

**Controlled Chaos:
Focus Groups with Women Warehouse Workers in New Jersey**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report—the result of a partnership between New Labor and the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers University—is based on focus groups with female “perma-temp” warehouse workers in New Jersey. Participants were asked about their paths of recruitment to warehouse jobs, experiences on the job, compensation, work/life balance, and home lives. The focus groups were conducted in fall of 2014.

The key findings of the focus groups are as follows:

- ***These women work within conditions of structural chaos that function to their detriment but to the benefit of their job agencies and employers.*** These conditions include:
 - companies that treat temp workers as interchangeable and expendable and fail to train them adequately for the work they perform
 - the inability to apply for specific jobs that fit one’s skill set, the lack of transparent pay scales, and cases of outright wage theft
 - unreliable, unsafe, and overcrowded agency-provided vans
 - few institutional mechanisms for requesting raises or reporting abuses
 - a culture of retaliation against agency workers who do report poor conditions
- ***These circumstances inhibit worker mobilization by discouraging friendships, pitting agency workers against companies’ direct hires, and de-incentivizing the reporting of abuses.***
- ***This structural disorganization facilitates negative conditions that specifically impact female workers.*** These conditions include:
 - *Occupational sex segregation and pay inequality*—Agencies explicitly recruit for “men’s jobs” and “women’s jobs” and assign workers accordingly. “Men’s” jobs are higher-paying. Even when male and female workers do perform the same labor, males receive higher wages.
 - *Sexual harassment*—Women in these focus groups described instances of inappropriate comments and touching by supervisors at the warehouses where they worked, as well as inappropriate touching by other workers on the crowded vans. Many respondents also described a pervasive culture of “flirting” that is connected to preferential treatment. They discussed instances in which they had been ignored or retaliated against for lodging complaints about these issues.

- *Issues of work/life balance*—The cost of childcare places a heavy burden on many of these women. Haphazard work schedules have a particular impact on female workers with children. The fact that these workers can be turned away from job sites without receiving pay means that they lose money when they have to pay for childcare.

Based on our findings, we recommend multiple interventions by various key stakeholders, including state and federal lawmakers and policymakers, job agencies and employers, worker centers and workers themselves, and scholars of gender and work.

INTRODUCTION

New Jersey is home to the second largest container port in the United States, the Port of Newark/Elizabeth, and is a major logistics hub for some of the largest retailers in the country. In 2014 alone, 73,686,795 metric tons of cargo passed through the port (Port of New York and New Jersey 2014). Warehouses in northern and central New Jersey employ thousands of workers—mostly Latino immigrants—who pack goods for these retail companies.

Recent literature in the popular press has brought attention to some of the ways in which the distribution centers and agencies that recruit men and women for positions in those warehouses infringe upon their workers' rights. In one instance, the United States Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cited an electronic cigarette manufacturer based in Lakewood, New Jersey with twenty workplace safety and health violations (U.S. Department of Labor 2013). More recently, in February of 2015, the owners of a New Jersey temp agency were arrested on a number of first-degree charges, including underreporting the number of employees their company outsourced and thus avoiding paying workers' compensation premiums (Palomo 2015).

Scholarly literature has also documented the conditions experienced by warehouse workers in the state of New Jersey as well as internationally. For example, Gonos and Martino (2011) have found that staffing agencies connected to "temp towns" recruit thousands of temporary laborers every day. Based on U.S. Census data, the authors locate a total of 100 temp agency offices in immigrant Latino communities within eight of these towns in central and northeastern New Jersey. These agencies are part of a labor market characterized by below poverty-level wages and outright wage-theft (Rowe 2012), substandard and dangerous transportation to worksites (Gonos & Martino 2011), minimal health and safety protections (Ernst & Zibrak 1998; Fawcett et al. 1992; Gonos & Martino 2011), and an inability of workers to organize to protect their rights (Gonos & Martino 2011). Further, while the jobs these agencies offer are ostensibly "temporary," workers employed through agencies make up a sizable share of the sector's permanent workforce. These "perma-temp" employees work similar hours to, though they are paid less than, direct-hire, "full-time" workers doing similar tasks (Rowe 2012).

