

Healthy Nail Salon Worker Project

MFL Occupational Health Centre

FINAL REPORT

April 2019 – December 2021

Executive Summary

Through this project, the Occupational Health Centre (OHC) improved health and safety awareness of nail salon workers and owners from the Vietnamese community in Winnipeg. This project was modeled after a very successful project for nail salon workers in Toronto delivered by Central Toronto Community Health Centres.

It is critical to acknowledge that the majority of this project took place during the global COVID-19 pandemic which had disproportionate health, economic and social impacts on low income and racialized communities, as well as women. Nail salon workers are part of all of these structurally disadvantaged groups of workers.

We recruited six nail salon trainers from nail salons throughout Winnipeg to participate in the project. OHC worked with a consultant to provide five Train the Trainer sessions to the trainers on the key health safety issues affecting nail salon workers: Skin Health, Ergonomics, Respiratory Health, Reproductive Health, and COVID-19.

The project adapted and translated into Vietnamese four resource booklets on the above health and safety topics which were distributed to trainers, nail salons, workers and on the OHC website.

When it was safer to do so during the pandemic, the Outreach Worker and nail salon trainers provided a total of 45 workshops on 5 different topics with 318 participants in eight nail salons.

The project also provided significant support and information to nail salon trainers, salons and workers on COVID-19 through this project. We advance a number of recommendations in this report to improve health equity among racialized, low income workers such as nail salon workers, as well as address weaknesses in occupational health and safety legislation and enforcement that were highlighted during the pandemic.

Project Overview

OHC will engage in outreach with nail salons and nail salon workers and deliver a Train the Trainer Program for six nail salon workers to equip them to provide a series of training sessions for workers in Vietnamese at approximately 12 nail salons in Winnipeg.

Objectives

1. Provide training to nail salon workers in four key health and safety areas for nail salons: musculoskeletal injuries; respiratory issues; skin disorders; and reproductive health.
2. Disseminate health and safety resources to nail salon workers and owners in Winnipeg.

Background

Nail salon work is gendered work – work that is mostly done by women, specifically racialized women of colour who are newcomers to Canada. In Winnipeg the majority of workers are from the Vietnamese community. The work in nail salons is low paid and provides minimal benefits.

The majority of this project took place during the global COVID-19 pandemic which had disproportionate health, economic and social impacts on low income and racialized communities, as well as women. Nail salon workers are also parents, and as women predominantly responsible for the caregiving of children, which was also an additional source of stress and an increase in unpaid caregiving work during the pandemic when schools closed. The pandemic also saw a rise in anti-Asian racism. Nail salon workers were especially vulnerable as a visible workforce in the service sector.

When this project was designed, it did not take into consideration the harsh realities of a pandemic for some of the most disadvantaged workers and communities, including nail salon workers. Despite this, OHC has had the privilege of working alongside nail salon workers through the past two very difficult years – supporting, learning, and sharing with the workers as we undertook to accomplish this project.

Work Completed

The following activities and accomplishments were realized throughout the project:

Outreach & recruitment of nail salon workers for the Train the Trainer Program

The Outreach Worker engaged in outreach with nail salon workers which involved visits to a number of different nail salons to promote the project.

Six trainers were selected from six different nail salons in Winnipeg. Four of the trainers are nail technicians and two of the trainers are nail salon owners. One trainer withdrew from the project shortly after it began. Five nail salon trainers continued for the remainder of the project.

Training

The following training sessions were provided to the nail salon trainers by an Occupational Hygienist on contract as a consultant to this project.

Orientation Session for Trainers – October 27, 2019

An Orientation Session for the Train the Trainer Program was held with six nail salon workers on October 27, 2019. The Orientation involved an introduction to the Occupational Health Centre, facilitators, and to the purpose and structure of the project. Participants also got to know one another through interviewing each other and playing an interactive game. We reviewed the training topics and the commitment required to participate.

The trainers were enthusiastic and eager to participate in this project. They did express some hesitation about approaching nail salon owners to ask if they could deliver the workshops at their salons. A number of the trainers thought that the Outreach Worker could play an important role to assist them with this task.

