



Top Story

RAACWI has a big presence at this year's Work Disability Prevention Program

The Work Disability Prevention CIHR Strategic Training Program is offered each summer to new researchers interested in learning more about transdisciplinary research approaches to work disability prevention. Headed by Dr. Patrick Loisel, the program brings together leading researchers in the field from around the world to provide training and mentorship to new researchers for a two-week period each summer. This year, the training program was held at the University of Toronto for the first time, its new home base. It was great to see both RAACWI academic and community participants making a big presence at the two-week session.

Two community members—Steve Mantis and Marion Endicott—were invited to participate in a two-day workshop within the Work Disability Prevention Program on the socio-political challenges of work disability prevention. The focus of this year's challenges workshop was chronic pain. Both Steve and Marion spoke about the challenges injured workers experience dealing with chronic pain, along with other health conditions, while also trying to get back to work. Marion provided a real-life example of a case she had handled as an injured worker legal representative, where the challenges were intensified by an employer who was unwilling to accommodate the worker in a meaningful way. Students at the session were impressed by Steve's and Marion's willingness to speak candidly about injured worker experiences and their ability to identify the core issues from a community perspective.


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The RAACWI theatre group was invited to perform a skit at a dinner gathering of the Work Disability Prevention Program. Kate Lushington led a troupe of community actors in a play written by Orlando Buonastella titled, *Tired of Being Dissected like a Frog* about how individuals can be treated as numbers, their humanity lost through compartmentalized treatment and bureaucratic red tape.



Some of the actors performing in Tired of Being Dissected like a Frog. From right: Orlando Buonastella, Christian Staal, Kate Lushington and Emile Tompa.

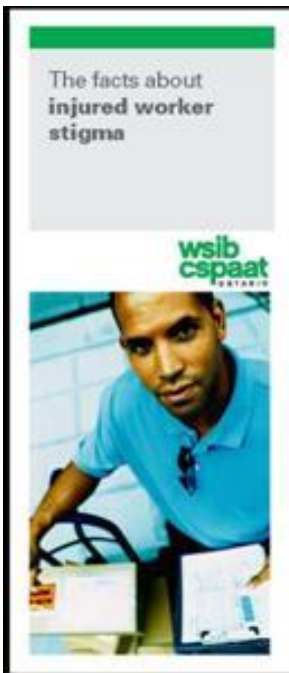
A number of academic researchers from RAACWI serve as mentors in the Work Disability Prevention program. Ellen MacEachen, Katherine Lippel and Emile Tompa have been part of the training program for many years. 

Research to Action

Ongoing efforts to reduce injured worker stigma have resounding success

In previous issues of our e-newsletter we have reported on focused topic dialogue sessions RAACWI has had with the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB), described as “Blue Sky Discussions.” The first one was on injured worker stigma. Over the last couple of years, participants of the Blue Sky Discussions on Stigma have made many inroads into tackling stigma. Several products and tools have been developed from their efforts. The first one was a “stigma framework” that identifies the multi-layered nature of stigma and how it can infiltrate an organization.

Building on the framework, the WSIB has developed a training module for WSIB staff aimed at reducing negative attitudes and behaviours toward injured workers. The training module includes a 21-slide PowerPoint presentation titled “When help leads to harm.” The discussion group has also produced a pamphlet titled “The facts about injured worker stigma” for distribution to Board staff and the public.



In November 2010, the WSIB training module was expanded to a stigma e-learning course. The Board also mounted a new stigma section on their intranet that contains the pamphlet, the PowerPoint presentation, a sensitivity checklist, presentations and papers by RAACWI researchers, and a link to the RAACWI website.

The Blue Sky Discussions on Stigma group has gone on the road to present their initiative to others who might benefit from their efforts. The group held a symposium on the stigma initiative at the Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health held in Toronto in May, and also at the National Learning Symposium of the Association of Workers’ Compensation Boards of Canada held in Quebec City in October.

“When someone is injured on the job, they need our help – not snap judgments about who they are just because they got hurt on the job. We have to do everything we can to help them recover their lives, dignity and health.”

**David Marshall,
WSIB President and CEO**

Overall the group has made substantial progress on raising awareness about injured worker stigma, and advancing tools and processes to combat it. We are grateful to the efforts of the WSIB and RAACWI individuals who have participated in the discussion group. 🔄

New “Blue Sky Discussions” group on injured worker outcomes

The success of two Blue Sky Discussions groups—one on stigma and another on return-to-work— has led the way for a new Blue Sky group on financial and health outcomes faced by injured workers. The group has held two joint WSIB-RAACWI meetings since the spring of 2010. The discussions have been guided by various RAACWI research like a survey undertaken by RAACWI on a sample of recent claimants with permanent impairments and a study on the labour market earnings and benefits adequacy of permanently impaired claimants. At the next meeting, the group will discuss data resources available to track the short- and long-term outcomes of injured workers.