While additional research has explored other topics relevant to the experiences of warehouse workers, such as the relationship between their ethnicity and well-being (Hoppe, Heaney, & Fujishiro 2010) and the causes of employee turnover (Min 2007), little scholarship has assessed

the role of gender in these conditions and experiences. One exception¹ is a 2012 report written by Rowe, in cooperation with New Labor, based on findings from a survey of 291 logistics workers in New Jersey. While gender is not the primary focus of the report, the author finds that agencies explicitly use gender as a hiring criterion and that female workers have limited access to higher-paying positions. Based on Rowe's report and anecdotal accounts, we know that women warehouse workers, like all women workers, encounter some challenges that men do not face.

This project—a partnership between New Labor and the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers University—is the first systematic study to document the conditions of these female workers. Based on focus groups with Latina warehouse workers in New Jersey, it concentrates on how gender matters—how it shapes recruitment, experiences of work, and efforts to balance work and family life. This research provides a deeper understanding of the issues facing New Brunswick's growing population of women warehouse workers and helps to identify areas in which policy interventions and increased access to services are needed. It informs New Labor's efforts to meet the needs of this workforce as well as contributing to the broader academic literature on gender and work more generally, and immigrant women workers in particular.

METHODS

In the fall of 2014, New Labor convened five focus groups, totaling 40 women warehouse workers. We recruited participants through New Labor's networks of workers with whom it has had contact and through snowball sampling. Focus groups were held at New Labor's offices in downtown New Brunswick and were facilitated by one staff bilingual staff member from the Center for Women and work and one bilingual staff member from New Labor. Participants were offered \$30 gift cards as incentives.

These women had engaged in various types of warehouse labor, including packing boxes, assembling items, sorting, sewing, labeling, loading pallets, cleaning, quality control, and "picking" (selecting products based on order requests). Some did not currently have jobs and spoke about their previous experiences. While participants had a range of years of work experience, the modal category was about 7-8 years. Though we did not specifically recruit on the basis of race or ethnicity, all focus group participants were Latina. We did not ask participants about their immigration status, although some mentioned their statuses during the groups. It is likely that most were undocumented.

The focus group questions covered five general areas: paths of recruitment to warehouse jobs; experiences on the job, including training and methods of transport to the job site; experiences with supervisors; compensation; work/life balance; and home life. The groups were conducted in Spanish and recorded and later transcribed in English. We analyzed the data by using the qualitative software NVivo to identify and extract salient themes.

¹Another exception is an article documenting occupational sex segregation among temp "pickers" in the mail order industry in the United Kingdom (Collinson 1987).

We received human subjects approval for this project from the Rutgers University-New Brunswick Institutional Review Board.

FINDINGS

These women work within conditions of structural chaos that function to their detriment but to the benefit of their job agencies and employers. In accordance with previous literature, we find that these circumstances include companies that treat temp workers as interchangeable and expendable and fail to train them for the work they perform, unreliable and unsafe transportation, and the absence of standardized systems for requesting raises or reporting grievances. These circumstances also inhibit worker mobilization by discouraging friendships, pitting agency workers against companies' direct hires, and de-incentivizing the reporting of abuses. In this section, after discussing these circumstances, we demonstrate the ways in which this structural disorganization facilitates negative conditions specifically impacting female warehouse workers—including occupational sex segregation and pay inequality, sexual harassment, and precarious work/life balance.

