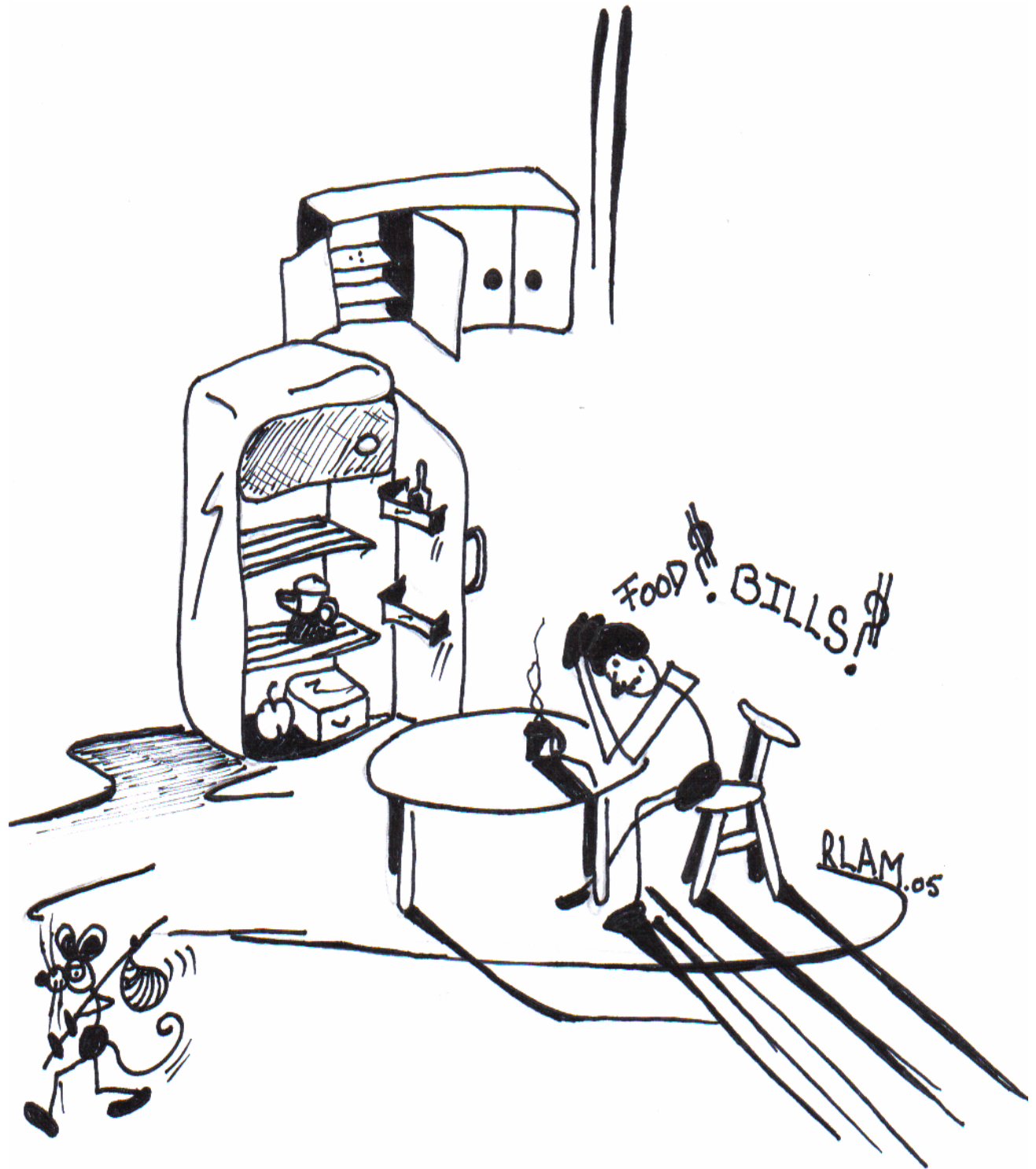


Poverty in Motion



The Rippling Effects

POVERTY IN MOTION, THE RIPPLING EFFECTS

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For more information contact the Thunder Bay & District Injured Workers' Support Group.

