

Research Feature

Report on the WSIB Extension Study

Understanding Work at the Front Lines of the WSIB: Implications for Injured Workers

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This issue of the RAACWI e-newsletter features one of the studies from our Legislation, Policies, Programs, and Practices theme. The “WSIB Frontline Worker Study” tries to describe and explain the work and practices of some of the people at WSIB— the adjudicators, nurse case managers, and customer service representatives— who have direct contact with injured workers and small businesses in Ontario. Conducted in the central Toronto office and in a regional office of the WSIB, the research consisted of interviews with frontline staff, observations of daily work life, the technology used, and analysis of documents and policies.

The WSIB, an organization that is undergoing constant change and re-alignment, has institutional accountabilities to stakeholders with contradictory interests, and must balance the conflicting demands of cost control, bureaucratic efficiency, regulatory/disciplinary control, and political neutrality. Clients include both injured workers and employers, who have very different stakes in the outcomes of compensation, return to work, and prevention. The way the front line staff thinks of and does their jobs reflects this highly charged location. To a varying extent across the three frontline jobs, the work involves managing

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an assembly-line like flow of involuntary and sometimes unhappy clients in a context of uncertain rules, policies and resources. The discretion frontline workers exercise in their work is an important tool of the trade for managing the contradictory and socially demanding expectations of their work, but can simultaneously put them at odds with the interests of their employer and their clients. The nature and logic of front line work has distinctive and challenging features when clients are from small businesses.

This project was funded by the WSIB, and the final analysis is currently in progress. An extension of this research beyond the original grant is being supported by RAACWI and will involve drawing out, writing up and communicating the implications of the study for injured workers and their representatives. 

The Research Action Alliance on the Consequences of Work Injury is a community-based partnership undertaking research on the workers' compensation system and its role in the economic, social and health consequences of work injury.

Building Academic Capacity

2nd RAACWI Post-doc awarded

In the spring of 2007 RAACWI posted a second call for a post-doctoral fellow. This call was named "The Carol McGregor Post-doctoral Fellowship." **Carol McGregor** was a long time disability rights activist and a researcher in the RAACWI initiative before she passed away on September 23, 2006 after a short battle with cancer.

The 2nd post-doctoral fellow was awarded to **Garry Gray**. Garry will be joining the RAACWI community in the spring of 2008. He is currently a Research Fellow at the Institute for Work & Health, holds a Master's Degree in Criminology, and is finishing his PhD in Sociology at the University of Toronto. He has previously been a Junior Fellow in Criminology and a S. Leonard Syme Fellow in Work & Health. He is also a past recipient of the top graduate article award in the Law & Society Section of the American Sociological Association for his research on the legal right to refuse unsafe work. His current research includes near-miss accidents, safety rights, qualitative methods, and regulatory studies. During the first year of the post-doc, Garry plans to design a research project in collaboration with other members of RAACWI on the consequences of deeming for injured workers. 🌱



*Garry Gray
RAACWI's second post-doc.*

New RAACWI Coordinator

New RAACWI Coordinator joins the team



*Edith Jacobet Wambayi
RAACWI Initiative Coordinator.*

Edith Jacobet Wambayi is the new Coordinator of RAACWI. Edith is a research consultant with Health and Life Promotion Research Consultancy, which provides research and community education and support services to hospitals, local and international organizations, and individuals. Edith holds a PhD and MSc in Medical Sciences, a Bachelor's degree in Education/Science, a Diploma in Community-Based Program Planning and Management, and several certificates in the health field. Edith is currently conducting research on HIV/AIDS among Toronto's African and Caribbean communities.

Edith is a member of the Ministerial Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. The Council advises the Federal Minister of Health on pan-Canadian issues related to HIV/AIDS. As well, Edith is the Program Coordinator with U-Links Centre for Community-based Research that links community projects with students from Trent University in the Haliburton County. 🌱

Former RAACWI coordinator starts her PhD in Disability Studies at York University

We are pleased to announce that our first initiative coordinator, **Bonnie Heath**, has begun her PhD in Disability Studies at York University. The program is new and Bonnie is part of the

first cohorts of students enrolled in the program. She began her studies in September of 2007.

