



# Setting an Agenda for Advancing Young Worker Safety

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(work done while at University of North Carolina)

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# Background

- Workers under age 25
  - ~ 18 million (US)
  - ~3+ million (Canada)
- Significant work-related morbidity & mortality
- Work has both liabilities & benefits
- Numerous disciplines, little cross-fertilization
- Need for research synthesis

# Purpose of project

- To engage an array of scholars & practitioners in setting an agenda for more integrated approaches to improve the safety & quality of work for young workers.

# Multidisciplinary organizing committee

*(listed alphabetically)*

- Robert W. Blum (medicine, public health, US)
- Leticia Davis (occupational health & safety, US)
- John Lewko (developmental psychology, CA)
- Sandra Miller (management, CA)
- Jeylan Mortimer (family sociology, US)
- Kimberly Rauscher (occupational policy, US)
- Carol Runyan (injury prevention, US)
- Richard Volpe (child development, CA)

# Method

Series of 4 invited meetings, with different foci

- Youth development & work (Toronto, 2007)
- Public health approach (Chapel Hill, 2007)
- Interventions & evaluations (Toronto, 2009)
- Research & policy agenda (Washington, DC, 2010)

# Procedures

- Meetings 1-3: White papers stimulated discussion
  - Ideas about research needs
  - What we know & can act on
- Meeting 4: Review, add, & prioritize issues & suggestions
- Post-meeting: Finalize research & policy recommendations

# Recommendations -- policy

- Develop a comprehensive and coordinated plan for surveillance of young worker health and safety, including monitoring of morbidity, mortality and hazardous exposures.
- Assure that youth working in agriculture receive the same level of protection under the law as those in other industries.