Thunder Bay & District Injured Workers' Support Group
Lakehead Labour Centre, Room 17
929 Fort William Road
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7B 3A6

Telephone: 807 622 8897

Fax: 807 622 7869

Email: info@tbayinjuredworkers.ca

<http://tbayinjuredworkers.ca>

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Introduction

The inspiration for this study grew out of a similar study that was conducted in downtown Toronto that found that 57% of those who were living on the streets had experienced a workplace injury at some point in their lives.

There are some 344,000 workers in Ontario who have suffered from a workplace injury or disease, which has left them with a permanent disability. Somewhere between 50 and 80% of these workers are chronically unemployed as a result.

Since 1995, the cumulative increase in the cost of living has been 29%. During the same time period, disabled workers' benefits have gone up only 4.9%. Permanently injured workers have lost almost 24% of their pensions.

The purpose of this small pilot study is to determine the relationship between workplace injury and poverty in Thunder Bay. While not representative of the experience of the whole population of injured workers in Thunder Bay, ideally this study could be used as the basis for a larger, more inclusive study in the future.

Further objectives of the report are:

- To identify the impact of workplace injury on workers
- To identify the extent workplace injury effects income
- To explore the unique challenges of impoverished injured workers in Thunder Bay
- To identify characteristics of those injured workers in our community who are particularly vulnerable to poverty

It also attempts to identify gaps in research that need to be explored. Given time and resource constraints, it would be impossible to explore all relevant themes. However, these gaps reveal a serious need for additional study and provide an opportunity for further research.

The research for this report began in the spring of 2007 as an undertaking of the Thunder Bay & District Injured Workers' Support Group. The TBDIWSG is a registered, non-profit, non-funded organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of injured workers.

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Methodology

The research for this study began in the spring of 2007 when the initial survey was designed with the aid of Dr. Liu, a Statistics professor in the Sociology department at Lakehead University. The survey was designed in such a way as to examine the relationship between workplace injury and poverty indicators such as decreased income and food bank usage. The survey consisted of Likert scales, multiple choice questions, and some open ended questions designed to allow the participants to identify their own concerns, without attempting to fit their responses into a pre-defined paradigm. The survey went through various manifestations and was adjusted slightly after its initial implementation.

The sample is purposive in that all those who participated were previously identified as injured workers.

Initially the survey was distributed at an event put on by the Thunder Bay Injured Worker's Support Group. Four facilitators were on hand to answer questions and to aid in the completion of the surveys. All participants were given a stipend for their participation.

The refined survey was given to social service workers at the Thunder Bay Shelter House and the John Howard Society and workers were told that a facilitator would be available should anyone need assistance in completing the questionnaire; no assistance was needed.

In total, 40 surveys were completed, with 20 coming from participants who attended events hosted by the Thunder Bay Injured Workers Support Group and 20 who were utilizing services of the Street Reach Ministry, the Shelter House and the John Howard Society.

Every participant did not answer all the survey questions so total responses may vary per question.

Sample

At the time of the survey, the largest group of respondents were between the ages of 50 and 59. Most of the respondents were male (n=33), only 18% being female (n=7)

Current Age	Frequency
1-19	1
20-29	6
30-39	3
40-49	8
50-59	12
60-69	6
70-79	2
TOTAL	n=38

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The average age when workplace injury occurred was 50 years old.

Injured Age in Categories	
Age	Frequency
1-19	1
20-29	6
30-39	3
40-49	8
50-59	11
60-69	6
70-79	2
TOTAL	n=37

Twenty-eight percent were single (n=11) but no other distinction was made for those who identified as being in a relationship. The number of marriages, common-law living arrangements, or similar relationships was not tallied.

Nearly 30% percent of participants had less than a high school education (n=11). As well, 30% had finished high school. Just over 12% had completed some postsecondary (n=5), and 25% hold a trades' certificate. Twelve percent (n=5) have a college diploma. None of the participants in this study had a university education.

