

NIOSH GRANT PROGRESS REPORT - TITLE PAGE

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Project Title

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Sponsors/Conveners:

- International Labor Organization
- Autonomous University of Zacatecas (Universidad Autonoma de Zacatecas, UAZ)
- Autonomous Metropolitan University (Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana, UAM)
- Autonomous National University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico)
- Citizens' Initiative and Social Development (Iniciativa Ciudadana y Desarrollo Social, A.C.)
- College of Sonora (El Colegio de Sonora)
- Zanzana, Knowledge and Expression (Zanzana, Conocimiento y Expresion, A.C.)
- Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)

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Abstract

Researchers and women's health advocates over the years have highlighted the importance of the relationship between work and women's health. This complex area of investigation includes the impact of women's work in the unpaid private and paid public spheres, the role of societal norms and social policies on gendered roles and discrimination in the workplace, and the disproportionate impact of precarious employment conditions, chronic musculoskeletal diseases, violence and harassment at work among others.

The 5th International Congress of Women, Work and Health, held in Zacatecas, Mexico from October 27th – 31st of 2008, brought together 625 participants from 43 countries - academic and government researchers, policy makers, workers and community and labor-based women's advocacy groups - to discuss these critical issues. Plenary sessions, workshops and discussion forums led to a series of resolutions including those focused on improving the health of domestic workers; monitoring persistent organic compounds in mothers' milk; developing indicators for gender equity, working conditions and health in population surveys; and developing a women, work and health initiative in the Americas.

A special issue of *New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy*, forthcoming in December 2010, will publish articles from the Congress, highlighting research and public policy initiatives in Canada, the U.S., Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil and Spain.

NIOSH funding facilitated the participation of nineteen women researchers and interpreters, the publication of articles in a special issue of the *New Solutions* journal dedicated to Women, Work and Health and the translation of four articles from Spanish for publication in that issue. The articles address work and health among immigrant and migrant women in the Americas and describe public policy initiatives to protect the health of domestic workers and home care providers in the U.S. and Canada and among female elected officials in Bolivia. They also document the impact of global and workplace production policies on women in the agricultural and maquiladora export industries in Mexico as well as the persistence of gender inequality in the domestic sphere and the effect on women who must juggle simultaneous work and family demands in Brazil and Spain. Articles will be published with abstracts in both English and Spanish and the issue will be distributed at the 6th International Congress on Women, Work and Health to be held in Spain. Information from the Congress and a link to the journal issue will also be posted on the Zacatecas Congress web page, currently being re-designed with partial funding from NIOSH.

Section 1

Highlights/Significant Findings

The 5th International Congress on Women, Work and Health, held in Zacatecas, Mexico in October 2008, builds on previous Congresses convened in the last decade. Initiated in 1996 in Barcelona, Women, Work and Health Congresses were subsequently held every three years, rotating locations in Brazil, Sweden, India and, most recently, Mexico.

The aims of the Congress were to identify and address critical work-life issues that affect women's health, to stimulate interdisciplinary research across national boundaries, and to disseminate research to advance policy change and advocacy efforts to improve working conditions and women's health.

Specific objectives of the Congress were to:

- Address critical issues affecting the work and health of women at the local, national, regional and international levels
- Promote research to improve the health of women workers
- Disseminate research findings to advance the capacity of women workers and advocates to improve working conditions

The Congress **addressed critical issues affecting the work and health of women** at the local, national, regional and international level through a series of plenary sessions, workshops and discussion forums convened by a core planning committee of twelve women from Mexico, other countries in Latin and North America, Asia, Europe and Scandinavia. Planning committee members represented academic institutions, unions, women's groups and other civil society organizations. They organized a total of 51 parallel oral sessions, 4 posters sessions, 2 plenaries, and 3 discussion forums. Sessions covered a diversity of themes including 1) work organization (schedules, job stability, etc.), 2) the work environment (toxic substances, noise, etc.), 3) public policy (health and safety coverage of domestic and other non-traditional workers, etc.) and 4) methodological challenges in researching women's health. The Congress brought together 625 participants from 43 countries, representing academic researchers, policy makers, workers, and community and labor based women's advocacy groups.

From these sessions, various **recommendations emerged to further promote research to improve the health of women workers**. Specific recommendations include the need to expand the impact of our research by: 1) integrating a gender perspective in all disciplines, 2) developing a conceptual framework within which to distinguish the impact of the work environment and work organization on women and men, 3) linking research and public policy issues by targeting research to address key policy questions and by applying research results to the formulation of policies and programs, 4) integrating cluster and multilevel analysis as well as qualitative and mixed methods approaches into the study of women, work and health and triangulating results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex realities of women's lives including the challenges of balancing professional and domestic work responsibilities, 5) expanding possibilities for involving labor and community-based women in collaborative research with academic organizations, 6) providing funding for gender-based research and analysis.

