	<i>Ontario Employment Standards Act</i>
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
OHSA	<i>Occupational Health and Safety Act</i>
OHSC	Occupational Health and Safety Committee
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers (of Canada)
WHO	World Health Organization



## DEFINITIONS

**Retail trade:** “The aggregate sales made through a business location (usually a store) in which the principal activity is the sale of merchandise and related services to the general public, for household or personal consumption” (Statistics Canada 2001).

**Non-standard work:** Part-time and casual/temporary work.

**Part-time work:** Work of less than full-time hours (usually less than 30 hours a week). It can be on a regular (permanent, continuous) or casual (occasional basis).

**Regular part-time work:** Part-time work that has a relatively fixed schedule and hours that are guaranteed, but less than full-time hours.

**Casual (temporary) work:** Work performed on an on-call basis for full-time or part-time hours. It does not have a fixed schedule or number of hours. No hours are guaranteed.

**Casual part-time work:** Work performed on an on-call basis for part-time hours. It does not have a fixed schedule or number of hours.

**Health:** In this context, health is viewed holistically as an interacting system with mental, emotional and physical components. We define health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO 1994). We also consider health as a basic and dynamic force in our daily lives, influenced by our circumstances, beliefs, culture and social, economic and physical environments. Additionally, we recognize the diversity of women in Canada, and appreciate the variety of home and work responsibilities that affect women’s experiences of health.

**Occupational health:** A person’s health status (or status of well-being) within the context of the work environment.

**Work-related stress:** Stress is examined as an occupational health problem. We cover work-related stress or the lack of it among workers. Defining stress is a very complex matter and is a topic of continuous debate among experts (Di Martino 2000). Individual symptoms include having the following some, most or all of the time in the last six months: exhausted at the end of the day, not able to sleep through the night, felt like crying, no energy on the job, burnt out, felt like yelling at people, like there is nothing more to give, difficulty concentrating, anger, felt helpless, not in control of own life, irritable and tense, dizzy (Zeytinoglu et al. 2000).

**Physical health problems:** Self-reported physical health problems, such as musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory illnesses, headaches and migraines, and burns or cuts incurred as a result of work or the work environment.

**Musculoskeletal disorders (MSD):** Disorders of the soft tissue and the surrounding structures. These disorders are not due to an acute or an instantaneous event (Hales and Bernard 1996). Such disorders occur as pain or discomfort in the neck or shoulder, arm, elbow or hand, back pain, sore or sprained muscles, hips, knees and feet.

**Emotional health problems:** Self-reported feelings that affect job satisfaction, motivation and self-esteem as a result of work and the work environment.

**Organizational problems:** Perceived workplace problems, such as high absenteeism, high staff turnover, a high rate of grievances or willingness to get into conflict with co-workers or the supervisor, or a willingness to go on a strike.

## PREFACE

Good public policy depends on good policy research. In recognition of this, Status of Women Canada instituted the Policy Research Fund in 1996. It supports independent policy research on issues linked to the public policy agenda and in need of gender-based analysis. Our objective is to enhance public debate on gender equality issues to enable individuals, organizations, policy makers and policy analysts to participate more effectively in the development of policy.

The focus of the research may be on long-term, emerging policy issues or short-term, urgent issues that require an analysis of their gender implications. Funding is awarded through an open, competitive call for proposals. A non-governmental, external committee plays a key role in identifying policy research priorities, selecting research proposals for funding and evaluating the final reports.

This policy research paper was proposed and developed under a call for proposals in September 2000, entitled *Women's Access to Sustained Employment with Adequate Benefits: Public Policy Solutions*. Other research projects funded by Status of Women Canada on this theme examine issues such as policy options for women in non-standard employment, improving working conditions among home day care providers, supports for single mothers and disabled women.

A complete list of the research projects funded under this call for proposals is included at the end of this report.

We thank all the researchers for their contribution to the public policy debate.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines factors affecting the occupational health of women in non-standard employment in the retail trade. We look at the impact of part-time and casual employment on work-related stress for women. We consider other factors (including other working conditions and demographic factors) that contribute to stress. In addition, we examine how these factors work together to affect stress. Our analysis focusses on gender as a determinant of occupational health and as a contributor to the non-standard employment status for women. Links are made between stress, the women's experiences in their part-time and casual jobs, and the unique conditions of women's lives in both paid and unpaid employment. We conclude the analysis by examining how stress, in turn, affects female workers' physical health and emotional well-being, and their workplaces.

Our analysis uses data collected from women employed in the retail trade sector organized by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) of Canada, and from non-union workers in the retail trade. We interviewed eight occupational health and safety committee (OHSC) representatives of the retail workplaces organized by the UFCW. We conducted discussion groups and interviews with 59 workers with experience in part-time and casual jobs.

All the occupational health and safety (OHS) representatives indicated that stress in women workers is an ongoing problem. The OHS representatives identified casual and part-time employment as a reason for stress for some workers, because the possibility of acquiring a full-time position in the workplace is very unlikely. They also discussed work scheduling, contract issues and the psychosocial work environments as contributing to stress for females in non-standard employment. As a result of this stress, the OHS representatives saw physical health problems (including musculoskeletal disorders, and migraines and headaches) among these women workers. OHS representatives said the sense of self-esteem, motivation and individual morale tended to decrease for workers in non-standard jobs due to the stress they experience in the workplace.

The women in part-time and casual jobs, in our discussion groups and interviews, said they were stressed at work, and fatigue, exhaustion, the inability to sleep through the night, and feeling irritable and tense were common. They mentioned non-standard work schedules, including shift work and inconsistent work hours, as sources of stress. The inability to gain seniority in part-time and casual jobs, and having a part-time employment contract but often required to work close to full-time hours (without the benefits associated with full time) were other sources of stress. The women in non-standard jobs also cited poor working conditions that often entailed low wages/benefits and not having job security in non-standard jobs. Stress also arose from the lack of management support, the lack of respect as a part-time worker and a lack of control over the work. Some of these women experienced harassment at work. Feeling like second-class workers due to their gender (female) and age (either old or young) added to the workers' stress. Personal responsibilities, such as caring for dependants and juggling multiple commitments, amplified the stress. Respondents also acknowledged that many of these stressors combined with others to produce even more stress in their lives. The

women said that as a result of stress, musculoskeletal disorders, migraines and headaches were common illnesses for them. They stated that the stress of working in non-standard jobs and in the retail trade resulted in a decreased sense of self-esteem, motivation, job satisfaction and individual morale. In addition, the participants said absenteeism, turnover and workplace conflict escalated as a result of stress.

The gendered nature of the work for women in retail trade and the gendered division of labour in retail workplaces are intertwined with the non-standard characteristic of the work to such a level that this is considered by workers as a given in the work environment; a “reality” of their work situation that the female participants in our study felt unable to change, despite their frustration about the inequalities. Although our recommendations focus on the retail trade, it is important to note that the occupational division of labour and non-standard work by gender in retail food stores is consistent with general trends in women’s employment in the Canadian work force.

We provide the following recommendations for policy makers based on an overall analysis of our findings, suggestions raised by the occupational health and safety representatives and by females who live with the non-standard work experience on a day-to-day basis.

**Recommendation 1:** Legislate full coverage of paid public holidays and termination notice/pay and severance pay for elect-to-work employees in the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000*.

**Recommendation 2:** Legislate full coverage for near farm workers in the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000*.

**Recommendation 3:** Educate workers about their legal rights according to the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000*, *Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1990*, and the *Employment Insurance Act, 1996* by providing easily accessible information in common areas in the workplace.

**Recommendation 4:** Modify eligibility criteria for pregnancy and parental leave/benefits under the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000* and the *Employment Insurance Act, 1996* to reflect the transient nature of non-standard work.

**Recommendation 5:** Require equitable treatment of all workers (non-standard and regular full-time) with respect to pay, benefits and training. Require that employers justify to the (Ontario) Ministry of Labour, Employment Standards Branch the differential treatment of workers in terms of hourly pay and benefits for doing the same or substantially similar tasks during hours worked.

**Recommendation 6:** Enforce laws that apply to non-standard workers (e.g., meal breaks, optional Sunday shifts, health and safety training) through periodic inspection of the workplaces.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, major changes have been taking place in work relationships in the Canadian labour market. Economies in industrialized countries are restructuring their labour markets; the service sector is growing; telecommunications technologies are affecting work relationships, and the internationalization of businesses is increasing. In response to restructuring, businesses have reorganized their practices and begun to implement strategies to reduce costs and achieve workplace flexibility, through various forms of non-standard work arrangements. The most common forms of non-standard employment are part-time and temporary/casual jobs (Zeytinoglu 1999a).

In Canada, there is a disproportionately high share of women in non-standard jobs, particularly in the service sector. Government data indicate that adult women (age 25+) occupy 70 percent of part-time positions and 68 percent of involuntary part-time positions in the country (Statistics Canada 1998; HRDC 1996). Given that poverty continues to be a pressing issue for Canadian women and non-standard employment has a negative impact on income, it is important that public policy makers know how these jobs interact with other factors to affect women's occupational health. Research has shown that work, paid and unpaid, performed at home or outside the home, is an important determinant of women's health; and women's access to sustained employment contributes significantly to their health (Denton et al. 1999). Emerging research has focussed on the implications of non-standard work on an individual's health, work and personal life, and raised concerns about the health implications of new trends in non-standard work (Collins et al. 1997; Messing 1997).

### **Purpose and Scope**

This report examines factors affecting the occupational health of women in non-standard employment. In examining occupational health concerns in non-standard employment, we focus on work-related stress. The objectives are to:

- determine the impact of part-time and casual work on work-related stress of women;
- analyze other factors (including working conditions in non-standard employment, psychosocial work factors and demographic factors) that contribute to stress for women in non-standard jobs;
- analyze interrelationships between these factors;
- examine how stress, in turn, affects women workers' physical health and emotional well-being, and their workplaces; and
- propose recommendations to reduce work-related stress for women in non-standard jobs.

We examined self-reported stress and physical problems resulting from stress (such as musculoskeletal disorders, migraines and headaches), self-reported emotional health and

well-being problems resulting from stress (e.g., low self-esteem, low job satisfaction and lack of motivation at work) and perceived organizational signs of stress affecting the workplace (e.g., absenteeism, turnover and workplace conflict).

The scope of this research is non-standard female workers in retail trade, including both unionized and non-unionized workers. We conducted this project in partnership with the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW). The UFCW is a diverse trade union representing more than 220,000 workers in Canada and 1.5 million internationally in more than 20 sectors of the economy including retailing, health care and other service sectors. A growing percentage of the UFCW's membership in Canada and the United States now work in part-time jobs. Many of these members in non-standard employment are female. This reflects general labour trends in the workplace, as well as the fact that thousands of full-time, well-paying jobs in food services and food retailing have been replaced by part-time, lower-paying and, usually, less secure work over the last decade (Hinton et al. 1999).

### **Sources and Methods Used to Collect Data**

Our project is informed by data collected from workers employed in retail workplaces organized by the UFCW Canada. We also collected data from a few non-unionized employees from other retail workplaces to represent the experiences of women working in non-standard jobs in non-unionized work environments that are also smaller workplaces. We recruited participants for this project in Hamilton, St. Catharines and Kitchener/Waterloo. To get information from union representatives who work daily with women in non-standard jobs, we conducted eight interviews with occupational health and safety committee (OHSC) representatives of retail workplaces. These interviews helped us understand health issues for women and non-standard workers in the unionized workplaces. We also conducted interviews and discussion groups with 59 workers employed in part-time and casual jobs and gathered their input on these issues. We selected these individuals because of their experience in non-standard employment and resulting expertise in factors affecting women's occupational health. In this report, we are presenting the results of our analysis based on the interviews with union representatives, and discussion groups and interviews with workers.

### **Organization of the Report**

This report contains a background section reviewing the literature regarding work stress. Based on our knowledge of the literature, we developed a model for this project, which represents the various factors leading to stress for female non-standard workers in casual and part-time work and the resulting health and workplace problems. There is a brief discussion of each component in the model: the symptoms of stress as an occupational health problem, the factors we identify from the literature as affecting stress and the predicted outcomes of stress. The methodology section includes a description of our project design, the population, sample and data collection process. It also provides information about the project participants and discusses the limitations of the methodology. Information gathered from the interviews with union representatives is described and summarized in Chapter 4. This is followed by the results of the interviews and discussion groups with the non-standard workers in the study. The conclusions and recommendations complete this report.



## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **The Model**

We developed a model for our research based on the recent available literature (Figure 1). Although previous studies have examined individual factors that affect the occupational health of women separately, an examination of these factors as a complete interacting system affecting women's health has not been done. We expected to find a connection between the occupational health of women and non-standard employment, and find that economic, legislative, workplace and individual factors work together to create stress for women working in part-time and casual jobs. Stress, in turn, results in health and workplace problems.

Our background summary follows with factors affecting stress: the economic factors, legislation or lack of it, non-standard work (part-time and casual work), psychosocial work factors in non-standard jobs, other working conditions in non-standard jobs, and demographic factors that affect stress. We should note that casual and part-time employment is an employment contract issue and would normally be placed under the working conditions factor. However, to highlight the unique effect of casual and part-time employment contract issues on female workers' stress, we examine casual and part-time employment separately. Then, we provide a summary on stress resulting in physical health and emotional well-being problems, and workplace problems.

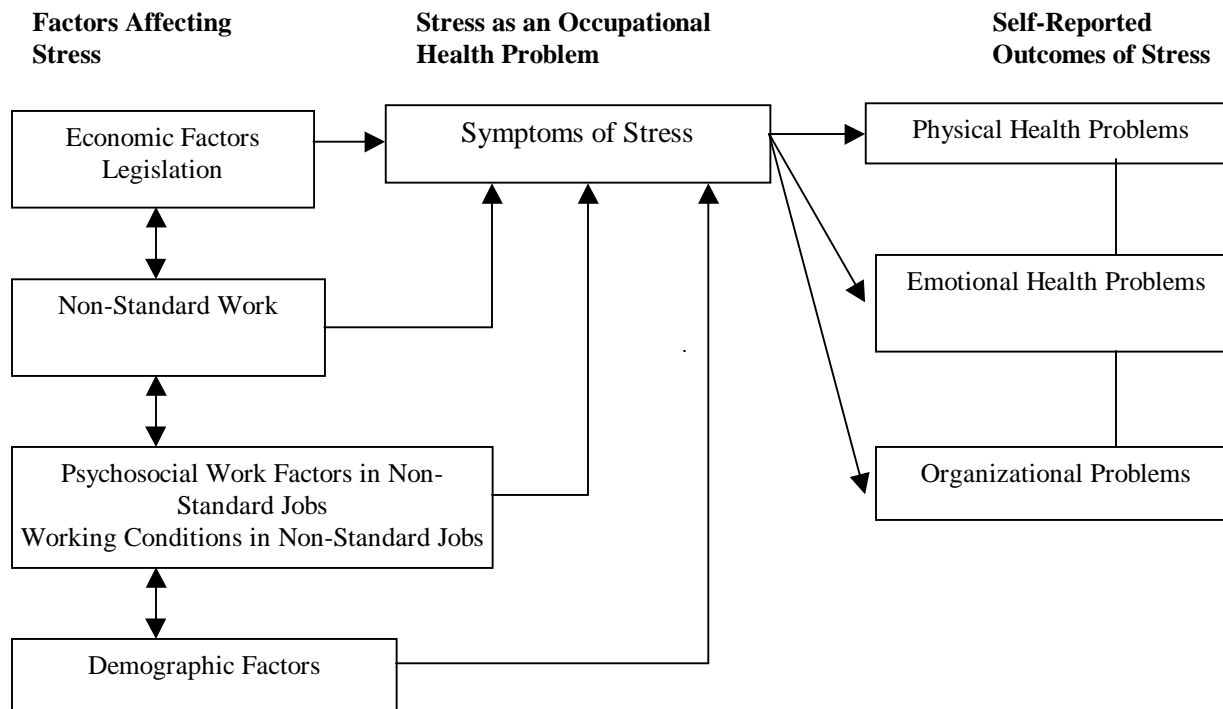
### **Stress as an Occupational Health Problem**

Both paid and unpaid forms of work are important determinants of health. Research indicates that paid work contributes to women's emotional health problems of stress, anxiety and depression (Collins et al. 1997; Messing 1997; Walters and Denton 1997). Our previous research on women's health has identified non-standard jobs as a specific source of chronic stress and exhaustion for some female workers. Studies point out that stress as an occupational illness has both physical and mental effects on workers as well as organizational effects (Hales and Bernard 1996; Kahn and Byosiere 1992; Lowenberg and Conrad 1998; MFL 1996; Wilkins and Beaudet 1998). Furthermore, Buchanan and Koch-Schulte (2000) found that stress in part-time and low-paid employment can have both physical and emotional consequences for employees, ultimately leading to high levels of turnover.

### **Factors Affecting Stress**

In light of the increase in non-standard employment in Canada, there is growing interest in the implications of non-standard work on the health, work and personal life of individuals. A number of factors affecting stress, as discussed in the literature, are explained below.

