SWEATSHOPS IN CHICAGO:

A survey of working conditions in low-income and immigrant communities

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Chicago, IL
February 16, 2000

Funding provided by
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
and the
Fund for Immigrants and Refugees

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE RESEARCH

Sweatshops in Chicago: A survey on working conditions in low-income and immigrant communities is the first research documenting the extent and severity of sweatshop conditions in the Midwest and the first systematic effort in the nation to document sweatshops across industries. The research is a product of the Sweatshop Working Group, a coalition of 32 community organizations brought together by the Center for Impact Research (formerly Taylor Institute).

Data was collected from approximately 800 respondents across 12 immigrant and low-income communities in the Chicago metropolitan area in the spring and summer of 1999.

RESULTS

What is a Sweatshop?

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, a sweatshop is places of employment that violate two or more federal or state labor laws governing minimum wage and overtime, child labor, industrial homework, occupational safety and health, workers' compensation or industry registration.

Who Works in Sweatshops?

Using the definition sweatshops developed by the U.S. Department of Labor:

- Thirty-six percent (36%) of all survey respondents work in sweatshops.
- The workplaces of 10% of all survey respondents violate four or more sweatshop laws.

Immigration Status

- Seventy percent (70%) of undocumented respondents work in sweatshops.
- Thirty-seven percent (37%) of respondents who are permanent residents work in sweatshops.
- Twenty-two percent (22%) of respondents who are U.S. citizens are employed in sweatshops.

Age

- Sweatshop workers are disproportionately young. Forty-nine percent (49%) of respondents under the age of 25 work in sweatshops.

Location

- Sweatshops exist in both the City and the suburbs. Thirty-four percent of respondents working the City and 35% of respondents working in the suburbs are employed in sweatshops.

What are the conditions in Chicago sweatshops?

Wages and Hours

- Eighteen percent (18%) of all respondents were required to work overtime but were not paid for overtime.
- Seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents earning less than $5.15 per hour were not paid for overtime.
- Eighty-nine percent (89%) of respondents making less than $5.15 per hour work in sweatshops. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of those making exactly $5.15 per hour (minimum wage) and 26% making above $5.25 per hour work in sweatshops.

Hazards

- Thirty-five percent (35%) of all respondents work with chemicals, open flames or dangerous equipment or within conditions of severe heat or cold. Forty percent (40%) of these workers were not given any protective clothing or training for working within these conditions.
- Sixteen percent (16%) of respondents work in sites with no ventilation.
- Eight percent (8%) of respondents work in buildings with locked exits.
- Thirty-one percent (31%) of the workers who experience one of nine health and safety hazards at their work sites have been injured on the job.
- Seventeen percent (17%) of respondents are not allowed to take any breaks during work.
- Thirty percent (30%) of respondents were not allowed to take a sick or vacation day, paid or unpaid, without risk of being fired.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The working conditions identified in this survey only represent the most public set of substandard workplaces. People surveyed in this study have some connection to an institution such as a church or community organization. In other cities such as New York and Los Angeles, the most egregious violations occurred with people that did not have such connections.

Resolving these problems in the Chicago area will require a multi-faceted approach, and should include the following:

- The establishment of a broad-based task force, convened by the U.S. Department of Labor and including union, community organization and business representatives, to look into the problems and design responses that will proactively address the sweatshop conditions. The task force would have the mandates to:
  - collect further information regarding specific industries where sweatshops are found within a number of ethnic communities;
  - design a set of responses to each of the identified sweatshop industries. These responses are likely to be different for each community and industry targeted for intervention, given their significantly different circumstances, environments and needs. These responses would include measures directed at:
    - educating and holding accountable the industries and the employers working within them regarding minimum labor standards and ways of addressing potential problems;
    - collaborating with community agencies to educate their constituencies;
    - developing viable mechanisms for community agencies and individuals to work with the Department of Labor to identify, report, and eliminate sweatshops. For example, this could include the creation of a limited number of "hot" or crisis lines through unions and/or community organizations to receive complaints and to begin verifying them. These organizations would then be required to work collaboratively with the Department of Labor to address the complaints. Another possibility would be the development of a single bureau within the U.S. Department of Labor to respond promptly and appropriately to sweatshop violations, alleviating the current situation in which each bureau can only respond to violations within its jurisdiction;
  - implement these responses in each of the communities; and
  - evaluate the impact of the responses and make any necessary changes to maximize their effectiveness.
- The involvement of the private industry councils and local industry committees to encourage and reward industry for enforcing basic standards.
- The support of further research to gain a better understanding of how goods created by sweatshop labor in this country work their way into the marketplace, and how this chain can be broken.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past three years, attention on both U.S. coasts has begun to focus on the problems posed by sweatshops. In 1997, the No Sweatshop Coalition, a group of twelve constituent organizations in New York joined with the U.S. Department of Labor to address the problem of sweatshops in the City's garment industry. The Federal Government's first ever compliance survey was carried out in New York City in the summer of 1997 and found violations in 63% of the ninety-four garment shops that they inspected[1]. On the west coast, the Asian Law Caucus and Sweatshop Watch has focused its efforts on educating workers about their rights, advocating for individual workers, and strengthening worker protective legislation. And on college and university campuses across the country, students are organizing and demonstrating to end the use of U.S. and offshore sweatshop labor in the production of their institutions' logo-imprinted clothing. Yet in the Midwest, there has been little activity regarding sweatshops. A few community-based organizations have focused efforts on educating communities and individuals at risk of employment by sweatshops about workers' rights[2]. This report presents the first research documenting the extent and severity of sweatshop conditions in the Midwest, and is the first systematic effort in the nation to document sweatshops across industries.

II. STUDY OVERVIEW

In the spring of 1998 Center for Impact Research formed the Sweatshop Working Group, consisting of 32 organizations. (Organizations that participated in the Sweatshop Working Group are listed in Appendix A.) After initial discussions regarding the absence of data concerning sweatshops and the organizations' inability to document conditions in the Chicago metropolitan area, the Group agreed on the need for a study to:

1. assess the extent and severity of sweatshops in this area;

2. systematically document the conditions under which workers labor in these industries; and

3. collect and disseminate this information in such a way as to educate the public regarding the problem and mobilize public policy to address the issues.

The groups believed that the lack of data on the extent and severity of the problem was hindering their efforts to harness the public's attention and force meaningful action on the issue. Unlike the nature of the garment industry on the U.S. coasts, where much of the industry is centered (with over four thousand garment factories in New York City[3] and four thousand garment

[1] Greenhouse, S. *New York Times*, "U.S. Says Many Garment Shops Break the Law", Oct. 17, 1997.

[2] The effort is being led by the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues, producers of the *Workers Rights Manual* (K. Sanford, P. Graham, 1999, (773) 728-8400); the Chicago Workers' Rights Board, a community forum for reviewing unresolved labor disputes and working towards resolutions (a joint project of Chicago Jobs with Justice, the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues and the Chicago Federation of Labor); and the Illinois Coalition for Immigration and Refugee Protection, coordinators of an immigrant collaborative that focuses on educating community groups about immigrants' rights in the workplace .

[3] Greenhouse, S. *New York Times*, "U.S. Says Many Garment Shops Break the Law", Oct. 17, 1997.

subcontractors in Los Angeles[4]), Chicago's garment industry is relatively small, with much of the work in the form of 'home work' (where employees take home material and are paid on a piece basis)[5]. Working Group participants suggested that Chicago Metropolitan area industries where violations of labor standards and OSHA regulations are more likely to be found include light industry (*e.g.* plastic injection molding), nurseries, domestic services (*e.g.* cleaning, gardening) and home construction. There also was anecdotal information that businesses employing youth (resorts, restaurants) are prone to wage and hour violations and poor working conditions.

Each of the Working Group participants thought that it would be quite valuable to have data documenting the extent and severity of the problem of sweatshops in this area. Similarly, they believe that it was important to collect data documenting the conditions under which the workers labor in these industries. However, none of the organizations, on their own, had the research skills, the knowledge base (regarding working conditions, immigration issues and welfare reform) or the entrée into the immigrant and other poor communities, all of which are requisite for carrying out an informed and responsible study of this issue. Furthermore, they wanted the data generated by such a study to have its potential impact realized. As such, from the project's inception, there was an awareness of the need to include the involvement of representatives of immigrant advocacy organizations, labor reform advocates and government authorities responsible for the protection of workers, immigrants (documented and undocumented) and other individuals at risk of employment in businesses with sweatshop conditions and researchers.

III. THE SWEATSHOP SURVEY

The Sweatshop Working Group agreed upon a simple research design. First, data was to be collected from a large number of respondents through a single-page survey instrument. Second, this was to be followed by in-depth interviews with a smaller number of survey respondents whose surveys indicated that they were both working in sweatshop conditions and willing to be interviewed. A copy of the Survey is included in Appendix B. Evaluation questions to be answered were limited to the following:

1. What is the extent and severity of sweatshops in this area?

2. What are the primary types of violations found?

3. Are there problematic work conditions that are not violations of law or regulations?

A decision was made to target communities where residents tend to hold poorer jobs and where their ability to move out of workplaces with bad working conditions might be hindered by lower education and skill levels, lack of transportation, lack of familiarity with the wider job market, minimal or no ability to speak English and problems related to residency status and the

[4] Foo, LJ. "The Vulnerable and Exploitable Immigrant Workforce and the Need for Strengthening Worker Protective Legislation". *The Yale Law Journal*, June, 1994. Vol. 103, Number 8, p. 2186.

[5] Interview with Manny Tuteur, Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), March 6, 1998.

right to work in legitimate jobs – *i.e.* poor and immigrant communities. That persons in middle class, non-immigrant communities may work in sweatshops is not being contested or examined by this study. However, given the employment vulnerabilities of immigrants, persons living in poverty and the working poor, and the limited time and financial resources available for this first examination of sweatshops in the Chicago metropolitan area, the Group believed it would be more successful in finding persons working in these conditions if it was to focus its efforts in more vulnerable communities. In doing so, the Sweatshop Working Group recognized that any conclusions about the extent or severity of sweatshop working conditions would be made within the context of these communities.

Defining Sweatshops

The Department of Labor defines sweatshops as places of employment that violate two or more federal or state labor laws governing minimum wage and overtime, child labor, industrial homework, occupational safety and health, workers' compensation or industry registration. To assess survey respondents' work sites for the presence of all of the potential violations covered by these laws would have required an unworkably long and detailed instrument, huge expense, and likely would have resulted in few persons willing to participate in the study. Instead, the survey was limited to a single page, comprised of questions about respondents' employment and workplace conditions, including those that would be considered violations of Department of Labor (DOL) standards, as well as a set of items assessing other poor working conditions that would not constitute DOL violations (*e.g.* working for abusive supervisors, not being allowed to take [unpaid] sick leave/vacation). Using only those items from the survey that are, according to the DOL, sweatshop violations, a sweatshop scale was created.

Sweatshop Scale Indicators
(Derived from Department of Labor Standards)

1. Hourly pay is less than $5.15/hour
2. Employees do not receive all wages due
3. Taxes are not deducted from wages
4. Employees are not allowed to take scheduled breaks
5. No bathrooms are available
6. If bathrooms are available, they are not cleaned/maintained
7. There is no ventilation
8. Employees are sexually harassment
9. The worksite has locked exits
10. Employees are required to work overtime, but not paid for overtime
11. Employees are working in dangerous situations without protective clothing or training

Survey Design and Administration

The survey instrument was drafted by the principal authors based on issues identified by the Sweatshop Working Group and the Department of Labor's (DOL) definition of sweatshops. The survey was designed for ease of administration by inexperienced interviewers and

understandability by interviewers and respondents. The survey was then reviewed and revised, based on suggestions from many of the Sweatshop Working Group participants. This was done to make the survey sensitive to the needs and limitations of the respondents and those administering the survey, as well as to enable the collection of as complete and honest data as was possible. The survey was translated into five languages (Vietnamese, Chinese, Polish, Korean, Spanish) and then administered by twelve organizations[6] to their clients/parishioners/ patients/students. Efforts were made to get a wide representation of ethnic groups, as well as to encourage participation by workers across the Chicago metropolitan area. Each organization was instructed to administer the questionnaire as widely as possible, the only selection criterion being to survey individuals who had worked within the past year.

