

Health and Safety Issues Faced by Vietnamese Immigrant Nail Salon Workers



Julia Liou

*Planning and Development Manager
Asian Health Services (AHS)*

Thu Quach

*Northern California Cancer Center
(NCCC)*

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Agenda

- About Asian Health Services
- What's the problem?
- What are the concerns?
- What are the characteristics of the nail salon worker population?
- What are the current efforts?
- What YOU can do to help!!!



Asian Health Services (AHS) Background

- **Medical services**
- **Health education**
- **Insurance counseling**
- **Client advocacy**
- **Serves 17,000 patients annually**



AHS' Responsiveness to Community issues

- **Health and Safety of Nail Salon Workers**
- **How did AHS get involved?**
 - Outreach to Vietnamese community
 - Chronic asthma, dermatitis, respiratory illnesses, etc.
 - Long-term concerns i.e.. cancer



What's the problem?

- **What's going on?**
 - Nail Care and personal care products contain chemicals known to be carcinogenic and reproductively harmful
- **WHY is this happening?**
 - Cosmetic manufacturers are not regulated!
 - Europe banned some of these chemicals, but US has not



Nail Salon Worker Concerns

- **Why are there such great concerns?**
 - The California cosmetology industry is the largest professional licensee population in the nation
 - The nail salon shops in California have tripled in number in the last two decades
 - 80% of the nail salons in CA are owned and run by Vietnamese*
 - 95% are women of reproductive age
 - Recent immigrants: low-income, limited English

Health Concerns

- **Cancer**
 - Exposure to known and suspected carcinogens
- **Birth defects**
 - Some studies have suggested an association between solvents & colorants and gastroschisis
- **Other adverse reproductive outcomes**

Health Concerns

- **Respiratory illnesses**
 - Workers have indicated problems around difficulty in breathing
- **Skin irritations**
- **Chronic pains**
 - Carpal tunnel, back pains
- **Other acute symptoms**
 - Difficulty breathing, nose and throat irritations

Health Concerns- Chemicals-of-use and Health Effects

Chemical	Possible Health Effects (cancer & reproductive)	Use
Benzene	Known human carcinogen; endocrine disruptor; long-term high level exposures can cause acute myelogenous leukemia (AML)	Nail polish remover
Benzoyl peroxide	Suggestive cancer risk based on animal studies	Artificial nail hardener
Di-n-butyl phthalate	Inadequate evidence for cancer in humans and animals; animal studies have been suggestive of adverse birth outcomes (e.g. low birth weight, cleft palate); endocrine disruptor	Nail polish
Formaldehyde	Some suggestive evidence that workplace exposure could lead to more than expected cancers of nose and throat	Nail hardeners, nail polish
Glycol Ethers	Found to cause birth defects and damage to the testicles in laboratory animals; reduce sperm counts in men	Artificial nails (occasionally)
Methylene Chloride	Probable cancer-causing agent in humans (WHO, EPA & DHHS)	Artificial nails
Toluene	Very high levels during pregnancy could lead to birth defects and retard mental abilities, and growth	Nail polish

Workplace Concerns

- **Insufficient ventilation within shops**
- **Improper handling of products due to language barriers**
 - Despite heavy concentration of Vietnamese workers, training materials not translated



Workplace Concerns

- **Multitude of chemical exposures at high levels (occupational exposures is highest source)**
- **Ergonomic problems**
- **Inadequate attention to health symptoms leading to chronic illness**



Nail Salon Worker Characteristics

- **Long-term chronic exposures**
 - Homeland exposures to chemical warfare from the Vietnam War
- **Lack of knowledge about legal and health care systems**
- **Low socioeconomic status**

Nail Salon Worker Characteristics

- **Large proportion of workers are not employees but rent a station from the shop**
 - Lack of worker-based health insurance
 - Longer daily hours (>8 hours per day)
- **Language barriers**

Nail Salon Worker Characteristics

- **Lack of job security**
 - unstable nature of nail shop business –
high turnover of shops and ownership
- **Lack of knowledge** about safety and handling procedures for chemical compounds (due to language barriers)

What are some of the human rights & reproductive justice issues?

- **Potential reproductive health impacts from daily chronic workplace exposures and unhealthy work conditions**
- **Lack of accountability for improving working conditions for a susceptible population**

What are some of the human rights & reproductive justice issues?

- **The lack of perceived power to change their work conditions**
 - **Nail collaborative survey results show workers:**
 - Believe products have adverse health effects
 - View as “temporary work” and prefer not intend to stay in the business for long because of their health
 - Report that they would leave this work when become pregnant; know it is not a healthy environment for their unborn child

What do we know about the nail salon business?

- **The California cosmetology industry is the largest professional licensee population in the nation with over 200,000 cosmetologists (hair & nail) and 83,500 manicurists**
- **The industry has also been shown to increase dramatically in other states as well**

Why are they drawn to this work?

- **Inexpensive, readily-available and relatively short-training required**
- **Does not require high English proficiency**
- **Attraction of other Vietnamese in the beauty schools and Vietnamese instructors**

Why are they drawn to this work?

- **Growing number of Vietnamese-owned shops who employed other Vietnamese**
- **Flexible work schedules (late evening, night and weekend shifts)**

Small steps forward

- **Safe Cosmetics Act (SB 484)—Cosmetic chemical reporting**
 - Requires manufacturers to report to DHS if their products contain carcinogenic or reproductive harmful chemicals



Challenges

- **Safe Cosmetics Act (SB 484)—
Cosmetic chemical reporting**
 - Cosmetic manufacturers are powerful industry!!
 - Small business argument
 - Difficult to convince Assembly Health Committee members of scientific evidence
 - EU argument wasn't convincing
 - Tough to mobilize workers—not there yet

Current efforts at AHS

- **Breast Cancer Risk Profile (Pilot Study)**
 - AHS & NCCC: community-research collaboration
 - Focus group and surveys of current workers
 - Systematically characterize the workforce and understand some of their concerns
- **Second Phase of research**
 - Air ventilation study with workers
 - Matching breast cancer registry and licensee files

Current efforts at AHS

California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative

- **Integrated policy advocacy, research, and outreach and education approach.**
- **Composed of twenty public health and environmental advocates, nail salon workers and owners, community-based groups, and allies in public agencies.**

Current efforts at AHS

Guiding Principles

- **Identify practices that benefit both workers and small employers**
- **Target manufacturers of harmful products, not small businesses**
- **Unify our collective voices and respective strengths to leverage greater power**

What can you do to help?

- **Spread the word among your friends and family about the issue**
 - Visit <http://www.cosmeticsdatabase.com>
- **Join the CA Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative and the national listserve!!**
 - Plug into the national listserve and be a part of a nationwide discussion

What can you do to help?

- **Identify any community members and friends who are:**

1) Nail salon workers

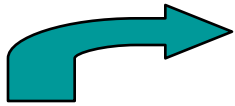
2) Nail salon owners

3) Cosmetology students

4) Family members

and willing to share their story....

What can you do to help?



- **Participate in legislative visits and sign letters!**
 - Need for legislator education & awareness
 - Powerful cosmetic industry lobby
 - Support bills that place accountability on manufacturers to do the right thing!!

Questions? More information?

Julia Liou

Asian Health Services

jliou@ahschc.org

510-986-6830 ext. 267