The fact that none of the participants had a university education may be significant.

Effects of Workplace Injury

Income

Ninety percent of respondents believe their income would have increased or stayed at a comparable level, had they not been injured at work. In reality, nearly all respondents reported a significant decrease in income as a result of their workplace injury. The most drastic decrease in income came from an individual who reported once making between \$60,000-\$69,000 and now has a yearly income of approximately \$10,000.

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Pre Injury Income	Frequency
No income	1
Less than \$5,000	2
\$5,000-\$9,999	5
\$10,000-\$14,999	1
\$15,000-\$19,999	2
\$20,000-\$29,999	6
\$30,000-\$39,999	6
\$40,000-\$49,999	8
\$50,000-\$59,999	2
\$60,000-\$69,999	2
\$70,000-\$79,999	1
\$80,000-\$89,999	1
TOTAL	n=37

Post Injury Income	Frequency
No income	3
Less than \$5,000	3
\$5,000-\$9,999	9
\$10,000-\$14,999	6
\$15,000-\$19,999	3
\$20,000-\$29,999	4
\$30,000-\$39,999	3
\$40,000-\$49,999	1
\$50,000-\$59,999	2
TOTAL	n=34

71% reported living below the low-income cut off, or "poverty line."¹

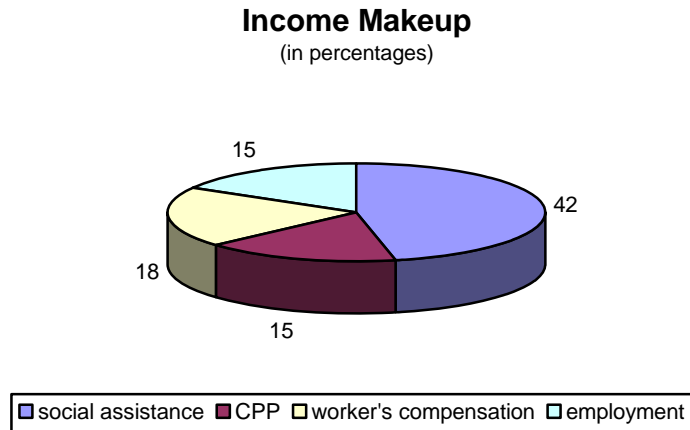
Income Makeup

¹ Canada currently does not have an officially recognized poverty line. Nonetheless, many anti-poverty groups speak of the "poverty line" as calculated using Statistic Canada's Low Income Cut Off amounts. Statistics Canada holds that the LICO is not a poverty line, but in absence of any other suitable measure, many organizations refer to it as such. The LICO for a single individual in Thunder Bay is \$17,895.

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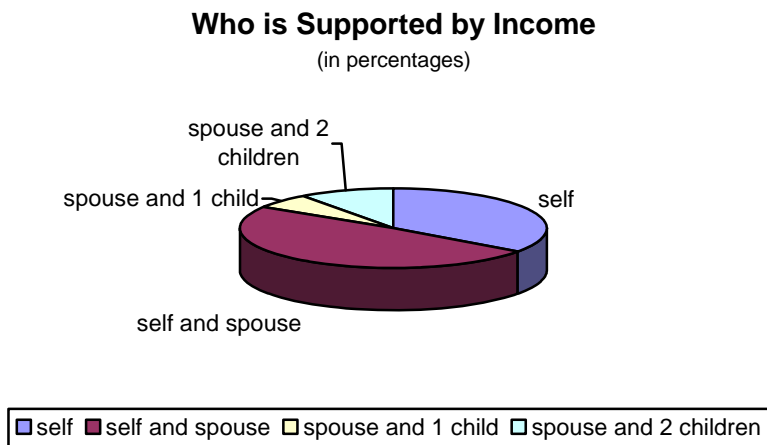
Income Makeup

42% of respondents reported their income consists of welfare (Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Payments) 15% reported receiving CPP support payments. 18% receive worker's compensation, and 15% reported employment income. Comparatively, more individuals collect social assistance than they do a pay cheque.