Participating organizations were given a workshop presenting and detailing 1) the circumstances leading to the creation of the Sweatshop Working Group, 2) the purposes of the survey, and 3) the interview process. Those persons responsible for administering the survey were then trained in the use of the instrument and given copies of the survey in English and/or the appropriately translated forms. Organizations received $4 for each questionnaire that was completed in full, regardless of the working conditions described in the forms. Of the 2,000 blank questionnaires requested by the twelve organizations, 799 were completed in full and returned.

After reviewing all of the questionnaires, twenty respondents were chosen for further interviews, of whom eighteen agreed to discuss their work situations with members of the research team. Staff members of the organizations through which respondents had filled out their initial surveys were present at the interviews. In addition, most organization staff members who helped administer surveys participated in individual or group interviews when data collection was completed.

IV. DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Survey respondents represent a wide range of individuals.

<u>Sex, Age, Marital Status, Household Composition and Welfare Recipient</u>

- Forty percent (40%) of the respondents are male and 60% are female.
- Respondents range from teenagers to senior citizens, with 3% seventeen years of age or younger, 13% between 18 and 24 years, 36% between 25 and 40 years, 36% between 41 and 55 years and 13% 56 years of age or older.
- Sixty-five percent (65%) of the respondents are married.

[6] The organizations include the following: Chinese American Service League (Chicago - Chinatown), Chinese Mutual Aid Association (Chicago - Uptown), Interfaith Leadership Project (Cicero), Korean American Community Center (Chicago - Horner Park), Mujeres Latinas En Acción (Chicago - Pilsen), Polish American Association (Chicago - Portage Park), Procare Centers (Melrose Park), St. Anselm's Catholic Church (Chicago - Washington Park), St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church (Cicero), St. Mark's Missionary Baptist Church (Harvey), St. Pius Roman Catholic Church (Pilsen), Vietnamese Association of Illinois (Chicago - Edgewater).

- Forty-three percent (43%) have children under the age of eighteen.
- Most of the respondents (74%) live in households with one to four people, 25% live in households with five to eight people, and 1% live in households of nine or more individuals.
- Thirty-nine percent of the respondents are the primary or only wage earner in their household.
- Eight percent (8%) of the respondents have received welfare benefits (TANF, food stamps, medical card) in the past year.

Ethnicity

The ethnicity of the sample included the following:

- 26% Hispanic
- 22% Chinese
- 21% Caucasian (non-Hispanic) – primarily Polish
- 18% Vietnamese
- 12% African American[7].

Although this clearly does not reflect the various groups' proportional representation in the Chicago metropolitan area, it gives us a sufficiently large number of respondents in each of these groups to be able to examine differences in experiences across and within ethnicities.

Residency Status

The residency status of the respondents was initially surprising when the data was first aggregated. Forty-six percent of the respondents said that they were legal permanent residents, 39% said that they were U.S. citizens and 10% recorded their status as "Other". When the survey was being designed, staff from immigrant organizations strongly recommended not including a category of "Undocumented" due to respondents being unlikely to record (even in a confidential setting) that they are not here legally. Although "Other" could include a number of other statuses (*e.g.* student visas), most if not all of the persons who responded "Other" likely represent undocumented persons. When first analyzing the data, the low percentage of persons in the "Other" category was thought to reflect false representation on the part of the respondents. However, what is more likely to be the case is that this instrument surveyed a larger percentage of documented individuals within immigrant communities and that a larger percentage of undocumented persons either are not connected with these organizations, or chose not to participate in the survey process.

[7] The number of surveys that the organizations chose to administer determined the number of respondents in each group. Thus, for example, the Vietnamese Association of Illinois returned 18% of the study's surveys, although they represent a much smaller percentage of the Chicago metropolitan's population.

Occupations and Types of Work

Respondents work across the Chicago metropolitan area, with 21% currently (or within the past year) holding jobs on the north side of Chicago, 16% on the west side of Chicago, 28% on the south side of Chicago, and 35% in the suburbs.

The range of occupations and types of work held by the respondents is extensive. There are ninety-three different occupations listed, ranging from "accountant," "butcher," "chauffeur," and "delivery man," to "roofer," "sales," "teacher," and "welder". When broken down into traditional occupational categories, 7% work in professional, technical or managerial jobs, 10% work in clerical or sales jobs, 34% work in service jobs, 9% work in processing, 27% work in machine trades, 3% work in structural or bench work, and 11% work in other classifications.

People found their jobs through a variety of methods. Many heard about them through friends, family and acquaintances, high school work programs, employment agencies and referrals from community organizations. Others read about the jobs in the newspaper or saw posters/signs advertising positions. Some people found their jobs by walking in off the street and asking if there were positions available.

Most respondents (81%) are working currently in just one workplace, and 78% worked in just one workplace over the past year. In addition, respondents have a considerable range in the number of employees at their workplaces, with 14% working with one to five people, 14% working with six to ten people, 18% working with 11-25 people and 52% working in places with 26 or more employees.

V. DO SWEATSHOPS EXIST?

The following sections present data on the terms of employment and working conditions of the survey respondents. Discussions in the Sweatshop Working Group acknowledged the reality of work and the difference between "lousy" jobs (with low pay, long hours, mindless activities and harsh conditions) and sweatshops. However, the primary goals of the Sweatshop Working Group were to document the extent and severity of sweatshops in the Chicago metropolitan area and describe the nature of those workplaces, rather than to provide an overview of poor working conditions.

The Sweatshop Scale was created out of eleven items whose presence under almost all conditions would constitute a violation of relevant state or federal labor laws[8]. The following table includes all eleven items, and indicates the percentage of all respondents who reported experiencing each particular violation:

[8] Again, these are state and federal labor laws governing minimum wage and overtime, child labor, industrial homework, occupational safety and health, workers' compensation or industry registration.

Table 1 Percentage of Respondents Experiencing Sweatshop Labor Violations	
Labor Violations	**Percent of Respondents Experiencing Violations**
Hourly pay less than $5.15/hour	8.2%
Not receive all wages due	19.6%
Taxes not deducted from wages	16.2%
Not allowed to take scheduled breaks	17.0%
No bathrooms available	5.7%
If bathrooms available, not cleaned/maintained	10.8%
No ventilation	37.2%
Sexual harassment	2.3%
Locked exits	7.6%
Required to work overtime, but not paid for overtime	17.2%
Working in dangerous situations without protective clothing or training	15.6%

Following the Department of Labor's definition of sweatshops as places with two or more routine violations, the scale was collapsed to show the number of respondents with zero or one violation, and those with two or more.

Table 2 Sweatshop Worksite Incidence	
Respondents working in sweatshops	36% (n=283)
Respondents not working in sweatshops	64% (n=500)

Thirty-six percent (36%) of all survey respondents are working in sweatshops as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor. Furthermore, ten percent (10%) of all survey respondents are employed in worksites with four or more violations. This indicates that a substantial portion of the sample population surveyed in Chicago is employed in worksites that routinely violate multiple labor standards.

Using this Sweatshop Scale, all of the categories of data that were examined initially were revisited both to see their relationships with sweatshops and to answer the following questions:

1. Who is working in sweatshops?
2. What are the terms of employment in sweatshops (including hours of work, breaks,

sick days and holidays and wages, pay and taxes)?

3. What are the working conditions in sweatshops (including the environmental conditions and rules within the worksite)?

IV. WHO IS WORKING IN SWEATSHOPS?

Ethnicity

Surveys were distributed in communities whose residents are primarily immigrants, poor or working poor. Not surprisingly, most of the survey respondents fell into one of those categories.[9] But when looking at which of the respondents were working in sweatshops, significant differences were seen across ethnic groups.

Table 3 Sweatshop Employment by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Sweatshop Worksite		Total
	No	**Yes**	
Hispanic/Latino	45.5% (91)	54.5% (109)	100.0% (200)
Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	48.5% (80)	51.5% (85)	100.0% (165)
African-American	71.6% (68)	28.4% (27)	100.0% (95)
Chinese	73.8% (127)	26.2% (45)	100.0% (172)
Vietnamese	91.6% (131)	8.4% (12)	100.0% (143)
Total	**64.1% (497)**	**35.9% (278)**	**100.0% (775)**

Just over half of the Caucasian/non-Hispanic (which in the case of this survey is primarily Polish) and Hispanic respondents are working in sweatshops, as compared to 28% of the African-American, 26% of the Chinese, and 8% of the Vietnamese respondents. It is uncertain to what extent this is a reflection of the differences in overall experiences of these groups, a result of the survey's ability to move beyond the level of most accessible information regarding employment

[9] All bivariate relationships in this report are significant at the p = .001 level unless otherwise noted.

conditions in the groups, or a reflection of the employment conditions of this sample that may or may not be reflective of the larger community. (Discussions about the findings and the challenges of administering the surveys with each of the participating organizations at the completion of the data gathering process highlighted some of these issues. This is discussed later in this report - see Appendix E.)

Residency

Residency status is strongly related to employment in sweatshops, although each category has significant numbers of persons working in these conditions.

Table 4 Sweatshop Employment by Residency Status

Residency Status:	**Sweatshop Worksite**		**Total**
	No	**Yes**	
U.S. Citizen	77.6% (239)	22.4% (69)	100.0% (308)
Legal Permanent Resident	63.2% (230)	36.8% (134)	100.0 (364)
Other	30.4% (24)	69.6% (55)	100.0% (79)
Total	**65.6% (493)**	**34.4% (258)**	**100.0% (751)**

Seventy percent (70%) of survey respondents in the 'Other' category (most of whom are likely undocumented, are working in sweatshops) compared to 37% of the respondents who are permanent residents, and 22% of the respondents who are U.S. citizens.

Sex, age, and primary wage earner status

All three of these variables were only weakly related to employment in sweatshops. Men were slightly more likely to work in sweatshops than women (37% vs. 35%) and the youngest and oldest survey respondents had the highest level of sweatshop employment. This may be a reflection of (or awareness of) fewer employment opportunities, or a sense of powerlessness to do anything about the situation for the youngest and oldest workers.

Table 5 Sweatshop Employment by Age

Age	**Sweatshop Worksite**		**Total**
	No	**Yes**	

12-24	51.3% (60)	48.7% (57)	100.0% (117)
25-40	65.9% (180)	34.1% (93)	100.0% (273)
41-55	71.8% (196)	28.2% (77)	100.0% (273)
56+	60.2% (62)	39.8% (41)	100.0% (103)
Total	65.0% (498)	35.0% (268)	100.0% (766)

One high school student was referred to his job in a grocery store (as a stockboy) by his school work-program.

"I started work at 3:00 or 4:00 [p.m.] and finished at 10:00 or 12:00. I worked mostly three or four days a week. Only a couple of times in busy time they give me the five days. I get one break for the whole day – thirty minutes... They paid me $4.65 per hour."

Hispanic male, age 16, stockboy

When asked if his school knew about his hours or the working conditions, he said that they didn't, but that he had spoken with his parents about them. One staff member from another community agency was frustrated by the number of young people who are employed in these sweatshops and their parents' response to the working conditions.