Structural Disorganization Persists at Agencies and Work Sites:

Agencies and Employers Treat Warehouse Workers as Interchangeable and Expendable

“The agencies don’t care where they send workers. They care about the bill that they send for all the workers that they assign. They don’t care what the employee is doing over there. They don’t care if they are trained to do the job. They don’t care how they are going to be treated. The only thing that matters to the agency is to earn their money, that’s it!” –focus group participant

One major theme that emerged during focus groups was the lack of standardized job classifications that would allow workers to be matched to jobs fitting their skill sets. These women often mentioned that they would apply for specific work through agencies, only to be sent to different types of companies or jobs. If they then lacked the skills for those jobs, the companies would ask the women not to come back the next day or sometimes send them home. As one woman explained:

“[The agency sends you] just where they need people. Sometimes it may happen that they request a specific person, knowing that this person has already worked there. But, they send *you* instead, because the requested person is not there. And the warehouse calls and says that they do not want this person because this person has not worked there, and doesn't know how to do the job. And one has to go back from the warehouse.”

Many focus group participants, like the above respondent, spoke about how oftentimes they did not receive training for jobs they were asked to perform. As one woman told us, when one gets to the warehouse where she will be working, “They tell you what to do, and *sometimes* they teach you. [emphasis added]”

In addition to lack of job classifications, there was lack of a clear payment structure. Most respondents indicated that they earned “the minimum” (which ranged from \$7.25 to \$8.75) at their jobs, out of which they paid for transportation and from which the agencies also took a cut. Moreover, some women discussed instances of outright wage theft on the part of the agencies. For example:

“[S]ometimes agencies also lie... ‘There is a job where you will lift boxes. The pay is \$7.25, but you’ll get \$8.00.’ And I said, OK, lifting boxes. I went to a place where all the boxes had to be placed in the pallet. The following Friday, was not pay day. But, when pay day came (I was happy thinking about the \$8.00), I received a payment of \$7.25. I asked the woman why she had done that. I told her that she had fooled me and lied to me.”

Workers Are Reliant on Unpredictable and Unsafe Transportation

“Usually, in the agencies, over [in] New Brunswick, they are forced to use the agency’s ride. There are people that can use their own transportation, or in the same job they can find people that can give them a ride, but the agency pushes people to use the agency’s ride so that they can get some of the share. It’s money, it’s business.” –focus group participant

“And sometimes they send you to companies that... the van will leave you there, and the company decides whether to take you or not. The van leaves, and you are stuck there, whether you did work or not. And you have to pay for your ride for that day.” –focus group participant

Many of these women get to their jobs in vans that the agencies provide for a fee—typically ranging from about \$35-48 per week. Oftentimes the workers are dependent on this mode of transportation because they do not have access to their own rides, and agencies pressure or require them to use the vans.

Focus group participants generally described the experience of taking the vans as disordered. Many women talked about vans that arrived late or did not arrive at all, leaving them stranded. Others indicated that the agencies had charged them unfairly for use of the vans—for instance, charging them for days when they were not even working. As one focus group participant summarized:

“This agency doesn’t allow people to use their own transportation. Their van doesn’t pick you up at home, they tell you to be at such park at 5 a.m. because work starts at 6:30. Everybody is there, under snow, rain, *etc.* and they show up one hour after the time they said they would. They don’t pick you up, and they charge you the \$40. And the van is full to the max.”

In addition to the overcrowding (As one woman put it, they “sit on top of somebody else’s feet.), these workers indicated that the vans are unsafe in other ways as well. They discussed drivers who drove at unsafe speeds and/or appeared drunk, and one focus group participant described an

incident in which a tire had blown off. “One cannot feel safe because drivers drive like mad men,” one respondent told us. “They don’t drive safely, they go through stop signs, they don’t care whether they are carrying people or not...The truth is that the transportation provided by the agency does not feel safe.”

There Are No Systems for Requesting Raises or Reporting Grievances

“When you go to work through an agency, you don’t work for a specific company. You are assigned to work 2 days in one place, 2 days at another place, and it’s the same everywhere. You have no rights. There isn’t a place where you can get settled, you have no right to say anything, or to complain, even when you see the injustice in the company, you see what they are doing, but you have no right to do anything.” –focus group participant

“[The companies] don’t pay any attention to agency workers. If we complain, they kick us out. That’s why we don’t complain.” –focus group participant

Another way that the agencies and companies benefit, and workers lose out, from structural disorder is through the lack of systems in place for requesting higher pay or reporting abuses. While some of the women in our focus groups had received raises, they talked about how companies seemed to grant these raises haphazardly. For example, one focus group participant explained:

“I started earning \$7.50. Then, I got a raise to \$8.25, and then up to \$9.75. After a few years, it’s always like that. And the reason why I’m not happy is because of the difference in wages among all the co-workers. Some co-workers earn \$11, some others earn \$12, and they do the same job that I do. That’s what makes me dissatisfied.”