**Figure 1: Occupational Stress for Women in Non-Standard Jobs**



### ***Economic Factors***

Canadian society is undergoing rapid transformations that are having significant effects on the health of individuals, families, communities and institutions. Global economic restructuring is taking place, and the work environment is changing, with non-standard jobs becoming more common (Beiser et al. 1993; ILO 1998; Zeytinoglu 1999a,b).

Researchers point out that cutbacks in government programs, job instability and high rates of unemployment have resulted in an increased sense of financial insecurity for families. And, because the number of Canadians seeking full-time employment exceeds the number of full-time jobs available, a growing number of underemployed individuals receive lower wages and engage in less paid work than they desire or need (Hinton et al. 1999).

Another economic factor concerns the sector in which these workers are employed. The service sector in Canada and, within that, the retail trade sector, employs the largest number of non-standard female workers. In a fiercely competitive market, organizations are attempting to survive under new names and restructured forms. These changes are creating a chaotic labour market with constantly changing jobs, massive layoffs and employment insecurity for workers. Employment in the service sector is now polarized, with highly skilled and well-paid, often full-time jobs in information and computer technology service firms, as opposed to lower-skilled, low-paid, and mostly part-time or temporary jobs in the retail trade, including retail food stores (Zeytinoglu and Crook 1997).

### ***Legislation***

There is some coverage for non-standard workers under existing laws in Canada, such as the *Ontario Employment Standards Act* (OESA), 2000 (see Table 1). Under this legislation, for example, regular part-time workers have the same coverage as regular full-time workers. Elect-to-work employees (usually referred to as casual workers or contract workers) are covered for most of the provisions, with the exception of paid public holidays and termination notice/pay and severance pay. Near farm workers, however, are only covered for minimum wage, vacation with pay, pregnancy, parental and emergency leave, and termination notice/pay and severance pay. We are including information about the provisions for near farm workers, because some of the women in non-standard employment who participated in this study are working under this category. We also refer to the OESA, 2000, because all the participants in this study fall under the jurisdiction of this legislation. In addition, they fall under the *Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act*, 1990. Women working in non-standard jobs have identical coverage to regular full-time workers under this legislation.

As discussed in detail in Zeytinoglu and Muteshi (2000b), problems have emerged with regards to the application of the legislation, particularly employment standards acts, for various types of non-standard work. In reality, workers in non-standard jobs rarely meet the continuous working hours or the permanent or stable relationship with the employer. In some cases, non-standard workers do not get benefits or certain rights in the workplace, because they do not work a sufficient length of time to access such benefits and rights. For example, in theory, non-standard workers are covered by pregnancy and parental leave provisions. However, because of their transient employment, these workers may not have been employed by one employer on a continuous basis for the required period of at least 13 weeks before a baby's expected birthdate. Thus, they may not qualify for pregnancy or parental leave. Likewise, non-standard workers are covered for maternity and parental benefits under the federal *Employment Insurance Act* (EIA), 1996. To be eligible for maternity or parental benefits, employees must show their regular weekly earnings have decreased by more than 40 percent, and they have accumulated 600 insured hours in the last 52 weeks, or since their last claim (EIA, 1996). Unfortunately, the eligibility criteria have created some problems for part-time and casual workers, who do not always have the insured work hours, because of their transient employment.

### ***Non-Standard Work***

Part-time and temporary work have always existed in Canada and, in fact, predate the standard "typical" work arrangement. However, what is new and challenging is the increase, particularly since the 1980s, in the proportion of non-standard work arrangements in newly created jobs. Labour force data from Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC 1996) showed that since 1976, 44 percent of total employment growth has been due to growth in non-standard employment. Lipsett and Reesor (1998) asserted that the "typical" full-time, permanent, nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday job with one employer is now the work arrangement for only a third of the Canadian work force.

**Table 1: Coverage for Non-Standard Workers under the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000***

Provisions of OESA, 2000	Job Categories		
	Part-Time Employees	Elect-to-Work Employees	Near Farm Workers
Minimum wage	Covered	Covered	Covered
Hours of work	Covered	Covered	Not covered
Daily rest periods	Covered	Covered	Not covered
Weekly/bi-weekly	Covered	Covered	Not covered
Rest periods	Covered	Covered	Not covered
Eating periods	Covered	Covered	Not covered
Overtime	Covered	Covered	Not covered
Paid public holidays	Covered	Partially covered	Not covered
Vacation with pay	Covered	Covered	Covered
Pregnancy, parental, emergency leave	Covered	Covered	Covered
Termination notice/pay, severance pay	Covered	Covered	Covered

Various flexible work arrangements are used by both private and public sector organizations, and in the service and goods-producing sectors. Part-time, temporary, contract workers and home-based workers are typically found in the service sector. In contrast, the goods-producing sector is characterized by flexible work arrangements, such as hiring full-time workers on an overtime or shift basis, or contracting out work. What is more, employment in these sectors is further divided along gender lines; the majority of employees in the service sector are female, and male workers dominate the goods-producing sector (Zeytinoglu 1999a).

The increase in part-time and casual jobs in the retail trade has had a negative effect on working conditions in the sector. UFCW worker representatives at both the national and local levels gave a general overview of the situation with respect to part-time employment in retail food stores in Zeytinoglu and Crook's (1997) study. According to these representatives, it is now rare to find eight-hour shifts in cashier and clerical positions in many retail food stores. They reported that employers are cutting back hours whenever possible and eliminating rest breaks. Split shifts, which occur when an individual works in the morning from 8 a.m. to 12 noon and from 5 to 9 p.m. the same day, for example, are increasing in frequency in the workplace. Unfortunately, for female workers, the split-shift schedules make it difficult to manage both work and life responsibilities, particularly if they have dependants. The worker representatives further reported that split shifts often create stress and tiredness, especially when workers have several split shifts in different workplaces. Stress and tiredness occur because, in comparison to someone working eight consecutive hour shifts, the part-time worker may have increased work-related expenses for transportation and also have difficulty arranging child care and other family responsibilities. Although split shifts are prohibited in the collective agreements organized by the UFCW, non-unionized workers in retail food stores are still vulnerable to this type of scheduling arrangement.

Overall, in the retail trade, employment used to be characterized by full-time jobs with part-time workers being used to cover peak periods only, such as Thursday and Friday nights, and Saturdays. Now, full-time jobs in the retail trade are being replaced with part-time positions. Regardless of peak time periods, tasks in retail food stores are being done by part-time workers. Throughout the years, many female-dominated jobs (e.g., cashiers, bakery and deli-counter positions) have been converted to part-time positions. Similar developments did not seem to be taking place with respect to jobs in warehouses, which were predominantly male (Zeytinoglu and Crook 1997). It is clear the move to precarious non-standard forms of employment within the service sector and downsizing are primarily affecting women workers. Townson (1997) identified the increase in non-standard work as a long-term policy research issue with implications for women's economic autonomy and financial security.

### ***Psychosocial Work Factors and Working Conditions in Non-Standard Jobs***

Research indicates that employer commitment to workplace health and the safety of employees varies considerably in the retail trade. One key issue is that the shift toward non-standard forms of employment has been accompanied by a decrease in staffing levels in retail stores. Reducing staff levels results in job loss for some workers and places an additional strain on the retained members of the work force, who are then responsible for managing the workload of two (or more) individuals. These all affect the stress levels. Studies also show that psychosocial work factors (Collins et al. 1997; Denton et al. 1999; Messing 1997; Zeytinoglu et al. 2000), such as the lack of support from managers and co-workers and lack of control over work, increase stress for workers. In general, retailers have policies relating to harassment and sexual harassment. However, those policies often lack procedures for their implementation (Zeytinoglu and Crook 1997).

One concern about non-standard jobs is that they do not provide an equitable work environment for workers in comparison to their full-time counterparts. Previous studies found that part-time workers earn, on average, much less than their full-time counterparts, and fewer have access to benefits, including company pension plans and extended health coverage. Non-standard jobs are unprotected by employment and health and safety legislation (Quinlan and Mayhew 1999). Temporary/contract workers are also paid lower than full-time workers (Statistics Canada 1998). Since temporary/contract workers are often paid a "fee for services," the employer-employee relationship is essentially non-existent. As a result, temporary/contract workers are usually responsible for their own benefits coverage and tend to not qualify for employer-sponsored pension programs. In 1995, about 10 percent of the Canadian work force was employed in temporary jobs (Lipsett and Reesor 1998) and less than 20 percent were entitled to benefits, such as an additional pension and health plan, dental plan and paid sick leave (in comparison to approximately 60 percent of full-time permanent employees) (Statistics Canada 1998).

With respect to wages and benefits, the wholesale and retail trades have the lowest estimated average weekly earnings of all industries. In the retail food sector, wage rates in both unionized and non-unionized workplaces tend to vary according to tenure. Moreover, while the sector provides employees with access to some benefits, individuals in non-standard employment tend to fare even more poorly than their full-time permanently employed counterparts by receiving

lower rates of pay and access to fewer benefits. The literature on job security, training, promotion and career development points out that, for part-time and temporary/contract workers, job security and income security take priority over training. Since women dominate part-time positions in the retail sector, their disadvantageous position in terms of income and job security contributes to the inequality between female and male workers, and between full-time and part-time women workers (Zeytinoglu and Crook 1997).

For most workers entering the service sector work force in non-standard jobs, there is less job security and fewer opportunities for positions with stability than in the past. Particularly in non-unionized jobs, workers may have no assurance from their employers about how long their job will last. For example, temporary/casual employment trends have resulted in a growing number of individuals employed for set periods of time only, such as during the holidays or for the summer season. In comparison, unionized workers generally have more certainty about their employment status, because the terms of collective agreements usually guarantee a minimum number of hours or weeks of work and, often, temporary/casual jobs become permanent after a defined period (Hinton et al. 1999).

It is also well documented in the literature that part-time and other non-standard workers do not receive the same amount and quality of training as their full-time counterparts. Additionally, it is known that training opens the doors to other career prospects and, when workers compete for the limited company budgets for training, part-time, temporary and contract workers are often left out. Moreover, in divisions of the industry where women in non-standard jobs make up a large proportion of the total number of employees, very few, if any, opportunities for advancement are provided. Salespeople in non-food stores have limited opportunities to move up to store management positions. Within food stores, cashiers can move up to head cashiers, but there is little opportunity for upward mobility and advancement beyond the head cashier position. As a consequence, most workers in the retail sector can only achieve advancement by changing employers. Unfortunately, it has been shown that part-time workers are rarely considered for promotion, and only if there are no full-time workers available to fill the position, or if the part-time worker has been willing to work in a full-time job ( Zeytinoglu and Crook 1997).

Research conducted by the UFCW (Hinton et al. 1999) indicates that working conditions for women in non-standard jobs are increasingly untenable, with workers being forced to accept lower rates of pay and few benefits to remain employed. For example, most workers in part-time and casual jobs in this sector are excluded from workplace benefit programs, such as pension plans, dental plans or other medical coverage. Unfortunately, because these employees are often working on an “on-call” basis and are required by the employer to be available for work on short notice, it is extremely difficult for them to seek better employment (Hinton et al. 1999). Nevertheless, unionization has been very advantageous to workers with respect to wages and benefits. In 1997:

unionized female part-time workers in Canada earned 94.3 percent of the hourly wage of unionized female full-time workers, while non-unionized female part-time workers earned only 75.5 percent of their non-unionized

female counterparts (Kumar 1998). In this same year, 86.6 percent of unionized full-time workers and 56.7 percent of unionized part-time workers were members of a pension plan, which far exceeds the pension coverage rate of 7.5 percent for non-unionized part-time workers (Jackson 1998). The extended health care plan coverage rate for unionized full-time, unionized part-time, and non-unionized part-time workers was 88.9, 47.8, and 9.0 percent, respectively, in 1997 (Jackson 1998: 173-174).

### ***Demographic Factors***

Adult women (25+ years) occupy 70 percent of part-time work positions in the country (Statistics Canada 1998) and 68 percent of involuntary part-time work positions (HRDC 1996). Statistics Canada (1998) also identified youth (15 to 24 years) as a large group in the part-time work force, as indicated by their 35 percent share of these positions in the country in 1997. From these statistics, it is clear there is a disproportionately high share of women and young people in non-standard jobs.

This literature suggests that in the restructuring economy of Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, adult males fared well. They are more often employed in permanent full-time jobs, and women, in their youth and adult life, occupy a larger percentage of the part-time and temporary/contract positions. Non-standard work arrangements place women in a secondary position not only in workplaces but, as an extension of that, in their personal lives. The less they earn, the more they depend for their survival on others — their spouse, family or the government. The less job security they have, the more they are prone to poverty when working and, in old age, the more they experience health problems (Zeytinoglu et al. 1999).

The work force in retail food stores consists of two groups: middle-aged women (between the ages of 34 and 55 years) with children or single mothers (24+ years of age), and female and male students (16 to 24 years of age). These two groups have different employment goals and expectations. While middle-aged women and single mothers consider employment in retail food stores as their career, students consider employment in retail food stores as jobs to support themselves while they study to pursue other careers. Each group of workers has to deal with personal life responsibilities (juggling work and home life, taking care of children or schoolwork) while working in non-standard jobs (with inconsistent schedules and hours). There is also an occupational division of labour in retail workplaces by gender; almost all supervisory and managerial positions (full time, relatively well paid) were held by men. Male employees tend to work in warehouse departments and as stock clerks and meat cutters. In contrast, women are generally in cashier, store clerk and bakery jobs, which are also the lower-paid and part-time positions (Zeytinoglu and Crook 1997).

### **Self-Reported Outcomes of Stress**

There are three ways in which the stress that non-standard workers experience from their jobs can have an effect: the physical being, the emotional well-being and the organization. Work stress can have adverse effects on the physical ability to function well. Aspects of non-standard work, such as long shifts and very short breaks, and the type of tasks typically found

in the retail industry, such as heavy lifting and repetitive motions, can lead to a variety of physically debilitating results, compounded by split shifts and the elimination of rest breaks (Zeytinoglu and Crook 1997). The possible physical manifestations of work stress include arthritis, heart disease, migraines and headaches, and musculoskeletal disorders.

For women in non-standard jobs, the work-related stress can affect their emotional health and well-being. In the retail sector, the nature of tasks combined with the daily interaction with customers and co-workers can reduce job satisfaction, self-esteem and motivation. Such outcomes can be a result of many of the factors described in the model. Research shows that work-related stress is highly associated with low job satisfaction, decreased levels of self-esteem and motivation (Walters and Denton 1997; Zeytinoglu et al. 1999).

The physical health and emotional well-being outcomes of stress can result in adverse effects on the employing organizations. Employers and unions need to understand the stress that women in non-standard employment face — the difficulties placed on these workers and how this stress affects the organizational and economic aspects of employment. Stress in part-time and low-paid employment can have both physical and emotional consequences for employees, ultimately leading to high levels of turnover (Buchanan and Koch-Schulte 2000). Other consequences of work stress include higher levels of absenteeism, a higher propensity to file grievances, lowered workplace morale and the willingness to engage in conflict with co-workers or management (this includes strike activities).



### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This project uses a qualitative research methodology (semi-structured interviews with union representatives, semi-structured interviews and discussion groups with workers). We take the female worker as the unit of analysis. Because this is a qualitative exploratory study, we do not identify statistically significant interactions between factors; we are interested in the rich information that emerged from the discussion groups and interviews. We analyze stress in the work environment as a complete, interacting system of factors, and we assess stress based on what the respondents tell us from their perspectives.

The research design is aimed at qualitative information allowing for an overall analysis of the work-related stress phenomenon. It gives voice to women working in non-standard jobs and attempts to learn from their experiences. Unlike quantitative data, which aims for total objectivity by eliminating outside factors and issues, a qualitative approach allows us to understand the context of the data gathered from the interviews and discussion groups, and to present this rich information in a meaningful way. The qualitative approach gives voice to participants acknowledging the value of their experience. It also provides the readers with a more complete understanding of the problems and issues with regard to stress that non-standard female workers experience within the retail sector.

#### **Population and the Sample**

The research population in this study consists of women working in part-time and casual jobs in Canada: eight members of the UFCW Canada who are occupational health and safety (OHS) representatives of the retail food stores and 59 workers in non-standard jobs. The intermittent and unpredictable schedules of non-standard workers make it almost impossible to reach a larger population given the time constraints and resources we had. We consider the achieved sample size of 59 in a qualitative study, where similar themes emerge in different discussion groups and interviews, as sufficient to provide policy recommendations. A sample size of 59 is respectable, as long as the themes that come up in the meetings are consistent (Lee 1999; Marshall and Rossman 1989), which occurred in our study. The UFCW Canada members were selected for this study because this union has a large percentage of members in non-standard jobs. The sample includes non-unionized workers as well, who provided us with information about their experiences in non-standard employment, in smaller workplaces and in workplaces not covered by collective agreements. This study focusses on the retail trade (a female-dominated sector) and casual and part-time work by sampling from a variety of retail trade outlets that rely on female workers for the non-standard jobs.