The RAACWI members involved with this group are Steve Mantis, Peri Ballantyne, Fergal O'Hagan, Beckie Casey, Marion Endicott and Pat V. Representing the WSIB are John Slinger, Alice Peter and Tom Teahen. 🌱

Academic Researcher Profile

Ellen MacEachen

Researcher, Legislation & Health Themes



Dr. Ellen MacEachen is an occupational health social scientist specializing in qualitative methodology. She is a scientist with the Institute for Work & Health and holds appointments as an assistant professor in the Dalla Lana

School of Public Health at the University of Toronto and as a mentor with the Work Disability Prevention CIHR Strategic Training Program. She is also associate editor with the Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation and president of the Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health. She has been collaborating as a researcher with RAACWI since its inception in 2006.

MacEachen's research has provided unique insight on the organization and delivery of workers' compensation services. One of her recent studies explores the experiences of providers and users of the labour market re-entry system and another highlights the return-to-work problems faced by workers with long-term workers' compensation claims. This work has resulted in the popular, "Red Flags/Green Lights" guide providing advice to decision-makers on what to consider in solving return-to-work problems. MacEachen's research also examines the role system design and processes have on the health of injured workers.

Currently MacEachen is collaborating with RAACWI community members, injured workers and WSIB representatives in a "Blue Sky Discussions" group on improving the situation of injured workers returning to work.

More information about MacEachen's work is available on the RAACWI and Institute websites: www.consequencesofworkinjury.ca, www.iwh.on.ca. 🌱

Partner Profile

OHCOW's role in the prevention system

OHCOW (Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers) was established in 1989 as a result of campaigns by the labour movement and others in the worker community. It is funded by the WSIB with a labour Board of Directors, along with one representative from the Ontario Network of Injured Workers.

OHCOW has six clinics across Ontario (Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Windsor, Sarnia, Hamilton and Toronto). The focus of their work is on gradual onset health conditions related to ergonomics and hazardous exposures, including workplace violence and stress. OHCOW's services include individual patient assessments, workplace evaluations, occupational health promotion, training for occupational health practitioners, and action research.

OHCOW works directly with the union/workers and/or with the employer/joint health and safety committee to assess problems and provide practical solutions for change. Their interdisciplinary team includes occupational hygienists, occupational health physicians, nurses, researchers, as well as ergonomists and administrative professionals.

OHCOW's services are free of charge. You can contact OHCOW at www.ohcow.on.ca. 🌱

Building Community Capacity

Speakers' School successes – Hamilton & Thunder Bay

The Injured Worker Speakers' School is a key component in RAACWI's Knowledge Transfer and Exchange (KTE) strategy. The program was developed to:

- build community capacity to be equal partners in RAACWI;
- share the individual experiences of injured workers and put them into the larger (system-wide) context;
- develop new community leaders;
- create opportunities for injured workers to learn about the history and current developments of the workers' compensation system.

The first Speakers' School took place in Toronto in 2007 and was hosted by Injured Workers' Consultants, a key RAACWI partner organization. Since then it has been expanding across Ontario.

The fourth session of the Toronto chapter began in November and a Grad Speakers' School was also created to further build the speaking skills of graduates from past sessions.


A Speakers' School was also started in Thunder Bay in 2008 through a partnership of the Thunder Bay Injured Workers Support Group and the Economic Justice Committee. Their fifth session's students will be graduating in December 2010.

In Hamilton, a third school began this year, hosted by the Hamilton District Injured Workers' Group.

Some indicators of success of the school include the following examples of actions taken by graduates:

- making presentations to the Ontario Minister of Labour and the President of the WSIB;
- starting a weekly injured worker radio program on the local radio station;
- being elected to executive positions in local injured worker groups;
- discussing new initiatives in the workers' compensation system;
- writing newsletter articles;
- presenting at local and regional events;
- participating in research on the poverty of injured workers.

The injured worker community is continuing to explore opportunities to further expand the Speakers' School program. Community members have developed a basic facilitator's manual and resource materials to assist new schools. A second training session is being planned for early 2011 for people wanting to start a new school.

Anyone who would like more information can contact RAACWI's community lead, Steve Mantis at smantis@tbaytel.net. 

Update on Community Forums

It was standing room only at RAACWI's most recent community forum on Oct. 18, 2010. The topic of the session was *The Economics of the WSIB in 2010s: What does it mean for Injured Workers?*

The objective of this forum was to explore issues of funding of the Ontario compensation system, and what it might mean for injured workers. The timing of the forum was perfect, given that the WSIB and the Liberal government had just announced a "funding review" of the system.