Train the Trainer Session: Skin Disorders – December 15, 2019

The first Train the Trainer Session on Skin Disorders was held on Sunday, December 15, 2019. Topics included:

- why skin health is important for nail salon workers
- review of chemical hazards used in nail salon products
- how to protect your skin –nitrile gloves, hand creams, hand washing
- resources for more information

Train the Trainer Session: Ergonomics – January 5, 2020

The train the trainer session on Ergonomics included the following topics:

- Use of body maps to investigate aches and pains
- Hazards that cause aches and pains
- Review of jobs and tasks that cause problems and possible solutions
- Resources for more information and help

Train the Trainer Session: COVID-19 Prevention – June 28, 2020

A COVID-19 Prevention Train the Trainer Session was held by Zoom with nail salon trainers on Sunday, June 28, 2020 in the evening and delivered by the Occupational Health consultant. Information shared included:

- Salon size in square feet and ideal numbers of people including workers
- Ways to ensure distance and reduce contact between workers and clients
- Importance of good ventilation and what that means
- Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Handwashing
- Manitoba provincial public health guidelines for nail salons

At this session nail salon workers had questions and concerns about asking their customers to wear masks.

Train the Trainer Session on Respiratory Health – March 21, 2021

An online Train the Trainer session on Respiratory Health was delivered to nail salon trainers on March 21, 2021. The session covered:

- How hazards get into your body
- The respiratory system
- Respiratory hazards in a nail salon
- Health effects of respiratory hazards, including asthma
- How hazards can be prevented

Train the Trainer Session on Reproductive Health – September 26, 2021

An online Train the Trainer session on Respiratory Health was delivered to nail salon trainers jointly by Women’s Health Clinic and the Occupational Hygienist consultant for this project on September 26, 2021. The session covered:

- Sexual terms & body parts
- Menstrual cycle
- Pregnancy control
- Consent laws in Canada
- Reproductive hazards in nail salons
 - Chemicals
 - Endocrine disruptors
 - Other hazards
- How to reduce hazards

Promotion of Workshops with Nail Salons

OHC staff developed a flyer to assist with promotion of workshops to nail salon owners which was translated into Vietnamese to explain the purpose and format of the workshops. The flyer was distributed to nail salons prior to

the pandemic, and then revised to offer online workshops and circulated again in the late summer and fall of 2021.

Workshops in Nail Salons

Prior to the pandemic, nail salon trainers delivered six workshops in nail salons on the two topics they had received training on: Healthy Skin and Ergonomics.

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March 2020, OHC informed all nail salon workers in our project to discontinue providing workshops on March 18, 2020. Nail salons were soon closed under public health orders on April 1, 2020.

Workshops resumed for a brief period when nail salons re-opened in June 2020 but did not continue for long.

Online workshops were offered to nail salon trainers and to salons, but trainers and nail salons did not take this up.

Following wide COVID-19 vaccination coverage in the summer of 2021, a substantial effort was made to deliver in-person workshops while following all public health guidelines. The Outreach Worker delivered workshops together with nail salon trainers to provide the support needed to accomplish as many workshops as possible prior to the completion of the project in December 2021.

By the end of the project, a total of 45 workshops on 5 different topics were held with 318 participants in eight nail salons throughout the project.

Support for COVID-19 prevention efforts in nail salons

During the first year of the pandemic, nail salons were closed for almost six months or half of the year. This makes nail salon workers one of the most

heavily impacted groups of workers in terms of job and income loss and instability during the pandemic.

At the outset of the pandemic, OHC compiled information on our website related to COVID-19 with a list of resources including health information and how to access COVID testing, as well as resources on how to access income and housing support. We shared a link to this information with the nail salon workers on March 24, 2020. At the same time, we also emailed the trainers' general information on COVID-19 translated into Vietnamese from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

When the Province of Manitoba announced that the nail salons would reopen again in June 2020, OHC prepared a short summary of important health and safety guidelines for nail salons adapted from the American Industrial Hygiene Association, Reopening Guidance for Hair and Nail Salons, May 6, 2020. This was translated into Vietnamese and sent by email to all the trainers in our project.