Many warehouse workers felt that they had no recourse when they encountered pay inequality or other negative conditions at work. As one woman asked, “How is it (I’ve always wondered), where do we need to go to get paid a bit more by the companies, according to the job that is done?” Similarly, over the course of the focus groups, we asked these women whether they had complained about the various negative conditions they had experienced at their jobs; a common response was, “Complain to who?”

Even when structures exist for reporting abuses, workers face losing their employment if they use them. Focus group participants were acutely aware that, as temp workers, they had little to no job security. Asked whether she thought that the way workers are treated can be improved, one woman replied, “We would have to speak up, and nobody wants to speak up for fear of losing their jobs.” Workers indicated that they feared “speaking up” against the companies as well as the agencies—both of which could take away their livelihoods. For example, one focus group participant described an incident in which an agency had stolen a check from her, and she had complained. The result: “They never sent me to work again. And I never got my check.”

Structural Disorganization Discourages Worker Mobilization

“At work, there is a lot of ups and downs. What it means is that if I’m not doing the job properly, this other person will tell the supervisor...Instead of helping out the person, they would report you to the boss, so that they let you go.” –focus group participant

“[There are no friends] at my work because nobody supports anybody there. And nobody means nobody because they don’t want to lose their jobs. If somebody suffers an accident, nobody says anything because nothing will be done.” –focus group participant [emphasis in original]

The focus groups also illuminated how the chaotic conditions described above create barriers to worker mobilization. One theme that emerged repeatedly during the focus groups was the inability to rely on one’s co-workers for training or for support. Many women indicated that there are “no friendships” among the workers in these warehouses. For example, in one focus group when the facilitator asked, “Do you feel like you have friends [at work]?” one respondent replied, “No. There are no friends there. You just do your work there,” another woman added, “There are coworkers, not friends,” and a third replied, “Friends are only God, and one’s own mother.”

The structural disorganization in these warehouses puts the workers in competition with each other, creating animosity when some workers get preferential treatment and those with skills in an area feel they need to pick up the slack for other workers who have not received adequate (or any) training and do not possess those skills. Some respondents talked about how other workers and even supervisors give priority to workers based on nationality. Additionally, the distinction between perma-temp “agency workers” and “company people” hired directly by the companies also creates divisiveness among the workers. One woman explained:

“Where you work you don’t make any friends, no camaraderie either, because you only go there for 1 or 2 days. Sometimes the people that are there already (the company people), sometimes they treat you poorly. During the lunch hour, if one wants to take a seat, they will approach you and they’ll say, ‘Not that chair, because that’s my friend’s chair. Not that chair because it’s “reserved.”’ You end up eating standing up. If you go somewhere else, [it] is all the same, in all the companies around here.”

Throughout these focus groups, it became evident that the haphazard and divisive working conditions at these warehouses impact the workers’ cohesiveness. Many women talked about how, in those instances when they did want to speak up about poor conditions, their co-workers would not support them in these attempts.

Structural Disorganization Facilitates Negative Conditions for Female Workers:

The lack of recruitment for specific jobs (on standardized pay scales), the disorder of the transportation system, and the absence of structures through which to report abuses or advocate for higher pay all impact female workers in specific ways.