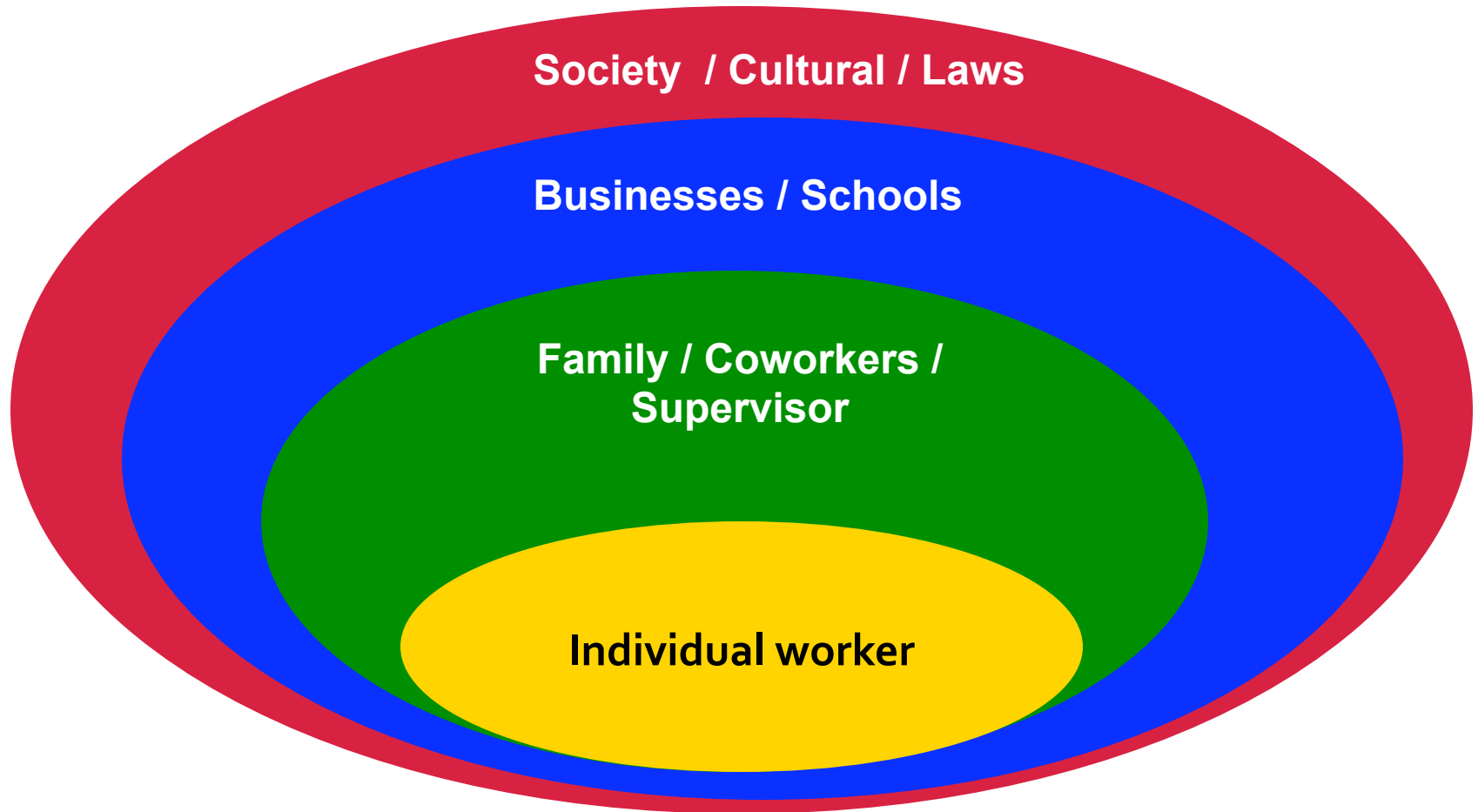
# Recommendations -- policy

- Develop a focus on youth labor within the US Departments of Labor and of Health and Human Services, to ensure continued attention to the issues of safety and health for young workers
- Ensure adequate funding for enforcement of child labor laws and OSHA standards at both the federal and state levels.

# Organizing Framework for Questions

## Social –Ecologic Model

*(adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1981)*



# Recommendations -- research

## Understanding social-cultural factors associated with young workers experiences

### *Sample research questions:*

- *What are the key elements of a successful campaign to change social and cultural norms about health and safety?*
- *How does the mix of young and old workers in the labor pool affect young worker safety?*
- *What factors enhance worker safety as a community value?*
- *How much control is it politically feasible to impose on businesses in support of young worker protection?*

# Recommendations -- research

## Organizational context of work

### *Sample research questions:*

- What work conditions and practices of supervisors, co-workers, and young workers contribute to safety?*
- How do training, supervision, other safety practices, and employer attitudes about young workers vary across different types or sizes of businesses?*
- What school factors are associated with young workers successfully managing the dual role of worker and student?*

# Recommendations -- research

## Interpersonal relationships between young workers & significant actors

### *Sample research questions:*

- *What roles do parents play in their adolescents' work decisions?*
- *What level of workplace injury risk and protection from risk is acceptable to parents?*
- *What types of peer relationships are conducive to positive vs. negative work experiences among young workers; do they differ by gender?*
- *How do power relations at work between young workers and supervisors impact health and safety?*

# Recommendations -- research

## Young workers' characteristics & behaviors

### *Sample research questions:*

- *How do job choices and timing of job initiation among youth vary by socio-economic factors, race and gender?*
- *How, if at all, does work change the risks among adolescents with regard to specific health outcomes (e.g., sexual debut, unwanted pregnancy, drug abuse, use of alcohol or other drugs)?*
- *What is the role of sleep deprivation on young worker injury risk?*

# Recommendations -Research

## Policy approaches (federal, state, organizational):

- *To what extent do workers compensation policies enhance young worker safety?*
- *How can the model of graduated driver licensing be applied to protect young workers?*
- *What would be the impact on teen work and work safety if the minimum ages for specific hazardous work tasks were increased?*
- *How much do worker safety committees; supervisor training programs; work permits; prohibited work; and/or work hour restrictions improve young worker safety?*

# Recommendations -Research

## Interventions to improve young worker safety

### *Sample research questions:*

- *What factors constitute effective supervision of young workers?*
- *What selection and training processes are most effective in preparing young supervisors to be successful (e.g., are certification courses a viable approach)?*
- *What are effective mentoring strategies that can be replicated across work settings?*
- *What are the effects of formal apprenticeship programs in improving outcomes (educational, health and safety) for young workers who participate?*



# Recommendations -Research

## Translational research and dissemination

### *Sample research questions:*

- *What strategies facilitate widespread adoption of interventions that improve young worker safety?*
- *How can the strongest evidence about prevention best be disseminated and applied in places employing young workers?*
- *What are the best methods to reach young workers with information about health & safety?*
- *What is necessary to get businesses to adhere to corporate policies that promote worker safety?*
- *How can occupational safety and health best be incorporated into school curricula?*

# Conclusions

- Much work to be done
- Takes varied approaches
- Value in cross-pollination
- Cross-national perspectives useful

# Next steps

- Canadian policy meeting being planned (2012)
- Publication of recommendations
- Dissemination to decision-makers
- Advocacy

**Watch for publication in:  
Public Health Reports, May/June 2012**

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