

Nail Salons Are Full of Health and Safety Hazards



When you think of dangerous workplaces, the first ones that come to mind are probably mines, construction sites, maybe a factory. It's unlikely that you'd include nail salons on that list. But in fact, nail salons are full of health and safety hazards.

Workers at nail salons may be at increased risk for a variety of occupational diseases including skin disease, musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs) and eye infections.

In addition, workers may inhale chemical vapours or dust during the application of products such as nail polishes, glues, acrylic nails and disinfectants. Long-term exposure to chemicals used in nail salons has been associated with reproductive effects, damage to the nervous system, liver and kidney failure, and cancer.

To assess these hazards, the Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease (CREOD) and the Queen West Central Toronto Community Health Centre (Queen West) interviewed five Chinese immigrant women in the nail salon industry in central Toronto.

Overall, the women spoke of their health concerns with a significant sense of fear and uncertainty. When it comes to their health, nail technicians are most worried about:

- Workplace chemical exposures related to hypersensitivity and pregnancy
- MSIs related to ergonomics
- Communicable diseases associated with cleanliness of equipment.

The researchers found that the barriers to addressing these concerns include:

- A lack of knowledge on self-protection. Many of the women had little to no on-the-job training on workplace health measures.
- The desire to keep their job. The job market is seen to be scarce, especially for immigrants with minimal English skills.
- The nature of nail salon work. For example, because nail work is meticulous, nail technicians may feel hindered by wearing gloves.

- The status quo at work. Some feel that health symptoms are a normal part of the job.
- Fear or indebtedness to the salon owner.
- Internalization of hardship, which is characteristic of Chinese culture.

In response to these issues, CREOD and Queen West recruited and trained four nail technicians from the Chinese community as Peer Health Workers (PHWs). The PHWs delivered seven workshops to 25 nail salon owners and technicians across Toronto, which covered topics such as chemicals, PPE, hand washing and hand creams.

Through pre- and post-workshop surveys, the researchers evaluated the workshops on how effective they were in improving skin care and reducing the risks of occupational skin disease.

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

- Say that wearing cotton gloves was important
- Report using protective gloves and cotton gloves in the last two weeks. The median response changed from 'Most of the time' to 'All of the time'
- Report using hand cream 10+ times per day.