In accordance with UFCW policies, this study was open to all workers regardless of gender. Thus, all workers who wanted to share their experiences of women's occupational health issues in non-standard employment were allowed to participate in the discussion groups and interviews. For this reason, the sample includes three male workers, and eight female workers

who were employed in full-time jobs at the time of data collection. We felt these individuals could provide us with some additional insight on how females in non-standard work are treated.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews and focus groups were used to collect data. Because the term “focus group” was somewhat confusing to our sample, we refer to it as a “discussion group” in this project. We collected data from workers in Hamilton (Statistics Canada census metropolitan area), plus St. Catharines and Kitchener/Waterloo in Ontario. All those who participated in this project work in retail trade. They learned about this project from notices posted in their workplaces, from their union steward or occupational health and safety representative, and from telephone contact with the first research assistant. Our primary contact has been the union and most of our participants were female union members working in a variety of organizations in the retail trade. We went through the union to reach women workers because, in our experience, this has been the best approach to contact non-standard workers. A few participants were employed in non-unionized retail establishments in the Hamilton area. We contacted those participants through connections of research participants and researchers.

We (i.e., the principal investigator and first research assistant) conducted the interviews with union members who were OHS committee representatives. The goal was to develop an understanding of health issues for women and non-standard workers in the unionized workplaces. We also conducted interviews and discussion groups with workers to gather their input.

During the discussion groups and interviews, each participant was given the project information package, then asked questions and invited to elaborate on the type of work they did, what they liked and disliked about their job, the symptoms of and factors affecting their stress, how stress affected them and their workplace, and the changes that could be made to reduce their stress and improve their health and that of other workers. Each interview took about one and a half hours and was tape recorded. Each discussion group took about two hours and was also tape recorded. The interviews in coffee shops were not tape recorded due to background noise; instead, the research assistant took detailed notes. The telephone interviews were also not tape recorded and the research assistant took detailed notes. At the end of each interview and discussion group, participants were asked to fill out a brief, demographic questionnaire and given \$20 as an honorarium to cover the costs of attending the meeting (e.g., child care and transportation costs). The three telephone interview participants were mailed the project information package. The tape-recorded interviews and discussion groups were transcribed between July and November 2001.

### **Interview and Discussion Group Questions**

We asked research participants the questions in tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2: OHS Representative Questions**

1. Can you tell us about your union and this local? What type of services do you provide to members of this local?
2. Can you explain your involvement in the OHSC and your role as a representative?
3. What type of health problems do your members have? What do you think are the causes?
4. Do you think your members have experienced stress in the last six months (or is it an ongoing problem)? Have you seen any of the following symptoms of stress in your members or heard them talk about any of these things?  
 Stress Scale: exhausted at the end of the day, headaches or migraines, not able to sleep through the night, felt like crying, no energy on the job, burnt out, yelling at people, felt like there is nothing more to give, difficulty concentrating, angry, helpless, not in control of one's life, irritable and tense, dizzy.  
 Are the members complaining about these symptoms (all the time, some of the time, or not at all)?  
 Is it you, who sees these things in workers (all the time, some of the time, or not at all)?
5. What are possible reasons for people in your workplace to be stressed? What are the probable causes of this stress?
6. What happens to workers as a result of stress? Are there any physical health problems as a result of stress?
7. Are there any physical health problems not related to stress? What causes those health problems? Can you give me an example of the causes (i.e., being in a hot or cold work environment)?
8. Coming back to stress, how do you think this affects workers' job satisfaction, motivation and self-esteem (emotional health)?
9. Outside of stress, do you think there are any other things affecting workers' job satisfaction, motivation and self-esteem (emotional health)? What causes these problems? Can you give me an example of the causes (i.e., working in a dark, dingy environment, physical/sexual/personal harassment at work)?
10. How do you think worker stress affects the workplace? Are there any workplace problems, such as absenteeism, the staff turnover rate, a high rate of grievances, willingness to get into conflict (with other workers, with supervisor, go on strike)?
11. Do you think any of these workplace problems are caused by something other than stress? What else causes those problems? Can you give me an example of the causes?
12. How do non-standard employment (part-time and casual work) and all the other factors that we discussed work together to affect stress?
13. Are there any other factors you can think of that affect the stress of workers?
14. What is the employer doing to promote workplace health? What are you (the union) doing to promote workplace health?
15. If you could make any changes in the workplace in which your members are employed to reduce stress and improve the health of workers, what recommendations would you give?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

**Table 3: Discussion Group/Worker Interview Questions**

1. Can you tell me about yourself? What type of work do you do?
2. What do you like about this work? What don't you like about this work?
3. Have you experienced any stress related to your work in the last six months (or is it an ongoing problem)?  
 Stress is generally defined as the following symptoms. Have you experienced any of these things (all of the time, some of the time, or not at all)?  
 Stress Scale: exhausted at the end of the day, headaches or migraines, not able to sleep through the night, felt like crying, no energy on the job, burnt out, yelling at people, felt like there is nothing more to give, difficulty concentrating, angry, helpless, not in control of one's life, irritable and tense, dizzy.
4. What are possible reasons for you to be stressed at work?
5. Do you have any physical health problems as a result of stress?
6. Coming back to stress, how do you think it affects your job satisfaction, motivation and self-esteem (emotional health)?
7. How do you think your stress and the stress of other workers affects the workplace? Are there any workplace problems, such as absenteeism, the staff turnover rate, a high rate of grievances, willingness to get into conflict (with other workers, with supervisor, go on strike) related to stress?
8. How do you think working part time or on a casual basis and the other factors that we discussed work together to affect your stress?
9. Are there any other factors that you can think of that affect your level of stress?
10. If you could make any changes in your workplace to reduce stress and improve your health and that of other workers, what recommendations would you give?
11. What types of workplace health problems do you have that we haven't discussed yet? What do you think are the causes?
12. What is your employer doing to promote workplace health? What is the union doing to promote workplace health?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

### **Analysis of the Data**

The contents of the transcribed interviews with the union representatives were analyzed manually, because of their small number, by the research team. For the discussion groups and interview transcriptions, the principal investigator developed a coding scheme. Each transcription was coded by the second research assistant under the principal investigator's supervision. The principal investigator also coded the data. There were no major discrepancies between the two sets of codes. This qualitative information was analyzed for common themes and emerging issues. QSR-N5, a qualitative data analysis computer program, was used for the data analysis of the transcribed discussion groups and worker interviews. (See Appendix C for the sample coding scheme.) A report for each theme and sub-theme was then prepared. The reports were read by both the principal investigator and the second research assistant, and samples were selected for inclusion in the report.

## **Research Ethics Compliance**

We followed the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*<sup>1</sup> in all aspects of this research project. In accordance with this policy statement, the responses to demographic questionnaires and all interview data have been kept in a locked cabinet. The union representatives and discussion group/interview participants have been given a copy of, or given access to, all questions before participating in the project.

## **Project Participants**

### ***OHS Representatives***

Eight OHS representatives from unionized food store and retail establishments participated in key informant interviews for this project. Seven of the OHS representatives completed demographic questionnaires. We report on the characteristics of these seven individuals in Table 4. Our sample consisted of mostly women, married and supporting two to four dependants (young or adult children, elderly parents) living in their homes. Most of the OHS representatives were between the ages of 30 and 55 years. On the whole, the sample was of a healthy group of workers who were satisfied with their jobs, although they described their jobs as being somewhat stressful. With respect to occupation and employment tenure, the sample varied. The participants in the OHS interviews were employed as a customer service representative, truck driver/delivery crew member, service and department clerks, a cashier, photo lab technician and a stock handler. Half the sample had been working in their occupation for more than 20 years. All the OHS representatives in the study had experience in non-standard employment, although four were employed on a full-time basis and seven were permanent employees in their workplaces. Three representatives were working in part-time jobs and one indicated she was a temporary/casual employee. Two of the eight representatives interviewed held second jobs in order to obtain full-time work hours or the hours they preferred to work. As is typical of work arrangements in the sector, six of the representatives were paid on an hourly basis; only one received a salary. Furthermore, all these individuals had significant experience working in the retail trade, having been employed for between seven and thirty-seven years in the sector. Finally, the sample was a racially and ethnically homogenous group of people. None self-identified as members of racial and ethnic minorities; all were more comfortable speaking and reading in English than in another language. One was an immigrant.

### ***Discussion Groups and Interview Participants***

We collected data from 59 workers who participated in discussion groups or interviews. Forty-one of these workers were UFCW Canada members and the rest were non-unionized workers. While most worker participants in this project were female, three men attended discussion groups and shared their knowledge of women's occupational health issues in non-standard employment. All the participants had experience in part-time and casual jobs in food stores or in retail establishments, such as clothing stores, garden centres and beer stores. Most respondents were young, single and without dependants. They were well educated and many had qualifications that exceeded the requirements for the tasks performed at work. Their self-reported health was at least good, though the majority self-reported job stress. They were mostly satisfied with their jobs. Tenure in the occupation was low. Many worked part time and many were in permanent jobs. They were overwhelmingly hourly paid

workers. Some had additional employment to make up full-time hours. Many worked in shift jobs. The respondents were overwhelmingly homogeneous in their ethnicity and language spoken. Table 5 provides further information about the worker participants.

**Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of the OHS Representatives**

Demographic Characteristic	OHS Representatives
Gender	Female = 5, Male = 2
Age group	29 years or younger = 1 30-55 years = 5 56 years and older = 1
Marital status	Married/living common-law = 6 Separated/divorced/widowed = 0 Single (never married) = 1
Number of dependants (young or adult children, elderly parents)	No dependants = 2 2-3 dependants = 4 4 or more dependants = 1
Self-reported health	Excellent = 1, Very good = 3, Good = 2, Fair = 1
Self-reported job stress	Very stressful = 1, Stressful = 2, Somewhat stressful = 4
Job satisfaction	Satisfied = 4, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied = 3
Occupation	Customer service representative, truck driver/delivery crew member, service clerk, hot deli clerk, cashier, photo lab technician, stock handler
Tenure in occupation	0 – 5 years = 2 6 – 10 years = 1 20 – 30 years = 3 31 – 40 years = 1
Length of employment in the retail trade sector	0 – 10 years = 1 11 – 20 years = 1 21 – 30 years = 4 31 – 40 years = 1
Employment status	Permanent full time = 4 Permanent part time = 2 Temporary part time = 1
Wages	Salary = 1, Per hour payment = 6
Additional employment (working in more than one job to have full-time work hours or hours that they prefer to work)	Yes = 2 No = 5
Immigrant status (i.e., born outside of Canada to non-Canadian parents)	Yes = 1 No = 6
Total	7 respondents*

Note:

\*One OHS representative did not complete the demographic questionnaire.

**Table 5: Demographic Characteristics of Discussion Group and Interview Participants\***

<b>Demographic Characteristic</b>	<b>Discussion Group/Interview Participants</b>
Gender	Female = 52, Male = 3
Age group	29 years or younger = 36, 30-55 years = 16, 56 years and older = 2
Marital status	Married/living common-law = 18 Separated/divorced/widowed = 1 Single (never married) = 36
Number of dependants (young or adult children, elderly parents)	No dependants = 39 1 dependant = 3, 2 dependants = 7, 3 dependants = 2 4 or more dependants = 2
Education completed	University or college (attended or completed) = 22 High school (attended or completed) = 28 Lower than high school education = 4
Self-reported health	Excellent = 11, Very good = 23, Good = 22
Self-reported job stress	Very stressful = 1, Stressful = 14, Somewhat stressful = 32 Not very stressful = 8, Not at all stressful = 1
Job satisfaction	Very satisfied = 3, Satisfied = 26, Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied = 22 Dissatisfied = 4, Very dissatisfied = 0
Tenure in occupation	0 – 5 years = 43 6 – 10 years = 5 11 – 20 years = 3 21 – 30 years = 4
Length of employment in the retail trade sector	0 – 5 years = 30 6 – 10 years = 10 11 – 20 years = 5 21 – 30 years = 8
Employment status	Full time = 8 Part time = 48
	Permanent = 38 Temporary (casual) = 15 Seasonal = 2
Wages	Salary = 1, Per hour payment = 52, Other = 2
Additional employment (working in more than one job to have full-time work hours or hours that they prefer to work)	Yes = 17 No = 38
Shift work	Yes = 42 No = 12
Racial or ethnic minority	Yes = 3 No = 53
Immigrant status (i.e., born outside of Canada to non-Canadian parents)	Yes = 6 No = 49
Total	56 Respondents**

Notes:

\* Three respondents did not fill out the questionnaire.

\*\* Some answers have fewer than 56 responses because some questionnaires were incomplete.

### **Limitations of the Methodology**

In most research projects of this type, there are some limitations of the methodology selected. However, these limitations can also be a source of strength. The qualitative methodology we chose allowed us to contact only a small number of individuals. Interviews and discussion group methodologies allowed us to obtain detailed information and explore the interrelationships among factors affecting the occupational health of women in non-standard employment in a holistic manner. We chose to contact unionized workers through UFCW Canada locals, because this gave us union assistance and support in gaining access to members in non-standard employment. In our principal investigator's previous research, the same assistance had not been received from individual employers in the competitive service and retail food trade. There is ample research evidence that unionized workers have better pay and benefits, and better working conditions than non-unionized workers. Thus, our sample of unionized workers most likely has good working conditions. Therefore, we believe the sample is biased toward those working in better working conditions than exists in many workplaces. Sampling from workers represented by the UFCW Canada has given us the additional advantage of including individuals from a variety of different establishments in our research, and helped us represent the diversity of female workers. We also sought to include non-unionized workers using a "snowballing" sampling technique. This allowed us to access individuals in non-unionized, worse off and more marginalized workplaces. At the same time, we had to keep in mind that all these individuals were self-selected in the research. Thus, although our findings are reliable and valid for the participants in this study, more studies are needed to support the findings. Although we did not focus on a single workplace, our results can be similar for workers in the service and retail sector, where non-standard work is predominant, across organizations and the entire country.



#### 4. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS WITH UNION REPRESENTATIVES

In this analysis of the OHS interview data, we provide information about the role of the OHS committees and the responsibilities of the representatives in their workplaces. Second, we discuss the health problems of workers as identified by the eight representatives. This chapter also includes information about the factors affecting stress in workers, the manifestations of stress as observed by the OHS representatives and the physical health problems of workers that are unrelated to stress. We include quotes from the OHS representatives; each representative's personal code is included at the end of the quote.

##### **Union Services to Members and the Role of OHS Representatives**

According to the representatives, the UFCW Canada provides a number of services to its members. The representatives noted that the union provides support to workers when they have problems with management, negotiates collective agreements with management about the wages, benefits and employment conditions for workers, offers health and safety courses to workers in addition to other training and skill-building educational initiatives, and has recently implemented a program, which provides assistance and support to workers with personal problems.

With respect to the role of the OHS committees and their own responsibilities in the workplace, all the representatives described very similar involvement. Both the certified and the non-certified representatives who participated in the interviews spoke of working closely with store managers on any health and safety problems, participating in health and safety training through the local union, going on monthly inspections of the workplace to make sure each department uses the proper health and safety policies and procedures, and meeting with the store manager and other members of the committee every three months to go over any accidents, health and safety concerns, or other related issues that have not been addressed in a timely manner by the company. The OHS representatives also indicated they are responsible for contacting the local union or the Ontario Ministry of Labour if the company does not resolve a health and safety problem adequately or if something in the workplace is posing a serious and immediate risk to the health and safety of workers.

Of note, despite monthly inspections and regular committee meetings, several OHS representatives spoke of the slow process for addressing health and safety issues in the workplace on the part of the employer. One OHS representative explained this process in detail.

*I meet with the company once every three months at a formal meeting. It usually lasts half a day. There's four people that meet together at that point. If there's any outstanding issues that the membership wants to bring up or things that they feel would benefit the employees then they bring it up at that time. Quite often, it's just things that the company has failed to address or*

*it's taking much too long in addressing and the process doesn't seem to speed it up. Ah, quite often it seems that the Ministry [of Labour] is called in because the process doesn't work the way it's supposed to, I don't think. There are issues that are...even though you're addressing them, they'll take three months, six months, nine months before the company takes enough action to get a resolution to the problem. Whereas, sometimes the membership feels that, you know, it would be faster if we went straight to the Ministry [of Labour] (OH2).*

The comments from the OHS representatives suggest that management commitment to workplace health and safety is tenuous. There are the legally required joint union–management OHS committees, and the establishment of health and safety policies in the workplace demonstrates employer interest for the well-being of workers. However, the slow or inadequate resolution process for health and safety issues is possibly indicative of insufficient procedures for policy implementation. Another representative cites economic factors as the cause of employer inaction when it comes to occupational health and safety issues.