Community Researcher Profile



*Marion Endicott
Community Lead for
the Legislation Theme.*


Marion Endicott has worked at Injured Workers Consultants (IWC) as an advocate and community legal worker for about 26 years. She was a key player in the development of our Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) initiative. As Co-Chair of the Bancroft Institute, she hosted a series of discussions between injured worker activists and academics that led to our CURA grant.

In 1976 Marion began her career at IWC helping injured workers in their appeals at the Ontario Workers' Compensation Board. Her job was not only advancing the legal rights and entitlements of individual injured workers, but also their "collective" interests, through education, community development and law reform.

Marion has developed and taught many courses in workers' compensation and presented at numerous workshops and conferences. Most of this work has been done within the labour and injured worker communities. Courses have ranged from a 30-hour course in workers' compensation offered through Humber College, to a three-hour overview course for union stewards through the Union Counselling

Programme of Metro Labour. Marion was also an advisor to the Canadian Injured Worker Alliance (CIWA) for 10 years, and in that capacity delivered training to injured worker activists across the country.

Over the years, Marion has written many articles for trade journals and submissions for Parliamentary Committees, government bodies and policy consultations. In 2004 she won the Ontario Bar Association's Ron Ellis Award in Workers' Compensation. With many years of experience in the field, Marion is considered one of the most experienced and skilled thinkers and practitioners in the workers' compensation field in Ontario.

Marion may be best known within RAACWI for her workshops designed for team members that explore complex topics like deeming and experience rating, making them easy to understand. She is also the Community Lead for the Legislation, Policies, Programs and Practices theme group within RAACWI, and serves on the RAACWI Steering Committee. 

Knowledge Mobilization

RAACWI – WSIB Liaison Committee

One of the primary goals for knowledge mobilization within RAACWI is to work with the government and the WSIB to improve the financial and health outcomes for injured and disabled workers.

In 2007, RAACWI took a number of steps to begin building a long-term relationship with the WSIB. In February, the RAACWI steering committee had its first meeting with senior management at the WSIB. The key messages from that meeting were:

- the WSIB is committed to improving its use of evidence in policy and decision-making;
- WSIB senior management are prepared to have ongoing, direct communication with RAACWI including through half-day sessions;
- there are ongoing opportunities to convey RAACWI research findings to the WSIB, such as through in-house professional development sessions called "Learning Exchanges;"
- RAACWI needs to be organized and focused on what it wants to achieve in such meetings so that it makes efficient use of senior management time.

Since the first meeting, RAACWI has been exploring opportunities to work with the WSIB to gather and share evidence.


One example of how the relationship with the WSIB has helped advance RAACWI's research is a project led by Dr. Peri Ballentyne. The WSIB has assisted Peri with the recruitment of injured worker respondents for a longitudinal survey. The sample is of 500 injured workers with a permanent impairment, selected using a randomized process. RAACWI and the WSIB have developed a protocol to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of workers participating in the survey is protected.

RAACWI has received updates on some of the research the WSIB is undertaking concerning the consequences of work injury, have advised them on a couple of their projects, and have been invited to work together in the future. In the fall of 2007, two of our researchers, Dr. Lippel and Dr. MacEachen, made presentations on some of their recent research to staff at the WSIB.

In January 2008, RAACWI had two meetings with WSIB staff. The first consisted of a group of 5

members from RAACWI and five WSIB staff, lead by Jill Hutcheon, Chief Executive Officer and John Slinger, Chief Operating Officer. The meeting was a "blue sky" discussion to explore the issue of stigma, something that many injured workers experience. Also discussed were possible steps that could be taken to minimize the negative image of injured workers.

In a second meeting in January, RAACWI hosted a presentation and discussion by Joe Morsillo, Director of Policy, WSIB, on how the Board develops policy.

Research on knowledge mobilization has found that building the relationship with the end user early on in the process is one of the keys to success using evidence in policy development and decision-making. RAACWI is well on its way in this process and hopes are high that a long term, productive relationship with the WSIB will be achieved. 

