

# Washington State Janitorial Workload Study

*Progress report to the Legislature*

June 2020

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# Acknowledgements

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# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

In 2018, the Washington State Legislature enacted a budget proviso requiring the Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) to conduct a new, four-year research project to address high injury rates among janitors in Washington by studying the impacts of janitorial workload. L&I's Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP) program began a study in 2018 with the goal of identifying janitorial workload issues that can be changed to reduce the risk of injury to janitors. The study is expected to be completed in 2022.

This progress report provides updated information to the legislature and the public about the Washington State Janitorial Workload Study. All components of the study are detailed in this report.

## Completed research

The study began with formative research to identify and characterize the needs of the janitorial workforce. This formative research included:

- Conducting focus groups with janitors to discuss workplace health and safety needs, workload, and organization of work. Other topics discussed were job hazards, equipment, supervisor/manager relationships, wage/hour issues, and stress.
- Holding individual interviews to explore workplace mistreatment.
- Completing an economic scan of the janitorial cleaning industry, to provide context for this study and research results within economic realities for both workers and employers.

The formative research has been completed, and full details are provided in this report's appendices.

## Ongoing research

The majority of the study is ongoing, and brief reports on the progress and status of all ongoing components are included in this report.

Ongoing components include:

- A statewide survey of janitors to gain understanding of their safety and health risks and learn more about their job tasks, hazards, exposures, and work issues.
- Worksite visits at participating janitorial firms. SHARP has completed several visits, and more are planned. During these worksite visits, staff collect detailed, job-specific data about biomechanical and physiological exposures, which is critical in assessing typical Washington state janitorial workload. Several of these worksite visits had been planned for the spring and summer of 2020, but have not been done due to COVID-19 safety and health restrictions. Our workload data reflect cleaning demands in the pre-COVID-19 workplace. Given that controlling COVID-19 relies partly on cleaner building environments, workload

demands may increase as a result of the pandemic. An overview of the progress to date of worker physical exposure assessments is provided in this report. We anticipate providing a final report in June 2022 with the data available to us to relate workload to injury risk.

- Individual interviews with injured workers who have filed workers' compensation claims. SHARP is conducting these interviews to obtain more information about the causes of injuries. This report includes a progress report of work done to date.

### **Summary of research and data to date**

Since July 1, 2018, we have developed our study design, obtained institutional review board approval for all necessary study components, and have completed formative research including nine focus groups (46 participants), 18 individual mistreatment interviews, and an evaluation of the state and national economic landscape to better situate the study and recommendations.

### **Next steps**

- Complete worksite visits.
- Restart individual interviews.
- Conduct a statewide survey of janitorial employers.
- Continue to develop multilingual and multimodal education and training resources.
- Develop and test a workload calculator.

# Introduction

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## BACKGROUND & SCOPE

Janitorial work is labor-intensive, demanding, and often exposes workers to physical and psychosocial hazards that increase the risk of work-related injuries.<sup>1</sup>

The number of janitors and cleaners (excluding maids and housekeeping cleaners) employed in Washington increased by about 20 percent between 2013 and 2018.<sup>2</sup> Janitorial workload also increased. A study of union and non-union janitors found that reported work intensity increased 8.6 percent over a three-year period.<sup>3</sup> In Minnesota, surveys conducted to identify the relationship between workload and injury found that an increase in self-reported workload was correlated with occupational injury.<sup>4</sup>

In Washington, prior research suggests that janitors are at higher risk of injury than most other occupations;<sup>5</sup> however, more research was needed to better understand the workplace and hazards faced by janitors.

The Washington State Legislature provided the Department of Labor & Industries, Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program funds in 2018 to conduct research to address the high injury rates of the janitorial workforce. The research must:

- Quantify the physical demands of common janitorial work tasks
- Assess the safety and health needs of janitorial workers
- Identify potential risk factors associated with increased risk of injury in the janitorial workforce
- Measure workload based on the strain that janitorial work tasks place on janitors' bodies

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<sup>1</sup> Teran & vanDommelen-Gonzalez, 2017. *Excessive Workload in the Janitorial Industry*. Berkeley: Labor Occupational Health Program: University of California, Berkeley.

<sup>2</sup> BLS (Bureau of Labor Statistics) (2020). *Occupational Employment Statistics*. <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Seixas N, Domínguez C, Stover B, Simcox N. (2013, August). *Janitors Workload and Health and Safety*. Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, University of Washington.

<sup>4</sup> Green, D. R., Gerberich, S. G., Kim, H., Ryan, A. D., McGovern, P. M., Church, T. R., ... & Arauz, R. F. (2019). Janitor workload and occupational injuries. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*. 62(3):222-232

<sup>5</sup> Smith and Anderson, 2017. *Work-related injuries among commercial janitors in Washington State, comparisons by gender*. *Journal of Safety Research*. 62:199-207

The department must conduct interviews with janitors and their employers to:

- Collect information on risk factors
- Identify the tools, technologies and methodologies used to complete work
- Understand the safety culture and climate of the industry
- Issue an initial report to the legislature by June 30, 2020, assessing the physical capacity of workers in the context of the industry’s economic environment
- Ascertain usable support tools for employers and workers to decrease risk of injury

Cleaning workers in the public sector are generally called “custodians,” and those in the private sector are called “janitors.” This report generally refers to cleaning workers in the private and public sectors as “janitors.”

## JANITORIAL STUDY

### Study goals

The primary goal of the Washington State Janitorial Workload Study is to quantify the physical workload of janitors so that janitorial workers’ workload can be appropriately assigned. This goal will lead to our primary outcome, which is to reduce work-related injuries among janitors.

Understanding the physical workload of janitors will be achieved through:

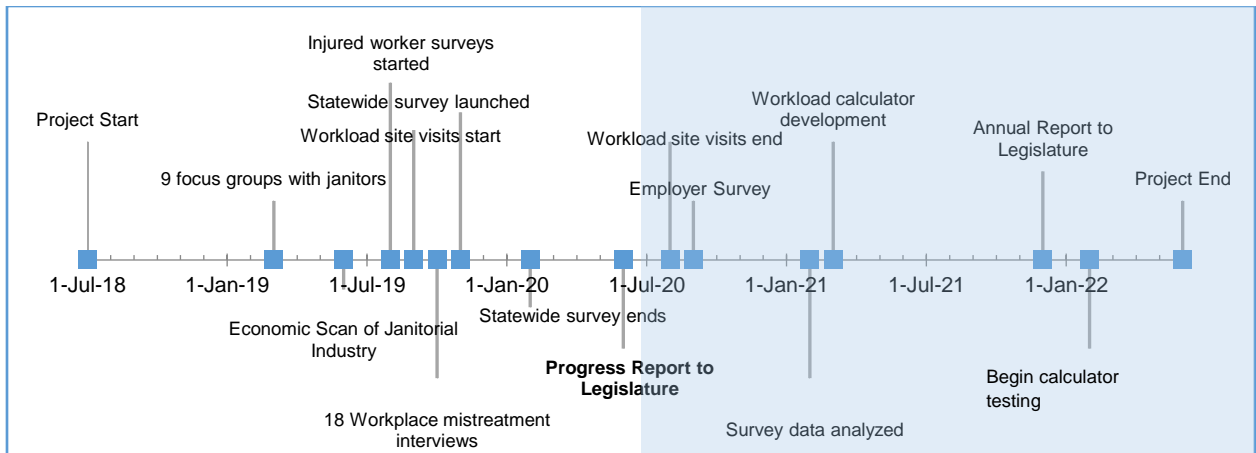
- Worksite visits, whereby janitorial task observations can be made to collect biomechanical and physiological workload estimates.
- Survey and interview data to assess psychosocial and safety climate perceptions.
- Injured worker interviews to collect more detailed data about the environmental and workplace characteristics in which the injury occurred.

All of the above workplace factors, together with exposure duration, determine the risk factors and exposures (workload) for individual workers. A worker’s capacity (both physical and psychological) will determine whether the workload is too high for the individual worker. Too high a workload results in negative health outcomes.

### Study components

To accomplish the complex task set forth by the legislature, SHARP designed a four-year study, which involves a multidisciplinary team of occupational health and safety researchers and includes multiple research phases and components. A timeline of study components is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Timeline for the Washington State Janitorial Workload Study\***



\*Blue shaded area indicates future activities. Project end date is 06/30/2022.

Preliminary or formative research was conducted to understand current issues facing janitors at work, including safety and health training; workload; work pace; equipment issues; and workplace mistreatment, bullying, and violence. In addition, preliminary research included an economic scan of the janitorial industry, both in Washington and nationally.

These formative research findings are included as final reports in Appendices A through C of this report. The data was valuable in developing the remainder of the study, including injured worker interview questions and employer surveys.

The formative research provides significant insights into the lives of janitors in Washington, and will help provide context for future study results within the economic, social, and physical circumstances in which janitors work and janitorial firms operate.



# Progress reports for each research component

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L&I has completed focus groups, workplace mistreatment interviews, and an economic scan of the janitorial industry. These activities are summarized in this section. More detailed information is included in Appendices A through C.

The Washington State Institutional Review Board reviewed the materials, methods and protocols of this study, and deemed it as exempt research.

## FOCUS GROUPS

Janitors' own expert knowledge of their working conditions and needs was solicited to help determine priorities for the design and implementation of the study. L&I used focus groups to identify pressing health and safety needs of janitors in Washington, using their own words, expertise, and experiences.

### Methods

From September 2018 to June 2019, L&I conducted nine exploratory focus groups involving 46 janitors. Five focus groups were conducted in Seattle and four in Spokane. Five were facilitated in Spanish and four were facilitated in English. All but one of the nine focus groups was composed of union-represented janitors. Almost half (48 percent) of the focus group participants were Latino. Participants were evenly split between men and women. Women were more likely to identify as Latina (73 percent) and men as white (67 percent).

Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service; Spanish-language focus groups were transcribed first into Spanish, then into English. Focus group facilitators reviewed all transcripts for completeness and accuracy. In addition, each group had a researcher taking notes, to add to the transcribed records. No personally-identifiable information was collected, and participants were instructed not to use proper names in the meetings. All focus group participants were given a small token of appreciation (\$25 gift card).

SHARP researchers created a general focus group guide that centered around three main themes:

- Top safety and health challenges at work
- Work organization, workload and pace
- Workplace policies, training and injury reporting

Clarifying questions were asked within each topic area, and participants were encouraged to bring up additional issues not addressed in the guide. Among the topics brought up by participants were:

- Lack of adequate supplies and working equipment

- Interpersonal issues with supervisors and coworkers
  - Harassment, bullying and discrimination
  - Claims suppression/intimidation; and how well these efforts work against immigrant janitors.
- Issues with pay, sick leave, and overtime

In addition to sharing concerns, focus group participants provided examples of how they cope and even thrive in their work, regardless of the challenges. These examples are described throughout this report.

## Findings

Due to the complex nature of qualitative analyses and the timely need to present the results of our exploratory focus groups, this report focuses on major results and provides quotes from participants to tell their story of working in the janitorial sector in Washington.

Almost all of the 46 janitors who participated in these focus groups shared similar examples of being overworked, rushing to get the job done, and lack of sufficient supplies, as well as being forced to use broken equipment. All of these issues have resulted in a stressed, frustrated labor group that is often working while sick or injured.

Among the more common coping mechanisms mentioned were support from coworkers (helping each other out), as well as formally presenting complaints to the union for action. The union was described as very helpful in accessing information about worker rights, and presenting this information to non-English speaking janitors.

## Overview of concerns

Focus group participants described the following concerns:

- Safety climate
- Lack of management commitment to safety
  - Lack of safety and health training
  - Lack of safe equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE), and supplies
  - Unsafe and unmanageable workload, fast pace, stress, and fatigue
  - Abusive supervision and discrimination
- Unlawful business practices, including wage and hour violations

## Key recommendations

Focus group participants made the following recommendations for improving their working conditions:

- Hold periodic workplace safety inspections, and conduct routine checks of job sites to identify where extra help is needed to prevent workers from taking unsafe risks.
- Improve company policies and procedures for workplace safety and health.

- Provide training for supervisors and janitorial staff, including language-appropriate safety and health training for janitors.
- Provide equipment in good working order, and regularly maintain equipment.
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Ensure adequate quantity of cleaning supplies.
- Evaluate and improve workload and how tasks are scheduled.
- Rotate task assignments to help prevent injuries caused by repetitive motion.
- Prevent and reduce abusive supervision and discrimination.
- Increase enforcement of labor standards.

The janitorial industry is very diverse. In our focus group recruitment efforts, we identified 25 different primary languages; however, time and resource constraints limited us to only English and Spanish-language focus groups. Consequently, there may be gaps in the information we received and the key issues identified, due to the lack of cultural and linguistic diversity among participants.

## Conclusion

Janitors report being at a high risk of injury due to several factors, including the pace of work and the expectations of supervisors and company management. Additionally, janitors in our focus groups describe numerous incidents of harassment, bullying, and discrimination; and most felt helpless to prevent or report these incidents. Increased education on worker rights will help, but only if there are meaningful ways to uphold those rights and investigate these complaints. Immigrant and nonunion janitors appear to be especially vulnerable to abusive workplaces.

The most common issue raised in almost all of the focus groups was poor safety climate, including lack of management commitment to safety; lack of safety and health training; lack of adequate staff, equipment, PPE, and supplies; abusive supervision; and high workload. There were also multiple examples of additional workplace stressors contributing to unsafe workplaces, and a concerning violation of worker rights regarding wage and hour violations and discrimination.

The focus groups were just a small sample of janitors in Washington, but they presented a clear need for systematic evaluation of the work janitors do, the training they receive, and a call for increased oversight of the workplace. Addressing these issues is difficult, due in large part to the complex nature of janitorial worksites (for example, multiple layers of responsibility, which may include building owners, management companies, building tenants, and janitorial employers – all of whom may play a role in determining worksite conditions). Responsibility for safe workplaces and how companies will ensure legal protections should be standardized and written into janitorial and tenant contracts.

## WORKPLACE MISTREATMENT INTERVIEWS

This section presents findings from a qualitative interview study on janitor workplace mistreatment. L&I's field research and analysis of narrative data focused specifically on discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment, and the consequences of mistreatment for janitor safety and health.

## Purpose and scope of the formative study

Stress in the workplace is related to increased risk for numerous physical and mental health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, depression, and anxiety. Documentation of the physiological pathways for the relationship between stress and these disease outcomes demonstrates that psychosocial work contexts affect health.<sup>6</sup>

A recent Stanford study found that job insecurity increased the odds of reporting poor health by about 50 percent; high job demands raised the odds of having a physician-diagnosed illness by 35 percent; and long work hours increased mortality by almost 20 percent. Mistreatment at work and related perceptions of injustice have been found to contribute to poor worker mental and physical health.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is imperative to account for health effects of workplace environments when designing policies to improve individual health outcomes.

## Research objectives

L&I's research objectives for the formative study derive from an occupational health psychology perspective:

- Obtain background knowledge on janitors' perceptions of workplace mistreatment experiences, and work conditions that may contribute to mistreatment.
- Recommend to the legislature ways to respond to the study findings.

## Overall objective

The study's overall objective is to understand questions related to:

- Janitors' experiences with mistreatment and harassment at work.
- The impact of mistreatment and harassment on workers' physical and mental health.
- Janitors' workplace psychosocial context and its meaning for marginalized workers.

## Study design and method

L&I conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews on the topic of workplace mistreatment, including general harassment, sexual harassment, and violence. The Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB) approved all research documents and procedures.

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<sup>6</sup> Ganster, D. C., & Rosen, C. C. (2013). Work stress and employee health: A multidisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*. 39:1085–1122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0149206313475815>

<sup>7</sup> Robbins, J. M., Ford, M. T., & Tetrick, L. E. (2012). Perceived unfairness and employee health: A meta-analytic integration. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. 97:235–272. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0025408>

SHARP researchers used purposive sampling methods to recruit for and conduct individual interviews with janitors in Washington working to clean high-rise office buildings who have experienced workplace mistreatment. Participants (18) worked primarily in Seattle, Bellevue, Tacoma, and Spokane. They included 11 janitors, three janitor foremen, three union shop stewards, and one union representative for janitorial workers.

Fifty-six percent of participants reported an education level of elementary/middle school, and 44 percent reported a high school/some college education level. Participants' gender was 61 percent female, and average age was 47 years. All participants except one (94 percent) worked full-time, with an average of 40 hours per week; 64 percent worked a night shift. Participants' race included African American/black (17 percent), American Indian/Native Alaskan (six percent), Hispanic/Latinx (67 percent), and white (11 percent). Interviews were conducted in English (28 percent) and Spanish (72 percent).

### Qualitative analysis

SHARP researchers used a method known as consensual qualitative research (CQR) to examine narrative data. This method is characterized by open-ended interview questions, small samples, a reliance on words over numbers, the importance of psychosocial context, an integration of multiple viewpoints, and consensus of the research team.<sup>8 9</sup>

Quotes were selected to illustrate primary and secondary themes and are presented in everyday language, incorporating participants' own words, to describe the psychological event, experience, or phenomenon of interest.<sup>10</sup>

### Findings

In the narrative data, janitors reported mistreatment primarily from company managers and supervisors, but also from coworkers and others working in the buildings they cleaned. The types of mistreatment included discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment, retaliation, wage and hour violations, and psychological and physical abuse.

- Discriminatory harassment was reported as racist behaviors or differential treatment based, for example, on participants' race/ethnicity compared to other workers whose race matched the race of the supervisor (often white).

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<sup>8</sup> Hill, C., Thompson, B., & Williams, E. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 25:517–572. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0011000097254001>

<sup>9</sup> Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, B. J., Williams, E. N., & Hess, S. A. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2):196-205. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.196>

<sup>10</sup> Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Sexual harassment was reported as inappropriate comments, touch, video imagery, and other behaviors from supervisors, coworkers, and in one case an on-site vendor.
- Retaliation was described as a company or supervisory response to worker complaints about their work tasks, worker union involvement, and worker formal reports of or efforts to seek outside union help with wage and hour violations and discriminatory and sexual harassment. Common company retaliation practices included increasing a janitor's workload following a complaint or request, and firing janitors from the job.
- Psychological harassment was the most commonly reported mistreatment behavior. This included humiliating the worker in front of others, verbal abuse, social exclusion, harmful rumors and gossip, denying worker requests, and ignoring health complaints, along with coercive insistence that janitors comply with supervisor demands for excessive work.
- Janitors reported wage and hour violations and delay or denial of benefits. These incidents were described as employers taking advantage of immigrant workers' lack of knowledge of standard U.S. business practices and worker rights. Language differences, communication difficulties, and limited job opportunities also contributed to workers' exposure to this type of mistreatment.

Janitors reported that mistreatment on the job affected their health and safety in various ways, including:

- Physical and mental health strains including injuries, anxiety, distress, and physical/mental fatigue or burnout. Strain was described as linked to a high-stress work environment with psychologically abusive treatment, sexual and discriminatory harassment, and disregard for workers' needs and human rights that janitors reported as difficult to bear.
- The mental distress and depressed mood spilled over into janitors' family lives, affecting their ability to care for their children and fully engage with family, partners, and friends.
- Janitors participating in interviews exhibited resilience, courage, and strength alongside fear of and actual economic harm, dissuasion, and negative effects on physical and mental health. Over time, with limited resources and without adequate recourse to address their work problems, janitors reported fewer protections and greater harm. This was especially the case for immigrants with limited English proficiency and non-union workers with limited personal financial resources or knowledge of their worker rights.
- The primary source of social support was the union, if janitors could overcome their fear of job loss and retaliation to reach out for assistance. The union was often the only support reported as a source of information and instrumental assistance toward filing grievances, recovering lost wages, and reporting discrimination and sexual harassment.

The following recommendations to prevent and address workplace mistreatment derive from janitors' own recommendations and from L&I's narrative data analysis. They are specific to L&I's sample of janitors.

- Enforce labor standards - increase effectiveness of worker protections by strengthening L&I's wage/hour and worker rights enforcement.

- Revise sexual harassment policy to include protection related to abusive supervision (see CA AB 2053; Appendix C).
- Train both workers and employers on worker protections and rights related to wage and hour violations, discrimination, sexual harassment, psychological harassment, and retaliation.
- Provide social support to encourage resilience – strengthen social programs, labor policies, and union capacity for worker programs that support problem solving and education, and build resilience and health.
- Address janitors’ requests to be treated with equality, humanity, dignity and respect (for example, include these concerns in employer/supervisory training).

## Conclusion

This study contributes new knowledge regarding the mistreatment and harassment of janitorial workers. The study findings align with previous research on workplace mistreatment; participants also confirmed that mistreatment and harassment are strong social stressors in their workplaces. Findings suggest that janitors’ health and well-being would benefit from interventions that not only reduce mistreatment and harassment, but also increase their knowledge of resources and social support.

Findings present participants’ perceptions that their health, well-being and performance were harmed by mistreatment and harassment, primarily from managers and supervisors, but also from coworkers at their places of work. This research opens up an opportunity to address psychosocial exposures and health and safety impairments that janitors experience on the job.

Future research analyses from janitor survey quantitative data are needed to fully examine and potentially corroborate the findings from the qualitative research findings presented in this report.

## ECONOMIC SCAN OF JANITORIAL INDUSTRY

L&I conducted an economic scan to characterize how economic pressures on janitorial services firms affect worker safety, and how safety performance may be improved.

### Background

#### Employment

In 2016, Washington’s janitorial industry had an annual payroll of over \$400 million.<sup>11</sup> Almost 70 percent of these workers were employed in the King-Snohomish-Pierce county region. According to

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<sup>11</sup> United States. (2016). County Business Patterns. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Data User Services Division.

Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD) records, over 18,000 individuals worked in this industry in the second quarter of 2017.<sup>12</sup>

### **Services provided**

The janitorial services industry in Washington specializes in providing commercial cleaning services primarily to office buildings, public facilities such as restaurants, and health care facilities. In addition, in some school districts, contractors classified in this industry conduct cleaning of elementary and secondary schools.

### **Contracting and vendors**

Most commercial cleaning work is done by workers employed by specialized janitorial services firms. These firms contract either directly with clients, or with a building management firm that provides a range of building management services to clients.