Female Warehouse Workers Encounter Occupational Sex Segregation and Pay Inequality

“When you get to the factory, men go this way, women go this way, and you have no option. You cannot say anything, there is no chance.” –focus group participant

“When you go to the agency they say ‘Men \$9, Women \$8’...It’s there in the papers.” – focus group participant

“Women have a different kind of job, or activity, and it’s not the same price. Men always get paid more than women.” –focus group participant

“It would be good to have the opportunity to do the work that men do, and get paid the same. No differences.” –focus group participant

In accordance with Rowe’s research, we find that male and female warehouse workers perform different types of jobs, and men are paid more for the work they do. In fact, sometimes companies and agencies explicitly recruit for “men’s jobs” and “women’s jobs.” For example, the photograph in Image 1, which was taken in the summer of 2014 in New Brunswick, shows two separate signs advertising work “for men” and “for women.” Similarly, in Image 2, the sign advertises one job “only for men,” and another for women.

Image 1: [translation, from top to bottom] “Full time gig for men 2nd shift (3pm - 12am). Own transportation. Work available for women!!! Work available with own car.”

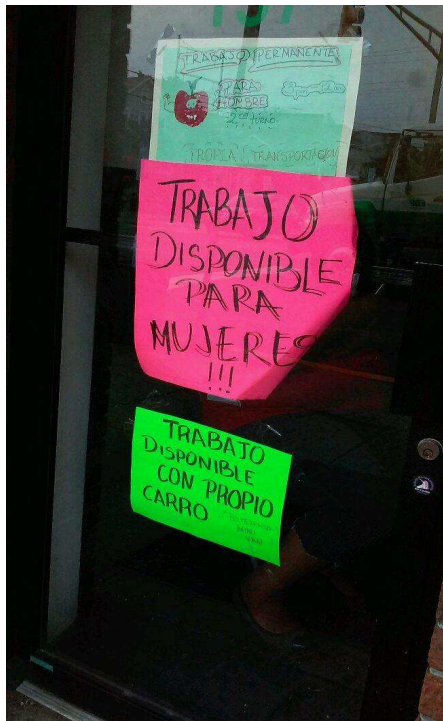


Photo: Courtesy of New Labor (Summer 2014)

Image 2: [translation] “Strategy Staffing Solution: We need people to work. We have a shift from 6PM to 6AM at \$10/hour only for men. And women from 7am to 3:30pm, also from 7pm to 7am. Interested people should get in contact with us at:...”

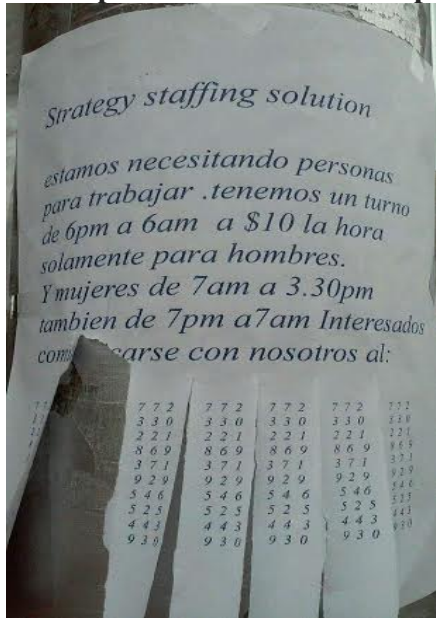


Photo: Courtesy of New Labor (October 2014)

Our focus group participants described this same bifurcation between “men’s work” and women’s work,” as well as stating that “male” tasks typically pay more. They indicated that men tend to do work such as lifting boxes and operating machinery, while assembly line workers are almost exclusively women. Asked whether a woman would be allowed to do a “man’s job,” such as operating a forklift, one focus group participant replied, “They won’t let you do it... You don’t have the option to apply for the job that you want.” A respondent in a different focus group explained, similarly, “They won’t let you [operate a forklift]... Because according to them, we’re not capable of doing that. They are mistaken because I know we can. But, they won’t allow it.” On the flip side, some respondents said that men were excluded from “women’s” positions. For example, one woman described an incident in which a male worker had applied for a sewing job, “and he knew how to do it, but he didn’t get the job only because he was a man.”

