

# Understanding the Occupational Health and Safety Knowledge and Behaviors Among Cosmetologists in Minnesota

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## Background

Cosmetologists, estheticians, and nail technicians are exposed to a range of chemicals while working with personal care products, and have an increased risk of injury and poor health outcomes. These workers may also have low wages, lack employer-sponsored health insurance, or lack coverage under workers' compensation insurance.<sup>1</sup> Within their industry, consumer protections are emphasized to prevent spread of disease or injuries, but occupational health and safety education for workers is comparatively lacking.<sup>2</sup>

Occupational health and safety training is important to reduce workers' exposures, but little information is known about their current knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about occupational safety and health.<sup>3</sup>

This qualitative study explores the relationship between work and health among one group of occupations—cosmetologists, estheticians, and nail technicians—that has an increased risk of injury and poor health outcomes. The study aims to understand the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about work-related exposures in this population.

## Objectives

Primary: To describe the job characteristics, knowledge and attitudes about occupational health and safety, and occupational health concerns among cosmetologists, estheticians, and nail technicians.

Secondary: To identify the survey preferences of this population of workers in preparation for developing a statewide survey.

## Methods

### Focus Groups

Purposive and referral sampling methods were used to identify and recruit a convenience sample of cosmetologists, estheticians and nail technicians. Focus groups (n=3) were conducted in-person with study participants at two cosmetology schools and the Minnesota Board of Cosmetology within the Twin Cities metro area.

The semi-structured interviews asked participants about their job characteristics, job tasks and services, behaviors and knowledge about occupational safety and protections from hazards, health concerns related to their work, and their survey format preferences.

### Participants

Nine people who worked as cosmetologists, estheticians, and nail technicians participated in the focus groups, and ranged from relatively new professionals to salon owners with many years of experience, educators, and salon managers.

### Analysis

Audio recordings of the focus groups were transcribed and reviewed for predetermined and emerging themes.

## Conclusions

Cosmetologists, estheticians and nail technicians described working within complex employment structures, and with little access to employer-sponsored benefits.

Workers did not report regularly using personal protective equipment or other methods to prevent chemical exposures from the products they use.

Workers identified several physical and mental stressors—primarily ergonomics and social fatigue, anxiety, and stress—but were less concerned with chemical exposures.

Some respondents indicated that they trusted the product brands and had been using the chemicals without protections for years without adverse problems.

These professionals reported that they rely substantially on knowledge sharing between peers, and getting occupational health and safety knowledge and training from their school training and continuing education.