When a company needing janitorial services -- the “lead firm” -- contracts with a building management firm for services such as security, grounds-keeping, and cleaning services, the lead firm and the building management firm negotiate the details of the cleaning contract before soliciting bids. These details include frequency and scope of work, and performance standards. The building management firm then contracts with separate vendors to supply the needed services. These vendors may be independent, owner-operated janitorial services firms; or franchised outlets of a large, branded janitorial services company.<sup>13</sup>

### **Responsibilities of janitorial services firms**

Whether an independent or franchised firm is used, only the janitorial services firm hires and manages the workforce. The lead firm, which controls the worksite and determines the scope of the work, has no contact with workers. The janitorial services firm is also responsible for complying with all applicable wage/hour, occupational safety and health, and environmental regulations.

Small janitorial services firms contracting with clients in a competitive market with low barriers to entry for new start-ups are under significant pressure to keep costs low. If they are franchisees, they must control costs while still following the franchisor’s required standards of performance and paying fees for royalties, management, and any interest payments on capital borrowed from the franchisor. Such constraints on their revenues may result in a focus on production, rather than on compliance with occupational safety and health standards and wage/hour rules.

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<sup>12</sup> Washington State. (2017). Quarterly unemployment insurance database, 2nd quarter, 2017. WA Department of Employment Security

<sup>13</sup> When a franchised outlet is used, the right to provide cleaning services to the lead firm’s premises is sold to a franchisee in exchange for an account purchase fee, a set percentage of the sales (royalties), and fees for management services (including marketing and contracting).



The purpose of this economic scan is to assess whether such pressures on janitorial services firms affect safety performance of janitorial services contractors, and how such performance may be improved.

### **Economic scan methods**

The economic scan uses a variety of existing data sources to characterize Washington's janitorial industry. Descriptive demographic information was pulled from the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau. Industry and occupation classifications used throughout the scan were the Census Occupation code (4220), and the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code (56). Employment and earnings (including full-time equivalent positions (FTEs) and headcount employment, number of firms, and hourly earnings for firms) came from employers reporting hours in Washington Industrial Insurance Risk Class 6602-02 or 6602-03 and NAICS 561720. Where available, data were broken out geographically and reported for the following areas:

- Statewide
- Puget Sound (Pierce, King, Snohomish, Thurston, Kitsap, Island, San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom and Mason counties)
- Metro (King, Snohomish, Pierce, Clark and Spokane counties)
- Firms with out-of-state headquarters

Additional employment and earnings data sources included L&I's workers' compensation employer tables linked to earnings, and headcount data from the Washington State Employment Security Department Quarterly Unemployment Insurance tables. Additional supporting data on hourly wages were extracted from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program. National data showing the shift of janitorial employment toward a concentration within the janitorial services industry came from OES tables for years 1997 through 2017.

Additional metrics examined were:

- Output per hour: The value of output of services produced by a janitorial worker in an hour of work, tracked by the Bureau of Labor Statistics Office of Productivity and Technology.
- Worker turnover: The percentage of a given firm's workforce that is replaced by new workers when comparing one year with the following year, using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.
- Employer survival: The percentage of employers active in a baseline year who are still active in the following year, using data from L&I's industrial insurance databases for 2005 through 2018.
- Seattle-area commercial office space supply: Information on the amount of office space was condensed from market reports issued by a private commercial real estate brokerage for the Seattle regional market.

## Results

The economic scan shows that janitorial work has become increasingly concentrated within the janitorial services industry over the past 30 years, as businesses across other industries shed in-house workers performing this function. One incentive for this strategy is that median hourly wages for janitorial workers working for janitorial firms (NAICS 561720) are lower than for janitorial workers employed by businesses in all other NAICS industries.

The janitorial workforce in Washington is diverse, with a high proportion of workers of Latinx background. Worker turnover is high at 50 percent per year, but similar to that of workers in other low-wage occupations. Turnover rates for janitorial services firms average 20-25 percent per year. Turnover is higher at small firms, which make up over 75 percent of firms in the industry.

Janitorial services is a technologically stable industry. Consequently, output per hour for janitorial services workers has not grown since 2002. Because of this, and because the industry is composed of many small, competitive firms, wage growth has merely kept pace with inflation. In King County, recent growth in office space area within the Seattle Central Business District is outpacing the growth in the area's supply of janitorial services workers.

## Conclusions

Although janitorial work has always been low-wage, the outsourcing of janitorial work at firms across many industries has shifted most janitorial work to a large number of small, specialized janitorial contractors that compete to provide janitorial services to clients. This has led to a reduction in wages and benefits for workers. Janitors working in the Puget Metro region earn higher wages than in rural regions. In recent years, the expansion of commercial office space in the Seattle area has outstripped the growth of the janitorial workforce. This may exert pressure to increase output per hour.

## STATEWIDE SURVEY

A professional survey research firm conducted a statewide survey of janitorial workers from November 2019 to February 2020 to gather detailed information about janitorial tasks, workload, work pace, and exposures. The aim was to survey a sample of the entire commercial janitorial population of Washington, capturing robust variation – union, non-union, injured, non-injured, various company sizes, various building types, across geographic areas, and of all demographic characteristics.

The information gathered from this survey will inform future study activities and guide the creation of injury/illness prevention materials, education/training materials, intervention activities, and outreach.

## Methods

### Identifying and recruiting participants

Surveying the janitorial workforce is difficult because there are no state licensing requirements, registry, certification, trade journals or associations, or easily accessible lists of all janitors with all the needed information. Additionally, some janitors are employed directly by large firms, or are self-employed or owners of cleaning businesses in which they are the only cleaner -- and are therefore not identifiable as an employee of a janitorial company.

Adding to the difficulty is that each data source had a limited number of needed data elements or had missing elements. For example, the Employment Security Department (ESD) has records of employees of janitorial companies within the specified North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code, but no identifying risk class information, addresses, phone numbers, or personal information for the employees. ESD's data also does not have occupation information, meaning it can't differentiate between types of workers at a firm (for example, between janitorial staff and central office staff). If we can identify individual workers, the Department of Licensing (DOL) has drivers' licenses with some contact information; however, some of that information may be incomplete or outdated.

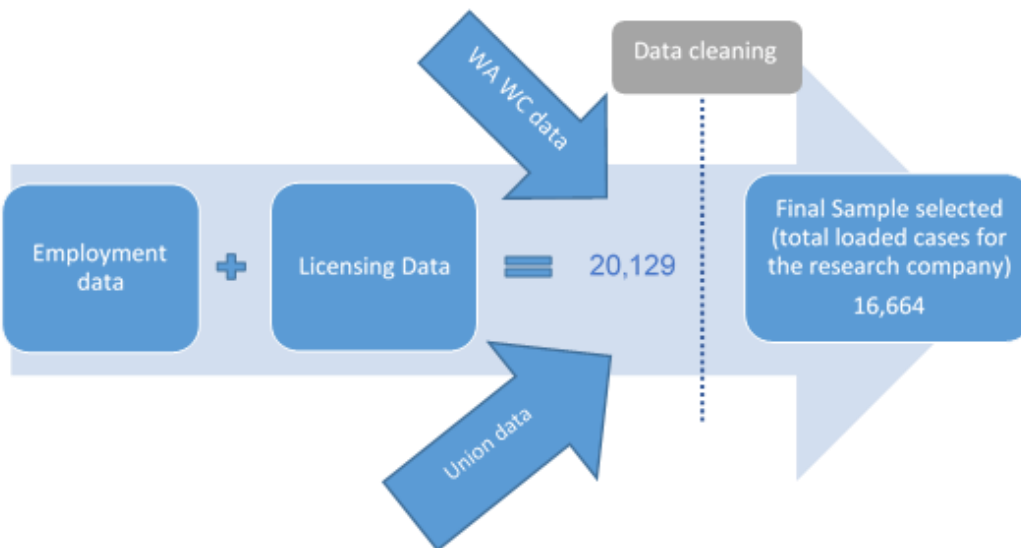
L&I also used contact and claim information for janitors who had filed workers' compensation claims, and membership rolls maintained by the union that represents janitors to identify the population to be surveyed.

All of these data sources had differing data security requirements. This required a complex web of data sharing agreements and data transfer protocols.

To resolve the data issues in order to identify the population, SHARP created a data linkage process, shown in Figure 2. The first step was to identify workers employed by janitorial services firms using ESD data. These firms were identified via hours reported by employers with the NAICS code 561720 Janitorial Services. To ensure privacy and remove bias, a final data linkage process was completed to ensure that the research team did not have access to personal identifiers. The linkage:

- Identified workers who were employed by janitorial services firms using ESD data.
- Matched the worker names to DOL drivers' license data.
- Added workers' compensation claims information for janitors (identified by risk class), then added union membership data. (The union sent their membership list to the survey research firm directly.)

**Figure 2. Statewide survey data linkage process**



The final sample size compiled through this process was 16,664. The survey research firm selected an initial sample of 12,847 workers to contact, then added 1,263 workers to increase the number of responses. The research company sent initial mailings to the initially selected sample on November 1, 2019.

Following the initial mailing of pre-notification and consent information, SHARP sent full survey packets explaining how to take the survey in multiple languages. Workers were provided a unique identifying pin number so that only workers who had been identified by the sampling process (verifiably janitors/custodians) were able to access the survey.

Participants had the choice of returning the questionnaire in an enclosed postage-paid envelope, filling it out online, or calling the provided phone numbers. The survey was available in: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Chinese – Traditional, Chinese – Simplified, and Amharic; however, the mail version of the questionnaire (Appendix D) was in English only, due to the data's inability to predict which workers preferred other languages. The online version of the questionnaire was available in English and Spanish. Support for all other included languages was by phone only.

Additional janitors/custodians who found out about the survey and wanted to take it were able to do so by contacting the SHARP research team, where their name and employment information were verified. Confirmed janitorial workers were then assigned pins to enable survey access.

## Response rates

Response rates for surveys are calculated to show the number of eligible participants in the sample that cooperate, and generally follow American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) standards. Response rates for all surveys have been declining.<sup>14</sup>

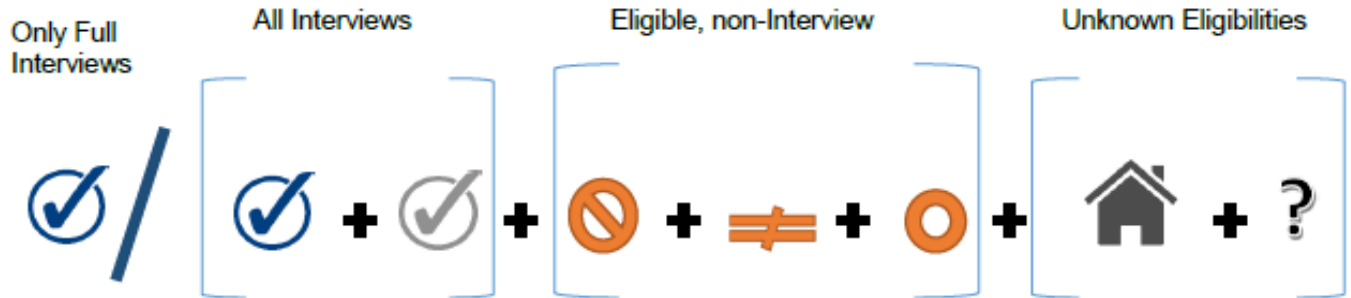
For this survey, two response rates and four cooperation rates were calculated. Responses are classified by eligibility and categorized for response rate calculation. Cooperation rates for this survey use the same classifications as described in Figure 3, but do not include those of unknown eligibility (who were not reached).

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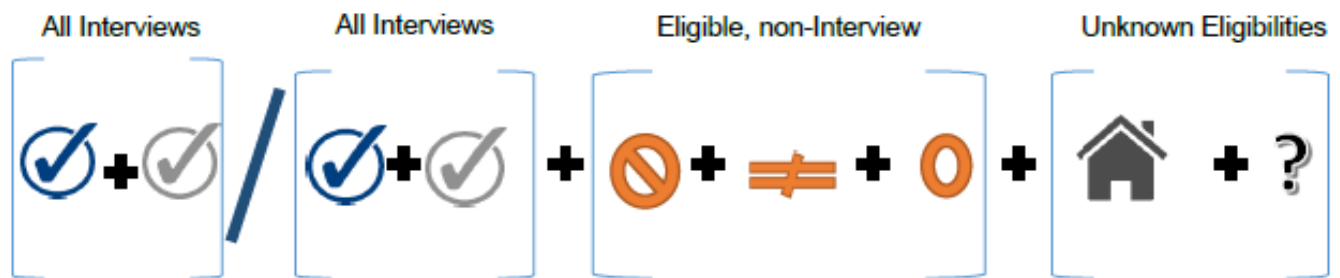
<sup>14</sup> American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). Response Rates, An Overview. <https://www.aapor.org/Education-Resources/For-Researchers/Poll-Survey-FAQ/Response-Rates-An-Overview.aspx>

Figure 3. Response rates

**Response Rate 1:**



**Response Rate 2:**





**"Interview"**

- Phone Completes
- Web Completes
- Mail Completes
- Partial Completes (Phone, Web, Mail)



**"Partial Interview"**

- Partial Completes (Phone, Web, Mail)



**"Refusal"**

- Refusal and qualified breakoff



**"Non-Contact"**

- Callback, Respondent not available



**"Other"**

- Completed, but not returned during field period
- Physically or mentally unable/incompetent
- Language Supported/Unsupported issues



**"Unknown Household"**

- Phoned – Busy; No Answer, Answering Machine
- Mailed – No response/no phone and/or phone not called



**"Unknown Other"**

- Mail Returned – No Phone

## Topics

The questionnaire covered an extensive range of topics. The full questionnaire in English is provided in Appendix D. Main topic areas included:

- Demographics – age, gender, race/ethnicity, income, marital status
- Work organization and tasks (workload, time, intensity), tenure, staffing, building type
- Other work information – supervisors, second jobs, extra tasks
- Occupational injury, health, and psychosocial information (workers’ compensation claims/reporting, sleep, depression, body mass index, general health rating)
- Hazards, protective equipment, safety policies
- Discrimination and harassment

These topics were selected in consultation with L&I’s entire team of multi-disciplinary researchers. The goal was to help identify primary hazards and physical outcomes, and help quantify workload/tasks to supplement data collected in-person during the study’s workload assessment component.

The survey was pre- and pilot-tested on SHARP staff and on a selection of L&I janitors for clarity and timing. Interviewers from the survey research company also performed some pre-testing in multiple languages, and made suggestions for clarifications.

## Summary of research activity to date

Active data collection took place from November 4, 2019 through February 4, 2020. Additional late returns by mail may still be received, and will be entered in the database separately.

This is the first large-scale telephone survey of janitors about their health and safety at work in Washington. As of the writing of this report, L&I has received 660 total responses to the survey, 621 of which were complete and 39 of which were incomplete. This is a total completion rate of 94 percent across all modes of completing the questionnaire.

Two response rates were calculated for this survey, as shown in Figure 3. Response rates are important to generalize survey results to all janitors. Both were in the four percent to 4.5 percent range. This low response rate was expected given the difficulty in obtaining a sample of janitors (for example, we had a very high number of “unknown households” and “unknown others,” which were non-respondents of unknown eligibility who were not reached).

Four cooperation rates were calculated for this survey as well, which focus on respondents of known eligibility (those of unknown eligibility are not included in the calculations). These cooperation rates, which highlight those we were able to reach/had information for and whether they chose to participate, were much higher than the response rates – ranging from 38 to 48 percent.

The average length of time to complete the survey was 61.9 minutes – 52.1 minutes by phone, and 77.5 minutes online. The survey research firm made 28,572 telephone calls, which includes calling

unanswered phone numbers until they were able to reach a potential participant, and calling back at appointed times to conduct interviews. Figure 4 describes key characteristics of the 621 complete responses L&I received.



**Figure 4: Unadjusted results from the Washington State Janitorial Workload Study statewide survey, complete response files, 2019-2020**

	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
	621	100
<b>SURVEY MODE</b>		
Mail	389	62.6
Phone	142	22.9
Web	90	14.5
<b>LANGUAGE ADMINISTERED</b>		
English	533	85.8
Spanish	41	6.6
Vietnamese	32	5.2
Somali	9	1.5
Other languages	6	1.0
<b>GENDER</b>		
Female	349	56.2
Male	262	42.2
Prefer not to say	4	0.6
No answer	4	0.6
Transgender or Gender Nonconforming	2	0.3
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>		
Married	253	40.8
Single	239	38.6
Divorced	69	11.1
Other	44	7.1
No answer	12	1.9

Refused	3	0.5
Missing	1	--
<b>ARE/WERE YOU A UNION MEMBER?</b>		
No	420	67.6
Yes	177	28.5
No Answer	19	3.1
Don't Know	5	0.8
<b>WORK-RELATED INJURY/ILLNESS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS? (DOCTOR/HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL DIAGNOSED)</b>		
No	468	75.4
Yes	121	19.5
Don't Know	24	3.9
No Answer	6	1.0
Refused	2	0.3
<b>CURRENT AGE (N=580)</b>		
Mean years (range)	45.0	(18-80)

## Next steps

L&I received data from the survey research company on February 26, 2020. This data is preliminary pending further data cleaning and analysis by the SHARP workload assessment team. The team will also analyze information from the survey on work tasks, organization, and work pace to complement the workload assessment data being gathered.

Further surveys of janitors are planned as issues are identified for follow-up through data analysis; surveys of employers will also be done to glean an understanding of their policies, issues, and needs.

In addition to technical and academic reports, L&I will develop prevention materials based on hazards/issues identified by janitors/custodians. Results and materials will be shared with the community stakeholders, L&I leadership and the legislature.

L&I will submit a final report to the legislature on the Janitorial Workload Study by June 30, 2022.

## Conclusions

Overall, preliminary analyses of the survey data indicate that janitors/custodians have many work-related injuries, are exposed to a wide range of chemical and physical hazards, and have complex and demanding work tasks. Statewide survey data will be used to identify the leading hazards and sources of injury, and develop prevention and training materials accordingly.

## WORKLOAD ASSESSMENT

The number of janitors and cleaners (excluding maids and housekeeping cleaners) employed in Washington increased by about 20 percent between 2013 and 2018.<sup>15</sup> Janitorial workload also increased. A study of union and non-union janitors found that reported work intensity increased 8.6 percent over a three-year period.<sup>16</sup>

Workload issues among janitors have been reported through various factors. In Minnesota, surveys conducted to identify the relationship between workload and injury found that an increase in self-reported workload was correlated with occupational injury.<sup>17</sup>

Many tasks that janitors perform require exertion of the muscular and cardiovascular systems.<sup>18 19</sup> Major risk factors for injuries among janitorial workers include musculoskeletal loading such as high muscle or static muscle loading, repetitive motions, awkward postures, or cardiovascular loading such as fast work pace. The main factors that may influence these loadings are work procedures (tasks), the environment, tools/methods, individual factors, and organizational and psychosocial contexts.

Figure 5 shows the most typical types of injuries among janitorial workers, with musculoskeletal injuries being the most common.

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<sup>15</sup> BLS (Bureau of Labor Statistics) (2020). Occupational Employment Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>.

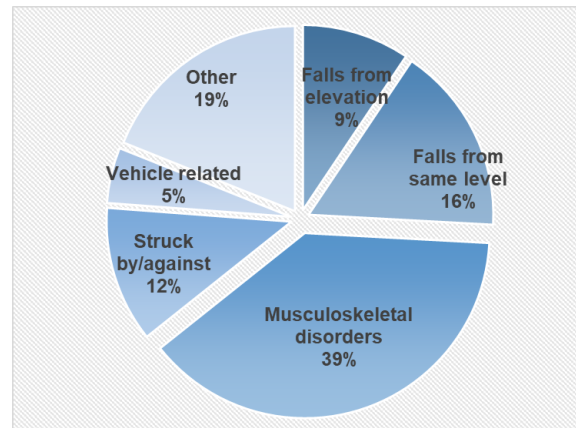
<sup>16</sup> Seixas N, Domínguez C, Stover B, Simcox N. (2013, August). Janitors Workload and Health and Safety. Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, University of Washington.

<sup>17</sup> Green, D. R., Gerberich, S. G., Kim, H., Ryan, A. D., McGovern, P. M., Church, T. R., ... & Arauz, R. F. (2019). Janitor workload and occupational injuries. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*. 62(3):222-232

<sup>18</sup> Sjøgaard, K., Fallentin, N., & Nielsen, J. (1996). Work load during floor cleaning. The effect of cleaning methods and work technique. *European Journal of Applied Physiology and Occupational Physiology*. 73(1-2):73-81.

<sup>19</sup> Woods, V., & Buckle, P. (2005). An investigation into the design and use of workplace cleaning equipment. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*. 35:247-266.

**Figure 5: Most common injury types for janitorial workers, compensable workers' compensation claims, Washington State, 2003-2013**



### Summary of published literature on janitorial workload and injury rates

Different factors define janitorial workload, and several corresponding methods can be used to measure these factors.

To quantify cardiovascular and overall workload, Green et al.<sup>17</sup> used Fitbit trackers to measure steps taken, heart rate, calories burned, and sleep duration. Energy expenditure, the metabolic burden quantified by oxygen uptake, heart rate, and calories burned have also been used to estimate the cardiovascular workload of janitorial workers.

For the various musculoskeletal workload measures, a number of commonly used ergonomics job assessment methods are available. For example, observational tools (such as the Manual Tasks Risk Assessment (ManTRA), the Quick Exposure Check (QEC), the Rapid Upper Limb Assessment (RULA), Ovako Working Posture Analysis System and Rapid Entire Body Assessment (REBA)) have been used among janitors to study the relationship between workload and injuries.<sup>20 21 22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Bell, A. F., & Steele, J. R. (2012). Risk of musculoskeletal injury among cleaners during vacuuming. *Ergonomics*. 55(2): 237-247.

<sup>21</sup> Kumar, R., Chaikumarn, M., & Lundberg, J. (2005). Participatory ergonomics and an evaluation of a low-cost improvement effect on cleaners' working posture. *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics*. 11: 203-210.

<sup>22</sup> Schwartz, A., Gerberich, S. G., Kim, H., Ryan, A. D., Church, T. R., Albin, T. J., ... & Arauz, R. F. (2019). Janitor ergonomics and injuries in the safe workload ergonomic exposure project (SWEEP) study. *Applied Ergonomics*. 81: 102874.