> *"There are butcher shops and they employ young people out of high school [dropouts] and they pay like $2.50 an hour. That's not even the minimum wage. The conditions are not very good. They have to clean and sometimes they're not paid for that. [Their parents] maybe think that those children are not able to find a better job or glad that they have a job at all. Sometimes I hear people say, 'Well, she works at this bakery store and she gets only $3.00 an hour, but at least I know that she's there and she's not on the street.'"*

Polish ESL teacher

The relationship between being the primary wage earner in the family and one's likelihood of working in a sweatshop was surprising. Of those respondents who are the sole or primary wage earners in their households, 42% are working in sweatshops, as compared to 31% of the persons who are not the sole/primary wage earner. One might have expected to find a greater difference between the two groups due to most sole/primary wage earners being responsible for other individuals' well being and thus more likely to put up with bad working conditions. Finally, there was no significant relationship between marital status, having children under the age of 18, or household size and employment in sweatshops.

<u>Type of Work, Number of Employees/ Current Employers, and Worksite Location</u>

There was a strong relationship between the occupational category of the survey

respondents and their likelihood of being employed in sweatshops.

Table 6 Sweatshop Employment by Occupational Categories

Occupational Categories:	Sweatshop Worksite		Total
	No	Yes	
Professional, Technical, Managerial	71.7% (33)	28.3% (13)	100.0% (46)
Clerical	78.4% (40)	21.6% (11)	100.0% (51)
Sales	86.7% (13)	13.3% (2)	100.0% (15)
Service	46.5% (105)	53.5% (121)	100.0% (226)
Processing	66.7% (40)	33.3% (20)	100.0% (60)
Machine Trades	74.4% (131)	25.6% (45)	100.0% (176)
Benchwork	100.0% (4)	0% (0)	100.0% (4)
Structural Work	50.0% (9)	50.0% (9)	100.0% (18)
Miscellaneous	85.1% (63)	14.9% (11)	100.0% (74)
Agricultural	33.3% (1)	66.7% (2)	100.0% (3)
Total	**65.2% (439)**	**34.8% (234)**	**100.0% (673)**

Although the relationship within general occupational categories is strong, it is even stronger when using more specific occupational categories that are sensitive to the status of jobs within categories. For instance, survey respondents in the service category hold jobs ranging from chauffeur, decorator, and travel agent to fast food worker, dishwasher, and warehouse worker.

A second correlation was run, using a set of 14 more specific job categories, with the following results:

Table 7 Sweatshop Employment by Specific Occupations

Occupations	Sweatshop Worksite		Total
	No	Yes	
Sales Clerk	84.6% (33)	15.4% (6)	100.0% (39)
Office Assistant	84.6% (11)	15.4% (2)	100.0% (13)
Professional	83.3% (20)	16.7% (4)	100.0% (24)
Machine Operator	74.7% (65)	25.3% (22)	100.0% (87)
Factory Worker	73.1% (79)	26.9.6% (29)	100.0% (108)
Medical/Teachers Aide	69.6% (16)	30.4% (7)	100.0% (23)
Garment Worker	57.7% (15)	42.3% (11)	100.0% (26)
Food Preparation/Restaurant Worker	53.8% (49)	46.2% (42)	100.0% (91)
Driver	50.0% (4)	50% (4)	100.0% (8)
Tradesperson	50.0% (17)	50.0% (17)	100.0% (34)
Maid/Laundry Worker	47.1% (16)	52.9% (18)	100.0% (34)
Janitor	42.9% (24)	57.1% (32)	100.0% (56)
Daycare Worker	38.9% (7)	61.1% (11)	100.0% (18)
Other	65.9% (151)	34.1% (78)	100.0% (229)
Total	**64.2% (507)**	**35.8% (283)**	**100.0% (790)**

The number of employees in a worksite also is strongly related to sweatshop employment.

Table 8 Sweatshop Employment by Number of Workplace Employees

Number of Workplace Employees:	Sweatshop Worksite		Total
	No	Yes	
1-5	33.3% (41)	63.7% (72)	100.05 (113)
6-10	49.5% (55)	50.5% (56)	100.0% (111)
11-25	60.3% (85)	39.7% (56)	100.0% (141)
26+	77.6% (319)	22.4% (92)	100.0% (411)
Total	**64.4% (500)**	**35.6% (276)**	**100.0% (776)**

Sixty-four percent of respondents who are employed in worksites with one to five employees work in sweatshops. This percentage decreases as the number of workplace employees increases--22% of respondents employed in worksites with 26 or more employees were identified as working in sweatshops.

The number of current employers for whom respondents work is related to sweatshop employment as well. Thirty-three percent (33%) of respondents who work for only one employer worked in sweatshops, as compared to 58% of respondents who work for two or more employers.

Finally, worksite location on its own was not a good predictor of sweatshops.

Table 9 Sweatshop Employment by Worksite Location

Worksite Locations:	Sweatshop Worksite		Total
	No	Yes	
Chicago North	63.9% (99)	36.1% (56)	100.0% (155)
Chicago West	69.6% (80)	30.4% (35)	100.0% (115)
Chicago South	66.5% (135)	33.5% (68)	100.0% (203)
Suburban	64.6% (166)	35.4% (91)	100.0% (257)
Total	**65.8% (480)**	**34.2% (250)**	**100.0% (730)**

Thirty to thirty-six percent of respondents who work in the City are employed in sweatshops, as

compared to 36% of the respondents who work in the suburbs.

This seeming lack of relationship between workplace location and sweatshop employment changes significantly when the relationship is examined in light of occupation, age and ethnicity variables. Workers employed in food preparation and the trades experienced sweatshop conditions at a higher percentage in the city than they do in the suburbs. Janitors, day care workers, and maids/laundry workers faired worse when employed in the suburbs than when employed in the city. In terms of age, although only 30% of respondents aged 12-24 work in the city; 62% of the respondents in this age bracket who are working in sweatshops are employed in the city. Finally, in terms of ethnicity, African Americans and Vietnamese respondents both fared significantly worse when employed in the city versus the suburbs. Seventy-four percent of African American and 54% of Vietnamese respondents are employed in the city. However, of all African American respondents employed in sweatshops, 87% are located in the city; of all Vietnamese respondents employed in sweatshops, 87% are employed in the city.

The argument that lack of access to suburbia is preventing people from getting better entry level jobs may be true for these groups whose levels of sweatshop employment are considerably higher in the city than in the suburbs. However, one may infer from these data that this argument may not be appropriate for a number of subgroups within the population.

V. WHAT ARE THE TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT IN SWEATSHOPS?

Using the U.S. Department of Labor's definition, sweatshops occur when employers routinely violate two or more of the state or federal labor laws governing a host of areas from child labor, to wages, to occupational safety and health regulations. Many working conditions, in and of themselves, do not violate one of these laws, but may be associated with or indicate the presence of sweatshop conditions. Thus, the survey asked respondents about a number of factors, situations, and conditions in an attempt to understand these relationships.

Hours/Days of Work

The first group of such bad but not illegal working conditions has to do with work requirements. When asked about the number of hours or days of work required by their employers, 31% responded that they have to work over ten hours per day, 41% responded that they have to work over 40 hours per week, and 28% have to work either rotating shifts or six days/week. Five percent of the workers were allowed or required to take work home.

The number of days and hours of work required of respondents was strongly related to sweatshop employment. Fifty-seven percent of all respondents who were required to work six days per week or rotating shifts are working in sweatshops, as compared to 26% respondents who are not required to work six days per week or rotating shifts. And 51% of respondents required to work over 40 hours per week work in sweatshops as compared to 24% of respondents not required to work over 40 hours a week.

Table 10 Sweatshop Employment by Hours/Days of Work

Work Conditions	Percent working in conditions		Sweatshop Worksite	
			No	Yes
>10hrs/day	30.9%	If yes then…	40.6%	59.4%
>40hrs/wk	41.0%	If yes then…	49.1%	50.9%
6 days/week or rotating shifts	28.5%	If yes then…	42.7%	57.3%
Work 2 of 3	18.5%	If yes then…	41.7%	58.3%

> *"I have freedom to move, they don't control me much, just I have to work hard… 12 hours a day Sunday through Thursday, and Friday and Saturday I work 13 hours a day and I don't have any time off. I don't have any time to rest…You know I have to work seven days a week."*
>
> Chinese male, age 42 years, chef

Many workers described being required to work extensive overtime, whether or not they wanted to do so. They also described facing the choice of complying with the required overtime or being fired. This was a particular problem for women with children.

> *"They won't let us go unless we have everything finished. So we have to work overtime… If we didn't finish the work even in 10 hours, we stay until 2 a.m. We have to finish the work." [Interviewer: "What if you have children?"] "If one goes, [they say] we'll all want to go, so they never let us go. If there's an emergency, they ask for proof… If you don't want to say, then they tell you tomorrow don't come in."*
>
> Hispanic female, age 27, food packer

Getting a Break?

Highly troubling was the number of workers who are not allowed to take periodic breaks during the day (a sweatshop violation), or only for a brief respite, despite the physically tiring work that they do.

Seventeen percent (17%) of respondents said that they are not allowed to take scheduled breaks at all in the course of their workday.

"Usually on a Saturday, I would get picked up from my house at 8:00. We just start getting everything together – cooking and everything. We have our breakfast and then we start cooking, taking orders until about 4:00 or 5:00. … Sometimes I work until 10:00 or 12:00 P.M…. Each of us takes a break, first one person then the next person … usually like about ten minutes for the whole day."

Hispanic female, age 15, cook in carnival

"We get a five-minute break, and if we are not back in time, they call our attention to it. If we go to take a glass of water, then they really don't let us [have our break]. We're not supposed to stop working. If we work for 10 hours, then we have 3 breaks for 5 minutes."

Hispanic female, age 23, factory worker

"I worked from 7 p.m. until 7 a.m. I had to be at the machine all the time. No breaks. No time for dinner or lunch. Seven days a week, twelve hours a day. Eighty-four hours a week. I worked all the time. No sleep. If I needed to drink or eat, I can bring food to the machine, while working."

Vietnamese male, age 24, printing shop worker

Other respondents talked about not being allowed to take bathroom breaks without being monitored.

"We can go to the bathroom, but … some woman goes in with us…to watch us. We have to have permission, we have to recognize his [the boss'] authority … and then he'll say whether we can."

Hispanic female, age 27, food packer

Whereas some respondents were not allowed to take breaks during the course of their workday, others are harassed if they take off a day, even if for reasons of sickness.

"If you are sick and don't come to work, they ask for proof – why didn't you come, the time you went to the doctor, what did the doctor tell you, what medicine did they give you – everything. And if your child is sick and you have to stay home with your child, even if you bring proof in sometimes they don't even believe it. They don't fire you, but they make it miserable for you, make us feel like it shouldn't happen at all."

Hispanic female, age 30, food packer

No sick days or vacations?

- Thirty percent of the respondents are not allowed to take a sick or vacation day, paid or unpaid, without risking being fired.
- Forty-two percent of the respondents said that they are not given paid sick or vacation days, but for the remaining 58%, there is often a refusal to grant sick or vacation days, even when they are part of the terms of employment.

Worksites that forbid sick days or vacations are far more likely to be sweatshops than those worksites that allow sick and vacation days to be taken by their employees. Of those respondents who are forbidden to take sick or vacation days, 63% are working in sweatshops, as compared to 24% of the respondents who are allowed to take sick or vacation days.

One of the volunteers administering the survey held up his hand during the survey administration training session, showing his right index finger that was missing two digits.