Research findings from the Congress are disseminated in three ways: 1) Publication of seven research and policy articles in a special issue of New Solutions: A Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health Policy, 2) Posting presentations, resolutions, videos and a link to the New Solutions journal on the Congress' web page, currently being re-designed with partial funding from NIOSH with a future site at: <http://www.zanzana-ac.org.mx/congreso/> and 3) Implementation of organization or country-specific activities implemented by Congress participants who are leaders in their fields of research, policy and advocacy implement. For example, Bolivian female elected officials subject to harassment and violence have organized for legislative changes to prohibit harassment, an initiative that has been adopted by women advocates in other Latin American countries. Similarly, information about chemical hazards and safer alternatives compiled by researchers in Spain is being utilized in U.S. education programs.

Translation of Findings

Plenary sessions, workshops and discussion forums led to a series of resolutions including those focused on improving the health of domestic workers; monitoring persistent organic compounds in mothers' milk; developing indicators for gender equity, working conditions and health in population surveys; and developing a women, work and health initiative in the Americas.

NIOSH funding of travel to facilitate participation by simultaneous interpreters who provided services for more than 60 sessions facilitated the communication and exchange of ideas between participants from different countries and disciplines that ultimately led to the above resolutions.

There is no systematic way at this point to document the activities and initiatives that are inspired by participation in the Congress; the special issue of New Solutions serves this function in a limited way. The issue will be publicized to Congress participants and arrangements made to distribute it in hard copy or electronically at the 6th International Congress on Women, Work and Health in Spain.

Outcomes/Relevance/Impact

The Congress supported the exchange of information and development of networks and collaboration between academic researchers, practitioners, and women policy makers and advocates leading to potential outcomes in the reduction of workplace risk. From a discussion forum among researchers emerged recommendations to share and jointly develop survey tools with the subsequent purchase of software to facilitate the exchange of such tools in order to produce comparable data regarding working conditions, gender and health across countries. Similarly, a discussion forum among women union leaders led to followup resolutions and activities to promote gender equity and women's health.

The Congress and resulting goal to publish research articles in New Solutions involved a critical and intensive process of mentoring younger women researchers and those from less developed countries to further strengthen their research, writing and publication skills. Abstracts and draft articles were solicited from a large number of women; those whose articles were not selected were nonetheless provided considerable feedback to ensure the further development of research and writing skills. This proved particularly important but challenging given language barriers.

Section 2

Scientific Report

Not applicable – this was a conference grant, rather than a research grant

Publications

The following articles will be published in the December 2010 issue of *New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy*. NIOSH funding contributed to translation of four articles from Spanish to English and inclusion of photographs from the Congress; it also facilitated participation in the process by collaborators in Mexico.

- Garduño M de los Angeles, Cedillo Becerril LA: (2010) The 5th International Congress on Women, Work and Health. *New Solutions*, in press.
- Delp L: (2010) Women's Hidden Work. *New Solutions*, in press.
- Ledesma MIM: (2010) Labor Attributes and Strategies: The Case of Tomato Workers in San Luis Potosi, Mexico. *New Solutions*, in press.
- Scarone Adarga M, Cedillo Becerril LA, Denman Champion C: (2010) Gender, Aging and Work: Aging Workers' Strategies to Confront the Demands of Production in Maquiladora Plants in Nogales, Mexico. *New Solutions*, in press.
- Moreno N, Moncada S, Llorens C, Carrasquer P: (2010) Double Presence, Paid Work and Domestic-Family Work. *New Solutions*, in press.
- Rotenberg L, Harter Griep R, Pessanha J, Gomes L, Fernandes Portela L, de Jesus Mendes Fonseca M: (2010) Housework and Recovery from Work among Nursing Teams: A Gender Perspective. *New Solutions*, in press.
- Rojas Valverde ME: (2010) Gender-Based Political Harassment and Violence: Effects on the Political Work and Public Roles of Women. *New Solutions*, in press.
- Hanley J, Premji S, Lippel K, Messing K: (2010) Action Research for the Health and Safety of Domestic Workers in Montreal: Using Numbers to Tell Stories and Effect Change. *New Solutions*, in press.
- Delp L, Muntaner C: (2010) The Political & Economic Context of Home Care Work in California. *New Solutions*, in press.