It should be noted that 41% of respondents reported at least two sources of income.

28% of participants supported only themselves on their income. Nearly 39% supported themselves and their spouse (or significant other). 5% (n= 2) supported their spouse and child, and nearly 8% (n=3) supported their spouse and two children. One respondent reported being supported by his spouse's income only, and 3 reported being supported by the income of their spouses and children.



The lack in adequate income has lead to strategies such as utilizing food banks or shelters in order to make ends meet. Nearly 27% reported visiting a food bank, and 20% had reported staying in a shelter. Five percent reported having to move into affordable housing due to decrease in income.

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Industry and Injury

Prior to their injuries, most (72%) individuals were working in full time positions (n=28), followed by those in contract positions (n=9). Only a small number of the participants were engaged in part time work (n=5). Some people were working at more than one job.

Most workplace injuries occurred to individuals in manual labour positions, which were in the construction, forestry and trades/transportation sector. This is not surprising considering Northwestern Ontario's dependence on this type of industry.

Industry	Injured Age in Categories						
	1-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
Agriculture	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Forestry, Fishing, Mining, Oil and Gas	0	1	0	2	3	1	1
Construction	0	2	2	1	3	2	0
Trade	0	1	1	0	1	2	1
Transportation and Warehousing	0	1	0	3	2	0	0
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Accommodation and food services	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
Public Administration	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Reporting Injury

Interestingly, only 64% of workplace accidents were reported to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. Unfortunately, researching reasons for this were outside the scope of this study. Recommendations for future research would include exploring why workplace injuries are not reported, what actions were taken, and do injured workers believe their experiences would have resulted differently had they been reported to the WSIB?

For those who did report their injuries, again 64% experienced difficulties with the process. Recommendations for future research would be examining the types of difficulties workers experience and suggestions from applicants on how to make the process more effective.

When asked about the experience reporting injury, many had negative comments. One felt that the process was too invasive, and that "lots of people asking many questions – too many", and that claims were "refused after nothing." They found the process to be complicated and demeaning.

One participant described his distress at his employer's "disbelief that work was a causal relationship to injury suffered." Another reported that the WCB "treated [me] like a criminal and made me jump through hoops."

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Employment Prospects

Of the sample, 78% reported being unemployed. Nearly all were actively looking for a job, but half (n=20) acknowledged that their prospects of finding a job as “unrealistic”. Twenty-three percent reported not having a suitable job to apply for.

Post injury, 18% (n=7) reported having to work at a “worse” job than their previous job.