*Bottom line, and that is a major, major point right now. It's [the bottom line], although [the employers] say health and safety is very important, and the workers are very important. What it really comes down to is with one against the other [the bottom line vs. the health and safety of workers], which one is going to win? And the bottom line is going to probably be the winner. We try and tell the workers it shouldn't be that way, and your health and your safety is important, but... (OH5).*

### **The Nature and Causes of Occupational Health Problems in Retail Food Stores**

In responding to our open-ended question of the nature of health problems in the workplace, the OHS representatives spoke of several health problems which members commonly experience. All eight mentioned repetitive strain injuries as one of the major, most prevalent health problems in their workplaces. In particular, tendonitis, carpal tunnel syndrome and chronic pain due to soft tissue damage in the back, shoulders, wrists and elbows were highlighted by the representatives as compromising the health of workers. Most of the representatives noted that repetitive strain injuries are found in all food retail departments, although cashiers, front-end staff, meat wrappers and service clerks are especially susceptible. It is important to note that women part-time and casual employees dominate the cashier, front-end staff, and service clerk positions in these retail food stores. Thus, it is mostly women in non-standard jobs who are likely to experience the repetitive strain injuries described by the OHS representatives. This type of injury was attributed to the repetitive nature of jobs in most departments (constantly twisting and lifting for cashiers, similar range of motion for bakery staff and meat cutters, continual lifting of heavy objects, twisting, bending and reaching for retail factory workers), and the non-ergonomic design of most workstations (e.g., workplace equipment that has been designed to fit a generic male body

and creates strain on women workers' bodies, including the non-adjustable tills at the checkout, and one-size-fits-all meat-cutting machines), which cause back problems.

In addition to repetitive strain injuries, two OHS representatives identified cuts from knives as a health issue for deli, produce and meat department workers. Migraine headaches, which were attributed to eye strain from the new lighting system in two stores and to stress from management, customers and co-workers in another store, were also mentioned by two representatives. One individual noted that members in her workplace slip and fall quite frequently because of poor housekeeping in the produce department. Last, three representatives indicated that stress is a major health problem for their co-workers. These representatives attributed stress in the workplace to working with customers on a daily basis (sometimes customers are extremely abusive verbally to workers), and to tension between workers and management.

Very significantly, one representative noted that repetitive strain injuries in the workplace are frequently exacerbated by workers ignoring the problem until serious damage has occurred.

*The repetitive strain injuries, you know, they're so...damaging to the body, where we have some people that end up being off [work] for a very long time. Sometimes, I think what happens is— I've seen over the years — where people, they are injured and you just work with it. You don't report it or you don't deal with it at the earlier stages. And then by the time, you know, you're working with it, then it's almost too late (OH8).*

The reasons cited by this representative for workers ignoring their injuries are a lack of certainty that the injury is 100 percent work related and the fact that workers don't necessarily make the connection between the injury and something in the workplace.

Another representative noted that some workers do not feel safe reporting their health concerns and injuries to employers for fear of repercussions, or they are preoccupied with trying to complete their workload and don't take the time to address their health issues with management.

From the interviews with the OHS representatives, it is clear that more training and education for workers and management in the retail food trade are needed on occupational health, repetitive strain injuries and healthy work environments. Recognition of the prevalence and seriousness of tendonitis, carpal tunnel syndrome and soft tissue damage due to repetitive overuse is badly needed in the unionized workplaces where the OHS representatives who participated in this study are employed. The significance of repetitive strain as a work-related health issue should be stressed by the union in future occupational health and safety training sessions to prevent injury and preserve the health of members. Furthermore, given the prevalence of female workers with part-time and casual jobs in both the retail workplaces and in the specific departments highlighted by the OHS representatives as having a high incidence of these injuries, it would be valuable for the union to stress women's unique risk for repetitive strain in health and safety educational initiatives.

## The Experience of Stress at Work

When asked about stress, all the representatives indicated that employee stress is an ongoing problem for women and non-standard workers in their workplaces. The representatives mentioned witnessing the following symptoms of stress in workers quite frequently: feeling exhausted at the end of the day, having migraines and headaches, feeling like crying, yelling at people or feeling like yelling, anger, having no energy, feeling burnt out, having difficulty sleeping, and feeling irritable and tense. The representatives also emphasized that they witness these symptoms most often in women with part-time and casual jobs.

*Many [symptoms of stress] are present on a daily basis at our place of employment. A prime example was today, even, at work, where the company has cut back so fine the number of employees, part time and full time, that they can't get all the work done, and they're expecting people to work overtime on a daily basis, and people are exhausted because of the physical nature. Migraines and headaches, I think, is something that does come about, mostly through the tension that's created at work. People are feeling burnt out and lacking energy due to the fact that, like, on a daily basis, myself, I would lift 800 to 1,000 cases of beer a day. And you would just...feel like you're drained by the end of the day after doing it day after day. There are a lot of shouting matches at work between employees, between management, and that creates a lot of tension and stress. Not only for those who are involved in it, but for those who are around as well (OH7).*

*Definitely being exhausted at the end of the day, because, especially with cashiers who are — although our whole workplace, nobody ever sits. It is clearly standing, walking. But cashiers, it's just standing. And so by the end of the day, you really are exhausted. And, in fact, we just did a scale on how much a cashier has to lift during a four-hour shift, and they lift about 4,000 kilos during a four-hour shift. So that in itself is exhausting. And because of repetitive strains, yes, [the cashiers] very often don't sleep well at night because of the pain. And, I think everybody, because of the pressures of the job, they need to get more work done in a shorter period of time, they get burnt out (OH5).*

In general, the representatives reported they became aware of worker stress through a combination of witnessing the symptoms themselves and hearing workers talk about the symptoms.

## Reasons for Stress at Work

In addition to learning from the OHS representatives that stress is a common and significant health issue for female part-time and casual employees in the workplace, we discovered that the possible reasons for the stress are numerous, but fall into specific categories: casual and

part-time work and other employment contract issues, the physical work environment, the psychosocial work environment and demographic factors.

***Non-Standard Work and Employment Contract Issues Affecting Stress Levels***

Casual and part-time employment was identified as a factor affecting stress for some women workers, because the possibility of acquiring a full-time position in the workplace is very unlikely and employers, in general, tend to frown on workers juggling multiple jobs.

*Some try to juggle part-time jobs. Um, [the employer] tends to frown upon that because they don't feel they're getting all that they can get out of the worker. Occasionally, some of them work within the store environment as well as the warehouse — management stopped calling them in because they feel that they don't need the work [in the warehouse], they've got work in stores. But the stores aren't giving them the same hours (OH2).*

*So we have a large number — I don't know if it would be half of them — but a lot of them, it's juggling two jobs and there's even a couple that have three jobs that, in order to have a steady income, they have to work the three jobs to make ends meet (OH6).*

The uncertainty and insecurity of part-time and casual jobs were identified as another source of stress for women workers.

*I think [part-time and casual workers] experience as much or more stress because of [non-standard work], because of the fact that...the employer can't guarantee, and they have no way of knowing, how many hours they're going to get in the future. They don't know if the job's going to be there, and they know that this is, a lot of them get hired because this is a busier time of the season, and there's an uncertainty of not knowing how long the job will last, or how many hours they'll get. I think that part-time help notices it and feels it more, a stress level of the uncertainty of...just what the future holds for them (OH7).*

The precariousness of non-standard forms of employment, with lower rates of pay and, sometimes, a complete absence of guaranteed hours of work, is well documented. While all workers are concerned about job and income security, unions are especially protective of these rights, and workers in unionized workplaces are at an advantage over non-unionized workers with respect to these factors. Thus, although it is not surprising that the female part-time and casual employees from workplaces organized by UFCW Canada experience stress because of job insecurity, it is probable that women workers in non-standard positions from non-unionized workplaces experience even greater anxiety and stress symptoms.

Furthermore, the odd hours that part-time and casual employees work, in comparison to the more regular schedules of full-time permanent employees, was also identified as a factor contributing to stress in women workers.

*Definitely part time [is a source of stress], because of the odd hours they work. Um, Our stores are open from 8 in the morning until 10 at night. And so you can be working anywhere from a four- to a nine-hour shift on any of those days. And of course it could be that you worked until 10:00 one day and had to be back for 8 in the morning, depending on how your schedule goes. And, so that's a problem (OH5).*

The comments of this OHS representative support the rarity of eight-hour shifts in cashier and clerical positions in retail food stores and the commonality of split shifts. These types of schedules create difficulties for female workers in managing their life and work responsibilities, particularly if they have dependants. They also create stress and fatigue. Although split-shift schedules are prohibited in the collective agreements organized by the UFCW Canada, it is clear that union members, particularly women, still suffer from the irregularity of work schedules in part-time and casual jobs.

Two OHS representatives discussed wages as a contributor to stress for new employees in non-standard jobs. This is largely a result of the new wage progression in many retail food stores. In the past, it took employees five years to get to the top rate of pay. Now, it takes the average worker eight or more years to achieve the top rate of pay, because the starting salary is now only minimum wage, and raises are granted based on the number of hours worked, not length of employment. New employees with low seniority are only scheduled to work a few hours a week; therefore, it takes them an extremely long time to have worked enough hours to be eligible for a raise, which is extremely disheartening.

*But you're working next to somebody that is earning a lot more than you are, because they've been around longer, but they're still doing the same job you're doing.... It used to be that you could get to top rate [of pay] in five years. Now, it takes about eight or nine.... Now wage increases every...once every 500 hours, and then went up to 750 hours, so you see that stretches it out (OH5).*

*You have people who have been here for six years who are making \$16 an hour. You have people who have been here for seven years making \$12 an hour. Basically, what it boils down to is that you're getting your foot in, how many hours you're able to work, whether you have children, whether you have a husband to take care of (OH4).*

Two representatives noted that non-standard employees in their workplace earn half the wages of full-time employees, which makes the part-time and casual women workers feel less valuable and makes their living conditions less tolerable, because they're trying to survive on half the money.

*Some people have been working there 14-15 years full-time [hours], and some of them even working close to 40 hours a week at a part-time wage. And that again causes a lot of stress, I think, and anxiety within [the workers in*

*non-standard jobs], because they see everybody else doing the same job they're doing for triple the pay that they're getting, and yet they're not being considered for being hired [for full-time permanent positions] (OH7).*

Two OHS representatives said the lack of career development or opportunity for promotion is stressful for the members in non-standard jobs in their workplace.

*The fact that we're looking at a company that hasn't hired full-time in numerous years. There doesn't seem to be a whole lot of light at the end of the tunnel for these people. They really need the work, they need the job, they don't want to be on welfare, they don't want to be on assistance, they just want to contribute to society and they're not. they're given the opportunity but on a part-time basis.... There's just no...future for them, and they can see that.... It doesn't appear to be, for numerous years, any hope that they'll get a full-time job. Not with the company downsizing (OH7).*

*The likelihood of part-time people that are [at the workplace] getting on full-time is basically non-existent. So for them to consider it will be a possibility — it's kind of fruitless, and they realize that after a few days, a few months, certainly within a year. I mean, even the last hope sort of dims after that. But usually people figure that out pretty quickly (OH2).*

### ***Psychosocial Work Environment Affecting Stress Levels***

In the category of psychosocial work factors, control over work was identified as a source of stress for non-standard female workers in one workplace.

*Part time you have no control over it, you have no idea when you're going to be working, and they can call you 15, 20 minutes before and expect you to work. And if you don't show up, then they stop calling you after a while. It's not unusual. Even now I occasionally get phone calls at six o'clock in the morning, you know. "Somebody didn't show up, can you come in?" It doesn't happen often, but for the part-time people, if they got that call, they would either have to, you know, have to show up or expect to not be called. And eventually it would be: "Well, we just don't need you" (OH2).*

Psychosocial work factors also came up in several other interviews. One representative commented that in her workplace, employees do not care about each other or operate in a team environment. Rather, they are only concerned about making money. This representative also spoke of all workers in her workplace feeling unappreciated by their supervisors. Likewise, another representative connected the stress from the lack of supervisor support to the occupational division of labour in the workplace by gender.

*I find in this store, stress levels are higher in a female employee than a male employee. I really do. Actually, I find that, I've been to all the stores, and I find that [is the case] in most stores, in this particular job.... In some ways,*

*in this organization, I feel that men get treated better; however, from a man coming to...a male in the business with power, they have an easier time contacting each other, they have a better communication.... It's the male management's better able to meet male department heads' or male employees' needs. They communicate better, they're taken seriously, more seriously than I find the women in the store, part-time employees and department heads (OH4).*

### **Gender and Other Factors Affecting Stress Levels**

In general, the OHS representatives were in agreement that women experience more stress than men, and having dependants was a factor affecting the stress of women workers in non-standard jobs, because of the added responsibility of juggling work and taking care of family members. However, we learned from the representatives that age also plays a role in the stress of workers.

*If you need baby-sitters, if your job isn't a 9 to 5 so you can't have a regular baby-sitter. So that every week your schedule is different, and so every week you have to try and arrange a baby-sitter for a different time, and yeah. So I think that's hard on people who have little ones, much more (OH5).*

*[Stress] depends on what age group you're in. Like, teenagers, you don't see a lot of stress in them because then it's just a fun part-time money job. You know, they're happy making their \$7 an hour, and they go and they spend it frivolously, because they can. That's what, you know, it's just a part-time job. Then we get, you know, the age group where, say 19 to 25. Some are in school and working, that's stressful for them.... And then people are balancing family and work, getting work, exactly. And then you get the 65s and or the 50s who are, you know, fearing whether the company's going to tell them: "Hey, you have to retire now." Some of them don't want to retire but they're forced to. And that creates stress (OH4).*

### **Outcomes of Stress as Explained by the OHS Representatives**

As indicated in Figure 1, stress affects each individual's health and creates health problems. The physical manifestations of stress mentioned by the OHS representatives as common workplace health problems for women in part-time and casual jobs are migraine headaches, repetitive strain injuries and back problems. According to one representative, chronic bronchitis, illnesses and the flu are significant health problems for members in her workplace. Anxiety was mentioned by three representatives as a stress-related health problem in their workplaces. The OHS representatives discussed how stress affects emotional well-being of women in non-standard jobs. They asserted that stress decreases job satisfaction, lowers the self-esteem of workers and reduces the motivation of workers to perform their jobs.



*I'd say when you're stressed, you wake up in the morning and you just don't want to come to work, and when you get here, you just don't want to do anything. It's like all of a sudden, you just give up and you don't care. Um, self-esteem and mental health — I've seen people take stress leaves, legitimate stress leaves, nervous breakdowns I've seen. I never see it in the males, but I see it in the women (OH4).*

We also learned high absenteeism, staff turnover and workplace conflict are all organizational problems that occur because of stress in the women employed in part-time and casual jobs in the workplace. Absenteeism and staff turnover, which were especially prevalent, have been linked to the low wages for non-standard workers, many of whom are women.

*And, you know, the pay is good if you stay for years and are getting lots of hours. But people who are just coming in, then they're getting 10 to 15 hours, and you know, \$6.90 an hour, there isn't anything holding them there at that rate of pay to deal with that type of atmosphere either (OH6).*

*Yeah, I can see it [high absenteeism] for my department, personally, one a day, sometimes two a day. Some of it's due to actual illness. Right now and it has been for the last, well, year, due to the fact that there's stress and the tension that's in this department. And they just don't want to come to work. They need the money but they can't take another day (OH4).*

## **Summary**

The UFCW provides several services to their members, including support for worker–management conflicts, negotiating collective agreements, and offering health and safety courses to workers. Many OHS representatives indicated that health and safety issues were not addressed in a timely manner by the employer. Often, the health and safety of workers were not a priority for employers. Common health problems that OHS representatives saw among the workers included musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) (e.g., carpal tunnel syndrome, pain in the back and wrists) and migraine headaches. MSDs were found in all departments, but cashiers, front-end staff, meat wrappers and service clerks were most susceptible to such injuries. Many of the workers in these positions are women working on a part-time or casual basis. These problems often worsen because the worker ignores the problem until serious damage has occurred, due to the uncertainty that the injury is entirely work related and the fear of repercussions if the injury is reported. OHS representatives felt that worker stress for women and others in part-time and casual employment is an ongoing problem, and symptoms, such as exhaustion, burnout, the desire to cry and yell, and anxiety are prevalent. Casual and part-time employment, physical work factors, psychosocial work factors, working conditions and demographic factors were cited as reasons women workers experienced stress. Self-esteem, motivation and job satisfaction were all affected by stress. Such stress tended to affect the organizations through increased absenteeism, high staff turnover and workplace conflict. High absenteeism and turnover were also connected to low wages.

## 5. ANALYSIS OF WORKER DISCUSSION GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

In this chapter, we learn what participants liked and disliked about their non-standard work. Then, we provide information the participants<sup>2</sup> gave about whether they experienced stress in their part-time and casual jobs. We discuss symptoms of stress described by the participants, followed by a detailed discussion of the reasons for the work-related stress in women that our participants identified. We also reveal how the study participants described the combination of various sources resulting in their overall work stress and discuss some factors the participants pointed out that decreased their stress. Then, we hear from the participants how work-related stress affects their physical and emotional health and the organization/workplace.

In the quotes from participants, each discussion group participant/interviewee's personal code is included at the end of the quote. F refers to a discussion group participant, I refers to an individual interview respondent, NU is a non-unionized worker and U is a union member or an individual covered by a collective agreement. Each person was given a unique identification code.

### Work

We first asked participants what they generally liked and disliked about the work they had been doing. Common categories that came up in this study included peer and organizational support, pay and benefits, work schedules, working with the public, and the emotional and physical challenge of the tasks performed. The participants also discussed the fact that they were on non-standard work schedules.

Working on a part-time or casual basis seems to be a positive aspect of the job for a small number of respondents (mentioned by 7 of 59 respondents in 6 of 29 discussion groups/interviews). For example, when she was asked why she enjoyed non-standard work, one respondent explained that she liked having an activity that kept her busy.

