



Texte original.*

Engager les jeunes travailleurs à leurs propres conditions: les jeunes travailleurs et la santé au travail et de la sécurité en Australie du Sud

Verna BLEWETT*

Jessica PATERSON*

Sophia RAINBIRD*

*Central Queensland University, Appleton Institute, PO Box 42, Wayville South Australia 5034, Australia

Résumé. Comme dans de nombreux pays, les jeunes en Australie sont à risque élevé d'accidents du travail et de maladie et ont peu de connaissances sur les droits des travailleurs. Ils peuvent être mal formés dans les principes de travail, de santé et de sécurité, des processus et des enjeux. Cet article présente un projet de recherche à méthodes mixtes visant à améliorer la santé et la sécurité au travail pour les jeunes travailleurs en Australie du Sud. Le résultat sera un plan stratégique novateur centré sur les jeunes travailleurs âgés de 12-25 ans (dans les écoles secondaires, la formation professionnelle et les universités, ainsi que ceux qui sont dans l'emploi et non étudiant). La recherche utilise la participation et l'autonomisation via les médias sociaux pour engager les jeunes travailleurs. Il s'agit d'une utilisation innovante de l'ergonomie participative à la conception organisationnelle et de gestion. Il vise à encourager l'auto-défense et d'améliorer la résolution de problèmes à travers un modèle de résilience chez les jeunes. Il fera également la promotion des points de report de sécurité pour les jeunes travailleurs. La stratégie sera finalisée par Un Atelier de Collaboration afin d'entendre la voix des jeunes travailleurs, leurs employeurs, les enseignants et les défenseurs.

Mots-clés : les jeunes travailleurs; travail, la santé et la sécurité; participation; ergonomie participative.

Engaging young workers on their own terms: young workers and work health and safety in South Australia

Abstract. As in many countries, young people in Australia are at high risk of workplace injury and illness. They are known to have little knowledge of workers' rights. They tend to be poorly trained in work, health and safety principles, processes and issues. We are conducting a mixed-methods research project that will result in a comprehensive strategy for improving work health and safety for young workers in South Australia. This paper reports on the process of developing an innovative strategic plan that is centered on young people (aged 12-25 years) in secondary schools, vocational education and universities, as well as those who are in employment and not studying. The research uses participation and empowerment via social media to engage young workers. This is an innovative use of participatory ergonomics in organizational design and management. It aims to encourage self-advocacy and improve problem-solving skills through a model of youth resilience, rather than youth vulnerability. It will also promote safe reporting points for young workers. The strategy will be finalized with a collaborative Future Inquiry Workshop as a means of hearing the voice of young workers, their employers, teachers and advocates.

Key words: young workers; work, health and safety; participation; organisational design and management.

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INTRODUCTION

General The stereotype for young workers is the teen-aged assistant behind a retail outlet counter or in a fast food shop; part-time workers paid on casual rates who spend most of their time at school or university and who work to save money for fashion clothes, travel or the newest mobile phone, rather than working to support themselves fully. But the stereotype does not hold good for all young workers, although about 36% of students in the young worker age group (12-25 years of age) also work (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2007). Many are not students, they may work to support themselves, live independently of their family group, and may work in a wide variety of industries, including mining and construction, that may take them away from their families and normal support networks.

Context of the problem Young people make up 40 per cent of all casual workers in Australia and are at a higher risk of experiencing sexual harassment, discrimination and underpayment of wages (Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia, 2012: 23). Previous research has found that despite safety training programs being targeted to young people, the rates of work-related injury and illness remain high (Chin et al., 2010, p.:577). In addition, a study of girls who attend secondary school and work, revealed that there was a high rate of incidents of sexual harassment in the workplace (Fineran & Gruber, 2009).