Muscle activity, measured by the use of surface electromyography (EMG), has also been used,<sup>23</sup> as well as biomechanical analyses.<sup>24</sup>

### **Current standards for janitorial work assignment**

The janitorial service industry uses standard cleaning time data for bidding and work assignment planning. The International Sanitary Supply Association (ISSA) standard cleaning times are commonly used to determine production levels. The official ISSA 612 time and tasks standard<sup>25</sup> is one of the best resources for identifying the types of tasks assigned to janitorial workers. This standard accounts for non-primary cleaning tasks as well, such as travel time and bucket-filling time.

In the janitorial service industry, the ISSA times and task standards are commonly used in janitorial work loading, scheduling, and bidding software, such as Infoclean 2.0. Such software can calculate standard times needed for cleaning jobs with specific building attributes (for example, building size, number of floors, number and types of rooms per floor, and total square footage).

### **Gaps in workload quantification**

No single definition of workload is widely accepted. In previous studies, workload has been defined using various terminologies, including work pace or work intensity and mental workload. Some studies used heart rate, work postures, and muscle loading as measurements of workload. In other survey studies, janitorial workers often self-report “too much work” or “not enough staff” to indicate high workload. There is a lack of understanding of the relationships between work pace and amount of work as quantified by the industry, self-reported high workload as indicated by the janitorial workers, and biomechanical and physiological workload measures as quantified by researchers.

### **Summary of research activity to date**

L&I’s research for the workload assessment focused on janitorial workers involved in office cleaning in large office buildings of more than 200,000 square feet. It excluded day porters (who perform a variety of daily services such as maintaining public areas during office work hours) and janitors involved in project work (who are normally not assigned to a specific location, but dispatched to different sites depending on project needs).

The goal of the workload assessment was to quantify the physical workload of janitors so that workload can be appropriately assigned. A tool for achieving this is worksite visits in which

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<sup>23</sup> Bak, H., D'Souza, C., & Shin, G. (2019). Upper extremity muscular load during carpet vacuuming with household upright cleaners. *Applied Ergonomics*. 79:38-44.

<sup>24</sup> Wiker, S. F. (2013, July 4). Evaluation of musculoskeletal disorder risk in hotel housekeeping jobs. Retrieved from <https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/doshreg/Hotel-Housekeeping.CH-and-LA-Final-Report.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Walker, B. (2014). The official ISSA 612 cleaning times & tasks. ISSA. Northbrook, IL. ISBN 0-9717810-3-6.

researchers observe janitorial tasks to collect cardiovascular and musculoskeletal workload estimates based on the conceptual model described below.

## **Methods**

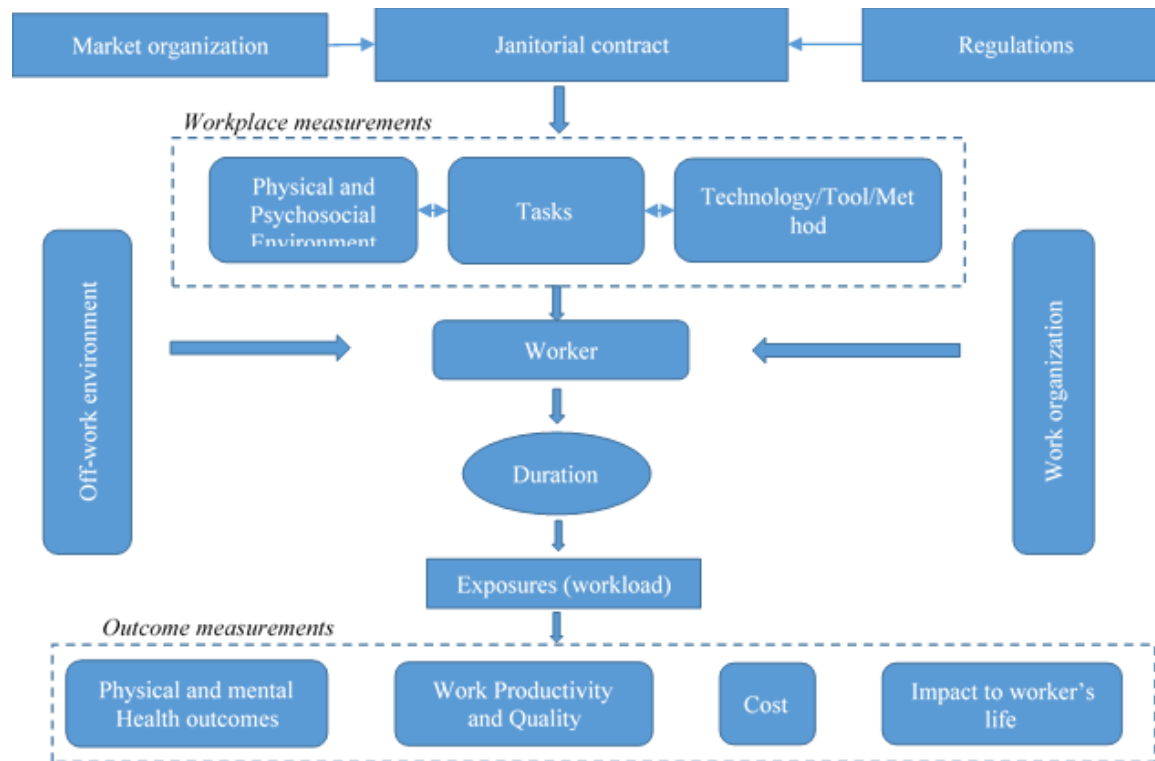
### **Conceptual model development**

When a janitorial contract is signed, the total physical exposure (for the janitorial contract) is determined by:

- **Environment:** The environment includes the type of worksite, the density of occupants, office layout, and location of work area.
- **Cleaning tasks:** Tasks are associated with different risk factors. The existence of risk factors in a task can vary depending on “environmental factors” and “technology/tools/methods.” The difficulty in performing the tasks can vary by schedules.
- **Technology, tools and methods:** Different technologies, tools and methods may be used to accomplish the cleaning tasks. These can include different equipment (such as vacuums or mops) and cleaning chemicals (such as “green” chemicals).

All workplace factors, combined with exposure duration, determine the risk factors and exposures (workload) for individual workers. A worker’s capacity (both physical and psychological) will determine whether the workload is too high for the individual, resulting in negative outcomes. This conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Workload conceptual model**



### Janitorial task classification

Researchers reviewed multiple resources to identify and classify tasks janitors commonly perform in the office-building environment. One of these resources is the O\*NET program, a primary source of hundreds of standardized and occupation-specific descriptors. Others include janitorial industry training videos, interviews with industry stakeholders, and previously published research. In addition, researchers referenced tasks listed in the Official ISSA 612 Cleaning Times & Tasks document.<sup>25</sup> Figure 7 lists the common tasks performed by janitorial workers. These tasks will be L&I's focus in the workload assessment.

**Figure 7: Common janitorial tasks in offices**

Restrooms cleaning	Sweeping	Carpet shampooing
Trashing	Damp mopping	Stripping/buffing/scrubbing
Dusting/Wiping	Wet mopping	Elevator cleaning
Glass door cleaning	Dust mopping	Escalator cleaning
Filling/Emptying bucket, equipment, sprayer, and clean-up	Vacuuming	
Cubicle/Private Office Cleaning		

### **Worksite measurement protocol and worksite visit logistics**

L&I is conducting research activities during worksite visits to quantify the workload of office janitorial workers.

#### **Detailed time study on routine tasks**

To complete the time study, researchers follow janitorial workers while they perform their daily cleaning routines, observe their task activities, and create a detailed time diary of their tasks. Video recordings are also taken to provide details of task activities and are used in the subsequent laboratory analysis of musculoskeletal workload measures. Additionally, researchers determine the corresponding square footage cleaned in order to calculate work pace.

#### **Quantification of musculoskeletal workload measures**

Musculoskeletal workload, commonly known as biomechanical exposures, includes repetitive motions, awkward posture, forceful hand exertion, manual material handling (pushing, pulling, carrying) and vibration. These activities are measured and evaluated with a variety of ergonomics job evaluation tools. Based on the characteristics of janitorial tasks and the intended future users of the end product for this project, the following criteria were used to select ergonomics job evaluation tools:

- Addresses at least one work-related musculoskeletal disorder (WMSD) risk factor and/or determined risk level (for example, duration and frequency)
- Has been previously published
- Is popularly used by researchers and practitioners in the WMSD community
- Quantifies risks related to injuries of the low back, upper extremities, neck, and lower extremities



Based on these criteria, the following tools are used for musculoskeletal workload quantification in this project:

- Manual Tasks Risk Assessment, version 2.0 (ManTRA) – Addresses awkward postures and repetitive motion of the upper and lower extremities (except hand/wrist)
- Revised Strain Index (Strain Index) – Addresses repetitive motion, repetitive exertion, and awkward postures of the hand and wrist
- Rogers' Muscle Fatigue Analysis (Rogers' Muscle Fatigue) – Addresses awkward postures and repetitive motions of the neck
- Liberty Mutual Manual Material Handling Guidelines (Liberty Mutual) – Addresses push/pull/carry activities
- National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Lifting Equation (NIOSH) – Addresses heavy, awkward lifting
- European Union Vibration Directive: Whole Body Vibration (EU Directive, WBV) – Addresses whole body vibration issues
- European Union Vibration Directive: Hand/Arm Vibration (EU Directive, HAV) – Addresses hand-arm vibration issues
- 3D Static Strength Prediction Program (3DSSP) – Addresses complicated forceful exertion activities
- HandPAK, version 2.0 (HandPAK) – Addresses specific hand forceful exertions

### **Measurements with instrumentation**

Two instruments are used to quantify cardiovascular workload as well as back posture measurement (biomechanical workload):

- Fitbit Zip pedometer -- Measures number of steps taken.
- Zephyr BioHarness™3 -- Records continuous heart rate and back postures during task performance

The number of steps taken by a janitorial worker, measured by the Fitbit Zip pedometer, is used to calculate total distance walked.

The heart rate and back postures are continuously recorded using a Zephyr BioHarness sensor worn on the chest of the janitorial worker. Using synchronized time-study data, heart rate and back posture, statistics are calculated for each of the tasks that the janitorial worker performed during the observation period. The overall workload will be quantified by maximal heart rate, percent heart rate ratio, heart rate index, and steps walked (steps/hour). The overall energy expenditure quantified by METs (metabolic equivalent of task or kcalories/kg/hour) for cleaning tasks will be calculated using the combination of heart rate and step data.

### **Soliciting janitorial firms' participation**

Researchers identified janitorial companies providing services for office buildings in Washington. With the help of the union (SEIU6), the building owners' industry association (BOMA), the

Janitorial Workload Study Advisory Committee, and a network of people familiar with the industry, L&I contacted representatives of potential janitorial firms to solicit their participation in this study. This often involved initial phone/email communication followed by an in-person meeting with company representatives to present the project and answer questions. Upon their agreement, details were determined regarding site selection, property management approval, tenant approval, potential information sessions with janitor participation, and worksite visit days.

### **Janitorial worker recruitment**

Since the majority of janitorial work is done during the night shift, L&I's recruitment of participants in the study focused on night shift workers. The recruitment procedures and participant consent forms used are all approved by the Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB).

Coordinating with janitorial site supervisors and company representatives, L&I arranged a recruitment meeting with janitors on site, normally in conjunction with their pre-shift meeting. Information flyers in several different languages were shared with potential participants, and signed consent for participation was requested. Participants had the opportunity to sign the consent form on site or at a later date.

Potential participants received contact information for the research team in case they had follow-up questions. Upon confirmation of voluntary participation, a worksite visit was scheduled, with the date of the visit dependent on the tasks participants performed. A single or multiple worksite visit might be needed, depending on the participant's work arrangement and schedule. The goal was to observe and measure all tasks performed by a participating janitorial worker. For each observation session, the participant was provided a monetary incentive for their time and assistance with the study.

### **Current progress**

As of the writing of this report, all measurement protocols and data collection methods have been developed and tested. This ensures the accuracy, efficiency and practicality of the data collection processes on worksite visits and task workload quantification. A comprehensive database has been designed, developed, and tested. This database will be used to store collected data from the worksite visits, allow researchers to link various measurements to specific tasks, export data for data analysis, and generate reports.

To date, janitors from three different janitorial services providers have been recruited and observed in five different office buildings in the Seattle and Tumwater areas. Participants include three female and 10 male janitors. Different buildings from different janitorial services providers, together with different janitorial workers, will allow us to capture the variations of task performances so that more realistic task workload profiles can be obtained.

So far, L&I researchers have completed 14 individual worksite visits. Data have been collected from 13 different janitors (three from private contractors and 10 from public sector contractors). The data includes approximately 60 hours of various cleaning tasks.

Worksite visits were scheduled to continue, but site visits have been put on hold due to Governor Inslee's Stay Home, Stay Safe initiative in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to restart visits when Washington is in Phase 4. Researchers hope to continue to observe and measure a greater variety of locations with their corresponding tasks and tools, which will ensure that the final workload profiles of the janitorial tasks reflect the realities of janitors in the Northwest region.

## Roadblocks and challenges

The approval process to gain access to buildings and collect data from participating janitors is complicated and not an easy task. It requires multiple levels of approvals, including from:

- Janitorial companies
- Building owners/property managers
- Building tenants
- Janitors working at participating sites

In addition, participating janitors must work in areas where tenants have granted access to L&I researchers.

More than 250 emails, over 100 calls, and nearly 70 text messages to various industry stakeholders were required to gain access to buildings and recruit janitors. People contacted have included owners, property managers, union representatives, and janitorial contractors.

Despite significant efforts by the researchers and tremendous help from the union, the industry association, the study advisory committee members and our network colleagues, our success rate for obtaining eligible janitorial workers to the study is relatively low. To guarantee the quality and validity of our final product, we are committed to observing and quantifying the variations of the common janitorial tasks in a variety of locations with different tools and technology. We will continue our efforts to contact janitorial companies and building managements in order to recruit more janitorial participants into this study.

## INJURED WORKER INTERVIEWS

The injured worker interview component of the Washington State Janitorial Workload Study identifies janitors who have filed existing workers' compensation claims, and interviews them about their injury and work experiences. These interviews yield information that is not already in the administrative workers' compensation data – for example, workers can provide more detail surrounding the circumstances of the injury (safety climate, training, hazards present in their workplace) and what could have been done to prevent the injuries.

In-depth interviews are also valuable for workers to be able to describe their experiences in their own words. Many workers with occupational injuries find it helpful to talk about their experiences, and feel proud of sharing their stories to help prevent future injuries. The detailed information janitors

share about their injuries, work organization, tasks, hazards, and health can be used to help generate and inform prevention materials.

## Methods

Claims are extracted from Washington workers' compensation claim filings for the previous 30-60 days. For example, an August 28, 2019 extract identified 69 claims filed by workers in the selected Janitorial Risk Classes from July 1, 2019 through August 1, 2019 (with injury dates ranging from January-July 2019). The risk classes included were "6602-03 Janitorial Cleaning Services, NOC" and "6602-05 Janitors, NOC." This excludes subclasses devoted to contract window washing services (-02), residential janitorial workers (-04), pest control (-08), portable cleaning & washing (-10), and street/building decorating hanging of flags/buntings (-12).

Selection criteria includes all claims filed (whether rejected, accepted, or provisional), and those where further information is required to understand injury causes. Additionally, claims are selected for interviews if the research team believes there may be an opportunity to develop safety and health prevention materials based upon the circumstances of the injury. Exclusion of claims from interviews does occur if occupation (risk classification) is miscoded, and the worker is not a janitorial worker.

An average of 68 new claims filed met these criteria per month. Due to limited resources and the time required to call workers, the L&I team reviews the list of claims periodically and selects a number of these workers for potential interviews (not all are selected).

L&I sends letters to the selected workers describing who we are, what the study is about, and how we got their information. After about a week (to allow workers time to receive and read the letter), a bilingual staff member begins the process of calling workers to schedule or complete interviews. Currently, letters and calls are conducted in English and Spanish. A language interpretation line is also available for workers who prefer another language.

While injury description and claim information is used to inform prevention materials (by identifying a common hazard or exposure experience to focus on), personal identifiers are not used to protect worker privacy.

## Summary of research activity to date

From August 2019 through January 2020, 407 claims were selected (for claims established from July 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019). Of these, 111 have been assigned for follow-up efforts so far.

As of February 1, 2020, 90 janitors were called; 26 individuals were reached, and seven interviews were completed (five in English, two in Spanish). Of the seven completed interviews, the injury event types included:

- Struck against stationary object
- Caught in or compressed by equipment or object
- Overexertion/repetitive motion
- Falls

Most of these injuries were strains, sprains, tears, or other injuries to muscles/tendons/joints; one was more serious (amputation).

Recommendations from the janitors themselves to prevent injuries like these from occurring included:

- Lighter backpack vacuums
- Fixing an uneven walking surface
- Not lifting heavy trash bags

### **Next steps**

Janitors' own words and lived experiences are valuable to help identify issues and inform prevention and intervention efforts. The injured worker interview process is ongoing and will continue through at least 2021. Results will be analyzed on a rolling basis as interviews are completed. Injury descriptions and comments from janitors will be used to identify common hazards and issues faced by janitors in Washington, and to generate prevention materials and potential interventions. Efforts are being made to increase response rate.

## Conclusions

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With a specific charge from the Washington State Legislature, L&I's SHARP program has developed a multi-tiered, systems approach to understanding the workload and workplace physical and mental exposures that may put janitors at risk of a work-related injury.

SHARP is currently in the process of conducting workplace site visits and individual injured worker interviews, and developing and disseminating multi-modal educational information for janitors and employers.

Data cleaning and analyses of the statewide employee survey are beginning.

Overall, L&I is on track to complete this study and report final results by the July 1, 2022 project end date, barring unforeseen additional delays from the COVID-19 pandemic or other factors.

The final report will be submitted by June 30, 2022.

# Appendices

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## Appendix A: Formative Research

### Janitor Health and Safety Study

#### Acknowledgments

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A special thank you to all of the brave janitors who decided to share their studies. Thank you to SEIU6, Entre Hermanos, Spokane Alliance, and all the other community organizations that assisted us with our recruitment efforts. We were able to facilitate the focus groups thanks to their support and guidance.

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## Executive Summary

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### Introduction

Janitorial work is labor intensive, demanding, and often exposes workers to physical and psychosocial hazards that increase the risk of work-related injuries (Teran & vanDommelen-Gonzalez, 2017). In Washington State, prior research suggests that janitors are at higher risk of injury than most other occupations (Smith and Anderson, 2017). In order to better understand the workplace and hazards faced by janitors, additional research was needed. Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 6, Property Services NW, which represents more than 7,000 janitors, security officers, airport passenger service workers, and allied industries workers in Washington State, has advocated for the Washington State Legislature to improve janitors' work conditions for several years. In 2018, the Washington State Legislature instructed and funded the Department of Labor & Industries' (L&I) Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention (SHARP) program, to research and assess janitors' work conditions (State of Washington, 2018). This budget proviso led to the Washington State Janitorial Workload Study. Focus Groups were instituted as exploratory work to identify pressing health and safety needs for Washington State janitors, using their own words, expertise, and experiences. Janitors' own expert knowledge of their working conditions and needs were solicited to help determine priorities for the design and implementation of the study.

### Methods

This report presents a summary of nine exploratory focus groups conducted in Washington State with forty-six janitors; the primary purpose of these focus groups was to hear from janitors about their safety and health needs, and to better understand their working lives. Data collection was initiated in September 2018 and concluded in June 2019.

Five focus groups were facilitated in Seattle and four in Spokane. Five focus groups were facilitated in Spanish and four were facilitated in English. All but one of the nine focus groups was composed of union-represented janitors. Almost half (48%) of the focus group participants were Latino, and evenly split between men and women, although women were more likely to identify as Latina (73%) and the men as White (67%). Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service; Spanish language focus groups were transcribed first into Spanish, then into English. Focus group facilitators reviewed all transcripts for completeness and accuracy, in addition each group had a researcher taking notes, to add to the transcribed records. No personally identifiable information was collected, and participants were instructed not to use proper names in the meetings. All focus group participants were given a small token of appreciation (\$25 gift card). The Washington State Institutional Review Board reviewed the materials, methods and protocols of this study, and deemed it as exempt research.

## Janitor Safety and Health Findings

Researchers in SHARP created a general focus group guide that centered around three main themes:

1. Top safety and health challenges at work
2. Work organization, workload and pace
3. Workplace policies, training and reporting injuries

Within each topic area, several clarifying questions were asked, and participants were encouraged to bring up additional issues not addressed in the guide. Among the topics brought up by participants were:

1. Lack of adequate supplies and working equipment
2. Interpersonal issues with supervisors and coworkers
  - a. Harassment, bullying and discrimination
  - b. Claims suppression/intimidation; and how well these efforts work against immigrant janitors.
3. Issues with pay, sick leave, and overtime

In addition to concerns, focus group participants provided examples of how they cope and even thrive in their work, regardless of the challenges. These issues of resilience and pride are presented throughout the report.

Due to the complex nature of qualitative analyses and the timely need to present the results of our exploratory focus groups, this report focuses on major results and provides quotes from participants to tell their story of working in the janitorial sector in Washington State.

Among the forty-six janitors who participated in these focus groups, almost all shared similar examples of being overworked, rushing to get the job done, and not being given enough supplies as well as being forced to use broken equipment. All of these issues have resulted in a stressed out, frustrated labor group, that is often working while sick or injured. Among the more common coping mechanisms mentioned were support from coworkers (helping each other out), as well as support from the union (such as formally presenting their complaint to the union for action). In addition, the union was mentioned as being very helpful in accessing information about their rights, and presenting this information to non-English literate janitors.

### **Overview of concerns brought up by participants in the focus groups:**

- Safety Climate Concerns
- Lack of management commitment to safety
  - Lack of safety and health training
  - Lack of safe equipment, PPE, and supplies

- Unsafe and unmanageable workload, fast pace, stress and fatigue
- Abusive supervision and discrimination
- Unlawful business practices: Wage and hour violations

**Key recommendations from focus group janitors:**

- Periodic workplace safety inspections
- Improve company policies and procedures for workplace safety and health
- Training for supervisors and janitorial staff
- Language appropriate safety and health training for janitors
- Provide equipment in good working order; regular maintenance of equipment
- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Adequate quantity of cleaning supplies
- Evaluation and improvement of workload and work organization runs.
- Job sites need routine checks to identify where extra help is needed to prevent workers from taking unsafe risks while completing their work
- Task assignments rotation, to help prevent injuries caused by repetitive motion
- Prevent and reduce abusive supervision and discrimination
- Increase enforcement of labor standards

The janitorial industry is rich with diversity, and in our recruitment efforts, we identified 25 different primary languages. Time and resource constraints limited us to only English and Spanish language focus groups, so there may be gaps in the information we received and the key issues identified, due to the lack of cultural and linguistic diversity amongst participants.