*It keeps me busy...I'm not sitting at home, you know. I don't have no kids to worry about. Like my son is going to be 20 and I have a daughter 17 and they're both gone. So it's just, you know, me and that's it. I just like my job (F1U4).*

In responding to what they dislike about their work, many participants mentioned the lack of organizational support, particularly not feeling supported or valued by management in doing their non-standard job. Over half of the respondents (32 of 59) mentioned this in 21 (of 29) discussion groups/interviews.

One participant noted the poor communication in her workplace, and how that posed a problem for her as a part-time employee who is not at the work site as often as her full-time co-workers.

*And I also find communication isn't that clear in my store... 'cause we also ship out orders, they expect me to know the customers and everything. But I'm not there all the time, I'm only there part time, so I don't know what's going on all the time. It would be nice if they could fill me in a little more. And some of the people I work with, like my manager, I ask questions because...especially when I was first starting, getting to know things and learning things wasn't...I wasn't properly trained, I don't think. I'd ask questions and they try to ignore me and go on. I don't know, I don't think he likes his job too much so he kind of treats me badly (F6NU25).*

Other participants noted personal attributes of their superiors (especially the fact that they were male). They felt this resulted in poor working relationships with them. One woman (F7U29) said her store manager was a bottom line person who worked employees to the bone, and was more concerned with looking good to his bosses than with his employees' well-being. She found him to be very arrogant, to exhibit favouritism; he never gave compliments or encouraged his employees. (He just criticized.) Her store manager made her not want to go into work, because she never knew if she would get the silent treatment or criticism from him. Another participant (F7U27) in the discussion group said that she, along with other females in her workplace, had had a lot of problems with the department manager, who did not always treat women very well. She filed a grievance with the union and the department manager found out, and he consequently gave her the silent treatment, yelled at her when she made mistakes often enough that she would cry, and kept her after work when she would try to walk away. These comments show the work relationships that exists between genders, and between management and workers. They indicate that some men, who are often in management positions, tend to exert power over their female employees. These women, in turn, feel powerless because of their gender and their subservient position as non-standard workers.

A smaller number (9 of 59 respondents in 8 of 29 meetings) cited a dislike of non-standard work, in particular, part-time and casual work. A participant explained her feelings about the short notice of her work schedule when responding to a question about whether or not she liked part-time work.

*No, I don't like it [part-time work] at all because of the hours. Like I never know from one week to the other what hours I'm going to be working. Whether I'm going to have nights or days or weekends or what it's going to be. So until Thursday I don't know what I'm going to have the following Monday (F1U1).*

### **Work-Related Stress**

Participants were asked to indicate whether they felt any symptoms of stress arising from their non-standard work. Almost all (50 of 59 participants) said they experienced symptoms of work-related stress. Stress symptoms were discussed in all 29 meetings.

In explaining her inability to sleep through the night and feeling exhausted at the end of the day or at the end of a shift, one woman said:

*Stress is a constant ongoing problem. I'm out. I will collapse maybe for an hour and then I'll wake up for like three hours and then I'll go for another hour, and then I'm up like, even if it's a day off, I'm up at seven o'clock going — no. So it's totally disrupted my sleep pattern (F10NU39).*

When we asked about feeling burnt out, this young woman worker discussed her non-standard work (holding multiple part-time jobs) as contributing to her symptoms of stress.

*Actually yeah. At the end of every summer because I work full time throughout the summer. So I work at least 40 hours a week throughout the summer and then have other jobs on top of that. Such as baby-sitting and all that, and working at a concession stand. So it does get to the point where I am absolutely burnt out. And you just break down and you cry and I've done it so many times (F10NU39).*

Again as a symptom of stress, when we asked if they ever felt angry or felt like yelling at people, the participants said that was often the case. However, they (F11U40 and F11U41) had to hide those feelings which then, created even more stress for them.

In another discussion meeting, three of the four participants said there was a lot of stress in the workplace. They also attributed this stress to the fact that it was a family-owned business and there seemed to be nepotism. One explained:

*There is a lot of stress. And it's just like they...like one person will be on cash and everybody else will just be wandering the store because it's a family-owned business so the daughter of the guy who owns the place, you know, she feels that she can do whatever she wants and she feels like, you know, she can order people around. And they let you be on cash all by yourself when you have like five people waiting in line and you're just about like — yeah (F1U2).*

In another discussion group, one participant (F3U14) said she was really stressed. She was not feeling secure financially; she was single but wanted to spend time with her family, but could not because she was accepting every weekend shift so she could build up the hours to get her first raise and get some security in terms of seniority.

Another participant (F7U28) said she found her patience was so low that she was getting irritable with customers and co-workers very quickly. Then, she felt bad about herself for being this person but didn't know how to change it. This worker said stress symptoms were an ongoing problem, but have been worse in the last six months. She always felt exhausted at the end of the day, felt like crying, with no energy on the job,

and felt burnt out and like yelling at people. Her co-worker in this discussion group added that she (F7U27) got one to two headaches a week (never had them before working at the store), and felt lucky if she got three to four hours of sleep at night. She said:

*Even if I'm not at work, it is there in my head [happening for a while]  
(F7U27).*

She always felt exhausted at the end of the day, felt like crying, had no energy on the job; felt burnt out and wanted to yell at people. Adding to this, another participant said:

*I get two to three headaches a week, had eight migraines in the past year after none for many years and I have been at this workplace for only one year (F7U29).*

### **Reasons for Stress at Work**

Interviewees listed many reasons for stress. These reasons can be broken down into several sub-categories: non-standard work and working conditions in these jobs, psychosocial work factors and demographic factors.

#### ***Non-Standard Work and Working Conditions***

Forty-one of 59 respondents discussed their employment contracts and work schedules as reasons for their stress. This issue arose in 22 of 29 meetings. This included issues related to seniority and part-time status, hours of work in casual and part-time jobs as related to benefits, the shift work expected of non-standard workers, and the lack of regularity and continuity in work schedules and hours of work. This included the irregularity of work schedules, the short notice of the work scheduling, working split shifts, and the effects of these issues on their personal lives and personal well-being. These issues are part of the working conditions factor for non-standard female employees in retail trade. However, to emphasize the specific effect of non-standard work contributing to stress, we analyze the responses to that factor separately.

#### **Seniority and part-time/casual status**

Being part time often meant their ability to gain seniority was hindered, especially since the newer contracts based seniority on the number of hours worked, rather than on straight tenure with the organization. Seniority (or lack of it) was a concern even for non-unionized employees and those working as casuals. This issue was identified as a major source of stress for everyone.

Seniority affected the work hours of part-time workers. Those with high seniority got the first choice in hours and part-time workers had to squeeze in their schedules accordingly. An interviewee (I1U1) mentioned a similar situation in her place of employment: hours scheduled by seniority were stressful to non-standard workers wanting more seniority, especially those

with families, because they could not get benefits until they attained permanent part-time status. At the time of the interview, there was only one permanent part-time employee in her store, and this person only received some benefits.

Working continuously in the same workplace, but for a few hours per week, resulted in low seniority for part-time workers. This was a source of stress for them because they were always low in seniority and full-time employees passed them by and earned more. One part-time worker (F2U5) was frustrated because her employer required her to help train these full-time employees, whom she knew would receive better treatment and better pay in their full-time jobs, even though she had been at the workplace for a longer time.

### **Hours of work in casual and part-time jobs as related to benefits**

Another example of stress is explained by a non-standard worker who was called a part-time employee but worked full-time hours. This person was questioning why she was given so many hours with no benefits and why she was expected to do so much.

*I'm going to tell you something — being considered a temp personnel, why give me 40 hours a week? There's no benefit by making less than half what the other guys are making. Why give me the 40? Then give me what I am, give me 15 to 20 hours. Don't expect so much from me (F1U3).*

Other part-time workers also regretted the fact that they had part-time contracts but were working close to full-time hours, without benefits.

*I feel the stress with working part time, like especially in the office. I found that was difficult because it was almost like you had a full-time job. Like I was working almost 39 hours every week. And I was still classed as part time and I wasn't getting any benefits out of it (F3U11).*

### **Shift work expected of non-standard workers**

In most cases, part-time workers were expected to work on Sundays or weekend shifts. According to laws in Ontario, this is voluntary, but some participants said they were somewhat forced into working weekend shifts. This, in their view, is a source of stress for them.

*There's not enough workers in the department and therefore we're forced to work on Sundays even though that's supposed to be voluntary.... See we used to...actually, we used to have a sign up sheet — what Sundays you could work and what Sundays you couldn't.... Like I agreed to work two Sundays a month but they have to be the early shifts because I have a family at home and on Sunday the afternoon is strictly for my husband and my son. So that's the time I set aside for them. On the rare occasion lately I've been working every...I've worked four Sundays and it's been all day (F2U8).*

### **Irregularity of work schedules and unpredictability of hours of work**

Over half (31 of 59) of the participants had a particular concern with their non-standard work schedules and hours of work. This topic arose in 16 of 29 discussions. Common topics that arose here were the irregularity of work schedules, the short notice of the work scheduling, working split shifts, and the effects of these issues on their personal lives and personal well-being.

The irregularity in work hours was a source of stress. Many participants revealed that during some weeks they worked 20 to 30 hours, while in other weeks they were lucky to get a single three-hour shift. This variability often depended on how busy their store was. In addition, their schedules were often provided to them just a few days prior to the work week.

*No, I don't like it [working part time] at all because of the hours. Like I never know from one week to the other what hours I'm going to be working. Whether I'm going to have nights or days or weekends or what it's going to be. So until Thursday I don't know what I'm going to have the following Monday. And then sometimes we'll go on a shift of straight mornings, like six o'clock, and then all of a sudden they're calling you in for an all night. ...so that's part of it [the stressful environment], not knowing whether it's morning or night sometimes I'm getting up early and the next day I'm not.... But we used to get 40 hours and now, like I said, it's 24 hours or under. And some people are getting five hours. It was straight eight-hour shifts and now there's a lot of five-hour shifts...I still have eight-hour shifts, but it's the constant uncertainty (F1U1).*

The inconsistency in hours and not having hours guaranteed in non-standard jobs were mentioned by many others (F3U13, F3U16, F9NU37). One participant (F2U8) mentioned the split shifts as a source of stress for part-time workers. In the same discussion group, another added:

*I think working part time, for me, is stressful. More stressful than a full-time job because of the hours and how they vary (F2U7).*

The unpredictability of a weekly income as a result of such irregular work schedules also proved to be a source of stress for non-standard workers (F3U12). This resulted in the inability of these women to organize their personal lives, which was a source of stress for them (F3U14, F3U13, F3U16 and F7U29). Being routinely scheduled for "bad" hours (i.e., late night shifts, weekend shifts) was also a source of stress (F4U18).

### **Wages and benefits**

Wage and benefit issues arose consistently throughout the discussion groups and interviews. Many part-time and casual working women felt they were not paid as well nor receiving the same benefits as their permanent, full-time counterparts. This was a source of stress for most of them as these individuals were often given the same work and responsibilities as their full-

time co-workers. This issue came up in 19 of the 29 meetings, with 30 participants discussing wages and benefits together.

Part-time workers considered their low wages to be a source of stress, particularly the inequalities in wages between those doing the same job but with different wages due to seniority. In an interview, another participant (I8U8) said low wages and the fact that her benefits did not cover very much (e.g., she had no sick days) contributed to stress. Her place of employment went on strike in 1993 which resulted in her taking a pay cut, and now, after eight years, her wage has finally risen to the rate she was earning in 1993. In another discussion group, participants (F4U18 and F4U19) explained how the hierarchy in pay according to the employment contract (of being full-time, permanent part-time or casual part-time) was a source of stress for them.

Few, if any, of these participants received benefits, compared to their permanent full-time counterparts. The seasonality of jobs and the industry these respondents work in (i.e., the agricultural retail near farming sector) resulted in no benefits for many participants. For one discussion group (F9), the participants' lack of benefits, such as overtime pay, was a stress factor. These summer greenhouse workers were aware of the current legislation and knew they were left "out in the cold" as "supposed" farmers without any legally required benefits. These individuals knew that because they were seasonal workers, and because they were in an agricultural line of work, they had little to no protection from the law with regard to work hours, pay, etc. They were also fully aware that their employers were taking advantage of the lack of laws governing them, which created additional stress for them.

Referring to the lack of benefits to cover their uniforms and the requirement to buy them, the participants in a non-unionized workplace found this to be a contributing factor to stress (F9NU36, F9NU37). Another interviewee remarked that she found the lack of uniform benefits very frustrating, because employers expect you to begin a job wearing the proper uniform and shoes, which could cost you anywhere from \$80 to \$120. She said:

*When you begin at \$8 per hour, it is very difficult to go and purchase these items (I13U13).*

Another respondent had this to say about not having benefits.

*[It worries me]...I've always been single, I raised my son by myself, and there was never, I've never had benefits, other than when the few times I was on mothers allowance, when I was out of work (I18U18).*

### **Lack of job security for non-standard workers**

Being part-time or temporary workers often meant jobs were continually at risk. These concerns arose in 11 of the 29 meetings, and were discussed by 13 of 59 individuals.

One young employee noted:



*Being a part-time employee, like it's almost like you're insecure about your job, because you're scared that you're going to get fired, or you're going to get disrespected, or being a full-time employee you know, you've been in the company for a while because you're full time, you're pretty secure (I5U5).*

A casual (seasonal) worker felt that not being in a union had an impact on her job security.

*But you also do feel, like more stress of knowing that since I'm not in a union that if I do call in sick I do have the potential of immediately losing my job. (F9NU37)*

### ***Psychosocial Work Factors as Related to Non-Standard Work***

The lack of supervisor support for non-standard workers was by far the most cited reason contributing to work stress. Most of the respondents (51 of the 59 respondents) mentioned this factor (in 26 of the 29 meetings overall). This issue often led to a variety of negative consequences, including low morale within the department as the workers do not feel appreciated. The employees' work often goes unnoticed, and they are rarely praised for their accomplishments. In some cases, managers were demeaning to workers. In some cases, managers simply did not know how to manage employees well, or the manager was a unionized employee and the workers felt there would be a conflict of interest if they complained.

*We are so busy that sometimes we don't get our break and no one ever says thanks for your extra effort, for helping out, and then I wonder does anyone even notice that I'm going the extra mile? When nobody says anything to you and you are going the extra mile, it makes you feel so unappreciated (F7U28).*

Participants also felt a lack of respect from management's unwillingness to invest in female non-standard employees. In some cases, the part-time working women, in particular, felt like they had no value to the company, that they were expendable. They noted that some of the managers in their workplace had made the comment: "Well, if you don't do it, we'll just get someone else" (F4U18, F4U19).

Respondents also found that the inability to have control over their work as non-standard employees was a source of stress for them. This included being able to make decisions regarding their work, being able to operate various machines and equipment, and having significant input into the scheduling of their shifts. Such issues came up in about half the meetings (15 of 29 meetings, discussed by 17 respondents).

Some respondents felt their status as part-time or casual employees was not respected by management, by their full-time counterparts and by customers. This issue arose in nearly half the meetings (15 of 29) and was discussed by 31 (of 59) individuals. For example, one participant described the discrimination she felt as a part-time worker, despite the fact that she did the same job as a full-time employee. This was a source of stress for her.

*And in some ways, as a part-timer and with the stress and with everything else, in some ways I feel as a worker, an employee, I feel a little bit discriminated. A little bit, probably 50 percent. Because I have an education behind me too and I have a very good work record and I need money also and I'm a young woman, 35 years old. Why not offer me a full-time job? I'm doing the same thing! You see, so those kinds of things, you know, are stress related to me (F1U1).*

The conversation continued with another discussion group member, describing the stress she felt from the stigma attached to part-time workers.

*Well...to work part-time, and working on a casual basis... you'll get looked at as a person who has no goals in your life, you're a loser, you know...there's other factors of stress too, other things. The way people look at you, like, they think: "Look at you, you're 35 years old, if you had this kind of a job before how could you end up here?" Like, people really don't know your place in life and the past that's happened. Being labelled as part time or casual, um, just the words really are stressful. When you actually work at it, just the way people look at you, the others in the company (F1U3).*

In another discussion group, the dialogue regarding the disrespect of part-time workers centred on the different treatment of part-time and full-time workers.

*I think one thing that is very stressful that I find in our store and our company is that full-timers, whether it be head office or whether it be in the store, are treated differently than part-timers.... And I understand what you guys [others in the discussion group] are saying. In our stores, in our company, part-timers — we're treated like we're nothing. Basically, they can replace you. "You do the work and you know what? If you don't want to do it then you can leave because we can replace you." It's only a part-timer (F2U5).*

When asked to elaborate on the "part-time/full-time difference" they were mentioning, one participant said:

*I mean in my department, the produce department, there are the four guys that are full time and one of them is the department manager who's in charge of my department. But then you've got...like, in their department they have the one manager and that's full-time. But we're the part-time people so we're the third-class citizen as far as I'm concerned (F2U8).*

A small number of non-standard workers in this study discussed harassment at their workplace. This harassment tended to emanate from co-workers and customers (F2U7 and I17U17). This topic was discussed by 10 of 59 respondents in 8 of 29 meetings.