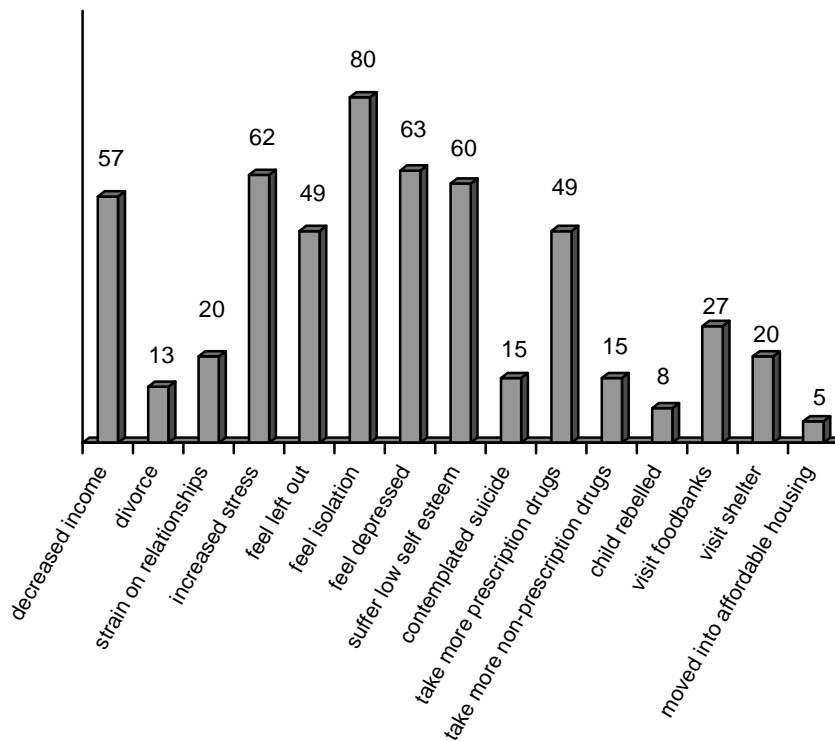
Personal results of injury

For those who believe their accidents have resulted in permanent injuries nearly 45% reported their spouses had either sought employment or work more hours. One respondent even reported his child having to engage in paid employment in order to supplement the household income (n=1). Twenty-two or 57% reported a decrease in household income due to injury.

Most respondents who reported a change in their relationships found that workplace injury negatively impacted their relationship with their spouse. 13% reported divorce or separation as a direct result of the effects of workplace injury (n=5). Close to 20% reported a strain in their relationship due directly to workplace injury (n=8). Nearly 8% reported a partner becoming withdrawn due to injury, and 13% noted problems stemming from the injury but reported staying together in attempts to work it out.

Most respondents reported an increase in stress resulting from workplace injury. Participants told of their fears and concerns, with one saying, “All I think about is money, money, money and my pain.” Another reported feeling extremely anxious wondering, “Will anyone help me? Will I be fired? Will I be covered?” One participant expressed his feelings of being misunderstood: “I wish for more understanding about what I experience. Esteem issues and injury get so bad that I can’t get a job. I wish for people to understand the hidden aspects of the pain and humiliation. It is not easy.”

Effects of Workplace Injury
(in percentages)



An incredibly high number of participants reported negative feelings stemming from their injury and subsequent inability to work. Sixty-two percent reported feeling stress. Forty-nine percent feel “left out” and 80% feel isolated. Considering that injury often results in decreased income, many are unable to participate in events that require money, even in small amounts. Sixty-three percent reported depression and 60% suffer from low self-esteem. Especially troubling is that 15% report feelings of helplessness and 15% have contemplated suicide.

Forty-nine percent reported taking more prescription drugs. Whether this use was recreational or non-recreational or abusive was not specified. A total of 15% reported using non-prescription drugs as a result of their injury.

Some participants found that the workplace injury has had a positive effect on their life. Interestingly, 10% of respondents reported that workplace injury has strengthened their relationship with their spouses. One respondent noted: “My spouse and I have become closer because we made a choice to deal with my injury together. We attend meetings and doctors’ appointments together as much as possible.” For others, the support they received while dealing with their injuries has enriched their lives. For one respondent, the anger and frustration he felt has turned into motivation to better his situation. For others, the helping individuals they encountered at the Thunder Bay District Injured Workers Support Group were a source of support. One individual even reported that being close to death as a result of his injury helped him re-evaluate his life, and acted as a catalyst to live a better life, physically, psychologically and emotionally.

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Family and Children

Eleven participants reported having children, and nearly 73% (n=29) reported having a family that consists of either a spouse, children, or both.

The effects of workplace injury and subsequent loss of income affects familial relations. Twenty percent reported a strain in their relationship directly related to work place injury. Stress inevitably spills over into relationships between spouses and children. Changes in lifestyle, necessitated by lack of income and feelings of uncertainty add to family stress levels. Children rebelling (n=3) and dropping out of school (n=1) were reported by participants, albeit in small numbers. Thankfully, most respondents felt they did an adequate job in dealing with their stress internally and did not allow it to spill over to their families. Thus, 84% felt that their situation did not lead to increased stress for their children (n=31). Nine percent reported that their children are unable to participate in extra circular activities due to lack of money. (n=3)

Suggestions

When asked for their input on what could be done to better the situation for injured workers, the respondents provided many suggestions. Many participants suggested that the government forge a working relationship with workers' rights groups, such as the TBDIWSG.