> *"I lost this part of my finger one day in the factory where I work. The boss sent me in a taxi to the hospital, but he told me that if I want my job, I have to be back next day. No sick day for nothing."*
>
> Hispanic male, age aprox. 30, factory worker

> *"I hurt my back 1½ year ago… after I was standing a long time. I bent myself to lift something heavy. When I went to company doctor, they say I could not have sick leave. However, when I went to insurance doctor, they say I should take leave. When I tell company what insurance doctor said, the company still said no to sick leave… I had to take a leave because my back hurt so much I was not able to stand straight. I had to take a leave for two month without pay."*
>
> Chinese woman, age aprox. 50, factory worker

Although not being allowed to take scheduled breaks would be a violation of labor laws, being required to work over 10 hours/day and not being allowed to take sick days or vacation are not violations. However, there is a strong relationship between these two conditions that merits highlighting.

1. Twenty-six percent (26%) of the survey respondents who were required to work more than 10 hours/day were forbidden scheduled breaks. Fourteen percent (14%) of the workers who were not required to work more than 10 hours/day were forbidden scheduled breaks. Thus, those who are required to work above 10 hours/day are almost twice as likely to be forbidden scheduled breaks as those who are not required to work over 10 hours/day.
2. Forty-one percent (41%) of the survey respondents who were forbidden sick or vacation days were also forbidden scheduled breaks. This compares to 7% of the respondents who were allowed sick/vacation days who were forbidden scheduled breaks. Thus, those who are forbidden sick/vacation days are almost six times as likely to be forbidden scheduled breaks as those who are allowed sick/vacation days.

One final point related to benefits arose periodically when speaking to workers in the

interviews. Employers frequently have two classifications of employees – permanent and temporary. As might be expected, temporary employees are rarely entitled to any benefits, paid or otherwise. What was surprising was the lack of connection between the length of employment and employee classification in many workplaces.

> *"There are two categories – people who are permanent and people who are only temporary. She doesn't know when she's [going to be] permanent. She doesn't have any benefits, sick days or holidays. Only when people are considered permanent workers… The boss decides when you are permanent or temporary. Right now, I'm considered temporary because I am substituting for people who are on vacation. You can be a temporary worker five or six years."*
>
> Polish female, age 36 years, office cleaner

Wages

- Nine percent (9%) of the workers reported earning less than minimum wage, most often working in restaurants, earning $2 to $3 per hour.
- Nine percent (9%) of the workers earned minimum wage ($5.15/hour).
- Eighteen percent (18%) of the workers reported being required to work over 10 hours/day or over 40 hours/week, but not being paid overtime.

Like the terms of employment, working conditions related to wages were examined as indicators of possible sweatshop conditions as well as problems in and of themselves. Survey respondents were paid, for the most part, at or above minimum wage. Nine percent of the workers reported earning less than minimum wage, most often working in restaurants, earning $2 to $3 per hour. Frequently those workers employed by fixed salary (18% of the respondents) earned the lowest hourly wage.

> *"I work 10:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. I wash dishes, sweep floors – cleaning. One day off a week. Paid $900 a month. [315 hours/month, $2.86/hour]. If I stay over, no extra money."*
>
> Chinese male, age 42, restaurant worker

> *"I start working early in the morning, like sometimes from 8:00 a.m. until… well, we close up around 10:00 usually, but there are occasions that I will work till like 11:00 or 12:00. I get paid in cash. $50 a day [$3.12 - $3.57/hour]."*
>
> Hispanic female, age 15, carnival worker

Another nine percent of the workers earned minimum wage ($5.15/hour) and 82% reported earning above $5.15 per hour. Only 3% of the respondents were paid by piecework, and 78% reported being paid by the hour. Again, receipt of overtime pay varied widely among the respondents, with 18% of the workers reporting being required to work over 10 hours/day or over 40 hours/week, but not being paid overtime.

A majority (80%) of the workers are paid by check. In addition, nine percent received their wages in cash, and another ten percent are paid with a combination of both check and cash.

Nineteen percent of the respondents reported not being paid all wages due. Occasionally, employers deny wages to workers when they are upset about a situation at the worksite.

> *"If they [co-workers] do something wrong, he just tells them to go home and he will not pay them. Usually he will hire someone else, but if the person has been working there for a couple of years, they will come back."*

Hispanic female, age 15, carnival cook

In some cases, the denial of wages is not acknowledged as such by the employer, but workers are told that they will get paid in the future for current work, and then are never paid the wages due. An ESL teacher described this situation as it effected one of her students.

> *"[He] worked for six months at this construction company. And the construction company offered him $12,000 . He alone wasn't paid that much. They always, you know, tell him, 'We are gonna pay you next week or next week or next.' There are some people who are owed like $5,000, not just like one paycheck. It's like they were working for half a year without pay."*

Other workers, when denied their full wages, were concurrently intimidated or abused to scare them into acquiescing to their employer.

> *"They owed me $1,925… The female owner said, 'I pay you a thousand dollars only because I see you as an old guy, and that's why I'm doing you a favor. Otherwise, I would pay you nothing and then I would kick you out and kick you.' I say, 'Fine, then you have to pay me for transportation fee too.' Then the female owner said, 'I prefer to throw the money in a garbage can than give it to you.'"*

Chinese male, age 42, chef

Taxes were taken out of 83% of the respondents' wages. A number of undocumented respondents reported that taxes were deducted from their wages, a portion of which was returned as a lump sum on their paycheck.

> *"I basically don't ask about taxes because I don't have papers so I don't really see it. But… in the tax line, they give out $5.00 extra and they're giving us the tax money back. Not all of it, but part of it. But I get like $5.00 extra on every check. The agency made us fill out an application so we could receive credit from the taxes for $5.00."*

Mexican male, age 46, construction

> *"Many people don't have papers. They pay us by check… and taxes are taken out"*

Mexican male, age 23, furniture manufacture

Looking again at the relationships between variables within this subsection, respondents' hourly pay is strongly related to most of the other wage factors.

- 73% of the survey respondents earning less than $5.15/hour are not paid for overtime, and 34% of respondents earning $5.15/hour or more are not paid for overtime. Thus those respondents earning less than minimum wage are twice as likely not to receive overtime as those earning minimum wage or more.

- 26% of the survey respondents earning less than $5.15/hour are paid by check, and 88% of respondents earning $5.15/hour or more are paid by check. Thus respondents earning less than minimum wage are over three times as likely to be paid by cash or a combination of cash and check than those earning minimum wage or higher.

- 25% of the survey respondents earning less than $5.15/hour did not receive all wages due, 40% of respondents earning $5.15/hour did not receive all wages due and 16% of respondents earning more than $5.15 /hour did not receive all wages due. Thus regardless of workers' wage level, there is a significant chance that they will not receive all of their wages due, although the relationship is not linear.

- 46% of the survey respondents earning less than $5.15/hour have taxes deducted from their wages and 90% of respondents earning $5.15/hour or more have taxes deducted from their wages. Thus those persons earning less than minimum wage are only half as likely to have taxes deducted from their pay as persons earning at least minimum wage.

Finally, an interesting relationship exists between the form of wages that workers receive and taxes.

- 94% of respondents paid by check have taxes deducted from their wages, and only 43% of respondents paid by cash or both have taxes deducted from their wages. As might be predicted, respondents paid by check are twice as likely to have taxes deducted from their wages as those paid by cash or both.

<u>The Relationship Between Wages and Sweatshops</u>

Wages are strongly related to sweatshops, although once again the nature of the relationship is somewhat surprising.

Table 11 Sweatshop Employment by Wages			
Hourly Pay:	Sweatshop Worksite		**Total**
	No	**Yes**	
Below $5.15/hr.	10.9% (7)	89.1% (57)	100.0% (64)
$5.15/hr.	42.9% (30)	57.1% (40)	100.0% (70)
Above $5.15/hr.	74.0% (447)	26.0% (157)	100.0% (604)
Total	**62.4% (484)**	**34.4% (254)**	**100.0% (738)**

As hourly wage diminishes, the percentage of workers employed in sweatshops increases. What was unexpected was the level of sweatshop employment (56%) among respondents receiving minimum wage. One might have anticipated that if employers complied with minimum wage laws, that the other labor laws would be followed as well. Yet in over half of the cases where respondents receive minimum wage, and over one quarter of the cases where respondents are paid above minimum wage, workers are employed in sweatshops.

The way that people are paid also is strongly associated with sweatshop employment. Of those survey respondents who are paid in cash, 79% are working in sweatshops. This compares to 27% of the respondents who are paid by check. Those persons who are paid with a combination of check and cash are also highly likely to be working in a sweatshop, with 65% of this group in sweatshop employment situations.

VIII. WHAT ARE THE WORKING CONDITIONS IN SWEATSHOPS?

This section looks at the data regarding both the environmental conditions as well as the rules within worksites. Like the previous two sections, many of the factors examined are not in and of themselves necessarily sweatshop conditions. However, as a set of conditions, they are highly informative when examining the nature of respondents' work environments.

Hazards

Working conditions of employees are, not surprisingly, highly correlated to the presence of sweatshops.

Table 12 Sweatshop Employment by Workers' Assessment of Danger

Where there dangers to your health and/or safety?	Sweatshop Worksite		Total
	No	Yes	
No	75.0% (401)	25.0% (134)	100.0% (535)
Yes	41.6% (92)	58.4% (129)	100.0% (221)
Total	**65.2% (493)**	**34.8% (263)**	**100.0% (756)**

Table 13 Sweatshop Employment by Health and Safety Dangers

Respondents working with dangerous work conditions:	Sweatshop Worksite		Total
	No	Yes	
Chemicals	42.3% (52)	57.7% (71)	100.0% (123)
Dangerous equipment	46.0% (75)	54.0% (88)	100.0% (163)
Open Flames	27.8% (27)	72.2% (70)	100.0% (97)
Heat Stress/Severe Cold	32.4% (56)	67.6% (117)	100.0% (173)
No Ventilation	16.1% (20)	83.9% (104)	100.0% (124)
Abusive Supervisors	26.6% (33)	73.4% (91)	100% (124)
Sexual Harassment	0% (0)	100.0% (19)	100.0% (19)
Locked Exits	10% (6)	90% (54)	100% (60)
Total	**30.5% (269)**	**69.5% (614)**	**100.0% (883)**

Those respondents who report that they work where there were dangers to their health and safety, who work with heat stress or severe cold, open flames or within crowded conditions and those who have abusive supervisors, work in sweatshops two to three times as often as employees who do not work with those conditions. And those respondents who work with dangerous equipment are almost twice as likely as those who do not work with dangerous equipment to work within a sweatshop.

Health and Safety Problems

A significant number of respondents work under dangerous conditions.

Table 14 Dangerous Working Conditions Experienced by Respondents By Occupations

Occupations	Works with One of Four Dangers- Heat/cold Chemicals, Open flames, Dang. Equip[10]	No protective clothing or training when needed	No Ventilation	Crowded	Locked Exits	Injured on the Job
Sales Clerk	5.1 % 2	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	5.1% 2	0.0% 0	5.1% 2
Office Assistant	15.4% 2	25.0% 1	7.7% 1	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	7.7% 1
Professional	4.2% 1	0.0% 0	4.2% 1	4.2% 1	4.2% 1	4.2% 1
Machine Operator	41.4% 36	32.5% 13	12.6% 11	13.8% 12	3.4% 3	9.2% 8
Factory Worker	46.3% 50	40.4% 19	25.0% 27	13.0% 14	6.5% 7	14.8% 16
Medical/Teachers Aide	21.7% 5	42.9% 3	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	8.7% 2	21.7% 5
Garment Worker	30.8% 8	54.5% 6	11.5% 3	23.1% 6	23.1% 6	19.2% 5
Food Preparation/ Restaurant Worker	30.8% 28	42.3% 11	7.7% 7	13.2% 6	6.6% 6	13.2% 12
Driver	37.5% 3	25.0% 1	25.0% 2	25.0% 2	0.0% 0	12.5% 1
Tradesperson	73.5% 25	38.5% 10	32.4% 11	23.5% 8	8.8% 3	35.3% 12
Maid/Laundry Worker	20.6% 7	31.3% 5	23.5% 8	5.9% 2	2.9% 1	5.9% 2
Janitor	48.2% 27	64.5% 20	17.9% 10	1.8% 20	8.9% 5	17.9% 10
Daycare Worker	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	0.0% 0	11.1% 2	5.6% 1
Other	35.4% 81	40.0% 34	18.8% 43	11.4% 26	10.5% 24	17.0% 39
Total	**34.8% 275**	**39.5% 123**	**15.7% 124**	**10.9% 86**	**7.6% 60**	**14.6% 115**

10 P-values are as follows for this table: works with one of for dangers – p = .000; no protective clothing – p = .085; no ventilation – p = .000; crowded – p=.010; locked exits – p = .073; injured on the job – p = .019.