It is believed the safety of young workers can be improved by parental involvement in safety information (Castillo, 2011). However, involvement and support of parents in their children's work did not lead to a reduction in exposure to work hazards (Runyan, Vladutiu, Schulman, & Rauscher, 2011). An exception to this was found in one study into family businesses which found that young people working in this environment had fewer hazard exposures and better safety practices than young people who worked in a non-family business and larger work force (Rauscher, Myers, Runyan, & Schulman, 2012).

Often programs that focus on workers' rights and 'reasons for youth injury' are informational rather than instructional. They do not address the challenges associated with reporting. Chin et al propose a model of self-advocacy that 'encourages youth workers to think more deeply about workplace safety by identifying their strengths, limitations, and goals as workers and connects these to advocating for their own rights and for group rights' (2010, p.:578). Young workers need to be encouraged to report workplace conditions that are unsafe (Chin et al., 2010), for example, schools may be able to act as a safe reporting place.

Transitional school to work programs are becoming more available in secondary education and include work experience, the Australian Government

Structured Workplace Learning Programme (SWL), vocational education and training (VET), vocational learning and Australian School-based Apprenticeships. The Australian Government has outlined a set of guiding principles which aim to inform the work health and safety education of students in secondary schools (Department of Education and Workplace Relations, 2006).

Concerns about young workers are not confined to Australia. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) provides a number of papers outlining good practice in policies, strategies, programs, action plans, subsidies, campaigns and agreements across the EU (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2009). These are aimed at integrating OHS into universities and secondary schools, and teacher training programs. These papers review current programs and case studies and outline examples of best practice as well as challenges and barriers faced by regulators and educational institutions (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2009, 2010, 2011).

In the US, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in collaboration with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, has developed a curriculum in OHS that is available across the country. The lessons, presentation materials and student handouts are available to teachers and can be downloaded from the web (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), 2010).

Despite these considerable efforts, young workers are over-represented in workers' compensation statistics; that is, they tend to have more work-related injuries and illnesses than older workers doing the same work. This has been shown in repeated research (eg see (Loudoun, 2010; Mayhew, 2000; Thamrin, Pisaniello, & Stewart, 2010). However, there is a poor correlation between workers' compensation data and self-reported, work-related illness and injury rates. An ABS self-reported survey revealed that young men aged between 20-24 experienced the second-highest work-related injury or illness rates of 63 per 1,000 people (69 per 1,000 men and 57 per 1,000 women) (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2010). It is known that young workers tend to under-report injuries and work-related illnesses. It has been estimated that only 50% of young people injured at work are likely to make a claim (WorkSafe Victoria, 2011) so the statistics are unlikely to tell the whole story. Reasons for under-reporting include being busy and not having the time to stop work, believing the injury to be their fault, or not receiving support from their manager when they had previously reported an injury.

Work health and safety cannot be reasonably isolated from other rights and conditions of work, such as hours of work and pay, because the response that young people make to these issues tends to be similar and their effects impact on each other. This was made clear in the recent review of Tasmania's

Child Labour Laws (Workplace Standards Tasmania, 2012) which examined: unpaid training; non-payment of loadings or penalty rates; no advance notice of rosters or roster changes; underpayment; no provision for meal breaks; and wages not paid in money, in addition to balancing school and work, and work safety and health. The report specifically looked at the conditions of work for children under 15 and found that 8.1% of children in this age group were engaged in some form of work. The report noted that,

A young person's limited experience can make it difficult for them to assess risk, and they may be more prone to take risks, and so it is important that their exposure to risk is removed, limited or well managed. Work conditions need to be appropriate to a child's age and experience. The casual and part-time nature of work for young people can mean that there is little provision of or opportunity for training in or information on health and safety matters. There has been anecdotal evidence that young workers are sometimes left alone in potentially dangerous situations, indicating a lack of proper supervision (Workplace Standards Tasmania, 2012).