### Conclusion

The most common issue raised in almost all of the focus groups centered on poor safety climate, namely, lack of management commitment to safety, lack of safety and health training, the lack of adequate staff, equipment, PPE, and supplies, abusive supervision, and the amount of work janitors are tasked with. There were also multiple examples of additional workplace stressors contributing to unsafe workplaces and a concerning violation of worker rights regarding wage and hour violations and discrimination.

The focus groups were just a small sample of janitors in Washington State, but they presented a clear need for systematic evaluation of the work janitors do, the training they receive and a call for increased oversight of the workplace. Addressing these issues is problematic within the janitorial industry, due in large part to the complex nature of their worksites (e.g. multiple layers of responsibility, which may include: building owners,

management companies, building tenants, and janitorial employers – all of whom may play a role in determining worksite conditions). Responsibility for safe workplaces and how companies will ensure legal protections should be standardized and written into janitorial and tenant contracts.

The results of these focus groups highlight that janitors report being at a high risk of injury due to several factors, including the pace of the work, and the expectations of supervisors and company management. Additionally, janitors in our focus groups describe numerous incidence of harassment, bullying, and discrimination; and most felt helpless to prevent or report these. Increased education on worker rights will help, but only if there are meaningful ways to uphold those rights, and investigate these complaints. Nonnative and nonunion janitors appear to be especially vulnerable to abusive workplaces.

### Focus Groups: References

State of Washington. Washington State Fiscal Information. (2018). 2018 Supplemental (revised 2017-19 Biennium) Operating Budget. ESSB-6032. Available at: <http://fiscal.wa.gov/>.

Teran, S., & vanDommelen-Gonzalez, E. (2017). Excessive Workload in the Janitorial Industry. Berkeley: Labor Occupational Health Program: University of California, Berkeley.

Smith, C.K., Anderson, N.J. (2017). Work-related injuries among commercial janitors in Washington State, comparisons by gender. *Journal of Safety Research*. 62:199-207.

## Washington State Janitorial Workload Focus Groups

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Janitorial work is labor intensive, demanding, and often exposes workers to various psychosocial and physical hazards that increase the risk of work-related injuries (Teran & vanDommelen-Gonzalez, 2017).

The Washington State Legislature requested for SHARP (Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention) to conduct a study to assess the work conditions of janitors in Washington. SHARP is a workplace safety and health research and prevention program within Washington State's Department of Labor & Industries. The goal is to identify workplace hazards to improve janitors' occupational health and safety.

In terms of the work context, many workers in the janitorial industry are low wage, immigrant workers with limited English and work while isolated. These janitors are more vulnerable to exploitation and harassment in the workplace (Costa, 2018; 2019; Kerwin D., 2013; Fine, 2017; Kerwin & McCabe, 2011). Fears linked to that vulnerability became a thread that was encountered through all aspects of the research from study design, to recruitment, in our analysis, and in reporting the study findings.

## Methods

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This report presents a summary of nine exploratory focus groups conducted in Washington State with forty-six janitors; the primary purpose of these focus groups was to hear from janitors about their safety and health needs, and to better understand their working lives. Data collection was initiated in September 2018 and concluded in June 2019.

Five focus groups were facilitated in Seattle and four in Spokane. Five focus groups were facilitated in Spanish and four were facilitated in English. All but one of the nine focus groups was composed of union-represented janitors. Almost half (48%) of the focus group participants were Latino, and evenly split between men and women, although women were more likely to identify as Latina (73%) and the men as White (67%). Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service; Spanish language focus groups were transcribed first into Spanish, then into English. Focus group facilitators reviewed all transcripts for completeness and accuracy, in addition each group had a researcher taking notes, to add to the transcribed records. No personally identifiable information was collected, and participants were instructed not to use proper names in the meetings. All focus group participants were given a \$25 gift card for their time and contribution. The Washington State Institutional Review Board reviewed the materials, methods and protocols of this study, and deemed it as exempt research.

The questions for the focus groups revolved around three broad themes. Those are:

- general health and safety,
- workload/work organization/pace,
- policies/trainings/reporting.

Data collection initiated in September 2018 and concluded in June 2019. SHARP researchers facilitated the focus groups. These were about an hour long, and were facilitated in English or Spanish. The study team had three bilingual staff (i.e., English and Spanish) who facilitated the Spanish focus groups. All of the participants provided informed consent and received a \$25 gift card for participating in the focus groups to thank them for their time and contribution to the study. All of the focus groups were recorded; identifiers were removed from transcripts during the coding process.

## Recruitment

SHARP researchers chose to focus on English and Spanish speaking janitors for the focus groups to make best use of our team's Spanish bilingual skills and relationships in the Latino community in Washington.

Community-based recruitment strategies were used to disseminate various recruitment materials to reach janitors and inform them of the study. Research staff drew on relationships they had formed with organizations from previous work experiences and involvement in different projects. These relationships were strengthened and new ones were developed to build rapport with the communities in the janitorial industry. In addition, these organizations reviewed study recruitment materials and made recommendations to improve recruitment efforts.

SEIU Local 6 (janitorial union), Spokane Alliance (a non-partisan and non-profit alliance), Entre Hermanos (a nonprofit servicing Latinx communities), and other organizations were instrumental in connecting researchers with other community partners and provided assistance with recruitment efforts (e.g., hosting us during their radio shows). All of the focus groups were facilitated in community organization offices.

## Analysis

The focus groups conducted in Spanish were translated and transcribed by a professional transcription service. The five researchers who facilitated the focus groups participated in the data analysis. The team used a qualitative consensual research (QSR) approach for the analysis including developing a codebook, discussing coding issues, and developing the thematic structure (Hill et al. 1997; 2005). A qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, was used to assist with the analysis. The coding team met multiple times throughout the coding and analysis steps to ensure that everyone was following the same coding protocol, to clarify questions, and to create and refine an analysis codebook. After coding was completed, verification of the coding ensured coding consistency across themes.

## Study Findings

What follows is a presentation of the research findings. The focus remains on the strongest themes identified during the coding process. Each section provides a brief summary that captures the overall theme. We elaborate on each theme and include representative quotes selected during the analysis.

## Safety Climate

Safety climate is a strong theme found consistently across all focus groups. We define safety climate as individuals' shared perceptions of the various ways that safety is valued in the workplace. A large body of research over the past 35 years demonstrates that safety climate is an important predictor of safety behavior and safety outcomes such as injury and illness (Casey et al., 2017).

Specific concerns janitors brought forward in the discussions include the safety climate dimensions of poor leadership commitment to safety, little or no job safety training, hazard identification and resolution, and personal protective equipment provision. In addition, unmanageable workloads, fast work pace, and abusive supervision and safety generated heated discussions in the focus groups. Participants noted that if a company provides safety training, it is generally more concerned with checking off items on a checklist rather than specifically helping each employee become proficient in the specifics of hazard identification and injury prevention. Janitors mentioned that a lack of proper job training results in workers incorrectly applying cleaning chemicals. Moreover, janitors reported that management often disregards hazardous chemical labeling; this increases the risk of incidents and injury.

Table 1 below presents a snapshot of the safety climate dimensions and key focus group findings related to each dimension.

Table 1. Safety Climate Summary Findings from Janitor Focus Group Responses

Safety Climate Dimensions	Focus Group Key Findings
Management Commitment to Safety	<p>Owners, managers, and supervisors lack safety commitment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor safety communication and leadership</li> <li>• Discourage janitors from reporting safety issues</li> <li>• Retaliate against janitors for reporting safety concerns</li> <li>• Pressure injured workers to continue working</li> </ul>
Safety Training – Policies, Practices	<p>Many in the industry lack proper job and safety training on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to use PPE</li> <li>• How to properly use and label hazardous chemicals</li> <li>• How to safely clean biohazards/pathogens (i.e., blood, viruses, bacteria, etc.)</li> </ul>
Safe Equipment, PPE, and Supplies	<p>Companies do not provide safety information and safe equipment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PPE is not provided by companies</li> <li>• Lack of cleaning supplies</li> <li>• Missing hazardous chemical labeling</li> <li>• Cleaning equipment, maintenance, and supply needs are dismissed</li> </ul>
Safe Workload and Pace	<p>Supervisors use various tactics to increase workloads and pace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overwhelming janitors with unmanageable workloads</li> <li>• Understaffing contributes to work overload and injury risk</li> <li>• Pressure to work faster</li> <li>• Pressure to work unpaid overtime to complete work overload</li> </ul>
Relationships and Safety	<p>Poor relationships compromise janitors' ability to work safely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress from abusive supervision creates safety hazards</li> <li>• Supervisors show a lack of concern for janitors - pressuring them to work while sick or injured</li> </ul>
Reporting Practices for Safety	<p>Janitors are uninformed about safe work practices and unaware of how to report hazards and work-related injuries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisory claim suppression</li> <li>• Management discourages reporting safety issues</li> <li>• Janitors are retaliated against for reporting</li> </ul>

**Note: PPE: Personal Protective Equipment**

### Management Commitment to Safety

Janitors shared their concerns regarding injury and illness in all of the focus groups. Almost all janitors shared a general concern for a lack of a safety climate including a leadership commitment to safety in their work place. This includes leader attitudes that injuries are not



always preventable and that “*accidents happen*” and that it is normative to work through an injury without reporting it or seeking medical attention. Janitors described workplaces that lacked hazard identification, assessment, prevention, and control procedures. Companies did not provide safety training, encouragement, and other support needed for janitors to work safely. Our analysis revealed that janitor perceptions of their company safety climates were that supervisors typically encouraged janitors to accept injury risks and discouraged reports of hazards and injuries.

*“Well, I actually got injured one night. I seriously thought I split my skull. I was grabbing a garbage can; the door was closed behind me. I walked right – I called my supervisor and you know what he did? He goes, ‘Yeah, I’ll be over there later. We’ll fill out an accident report.’ He never showed up. I brought it up the next day. He goes, ‘Oh, it’s no big deal.’ That’s how – they don’t care.”*

*“But chemicals are the worst hazard we have. And if you do report an injury – I waited five hours before they took me to the emergency to get attended to. It was at the discretion of the supervisor. She wanted my job finished first.”*

Moreover, janitors did not seek medical care due to a safety climate that fostered fear of retaliation and termination. Janitors reported regular exposure to hazardous conditions in indoor and outdoor work environments. They noted that their risk of injury escalates due to time constraints, unmanageable workloads, heavy, awkward lifting, lack of personal protective equipment, and isolated work for long periods.

In the context of poor safety climates, janitors reported various recurring work-related injuries. These include musculoskeletal injuries, including arm, wrist, back, and hip injuries from repetitious, fast-paced job tasks such as vacuuming, mopping, and lifting multiple heavy trash bags and barrels. Janitors stressed that supervisors pressure injured workers to continue working, ignoring their pain and need for time and medical care to heal.

*“The repetitive motion of doing that can actually cause – I’ve seen people with things wrapped around. And there was one coworker I had – he’s no longer there. I would see him sit down, and wrap a cloth around his wrist because he said he was in pain.”*

*“But for seven years, I moved 300 pounds around on two wheels, and I did seven of them bins a night at that time. So, my body, like the other gentleman said, my body paid for that.”*

*“Now, my arm is bad; I can’t take the pain in my arm, the pain and all of that doesn’t let me sleep.”*

A participant describes their experiences with a poor safety climate.

*“It’s all kind of – they do the paperwork and everything, but they don’t do anything to make it any easier to not have the injury again. They won’t listen to workers or what you do, and any of that stuff. You still go back in the same situation. You go home maybe for*

*a while and heal up a little bit, and you're thrown right back into the fire again, doing the same thing you were doing before."*

This participant points out some of the issues and how to address them.

*"But as far as safety, I think – Let's put it this way. They are lagging. They need stiffer regulations. Or inspections."*

Safety climate is strongly influenced by manager expectations, communication of safety messages, and actions taken to ensure a safe workplace. These actions include all aspects of the work from safety attitudes conveyed by supervisors, training, personal protective equipment, reporting practices, workload, work pace, and response to injury that promotes worker recovery and healing that might rightfully require a worker's compensation claim. Participants described a number of ways that poor safety climates and manager commitment to safety created safety hazards and injury.

### Safety Training

Janitors pointed out that many in the industry lack training. This includes job and safety training supervisors and janitors should be receiving. They asserted that management does not provide job descriptions, safety policies, safety orientations, and safety training to new employees or stand-by employees. This leaves them uninformed about safe work policies and practices and unaware of how to report hazards and work-related injuries. Janitors reported that they do not receive blood borne pathogen training or other biohazard training, as well as the personal protective equipment they need to prevent infections, illnesses and injuries while cleaning hospitals and medical labs.

*"So, they never told us that we had to use special attire or anything there. In fact, I know the person, and they said that they just go in with plastic gloves, and your own shoes that you use every day. So, sometimes there's blood, in the [hospital] that gets accumulated. So, to me, I think it's very sensitive, to be cleaning that. And many people go and don't know what it is. They just know that they have to clean, so they have to clean. But in reality, I don't think everyone knows the danger there."*

New janitors reported receiving little orientation of all the spaces and things they have to clean or where cleaning supplies and equipment are located. This in combination with lack of safety training and fear of asking their supervisors questions that might identify them as inexperienced and a target for replacement, increased their risk for injury. Janitors pointed out that managers do not provide the necessary safety information in Spanish or other languages to limited English proficient workers.

Janitors also reported that managers blame them for poor job performance while not offering the required trainings. They also explained that management uses supervisors as substitutes for absent workers, which compromises employee safety training and monitoring of cleaning supplies and equipment. Moreover, while under pressure from supervisors to complete more

tasks, janitors explained that their stress levels increase. This forces them to rush in an attempt to keep up with the unmanageable workloads, which subsequently increases their risk for injury.

*“Since I started, I’ve not once been given any training. When I talked to my boss, not the supervisor, the one above the supervisor, uh, he told me that I wasn’t able to get the job done. So, I told him at that moment, ‘Okay, so give me training because, since I started, I haven’t been trained. If you want me to get the job done in the time you want, maybe the way I work doesn’t work. Train me again.’ And no, never [received training].”*

Janitors reported that supervisors do not receive any trainings, this includes training in employee supervision and leadership skills. This lack of training means janitors must deal with supervisory incompetence and the consequences that come with that. Supervisors lack the janitorial industry knowledge and skills needed to train employees in their basic job duties. As a result of this practice, janitors take on the added responsibility of training new co-workers, sometimes while experiencing language barriers. Supervisors who lack communication skills training are rude, insulting, and verbally hostile towards subordinates. They also lack knowledge of equipment maintenance. Janitors advocated for supervisors to receive training to fulfill their role in employee safety. Janitors expressed dismay with companies that have rolled back training standards, demonstrating indifference towards safety.

*“So, a lot of companies aren't doing it. I've had to train managers of companies that come out of school because they studied finance and studied this. They don't understand the reality of cleaning offices. . . They don't understand cleaning a bathroom. They don't have an idea nor how to empty a trash can and they push their work off on others.”*

In another concern related to training and safety, janitors described management as unresponsive to their cleaning equipment, maintenance, supply, and training needs. Most janitors reported, “*being forced*” to work with worn and damaged vacuum cleaners, inadequate cleaning chemicals and other supplies with job performance and safety consequences.

*“The vacuum does what it’s supposed to do. For your safety, it shuts off, and you’ll smell it or you’ll feel your vacuum hot. What you want to do is unplug. Okay, they say they’re fixing it. What they do is they hardwire, or straight wire that switch, put the defunct switch back on there, and say, “It’s all good,” and you’re – and then two days later, the vacuum’s actually smoking.”*

Specifically, janitors reported supervisors’ failure to train workers in hazardous chemical communication and the safe handling of cleaning chemicals and chemical wastes. In their comments, they noted that companies do not provide appropriate cleaning supplies, first aid kits, and necessary personal protective equipment, which often forces janitors to improvise with less effective substitutes.

*“But chemicals are the worst hazard we have. And if you do report an injury – I waited five hours before they took me to the emergency to get attended to. It was at the*

*discretion of the supervisor. She wanted my job finished first.”*

When janitors and their supervisors miss safety training, workers are left uninformed about safe work policies and practices and are placed at greater risk for injury. Janitors lack the information they need to report hazards and work-related injuries, and they are retaliated against when they share safety concerns with their supervisors. Janitors are also afraid to request personal protective equipment.

### Safe Equipment, PPE, and Supplies

Janitors expressed a lack of confidence in management taking their safety issues seriously, which leaves them feeling compelled to complete job tasks using risky or less effective alternative means including working without emergency aid kits needed to care for minor injuries. Janitors feared supervisor retaliation for reporting equipment or supply issues. Janitors stressed that working with inadequate or broken cleaning equipment takes more time. This forces them to work harder and faster to finish their duties, which increases their risk of exposure to hazardous cleaning equipment, chemicals, and environmental conditions.

*“For example, (when equipment is) in bad condition then one works double the amount of time and eh– also the mops are two three little cloths that the old mops already has, and it also fights you a lot so that you mop double. . . They don't give you mask for the chemicals, when you finish vacuuming you end up with the dirt in your face.”*

In sum, our data suggest that company practices frequently compromise janitors' health and safety. Janitors identified safety issues that their companies are responsible for addressing including a lack of safety trainings and trainings that meet the language needs of Janitors with limited English, and failure to provide necessary equipment, maintenance, parts, cleaning supplies, and PPE. The safety issues reported by janitors contribute to the likelihood of hazard exposures and incidents that negatively affect janitor health and well-being on the job.

### Unsafe Workloads and Pace

One of the strongest themes that emerged from our data was work overload and its impact on janitors' health and safety. Janitors in every focus group reported supervisor overburdening with work, adding work but with no additional staff provided to complete it. Janitors attempted to keep up with the additional tasks by increasing their pace. However, rushing increases their risk for injury, which many reported in the focus groups. In addition, many janitors pointed out that their employers and supervisors actively discouraged them from taking their paid rest and lunch breaks required by law. Janitors requested a workload and task assignments reassessment and adjustments made to a reasonable and safe level.

A strong majority of janitors reported increased workloads, added tasks, and expectations on their jobs. Janitors reported work conditions including understaffing, no extra time allotted to complete the additional work tasks, and no overtime pay compensation for working beyond their shift to complete tasks. Janitors stated that they are expected to clean entire buildings with square footage almost doubling over last five years or so. For example, some janitors reported

that six full-time janitors and a janitor working 5 hours per day must now clean a building that used to have 15 full-time janitors to clean it.

*“When we started out, it was like 3,500 sq. ft. per hour. And you can get everything clean at least, maybe dust it real good at least once a week. Then it went up to like 4,000 or 5,000, and yeah, you know. At least you still vacuum and get the main stuff done. I’ll give you an idea what we’re doing now. A three bedroom, one bath, house is 1,500 sq. ft. They want us to clean 6,000 sq. ft. per hour. That’s four of those houses every hour, and they want the same work done when we were doing 3,500 sq. ft. per hour.”*

Our analysis revealed that nearly every janitor pointed out that heavier work demands increased their risk of injury and attributed this to the fast work pace. As one janitor commented below.

*“You are giving me 20 bathrooms, more than 200 offices... And that’s why the workers, all of us get injured, backaches, joint pains, everything, because of overwork because everyone here is overworked, and I told the general manager.”*

*“Back when we used to do like 35 or 4,000 sq. ft., we ranked in the top ten in fewest injuries in all the offices. When we started jumping to 5,000, 6,000, we all of a sudden dropped to 113th, about 115th in injuries, we had that many injuries.”*

Another janitor describes the cumulative effect of repetitive heavy lifting and subsequent injury.

*“One of my problems I’ve had is heavy lifting, and for 22 years I’ve repeatedly done the same stuff and I’ve got injuries from it.”*

Inadequate staffing was another safety-related practice that most janitors reported as problematic and contributing to an unsafe and unmanageable workload. For example, when their coworkers are out on leave, management often does not provide enough workers to cover the gap in staffing. Janitors suggested that additional hiring should increase staffing levels in these situations. Another concern brought up by janitors is the expectation that when other teams need help with their work, they should provide it, but cannot because of pressure to keep up the fast pace. They have no spare time to provide the needed assistance.

*“We have a team, but we can’t even get help, because they’ve got to do their work too, you know. You don’t get help at all.”*

Janitors also discussed a team cleaning approach used by some companies and noted the issues that came with it. Having a “deadbeat partner” meant a janitor had to carry the greater burden of the workload including the greater risk for injury.

*“Because they didn’t want the team cleaning. . . So, we had a well-oiled machine going until they said let’s do team cleaning, and then pfft; it all fell apart . . . there had been people that had worked for 20 years by themselves, knew how to do it, had a rhythm. All of a sudden they got deadbeat partners.”*

On the other hand, a team that works well together may provide a higher level of safety. They split up tasks and with several workers, help is close by for tasks that require heavy lifting or awkward postures for a sustained period of time.

*“In my building we figure it out as a team. What are your points that you wanna do this, this, and this? And then I’d be like, ‘Well, I wanna do this, this, and this.’ So, we just kinda made it up as we went. As we came to the building we just said okay, this is my job; this is your job; this is your job. And that’s how we split it up.”*

Even so, most janitors pointed out that they feel isolated when working alone. The rare interaction with a coworker was welcome and shifts with no one to share a few words with were difficult to bear. In addition, working in isolation increases risk for injury if help is not available with a difficult task or heavy lifting.

### Consequences of Unmanageable Workloads

Stress due to unmanageable workloads was a strong theme across all focus groups. Janitors reported that the supervisor mistreatment created a hostile work environment and was a key stressor. Supervisors’ use various types of mistreatment to intimidate and manipulate janitors including insults, work scapegoating (i.e., being blamed for something they did not do), work sabotage, yelling, and threatening job security.

*“I have personal issues with my foreman. She screams and yells a lot.”*

Janitors reported that those behaviors are used to pressure them into working faster and to pressure them to take on more work. It was reported that some supervisors use all of those tactics while others use a combination of them. Janitors shared that dealing with their supervisors’ mistreatment was the most stressful part of their job. Janitors explained that this stress spills over into their personal lives.