When examined as a group, 35% of all survey respondents work with/in one of these conditions, and 40% of this group of respondents were not given protective clothing and training for working with/in these dangerous conditions.

"First of all I use the sander to sand down the desk and after I sand it down, I usually spray paint the desk black… It's a line. They have two painters here and I'm in the middle and then the finish painter on my other side. Since I'm in the middle, I get both toxic chemicals from both sides. Usually, the painters have their own masks. I have to be insisting on a mask for the paint. It's very toxic. I have to insist my supervisor for the mask… [Interviewer: When you ask the supervisor for a mask, does he provide it?] He'll give me the mask after a half hour, but I still have to be working in it [the fumes] until it comes."

Hispanic male, age 23, furniture sander/painter

"They usually have a fan there, but it really does not work because of the fire which is about 400 degrees, and the grill, so the only thing we usually do is just pack down with ice… We usually grab towels, put ice in it and just put it around or necks and over our shoulders… It works like about for an hour if it's really hot. [Interviewer: Do you take more breaks when it's that hot?] Yes, we usually sit down for a couple of minutes and then get up again."

Hispanic female, age 15, carnival cook

- Eleven percent of the respondents reported working in crowded conditions. Sixteen percent said that they worked in sites with no ventilation, and eight percent said that they worked in buildings with locked exits.

"Outside its 100 degrees and inside its like 200. It's real hot in there. They don't have windows. When it's 90 degrees, we're just sweating. The sweat is just pouring off us. We just have fans but no ventilation."

Hispanic female, age 30, food packer

"After 5:00, the air conditioning is off, so we have to work in very bad conditions because it is hot. We have to use chemicals to clean the bathrooms, and they are dangerous because there is no ventilation or air conditioning. There is very bad conditions there."

Polish male, age 52, office cleaner

"It's very congested, very hot… The windows have those iron things, the bars, and there's no way to open the widows, so that is why they have industrial fans. So there's no ventilation going out."

Hispanic Male, age 38, furniture sander/painter

"Sometimes they lock the outside so you can't get through. You have to get permission from them. There are doors, but they lock it from the outside. They close it so other people can't go in. [Interviewer: But could you get out if you needed to?] There is only one door for emergency exit."

Hispanic female, age 30, factory worker

Injuries at Work

Thirty-one percent (31%) of the workers who experience one of the nine health and safety hazards (heat stress/severe cold, chemicals, dangerous equipment, open flames, crowded conditions, no ventilation, abusive supervisors, locked exits and sexual harassment) report that they have been injured on the job. Workers exposed to these hazards or dangers have a nearly one-in-three likelihood of being hurt on the job.

Finally, when asked if they had ever been injured at work, 15% of the respondents said "yes." And, the numbers climb dramatically when this variable was examined controlling for workers who experience any of the previously discussed nine health and safety dangers in the workplace (heat stress/severe cold, chemicals, dangerous equipment, open flames, crowded conditions, no ventilation, abusive supervisors, locked exits and sexual harassment). Two to five times the percentages of workers are injured who work in these conditions, as compared with those who do not. The strongest relationship is for those workers who experience heat stress and severe cold. Forty percent of survey respondents who work with heat stress/severe cold have been injured at work, as compared to 8% of the respondents who do not work with heat stress/severe cold.

Most agencies participating in the study had staff who reported horror stories related to their clients who were hurt on the job. Often, these stories involved employers who did not respond to their employees needs appropriately, much less provide adequate compensation. An ESL teacher reported that one of her clients was "butchered" at work.

> *"There was this gentleman, [my student], the machine cut his hand off and he bleed and you know, big problem. He didn't have a green card. He was in the process of being sponsored by his children I think. The employer was really giving him a bad time, telling him that he was going to send immigration* [Ed. note: i.e. contact the Immigration and Naturalization Service] *and stuff. First they gave him some money, like $300 or something. They didn't want to pay his medical bills – terrible."*

Other respondents reported far better treatment from their employers when they were hurt on the job. Some workers reported that their employers paid their medical bills for work-related injuries, although 45% of the respondents did not have health care insurance through their work. One of the agency workers explained that many of their clients don't know that health care insurance may be an option as an employment benefit, and given their limited English fluency and unfamiliarity with the U.S. work system, may not be taking health care coverage even if it is available. According to her, the workplaces are not eager to make the employees aware of the benefits.

<u>Harassment and Abuse</u>

- ♦ Two percent of the respondents reported sexual harassment.
- ♦ Sixteen percent of the survey respondents reported working under abusive supervisors.

Two percent of the respondents reported sexual harassment. One group of women in a food packing plant reported that they had to have sex with the supervisor or else they and their entire families who also worked in the factory would be fired. According to one staff member in a community agency, the problem is tied into cultural issues as well.

> *"When women have Latino supervisors, many are sexually harassed. They [the supervisors] think that they are still in Mexico. The first generation immigrants won't speak out. The second generation, yes."*

Furthermore, when asked during interviews about sexual harassment, women repeatedly said that they interpret 'sexual harassment' as being forced to have sex with someone, and did not consider being grabbed, propositioned or having sexual comments made to them as sexual harassment. Thus, this experience is likely to be underreported.

Sixteen percent of the survey respondents reported working under abusive supervisors. Abuse took a variety of forms. Supervisors as a part of their 'normal' interactions routinely verbally abused some workers.

> *"Very often, if people want to ask some questions or wanted to know why is this or that, she never explained it and instead she was shouting and you know, she really was abusive."*
>
> Polish male, age 52, office cleaner

> *"If the restaurant make good business, the owner will be happy. But if it doesn't have good business, then he doesn't feel happy and passes it on to us. [Interviewer: What would he do?] Yelling*."
>
> Chinese male, age 40, chef

> *"My boss was saying very dirty words to me like, 'F--- Y—' and you know 'You're a S— of a B----'. Real dirty words I don't want to say it."*
>
> Chinese male, age 42, chef

A few workers mentioned outright racism and ethnic discrimination by supervisors.

> *"They don't give a respect for us… They used names for us, nicknames… like 'Brazers' or 'Wetbacks'."*
>
> Hispanic male, age 16, grocery stoker

> *"Most of our workers… they're African American and he usually treats them very very bad – like as in name calling. Like if they do something wrong or anything, he'll go off on them or just tell them to leave or be very disrespectful."*
>
> Hispanic female, age 15, carnival cook

Other workers described arbitrary discrimination against workers, based on the personal likes and dislikes of workers by supervisors.

"A group of people under her supervision were working only 8 hours, but they were paid extra, like for 12 or 15 hours. She chose people she liked to give extra money, and other people never get overtime. This supervisor was giving a raise for people she likes…She was taking bribes, so it didn't depend if you were legal or illegal. If you were giving … bribes, you were treated better...

Polish male, age 42, office cleaner

Physical abuse was reported only rarely. In most cases, the worker was undocumented and did not speak English, thus reducing the chances that he or she would report the abuse or seek retribution, and was placed in the jobs through the illegal employment agencies [see Appendix D]. However, it is helpful to hear about an incident to get a sense of the danger and severity of the situation for some workers.

"At this time, the owners kicked me out, pushed me out. I told him, 'I am not going unless you give me my salary.' AT this time, my male boss said, 'You don't want to go? Then I call police. I call INS and send you back to China.' And then the female boss said 'If you don't go then you will disappear tonight – you will disappear.' Eliminate me you know, kill. At this time the male owner took a iron tray and hit my left leg. And then I couldn't stand it. I feel pain and then I sit down on the ground. At this time, they continued to kick me out, pushing me out. At this time, the chief cook tried to kick me out and said, 'Let's go out and fight. I will hit you in the outside!' At this time I was holding on to something in the kitchen… a bar or something… and they could not kick me out. At this time, the male owner and female owner went back to the office. I was sitting on the ground about 10 minutes. I was so scared at the time. I thought well in this situation, I don't want it to happen like this because it is not good for me… I was thinking what should I do. I have big trouble right now. What if the police came and the INS can send me back? I was so scared they would hire someone to kill me and I know nobody there. And they [the owners and other workers] are from [a different Chinese Province from his own] and I know nobody there in the restaurant. I was so scared if someone killed me and nobody know me there. If I was killed, no one would notice."

Chinese male, age 42, chef

<u>Bathrooms</u>

Bathrooms are not available to 6% of the survey respondents, and 10% of the respondents who had bathrooms available said that they were not clean and maintained.

"There are about 30 people on each shift. There are two bathrooms, but only one works."

Hispanic female, age 23 years, factory worker

IX. WORKERS' RESPONSES TO SWEATSHOP CONDITIONS

Complaints

Despite the fact that many if not most of the employees in these sweatshops have few of the resources or supports that it would take to try and change the circumstances under which they work, not all of them sit back and take the abuse. In interviews with these workers, some respondents described how they had spoken up and complained. However, rarely was the outcome of this response beneficial to the employee, at least in the short run. On occasion, workers described the outcome as, for the most part, simply ineffective.

> *"It gets really bad. Sometimes the workers complain about the conditions to the boss and sometimes he'll do something about it, or sometimes he says he will and he'll never do anything about it. Like complaining about one of the fires that keeps blowing out. We told him something about it and he did something about it, he went to go get it fixed. But some of the gases are coming out through some of the hoses so we told him if he could clean it to get it and he said he would get to it, but he didn't get it till like some months later… We complained about the heat and danger of the oil, but there was really nothing that he could do about it."*
>
> Hispanic female, age 15, carnival cook

Others said that the response was to tell them that they could leave if they didn't like the conditions.

> *"I told [the boss] this is illegal. He said he didn't care if it was illegal and that he could get someone else if I didn't want to do the job. I spoke to [a coworker] and she spoke to the boss and they questioned her – why was she suddenly asking questions when before she didn't?*
>
> Hispanic female, age 23, factory worker

> *"The worst part was when we have to carry the water to the shelves and it was too heavy and we had to carry so many. It was sometimes I got back pain because it was too much to carry and it was heavy. I complained to the supervisor, and he said if I don't want to, don't come in.*
>
> Hispanic male, age 16, stockboy

For most workers, the response was quick and certain. Complaining about conditions was a one-way ticket out of their jobs.

> *"People are afraid to say they [won't] handle [the chemicals] because they might lose their jobs. If one person complains, he is fired. They quickly find another person to replace him. And there are many people looking for a job.."*
>
> Polish female, age 36, office cleaner

> *"I was working at the factory. I was given five minutes for bathroom break. I spoke up about how that was not reasonable. When I returned to work, I was fired. Other workers said that they would talk [to management], but they didn't."*
>
> Hispanic female, age 27, food packer

Workers also spoke periodically about the lack of interaction, communication and support between employees on the job and even outside of the work setting.

"It's sometimes better to be quiet rather than to speak up and be supportive of others. Sometimes you can go to worse trouble than previously. Because I was always telling the truth, sometimes I had problems."

Polish male, age 52, office cleaner

"I don't know what other workers thought about the conditions. We don't talk to each other. Many different ethnic groups work here."