The harassment appeared, in many cases, to be directed at the females from their male co-workers. This male part-time worker provided his observations about harassment of females in his workplace.

*There's a lot of verbal harassment [in our place of work].... Making fun, kind of thing, of someone. You know, and making fun of them in a sexual way verbally. And, actually, somebody's been fired for sexual harassment.... And with the females, they feel really intimidated by the way the males may make fun of them or something. Or even just observing how the males make fun of each other scares them and kind of makes them feel uncomfortable working with us. I think it's even worse for cashiers because they're sitting at the same spot and packers can move where they want, to pack for whichever cashier. So there's a lot of entrapment if you think about it 'cause they can't move around and they can't avoid us as a packer, right? The packer can just come and talk whenever he wants to.... I've had cashiers ask me to pack for them to avoid another packer from coming to their till...and I don't know if they've brought it up to the employer or not. I know nothing has been done about it. But I see that all the time (F11U41).*

### **Demographic Factors**

Basic demographic factors were presented as sources of stress in the workplace for our part-time and casual workers. Gender and age were singled out as the most prevalent sources of stress. The female non-standard workers in this study did not discuss race or ethnicity as factors contributing to their stress.

### **Gender**

Being a female part-time or casual worker in the retail environment appeared to be a significant source of stress for many of our participants. This issue arose in 19 of the 29 meetings, and it was discussed by 27 of our 59 respondents.

A part-time female worker in a hardware store discussed the stress she felt from the female stereotypes that both co-workers and customers projected toward her.

*It's just some people that you work with have the stereotype...stuff like girls to stay at the cash and boys to do the work. We overcome it eventually but it's constantly [there].... Stress is a constant ongoing problem. If you deal with elderly customers who don't understand you, who are stuck in their ways and you're trying to explain it to them and they just overlook you and say: "Where's the man?" and walk away (F10NU39).*

In another discussion group, two male participants (F11U41 and F11U40) talked about a similar situation. They outlined how the males and females were segregated into different positions, and how the female part-time and casual workers appeared to exhibit more stress because of their positions. They also distinguished between the emotional and physical stress they felt differed between the sexes. One explained:

*I would say mental stress, it's females more at the store, compared to the front end. Physical stress, males have more, because girls don't parcel pickup or anything like that. I mean standing in one spot all day is pretty crappy and it might be hard on your feet, but it's not physically tough. So I would say the physical stress goes to the guys (F11U40).*

The following dialogue took place among the part-time and casual working women (F1U4, F1U3 and F1U1) about their wages and the work they do, compared to their male counterparts.

*It's frustrating. They're making \$6 more and you're doing the same thing as they're doing (F1U1).*

*Yeah. Like we do what they do, the men, when we're in the warehouses. We have to run the machines but we also have to throw cases. Sometimes, we have to throw 300 to 400 cases just like they do. Like they get 1,000 cases a day to throw, like that's it (F1U4).*

The participants in this discussion group also added that they were not even offered permanent part-time positions, because they were women and permanent positions were not considered for them. As a result, they were stressed and frustrated (F1U3).

In another discussion group, being female as contributing to work stress was mentioned and explained in this way.

*Men are treated a little bit differently than women are. Definitely. It's OK for a man to have a mood swing and be grumpy and yell at you — that's OK — [agreement by the others] but if a woman does it...you get the jokes about PMS [agreement by the others]. You get: "What's her problem, she's just a you know what" — and we're not accepted. And, again, like I told the moderator before, you go to a manager as a female...and I know this from being a department head for a while...they don't take you nearly as seriously as a male manager going to the store manager. Their things are done right away. You're a female. "Oh, you're overreacting [agreement by the others]. It's not a big deal; deal with it on your own. And that's a big thing (F2U5).*

Women non-standard workers in a discussion group also talked about how they were discriminated against because of their gender when it came to training, and how this was a source of stress for them (F2U8 and F2U5). These participants wanted training for health and safety purposes, but they were denied the opportunity.

*In the meat department when I go to get my chickens — it's unreal. [I'm often asked:] "Where's the guys today? You can't do that, you're a girl." They [the men] don't appreciate it. And it's uncalled for, because I'm not trained on power jacks so I have to use the hand jack and, yes, they are*

*heavy. If I could use the power one, all I do is push a button and it holds it for me. So, you know, there's a lot of stress when it comes to that (F2U8).*

### **Age**

Being too old or too young appeared to be a source of stress for many of our participants. This issue arose in just about half the meetings (15 of 29 meetings) and was discussed by 17 (of 59) respondents. For example, the younger non-standard workers in non-unionized work environments (F10 participants) felt downright exploited, because of their poor working conditions. Many of them connected this to their age (and gender). This was particularly difficult for them, because they knew they were being exploited, yet they needed the employment to cover their school and other expenses.

One interviewee (I2U2) provided some details. She explained that two older females at work with families were very stressed and worried about money, and they wanted benefits. It is quite stressful and frustrating for older workers with less education, because younger workers with education but no work experience in the company get manager-type jobs. She went on to say that these younger workers get hired out of school and have no idea how things in a store actually work. Other workers in her workplace were discouraged that these young guys were telling them what to do, but they could not sympathize with how hard the job is or could not understand the difficult working conditions. She felt it would be better if older workers had opportunities for promotion to these positions as it would be more encouraging for them.

*It would be discouraging to know I could never move up in my job (I2U2).*

This is stressful for other workers who work at the store as their career. She went on to explain how shifts were assigned.

*Older part-time workers get earlier eight-hour shifts on busy weekends because younger workers [are] assumed to be able to handle the busier, harder work. Older part-time workers always get Sundays off; younger workers always scheduled [on Sundays] (I2U2).*

A discussion group participant compared age and gender factors as contributing to stress and found gender to be a more significant factor. She said:

*I'm the only one who has a licence [to deliver products] out of the part-time workers. And I'm not allowed to drive the delivery truck, because who wants a female delivering their barbecue, sort of thing. So that privilege is taken away from me, because I'm a female. And even if I were older, they still wouldn't let me do it. A lot of people think I'm younger than I actually am so they'll say: "Don't worry about it little girl," and walk away. Which is very aggravating (F10NU39).*

### Combined Effects of Stress

The participants in each discussion group and interview were shown the model and asked whether they thought the stress they experienced was a result of multiple factors as demonstrated in the model. Unfortunately, many individuals were confused by this question, and most of the workers were unable to answer the question directly. However, as can be seen in the quotes, many participants identified more than one source of stress without realizing they had done so. This is especially true in the category of multiple personal commitments. About a third of the respondents (21 of 59) explicitly identified multiple sources when asked how the model reflected the stress they experienced as part-time and casual workers. This topic was discussed in 15 of 29 discussion groups and interviews.

The combined effects of stress were particularly prevalent among women non-standard workers who had another significant activity that took large portions of their time. These activities included attending school full time, raising children, taking care of their houses and homes, and working at another job.

One female student identified having to manage school and working part time as a source of stress for her.

*Well with me, working part time and going to school. I mean it's not a huge stress factor, but the factor is there, because you are trying to juggle so many things — when exams are coming and things like that. Like, it gets a little bit stressful, but like I said, being here, working here, they are pretty good with that (I4U4).*

A number of our respondents identified juggling non-standard work with other commitments, such as school, dependants, other jobs and volunteer work, as a considerable source of stress for them. A female discussion group member described the stress from her multiple commitments.

*Yeah, I find it hard to balance it too. Part-time jobs are good in that sense that they give you the options to be able to balance it. But I know when I was younger, even like two years ago or when my OACs [final year of high school] started coming up, I found it really hard. Right away I just cut my schedule down, you know what I mean? And I didn't work that much and even that was still kind of too demanding and I got really stressed (F11U41).*

One part-time worker complained that other workers did not have to juggle the multiple activities she had to, yet they claimed to have stress.

*I was just going to comment, it seems to be an easy crutch for a lot of people to go to the doctor and get a leave of absence for a month, or get a leave of absence for whatever reason. The majority of them say stress. And I'll think — stress? Like give me a break. OK, be married with two children and juggle*

*a part-time job and home life and everything else, and then you talk to me about stress. You're single, you have no dependants and then you come in here and tell me you're under stress, you need six weeks off. Oh please! You know, I can't empathize with someone for that. I have no sympathy for people like that (F3U16).*

One high school student who was working at two part-time jobs described the stress and the sacrifices she had to make from trying to fulfill multiple commitments.

*Especially just recently when we had exams like the week before. It was Sound of Music Festival and I had to be working there anyway and I'd taken, you know, a week off my other job. But I couldn't take time off there and ended up working practically every single day and did not have time to study for exams. And that was really stressful. And I had to cram and that is not good for you. And tired, like, being tired is really stressful (F9NU22).*

Some other participants outlined how trying to satisfy various commitments and engaging in various activities on top of their part-time job was a source of stress for them. One member of a discussion group (F7U29) said she was stressed, because she has to plan her life around the part-time schedule hours, resulting in having to juggle her work and her kids. Her work shifts were all over the place, so it was hard to book doctor appointments and the like, especially since her shifts were not consistent. Another member in the meeting (F7U28) said that working two part-time jobs was very upsetting for her because she had to work seven days a week running around all over the place but she still did not make a lot of money. She also noted that school and work was hard to juggle. Another participant (F8NU31) felt that students were stressed from trying to balance school and work, because work impeded their ability to do school work or finish projects. A student (F8NU31), who held a part-time job, says that when she was at work, she often thought about her school projects. Because her schedule at work came out the week before, if she was given a last minute test or assignment at school, she did not have time to do it, as she was unable to book time off to study.

### **Factors Decreasing Stress**

Interview participants also indicated there were some things associated with their non-standard work and their work environment that contributed to a less stressful work experience. The sub-categories for these responses were almost identical to the reasons that contributed to an increase in work stress for women in part-time and casual jobs. The most common factors included having a flexible work schedule, having supervisor support, the ability to seek co-worker support, and being given a high or acceptable wage and good benefits.

#### ***Flexible Work Schedule***

Some individuals enjoyed the flexibility and variety of their part-time and casual jobs. This helped decrease stress for 13 (of 59) respondents, in 10 of 29 meetings.

*I don't think I could be at one or the other place for full-time hours. I like having the difference (F8NU30).*

They liked the fact that their schedule varied from week to week. One said she could submit her availability and her employer would try to accommodate her. She found that having the flexibility to set her own hours decreased her stress. Another non-standard worker explained how her flexible schedule and an accommodating employer permitted her to do other things in her life that she would not otherwise be able to do.

### ***The Presence of Supervisor Support***

The support of their supervisors, managers and employers reduced stress for our participants. This was mentioned in 10 of 29 meetings, and discussed by 12 of 59 participants. A member of one discussion group described a situation where her employer was compassionate and supported her during a difficult time in her life. She specifically praised the emotional support of her employer.

*With my job, mental support...like emotional support is really there especially from the owner itself. Whereas...a perfect example, last year there was a car accident...death of two teenagers, and another one paralyzed — my best friend. So I found out and right away he just took me right into the back and I think I talked to him for about an hour. And then he gave me the whole week off and he said: "You call me when you're ready to come back." And he would constantly call me to see how I was doing. So he's very supporting in that way (F10NU39).*

One interviewee talked about how her employer was concerned about her work-related stress. She described the flexibility in scheduling hours and time off provided when she felt too much stress.

*They won't give me nine-hour days, those kinds of things, I pretty much can make up my own schedule and they'll accommodate that [my availability], and then they'll work around that and, if I say, if I was to tell them, I'm working too much and it's just too stressful, they'd say: "OK, we'll cut back for you," so, I get to work in that kind of environment, which is good (I12NU12).*

### ***Peer Support***

Some participants identified peer support and good working relationships with their co-workers as decreasing stress in the workplace and with their non-standard jobs. Fifteen (of 59) respondents mentioned this, and it came up for discussion in 10 (of 29) meetings.

A non-standard worker (F9NU35) noted how working with people that were similar to her in age and working in a small business contributed to an enjoyable workplace. Another worker (F9NU34) emphasized how much she enjoyed working with her co-workers, and she said she felt needed, and they cared about her. This helped her enjoy her work.



Having good friends at work can turn undesirable shifts into pleasant ones.

*Even though I hate working Sundays, still it was fun. We'd all bring a treat and stuff. We wouldn't have a break but we'd lay everything out on the desk and we'd nibble between customers and whatnot. It was fun...I enjoyed it. I hate working Sundays but I liked that (F4U18).*

In some cases, peer support decreased stress, but this support was divided among full-time and part-time workers, and men and women. Typically, men held the full-time positions, while women primarily filled part-time positions. These discussion group members described a situation where peer support significantly contributed to their positive experience of non-standard work in a predominately male environment.

*We don't gossip behind each others' backs or I don't talk bad about her [pointing to another discussion group member] to the guys or whatever. Like we stick together, us three girls. You have to because they [the males] stick together. They support each other in there like you wouldn't believe (F1U3).*

### ***Wages and Benefits***

Having acceptable wages and benefits in their non-standard positions seemed to decrease stress for those individuals who were satisfied with their remuneration. Twelve of 59 respondents mentioned wages and benefits as decreasing stress. This topic arose in 11 of 29 meetings.

Fairness in earnings seemed to be an issue that decreased stress. A part-time greenhouse worker said she was pleased that she was paid for her entire time on the job site, not just for her fixed shift hours. That way, if more time was needed to get the work done, then they did not feel they were volunteering their time to complete their tasks.

*We get paid to the minute, so if you clock in a few minutes early and then you stay an extra 20 minutes to help out, you know you're going to get paid for every minute that you've done. It definitely helps the atmosphere of the place. No one is saying: "Oh I'm still here after my hours, I don't want to be here, I don't want to work anymore, I'm not getting paid." Like it's never an issue with that. So people like to stay after for at least a few minutes to help and get everything done on time (F10NU38).*

In several cases, the same workplace had different contracts with employees who entered the organization at different times. Those individuals covered by better (and older) contracts tended to be satisfied with their pay.

*As far as the pay, it's pretty good. Fortunately, I got hired before this new contract just came up which was in September. And that kind of...I don't know, it's not very beneficial to the staff that are being hired. But I'm happy with the rate of pay that I'm getting. Especially in relation to the other part-time workers that are my friends at other jobs (F11U41).*

Another non-standard worker (I11U11) explained her satisfaction with her pay, due largely to seniority. Again relating to seniority and tenure, getting raises appeared to be a source of decreasing stress for part-time and casual workers (I12U12 and I18U18). Getting benefits was also a source of decreased stress, especially since many part-time and casual employees do not expect to get benefits. Another participant (F3U14) compared her workplace to her previous place of employment, noting how excited she was to find she was going to get a bonus — something she was not used to or expecting to receive.

## **Outcomes of Stress**

### ***Physical Health Problems***

Many of the non-standard women workers in this study indicated they experienced some physical problems associated with stress. The most common were musculoskeletal disorders, and migraines or headaches. Other physical problems that people encountered included eczema and other skin diseases, arthritis, respiratory illnesses and heart disease. There is one note to keep in mind: the health problems that the non-standard women workers are experiencing may or may not be due to work stress. We are not able to determine that information ourselves; we are reporting what the women say they perceive to be ailments due to stress.

### **Musculoskeletal disorders**

Just over half the respondents (31 of 59) mentioned this in 26 of the 29 discussion groups and interviews. One participant (F7U27) mentioned she had been seeing a chiropractor for the last six months for her back and neck pain, and she had had pain in her wrist and thumb for the last six months due to a problem with her tendon arising from nine years of work.

When asked if they had physical health problems as a result of stress, one female participant working in a part-time job said:

*I don't know too much about tendonitis, but I know that when I stopped doing this motion by packing groceries in the bag that is very repetitive, and I find myself grabbing the bag with the opposite hand and switching, and finding right away a direct relationship to how I felt and the pain going away.... I remember last summer I was working there a lot more, pretty much everyday, and my shoulder was just killing...but it's gone away now just because I haven't been working too many shifts a week (F11U41).*

Another respondent (F1U4) described her deteriorating body from the repetitive work she was doing, which resulted in tendonitis. Tendonitis appeared to be a common disorder among the part-time and casual workers in the retail industry (I1U1).

*There's a lot of cashiers that have carpal tunnel or tendonitis — there's a lot of them. A lot have got chronic back pain from...most of our departments here...I know from my department we're constantly bent over, we are never actually ever standing up straight. If you're at the cash you're bent over, if*

*you're at the counter you're bent over, if you're doing prep you're bent over. You are always bent over (F2U5).*

A couple of participants (F3U14 and F3U13) discussed how the tasks at their workplaces had resulted in various types of pain in their feet, back and elbows. Back, neck and shoulder pain due to the physical nature of the job seemed to be prevalent, but this pain seemed to appear more when the workplace became busy (presumably when these workers were becoming increasingly stressed) (I16U16).

Some part-time and casual workers continued to work at their jobs and to do the same tasks despite the fact that they believed their jobs had resulted in physical injury over time, because they were concerned about their job security.