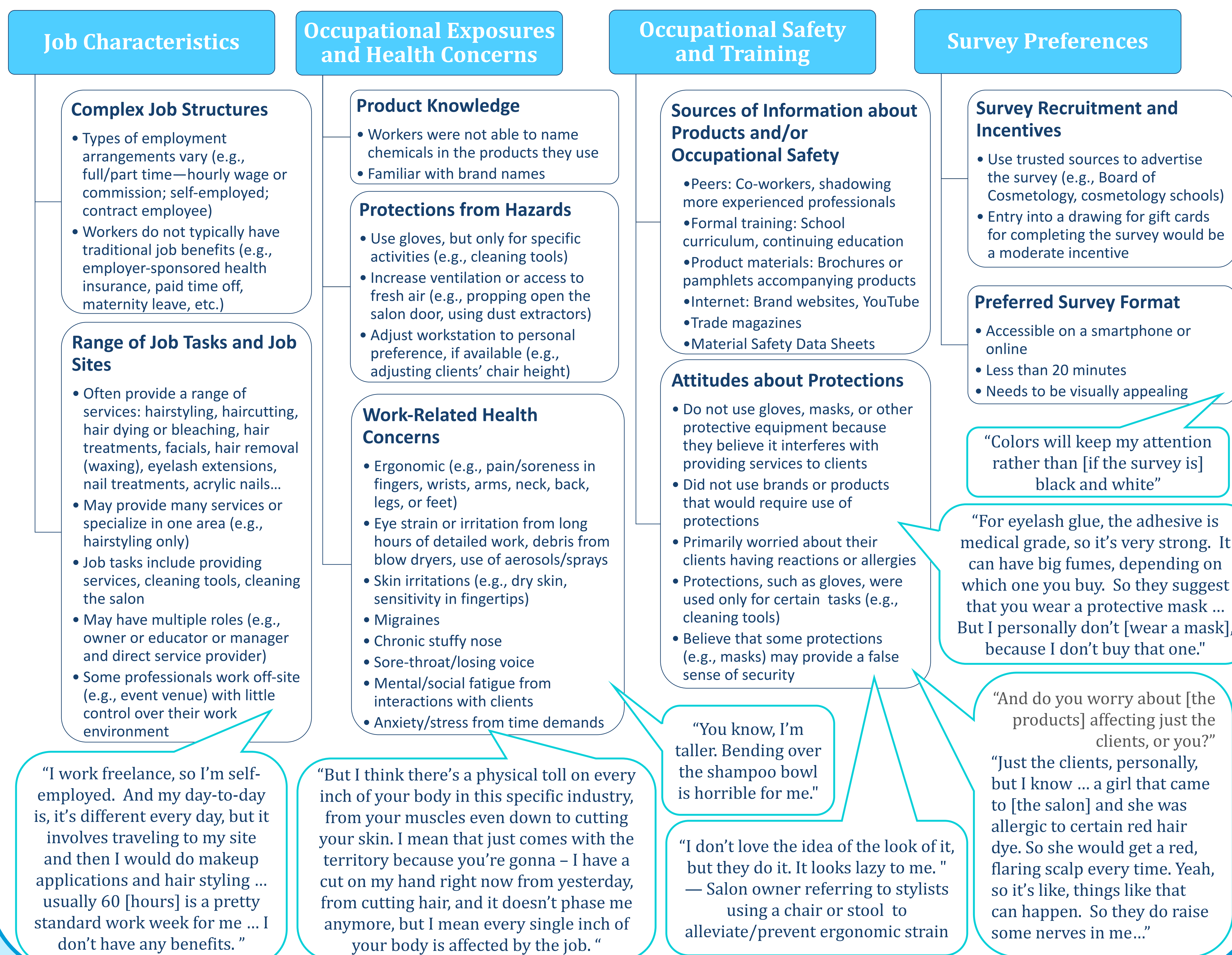
These results, and future studies, can inform the development of occupational health and safety trainings for this workforce, including chemical hazard communication activities.

## Next Steps

These results will inform the development of a statewide, online survey related to knowledge and attitudes about occupational health and safety. The survey will be emailed to the approximately 32,000 cosmetologists, estheticians, and nail technicians licensed by the Minnesota Board of Cosmetology.

## Results

The following themes emerged from the analysis of focus group interviews with cosmetologists, estheticians and nail technicians:




## References

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<sup>2</sup> Quach, T., Gunier, R., Tran, A., Von Behren, J., Doan-Billings, P. A., Nguyen, K. D., ... Reynolds, P. (2011). Characterizing workplace exposures in Vietnamese women working in California nail salons. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(SUPPL. 1). <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2010.300099>

<sup>3</sup> James, L. (2014). *Policy Report: How Safe is Your Nail Salon?* New York, NY.



**Funding**

This project was supported by a Scholarly Activity Grant from the Society for Chemical Hazard Communication.

Funding for this study was also provided, in part, through the National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH)-funded MCOHS-ERC Training Program (OH008434). The contents of this effort are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official view of NIOSH, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or other associated entities.

## Acknowledgments

The authors thank Adrienne Landsteiner, PhD, MPH, and Kathleen Norlien, MS, CPH at the Minnesota Department of Health for their contributions to this project.