Moreover, even when men and women do the same tasks in these warehouses, women are typically paid less than men for this work. As one respondent explained, “Sometimes we do the same job, but men earn more.” When the focus group facilitator asked if anybody else had a different experience, another woman added, “No. I think it's always the same. Women are a bit more discriminated against in that regard. Anywhere we go, we earn less. And we can be doing the same thing that men are doing.”

The pervasive occupational sex segregation and wage inequality in these warehouse jobs are two clear ways in which conditions of structural disorganization—such as the lack of a system of standardized job categories for which agency workers can directly apply, and the absence of systems for reporting grievances—negatively impact female workers, in particular.

Women Warehouse Workers Describe Instances of Sexual Harassment

“If [the supervisors] like you, they’ll treat you nicely. Otherwise, they won’t. That’s what I have seen in my case. We’re like 3 of us that are not liked by the supervisor. Why? Because he cannot fondle us. He goes by, and he wants to put his hand on your back. I say, ‘You shouldn’t do that. You don’t do that.’ I’m not going to tolerate that a supervisor touches me like that. We’re not in those familiar terms.” –focus group participant

“There shouldn’t be discrimination only because you don’t allow the supervisor to flirt with you. That’s not fair...The supervisor must respect the employees, be it man or woman.” –focus group participant

The institutional disorder that curtails the reporting of other abuses also inhibits the reporting of sexual harassment. Several women in our focus group described instances of harassment at the warehouses where they worked. One respondent, for instance, talked about her experience at her current work site:

“Where I work, the supervisor likes to flirt with the new women. At the beginning, he asks whether one is single or if one has a husband. It’s the first thing he asks when one arrives at that company. I told him that I have my husband, and that I respect him. So, he told me that I was beautiful, and that he liked me. I told him that I was there to work, that I respected him, and that I wanted respect from him too. Later on, he said something else to me, and I told him that I never did that because I had my husband. Then, he tried to say more things to me until I told him that he needed to stop. I told him that I needed respect, and that I respected him, as an older man, and as a supervisor. I cannot go to the office. I have heard that if you go to the office, if you file a complaint, you get kicked out. Allegedly, he has been involved with women that are just starting to work there. That’s the reason why women don’t speak up: so that they keep their jobs.”

Other women described incidents of inappropriate touching on the crowded vans. For example:

“In the van that I would take, they would like touching the person’s behind, or her breasts, and the other ones that would know about it, would laugh, would make fun of it. And what can one do, if you are packed like sardines? But you do realize it. One does know when they are messing about with you... You call the agency, and tell them what’s going on, and they say, ‘Well, that’s the only one we’ve got. I got a lot of people waiting for jobs.’”

While several women, such as the ones quoted above, recounted specific incidents of harassment and fondling, many others described an overall culture in which younger women and “pretty women” were given preferential treatment, both at the agencies and in the warehouses. For example:

“Here is the thing. If you are a man, and you like them flirting with you, then you give

them an easier job.”

“The ladies that look good and are liked by the agency, they get treated nicely.”

“[The supervisor] would always say, ‘I am going to request this one, this other one, this one too.’ He would only request the girls because they were good looking—he would say that to us. He would tell *me* that. [emphasis in original]”

“The agency that would send me to this company called []; they used to differentiate a lot. If the person in charge would see a lady, young lady, pretty lady, and a flirt, she would get the best position.”

These accounts, and the many others like them that emerged during the focus groups, illuminate a pervasive culture of ageism and advantages granted based on appearance. They also suggest a *quid pro quo* system with sexual undertones, in which some women feel they must “flirt” to be assigned to less labor-intensive work or be asked back by the company. In these ways, the lack of a structure for reporting grievances and the fear of losing one’s temporary employment if one does report abuses pose unique issues for female workers.