In its most recent report Safe Work Australia (Safe Work Australia, 2013) identified work health and safety for young workers as a 'burning issue'. The report identified the problems of greater experience of work-related injury and ill health by young workers, the failure to report these incidents, and the lack of awareness of risks to young workers by employers and young workers themselves as a major concern. Thus this research, is taking place at a time when Australia is poised to take action to improve a known problem, and a problem that is of significant size.

Research plan The problems of poor work health and safety amongst young workers is well known and considerable effort has been made by regulators and governments to improve matters, but little progress has been made. SafeWork SA, the South Australian government agency responsible for work health and safety, is particularly concerned to make marked improvements in work health and safety for young workers by taking a strategic approach to the problems. We have been commissioned to research and develop a strategy to improve work health and safety for young workers in South Australia. This research aims to produce this strategy by using a mixed methods approach that includes hearing from young workers themselves through social media, surveys and focus groups. We will also hear from other people who impact on young workers' health and safety including: parents, teachers (secondary and tertiary), unions, business organisations, employers, and the regulator. We will bring our findings together, and plan the strategy, using a highly participative large-scale group process, that involves 'the whole system'.

At the time of writing the research is a work-in-progress and the data collection is still underway. However, we are able to report on our preliminary findings.

METHOD

The research uses a multi-disciplinary team (ergonomics and work health and safety, psychology, and anthropology) to conduct a five-phase research process.

- *Document and program identification and analysis*, which includes an examination of the academic literature as well as the 'grey' literature in order to learn from young worker programs conducted in other Australian jurisdictions as well as internationally.
- *Conduct surveys of young people using social media techniques*. This phase allows us to hear from young workers through two on-line, anonymous and voluntary surveys. The first is a survey designed to collect case studies of young workers' work health and safety experiences; both positive and negative. These so-called 'me-too' stories are used to prompt the thinking of other young people and are posted (in a de-identified format) on the research project's Twitter site and FaceBook page (CQUniversity – Young Workers Project, <http://www.facebook.com/pages/CQUniversity-Young-Workers-Project/137006469806918?fref=ts>). This survey is live now and we report on the findings thus far in this paper.

The use of social media is imperative for this age group as Lavack et al argue (Lavack et al., 2008). They found that social marketing is an effective tool to focus upstream and proactive approaches rather than downstream reactive in addressing youth workplace interventions that encourage employers to take responsibility. Social media is included in this research as a means of both hearing from young workers, and testing the medium as a means of influencing their knowledge and behaviour.

The second survey, which is in development now, will cover young workers' knowledge of work health and safety and other work rights. It will also allow us to find out why they do or do not report, and what would encourage them to take action.

- *Conduct interviews with key stakeholders*. These include: youth, young workers, unions, small and large business, parents, teachers, the regulator (SafeWork SA inspectors), and business representatives.
- *Research and write case studies*. These will draw on the first survey and our interviews with young workers and will provide examples of real-life youth employment scenarios.
- *Facilitate a collaborative process to test our findings*. A one-day Future Inquiry Workshop (Blewett & Shaw, 2008) will be conducted to draw together the whole system (young workers and representatives of the other stakeholder groups) to test our findings and help us

determine the strategy for South Australia.

We aim to develop a strategy that is innovative because it will be informed by a diversity of stakeholders and will focus on developing capacity amongst young workers and clear advocacy processes for them. We will specifically address the known problems of under-reporting by young people, bullying, discrimination and underpayment in the workplace through the involvement of schools, vocational education and universities and alternative and anonymous places for reporting.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Although we are in the early stages of data collection, 17 young workers have completed our online survey and told us stories about their work health and safety experiences. We have posted shortened versions of their stories on the Facebook site and are experiencing an increasing traffic on the site as more material is posted to it, reinforcing the expectation that 'me-too' stories have impact for young workers.

Several themes have emerged in the data thus far: exposure to poor work environments; lack of appropriate training; a sense of betrayal, and lack of control at work. We expect these themes may change, and there may be more themes that emerge with additional data. We present a precis of our findings here.