Building Capacity in the Community

Report from the RAACWI Community Forum

The RAACWI met at Injured Workers Consultants (IWC) on October 18th for one of its Community Forums. The forum is part of RAACWI's capacity building activities, designed to increase the involvement of the injured worker community in the initiative. Capacity building in the community is accomplished in several ways:

- building community skills to understand and analyze research;
- bringing real life experiences to the research projects;
- helping shape the research to better meet community needs;

- building stronger relationships within the team;
- helping find solutions to the problems faced by the community.

Sixteen people participated in the session. The first half of the forum was a presentation and discussion led by Katherine Lippel. She is one of the leading researchers in the field of workers' compensation in Canada (and part of our RAACWI team). She spoke about her research project undertaken in Quebec called "Managing Claims or Caring for Claimants: Effects of the Compensation Process on the Health of Injured Workers."

Katherine's research found three main factors negatively affecting the health of injured workers:

- stigmatization;
- imbalance: fighting against a "big machine;"
- absence of social support.

The research also found that receiving compensation is therapeutic. While the research report from this project covers a lot of ground, even these few summary findings are very important to the injured worker community.

While Katherine's research was done in Quebec, much of it sounds very familiar to the experiences here in Ontario. Hence, the presentation of the project led to lots of discussion at the forum.

In the latter part of the forum meeting, Katherine was joined by another leading researcher in the workers' compensation field, Joan Eakin, as well as Iggy Kosny, RAACWI's first post-doctoral fellow. The three are beginning a study on the role of doctors in the workers' compensation system. Doctors play a critical gate keeping and


consultative role in the compensation process and in return to work. The project the three are working on will examine the nature and logic of doctors' participation in this process and how it comes to affect the lives of injured workers.

Participants at the forum meeting shared their thoughts and experiences with the researchers. These included discussions about lived experiences, what sort of questions to ask doctors in the study, whether doctors understand (or not) the compensation system, and how medical care changes over time and how the system deals with this change. Several people at the forum expressed an interest in being involved in the project.

An evaluation of the forum at the end of the meeting revealed:

- participants appreciated formulating research questions together;
- they were pleased to hear that researchers are doing community based research on injured workers' issues;
- participants learned a lot from the research presentations, and it gave them hope.

Overall, the forum meeting was quite a success. The researchers expressed their thanks for assistance with grounding their research through the lived experiences of injured workers.

Community forums are held 6-8 times each year. See our website calendar for details (www.consequencesofworkinjury.ca). 

Partner Profile

Institute for Work & Health: A resource for research evidence


IWH is an independent, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to conduct and share research with workers, labour, employers, clinicians and policy-makers to promote, protect and improve the health of working people. The Institute is pleased to be a partner in the RAACWI initiative. It sees community involvement as critical to understanding the issues concerning injured workers and to identifying how policy can be improved to address these concerns.

The Institute has two core functions: to produce research, and to facilitate the use and application of research in the health and safety field, through knowledge transfer and exchange. It has more than 20 scientists, as well as adjunct scientists from across Canada, the U.S. and Europe. The Institute encourages an approach to research that crosses disciplines, and its research teams reflect this. They come from a range of disciplines including medicine, nursing, economics, sociology, anthropology, communications, psychology, chiropractic, epidemiology, biostatistics, physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

IWH is committed to sharing knowledge based on research evidence with others in the work and health field. The Institute is one of a handful of research organizations in Canada with a fully-funded department of Knowledge Transfer & Exchange (KTE).

The Institute takes pride in training and mentoring the next generation of work and health researchers. Its links to the university community and its ability to access key sources of data have made it a respected advanced training centre. Its post-graduate fellows and students receive guidance from scientific staff, participate in projects and gain practical work experience, including KTE.

The Institute is formally affiliated with four Ontario universities: McMaster University, the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo and York University. It has created linkages and collaboration with the three Centres for Research Expertise. They include the Centre for Research Expertise for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders (CRE-MSD) based at the University of Waterloo, the Centre for Research Expertise in Improving Disability Outcomes (CREIDO) based at Toronto Western Hospital, and the Centre for Research Expertise in Occupational Disease (CREOD), a collaboration between the University of Toronto and St Michael's Hospital in Toronto.

The Institute receives annual core funding from the WSIB. Scientists also apply for and receive grants from funding agencies such as the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the U.S. National Institutes of Health. 

Research Action Alliance on the Consequences of Work Injury

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