OHC organized a Zoom meeting with our Nail Salon Trainers on May 30 to share information and answer their questions and concerns. None of the trainers or the Outreach Worker had used Zoom, so OHC staff provided a fair amount of technical support to the group to get set up to use this platform. Provincial guidelines for nail salons were shared and discussed at this virtual meeting. Trainers shared their questions and concerns. A primary issue of concern was how to communicate with their clients to ensure they would follow the public health guidelines. Following the meeting we provided them a sample poster that they could adapt for their own salon.

Adaptation of Educational Materials for Nail Salon Workers

Working with the original designer, we reviewed, adapted and then translated into Vietnamese the following resources from Toronto for nail salon workers in Winnipeg:

- **“Healthy Skin, Healthy Nail Technicians: A Resource for Manitoba Nail Salon Workers”**
- **“STRETCH: Preventing Stress & Pain While You Work for Nail Technicians”**
- **“Reducing Risks to Respiratory Health: A Resource for Manitoba nail technicians”**
- **“Reducing Risks to Reproductive Health: A Resource for Manitoba nail technicians”**

These resources were distributed to nail salon trainers, posted on the [OHC website](#), shared on the Facebook Group, and printed copies with a complete set of resources were delivered to approximately 30 nail salons. The SAFE Work Manitoba member on the Project Advisory Committee also shared resources with Apprenticeship Manitoba for the esthetician trades.

Facebook Group

To try to reach and inform nail salon workers during the pandemic, a Facebook Group was set up and members were invited to join, this resulted in 34 members. The purpose of the group is to share information and resources in Vietnamese and English related to the health and safety of nail salon workers. All of the resources developed in this project have been shared on the Facebook Group.

Development, recording & posting of online presentations

Based on the adapted resources, OHC staff developed five powerpoint presentations on all topics for online delivery. The presentations were translated into Vietnamese. One trainer recorded the presentations which were uploaded onto the Facebook Group.

Distribution of Resources to Nail Salons

Information packages with all of the resources developed through the project were distributed in the final months of the project to approximately 30 nail salons most of whom who were unable to participate in the workshops.

Project Advisory Committee

The Project Advisory Committee was formed with representatives from Women's Health Clinic, SAFE Work Manitoba, the Lung Association of MB, European School of Aesthetics, as well as the Occupational Hygienist consultant, Outreach worker, and OHC staff members for the project. After the first year, the Women's Health Clinic and the European School of Aesthetics representatives both moved out of province to other positions. They were not able to provide replacements on the committee.

The Advisory Committee met six times during the project, including a final meeting to evaluate the project.

The Advisory Committee was very helpful with the design and implementation of the project and brought many different perspectives and experiences that benefited the project. Their guidance and support during the pandemic was especially valuable.

Evaluation

The Project Advisory Committee evaluated the project together in their final meeting. Some of the highlights included:

Strengths of Project

- participatory approach
- built new relationships with workers in a new sector
- ability to provide information and education in Vietnamese was critical for this group of workers
- built the skills and capacity of the five nail salon trainers who participated in the project
- resources created through project are good, informative, easy to understand, and can continue to be used after the project is completed
- providing honorariums to participants and nail salon owners to participate in training made it much easier to gain access to the salons and the workers

- built the skills and capacity of the OHC staff who participated in this project
- ability to connect and support with a group of women workers heavily impacted by the pandemic made the project very meaningful for both participants, trainers, staff and OHC
- the project succeeded in increasing awareness in the community about the health and safety of nail salon workers – more people are asking for information and materials by the end of the project

Challenges

- Acknowledgement that the pandemic made the project very difficult to accomplish – and that we achieved a great deal under the circumstances.
- The project included many different facets which were all important but overly ambitious to achieve in a two year(+) project – outreach to workers & employers in this sector; building relationships; adapting and translating five different resources; delivering in-depth training to trainers; and providing workshops to nail salon workers in salons.
- Due to language barriers, all communication with trainers had to go through the Outreach Worker. This made it impossible for OHC staff to communicate directly with the trainers and step in to provide support when needed. It also always added time for each step of the work – everything had to be interpreted and translated – training, resources, & communication.
- Balancing what health and safety recommendations are ideal and what is possible was an ongoing issue. Some recommendations may be costly or out of reach for many salons such as ventilation improvements. Important to share the information but also not discourage workers or ignore their realities.
- The time lag in formally recognizing aerosol transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and appropriate mitigation strategies by the provincial government resulted in mixed messages between health experts and government, and reduced trust among nail salon workers in the public health guidance provided by government.