Vietnamese male, age 24, printing shop worker

"If I had a friend working in the restaurant and he complain to me about the workload, the working hours and the low salary, I would not give person suggestions and tell him there's other job available like airport job. Everybody has different thinking."

Chinese male, age 42, restaurant worker

Unions and Government Agencies as Tools

The use of unions as a tool to respond to sweatshop employment conditions was of mixed effectiveness according to the respondents interviewed in this study. Unfortunately, there was not a question on the survey as to whether or not the respondents were unionized. However, five of the interviewees worked in unionized shops and spoke about the impact of having them on the quality of their jobs.

Some spoke of the ways that the union had mediated in difficult situations and had been effective at improving their working conditions.

"There is another person, the [union] steward who checks around [to see] if there's some kind of abnormal situation or if the work is not done properly, to remedy, so that there's no complaints or anything. She checks around to make sure that things run smoothly. I think that it [the union steward] is there. Employees elect this person and she reports to the boss. Where my mother-in-law was, the steward was chosen by the boss, so it wasn't helpful to the workers ."

Polish female, age aprox. 55, office cleaner

"We had a terrible supervisor. We tried for a few years to get rid of her, and now we have a new one. It took us two years because she [the supervisor] has some contacts in unions, some friends so she was able to keep herself there… We were talking with union and they changed her. They didn't do anything about the danger of the building [harsh chemicals used for cleaning, no ventilation], but now we have fans and we can go outside for some time… I have $9.50 [per hour wage], but everybody starts from $7.45 and every year they have a raise like fifty cents plus they have labor union, so they get extra fifteen, twenty cents every year… Sometimes I have to work overtime, but it is paid and since it is union, you know, time and a half."

Polish male, age 52, office cleaner

For other respondents, the union was of no help in dealing with the problems that they encountered.

"We had a union. [The factory] laid a lot of us off, but when they called people back to work, they called back people with less seniority than me. I think it is because I always speak up. So I called the company and they said they didn't know. The union did nothing. I complained to the Chicago Department of Human Rights. When we had a meeting with the president and the vice-president, they asked me to withdraw my suit and they'd return my job, but three to four months were lost without pay. When I returned, they treated me badly and the union did nothing."

Hispanic female, age 33, factory worker

"There were some supplies missing from the office and my co-workers were not taking the stuff; somebody else was. But one of the employees was fired. The union didn't stick up for them."

Polish female, age 36, office cleaner

"When I was hurt and insurance doctor say I should take leave but company still said no to sick leave… I had to take a leave because my back hurt so much I was not able to stand straight. I had to take a leave for two month without pay… I spoke to union person in the working place. The union person told me to get all the materials. My son helped me to put everything together and gave to the union. But nothing happened.

Chinese female, age 45, bakery worker

Two people interviewed talked about their interactions with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) when they contacted it for help regarding employment abuses. One worker who contacted the DOL when she was fired after being verbally abused on the job by a supervisor, had her job reinstated .

"I went to the labor department [DOL] but the owner of the company said that I was somebody who talked and didn't work. They decided I was right... I was very good worker for two and a half years and I was very shy person, so you know to say that I was abused it was really terrible. But this case was in court for a half year. It took a half year to finish it and finally get some money because half year I was without money."

Polish female, age late twenties, factory worker

Yet an employment counselor had far less satisfaction from her interactions with the Department and feels that improvements could be made that would help her clients.

"The Department of Labor needs to have someone who can answer questions in Polish. There is no one who can speak Polish there. When you hear complaints, what can you say? Even if someone calls us and we call the DOL, the government won't do anything about them [the complaints]."

Job Counselor

Why People Stay

Far more often than not, employees stay in the sweatshops where they work, rather than leaving for a better employment situation. When asked why, respondents had many responses. Frequently it was plain and simple. They needed the money, and saw no other options.

"I don't have time to go looking for another job. I need the money. I needed the money. I have family. I needed the money."

Vietnamese male, age 24, printing shop worker

"Its not so easy to leave a job. If they could change jobs today so that they are not left without a paycheck, they would probably do it. But if it means leaving this job and looking for another better job, it's this indefinite time they are left without being paid. I mean they have to pay rent, they have to raise a family and they have to even support a family back home. Nobody could afford that… They need that security of having a job."

Polish ESL teacher

Community workers from each organization raised the role of English proficiency as a factor in their constituencies remaining in sweatshops. According to agency staff, those immigrants whose English skills are weak or who do not speak the language at all are at risk of working in sweatshop. This is more often true of older immigrants, as was reported in each of the immigrant agencies.

"If they have little or no English, they probably work in the Asian restaurants for a flat rate – cash. This is mostly older people who came in their 30's or 40's. If they had language skills, they'd come [to us] for a job."

Vietnamese employment counselor

"People are adjusted to their environment. They'd have to learn English if they were to leave. They don't want to lose the comfort of their known surroundings."

Chinese community organizer

Others across ethnic communities raised the possible need to travel outside of their immediate neighborhood or community as another significant deterrent from leaving sweatshop worksites.

"In the airport, I could earn $7.85 and hour, but I am only able to work for eight hours. Now in my new job, I only earn $5.40 an hour, but I can work for 11-12 hours a day. Probably the total pay is the same, but the location is closer to home and not requires traveling."

Chinese male, age 50, bakery worker/delivery man

A group of Hispanic food packers asked to be interviewed because their working conditions are so bad (*e.g.* unpredictably long hours, intense heat, locked doors, no communication with people outside factory during work). When asked why they stayed at this workplace, they responded similarly.

"We get used to it and it's close to home."
"We don't know about other places and we're close to home."
"We don't have to take buses – it's close to home."

Transportation concerns are not simply ones that can be conquered via a change in attitude. Dependency on public transportation or on other private arrangements can leave workers stranded.

> *"They don't believe that they can find anything else. This area here – most of these people are not independent. They don't have cars, for example, so they have to rely on public transportation. They know this factory I can go to on my own, but there's another factory. Maybe they would pay me better, but I cannot get to it because there are no buses. Sometimes they carpool. But you know how many times do people tell me that they made a deal with somebody who will take them over there and they stranded them back? They didn't know how to get home because they were left on the other side of the city. It's terrible."*
>
> Polish ESL teacher

Others remain out of a lack of awareness that many of the working conditions at their jobs would be considered sweatshop conditions and are illegal.

> *"Our students are mostly females and are training to be CNA's for nursing homes. Before this, most were cleaners, nannies and cooks. At first, they did not want to talk. They don't complain a lot. They are not even aware of the abuse."*
>
> Polish ESL teacher

The 42-year old restaurant worker who earns $900 a month for 315 hours of work ($2.86/hour) when asked why he stayed in this job rather than looking for one with better pay said,

> *"It is nothing special. It is ok ."*
>
> Chinese male, age 42, chef

Other agency staff persons raised the issue of conditioning. After living in a particular cultural context in their homelands, immigrants carry similar expectations of their work life here in the U.S. This came up repeatedly in staff comments across each of the communities that participated in the study. In the case of Polish immigrants, life in Poland conditioned those now living in the U.S. to distrust the government and certainly not to look to it to remedy bad working conditions. This conditioning extended to a lack of trust for seemingly supportive community or labor organizations.

> *"A janitorial union from the suburbs tried to organize the Polish women who were working in the suburbs. Their pay rates were low, the downtown was unionized [Ed. Note: Janitorial wages are much higher in the City.] These are middle-aged women in their fifties and sixties. They usually live in the vicinity of the places that they worked. They did not want to unionize. They are afraid of losing their jobs. Fifty years of communism taught people to mistrust the government."*
>
> Polish job training coordinator

According to a job counselor in the Chinese community, the lack of interest in addressing workplace abuse is a result of learned character and expectations from one's homeland.

> *"We are too shy to ask for promotion or raise, even when pay is very bad for many years.*

And there is no overtime pay in China. You get your job done, however long it takes."

For some workers, their current situation, even if it is bad, is not as bad as stories of other employment conditions that they have heard, such as those experienced by day laborers and those persons who find work through the illegal employment agency placements[11]. Many workers would rather stay with the 'hell' that they know, rather than risk finding themselves in something worse.

> *"People stay because compared to the other restaurants, maybe its worse or the same. So that is why they stay."*
>
> Chinese male, age 40, chef

> *"…everything is so far so good compared to my mother-in-law. Her boss hit her. She [the boss] treats people terribly. [My mother-in-law] didn't work for three months because she has swollen legs and can hardly walk and its from the job… The bosses were screaming and yelling at people. I have a comparison because what I have now, compared to my mother-in-law, my bosses are fair and they're patient and they can explain things."*
>
> Polish female, age 36, office cleaner

These reasons for staying (money, language, transportation/location, ignorance and fear) were raised frequently by workers across ethnicities. Yet in addition to these common themes, different circumstances and conditions between ethnic groups led to additional and different reasons that workers remained in sweatshop worksites.

Within the Polish community, agency staff discussed their community's attitudes towards receipt of welfare within the community and how this effects people's willingness to work in bad employment situations. It is their experience that people in their community believe that if you are healthy, you should be working, even if it is not in a great job - even if it is in a lousy job. They are reluctant to use the public welfare system.

> *"Polish people believe that if you are able, you should work. 50,000 Poles live below the poverty line in Illinois, but only 1000 are on welfare. When the SSI laws were changed, we expected to see many people at our door saying that they couldn't survive, but we only had 800-1000 additional clients. People find ways to work and survive."*
>
> Job training coordinator

According to agency staff collecting surveys from residents in the Mexican community, fear of deportation for oneself or one's family or friends is a primary motivating factor for remaining in jobs with dangerous working conditions. According to the Ethnic Handbook[12], as of 1996, the Latino Institute estimated that approximately 20% of Mexicans living in the Chicago metropolitan area were undocumented[13].

[11] For further discussion of these employment conditions, see Appendix D.

[12] (1997). Lynton, Cynthia. The Ethnic Handbook. IL Ethnic Coalition. Page 141.

[13] Within this study, approximately 30% of the Hispanic respondents are undocumented.

"I worked with a client who was documented. She had a job in a factory and was being threatened by her supervisor. She complained and eventually got an apology from her supervisor, but no one else stood up for her. She was alone. The other Hispanics didn't speak English and were afraid that they'd lose their jobs. They have large families and won't be able to pay expenses… The documented workers fear for the undocumented workers. They want to say something, but everyone is afraid that they will call the INS."

Sexual assault counselor

In addition, staff raised concerns about their clients' and parishioners' feeling that because they speak no or little English, they cannot complain to anyone. As a result, the clients believe that they have no alternatives to the types of worksites in which they are employed. Most of the people that the clients know also work in these conditions.

"Even if you are documented, just because you can't speak up, you are hurt. Employers take advantage of you… you can't defend yourself. And most of the women work in the suburbs. They all have, plus or minus, the same bad work. They figure that is all there is."

Intake worker

"This is not ignorance or even a [lack of will]; but they see no alternatives. "

Local religious leader

Examining the extent and severity of sweatshops within the Chinese community was complex and difficult. Although many people within the Polish and Mexican community work for companies that are owned or managed by other Poles and Mexicans, rarely do the owners or managers of these workplaces live in the immediate vicinity of the workers. According to staff within a Chinese community-based agency, in the case of the Chinese immigrants, many live and work in Chinatown, rarely stepping outside this small geographical area for any reason. Furthermore, their employers are likely to be their neighbors or live within the community as well. This makes speaking out against the sweatshop conditions existing in some of the worksites extremely difficult.

When workers are given an opportunity to leave sweatshop worksites, but are required to go outside of the Chinatown community, community agency staff reported that most workers were not interested. Some Chinese workers remain in jobs with severe working conditions out of loyalty to friends or family. There is a tradition of loyalty to anyone who has ever helped you, such as a boss, who gave you a job when you had nothing.