Exposure to poor working environments

Some of the respondents to our survey have praised the approach to work health and safety at their workplace,

I'm responsible for my actions but my boss helps me to be safe and healthy at work (16, electrical apprentice).

...the workplace did its best to maintain safety and train staff in correct procedures (20, retail).

Others have identified key risks to which they have been exposed.

The water heater, that was known to be unsafe, fell off the wall onto another colleague's head. Arm of a meat slicer that was stored on the top shelf in a tiny kitchen fell on a different colleague's head (21, hospitality worker).

There were quite often incidents where people would be injured by equipment, eg. tables falling on their foot, scratches from sharp metal on the arms that hold clothing, hangers breaking and scratching people, etc. Other more serious incidents such as people falling off of ladders have also occurred (17, retail clothing store).

...lifting boxes for extended periods gave me a pain which I couldn't continue with (16, retail).

Other respondents identified being the target of bullying and harassment, and being subjected to poor management practices as work health and safety issues.

Lack of training

Some young workers reported having training at the start of their employment,

At the commencement of employment all staff members are trained in health and safety procedures. These include the

correct way to lift boxes, the safest level to go up to on a ladder, what to do in case of the fire alarm going off, the correct way to use stanley knives, etc (18, retail).

More frequently young workers told us about lack of training,

We weren't briefed on health and safety, and the job was cash in hand. The canteen was never cleaned, there were no taps or soap to wash hands, and there were often cockroaches in the food boxes and slugs around the place. There was also a mouse problem, it was gross (15, hospitality).

Lack of training and systems for dealing with difficult customers and the pressure of work were also a concern for several respondents.

A sense of betrayal

Implicit or explicit in young workers' stories is their surprise at the indifference or lack of concern expressed by their supervisors, managers or owners of the business in which they were employed. As one young worker expressed it,

My parents looked after me, my teachers looked after me, I expected my boss at work to look after me. When I was badly injured they wanted to ignore me, not look after me (17, retail).

This young worker was bewildered by the lack of concern shown by the manager in the workplace, and felt let down and betrayed.

Other young workers reported a managerial lack of concern over incidents and injuries. For example, one young worker told us about numerous burns he experienced as a worker at a fast food outlet. The last one was quite bad and he reported it to the manager who said,

The first aid kit's over there, fix yourself up and get back to work.

Indifference by management about workplace incidents may well be an important reason for the non-reporting of workplace incidents by young workers that is identified in the literature.

Lack of control

Some young workers identify that they have little control over workplace conditions and do not have a voice in identifying hazards or taking action to make the workplace healthy and safe.

When I'm under a car it's dangerous all the time because parts could fall off or roll off. I spoke to my boss about it, and my co-worker but they've ignored my concerns. What can I do? (19, apprentice vehicle mechanic).

There are no real safety practices, you aren't taught how to lift heavy things. I have heard from friends and parents that anyone lifting heavy items should be able to say no or at least be taught the correct lifting style. In the end I was forced to quit my job after advice from a friend's mother who also worked there, however my employer has told the small community I live in it was my fault (16, retail).

Several young workers reported that they had left their jobs in response to their concerns about safety, their lack of control and lack of action by management. Leaving the job is the final exertion of control.

CONCLUSION

Young workers are more vulnerable at work than their older co-workers. They are more likely to avoid reporting incidents, and appear to be less persistent in this activity. It may be that the features we are observing in our data can explain some of the differences between young workers and their older counterparts. A general sense of lack of control over the working environment may produce a sense of powerlessness and a reluctance to report. Having a report ignored or contradicted is likely to increase the sense of powerlessness, and produce feelings of betrayal. Ultimately the only control that many young workers can exert is to leave their job. That may save them from work-related injury or illness, but does nothing to improve workplaces for others, and so the cycle continues.

As this research progresses we will build a case for interventions by the regulator, unions and business representatives that result in safer and healthier workplaces for young workers.

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