*I think that causes stress in itself. Like I know that if I can't lift 50 pounds throughout my whole shift constantly, I don't have a job. You know, if you can't pull your weight and lift that much, then there isn't a position for you, because there isn't like easier work. So you do it or, like I say, you get [pain in the arms or back] (F1U1).*

### **Migraines/headaches**

Of 59 respondents, 24 identified headaches and migraines as an outcome of stress for them. This issue arose in 24 of 29 meetings. When we asked one respondent in a discussion group if she had physical health problems as a result of being stressed, she responded that her headaches were a result of both her non-standard work and her personal life.

*I get tension headaches. And I know a lot of it is stress related, that is, some part of it is through work and some part of it [is my personal life] (F3U16).*

### ***Emotional Health Problems***

The two most common effects of stress on emotional well-being that participants reported were low motivation and morale, and low self-esteem. Some also said they felt dissatisfied with their part-time and casual jobs and they were generally unhappy at work.

### **Low motivation/morale**

Many respondents found that their individual morale and their motivation levels decreased as they experienced more stress on the job. This was mentioned in 22 of the 29 discussion groups/interviews; 30 (of 59) respondents discussed this issue.

One participant talked about how her motivation levels tended to drop.

*Lately, I don't really care about that job, like, I just, I could care less if I finish cleaning the store, so I'm not very motivated at all for that anymore. Like, the manager will ask me to do something, you're like OK, but I don't do it, like, and that's horrible, because usually I'm not like that at all. Like, I like to get things done, and, but I just don't care anymore (I9U9).*

Another non-standard worker (I4U4) made similar remarks about her motivation levels and how it often declined during a shift due to stress. One respondent (F7U27) felt that stress affected her job and, as a result, she was not as motivated to be friendly and chatty to customers. She often thought about walking out on her non-standard job because of stress. When she did experience stress, she did not treat her co-workers and customers as well as she should. There are times when she could not serve customers, because she was shaky and her eyes were filling up with tears as a result of the stress arising from her co-workers. Another participant (F7U28) often wondered if she was in the right line of work and how much longer she could continue to go to work. This respondent regularly considered leaving her part-time job, because she took her stress out on her family and friends after work.

### **Low self-esteem**

Some participants found they experienced lowered self-esteem as a result of the stress in their part-time and casual jobs. This was mentioned by 14 (of 59) respondents in 14 (of 29) discussion groups and interviews. Several part-time and casual workers found that work stress made them feel discouraged and “less than human,” because of co-workers, management and customers. Frequent complaints relating to lowered self-esteem included a lack of acknowledgment and praise.

One worker described how he felt sometimes when at work. He found himself questioning his skills and his ability as a worker.

*Actually, I just found out today...on that self-esteem part too...I actually do find myself just being discouraged and discouraging myself, just 'cause, when I do something it's part of my personality, when I do something I work hard for it. They [management] totally ignore the good thing that I did, right? So I kind of find myself saying: "What's wrong with me?... I work so hard here and am I really that bad of a worker?" Questioning my skills just because I find that employer doesn't know how to acknowledge the good things that we do (F11U41).*

A part-time worker (F7U29) in another discussion group mentioned both the condescending attitude her manager demonstrated toward her and the resulting doubts she began to have about her ability to do her work. She said she questioned herself all the time, and these incidents often made her think of leaving her job.

### **Decreased job satisfaction**

Some participants (14 of 59 respondents) found they experienced low job satisfaction when they were stressed on the job. This outcome arose in 11 of the 29 meetings in our study. In some cases, the women were generally unhappy while at work, and they found themselves just coming in to do their shift without any feelings of pride or fulfillment (F1U3).

*So everybody is miserable. Like they've even said that toward management that the morale is so bad it's unbelievable. And everybody is strictly — "I'm*

*just coming in and punching in and punching out”— there’s nothing there anymore (F1U1).*

### **Workplace Problems**

The interview and discussion group participants felt that, in many cases, the high levels of absenteeism and turnover were a result of stress from non-standard jobs. The women workers also felt workplace stress led to lower workplace morale, a less happy work environment and a higher likelihood of employees getting into conflict with other workers and with their supervisors/management. Once again, we must caution that these organizational effects are only reports of what our respondents perceive as effects resulting from stress.

Turnover was the most discussed organizational outcome; however, turnover in the various companies was attributed to a variety of other factors rather than stress. Overall, 22 of the 59 respondents identified turnover as an organizational outcome, and it was mentioned in 18 of 29 meetings. Much of the turnover respondents spoke of was a result of a host of other issues related to the non-standard jobs in the retail sector. Participants cited the fact that some jobs were seasonal, with naturally high turnover, because of that aspect. In other cases, turnover was high because many of the people employed were students and they had to return to school. One person mentioned there was high turnover in her organization, because many of her co-workers were very young and were not likely to stay. Other reasons, indirectly related to stress, included a lack of incentive to stay, low wages, inconsistent hours, a lack of promotion opportunities, being overworked, having an undesirable or unglamorous job, and poor management.

Absenteeism was mentioned in 14 of the 29 meetings, with 17 (of 59) participants discussing absenteeism in total.

A small group of study participants noted that stress arising from part-time and casual work in the retail industry was demonstrated through low workplace morale and an unhappy work atmosphere. This was identified in 12 of 29 meetings by 17 of 59 respondents.

A small number of participants cited the willingness to engage in conflict as a manifestation of stress in the work environment. Seventeen of the 59 participants discussed this topic, in 14 of the 29 meetings.

A non-unionized respondent briefly described the conflict between the part-time staff and the managers in her store.

*I think there’s a lot of conflict between workers in our store because all the part timers, when we’re in together and the managers go on break, there’s resentment (F6NU24).*

## Summary

Overall, interviews and discussion groups with the individuals in this study provided much information about what non-standard women workers liked and disliked about the work they had been doing, their work-related stress, the factors affecting stress and the outcomes of the stress. Female non-standard workers enjoyed various aspects of their workplaces, such as job flexibility. Their dislikes included the lack of trust, compassion and respect from their managers, poor workplace communication, discrimination by male co-workers and the short notice they received with regard to work schedules. Fatigue, exhaustion and dizziness were common symptoms of work stress.

Various aspects of the non-standard work were sources of stress for women. The nature of non-standard work itself was a source of stress. The respondents cited the inability to gain seniority in part-time and casual jobs; having a part-time employment contract but working full-time hours (without benefits); shift work (weekend and evening shifts); the irregularity of work schedules and the unpredictability of hours of work. Poor working conditions, particularly low wages and benefits (sometimes no benefits) and no job security were reasons for stress for these participants. Psychosocial work factors were important sources of stress as well. The lack of management support for women in non-standard jobs was the most commonly discussed reason for stress at work. Lack of control over their work and not being respected for being a non-standard worker were other psychosocial sources of stress. Their treatment at work (i.e., as female non-standard workers and being either old or young) was an additional source of stress. Personal responsibilities, such as caring for dependants, juggling multiple commitments and dealing with abusive customers amplified the stress. Respondents also acknowledged that many of the factors they cited combined to produce more stress. Musculoskeletal disorders, migraines and headaches were common in female workers in non-standard jobs. In addition, their sense of self-esteem, motivation and individual morale tended to decrease in part-time and casual jobs. Workers felt these physical health problems, perceptions of self-esteem, the lack of motivation and feelings of low job satisfaction were affected by the stress at work. Participants also believed absenteeism, high turnover and workplace conflict escalated as a result of stress, accompanied by lower job satisfaction and diminished workplace morale.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusions**

Based on our interviews with the OHS representatives, health and safety issues are not dealt with in a timely manner by employers, and the health and safety of workers are not priorities. Common health problems that OHS representatives see among women workers in part-time and casual jobs include musculoskeletal disorders and migraine headaches. These health problems are found most often among cashiers, front-end staff, meat wrappers and service clerks, which are positions dominated by female non-standard workers. Symptoms of stress, such as exhaustion, feeling burnt out, the desire to cry and yell, and anxiety, are prevalent in their workplaces, and individual self-esteem, motivation and job satisfaction are all affected by worker stress. Increased absenteeism, staff turnover and workplace conflict appear to be common in workplaces due to stress.

Based on our discussion group meetings and interviews with women non-standard workers, we concluded that female part-time and casual workers in the retail sector experience a considerable amount of stress from their work. The workers were often exhausted after their shifts and sometimes they were unable to sleep through the night as a result of stress. Many factors contribute to this stress. Non-standard work conditions are a major source of this stress. Other sources include the inability to gain seniority quickly in non-standard jobs, low wages and few benefits, inconsistent work schedules, the unpredictability of hours and minimal job security. Not having the support of their managers, not being respected as a non-standard worker, and harassment by peers and customers are additional sources of stress for female non-standard workers. Gender (female) and age (old or young) also play roles in contributing to stress. A combination of these factors produces even more stress for these women workers.

These sources of stress produce various outcomes. Common physical health problems from stress include musculoskeletal disorders, headaches and migraines. Stress also results in low levels of self-esteem, motivation and individual morale, and reduced job satisfaction. In organizations where female workers in part-time and casual jobs are stressed, there is high turnover and absenteeism, low workplace morale and a higher likelihood for conflicts to exist. Since retail trade has the highest percentage of women in non-standard jobs in Canada, we argue that our findings are similar to the experiences of female workers in non-standard jobs. However, we recommend more studies to support the conclusions of this research.

### **Recommendations**

Our recommendations are based on an overall analysis of our findings, suggestions raised by the occupational health and safety representatives and by female workers who live with the part-time or casual work experience on a day-to-day basis. We should note that our recommendations focus only on the retail trade, because most of the respondents in this study worked in retail food stores (e.g., department stores, beer stores, specialty food stores and

coffee shops), retail personal services stores (e.g., flower shops, hardware stores, photo labs or pharmacy sections of department stores), clothing stores (e.g., small specialized clothing stores in malls), and the retail agriculture sector (e.g., garden centres). Our recommendations should also be taken in the context of the women workers' demographic characteristics, workplace experiences, perceived work stress and work satisfaction.

Certain characteristics of the workplaces should be kept in mind in reading our recommendations. For example, respondents often referred to the management staff. These individuals in management are employed on a full-time basis, while almost all lower-level service workers are in non-standard employment. Men dominate the management level; women dominate the lower level (called the "front end" or customer contact level by the respondents). Most of the jobs at this level are part time or casual. We found that the gendered nature of the work for women in retail trade and the gendered division of labour in retail workplaces are intertwined with the non-standard characteristic of the work to such a level that this is considered a given in the work environment — a "reality" of their work situation that the female participants in our study felt unable to change, despite their frustration about the inequalities.

Although our recommendations focus on the retail trade, it is important to note that the occupational division of labour and non-standard work status by gender, in retail food stores, are consistent with general trends in women's employment in the Canadian work force. There is a disproportionately high share of women in non-standard jobs, particularly in the service sector. Thus, the knowledge we have generated in this study on how part-time and casual jobs interact with other factors to affect women's occupational health in retail trade may well apply to women in non-standard retail jobs in other parts of Canada, other sectors of the Canadian work force, and in other parts of the world.

Our recommendations for policy makers begin with a general discussion of three main pieces of legislation that cover workers in Ontario and in Canada. Then, we discuss this legislation in the context of non-standard women workers' experiences, and present specific policy recommendations to assist policy makers in their actions to promote women's health in the workplace through access to sustained employment and adequate benefits. We then make general recommendations to managers and unions about ways to reduce factors affecting work-related stress, thereby promoting the occupational health and well-being of women in part-time and casual jobs.

By generating knowledge and documentation on the factors that affect women's health in non-standard employment, this research can provide evidence on occupational health problems, economic policy and employment support policy, particularly relating to women in low-income groups. Such results can assist the government in evaluating its human resource programs and help Human Resources Development Canada, particularly the Gender Analysis and Policy Directorate, in evaluating the type of programs it can provide to women in non-standard work. We believe our research can advance women's equality by increasing awareness of the physical health and emotional well-being ramifications of part-time and casual work.



### ***Recommendations for Policy Makers***

Three main pieces of legislation are particularly relevant to women working in part-time and casual jobs in retail trade in Ontario: the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000*, which contains regulations about the rights and responsibilities of both employers and workers, the *Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1990*, which describes the rights and duties of all parties in the workplace, and the federal *Employment Insurance Act, 1996*. Each act provides some coverage for non-standard workers; the OESA, 2000, provides the same coverage for non-standard workers as it does for regular full-time workers.

Although legislation that should promote the health and well-being of most non-standard workers does exist, the provisions for certain groups of the women in non-standard employment who participated in this study, such as elect-to-work employees (usually referred to as casual workers or contract workers) and near farm workers, are not as comprehensive. Elect-to-work employees are excluded from regulations on paid public holidays and termination notice/pay and severance pay under the OESA, 2000. According to this same legislation, near farm workers are only covered for minimum wage, vacation with pay, pregnancy, parental and emergency leave, and termination notice/pay and severance pay. In addition, due to the transient nature of the non-standard employment described by our female participants, it is clear that many of these women in part-time and casual jobs would have difficulty meeting the requirements to qualify for pregnancy or parental leave under the OESA, 2000, and for maternity or parental benefits under the EIA, 1996.

We have learned from the female participants in this study that there are gaps in the legislative coverage for non-standard workers, and these gaps have a negative impact on women's health and well-being in part-time and casual jobs. We therefore make the following recommendations for policy makers.

#### **Recommendation 1: Legislate full coverage of paid public holidays and termination notice/pay and severance pay for elect-to-work employees in the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000*.**

Elect-to-work employees (casual or contract workers) are partially covered by the paid public holidays provision of the legislation. The general standard (that workers are entitled to public holidays off work) does not apply to them, though they are entitled to one and a half times the regular rate for hours worked on the public holiday (OESA, 2000). This special provision in the legislation allows employers to ask elect-to-work employees to work on public holidays while giving paid holidays to full-time and regular part-time workers. Elect-to-work employees have, in theory, the right to refuse the work, but the reality of the work environment and, in particular, the imbalance of power between employers and employees, dictate that these elect-to-work employees are the ones who work on public holidays. Thus, full-time and regular part-time workers are permitted to take holidays while the elect-to-work employees are forced to work.

In reference to termination/notice pay and severance pay provisions of the legislation, we should keep in mind that exclusion from the termination notice/pay and severance pay seems to fit with the employment contract where there is a definite end to the employment.

However, it places elect-to-work employees in the extremely insecure position of relying on an employer's good will on a day-to-day basis for continued employment. The women workers in our study were constantly reminded by their employers of the instability in their employment. The participants discussed job insecurity as a significant source of work-related stress, and many were reluctant to assert their legislated rights to meal breaks, optional Sunday shifts and safe working conditions, for example, for fear that their jobs would be terminated.

In addition, some elect-to-work employees are considered by the OESA, 2000, to be self-employed contract workers and do not fit into the subordinate relationship expected of an individual to be considered an employee. The legislation implicitly assumes that there is equal power between employees and employers. Thus, in line with the centuries-old common-law principles, the elect-to-work employees are presumed to have the freedom to leave their jobs at any time and seek employment elsewhere.

**Recommendation 2: Legislate full coverage for near farm workers in the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000*.**

The women non-standard workers employed in retail garden centres who participated in our discussion groups experienced tremendous work-related stress with physical health and emotional well-being consequences. Much of the stress and the occupational health concerns of these women would be alleviated by legislative changes to the OESA, 2000. These workers were forced to accept minimum working conditions, insecure employment and demoralizing treatment by employers, because of their combined elect-to-work and near farm worker status. Since they are not covered by the hours of work provisions of the legislation, they are expected to work long hours if the work demands it and are not entitled to overtime pay. Moreover, according to the legislation, they are not entitled to daily rest periods or eating periods, nor to weekly/bi-weekly rest periods. Thus they might be required to work throughout the day without a break for a week or two without a day of rest in between. They are not entitled to paid public holidays; these places are open for business on public holidays and workers are required on those days. The exploitation of agricultural workers including the near farm workers was recently found to be unconstitutional by the courts, and the Government of Ontario promised to amend the laws. To our knowledge, there has been no action yet.

**Recommendation 3: Educate workers about their legal rights according to the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000*, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1990*, and the *Employment Insurance Act, 1996* by providing easily accessible information in common areas in the workplace.**

We found that the women participating in our study had minimal knowledge of their rights and responsibilities under these laws. Legislation places the burden of responsibility on workers to educate themselves about their rights as protected by the law. While one can assume that the legislation is in the public domain and available for everyone to access and learn, the reality is that in the day-to-day work and life struggle many workers do not have time to seek out that information. Some might not have the resources to access the

Government of Ontario or the federal government Web sites. Perhaps posters can be placed in the workplaces or brochures can be distributed in targeted workplaces so women in non-standard jobs can have access to basic information on the legislation. Television ads giving phone numbers to call for information related to employment laws could be helpful in disseminating the information. In addition, make frequent workplace inspections and provide legal assistance if workers need to hire lawyers to seek enforcement through the courts.