- Online training had limitations – we need to find better ways to deliver. A number of trainers participated on their cell phones – there was a need for laptops or tablets for trainers.
- Topics covered were all important but may have been too many for trainers to feel confident to deliver all topics.
- Due to time lag in training caused by pandemic but also ambitious workplan, trainers had to relearn some of the information before delivering workshops.
- The time commitment for trainers was significant and a barrier to participation in the project. We attempted to be as flexible as possible with trainers regarding their level of participation.

An evaluation session was also held with the nail salon trainers on December 5, 2021 to discuss their experience during the pandemic, their participation in the project, the project achievements and their recommendations.

One trainer lost her job during the pandemic. She spoke of the stress that she experienced. She used the time to stay at home and study English.

One of the trainers who owned a nail salon prior to the pandemic shared her experience,

“It was very difficult to run a nail salon during the pandemic. I finally sold my salon two months ago and took job as a technician in another salon. It makes my life easier, though I’m the only person at home and I’m responsible for everything.”

Another trainer spoke of the fear she experienced throughout the pandemic. Both the fear of contracting COVID-19 and also the fear of transmitting it to others. She wonders if it will be possible to keep some relationships in the future.

A trainer also spoke about how this project improved her knowledge and built her confidence. Sharing this information with others helped her to feel good about herself.

One of the trainers became pregnant and had a baby during this project (and the pandemic). We asked her to record the online presentations for the project which she could do from her home at whatever times were best for her. She said,

“I proudly work for your organization, really enthusiastically and enjoy working on these excellent things. Especially grateful for Karen and Van’s strong support. Highly appreciated!”

The trainers had mixed feelings about online workshops – a few found the online Train the Trainer sessions to be very productive and would have liked to provide online workshops for nail salons saying they can be more convenient for participants and in-person workshops are difficult to coordinate with staff schedules in the salons. Others mentioned that online workshops are not the same, and how much they preferred our first Train the Trainer sessions which were delivered in-person.

The trainers suggested that the project could have benefited from more visual information like video clips and pictures.

Trainers also felt that it would be beneficial for the project and this work to be extended and continued as it is a good opportunity for workers in this community with valuable information to share.

Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted weaknesses in occupational health and safety legislation and enforcement for workers in Manitoba, including nail salon workers. The pandemic also revealed the inequities faced by many low income and racialized workers in our province. To further the goals of health equity for nail salon workers, it is critical that community health centres such as the Occupational Health Centre, as well as government-related organizations preferentially allocate resources to better protect this group of workers. It is also key to enact policy recommendations that will address the weaknesses in health and safety legislation and enforcement, and the structural issues that result in inequities to improve health across worker populations.

1. OHC should continue to engage in outreach and provide training in this industry on an ongoing basis, and follow up with trainers and workers who participated in this project. This ongoing work will require funds for interpretation, at the very least.
2. OHC should connect nail salon trainers with the Healthy Nail Salon Network in Toronto.
3. OHC should place the learnings and experience from this project in the context of gendered work done by women and link with other groups doing related work.
4. OHC should continue to look for opportunities to participate in gatherings/conferences about nail salon workers to learn from other experiences and to share our own experience.
5. Safe Work Manitoba and Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba should partner with community organizations like the Occupational Health Centre and provide funding for training and resources in Vietnamese on those topics of importance for worker health and safety in nail salons. All nail salons should receive this information.
6. The provincial government and Workplace Safety and Health Branch should adopt and enforce standards on ventilation in workplaces, and mandate HEPA filtration for those workplaces without adequate ventilation.
7. The provincial government should invest resources in upgrading ventilation systems in a range of workplaces in Manitoba, including nail salons. This will protect workers against respiratory viruses as well as chemical hazards present in nail salons moving forward.
8. The provincial government should provide N95 respirators for free to all nail salons for their workers.
9. The provincial government of Manitoba should enact legislation to provide 10 paid sick days to all workers in the province to assist nail salon workers as well as other low wage workers and protect their income when they need to miss time from work due to illness.