"Some stay in restaurants for twenty years. There, the owners gave them food, money and sometimes helped their children. Now, they [the workers] always think they owe them [the owners]. Sometimes, they say, 'I work hard for you for many years. Why do you beat me?' But they don't think they leave the employer. They can never do that."

Community organizer

"Our culture teaches more loyalty to employers. Many work for employer for whole life. [People believe] if you take care of the boss' business, he'll take care of you."

Employment counselor

"There is another factor leading to people staying in bad working conditions. It is our tradition. We owe people for life long. For Asian people – it is our tradition – only when they have cause like being hit will they say anything."

Community organizer

According to Chinese community-based staff, other explanations for Chinese workers remaining in sweatshops included cultural norms about obedience or the moral responsibility to work and provide for one's family.

"Chinese norm teaches you to tolerate, try not to fight. Security is most important. When Chinese are children, they say, 'You have only ears, no mouth. Just do what I say. Discipline is important. Then they lack thinking how to take risk or adventure. Why are we surprised when they don't say no to bad employment?"

Employment counselor

"They have family to feed. If they don't have job, it is a shame. If you don't have a job, do anything. Even it is a bad job. You are better if you clean street for bad money than if you don't work. It is a shame on your family if you don't work. When you have a job, you have social standing. You are valuable. Without a job, you are not valuable."

Community organizer

For the Vietnamese community, the incidence of sweatshop conditions is significantly lower. Community agency staff attribute this to the fact that most of these Vietnamese immigrants have been here for a considerable period of time, almost all are documented, and their level of English is, overall, quite high. Most would not accept a job without receiving at least minimum wage and benefits. If they were offered less, they would return to the community job placement offices and find a better situation.

"Our clients are, overall, comfortable in their work place. They receive minimum wage or better, and they prefer to work for a company that has good benefits. If we send them to a company and they find out there are not benefits, they come back to us and complain. They say, 'There are no benefits. I don't want to work there. Help me find a better workplace."

Employment counselor

Within the African-American community, a relatively low incidence of sweatshop conditions was found. One counselor noted that almost all the African-American's surveyed were citizens, spoke English and had some ideas of their workplace rights.

"In my church people know enough to know they can complain. Some may not because

they don't have a choice because of TANF controls..."[14]

Counselor

One note about the inclusivity and representation of the survey sample. Although an attempt was made to include other ethnic communities in the survey, it was not successful. With some populations (*e.g.* Russian Jews, Ethiopians), community leaders felt that the circumstances within which their constituencies work are, overall, quite good, and certainly do not approach the problematic conditions associated with sweatshops. Leaders within other ethnic communities (*e.g.* Indian, Cambodian) said that although they supported the work and saw a need for looking into the situation, they did not have the staff or volunteers to participate in the data collection process. And in a number of communities (*e.g.* Arab, Haitian) attempts to make contact with the community leaders to include their constituencies were unsuccessful. Finally, community leaders from two other ethnic groups (Pakistani and Korean) were unable to convince their members to participate in the study, despite repeated attempts. (For a more detailed discussion of this, see Appendix E.)

Isolation and Lack of Communication

Through the interviews following the collection of the surveys, it became clear that a highly important factor in determining whether people worked in sweatshops was their ability to communicate with others, both on the job and in their homes and communities. On the job, the ability to speak English was raised repeatedly by workers as a factor leading to their holding better quality jobs. And when this ability does not exist, abuse and harassment are common.

"I had some English and I could do certain, better jobs than other people I knew… [People like me] had very good jobs and were not complaining about not getting paid or people harassing them or anything else."

Polish ESL teacher

"In the airport, you can speak Chinese, but because I know a little bit of English, I didn't have a bad time."

Chinese male, age 40, chef

"They treat people like zero, like nobody, like you are not human being. Like I can fire you just now [because] I don't care about you. If you don't speak English, they treat you that way because you don't know to whom to speak and what to say and because you don't know English you don't know what to do and you're really trapped because you have to work some way."

Hispanic female, age aprox. 35, factory worker

"She was treating people worse when their English was worse. She was hired because she was bilingual and she very often spoke English to people who doesn't speak English so this was a kind of abuse. She was hired to explain everything in Polish to people who

[14] TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families) is the public welfare benefit program that replaced AFDC. A major component of TANF is the focus on getting welfare recipients back into the workforce. The counselor in this quote may be referring to her perception that they do not have a choice as to the workplace conditions in which they are employed.

were there. She very often took advantage that she knew English and, you know she treated those people without English very, very bad. If she wanted to fire somebody, she put some dirt somewhere, put lipstick marks on the toilet because she wanted to fire the person. She called the boss and showed, you know, that this person didn't do work, didn't do the right job. And because this person didn't know English, she could say nothing."

Polish male, age 52, office cleaner

When workers do not have the language skills to communicate on the job, connections with others who can interpret and advocate for them can mean the ability to resolve problems or address situations before they become problems.

"Sometimes, people who have like, family who support them not only financially, but morally. There are some times, some instances where, for example, a son… went to the factory and he made a big brawl. 'How are you treating my father?!' and they feel secure that no one is going to mess with them because somebody's gonna come and speak up for them. So many don't speak any word of English. They have to call home and ask somebody to talk to their boss and either change hours or change something else. Even ask for a paycheck if its late or they forgot or whatever."

Polish ESL teacher

Family also can fill the role of trusted informants, providing information and guidance to other family members who may not know about workplace rights, employment options or response options when troubles arise. In addition, family can teach the more mundane, but equally important information and skills necessary for traveling outside of workers' immediate neighborhoods, thus providing them with access to a far larger set of job possibilities. Although this information may be available through community organizations, immigrants who are not familiar with the larger community may not know of these organizations, may not feel comfortable approaching them, or may not trust anyone outside of their family system.

"My son-in-law has been here for a long, long time, and he helped me when I submitted an application to different places. He would tell me, 'You cannot go there because the work would be too difficult for your or too hard or conditions would be too bad.' So I had advice from him. But I relatively quickly found a job so I didn't have to experience actually going to another job. My family was a source of information. I had a friend who would help me around and drive me to different places and when I found a job, she gave me a lift to the building because I was totally lost. I didn't know where to go. She showed me how to use the bus, and now I drive myself."

Polish female, age aprox. 55, office cleaner

"It would be very hard for us if we didn't have family here, because we feel we cannot trust anyone. So for us, a different place or institution or any kind of organization or church or anything, we don't trust. We don't trust anybody. We can only trust our children to talk with us, to ask them something."

Polish female, age aprox. 60, homemaker

For those people without family connections, community ties and neighbors also can serve the function of trusted informants and providers of support. Some respondents looked to members of their own ethnic group, even if they had no personal ties to individuals within these groups, as a potential source of help. However, whether these groups can serve this role is dependent on the information, resources (both time and financial) and stability of these groups.

> *"I came to Chicago because there's a lot of Chinese in Chicago. If I just go back to Iowa, there's not many Chinese there. I cannot ask for help there."*
>
> Chinese male, age 42 , chef

> *"The ladies in the morning language classes and neighborhood centers are connected with each other and use each other for support. They work long hours, but usually they get minimum wage. Their lives are centered in [this town]."*
>
> Hispanic ESL coordinator

> *"People who come from a small city or village – they tend to stick together. They have picnics, dance parties… These people sometimes even work together they tend to live close by… Mostly, its social support, but they network too… If anybody from the outside comes in, they're going to close up and not gonna talk to you."*
>
> Polish female, age 36, office cleaner

Without the ability to communicate in English and without connections, either with family, neighbors or community, people are isolated and have few resources to cope with the dangers and problems frequently present in the lives of poor and working poor people.

> *"I work twelve hours every day – every single day of the week. I have no time to talk to anyone else about my work. I have no time, no connections with other people, no church, no organization. I am alone. All alone."*
>
> Vietnamese male, age 24, printing shop worker

> *"I don't speak English and I cannot find anyplace to ask for help. I don't have anyone to talk to. What can I do in my situation? Right now, I feel helpless. Don't speak English. Don't know how to get my money. No help. Helpless."*
>
> Chinese male, age 42, chef

Time after time in interviews with advocates from community organizations, staff would discuss their frustration with the level of isolation among many of the people living in their neighborhoods, particularly when they have at least some limited resources available to help them.

> *"Its just a little small community. These people, its really hard to reach them because they don't read newspapers. A weekly Polish paper is full of ads and most of these ads are really decent jobs. But they don't read the newspaper, they don't go out, they don't even come to us."*
>
> Polish ESL teacher

X. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The Sweatshop Survey and Report have shown that there are a significant number of people in the Chicago Metropolitan area in workplaces that violate multiple federal wage and labor standards. Thirty-six (36%) of the population surveyed, which was predominantly drawn from low income and immigrant communities, work in places that meet the Department of Labor's definition of sweatshops. Beyond the issues regarding sweatshops, there are serious health and safety problems in substantial numbers of workplaces.

The working conditions identified in this survey only represent the most public set of substandard workplaces. People surveyed in this study have some connection to an institution such as a church or community organization. In other cities such as New York and Los Angeles, the most egregious violations occurred with people that did not have such connections.

Resolving these problems in the Chicago area will require a multi-faceted approach, and should include the following:

- The establishment of a broad-based task force, convened by the U.S. Department of Labor and including union, community organization and business representatives, to look into the problems and design responses that will proactively address the sweatshop conditions. The task force would have the mandates to:
    - collect further information regarding specific industries where sweatshops are found within a number of ethnic communities;
    - design a set of responses to each of the identified sweatshop industries. These responses are likely to be different for each community and industry targeted for intervention, given their significantly different circumstances, environments and needs. These responses would include measures directed at:
        - educating and holding accountable the industries and the employers working within them regarding minimum labor standards and ways of addressing potential problems;
        - collaborating with community agencies to educate their constituencies;
        - developing viable mechanisms for community agencies and individuals to work with the Department of Labor to identify, report, and eliminate sweatshops. For example, this could include the creation of a limited number of "hot" or crisis lines through unions and/or community organizations to receive complaints and to begin verifying them. These organizations would then be required to work collaboratively with the Department of Labor to address the complaints. Another possibility would be the development of a single bureau within the U.S. Department of Labor to respond promptly and appropriately to sweatshop violations, alleviating the current situation in which each bureau can only respond to violations within its jurisdiction;
    - implement these responses in each of the communities; and
    - evaluate the impact of the responses and make any necessary changes to maximize their effectiveness.

- The involvement of the private industry councils and local industry committees to encourage and reward industry for enforcing basic standards.

- The support of further research to gain a better understanding of how goods created by sweatshop labor in this country work their way into the marketplace, and how this chain can be broken.