*“They don’t try to take care of you, of that excessive burden, that’s what it affects, because you already know when you choose a job, it’s at night and maybe I’m not going to have the same spirit to take care of my family please help us, because we’re already screaming. We’re already desperate because, uh, we’re humiliated, we’re loaded with work, so it’s not fair to have a lot of stress at work.”*

Janitors reported constant pressure to complete unmanageable workloads. This creates a lot of tension for workers. Psychosomatic pain such as neck pain is a common stress-related complaint.

*“No, and you can’t work like that. You can’t work with a person who is stressing you out daily, daily, or continuously.”*

*“I tell my husband, ‘It seems I have a cat here with claws like this because of how much my neck hurts.’”*

The stress experienced from these abuses pushes many janitors into skipping their paid breaks and their lunch in order to attempt to keep up with unmanageable workloads and to avoid becoming a target.

*“There have been times I haven’t taken 10-minute break. I’d take a 10, 15 – I wouldn’t take my first break; I’d take a 15-minute lunch, but clock out for the half hour but take 15 minutes. And there have been times I’ve taken 15 minutes out of an eight-hour shift to make sure I got stuff done on time.”*

One of the biggest stressors for janitors is not being able to take time off when they are sick or want a vacation. Janitors especially feel stressed when supervisors have a history of firing people who asked for days off; some supervisors approve the requested leave and terminate the employees when they return to work.

*“They don’t have to say it considering the amount of pressure they have us under. You are afraid of asking for time off because what if you come back and don’t have a job anymore? Also, related to the example she just gave you, where she was laid off without any sort of notice.”*

Fatigue is another consequence of work overload discussed by many participants. Janitors reported not having enough time meet their supervisors’ unrealistic expectations. and discussed how unmanageable workloads result in physical and emotional exhaustion that leaves them feeling constantly tired and depleted. Janitors frequently described how work-related fatigue negatively affects their home life, leaving them too tired to engage with family members and to perform domestic chores.

*“When you leave work and come home you don’t even want to get out of the car.”*

*“Well, it affects a lot because you can’t be watching the family because you want to rest.”*

*“Oh yes, you don’t take care of them because what you want is to arrive and land in bed, the next day you don’t want to get up or make them food either, you don’t want to do what you do at home because you are very tired, you don’t want to move anything because, if you get tired of your house because you are going to die at work, that is, it affects you emotionally.”*

*“You wake up. And you’re already going back to work in an hour. I’ve had that happen; I’m just – I’m too tired and I stress easily. And that’s part of the reason why I was gonna try to get some counseling. I’m not ashamed to admit it”*

In conclusion, janitors reported unmanageable workloads as a detrimental managerial practice that produced high-risk job conditions such as working off the clock to complete some tasks

before the regular work shift, working under pressure and understaffed, and working very fast without recovery time from rest breaks. The participants explained that these work conditions contributed to an increased number of injuries as well as cumulative bodily stress injuries due to heavy or repetitive lifting and working in awkward postures. A hostile work environment due to abusive supervision was also discussed as a strong stressor that resulted in negative health outcomes such as musculoskeletal pain, headache, and fatigue that compromised their engagement with family life.

## Workplace Relationships and Safety

### Abusive supervision

Work relationships and safety emerged as a strong theme in our analysis with most janitors in agreement that their interpersonal interactions with supervisors could be characterized as disrespectful, even hostile, and contributing to safety hazards. Janitors reported that their supervisors created problems instead of helping resolve complaints. Problematic supervisor behaviors included spreading rumors, work sabotage to justify firing a worker, and pitting workers against each other to set them up to compete for cleaning supplies and equipment. Janitors reported that they view these behaviors as manipulative. Additionally, janitors reported supervisors' manipulating workers through fear tactics, for example, threatening a janitor with job termination to motivate increased speed and productivity on the job.

Janitors noted a lack supervisory empathy or humanity for worker safety and sickness. Supervisors threatened workers to show up on the job when they were ill, creating a public health risk. Supervisors criticized without offering any constructive feedback. Many janitors mentioned that their only contact at the company is through their supervisors. Some shared that they do not know their supervisors at all. For many janitors, there is little time to build a positive relationship with their supervisor when the only time they hear from their supervisor is due to a complaint made against them. In an environment of abusive supervision, supervisors may also have little interest or expectation that they should lead by positive example, building respectful relationships with employees to motivate their best work.

Janitors reported disrespect and harassment from their supervisors and the people in the buildings they clean. This includes giving unfair warnings and prohibiting janitors from using communal spaces such as the dining room. The disrespect janitors reported in the focus groups occurred quite often in the form of subtle microaggressions as one janitor described,

*“They treat you like you are nothing – (you) belong to them.”*

And another janitor explained the treatment as,

*“Disrespecting like we are not human beings, you know. . . When you're trying to say something, they stop you – to not say [it].”*



Often a more intense mistreatment, abusive supervision, was described by janitors as linked to supervisor fear tactics aimed at pressuring them to work faster and get more work done. *“I had a supervisor who taught me – or a foreman – took me aside and said, ‘You know, I could find something on anybody, no matter how good they are.’”* The intimidation also contributes to fear of reporting work injuries. A supervisor told a janitor *“You’re on your own.”* when a janitor cut himself while working. Supervisory intimidation included threatening a janitor’s job when a participant revealed the following,

*“He [supervisor] snapped his fingers and he said, ‘If you don’t do your job quickly, you know what can happen to you... You’re going to fly.’... so I am afraid to report anything that happens to me at work... I have to remain quiet even when I injure myself.”*

Under conditions of abusive supervision, a Spanish-speaking janitor who can also speak English explained that due to fear and the hostile work environment, she forgets how to speak English with her supervisor. Finally, a number of janitors expressed fear for their safety in case of an emergency, because their supervisors do not allow them to have their cellphones while working in isolated, dangerous environments.

## Discriminatory Harassment

Janitors reported discrimination from managers or supervisors as well as witnessing discriminatory harassment against another janitor due to their immigration status. This was discussed in a majority of the focus groups with acknowledgement that non-English speakers were treated differently compared to native English speakers. Language barriers made it more difficult for janitors to advocate for themselves and this, in turn, increased janitors’ vulnerability to exploitation, mistreatment, and wage theft. Some janitors also reported discriminatory harassment based on age. Research has documented that stressful work environments take a toll on worker overall health (Truxillo, Cadiz, & Hammer, 2015; Lee, et al., 2016; Costa, 2019; Cho, Williams Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013).

In a comment on her experience of discrimination, a Latina immigrant with limited English skills reported being paid \$14.50 per hour while her co-workers are being paid \$15. She confronted her employer about the wage issue, and he made an excuse for the pay difference.

*“I think that there’s racism there, right? Because this man I was working with – a new employee just started and he’s going to pay him more because he speaks English”*

Nonnative janitors expressed a strong fear of retaliation from their supervisors and fear of immigration authorities. These legitimate fears stop them from advocating for themselves and from reporting discriminatory harassment incidents or work injuries. Janitors reported being afraid to report work injuries or violations to Labor and Industries because of uncertainty about how government agencies work in the United States. They expressed the fear that the agency works with the Department of Homeland Security. Janitors described the following means used to manipulate and exploit them: threats of deportation, threats of firing, being pressured into not

submitting worker compensation claims, wage theft through time loss/misreporting, and being paid lower wages than other English-speaking janitors and documented versus undocumented janitors. As one janitor noted,

*“You are undocumented and you are afraid to report that you injured yourself.”*

A second janitor corroborated this in another focus group discussion,

*“Many people have fear that in talking with the Department of Labor and Industries, um, they’re going to get involved with immigration (authorities).”*

Undocumented janitors explained that they are willing to withstand inhumane work conditions to keep their jobs in order to provide for their families. They do not report unlawful business practices or file claims for workplace injuries because they must keep the job they have.

*“For me you’re (employer) going to retaliate for two things. One, because they don’t have social security (retaliation against undocumented workers). They have their job and they have the opportunity to be in the union, and they say well, the truth I don’t want to (report) because if they fire me and I don’t have social security, where am I going to get a job?”*

The workplace safety climate that focus group participants described included abusive supervision and, for marginalized janitors, discriminatory harassment. These psychosocial stressors add up to a pattern of stressors that, taken together, may contribute to poor work and health outcomes for janitors. One resource that mitigates the stress exposure harm is social support and coworkers were a source of support for some janitors, especially those that worked in teams.

## Coworker Support

In more than half of the focus groups, janitors reported having diverse experiences with their coworkers. Janitor focus group participants described relationships that included a range of mostly positive and supportive interactions to some negative and harmful interactions. A lack of needed and wanted support was also mentioned, but this was mainly due to support that could not be provided by coworkers because of staff shortages or working in isolation.

Many janitors discussed helping their coworkers when they saw them struggling, explaining that they sought to assist injured janitors, to help each other with unexpected added tasks (e.g., breaking down boxes, lifting heavy objects), and to prevent burnout.

*“You gotta go find them and say, “Okay, take that off. I’m taking over on the backpack. Give me the list of all the areas. I’ll knock this out,” you know – and let them do their stuff...Because if you kill your crew off with foul equipment, where are you gonna get another backbone crew of women that know how to detail?”*

*“I go and help him sometimes because he can’t lift these just over-glut of heavy garbage recycling (bags or bins?) and all that. And they don’t care because they’re not the ones doing it. We are.”*

Janitors also took the initiative to train new coworkers supporting and coaching them to learn the job and work safely.

*“We give the training ourselves to those who come in. Those that are – are already in the building. Because, the supervisor does not take their time to give that type of training.”*

At a more basic level, janitors helped their new coworkers document their work hours and clock into the system. This type of instrumental support has a positive effect on janitors’ coping with entering into what participants described as “toxic” work environments. Additional practical support included encouraging each other to submit workers’ compensation claims or make doctor appointments to address work-related injuries. This type of support is crucial, as janitors mentioned a general lack of knowledge of workers’ compensation benefits and company discouragement of seeking information or filing injury claims.

### Unlawful Business Practices: Wage and Hour Violations

A consistently reported concern among janitors across all focus groups was unlawful company practices. This included different types of wage theft, retaliation for using sick leave, and worker’s compensation claim suppression. Some janitors explained that employers do not communicate the dollar amount earned per hour that they are paid. This lack of knowledge creates a context for vulnerability to employer exploitation.

Wage theft was one of the most commonly reported forms of exploitation. According to many janitors, keeping up with their unmanageable workload demands forces them to “*put in work time before clocking in*” For example, one janitor commented, “*I started 15 minutes early for five years.*” Janitors also reported relationship problems with their foremen, who tend to side with the supervisor’s agenda.

Janitors emphasized that increasing workloads, staff shortages, and last-minute requests force them to work overtime. Janitors pointed out that their overwhelming workloads do not allow them to take their meal and rest breaks. Janitors shared that their supervisors discourage them from taking their breaks. They clock out for lunch and are not able to take their break or are only able to take a partial break.

*“It’s not a question that she’s not doing the job...she’s not getting breaks and that’s against the law...it’s not a question that she doesn’t want to do the job, it’s a question that they have a lot of work and she doesn’t finish on time, she doesn’t have time to take breaks.”*

Janitors expressed a strong sense of injustice for not receiving overtime payments.

*“Oh, we don’t wanna pay you overtime, but you gotta get that done.’ And they won’t bring anybody else in to help you get it done in your eight-hour shift.”*

Some janitors reported missing hours from their paychecks.

*“We worked together and what a surprise, she got even fewer hours than I did and he was very upset. She said, “It’s not fair. They are paying me these many hours.” I said, “What? You worked more hours than I did.” And as far as I know, they have to pay us for the same hours because we are coworkers.” And he said, “They paid me for these many hours and it’s not possible.”*

Other janitors, working in another company, reported wage theft through a new payment system; they were also discouraged from entering their overtime into the system.

*“I went to the office and I told the lady, I told her you know what? Here I am missing hours, I said, because I punched in right and she said “no, it’s that you just worked these hours. I said, “No, I worked all my time, and here, you owe me hours.”*

Janitors also reported that their employer deducted the sick leave from their pay check.

*“When I got hurt, they took out \$125 out of my check, of each check. Imagine. For three years. But, I didn’t know that – that they had to take that out. And I told them, “Why are you taking out \$125?” What they answered – what they said was to sign, to sign the paper, it’s to pay the other person who is going to do your job.”*

Janitors noted workers’ compensation problems in almost all of the focus groups. This includes claim suppression and participants reported that supervisors discouraged janitors from submitting claims. Additionally, janitors described a reluctance to file claims due to fears of retaliation, potential costs, and their immigration status. In the focus group discussions, participants said they are told to visit specific doctors who tend to claim that injuries acquired at work are not work related and that their employer refuses to pay for their claims. Furthermore, many supervisors refuse to file claims because this adds to their workload, which they are motivated to limit by not taking on additional tasks. Janitors reported that it takes months or years for claims *“to go through.”* This causes financial burdens due to medical expenses they must pay while not working due to the injury. One participant volunteered that they nearly lost their home in this way. Spanish speaking janitors expressed much concern over problems with LNI claims due to language barriers and fear.

Janitors pointed out that many of the workload issues are rooted in poor management of contracts. They requested task assignments to be reevaluated and redefined. Janitors noted that square footage is not an accurate way to measure workloads, stating, *“You can’t evaluate workloads on size, on square footage,”* explaining that they are required to walk the area multiple times to complete all the assigned tasks (e.g., vacuuming, mopping, taking out trash, etc.). It is especially difficult to complete their work when odd/difficult tasks (e.g., cleaning up after

restroom accidents, parties, vomit, dividing trash into recycling bins, etc.) are added. Work accumulates.

*“We’re forced to – well, pick and choose in what we do because we just don’t have the time to do the full job that we’re supposed to be doing”*

Janitors reported that unfair contracts are being signed. The customer expect janitors to do more than what they can. Janitors requested that contracts be renegotiated to make sure expectations from all the involved parties are being met.

*“The customer... start dwindling what they’re willing to pay for vs. what they want, okay? Then the company [should] go back to their office, and they do their numbers, and the company makes their numbers match what this person wants, and they’re all happy.”*

*“It’s called renegotiation. Well, here, we don’t have – in the janitorial field. In the janitorial field, we don’t have renegotiation. It’s, no, we agreed to do this. Now we’re going to make you do this, and you – does that make sense?”*

Janitors reported that extra tasks are added after contracts have been completed and agreed to.

*“It is a contract for a service. It’s not a contract to – once we sign it with you, you can do whatever you want to do, and you can add whatever you want to add. And that is what happens in the janitorial industry, across the board.”*

Janitors primarily emphasized that unrealistic expectations and extra tasks added to completed contracts were problematic. In their view, the work overload appeared to add pressure to supervisors with little to no training in how to handle these situations; in turn, supervisors resort to using intimidation tactics to force janitors to work extra and harder, while discouraging union involvement. Moreover, janitors expressed that it is not fair for their employers to ask them to complete tasks that are not related to their jobs (e.g., clearing snow, picking up trash in the driveway, construction work cleanup, etc.). Some janitors with many years of experience in the industry understood issues around contract violations. Janitors requested that contracts be honored as written and redrafted if extra work is requested after the contract is signed.

## **Consequences of Unlawful Practices**

During the focus groups, janitors described themselves as vulnerable to exploitation and discussed how unlawful business practices affect their wellbeing. This includes being discouraged from or not being allowed to take their meal and rest breaks. Having time to rest and recover is crucial for injury prevention (Arlinghaus, et al., 2012). Overwhelming workloads and staff shortages do not allow janitors take lawfully required breaks. Janitors reported retaliation from their supervisors for attempting to take their breaks.

Janitors revealed how their fears of retaliation force them to ignore their health concerns and doctor visits. They reported not being allowed to use sick leave even during medical emergencies or after requesting it months in advance. Janitors mentioned being threatened or fired for requesting and using sick leave. Some janitors reported not being paid for the sick leave they used. Others reported not disclosing where they injured themselves to avoid involving Labor and Industries out of fear of retaliation for filing a workers' compensation claim.

*"I also want to raise that my complaint is also not to force us. An example is that when we get sick we get in trouble. . . I got sick. I presented my papers of illness, and the foreman calls me by telephone, that I had to come in because they had nobody to do it, I came that night but at 11 that night I had to leave because the vomiting. I told him, crying, . . . I have some dizziness that I can't, I'm going to fall and it's going to be worse if I fall here and they made me work. 'We're sorry, but we don't have anyone, there's no one to do the work.' "*

*"For example, last year I also had a problem. I asked for a sick day and they took the hours from the sick days you have available but I was not paid for that day."*

*"I have been going to therapy at Sea Mar and everything. But I – I said, for the same reason I said that I had injured myself at home because I was afraid that they would report me and fire me"*

Having missing hours or being a paycheck behind causes various financial problems for janitors. They are forced to deal with accumulating late fees for bills and overdraft fees for their bank accounts.

*"That was this pay period that it happened, right? I'd already budgeted for everything we were going to pay, hadn't I? And I had one bill left, this one I had to pay, I told him "no look, with both checks it will be possible to cover everything", and when I look at my check I told him you know what? I'm telling you, no. That bill I sent, the bank still charged me the surcharges, because it didn't cover it."*

To summarize, our findings related to unlawful practices highlight janitors' harmful work experiences. These include reported wage theft, unpaid overtime, denied rest breaks, and workers' compensation claim suppression. These stressors negatively affected janitors' overall health and well-being. The marginalized workers that experience exploitation find themselves in daily precarious job conditions.

## Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The janitors we spoke to conveyed a great deal of specific and detailed information about their workplaces and the challenges they confront to complete their work safely and stay healthy in spite of exposures to hazards. This knowledge is of great value to policymakers and others who are in a position to act on behalf of workers, especially those workers who are marginalized in

multiple ways. A concise summary of concerns and recommendations from the janitors who participated in the safety and health study reflect their contributions.

**Overview of concerns brought up by participants in the focus groups:**

- Safety Climate Concerns
- Lack of management commitment to safety
  - Lack of safety and health training
  - Lack of safe equipment, PPE, and supplies
  - Unsafe and unmanageable workload, fast pace, stress and fatigue
  - Abusive supervision and discrimination
- Unlawful business practices: Wage and hour violations

**Key recommendations from focus group janitors:**

- Periodic workplace safety inspections
- Improve company policies and procedures for workplace safety and health
- Training for supervisors and janitorial staff
- Language appropriate safety and health training for janitors
- Provide equipment in good working order; regular maintenance of equipment
- Provide adequate personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Adequate quantity of cleaning supplies
- Evaluation and improvement of workload and work organization runs.
- Job sites need routine checks to identify where extra help is needed to prevent workers from taking unsafe risks while completing their work
- Task assignments rotation, to help prevent injuries caused by repetitive motion
- Prevent and reduce abusive supervision and discrimination
- Increase enforcement of labor standards

The janitorial industry is rich with diversity, and in our recruitment efforts, we identified 25 different primary languages. Time and resource constraints limited us to only English and Spanish language focus groups, so there may be gaps in the information we received and the key issues identified, due to the lack of cultural and linguistic diversity amongst participants.

## Conclusion

The most common issue raised in almost all of the focus groups centered on poor safety climate, namely, lack of management commitment to safety, lack of safety and health training, the lack of adequate staff, equipment, PPE, and supplies, abusive supervision, and the amount of work janitors are tasked with. There were also multiple examples of additional workplace stressors contributing to unsafe workplaces and a concerning violation of worker rights regarding wage and hour violations and discrimination.

The focus groups were just a small sample of janitors in Washington State, but they presented a clear need for systematic evaluation of the work janitors do, the training they receive and a call for increased oversight of the workplace. Addressing these issues is problematic within the janitorial industry, due in large part to the complex nature of their worksites (e.g. multiple layers of responsibility, which may include: building owners, management companies, building tenants, and janitorial employers – all of whom may play a role in determining worksite conditions). Responsibility for safe workplaces and how companies will ensure legal protections should be standardized and written into janitorial and tenant contracts.

The results of these focus groups highlight that janitors report being at a high risk of injury due to several factors, including the pace of the work, and the expectations of supervisors and company management. Additionally, janitors in our focus groups describe numerous incidents of harassment, bullying, and discrimination; and most felt they had limited avenues to prevent or report these. Increased education on worker rights will help, but only if there are meaningful ways to uphold those rights, and investigate these complaints. Nonnative and nonunion janitors appear to be especially vulnerable to abusive workplaces.

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## Sub Appendix A: Focus Group Questions

- A. *General Health Safety – process – participants will list hazards and assign priority; the top 3 will be discussed in more detail.*
- 1) What are your top health and safety concerns?
    - i. Prompt if needed with types of concerns – chemicals, slip-trip-fall, pace of work, etc.
    - b. Please give us some example of what happens to make this a problem (describe the incident)?
    - c. How could this work be done more safely?
- B. *Work Organization, workload and pace*
- 2) How is work organized to clean one floor/area?

- a. Probes:
  - i. How many people are needed?
  - ii. How are tasks divided?
    - 1. Gender differences?
    - 2. Help & support vs. work alone?
  - iii. Do you do the same task every day?
- b. Can you get everything done in one shift/on time?
  - i. Do you have special strategies for getting work done when there is too much to do?
- c. What is the most difficult task you do?
  - i. Do you rotate tasks?
  - ii. What is the rotation schedule?
- d. What is your workload like? (i.e., light, medium, heavy?)

3) What is the difference between team cleaning and zone cleaning?

- a. Probes:
  - i. If you do team cleaning, what are the specialist jobs?
  - ii. What do you call them and what do you do as a specialist?

4) How often do you meet with your supervisor?

- a. When? Where? Alone or as a team?
- b. What do you talk about when you meet with them?
  - i. Probes: assign tasks, etc.
- c. If you have a problem, can you go to your supervisor and get help?
  - i. Probe: Does he/she assign work fairly? Treat each person fairly? Handle conflict well?
  - ii. Probe: if there is too high a workload, can you say something?
- d. Do you have a lead team member, and what are their tasks? (Aside from supervisor – what are differences in what they do?)

5) How often are you understaffed?

- a. How do you deal with that?

6) Have you had any problems with pay?