Female Warehouse Workers Experience Unique Issues of Work/Life Balance

“One pays \$90 for the babysitter, \$40 for transportation, and one makes \$200—how much is left? Nothing!” –focus group participant

Structural disorganization also poses issues of work/life balance that uniquely impact female workers. Many of the women in our focus groups have children, and many also indicated that they are remitting money to their families in their countries of origin. While some focus group participants talked about relying on family members or neighbors for inexpensive childcare, those who use (or have used) babysitters indicated that large portions of their paychecks went toward that expense. “I have 3 [children]. If I go to work, paying for transportation, plus my food...I don’t get enough,” one woman explained. “I would have to earn at least \$14/hour in order to cover for my children’s babysitter.”

Moreover, their haphazard work schedules and the unreliability of jobs place a particular burden on female workers with children. The fact that these workers can be turned away from job sites without receiving pay means that they lose money when they have to cover childcare. One respondent explained:

“One pays the babysitter whether one ends up working or not, and when one arrives to the jobsite, they say, ‘The agency sent too many people. We didn’t request so many people. We only asked for X amount!’ I talked to the agency that day. I told them that if they knew how many people they were requesting, why did they send more? It’s not fair. One gets one’s child to the babysitter, one pays the babysitter, and one shows up on time.”

The focus group facilitator followed up this account by asking, “And they don’t pay your work day?” to which another participant replied, “No. They don’t pay anything. I had that experience myself.”

It is evident how these work/life integration issues uniquely impact women. A wealth of previous research has demonstrated that the burden of caregiving (for children as well as the elderly and disabled) in the United States falls disproportionately on women (Heymann, 2000; National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 2009; Smith & Schaefer, 2012). Perma-temps’ uneven and unreliable schedules make work/life balance even more problematic for these working mothers, especially given their demographic characteristics. Rowe found, for instance, that 42.3% of the families of these types of workers with children fall under the Federal Poverty Level.

Finally, while workers in our focus groups did not discuss the topic of maternity leave, it is highly unlikely that any of these mothers received job-protected leave. As Rowe points out:

“[G]iven the contingent nature of employment through an agency, pregnancies and maternity leaves likely carry risks for female perma-temps of not having a spot to which to return. While such returns to work should, in theory, be covered by the federal Family Medical Leave Act, the relative instability of perma-temp employment raises questions about whether, in practice, such rights are respected.”²

It is also unlikely that these women have access to other job protections, such as workers’ compensation or earned sick days.

CONCLUSIONS

Female workers in New Jersey’s warehouses encounter unique challenges. These warehouses, and the agencies that funnel “perma-temp” workers into them, are chaotic contexts in which workers are treated as dispensible, transparent job classifications and payment structures are often absent, workers have little choice about where they are sent, and transportation is unreliable. This disorganization creates a breeding ground for negative conditions specifically impacting female workers. Such conditions include gender discrimination in hiring for warehouse positions and unequal pay for men and women, as well as sexual harassment at work and precarious work/family balance.

In many ways, workers lose out because of this structural disorder, and it is also evident that, in many ways, employers gain. Controlled chaos benefits these companies and agencies by enabling them to engage in openly discriminatory practices, limiting the benefits they provide to their workers, inhibiting worker organizing, and minimizing the reporting of abuses.

While it might be easy to place “blame” only on particular temp agencies for specific abuses, it is important to view these conditions as part of a broader system of exploitation, from which employers also benefit. OSHA has pointed out, for example, that changes in workers’

²Rowe cites Haase & Paul 2011.

compensation have made it “increasingly difficult for injured workers to receive the full benefits” and that perma-temps such as the women in our focus groups are at the crux of this issue: “The pervasive misclassification of wage employees as independent contractors and the widespread use of temporary workers have increased the risk of injury and the number of workers facing financial hardships imposed by workplace injuries” (Occupational Safety and Health Administration 2015).

Moreover, while our report focuses on New Jersey workers, the specific conditions we find are not unique to this locality. For example, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) recently filed two lawsuits against a Chicago-area staffing agency, alleging many of the same violations we found in our research, including assigning female employees to a known hostile work environment, retaliating against two female employees who reported that their supervisor was making sexual advances toward them, and categorizing jobs as “men’s work” or “women’s work” and assigning workers accordingly. The agency paid \$800,000 to settle the claims (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2015). (For an excellent summary of other legal action involving gender-based discrimination against temporary logistics workers in the United States, see Smith and McKenna 2015, p. 17.)