Some suggestions centered on increased education regarding workers' rights, and increasingly, the responsibility of employers to provide safe workplaces, thus reducing the likelihood of an accident occurring in the first place. Some participants felt that workplace safety should be taught to young children in school.

Other suggestions included increasing services for those living on low incomes. Participants also suggested a raise in the rates for social assistance and compensation to reflect the actual rise in the Cost of Living.

Another suggestion was increased research into Canada's high rate of occupational illness and deaths. Respondents also suggested that there be stiffer penalties for employers who knowingly neglect to clean up dangerous workplaces.

Some participants felt that the process of applying for social assistance and compensation was unnecessarily complicated and humiliating. Some participants suggested having policy makers "jump through the hoops" that injured workers are required to, in order to make them understand. One participant felt that case workers for WSIB, ODSP and Ontario Works should take sensitivity training, and change their sometimes derogatory attitude towards clients. Most also wished for more understanding of their situations.

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Areas for Further Research

It is important to note that this study is not representative of the experience of injured workers in Thunder Bay on the whole. Due to limited time constraints and budget, this study was limited to a small sample size. It is useful in demonstrating some trends that we can assume extend to injured workers on the whole, and provides the basis for a larger, more inclusive study in the future.

Demographic information

A breakdown of the number of injured workers living in the city would be useful. Having a breakdown, which gives the number of individuals who are disabled, and a breakdown of disabilities, such as physical or mental, and the number who are poor would help draw much needed attention to the poverty faced by those who are disabled. The current lack of information for this segment is troubling, especially considering people with disabilities are far more likely than those without disabilities to be living in poverty.

Numbers of injured workers receiving OW or ODSP would also be useful. Support programs such as these are designed for individuals who are unable to work.

Reporting of Injuries

Given that only 64% of injuries suffered by this sample group were reported to the WSIB, recommendations for further research could include exploring why injuries were not reported, what action was taken, and do workers feel their situation would have been different had it been reported?

Income Levels

This study asked injured workers to speculate as to whether or not their income would have increased had their injury not occurred. Actual study needs to be undertaken which provides a detailed picture of employment wages, and this number should be compared with actual incomes of injured workers to demonstrate the dramatic effect workplace injury has on income.

Also, actual average incomes for injured workers in the city would be useful for demonstrating the devastating economic impacts of workplace injury, and would aid in arguments regarding increasing social assistance rates. It is clear that injured workers are living far below the poverty line and are turning to the welfare system to help, while there are specific systems in place designed to help those injured at work. These programs are failing injured workers, and numbers of injured workers who rely on social assistance are demonstrative of that fact.

Occupational Illness

Given that two thirds of fatalities reported to WSIB are related to occupational disease much future research needs to be dedicated to the topic. Research on the frequency of illness in specific industries, such as paper mills which has been noted as an industry of concern, needs to be undertaken.

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Recommendations

1. Benefit levels for WSIB, Ontario Works and ODSP should be restored to pre-1995 levels and fully indexed to inflation on an annual basis, both retroactively and going forward.
2. The practice of “deeming” an injured worker by the WSIB to have a job following injury – and subtracting the hypothetical wage from their wage loss benefit – must stop.
3. The Experience rating programs developed by the WSIB for employers over the last twenty years must be changed to actually support safe workplaces. At present, the programs foster “claims management”, not reporting injuries and hiding claims.
4. All workers in Ontario should be covered by Workers’ Compensation in the case of a workplace injury or disease. At present, less than 70% of the workforce is covered.
5. Change the name of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) back to the Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB) and put support to workers injured or diseased at work, or their survivors, as their top priority.
6. Life long compensation for a life long illness or injury
7. Injured workers should not become a financial burden on their families or other agencies

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