- a. Probes: overtime, problems getting paid, lunchbreaks

C. *Policies, training, & reporting*

7) What safety training have you received to do your job, and when/where did/do you receive it?

a. Probes: Are you trained on using new equipment, on how to use new chemicals, on doing new job tasks, ongoing to new locations?

8) Do you know how to report a work-related injury?

a. Probe: Do you get help filing an injury incident report?

b. Are you discouraged from reporting?

9) What causes you the most stress on the job? (What is the most frustrating thing? The thing that is still bothering you after you go home after work?)

a. Probes: getting things done, physical demands, getting along with others

b. Probes: Night shift impact on family life? Lack of sleep?

D. *Wrap-Up*

10) As mentioned, the study is made up of different things like this focus group, interviews, observations and a state-wide survey. What would be a good way to promote these things? (and remember that you will be given a \$25 gift card each time you participate).

a. In addition, what is the best way to get ahold of janitors?

b. We are finished asking you the questions we had. However, before we end, is there anything you would like to share with us?

# Appendix B:

## Mistreatment of janitorial workers: A hidden health and safety issue

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Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

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### **Safety and Health Assessment and Research for Prevention (SHARP)**

SHARP research program at the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries is recognized as a leader in the multidisciplinary field of occupational safety and health research. Among other work, SHARP has conducted studies devoted to understanding how individual and work environment factors influence occupational safety, retention and turnover, as well as worker health and well-being. SHARP was created in 1990 by the Washington State Legislature with the mission of conducting research to prevent illness and injury in Washington workplaces.

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The contents of this presentation are solely the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of these agencies, associations, or departments.

## Executive Summary

### Overview

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Stress in the workplace is related to increased risk for numerous physical and mental health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, depression, and anxiety. Documentation of the physiological pathways for the relationship between stress and these disease outcomes demonstrates that psychosocial work contexts matter for health (Ganster & Rosen, 2013; Heaphy & Dutton, 2008). A recent Stanford study found that job insecurity increased the odds of reporting poor health by about 50%, high job demands raised the odds of having a physician-diagnosed illness by 35%, and long work hours increased mortality by almost 20%. Mistreatment at work and related injustice perceptions are identified as contextual factors contributing to poor worker mental and physical health (Robbins et al., 2012). Therefore, it is imperative to account for health effects of workplace environments when designing policies to improve individual health outcomes.

In this report, we present findings from a qualitative interview study on conditions of janitor workplace mistreatment. Our field research and analysis of narrative data focused specifically on discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment, and the mistreatment consequences for janitor safety and health.

### Purpose and Scope of the Formative Study

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In alignment with an occupational health psychology perspective, our research objectives of the formative study were twofold: 1) obtain background knowledge on janitors' perceptions of workplace mistreatment experiences and work conditions that may contribute to mistreatment; and 2) provide some recommendations for the state legislature to respond to the study findings.

The primary objectives of this study were to understand questions related to:

- a) Janitors' experiences with mistreatment and harassment at work;
- b) The impact of mistreatment and harassment on worker physical and mental health; and
- c) Janitors' workplace psychosocial context and its meaning for marginalized workers.

### Design and Method

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SHARP researchers used purposive sampling methods to recruit for and conduct individual interviews with janitors working to clean high-rise office buildings who have been exposed to workplace mistreatment in the state of Washington. Participants (18) worked primarily in Seattle, Bellevue, Tacoma, and Spokane and included 11 janitors, 3



janitor foremen, 3 union shop stewards, and 1 union representative for janitorial workers. The participants reported an education level of elementary/middle school at 56% and high school/some college at 44%. They also reported gender of 61% female and an average age of 47 years. All participants except one worked full time (94%) with an average of 40 hours per week with 64% working a night shift. The participants' race included African American/Black (17%), American Indian/Native Alaskan (6%), Hispanic/Latinx (67%), and White (11%). The interviews were conducted in English (28%) and Spanish (72%).

We conducted the in-person semi-structured interviews on the topics of workplace mistreatment including general harassment, sexual harassment, and violence. The Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB) approved all research documents and procedures.

### Qualitative Analysis

SHARP researchers applied an inductive method known as consensual qualitative research (CQR), to examine narrative data characterized by open-ended interview questions, small samples, a reliance on words over numbers, the importance of psychosocial context, an integration of multiple viewpoints, and consensus of the research team (Hill et al. 1997; 2005).

Throughout the analysis, SHARP researchers discussed emergent coding issues, developed the final coding structure and themes and planned the theme presentation and the corresponding recommendations for this report. Quotes were selected to illustrate primary and secondary themes and are presented in everyday language incorporating participants' own words to describe the psychological event, experience, or phenomenon of interest (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

### Study Findings

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In the study narrative data, janitors reported mistreatment primarily from the company's managers and supervisors but also from coworkers and others working in the buildings they cleaned. The types of mistreatment included discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment, retaliation, wage and hour violations, psychological and physical abuse.

- Discriminatory harassment was reported as racist behaviors or differential treatment based, for example, on participants' race/ethnicity compared to other workers whose race matched the race of the supervisor, which was often white.
- Sexual harassment was reported as inappropriate comments, touch, video imagery, and other behaviors from supervisors, coworkers, and in one case an on-site vendor.
- Retaliation was described as a company or supervisory response to worker complaints about their work tasks and to worker formal reports of or efforts to seek outside union help with wage and hour violations, discriminatory and sexual

harassment, and for worker union involvement. Common company retaliation practices included increasing a janitor's workload upon a complaint or request, and firing janitors from the job.

- Psychological harassment was the most commonly reported mistreatment behavior. This included humiliation of the worker in front of others, verbal abuse, social exclusion, harmful rumors and gossip, denying worker requests and ignoring health complaints with coercive insistence that janitors comply with supervisor demands of excessive work.
- Janitors reported wage and hour violations, and delay or denial of benefits. These incidents were described as employers taking advantage of immigrant workers' lack of knowledge of US standard business practices and worker rights. Language differences, communication difficulties and limited job opportunities also contributed to worker exposure to this type of mistreatment.

Janitors reported that their mistreatment on the job affected their health and safety in various ways, including:

- Physical and mental health strains including injuries, anxiety, distress, and physical-mental fatigue or burnout. Strains were described as linked to a high-stress work environment with psychologically abusive treatment, sexual and discriminatory harassment, and disregard for workers' needs and human rights that janitors reported as difficult to bear.
- The mental distress and depressed mood spilled over into janitors' family lives, affecting their ability to care for their children and fully engage with family, partners, and friends.
- Resilience, courage, and strength were evident in the interviews, but also, fear of and actual economic harm, dissuasion, and physical and mental health decrements. Over time, with limited resources and without adequate recourse to address their work problems, racialized and marginalized janitors, particularly immigrants with limited English proficiency and nonunion workers with limited personal financial resources or knowledge of their worker rights, reported fewer protections and greater harm.
- The primary source of social support was from the union if janitors could overcome their fear of job loss and retaliation to reach out for assistance. The union was often the only support reported as a source of information and instrumental assistance toward filing grievances, recovering lost wages, and reporting discrimination and sexual harassment.

Recommendations to prevent and address workplace mistreatment are derived from janitors' own recommendations and from our narrative data analysis and are specific to our sample of janitors:

- Labor standards enforcement - increase effectiveness to better protect workers by strengthening Labor & Industries wage/hour and worker rights enforcement program.
- Sexual harassment policy revisions to include protection related to abusive supervision (See CA AB 2053; Sub Appendix C).
- Training for workers in worker protections and rights related to wage and hour violations, discrimination, sexual harassment, psychological harassment, and retaliation.
- Training applicable to employers that mirrors the training topics for workers.
- Address social support and resilience – strengthen social programs, labor policies, and union capacity for worker programs that support problem solving and education, and build resilience and health.
- Address janitors' requests to be treated with equality, humanity, dignity and respect.

## Conclusion

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This study contributes new knowledge regarding the mistreatment and harassment of janitor workers. The study findings are in alignment with previous research on workplace mistreatment and our participants have confirmed as well, that it is experienced as a strong social stressor in their workplaces. Our findings also suggest that janitors' health and well-being would benefit from interventions that not only reduce mistreatment and harassment, but also increase knowledge and social support.

Our findings present participants' perceptions that their health, well-being and performance were harmed by mistreatment and harassment primarily from managers and supervisors but also from coworkers at their places of work. This research opens up an opportunity to address these psychosocial exposures and health and safety impairments that janitor's experience on the job. Toward that end, we have provided recommendations as suggestions to provide additional resources for janitors that seek recourse to prevent or limit these harms.

Finally, janitorial workers in low wage, low control, and low support jobs experience individual combinations of stressors and subsequent mental and physical health decrements -- consequences of exposures to workplace abuses such as discriminatory harassment and abusive supervision. Future research analyses from our janitor survey

quantitative data are needed to fully examine and potentially corroborate the findings from the qualitative research findings presented in this report.

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# Mistreatment of Janitors: A Hidden Health and Safety Issue

## Overview and Research Objectives

In the janitorial sector, there is limited knowledge available from researchers about the psychosocial context of systemic mistreatment in which workplace discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment, and violence occurs in employees' work experience (Kristen, Banuelos & Urban, 2015; Wittmer et al., 2013). The small number of existing studies concerning workers report that workplace discriminatory harassment have adverse health and well-being consequences (Cortina, et al., 2013; Rospenda et al., 2009). These occur for those who are exposed to specific events, and for workers and their families whose economic well-being may be compromised as a direct negative consequence of the problem (Teran et al., 2017).

When perpetrators, targets, and bystanders observe the stressor of mistreatment in their workplace, increased reports of high levels of strains occur with impacts at the individual, workplace, and nonwork levels (Pindek & Spector, 2015). Examining janitorial worker perceptions about their workplace mistreatment and harassment allows researchers to identify unrecognized psychosocial hazard exposures that occur. This knowledge provides valuable information toward developing policies and programs that prevent or address workplace harassment and aggression.

The primary objectives of this study were to better understand:

1. Janitors' experiences with mistreatment and harassment at work;
2. The impact of mistreatment and harassment on janitors' physical and mental health; and
3. Janitors' workplace psychosocial context and its meaning for marginalized workers.

## An Occupational Health Psychology View of Work Stress and Safety

Occupational health psychology (OHP) is an interdisciplinary area of psychology where the focus is on maintaining and promoting healthy workplaces and fostering the physical and mental health of workers within organizations (Schonfield & Chang, 2017; CDC; Tetrick & Quick, 2011). According to Sauter and Hurrell (1999), OHP emerged in response to three developments: "(a) the growth of and recognition of stress-related disorders as a costly occupational health problem; (b) the growing acceptance that psychosocial factors play a role in the etiology of emergent...problems such as burnout syndrome, depression and musculoskeletal disorders; and (c) recent and dramatic changes in the organization of work that result in both job stress and health and safety problems at work" (p. 177). Thus, OHP researchers seek to understand the psychological processes that guide individual behavior within the occupational, organizational, and

societal contexts that influence the behavior (Johns, 2006). A contextual and social structural approach is useful in OHP research and we draw on research throughout the report to support understanding mistreatment of janitors working in hierarchically structured organizations.

## Qualitative Methods

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Qualitative methods, a broad class of empirical procedures, are designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting such as janitorial work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). SHARP researchers applied an inductive method known as consensual qualitative research (CQR), to examine narrative data characterized by open-ended interview questions, small samples, a reliance on words over numbers, the importance of psychosocial context, an integration of multiple viewpoints, and consensus of the research team (Hill et al. 1997; 2005).

## Participants and Procedures

SHARP researchers used purposive sampling methods to recruit for and conduct individual interviews with janitors who clean office buildings and have been exposed to workplace mistreatment in the state of Washington. Participants (18) worked primarily in Seattle, Bellevue, Tacoma, and Spokane and included 11 janitors, 3 janitor foremen, 3 union shop stewards, and 1 union representative for janitorial workers. The participants reported an education attainment of elementary/middle school at 56% and high school/some college at 44%. They also reported gender of 61% female and an average age of 47 years. All participants except one worked full time (94%) with an average of 40 hours per week and with 64% working a night shift. The participants identified themselves as African American/Black (17%), American Indian/Native Alaskan (6%), Hispanic/Latinx (67%), and White (11%). Researchers conducted the interviews in the participant's primary language of English (28%) and Spanish (72%). Of the 18 total participants, 83% were union members including one union representative.

Recruitment efforts entailed building relationships with Hispanic/Latinx community organizations, placing notices at diverse community organizations, attending community events, facilitating informational workshops and Spanish radio interviews. Recruitment also took place in meetings at SEIU Local 6 in Seattle and notices were posted at organizations in the Seattle, Bellevue, Tacoma, and Spokane areas. Recruitment notices and announcements clearly stated our purposive sampling objective of inviting potential participants to volunteer for an interview on the topic of workplace harassment, sexual harassment, and violence.

The in-person semi-structured interviews covered the topics of workplace mistreatment mentioned previously. We also asked about reporting harassment and assault, company response to incidents, sources of support, and effects of harassment on health and well-

being (see instruments, Sub Appendix B). Interview participation was voluntary and lasted for 60-90 minutes. Participants received a \$25 gift card for their time and contribution to the study. The Washington State Institutional Review Board (WSIRB) approved all research documents and procedures.

## Qualitative Analysis

A professional transcription and translation service transcribed the digitally recorded interview data into text documents. Interviews conducted in Spanish were translated into English and back translated into Spanish following procedures recommended by cross-cultural researchers (Brislin, 1986). SHARP bilingual researchers verified the translated documents for meaning equivalence and accuracy. Researchers audited the interview documents and removed all personal identifiers such as names of individuals and descriptive details. Following transcription and auditing, the digital voice files were deleted. A CQR committee approach guided all analysis steps (Hill et al., 1997; 2005).

SHARP researchers coded the interview documents using an open coding approach. The research team developed a coding structure of themes and refined these themes throughout the iterative coding process. Researchers generated coding reports by theme and wrote corresponding thematic summaries. Throughout the analysis, SHARP researchers held discussions concerning emergent coding issues and developed themes and recommendations for this report. Quotes were selected to illustrate primary and secondary themes. Qualitative findings are generally presented in everyday language and often incorporate participants' own words to describe a psychological event, experience, or phenomenon of research focus (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Researchers protected participant confidentiality by changing details in the reporting of the interview findings in ways that preserve the meaning and ensure that individual stories or situations cannot be identified. In addition, quotes presented in this report may have been slightly altered to remove details such as person and company names or positions of individuals that may be identifying. All participants had contact with janitorial-related roles in the system, for example, janitors, janitor foremen, janitor shop stewards, and a janitor union representative.

## Janitors' Work Psychosocial Context, Demands, Strains and Resources

Job demands or stressors, low control on the job, low social support, and subsequent job strains are notable issues in today's workforce. The association between work stress, workload and health problems has been well documented (Belkic et al., 2004; Nappo, 2019; Warren et al., 2004). For occupational health psychology and safety researchers, a major focus has been on understanding how various elements of the physical and psychosocial work environment come together to shape health, safety and well-being. Karasek and Theorell's classic job strain model, based on psychosocial characteristics of work



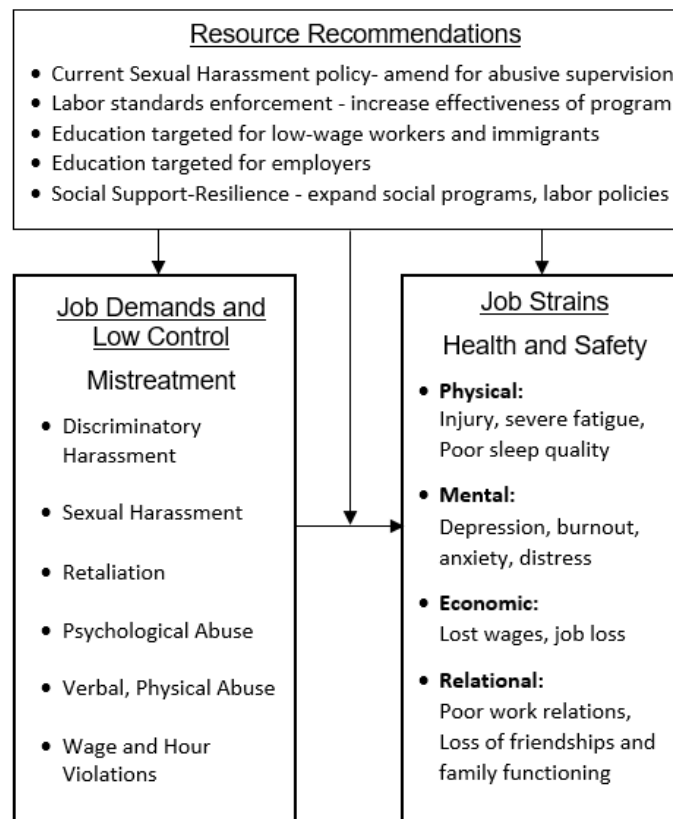
(Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990), is one of the most researched contemporary models for describing work stress. The model depicts patterns of conditions at work where the joint effects of high job demands coupled with low control and low social support result in work stress and subsequent job strain and poor health outcomes such as coronary heart disease (Kivimäki, et al., 2012; Schnall & Landsbergis, 1994).

Job demands include chronic stressors such as discriminatory harassment and pressure to work very hard and fast combined with low control over work schedule, workload, or how tasks are accomplished. The recent job demands-resources (JD-R) model extends the job strain model by expanding the number of job demands and resources considered, while holding central that a systems approach that includes the overarching *work context* remains essential to its argument (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017; Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001).

As the labor market continues to experience structural changes with the increasing prevalence of freelance work, scholars and policy makers need to design policy that can shape workplace policies, procedures, and practices to address abusive supervision and promote janitor workers' well-being while taking into account unique industrial characteristics, for example, female janitors performing work in isolated settings. At the end of the report resource recommendations will be made toward this end.

The Job Demands-Resources Model below represents a concise view of our research findings on workplace mistreatment as a job demand or stressor. The model reading from the left to the right includes the types of mistreatment of janitors including discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment, retaliation, psychological abuse, verbal and physical abuse, and wage and hour violations. In turn, the mistreatment leads to negative effects on janitors' job strains including physical and mental health strains as well as economic and relational impairments. The top section focuses on the resources in the form of recommendations that suggest actions to mitigate the harm from the job demands.

Figure 1. Model of Janitors' Job Demands, Strains and Resources



### Study Findings for Workplace Mistreatment

Exposure to occupational hazards and injustices such as general, discriminatory, and sexual harassment, are a frequently encountered stressor at work. Researchers (Grebner et al., 2004) found that social stressors, such as conflict and abuse, comprised the most frequently reported category of workplace stressors. It is not surprising then that Keenan and Newton (1985) proposed that interpersonal conflict might be the most important workplace stressor affecting workers in organizations.

In a study relevant to our current examination of janitors' work mistreatment, researchers reported 82% of low wage workers were exposed to at least one occupational hazard such as job strain or psychological demands, namely, working very hard and fast. In addition, 79% to at least one social hazard, such as discrimination and workplace abuse, with 15.4% reporting clinically significant psychological distress scores (Krieger et al., 2011). The significant associations with psychological distress occurred among men and women for workplace abuse and high exposure to racial discrimination. High exposure to stressors of occupational hazards and poverty resulted in reports of psychological distress for women but not for men.

We present the findings for discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment, retaliation, psychological abuse, and wage and hour violations. The findings have been organized by type and source of mistreatment. Table 1 below shows the source by type of mistreatment. Management is the greatest contributor of exposures in all types of mistreatment through abusive supervision.

Table 1. Number of participants reporting mistreatment type by source

Note:

Interviews conducted totaled 18. Coworkers, customers or vendors do not commit wage-hour violations.

Mistreatment Type x Source	Management/Supervisor	Coworker	Customer/Vendor
Discriminatory Harassment	13	3	1
Sexual Harassment	10	7	1
Retaliation	13	1	0
Psychological Abuse	18	4	1
Verbal and Physical Abuse	9	1	0
Wage - Hour Violations	11	--	--

## Findings for Discriminatory Harassment

### Management/Supervisor

The most commonly reported source of discrimination came from the janitors' company management and supervisors. Participants' perceptions of discriminatory harassment were described in two ways; either by using the terms *discrimination* or *racism* directly in their response or by noting that their company or supervisor treated them differently from others by targeting them with mistreatment based on their race/ethnicity and/or language difference. In contrast, other workers received better treatment or favoritism. Discriminatory harassment was often described by participants in language such as *favoritism, unfair, unjust, exploitation, taken advantage of, and racist*.

*"I said, 'Even when we have the safety meetings, you talk in your language and the supervisor speaks to you in your language, how come nobody talks to us in our language? We are Hispanic.' I said, 'That's racism. And you shouldn't be telling me. . . that I shouldn't speak Spanish. No.'"*

*"He (supervisor) doesn't talk to me that way, but I feel like other people . . . I've noticed it's more of the immigrants that he speaks to in that manner . . . because he talks crazy to them."*

*“So, his exploitation is only towards me. Because, even the girl (coworker) that works there tells me, ‘I don’t understand why he only is like that with you. He only takes it out on you because he doesn’t come and bother me.’ I told her, ‘I don’t understand either because; I’m doing my job well.’ ”*

Janitors reported mistreatment behaviors related to discriminatory harassment included supervisors ignoring them when asking for help, expecting them to work longer hours when others were let off early, denying overtime, denying vacation leave requests that others received, threatening them, and failing to provide safety training in Spanish.

One participant noted that their employer takes advantage of workers who speak different languages. He gave the example of the company intimidating workers to sign paperwork they do not understand because they do not speak or read English. He concluded by saying, *“That is why it’s important to have a union, to have representation.”*

A supervisor may threaten and intimidate a janitor to send the message that they should not go anywhere to seek help for worker rights violations. As one janitor stated below,

*“And one time he (supervisor) told this lady to take care of fixing her immigration status before going to the union for anything. Telling her, ‘You are going to lose.’ And that was enough to stop this lady and she didn’t say anything. She stopped complaining and she had to put up with everything. . . If you are sure that the company is going to help you then maybe they would come forward. But they are not sure and they are afraid of losing their jobs.”*

Participants pointed out that they had observed patterns of mistreatment and humiliation directed at immigrant janitors who fear taking action to protect themselves even when assistance is available.