**Recommendation 4: Modify eligibility criteria for pregnancy and parental leave/benefits under the *Ontario Employment Standards Act, 2000* and the *Employment Insurance Act, 1996* to reflect the transient nature of non-standard work.**

Non-standard workers are covered for these provisions under the legislation, but they do not always meet the eligibility criteria due to the very nature of their employment. They often do not work the required hours or length of employment for eligibility. The eligibility criteria must reflect the transient nature of part-time and casual employment to protect these workers fully. One possibility is to reduce the eligibility hours or length of employment for part-time and casual workers so women in non-standard jobs can benefit from the maternity and parental leave provisions of the laws.

**Recommendation 5: Require equitable treatment of all workers (non-standard and regular full-time) with respect to pay, benefits and training. Require that employers justify to the (Ontario) Ministry of Labour, Employment Standards Branch the differential treatment of workers in terms of hourly pay and benefits for doing the same or substantially similar tasks during hours worked.**

Participants in our study performed substantially similar tasks at work as the regular full-time workers but still are paid substantially lower than these workers with lower benefits (or no benefits at all). Moreover, they are not provided with training for the job, such as how to use time-saving machinery. Employers tend to claim that retail workers in part-time and casual jobs do significantly different jobs than their full-time counterparts, thus they pay them differently. However, the reality is that, in the workplaces, the differences between full-time and part-time work are very small. For example, some female participants worked near full-time hours often with responsibility for the cash or the management of the other cashiers, or managing the store alone in the absence of owners or managers, but they were still paid the part-time rate and did not receive benefits. It is well known that employers cut costs this way, and this is not equitable treatment for non-standard workers. One possible solution to eliminate such inequities is for governments to have a sufficient number of inspectors to visit workplaces to examine their books and working conditions, and require employers to justify their decisions regarding differential treatment.

**Recommendation 6: Enforce laws that apply to non-standard workers (e.g., meal breaks, optional Sunday shifts, health and safety training) through periodic inspection of the workplaces.**

The women in non-standard jobs in our study considered working without meal breaks, or consistently being scheduled for weekend shifts and not receiving health and safety training as sources of stress. Because these employees do not have the same access to legislative knowledge as their employers, they accept sub-standard working conditions. Periodic

inspections of workplaces can protect workers and send a message to employers that not applying legislation is unacceptable, and that non-standard workers should not be treated as second-class citizens in the workplace.

### ***Recommendations for Management***

OHS representatives and women working in non-standard jobs made specific recommendations to management in retail workplaces. We synthesized the knowledge that we learned from the study participants to make several additional suggestions to managers on ways to reduce work-related stress for women non-standard workers. These recommendations fall into two general themes: creating fair and equitable working conditions for non-standard workers, and creating supportive, respected, harassment-free work environments for non-standard workers.

#### **Recommendation 7: Have regular and consistent work schedules and work hours for non-standard workers.**

To decrease work-related stress, we recommend that the sources of stress be removed from the workplace. The women in non-standard work identified work schedules as a significant source of work-related stress, because irregular work schedules and hours result in problems arranging elements within their personal lives, such as child care, elder care or school work. To reduce this stress, managers should let workers know their work schedule at least two weeks ahead of time so they can plan their lives. It is also important that if workers are hired for part-time hours, they should not be expected to work full-time hours but get paid (the low) part-time wage and benefits.

#### **Recommendation 8: Distribute shifts equitably between non-standard and regular part-time workers.**

Non-standard workers should not be given all “bad” shifts (weekend shifts, night shifts). Regular full-time workers should be scheduled to work weekend and night shifts as well. In addition, managers should avoid split shifts of non-standard workers as much as possible. Split shifts might be convenient for management but result in havoc for workers’ personal lives. When scheduling workers to shifts, in addition to seniority, managers should consider the work scheduling requests of non-standard workers.

#### **Recommendation 9: Enforce equitable treatment between full-time and part-time workers, and between permanent and temporary workers in terms of workplace policies and rules, such as meal breaks, the allocation of Sunday work, and health and safety training on equipment.**

Women participating in our study gave many examples of employers favouring full-time workers over part-time workers, and permanent workers over temporary ones. These inequities that they faced on a day-to-day basis were a source of stress. We recommend employers treat all workers equitably. For example, if a part-time worker is assigned a five-hour shift, at least one break for a rest period should be given. For Sunday work, a scheme can be established so it is not only non-standard workers who have to work these shifts. Health and safety training on equipment should include non-standard workers. Injuries and

accidents at work do not differentiate between full- and part-time employees, or permanent or temporary workers.

**Recommendation 10: Provide equal pay for non-standard workers doing the same or substantially similar tasks as full-time workers.**

Managers should determine whether non-standard workers are doing substantially the same work and using substantially the same skill, effort and responsibility. If the jobs are substantially similar, then non-standard workers should be paid the same rate per hour as full-time workers. As well, managers should provide pro rata benefits to non-standard workers for hours worked. These should be provided as tangible benefits (rather than cash paid in lieu of benefits). Part-time and casual workers should also be given sick days, vacation time and bonuses, based on time worked (not an arbitrary amount). To reduce further the work-related stress of the female non-standard work force, managers should modify methods of promotion and wage increases within the employment contracts into ways that incorporate and emphasize merit, not just tenure, so women and other workers who are young but are quick learners and high achievers can move ahead and not feel “stuck” in their current positions.

**Recommendation 11: Management should provide support and encouragement to non-standard workers in performing their jobs.**

Our results showed that social relationships at work are highly associated with stress for women in part-time and casual jobs. If social relationships between management and workers, between full-time and part-time workers and within each group are poor, work-related stress increases. Decreasing and eliminating such stress depends on good management and communications skills. Thus, we recommend that managers should respect the non-standard workers' contribution to the workplace and show appreciation to these female workers. In addition, the women who perform these part-time and casual jobs should be treated with courtesy. For example, rather than socializing only with regular full-time workers, management should exchange simple pleasantries with all workers. Uncivilized behaviour from management creates stress among female non-standard workers and makes them feel like they are second-class workers. Managers should also show these women workers that they are valuable assets in the workplace. Not being appreciated creates stress; positive reinforcement helps reduce stress levels. Management can show non-standard workers they are part of the team in the workplace, thereby fostering positive morale among all employees.

**Recommendation 12: Create a harassment-free work environment for non-standard workers.**

There were a few examples given by the participants in this study of how women in non-standard jobs are very vulnerable and some experience harassment at work. Women in part-time and casual jobs in retail trade already feel they are at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy. Management should not tolerate harassment of these vulnerable workers by managers, co-workers or customers. Even one person harassed is too many. Management should be responsible for the behaviour of all those working with and under them.

**Recommendation 13: Provide non-standard workers with more control over their work.**

Lack of control over work is another source of stress for women working in part-time and casual jobs. Managers should allow workers to make decisions on their own or with co-workers about the scheduling and organization of their work, and also take responsibility for the results.

***Recommendations for Unions***

Though most of our recommendations are for policy makers and managers, there are a few that we recommend unions consider to improve on existing efforts.

**Recommendation 14: Create fair and equitable working conditions for non-standard workers as compared to full-time permanent workers.**

We recommend that to create fair and equitable working conditions for their female members who are in non-standard jobs, unions should negotiate regular and consistent work schedules for their members. Negotiating equal hourly pay for non-standard workers doing the same or substantially similar tasks as full-time workers is another important issue to consider. The union involved in this study already negotiated (in one local) the same benefits for part-time workers as their full-time counterparts. We recommend that all unions representing part-time and casual workers follow this example as much as possible.

**Recommendation 15: Provide training or give information on laws and regulations that apply to non-standard workers, as well as on their rights under collective agreements.**

Non-unionized and unionized workers were not well informed of laws that apply to them or their rights under the collective agreement. Periodic training sessions for members in non-standard jobs should be considered. Brochures can be distributed in workplaces, or television and Internet advertisements can be placed for workers to contact unions for more information.

## **APPENDIX A: PROJECT INFORMATION LETTER**

### **OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH OF WOMEN IN NON-STANDARD EMPLOYMENT**

Principle Investigator: Dr. Isik Urla Zeytinoglu, McMaster University  
Co-Investigators: M. Bianca Seaton, McMaster University, and  
Josefina Moruz, UFCW Canada

This project examines factors affecting the occupational health of women in non-standard employment, such as part-time and casual work. We focus on stress and its physical, emotional and organizational effects. Our objective is to analyze the interactions between various factors interacting with non-standard employment to affect the occupational health of female workers. Some of these factors include the economic environment and legislation, workplace and working conditions, and individual characteristics.

We are conducting interviews with representatives from occupational health and safety committees. We are also having discussion groups with part-time and casual workers in the retail trade. In the interviews and discussion groups, we are asking workers to talk about their work and health. All participants are given a \$20 honorarium to cover the costs of attending the interviews and discussion groups (e.g., transportation and child care). We will use this information to prepare a report for Status of Women Canada. Our goal is to improve women's access to sustained employment, thus creating healthy work environments. We hope that our project will advance women's equality, help them maintain economic independence and alleviate the financial struggles that casual and part-time work bring on Canadian women.

If you would like to learn more about this project, please call Dr. Zeytinoglu at (905) 525-9140 ext. 23957 or M. Bianca Seaton at (905) 525-9140 ext. 23584.

## **APPENDIX B: PROJECT INFORMATION PACKAGE**

### **DISCUSSION GROUP INVITATION LETTER**

Occupational Health of Women in Non-Standard Employment Project Co-ordinators:

Dr. Isik U. Zeytinoglu (McMaster University)

Josefina Moruz (UFCW)

M. Bianca Seaton (McMaster University)

Sue Yates (UFCW)

The UFCW and researchers from McMaster University are working on a project looking at issues affecting the occupational health of women working in part-time and casual jobs. We focus on stress and its physical, emotional and organizational effects. We are inviting you to participate in a discussion group as an individual with experience in the retail trade working in part-time and casual jobs. In the discussion groups, we are asking workers to talk about their work and health. Each discussion group will include six to ten individuals and each participant will be given a \$20 honorarium to cover the costs of attending the discussion group (e.g., transportation and child care costs). The discussion groups will be held in a central location convenient to everyone during the weeks of May 28 to June 29, 2001. The names of all participants and their comments during the discussion groups will be kept anonymous.

This project is being funded by Status of Women Canada (SWC). SWC is interested in learning from your experiences so they can propose policy recommendations to the government to improve women's employment opportunities.

We invite you to participate in one of our discussion groups.

Your experience is valuable and important. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you on this project. Please contact us as soon as possible!

Please call Bianca Seaton, Research Assistant, at (905) 525-9140 ext. 23584 by May 25th at the latest or write your name on the sign up sheet so she can contact you.



**DISCUSSION GROUP AND INTERVIEW DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Occupational Health of Women in Non-Standard Employment**

**Principle Investigator: Dr. Isik Urla Zeytinoglu**

**Co-Investigators: M. Bianca Seaton and Josefina Moruz, UFCW Canada**

The purpose of this questionnaire is to help us describe the characteristics of those who attended the discussion groups. Data will be released in the form of a report and **no information that will identify you will be released or included in the report.** Please complete this short questionnaire. Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR FIRST NAME ONLY \_\_\_\_\_

1. In general, would you say your health is:

Excellent    Very good    Good    Fair    Poor

2. Would you describe your work as:

Very                      Stressful                      Somewhat                      Not very                      Not at all  
stressful                                           stressful                      stressful                      stressful

3. Would you describe yourself at work as:

Very                      Satisfied                      Neither satisfied                      Dissatisfied                      Very  
satisfied                                           nor dissatisfied                                           dissatisfied

4. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How long have you worked in this occupation? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How long have you worked in the retail trade sector? \_\_\_\_\_

7. A) Do you work:

Full time                      Part time                      Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

B) On average, how many hours do you work per week? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Are you employed:

Permanently                      Temporarily (casual)                      As an independent contractor  
Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

9. In your job, are you paid:

A salary      Per hour      Per task      Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
(fee for service)

10. Are you working in more than one job?

Yes (please explain why) \_\_\_\_\_  
No (please explain why) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Do you work on shifts?      Yes      No

12. Which age group are you in?

29 years or younger      30-55 years      56 years and older

13. What is your gender?      Male      Female

14. What is your marital status? Are you...

Married/Living common-law  
Separated/Divorced/Widowed  
Single (never married)

15. How many people live in your home who are dependent on you (young or adult children, elderly parents)? \_\_\_\_\_

16. What is the highest level of education that you have completed? (Check one)

Attended or completed high school  
Attended or completed community college or university  
Other (please specify, i.e., a student) \_\_\_\_\_

17. Are you an immigrant? (i.e., born outside of Canada to non-Canadian parents)

Yes      No

18. Are you a racial or ethnic minority? (i.e. Aboriginal, non-white, Jewish)

Yes (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_      No

19. Are you more comfortable speaking and reading in another language than English?  
(i.e., French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Mandarin, etc.)

Yes (please specify the language) \_\_\_\_\_      No

**THANK YOU**

**CONSENT FORM (DISCUSSION GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS)**

**Occupational Health of Women in Non-Standard Employment**

**Principle Investigator: Dr. Isik Urla Zeytinoglu**

**Co-Investigators: M. Bianca Seaton and Josefina Moruz, UFCW Canada**

This form is to obtain your consent to participate in a discussion group (focus group) on how non-standard employment relates to the occupational health of female workers. This project is funded by Status of Women Canada.

We will be tape recording this discussion. The information gathered from the discussion will be transcribed. Individual answers will be kept anonymous. Only Dr. Zeytinoglu and Ms. Seaton will have access to information that can identify you. In the project report, each participant will have a code number, such as F5. The information that can identify you will be kept in a locked cabinet at McMaster and will NOT be available to your workplace or union. You have the right to withdraw from the discussion at any time and/or to refuse answering whatever questions you prefer.

This project follows the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. Participants who have any concerns or questions about their involvement in the project can visit the Office of Research Services Web site and view the policy statement <[www.mcmaster.ca/ors](http://www.mcmaster.ca/ors)>.

If you have questions or want to add to the discussion, you may call M. Bianca Seaton, Research Assistant, at (905) 525-9140, ext. 23584.

I agree to participate in the discussion.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

**RECEIPT FOR HONORARIUM TO PARTICIPANTS**

**Receipt**

**Research Project:** Occupational Health of Women in Non-Standard Employment, funded by Status of Women Canada

**Principle Investigator:** Dr. Isik Urla Zeytinoglu, McMaster University

**Co-Investigators:** M. Bianca Seaton, McMaster University  
Josefina Moruz, UFCW Canada

-----  
I have received \$20 to cover the cost of parking and other expenses incurred by participating in a discussion group.

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone # \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: DATA CODING SCHEME

### OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH OF WOMEN IN NON-STANDARD EMPLOYMENT

#### QSR5 CODES FOR WORKER DISCUSSION GROUPS/INTERVIEWS (Summary Version)

Coding Manual, December 4, 2001

Notes:

Code information from the questions under appropriate nodes.

Codes for an entire paragraph should be written in the **right margin**.

Codes for sub-sections (i.e., sentences within paragraphs) should be **boxed in pencil** with the code written in **the left margin**.

If new sub-branch is needed, contact Isik Zeytinoglu.

NODES:

#### 1. Background

This section includes such items as age, gender and length of work in the retail trade.

#### 2. Work

- 2.1. Likes about work
- 2.2. Does not like about work

#### 3. Stress

- 3.1. Yes, have work stress
- 3.2. Symptoms explained
- 3.3. No, does not have work stress

#### 4. Reasons (factors) for stress (stressors)

- 4.1. Economic factors
- 4.2. Legislation
- 4.3. Employment contracts and work schedule
- 4.4. Physical work factors
- 4.5. Psychosocial work factors
- 4.6. Working conditions
- 4.7. Demographic factors

5. Stress affecting physical health — individual physical manifestations  
Includes such items as MSD, respiratory illnesses, heart diseases and migraines/headaches.
6. Stress affecting emotional health — individual mental manifestations  
Includes low self-esteem, low motivation and job dissatisfaction.
7. Stress affecting the organization/ the workplace — organizational manifestations  
Includes high absenteeism rates, high turnover and workplace conflict.
9. Other factors that affect stress levels  
Includes not being respected as a part-time worker by customers and management, and angry, rude, abusive or demanding customers.
10. Recommendations to improve  
Includes such items as reducing individual workload, increased wages and benefits, improved working conditions and having more access to training.
11. Any other workplace health problem not related to stress  
Includes physical and mental health problems, and harassment.
12. Health promotion
13. Other added information
14. Reasons (factors) decreasing stress
  - 14.1. Economic factors
  - 14.2. Legislation
  - 14.3. Employment contracts and work schedule
  - 14.4. Physical work factors
  - 14.5. Psychosocial work factors
  - 14.6. Working conditions
  - 14.7. Demographic factors

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Tri-Council refers to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institute for Health Research and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada. The policy document may be viewed at <[www.nserc.ca/programs/ethics/english/policy.htm](http://www.nserc.ca/programs/ethics/english/policy.htm)>. Accessed December 2, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> We want to remind readers that, in line with the purpose of this research, most of the respondents included in this study are female part-time workers. Thus, when we refer to workers, part-time workers are meant. In most cases, these occupations are all part-time in their workplaces. Full-time jobs in these occupations typically do not exist. Most jobs are temporary/casual.

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\* Some of these papers are still in progress and not all titles are finalized