There were two guest speakers at the forum. Andrew Bome, a lawyer at McQuestin Community Legal Services, talked about compensation funding models. Jim Stanford, an economist at

the Canadian Auto Workers, provided an overview of the broader economic environment.



A full house at the October community forum.

The two speakers described how funding of a workers' compensation system can be both a political and economic issue. They noted that changes in the local, national and international economy can have significant impacts on the workers' compensation system. For example, the WSIB's reliance on stock market investments was significantly affected by the stock market downturn in 2008. It considerably increased the unfunded liability and brought to the surface questions about how injured workers will be compensated in the future: Will employer premiums have to increase? Will injured workers' benefits have to be cut?

The speakers stressed that continued changes in the economy may cause ongoing financial pressure for the WSIB in the short- and medium-term. Finding a solution to the funding issues appears to be a priority with the present provincial government.

The speakers examined different funding models – full funding, steady state funding, pay-as-you-go funding –that provided participants insight into some of the possible ways that the system could be designed.

The presenters left the audience with ideas to explore. Clearly there is need for further research on funding options to identify the ones that will

best ensure the compensation system continues to be there for future generations.

RAACWI community forums take place six to eight times per year from September to June. The next forum is planned for Dec. 13 and will focus on funding strategies in different provincial jurisdictions. 🔄

Research Update

Study on marital formation after work injury

Principal Investigator: Heather Scott-Marshall
Co-investigators: Miao Fang, Sara Morassaei
Emile Tompa

Heather Scott-Marshall, the recipient of RAACWI's Dan Ublansky Post-doctoral Fellowship has just completed a study on the probability of marriage after sustaining a permanent impairment from a work injury. The study is based on a linkage of Ontario workers' compensation claims data with a database called the Longitudinal Administrative Databank (LAD for short).

The researchers found that individuals who suffered a disabling work injury had a significantly reduced probability of marrying compared to able-bodied individuals (21 per cent and 11 per cent reduction for women and men, respectively). Also, men who experienced a work injury prior to age 30 had a one-third lower likelihood of marrying than men being impaired later in life.

Previous studies have found that social and interpersonal consequences complement successful labour market re-entry, yet most workers' compensation systems focus on the work consequences. The findings from this study underscore the importance of examining the social and interpersonal consequences of work

injury, since they can have important impacts on the life course of injured workers. 🌱

Lost in translation: language and new immigrants' experiences after a work-related injury

Principal Investigator: Agnieszka Kosny
Co-investigators: Ellen MacEachen, Marni Lifshen, Peter Smith, Cynthia Neilson, Diana Pugliese, John Shields

This study has been undertaken by RAACWI's first post-doctoral fellow, Iggy Kosny. The study traces the important role that language plays in new immigrants' experiences of work-related injury. Based on in-depth interviews with 14 service providers who work with new immigrants and with 28 immigrant workers, this study points to the ways that language knowledge shapes the jobs that are available to new immigrants; workers' knowledge of their rights; the reporting of injuries; and workers' experiences with the compensation system.

The researchers describe how a worker's credibility can be called into question when they do not know the "right" language to use when reporting an injury, use "incorrect" language on forms or when they cannot fully explain the circumstances surrounding their injury. Workers who have poor English language skills are often heavily dependent on others as they navigate the workers' compensation system and, as a result, have little control or understanding of what is happening with their claims.

The researchers suggest some ways that policies and practices related to injury prevention, health and safety education and workers' compensation can be changed to better serve new immigrant workers. 🌱

Initiative Updates & News

RAACWI full team meeting

Thirty-five RAACWI members participated in the full team meeting held on May 17. The day was focused on building a vision for the future of RAACWI.

The group explored ways RAACWI research can address significant developments occurring in the Ontario workers' compensation system and used an exciting strategic planning method to brainstorm and shape ideas for future success. A wry skit on WSIB's unfunded liability and role-playing on workers' compensation issues entertained one and all while underscoring the importance of continuing the alliance.

The next full team meeting will be held on Dec. 17. At this meeting, the group will be discussing the initiative's long-term plans. Contact smacdonald@iwh.on.ca to join in. 🌱

Announcements

RAACWI full team meeting

Friday Dec. 17, 2010

At the Textile Museum. All are welcome!
Email smacdonald@iwh.on.ca.

Forum presentations

***Working with the policy "bureaucracy":
Insights of a former policy advisor.***

Dec. 13, 2010

Community forums are open to everyone and are held at IWC, 815 Danforth Ave, Suite 411.

CARWH Conference presentations

Several RAACWI researchers presented their work at the conference in May 2010.

The conference agenda and abstracts of the presentations are available at <http://carwh2010.iwh.on.ca/>.