*“Because regardless of how much I want to help them, they are afraid (and say), ‘I don’t want to lose my job. I don’t want to lose my job. I have a family.’ and things like that. And that is why a lot of Latinxs remain silent.”*

Finally, a number of immigrant, Latinx participants perceived racism in supervisors choosing to assign them the most difficult tasks, tasks that others did not want to do such as cleaning bathrooms. In some cases, companies directed their supervisors to demand excessive amounts of work that janitors could not complete during their shift even as they ran between cleaning areas and tasks, skipping breaks and meals.

*“I see that the others take breaks. . . Every floor I go to, the women are resting, while I’m running. And that makes me feel bad because, I say, ‘Why can’t I do it, but they can? What can I do?’ I can’t say anything.”*

*“I already complained to her, and to him, and they don’t do anything. Instead of decreasing the workload, they’re giving me more. And well, I wish there were an organization that could help people like me, in the sense that they give me an*

*excessive amount of work. I wish someone could help me, . . . to speak for me, for someone to listen to me. Because, they honestly do not listen.”*

This participant cannot defend herself because she has limited English but she is observant of workplace interactions as shown in her statement below:

*“He (supervisor) wants them to do less work, and load it onto me. He’s only like that with me. . . I see that even with the rest, those of his same race that work there, he doesn’t say anything to them because he knows that they’re not going to let him. . . they get mad and they defend themselves.”*

A participant described the managers of his company as racist and stated, *“They assigned you (immigrants) the worst tasks and even want to work you to death there.”* He went on to say:

*“In reality, the work overload is caused by us because we stay quiet. We do the work because we need to do it. And that need only results in more work.”*

*“This woman who comes in the mornings is a very hard worker. She can work for two . . . If you have a problem or anything she will take care of it immediately. But since she didn’t let her (supervisor) give her a warning, she started taking it out on her. I don’t know what she has against Latinos that she can’t stand them. She humiliates us a lot. She tries to make our lives impossible. She gives us more work.”*

In sum, janitorial workplaces are characterized by particular job conditions of abusive supervision, work overload, low control over schedule and tasks, and lack of support. On more than one occasion, participants described the strong work ethic of immigrant janitors as *“she or he can work for two.”* The janitor stood up for herself with her supervisor over a warning, exerting some assertive control over her job, but she paid a price for it. The heavy work overload, abusive supervision and discriminatory harassment make up a constellation of strong stressors.

## Coworker

Participants had much less to report about coworker discriminatory harassment as compared to discriminatory harassment from managers and supervisors. It is possible that it is hard to detect because the discriminatory behaviors are subtle and are experienced as microaggressions or incivility. Even so, commonly occurring microaggressions cause much distress as the participant explains.

*“So, that does affect me a lot. And it angers me a lot, but I can’t do anything other than sometimes crying alone, from being so upset . . . I get emotional seeing how they (managers) treat me, and they’re not like that with the rest. The others just look at me, mocking me, too, like, saying, ‘Ah, let her be treated as they want to treat her’. . . workers even laugh at me because I can’t speak English.”*

A second participant described an injury caused by a coworker that appeared to be intentional and racist. The coworker purposefully dropped a piece of heavy equipment on the janitor's leg and smiled. The pain of the injury was intense he pushed it back off his leg. This nearly caused the offending janitor to fall.

Overall, the coworker mistreatment was more often psychological aggression, namely, harmful gossip, making false complaints against a coworker, and socially excluding others. The term microaggressions refers to commonplace daily verbal, behaviors, or other situational indignities, intentional or unintentional, that convey hostile, or negative discriminatory slights and insults toward any group, and marginalized groups in particular. While the research literature on microaggressions and incivility describes milder forms of aggression as discriminatory (Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2013; Sue, 2010), because it was not perceived or reported by participants as discriminatory harassment, we chose to report these findings in the later section on psychological abuse.

## Findings for Sexual Harassment

Participants, female and male, reported sexual harassment primarily from supervisors, then coworkers, and in one instance from personnel working in the building and employed by another vendor. The sexual harassment behaviors described were unwanted touching, inappropriate and suggestive looks and staring, inappropriate texting, and showing sexually explicit video clips on cell phones. The findings have been organized by source of sexual harassment.

### Management/Supervisor

Participants described supervisor sexual harassment as particularly difficult because of the power difference created more risk for further harmful consequences. A supervisor used this to his advantage when threatening a janitor, *"Nobody is going to believe you because I am the supervisor and I have been telling everyone that you are a liar."*

There is much uncertainty for a target that reports a supervisor for sexual harassment or assault. Some supervisors did lose their jobs consequently, but in other cases, they kept their jobs and no action was taken by the company to investigate or follow through on the report.

*"I think that the owners and human resources should work harder. They should listen to us ... I have messages with my female coworker about this. We feel that nobody believes us. We feel like nobody listens to us. Who can we trust? I mean, there's no one there."*

One participant admitted that women learn not to report because nothing is done by the company to help or protect them. In her case, she reported to several different managers with no result and noted that the next time she will call the union representative first, even

though she believes the union is limited in what it can do. She learned later that the harasser had targeted several other immigrant janitors and that they did not report out of fear of losing their jobs. He has kept his job. The company moved him from day to night shift, a decision that may put female janitors on the night shift at risk for harassment.

In a similar incident with a different janitor, a sexually harassing foreman, showed her a sexually explicit video on a cell phone and made suggestive comments. He had done this with several other janitors and the company moved him to another building. Even with multiple complaints filed, he remained with the company. He badmouthed the janitor who complained about him in her report. She stated, *“The company simply says, ‘Okay, we’ll talk to him,’ or, ‘We’ll move him.’ Done. Problem solved.”*

## Coworker

Coworker sexual harassment was reported in a range of situations with resolutions that varied, some resolved with the harasser losing their job, others with the harasser moved to another building. Examples of incidents are given below.

A coworker described sexual harassment on her night shift by another janitor repeatedly making advances “tailgating” her until she was afraid. The harasser also saw her in a public place after work and threatened her. Mostly janitors are working separately on their own floors but may meet in a common area and *“never know when they (might) get pinned.”* The team foreman and the janitor reported the incidents and the harasser was eventually fired after harassing multiple janitors in the building.

A male janitor refused a female coworker’s invitation to be in a relationship. What followed was a high level of sexual harassment by his coworkers that included making jokes about his sexual orientation and calling him gay. He notes that male janitors will be suspended when women coworkers report them for sexual harassment, but in his situation, he saw no solution. He described his response as *“keeping to himself at work,”* staying in his job because he has a family and children and, therefore, must endure frequent harassment.

Another janitor brought up her friend at work, a female janitor, who is frequently sexually harassed by coworkers and has become calloused to it. She pointed out that, *“She doesn’t report the sexual harassment because she knows she may not be believed regarding the rumors.”* In addition, it was clear from her comments that some of the sexual harassment by coworkers is thought to be verbal harassment and not understood to be sexual harassment and illegal.

An immigrant janitor reported a conversation about sexual harassment that revealed her greater vulnerability as an immigrant compared to the other janitor. Both were women.

*“One day I saw the girl and I asked her, ‘I haven’t seen you in a while. Is everything okay?’ And she said, ‘They moved me from this building.’ I asked, ‘Why?’ And she*

*said, 'Because the guy who cleans the 21<sup>st</sup> and the 22<sup>nd</sup> floor was bothering me. He touched my butt . . . He tried to kiss me by force.'*

*She is a black woman. So, I asked her, 'Who?' She told me the name of the man. I said, 'Are you being serious?' I said, 'He also bothers me.' She told me she had to go to the police to file a report. And she said, 'You should also go.' But, since I am an immigrant, I am afraid to talk."*

Some of the situations participants reported revealed that sexual harassment exposures could be complex and evolve over time. For example, a male participant and shop steward reported that he observed a female coworker get sexually harassed, asked if she was going to report it and offered to submit a report as a witness if she needed the support. Weeks later, she could not be found on the job when their supervisor searched for her, enlisting the shop steward's help. She got a third reprimand for not being on the job. In anger at the shop steward, she falsely reported that he had sexually harassed her. He did not get suspended because he had documented events and dates including details of all his activity and whereabouts for each day. He submitted these to the supervisor (See case study, p. 12).

## Customer/Vendor

Sexual harassment may occur from any individual at the worksite and one janitor participant reported an incident with another worker who worked for another company working under another company's vendor contract.

*"They were employees of the facility that we were placed at. I clean bathrooms, and I didn't like when people would come inside the bathroom in non-work ways to interact with me. It made my work environment not safe. There's no reason, unless you're the supervisor, to enter the bathroom with me as a female, in a small area, and leer, look, comment. It made me uncomfortable, and I don't feel there is a system in place that you can comfortably report without retaliation, or the agency being more concerned with losing the client or contract than said complainant."*

Janitors also made note of company cultures that foster sexual harassment with one participant expressing some resignation or acceptance of it as a feature of the workplace that she could not fully control.

*"I feel like it's a culture where its (sexual harassment) accepted. There are a lot of males. There are more males working nights than there are females, and the females that do work nights are more of immigrant status than me. . . There is a culture where they want to keep their jobs, so you don't report. You keep your head low, you know?"*

Another janitor commented on the pressure to conform to keep her work hours.



*“A coworker had done that (sexually harassed) a few times. I spoke to my supervisor. He had a conversation with him. He stopped entering the bathroom, but then he was there in the hallway. It was still an atmosphere that you have to have certain toleration for. And you have to play ball if you want your hours . . . That’s the atmosphere that I feel.”*

The participant’s comment above speaks to a company climate where sexual harassment is an acceptable job condition. In order to have paid work this female worker expresses that sexual harassment was the “*atmosphere*” or part of the job.

## Findings for Retaliation

Participants described retaliation by company managers and supervisors for standing up for their rights, reporting injuries, reporting discriminatory and sexual harassment, and for going to the union to take on a role such as shop steward or to seek assistance for employer labor violations. A janitor noted that he was “*being targeted as a shop steward is because I’m pro-union.*”

*“That’s a thing about the janitor. Cover your ass. You’re the lowest man on the totem pole. You are – You are replaceable. But when you have notes, and pictures, that’s how you can fight back. Show up to work on time, do your job, but cover your ass or they will replace you. You are replaceable.”*

Companies target employees with retaliation in many ways. Janitors described retaliatory behaviors that included micromanaging, frequent shadowing, questioning every move, targeting, pushing them to work faster, and personally attacking the worker to humiliate them in front of others.

A frequently mentioned retaliation was giving extra and excessive work. The participants frequently stated that their supervisor wanted to push them into quitting the job. In one example, the participant believed it was done to prevent a report of harassment from being investigated. Participants noted that companies lied to the union about them and made fake allegations against the employee. They reported that supervisors sabotaged their work to set them up for receiving reprimands.

Janitors described supervisors making subtle threats and warnings, blaming the janitor for a supervisor’s failure to provide job resources, manipulating teams and pitting one worker against another, suspending a worker’s schedule for days or weeks, and firing the worker. The message these retaliatory actions send to observant janitors is clear and their response is fear.

*“So, where is the confidence given to us for us to be able to do that? Where are they? They tell you, “Don’t be afraid, and this and that...” Okay. So, educate us or help us to lose that fear. It’s not just saying “Lose the fear.” Because, I’m talking*

*about me, I, for example, from the community I come from, those who speak up get killed. Those who speak up, get put in jail. So, subconsciously, even though I'm in United States, here, subconsciously, when you're told "Speak up," my mind gets blocked. I can't because I'm afraid of losing my job. And when you say something, there's always an action behind it. There's always an action from what you say. Let's say, the action can be harassment. It can be more work. It can be getting fired. But they always find it."*

Supervisors also deny vacation time, lie and claim the worker already took vacation. One worker denied for three years asked again for vacation time and the supervisor replied, *"No, because I don't want to. What if another person wants to take them, then they should have them."*

Finally, one final janitor gave an account of his company's supervisory practice of enlisting their foremen to make workers' lives miserable. This included giving an excessive workload and ordering them not to speak to the union. He also described intimidation with one supervisor saying to him, *"No one can do anything to me."*

## Findings for Psychological Abuse

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Psychological abuse can include behaviors that are overt (e.g., yelling, insulting swearing, put downs, hostile teasing), or covert (manipulation, intimidation, threats, social isolation). These tactics often result in negative emotions for the target such as [fear](#), humiliation, shame, [guilt](#), and anger. Over time, the psychological distress may reach clinical diagnosable levels and mental health conditions can develop, such as [depression](#), [anxiety](#), low [self-esteem](#), and [trauma](#).

Our analysis revealed that managers and supervisors were the primary instigators of psychological abuse and almost all participants gave accounts of these behaviors. The behaviors reported included the overt and covert behaviors mentioned above and supervisory-specific behaviors such as blaming workers for supervisor responsibilities, punishing workers with extra work to set them up for failure, sabotaging janitor's work to give a written reprimand, refusing to comply with employee requests for paperwork, telling workers they are disposable, and exerting excessive control micromanaging – holding a worker to an extremely high standard of cleaning that other workers are not held to. An often-mentioned supervisory tactic was increasing the workload to set up an employee for failure, then criticizing, reprimanding them, and firing them.

A participant conveyed that the companies harass their workers by telling them not to talk to the union or they will get in trouble with the company. *"If she comes here again, don't talk to her. Don't take any of her phone calls."*

A janitor told of a professional photographer who had set up a photo shoot in the building and damaged the lobby floor requiring expensive repairs. Even though video evidence showed otherwise, the company management blamed and humiliated the janitor for the damage. His sense of injustice was keen. He later learned, the company insurance covered it.

The supervisor's tell the workers they are disposable and replaceable, and janitors experienced this as humiliating.

*“ . . . after several years that they have worked for the company, after having made a great effort to do their job, many of them have told me that the supervisor told them, ‘If you leave, fine. Four or five other workers will show up here.’ It’s humiliating because when you say that to a worker you are telling them that you don’t value the work they are doing.”*

Another participant noted that the union helped and still, the company has shifted from aggressive to passive aggressive behavior related to a sexual harassment investigation. For example, they would not respond to her phone calls or give her a company document she requested that stated she would be paid for time away from work due to the investigation that ruled in her favor.

*“I thought we, as a culture, had come further than this. I didn’t realize they just figured out another way to do it. . . And I’m going to be honest, I’m less likely to report it (sexual harassment) in future.”*

An injustice that was particularly hard to bear was supervisor favoritism of some employees and mistreatment of others. The favorites were allowed to chat with others, take longer breaks, and were given a lighter workload. Favoritism was a frequent observation of participants about their workplace and was called out as unfair and demeaning.

*“So, another thing, he wouldn’t go to work much and so the boss would tolerate that, too. He was one of his favorites. But then, that’s why I said that the boss always wins. Even if he’s found out, he always tries to find a way to cover everything up.”*

Negative behavior role modeled by managers and supervisors can spread throughout a team to create a culture of abuse as this participant observed. He went on to describe what targeting looks like; after cleaning an area then taking a break, workers come back to sabotaged work with planted fingerprints and debris, then get singled out (with disciplinary action). He described this as bullying.

*“Managers put the fear, place blame, belittle and knock down workers on a daily basis. It’s your word versus mine, and then the whole company tags in. Then you’re targeted, and then your whole team is targeted.”*

The primary behavior from coworkers was harmful gossip. A janitor reported coworkers always talking, gossiping cruelly about another janitor who eventually quit because of it. *“They did hurt her. They hurt her psychologically because of how they were talking.”*

In conclusion, the findings for psychological abuse, if taken as single incidents, do not seem to be the cause of much harm. However, the harm from microaggressions, covert discriminatory acts, incivility, and abusive supervision accrues over time with each incident exposure.

Understanding and addressing the dynamics of subtle racism and sexism is required or it will remain hidden and potentially harmful to the well-being and standard of living of people of color (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). It has been proposed that the daily common and subtle experiences of aggression that characterize discriminatory harassment may have significantly more influence on racial anger, frustration, and self-regard than traditional overt expressions of racism (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Moreover, when behaviors of aversive racism are covert, perpetrators are less likely to grasp and confront their own complicity in exposing marginalized workers to psychological harm and, in turn, contribute to inequities and disparities in employment, health, and safety.

### Findings for Verbal and Physical Abuse

Participants gave very few examples of verbal and physical abuse, indicating that workplace mistreatment that is overt may be far less common than subtle or covert mistreatment such as psychological abuse. For example, in one case, a participant noted that supervisors yell at, berate, and humiliate janitors in staff meetings.

*“If you’re not wearing the (company) t-shirt, I don’t want you to even come here! I don’t want you to get sick either, you get sick every day! No more getting sick!”*

In another case, the supervisor would grab a janitor’s hand, force him into a chair and throw things to intimidate him.

*“So, what he would frequently do, he had his pen in his hand and he’d throw it against the wall, and it would break apart. I’d freak out, as we say. I’d be aside myself. So, those are things that would intimidate me . . . well, he is the boss, and well, by the experience I have, his words are stronger than mine. Who will they listen to? Well, him, not me. So, those are things that I never, ever, for obvious reasons, had the courage to say to the union.”*

## Findings for Wage and Hour Violations

The [Fair Labor Standards Act \(FLSA\)](#) protects workers from illegal business practices, such as lost wages, rest periods, meal breaks, retaliations, and child labor. In the case of labor violations, a worker files a complaint and an investigation should follow. It is a violation to fire or in any other manner discriminate against an employee for filing a complaint or for participating in a legal proceeding under FLSA.

Janitors reported company violations and retaliation including the following:

- Not including pay for all hours worked.
- Not paying for overtime hours worked.
- Failing to pay an agreed upon hourly wage amount.
- Failing to follow protocols for payment schedules.
- Coercive approaches to discourage janitors from taking breaks and meals.
- Denying health insurance benefits to some workers but not others.
- Not allowing workers to take sick days or leave that other workers are allowed to take.
- Retaliation for reporting discriminatory and sexual harassment, injuries, wage violations.
- Retaliation for speaking up on the job to request changes in work tasks or workload.

In their interview comments, janitor participants, most of whom were immigrants and whose primary language was Spanish, revealed that they had limited knowledge of standard business practices in the United States. These janitors assumed the mistreatment, harassment and retaliation they experienced was “*how things are done here*”, and it took time before they learned that they had experienced rights violations.

For example, one janitor received instruction from a coworker on how to look at her paycheck to see if her pay was correct. She discovered that hours she worked were not included and she commented, “*I think that’s abuse, right, because, they know that I don’t know about that, and so, that’s how they begin to abuse you.*” She reported the violation to her supervisor and he ignored her saying it was not his problem. She was a nonunion worker and never recovered the wages.

Another participant explained that workers come into work early, at the end of the shift they clock out and continue to work in order to complete the work that is assigned to them but impossible to complete in 8 hours. In another case, a janitor says that workers start at 7:00 am and work until 4:30 pm but are paid from 8:00 am until 4:30 pm – missing one hour of pay each day. Finally, an immigrant janitor tells of running to complete work, rarely taking breaks or only 10-minute breaks. The quote below shows how her supervisor pressured her to work through her shift.

*“He told me – saying – he told me that he doesn’t eat so that he can work. He’s insinuating I have to work. I have to dedicate myself to the job, and it doesn’t matter if I take lunch.”*

A participant explained how his supervisor discouraged janitors from filing claims when injured and asked to see the injury report. His supervisor said, *“Leave it that way. Don’t get into trouble.”* This intimidated the worker into not filing a claim. In another case, a company told a janitor with limited English literacy that he was to move to another building and asked him to sign a paper, which he did. He later learned that the paper he had signed said he was fired. The company did not pay him for his last month of work. There were other civil rights violations. His case was taken up by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the union assisted him in finding another job where he is not discriminated against.

Janitors may eventually become aware that employers demand much of them while denying them the benefits accorded to them by law. Without resources and knowledge, immigrant janitors are less likely to find redress for these injustices.

## Job Strains

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The job strains that result from mistreatment and harassment at work have been well established in the work stress literature. Studies reveal health effects relevant to workers’ well-being, including psychological health (Raver & Nishii, 2010; Spector & Jex, 1998; Strazdins, D’Souza, Lim, Broom, & Rodgers, 2004) and physiological health (Raver & Nishii, 2010; Girardi et al., 2015; Strazdins et al., 2004). Research suggests that mistreatment by a manager or supervisor is particularly threatening due to the leader’s legitimate power over the subordinate’s future work.

In early research, job strain was characterized as high job demands combined with low control (Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990). Examples of high demands and low control include pressure to work very fast to complete work during a shift and others, such as a supervisor, choosing when and how a worker completes work tasks (Strazdins et al., 2004).

The mechanism and magnitude by which job demands affect worker health varies across demographics such as gender and race-ethnicity (Raver & Nishii, 2010). Our study participant demographics were primarily, Latinx, immigrant, female workers with limited English and little knowledge of standard workplace practices and worker rights -- a pattern that influences how the mistreatment may affect workers differentially (Saucedo, 2014). This pattern suggests that policymakers should address this issue and take into consideration immigration, gender, and language as factors that shape policy to improve health and safety outcomes (Castañeda et al. 2015).

The findings presented below provide evidence of janitors' physiological and psychological strains. These strains result in harm done to work and nonwork relationships that janitors' draw on for support, economic harm and uncertainty from unpaid wages, and harm from employer retaliatory job actions such as firing janitors.

## Findings for Job Strain

In our analysis, participants described themselves as distressed, overworked, and mistreated in ways that strained them physically, mentally, economically, and relationally. Workers reported enduring much abuse at work and succumbing to business practices that allowed them to complete an "inhumane" quantity of job tasks, oftentimes sacrificing their own personal health. For example, some janitors described running during their shift in order to complete their work. Janitors reported living with diabetes and other chronic illnesses and working through their symptoms and pain to complete their work. One participant describes the physical toll as follows:

*"By the afternoon, my fingers hurt. They curl and cramp. My waist hurts, I can't walk, I can't get out of the car at night. My back hurts terribly, I have only been on those floors like a month and a half, and my health is very poor. I can't stand it."*

Janitors described their physical strains in the context of work overload, due to abusive supervision and exploitation. In addition, workers reported a great deal of psychological strain, humiliation, subjugation, harassment, and disrespect by their employer, supervisor, and sometimes coworkers. Participants described themselves as very "stressed," and as working and living with fear of their supervisor, fear of physical and verbal abuse, fear of losing their jobs and the ability to support themselves and their families. A janitor explained the consequences of working fast, without breaks, and while injured.