APPENDICES

A. Sweatshop Working Group Participants

B. Sample Survey Form (with response statistics)

C. Descriptions of Occupational Categories

D. Day Labor/Employment Agencies

E. Missed Communities

Appendix A

SWEATSHOP WORKING GROUP

Asian American Institute
Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
Center for Labor and Community Research
Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues
Chicago Archdiocese Office of Peace and Justice
Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL)
Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues
Chicago Jobs Council
Chinese American Service League
Chinese Mutual Aid Association
Cook County Hospital
Heartland Alliance
Illinois Coalition for Immigrants and Refugee Protection
Interfaith Leadership Project
Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago
Korean American Community Services
Latino Institute
Legal Assistance Foundation
Midwest Center for Immigrant Rights
Mexican American Legal Defense Fund
Mujeres Latinas en Acción
Office of Congressman Danny Davis
Polish American Association
Poverty Law Project
Service Employees International Union
Spanish Coalition for Jobs
Teamsters Union
Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE)
United Electrical Workers (UE)
U.S. Department of Labor, (OSHA, Wage and Hour Division, Women's Division)
University of IL School of Public Health
Vietnamese Association of Illinois

Appendix B

Sample Survey Form
(With Response Statistics)

WORK PLACE SURVEY

1. Currently employed outside home Yes **88%** No **12%** If yes, how many employers? _____ } **1=81%, 2=9%, 3-5=6%, 6+=3%**
2. Employed outside home in past year Yes **96%** No **4%** If yes, how many employers? _____ }**1=87%, 2=15%, 3+=7%**

2a. Work site location: Chicago North **21%** Chicago West **16%** Chicago South **28%** Suburban **35%**

3. Type of work that you do/did and for how long: _____

Questions regarding current employment or regular employment outside home in past year

4. Hourly pay: No_____ $5.15/hr. **9%** Above $5.15/hr.**82%** Below $5.15/hr. **9%**
5. How were you paid? **78%** By the hour? By piecework? **3%** By fixed salary? **18%**
6. Were you required to work: more than 10 hrs./day? Yes **31%** No **61%** (8% missing)
   more than 40 hrs/week? Yes **41%** No **55%** (4% missing)
   6days/week or rotating shifts? Yes **28%** No **61%** (10% missing)
7. Were you allowed/required to take work home? Yes, I was allowed **4%** Yes, I was required **1%** No **90%**
8. Were you paid for overtime? Yes **59%** No **39%**
9. Were your wages paid by : cash? **9%** check? **80%** both? **10%**
10. Did you receive all wages due? Yes **79%** No **19%**
11. Were taxes deducted from wages? Yes **83%** No **16%**
12. Were you allowed to take scheduled breaks? Yes **82%** No **17%**
13. Were paid sick days or vacation benefits offered? Yes **58%** No **42%**
14. Were you allowed to take sick days or vacation? Yes **70%** No **30%**
15. Were health benefits (insurance) available? Yes **54%** No **45%**
16. # of workplace employees: 1-5 **14%** 6-10 **14%** 11-25 **18%** 26+ **52%**
17. Were bathrooms available? Yes **92%** No **6%**

    IF YES: Were they clean and maintained? Yes **87%** No **10%**
    Was there more than 1 bathroom per 10 workers? Yes **64%** No **29%**

18. Were there dangers to your health and/or safety? Yes **28%** No **68%** (4% missing)

    IF YES, was it:
    Chemicals Yes **16%** No **84%**
    Dangerous Equipment Yes **21%** No **79%**
    Open Flames Yes **12%** No **88%**
    Heat Stress/Severe Cold Yes **22%** No **78%**

    If YES to any of these four, were you given protective clothing & training? Yes **55%** No **45%**

    Crowded conditions Yes **11%** No **89%**
    No ventilation Yes **16%** No **84%**
    Abusive Supervisors Yes **16%** No **84%**
    Sexual Harassment Yes **2%** No **98%**
    Locked Exits Yes **8%** No **92%**

    Other/Explain:_____

19. Have you ever been injured at work? Yes **15%** No **84%**
20. Sex Male **39%** Female **57%**
21. Age 12-15 **1%** 16-17 **2%** 18-24 **13%** 25-40 **36%** 41-55 **36%** 56-65 **12%** 66+ **1%**
22. Family Status
    Married Yes **65%** No **35%**
    Children under age 18 Yes **43%** No **57%**
    # people living in your household 1-4 **74%** 5-8 **25%** 8+**1%**
23. Are you the only or primary wage earner in your household? Yes **39%** No **61%**
24. Ethnicity
    Hispanic/Latino Yes **26%** ***41%=** Chinese-**22%**
    Asian Yes **41%*** Vietnamese-**18%**
    African-American Yes **12%**
    Caucasian (non-Hispanic) Yes **21%**
25. Residency Status: **46%** Legal Permanent Resident **39%**U.S. Citizen **10%** Other (5% missing)
26. Received TANF in past year (includes foodstamps, medical card) Yes **8%** No **84%** (7% missing)
27. Are you willing to discuss this further? Yes **6%** No **93%**

If YES: Name_____ **Phone #:**_____

Appendix C

Descriptions of Occupational Categories

Appendix D

Day Labor/ Employment Agencies

Although the working conditions described in this report range from the unacceptable and unpleasant to the illegal and dangerous, this study has captured the experiences of the more 'public face' of sweatshops. Persons who answered the survey and those interviewed are connected in some way with other individuals, churches or organizations, a direct result of the research design that relied on community organizations to collect data from their memberships, parishioners and clients. But there is an entire group of people working in sweatshops who are isolated from any individuals or groups that could serve as a support system. Many of these individuals work as day laborers, waiting in storefront office rooms, warehouses and parking lots and on street corners[15]. Others find their way to horrendous sweatshops via employment agencies that 'specialize' in trafficking undocumented workers. One-on-one interviews provided information on the practices of these employment agencies. Many of these agencies look to an outsider like legitimate employment services[16], and indeed they may provide some legitimate employment referral functions. But they also serve as a broker of undocumented individuals, looking for employment and for employers looking for cheap, easily exploitable labor. The two stories of workers employed through these agencies had a number of striking similarities: each worker was here without any connections to family, friends or community; neither spoke any English; both were sent out of state for a prearranged position; and neither of them had any idea as to how to get away when the situation was untenable.

The first worker interviewed was a high school teacher in China who was not able to support his elderly father and mother, son, and wife on his salary, after his wife lost her job due to the closing of the local factory. He studied Chinese cooking, became a chef, and then came to the U.S. to work in a restaurant. He had been told by a friend of his in China that there are employment agencies in many cities that will place undocumented workers in jobs. At an employment office in New York, he was put on a bus to Iowa where the owner of a Chinese restaurant was waiting for him. After working there for a number of months, he was sent to another restaurant owned by the family in Missouri, followed by another of the family's restaurants in Wisconsin. There, he was verbally and physically abused, denied over half of his wages, and threatened with being killed if he didn't leave. They put him on a bus to Chicago and told him not to say anything to anyone and never to come back.

> *"I got a phone number from my co-worker because I asked him the situation in Chicago, They gave me this employment agency telephone number which is when I get off the bus, I gave them a call. They came to pick me up. The employment agency do pick up and deliver and then you stay here and they find a job… Now I stay in a room here [in*

[15] A study is currently underway by Chicago Jobs with Justice, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, and the University of Illinois at Chicago documenting the experiences of day laborers. The Chicago Workers' Rights Board released the preliminary report on November 4, 1999.

[16] One interviewee provided documentation, showing the employment agencies that had sent him referral forms that were used to send him to sweatshops across the U.S.

Chinatown]. [Interviewer: In whose room are you staying?] Employment agency has rooms. I pay $10 a night. Includes rice and oil, you know vegetable oil and salt, but not vegetables, no meat. If you want, you have to buy it and then you got to cook it… They send me to restaurant in Wisconsin. [Interviewer: Why not stay here in Chicago and work in Chinatown or in another section of the city?] The employment agency referred this job for me. They refer a job and I go. I think maybe there's not a job opening in Chicago."

The other story was related to us by a community agency staff member whose family tried to help a friend of a friend, whose efforts to earn some money led her into a frightening and dangerous situation.

"Our family's friend called from Poland and said there's a lady coming and if we can help her out and find her a job. So she lived maybe a couple of weeks with us, maybe two or three weeks and then my mother found a couple of names of work agencies, it was on the North Side. We used to live there and it was an American work agency and this lady went there on her own. She's by herself, she spoke a little bit of Ukrainian, a little bit of Russian, so she talked to this lady who was the owner of the agency. She said [to the owner] 'I'm here by myself. I don't have any family.' This was very important for the owner to hear. So the owner said, 'Well, come, bring your suitcase, whatever you have and come to the agency and we're going to give you a job. You're going to live outside of Chicago with this elderly couple and you're going to live there seven days a week and you're going to have this $200 or $300 paycheck and you're going to live there. And, once in a while, you're going to have a day off.' And my mother came home and this lady was gone. So we didn't know. She was gone and we didn't hear from her for about two or three weeks

And then, in the middle of the night, there's this phone call and the lady said, she goes, 'You know what – I think I was kidnapped. This lady from the agency, she brought me to this house. It is a secluded farm and I cannot see another house anywhere. I don't know where I am . I don't know what the name of the city. And I just found an old bill and the address on this bill tells me its like [a town in Indiana]. And I remember I went through my things and found your phone number. I didn't receive any money. The daughter of these people I work for – these old people are totally paralyzed. They don't speak. They don't move. They don't communicate at all. The daughter of these people, she comes once a week, she drops off the groceries, she gets in her car and she drive off.' So my mother said to just read the address from the bill and I'm going to come and get you. And we just called the agency and – she never was paid. I imagine many people, not just the Polish people, but probably other groups who get treated like this. They work for free, probably they pay the agency and don't bother paying the workers and they don't even know where they are. They have nobody here. Its like slavery, isn't it?"

Another interviewee who worked in a food packing factory spoke of undocumented workers who were sent by employment agencies whenever the factory needed extra workers to fill in for or supplement the regular crew.

"The workers from the employment agency were treated even worse than the regular

workers. The owners all know that they are undocumented. [Interviewer: Don't they have faked papers?] Sure. But the employment agency knows the bad ID's and the agency sends them there to the factory and lets them (the factory owners) know that they're undocumented."

Appendix E

Missed Communities

What was most frustrating about the effort to include as many groups as possible was the willingness of two groups of community leaders to include their groups in the study, but the unwillingness of their constituencies to participate. In the case of the Pakistani community, community leaders invited a representative of the Sweatshop Working Group to make a presentation at a large gathering of their members. Although the presentation and ensuing discussion was well received, leaders were unable to convince any of their members either to fill out the survey, or to help get others to fill it out. In the case of the Korean community, one of longstanding Korean community agencies agreed to participate in the data collection process, had their employment counselors trained in the administration of the survey, publicized the survey to its membership though its newsletter and at its gatherings, contacted the Korean press and television, all of which printed/aired stories about sweatshops and the study, and invited people to contact the community organization. Yet not a single person was willing to have a survey form filled out about their experiences.

In the course of discussion with the community agency staff, two theories to explain this situation were suggested. According to one of the employment counselors, discussion of anything related to "personal misfortune" would be unacceptable within the Korean community.

> *"It is a shame to talk about anything bad… It is embarrassing because we look not good. No one want to share these stories. No one will talk about this."*
>
> Employment counselor

> *"Koreans are too shy even to have someone document their situation anonymously. I have one woman who is working in bad job. I talk with her a long time. Her situation was very bad, but she would give no details [of where she was working]. But when I ask her if I can fill out survey at end of our conversation, she just hang up. She just wanted to complain, but not do anything about it."*
>
> Employment counselor

> *"The women are working in horrible shops – no ventilation, no benefits, long hours, dangerous chemicals with no protection. But they will NOT talk to anyone about organizing to fight the employer. We gave up after a while."*
>
> Union Organizer

The other theory presented by a member of the Korean press is that Koreans in Chicago are predominately well-educated. Most work in small shops run by their own families where they work long hours, or in other decent businesses.

> *"Most of our community is documented and have minimum wage or higher jobs. Even those people who are undocumented work in jobs where they make more than minimum*

wage… Koreans did not work for low wages in their home country. They are not willing to work in these bad places… Most people try to get mainstream, non-Korean jobs if they have high level of education. Many people educated. But if you have language problems and work in American companies, people gossip about us. They make us uncomfortable and we quit. You need to study discrimination against Koreans in shops."

Clearly, at least some Koreans work under sweatshop conditions, although the community overall may have better working conditions, due to previous work experience and higher levels of education and expectations. Unfortunately, for the purposes of this survey, the effort to document the experiences of those members of the community who are working under sweatshop conditions was not successful.