Our study has led to a deeper understanding of some of these issues facing New Brunswick’s growing population of women warehouse workers and has helped to identify areas in which policy changes and increased access to services are needed. In the final section, we put forth some of these recommendations. While our focus groups have produced rich qualitative data on the experiences of these workers, quantitative data is also necessary to understand fully how these findings play out on a broader stage. Over the longer term, our results should be used to guide the development of additional research projects, including a survey of a large sample of warehouse workers in the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, we recommend that multiple interventions be made by various key stakeholders, including state and federal lawmakers and policymakers, job agencies and employers, worker centers and workers themselves, and scholars of gender and work:

Government Agencies and Policymakers should:

- ...require more stringent oversight for New Jersey temp agencies, the employers they serve, and the transportation they provide, and enforce existing regulations regarding wage theft, gender discrimination, and transportation safety.
- ...consider legislative action to make both client firms and agencies responsible for conditions and restitution if they can be determined to be joint employers.
- ...take action when abuses occur. For instance, the EEOC should continue to respond in instances of alleged gender discrimination and sexual harassment, as it did in the Chicago case.

- ...engage in inter-agency collaboration and communication in instances of alleged gender discrimination, as well as other potential violations of employment law, to help establish responsibility and ensure safe working conditions for all workers.
- ...enact and enforce legislation providing earned paid sick days to all workers.
- ...make efforts to better understand and adjust the convoluted supply chain that has facilitated the broader system of exploitation in which these workers find themselves.
- ...enforce corporations' codes of social responsibility throughout their supply chain.

Job agencies and employers should:

- ...immediately cease advertising jobs as “men’s” or “women’s” and change their staffing policies accordingly.
- ...ensure that they have in place transparent systems for reporting abuses, which workers are able to use without fear of retaliation.
- ...put in place transparent classification systems through which workers are able to apply for specific jobs that match their skills, and get sent to the jobs for which they apply.
- ...implement greater transparency in their systems for requesting and receiving raises.
- ...provide on-the-job training and safety programs for all workers.
- ...comply with federal and state requirements for providing benefits, including maternity leave, earned sick days, disability, and workers' compensation.
- ...evaluate the van system that they use to transport workers and ensure that it is in line with existing transportation safety regulations.
- ...sign a Responsible Employer Pact (REP) with New Labor.

Worker centers, such as New Labor, should...

- ...continue to pinpoint instances in which abuses have occurred.
- ...take collective action to bring attention to the ways in which agencies and employers infringe on the rights of all of New Jersey's warehouse workers, and specifically women.
- ...continue to aid in the mobilization and empowerment of women workers.
- ...support the creation of a union or worker organization representing both agency workers and direct hires in order to increase dialogue and engagement between these two groups.

Scholars of gender and work should:

- ...conduct further research to understand the experiences of female perma-tmps at the state level and more broadly. For example, our findings should lay the groundwork for a large-scale survey of women warehouse workers in New Jersey.

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ABOUT NEW LABOR

New Labor is an alternative model of worker organization that educates, organizes, and fights for better conditions of work for immigrant workers throughout New Jersey. Founded in the year 2000, and with almost 3,000 dues-paying members forming its base, New Labor organizes to develop power and amplify our members' voices in the community, the workplace, and the political realm. The organization is guided by 5 fundamental principles: 1. Working Together; 2. Creating Opportunities; 3. Respect; 4. Empowerment; 5. Equality.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR WOMEN AND WORK

The Center for Women and Work (CWW) is an innovative leader in research and programs that promote gender equity, a high-skill economy, and reconciliation of work and well-being for all. CWW is located in the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and is a member of the Institute for Women's Leadership Consortium.

To find out more about CWW, visit our website at: cww.rutgers.edu.

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