*"And they are killing us... When you walk a lot, a lot, a lot, the time comes when you heel starts to hurt... and many people say "you can't complain from walking," right?... but when you are at work, there are times when you don't take your breaks... you don't stop. You don't stop and that is when you start to get hurt."*

Another janitor observed.

*"My friend is ill. . . there's another lady who is starting to lose her hair. And it's due to stress."*

Janitor participants' most commonly reported strain was psychological distress with nearly every participant reporting this form of strain. Specifically, this included reports of humiliation, exploitation, social exclusion and the psychological pain of experiencing discriminatory harassment and micro-aggressions due to gender, race and ethnicity, immigrant standing, lack of English proficiency, for example. Janitors' described the

distress and anxiety as linked to stress-related physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, lack of appetite and sleep, all of which contributed to weakness, fatigue, dehydration, and fainting. As one participant managing a serious health condition while working described,

*“I was afraid to go to the bathroom to warm myself up or to use the bathroom because I was afraid they (supervisor) were checking on me. So, any little thing made me cry and I was shaking.”*

One participant’s mother passed away and through this hardship, he needed extra support finishing his tasks. However, his team belittled him and called him a liar. He kept pushing through to finish his work noting that it caused him a lot of pain. *“Like there are times I sat in my car. I couldn’t get out of my car because I could not get out because I was in so much pain.”* The participant did not know how much physical, emotional, and mental strain he could take before quitting, saying, *“I think it just really breaks a person down.”*

A janitor who was sexually harassed and then threatened with harm outside of work made the next comment. She reported that she did not feel safe at home or in her own community because the perpetrator lived in the same part of town. She stated that she lived in fear that the perpetrator would get her address or follow her home and hurt, rape, or kill her. Her supervisor advised her not to get the union involved because she could lose her job. She did not feel safe or protected by her employer or the police.

*“If I go out to the park with my children, I don’t feel safe. I really don’t feel safe because I am not protected by the police and at work they didn’t protect me either when it was time to protect me.”*

The second most reported strain was financial strain and the *“need to survive”* even if it meant continuing to work under conditions of mistreatment. A majority of the participants reported financial strain. Janitors reported reduced work hours and job losses due to retaliation or for any reason related to their mistreatment. A number of participants stated that the fear of losing their jobs led workers to withstand unjust work conditions, remain silent about workplace harassment and injuries due to potential loss of income and the ability to support themselves and their families. A janitor reported multiple strains after a work-related back injury. She complained to the union about the work overload. Her supervisor learned of this and cut back her work hours.

*“When she told me that she didn’t have any work for me, I fought to get it back and I suffered from panic attacks and depression. I couldn’t sleep for two or three weeks because of depression. So, that’s why I asked the doctor, ‘Give me my job back, doctor. I said, ‘Give it back to me because it’s even worse for me to stay at home’. My panic attacks and health are worsening and I am even more scared of that than I*



*am of the back pain. And that's when the doctor released me but she didn't release me because I am okay. She did it because I asked her to."*

Participants reported on the problem of negative spillover from work to family and friend relationships. This included participants bringing home physical fatigue and depressed feelings and frustrations experienced due to demanding workloads, and/or difficult relationships with their supervisors. Janitors acknowledged the exhaustion and stress left them little to no energy to spend time, take care of, and engage in meaningful ways with their families.

*"You come home tired and everything hurts and you are sad because of the bad time you had at work, because you were running around and you feel stressed. . . That also affects your family life because they don't deserve to see me angry or sad or whatever. I can't take care of them and they end up paying for it too."*

Finally, some janitors recognized that taking out their frustrations on their significant others and children was unfair. Others said they did not talk about their work problems at home to protect their families from knowing how they were mistreated.

In sum, janitors reported an understanding that their work conditions put wear and tear on their bodies over time. They take home their frustrations and stress along with the physical and mental strains from their work, leaving them exhausted with little energy for family or friends. The combination and accumulation of these strains is costly to worker health over time. Even so, participants are enduring, hardworking and resilient. In spite of the abuse, they push through the physical pain and emotional toll of mistreatment to not only complete their work, but also hold onto their pride in their work. Participants expressed that they want to work, and they want respect, justice, and to be treated like human beings, with dignity.

## Resources: Assertive Resilience and Social Support

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### Hardiness and Assertive Resilience

In our analysis, a majority of participants spoke about their mistreatment in ways that reflected resiliency, the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, mistreatment, threats or even significant sources of risk (Ozbay et al., 2007). Resilience researchers, George Bonanno and colleagues, define hardiness as, "being committed to finding meaningful purpose in life, the belief that one can influence one's surroundings and the outcome of events, and the belief that one can learn and grow from both positive and negative life experiences" (2004, p.25).

Hardiness and assertive response were two aspects of resilience participants described when confronted with mistreatment on the job. The janitors exhibiting hardiness remained positive and saw the "silver lining" in the hardships they were experiencing. They came

up with creative ways to take control of their situations to help themselves or their coworkers. This includes seeking skills or knowledge to protect themselves; seeking assistance from and joining the union; strategizing to find a new job; working together to help each other; and documenting their experiences.

*“I’m fed up. I became shop steward. I’m gonna be doing everything I possibly can to become educated too. I first started with standing up, then being active. Winning our labor management less floors. What they do is they add more. It’s not less.”*

Assertiveness is a social skill that relies on effective communication, while simultaneously respecting others. An assertive response is one where communication is clear and respectful of one’s wants, needs, positions, and boundaries in relation to others. Highly assertive people will stand up for their viewpoints or goals, seek to help others to see their perspective, and are open to positive feedback and constructive criticism. One janitor describes using his foreman role to advocate for worker rights.

*“I don’t feel capable of being – how can I say it? Pushing my own people. Strangling them to make someone else rich, or do that to myself, either. Because, people get tired. People have a right to breathe. They have a right to use the bathroom. They have a right to drink water.”*

Another janitor, wanting to stop the mistreatment, sought out education for a better job.

*“I don’t want to be a doormat, I don’t want them to continue mistreating me and I want... I rather help (myself) that is why I decided to take classes online. I am studying. I want to stay in this job for a little while until I can finish or until I can find work in something better.”*

Even as some janitors succeeded in using assertiveness to their advantage, many others were reluctant to risk speaking up for fear of retaliation. Filing reports of sexual harassment were especially difficult.

*“Yes, and nobody did anything. I filed a report against him and I also reported him to another supervisor who used to be a supervisor there and she was also an area supervisor. And she said that she was going to talk to human resources and nothing happened. I reported with another woman (building supervisor) who also deals with issues in the building and she told me, ‘All that I can offer you is to change you to another building.’ And I said, ‘If you think that is the best solution go ahead.’ But in the end – the following day they told me not to come into work and on Tuesday I found out that they had already fired me.”*

Resilience is also fostered by social support from others in the workplace. The link between resilience and support is apparent in the following participant comment from a

janitor describing how in supporting each other, she and another janitor held a sexual harasser accountable. One of them helped the other file a police report and tells her,

*“Go to the police station. Give them the papers that I handed to you and tell them that he has done this to you. That way they can see that I am not the only victim.”*

## Social Support

Numerous studies show a direct link between quality relationships characterized by high social support to overall mental and physical health and well-being (Kumar et al., 2012). In addition, research on social support strongly suggests that the more support employees receive from their workplace, the more favorable their occupational health and well-being outcomes (e.g., Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Viswesvaran et al., 1990). It has also been found that perceptions of abusive supervision are strongly linked to perceptions of injustice in the workplace (Mackey et al., 2017) and under those conditions social support from coworkers, for example, may protect workers from some of the harmful effects of the abusive supervision (Caesens et al, 2018).

Multiple sources of social support, and *particularly manager and supervisor support*, are important resources for health and well-being at work and need strong consideration as key components toward promoting employee health. Sources of social support found in the workplace include the organization (i.e., company management, human resources), direct supervisors, coworkers, union shop stewards at the job site, and union members at events held at the union location. Other sources of support are family and friends, community programs and organizations, and government or private social and health services.

*Company support* refers to positive social interactions in which janitors received needed help from managers and supervisors. Examples include leaders who:

- Provide and fairly implement policies and procedures to prevent or address discriminatory harassment or mistreatment in the workplace.
- Assist in making schedule arrangements to help janitors balance work and family responsibilities including illness.
- Ensure janitors receive resources i.e., training and equipment for safety and health. Assign and distribute work tasks fairly and reasonably.
- Role model positive behaviors such as consistent policy implementation and quick, respectful response to harassment incidents -- providing inclusive and just treatment of all janitors on the team.

*Coworker support* refers to positive social interactions in which janitors receive needed help with tasks from their team member or in other aspects of their work such as receiving advice on how to handle a work conflict. Examples of support include coworkers who:

- Go out of their way to be helpful when a janitor is behind on their work tasks.
- Cover for a sick janitor and support janitor coworkers during difficult circumstances.
- Role model good team behaviors such as civility, inclusion, and fairness.
- Positively intervene to correct rumors, misinformation, and unconscious bias.

Social support might be the complement to mistreatment and harassment, if it were a common and expected normative behavior. That is, if everyone is supportive, then there is little mistreatment. However, even one supportive person in the target's workplace, might be enough to reduce the otherwise harmful effects of harassment. Moreover, this reduction might be most effective when the social support action matches the needs and wants of the target or is particularly important in relation to the specific stressor in some way (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Yragui et al., 2012). Lack of support or low levels of work support is a psychosocial stressor that research has found to be a strong risk factor for poor physical health (e.g., injury, general health; Niedhammer et al., 2008) and mental health outcomes (e.g., depressive symptoms; Niedhammer et al., 2020; Schutte et al., 2016).

Research shows that effective leadership (Arnold & Walsh, 2015) as well as social/emotional support at work (Miner et al., Yragui et al., 2017) and home (Lim & Lee, 2011) can reduce the negative effects of mistreatment and harassment. Finally, a study demonstrated that a relatively brief training program helped managers become more supportive and less abusive (Gonzales-Morales et al., 2018).

## Findings for Social Support

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Every participant responded to social support questions and a pattern emerged with social support as one of the strongest themes in the study -- including manager and supervisor support, coworker support, union support, and a lack of support from company managers and supervisors. Participant responses converged to describe social support as meaningful and janitors expressed a great need for help with handling mistreatment such as discriminatory or sexual harassment problems. Reports of *lack of support* were also common and emerged as a strong secondary theme.

## Management and Supervisor Support

Participants reported little positive support from managers and supervisors which makes sense given that the strongest theme in the study for management and supervisors was abusive supervision. Only a few participants offered comments regarding company support, in sharp contrast to the support received from coworkers and the union. Still the few comments are worth noting because they do reveal some attitudes and actions that company managers and supervisors take to provide effective solutions that result in

janitors' sense of a respectful and just response to the mistreatment problems they confront.

*“So, I think that my manager is a very good person. She’s understanding, she tries to help everyone, she’s on our side, in an equal way; there is no favoritism with her, being a woman. She treats us very well, but she’s the manager, and she also has the supervisors, who are our immediate bosses.”*

Another participant reported that his team targeted him with harmful gossip and social exclusion. A manager met with the team without the target present and learned that only a few on the large team were the harassers. They were removed and the target described feeling supported, satisfied, and secure in his job. Another janitor reported that the team supervisor was also an immigrant and that she was fair, acting as a mediator to solve issues between the company and the janitors.

## Coworker Support

Some workers form strong bonds of trust with their coworkers where they safely vent frustrations or discuss their work mistreatment. Through these relationships, they can be heard and receive affirmations of their experiences with mistreatment. Other participants express receiving support when they need help finishing their work tasks. Participants reported that they share union and labor rights information and resources with each other, as well as encourage each other to take their breaks, support each other when they do not feel well at work, and walk a coworker to her car at the end of the night shift. For some workers, a coworker’s support is the only support they receive, especially when they experience mistreatment by a supervisor or another worker. Additionally, janitors noted that coworker support provided empathy, validation of experiences, motivation to act, strength and connection.

A participant received help from a coworker when their supervisor harassed her, giving her a much higher workload compared to her team members.

*“But that’s not the way she (the supervisor) does that. It’s very humiliating. And he (coworker) said, ‘She’s not okay. I know she’s not okay. Hang in there. Hang in there for two months. There are people who are going to leave and maybe she’ll move you somewhere.’ ”*

When an immigrant janitor experienced discriminatory harassment from a supervisor, it was not until a coworker told her about the union that she started informing herself. However, she was very fearful of going to the union because of company retaliation - being fired or assigned more work. *“So, it is a bit frightening in the beginning, but after I came to the union and I learned about my rights, I was no longer afraid. I was no longer afraid, and I told my coworkers about it.”*

Another participant tried to support his coworkers the best he could in his role as a janitor foreman, but sometimes his supervisors and managers did not want to offer the same level of support to workers. In one instance when a coworker did not feel well and was feeling dizzy, he wanted to drive her home to be safe, but his supervisors and managers told him to let her go. In another occasion, his female coworker who he gives a ride to work shared with him that a male coworker makes her feel uncomfortable. So, when the harassing coworker (the one harassing his coworker) asks to work with her, the foreman participant said no.

Janitors working under conditions of work overload that can be dehumanizing, offer their coworkers words of support that add humanity to their work lives.

*“I tell her, “No, don’t worry. Eat slowly. Look, we do what we can and if we don’t make it on time then it’s fine. We are humans. We are not—we are not robots. We do what we can and then we can continue tomorrow because either way it’s not enough time.”*

## Union Support

The janitors’ local union SEIU Local 6, is oriented toward providing all types of support to protect janitors from workplace harm. This support is critical when employers do not respond to worker reports of harassment or complaints about rights violations and mistreatment. Even so, our data suggests that for immigrant janitors, accessing union support is constrained by fear of retaliation when a company fires them or threatens to fire them for seeking union assistance.

*“Most of the companies are having labor-management meetings to solve the problems in the buildings. It has been working, but the companies are still taking advantage especially of the workers who never talk and never complain. They are afraid to come and talk to the union.”*

The janitor’s union was the most often mentioned source of support by nearly every participant. Types of union support noted by participants included a strong emphasis on informational and tangible support, with emotional support offered as well. Participants reported the following union actions as supportive:

- Assists janitors in filing grievances, reporting sexual harassment, writing statements defending themselves against false accusations, and writing up complaints regarding wage and hour violations.
- Assists workers in recovering jobs lost by employer illegitimate firing practices.
- Provides education regarding actions to take to prevent or address worker rights violations, skill development opportunities, networking, finding jobs.

- Provides connection, and belonging through the shop steward role, i.e., meetings and support groups where janitors can take steps to address workplace rights violations.
- Facilitates janitors' moves to a different building or to change jobs to work with a respectful, law-abiding company, also problem solving, and arbitration.
- Works with janitorial company management to solve problems in the buildings.

Union representatives are very busy responding to many calls from janitors who may be easily discouraged because of their fear of company retaliation. A janitor commented below.

*“Sometimes you are calling them and they are answering the phone or are talking to another person at the same time. They don't hear you. So, that is disappointing and it's scary for the people who are there because they say, 'I'm not going to see any results. What am I going to do? I'm not going to lose my job' and then they (janitors) put up with everything.”*

Another janitor describes, from his perspective, how difficult it is for coworkers to report to the company or to the union due to fear. Then he goes on to say that, yes, support from the union is there if one can move from fear to confidence.

*“I say it from experience. No one is going to talk. Even worse – worse when you have the company, like in Seattle, that isn't a part of the union. But they (union) take us all and say, 'Okay, tell me what's wrong' . . . No one says anything because they're afraid of the boss. And how, with the union, am I going to say something in front of my coworkers? When I know that some of them are snitches. They're going to give me the finger. . . I've realized that if we really got involved, taking it more consciously to the union, there is support. There is support. The thing is that we have to look for it because we feel confident. We feel protected. So, that's when you go to the union. For the moment, it's a new feeling. But I feel a little more support from the union because I've personally seen that the person is fighting for the workers.”*

The importance of union support is in evidence in the two situations below, where without the intervention and protection from the union, the costs to the janitors would be high.

In one case, a janitor wrongly accused of sexual harassment by a coworker protected himself by applying knowledge and skills learned through his union involvement as a shop steward (see case study below). He documented his work with photos to prevent the kind of work sabotage he had experienced before. He made notes each day to answer the false accusations, stayed in touch almost daily with his union representative, and communicated frequently with his supervisor to share his notes and photos, finally saying, *“You've got to fix this.”* He acknowledges the union's value.

*“And you – you will replace me within a heartbeat if I didn’t have the union, and if I didn’t take notes, and take pictures. It’s about, you know, what you can prove.”*

In the case study below, a participant was not aware that her company did not pay her fully for her hours worked and was withholding the health insurance normally provided to all employees. Discovering that there was no health insurance coverage for herself and her baby greatly distressed her. The union fought for her to recover wages for the hours and advocated for her insurance coverage.

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## Case Study: Union Support as a Resource for Resolving Harassment

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The case study affords an examination of incidents and actions related to a janitor’s sexual harassment exposure. “Martha” is a female, Latinx, immigrant, Spanish speaker, and non-union janitor at the time of the sexual harassment instigated by her supervisor. The core set of incidents occurred over a three-week period.

To protect participant privacy, details in the case study represent a compilation of reports from participants. In this way, we preserve the meaning and impact of a sexual harassment exposure while ensuring that individuals cannot be identified.

### Sequence of Events

- Martha’s supervisor attempted to touch her, spoke in sexually explicit manner. He made sexist comments: *“This job is for men.” “We need more men here.”* He sent her unsolicited text messages: *“I’ll miss you.”*
- Martha filed her first sexual harassment report with a company manager who advised her to first talk to her supervisor (i.e., harasser) in person and then report back to him and he would report the incident, but did not.
- Her supervisor continued to target her with sexist comments. He scolded her for the same behaviors that others on her team practiced.
- Martha filed a second report on the sexual harassment incidents to a female area supervisor who said she would talk to Human Resources, with no response.
- Martha filed a third report to another supervisor who normally handles issues in the building. This person offered to move her to another building.
- Employer retaliation followed. After being told she could move, the company fired her. The company then falsely accused her of sexually harassing a co-worker and produced several witnesses to support the accusation. Martha confirmed that she did not make any sexual comments to others at work.



- Martha described strains from the stress exposure and hardships due to her job loss. Her mental health deteriorated into a deep depression. She felt isolated from her family and daughter in Honduras. She made a number of suicide attempts in the next few weeks. The job loss meant she had to find a job by month's end or move out of her apartment.

## Union Support Resources

- The Union provided support after Martha reported the sexual harassment incidents to them. They responded by immediately investigating the issue. However, witnesses declined to participate in the investigation out of fear of retaliation. The union helped Martha go through the grievance process. She met with the company and a union representative and succeeded in getting her job back. During these crises, the union support buffered the stress in a number of ways. Aware of Martha's severe psychological distress, a representative texted, called, and met with her to check-in and invite her to participate in union activities.
- She became involved and attended union monthly meetings, participated in a professional development training, helped create a social support group for women for sexual harassment trauma recovery and growth.
- Martha received emotional support and gained a sense of belonging. She shared and processed the trauma in a safe environment and listened to other people's stories that let her know she was not alone. She benefitted from members sharing additional resources and coping strategies.

Martha improved as she continued to seek more opportunities to heal and grow. She reported that she still struggles in some respects, especially with missing her family, yet she finds strength and motivation in thinking of her daughter.

To summarize, the union provided various types of support including; 1) instrumental support in filing a grievance and representing Martha to resolve the sexual harassment problem; 2) emotional support and belonging via a support group for processing trauma; 3) informational support and education regarding sexual harassment; 4) increased access to additional resources, and 5) support for starting a new direction with professional development. Taken together, the union provided an extremely powerful set of support approaches. These functioned in way that enabled Martha's own actions toward a recovery that restored her health and well-being.

## Case Evaluation

Martha was sexually harassed and then retaliated against by her management team for reporting the incidents. The wrongful acts she experienced at work included sexual harassment, sexual assaults, and workplace intimidation. Company management did not investigate Martha's complaints of harassment, allowing the harassing supervisor to

continue working for the company. The managers retaliated against Martha by falsely accusing her of sexual misconduct and terminating her job. Martha denied any sexual harassment misconduct on her part.

This case study raises the question of how small and large companies maintain their compliance to (R.C.W 43.01.135). Companies and workers must be well prepared in terms of sexual harassment knowledge including laws, policies, procedures, and best practices in the workplace for prevention and to address incidents when they occur, for example, encouraging reporting and conducting thorough and timely investigations. A larger company may have more resources and motivation to comply with the rule of law in comparison to a small company with few resources. In this case, we ask if this company had the proper policies and procedures in place. Are the managers, supervisors trained, and knowledgeable? Are they consistently implementing and enforcing policies and procedures? Are employees receiving training on the topic? Finally, what additional means exist to enforce the current labor standards for sexual harassment exposures or to prevent sexual harassment in the first place?

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### Lack of Support and Low Support

Support that is needed and wanted but not received is a strong social stressor. Nearly every participant struggled with lack of support at work. There are various sources of lack of support including company management and human resources, supervisor, coworker, and union. The most frequently mentioned as unsupportive were the company managers, HR, and supervisors.

Participants noted that their supervisors prioritized the work tasks and schedule above all else, even at a cost to their health. They expressed their concerns and filed reports about sexual harassment, lack of equipment, work overload, or not feeling well at work. They also described a lack of response to their complaints, supervisors not listening, and no change taken to correct injustices such as sexual harassment or other mistreatment. This was the case for the participant below who reported sexual harassment.

*“So, I am a little bit upset with that company because I don’t know if they think that I don’t have any rights because I am a woman... I mean, it’s not fair. It’s not fair to be harassed at work and that the companies don’t do anything about it.”*

A participant, working alone at night cleaning bathrooms in a high-rise building was sexually harassed and filed a report with the company and a complaint to the union when the company ignored her report. After a complicated series of interactions that included retaliation, she retained her job with union support. However, the janitor reported that the company continued to be unsupportive.

*“Even after everything, the job wanted me to go to a sexual harassment class by myself -- not all of our company getting trained (with) everyone sitting in the room. They wanted me, singular, by myself, to take a sexual – I feel like I’m being punished for saying, ‘I don’t like this behavior.’”*

When confronting discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment and retaliation, janitors’ need for support and assistance is great. Participants described the struggle of lack of support at work, the frustration, confusion, distress, and overwhelming sense of helplessness. They found the harassment and lack of support strained their relationships with their family and friends. The low support conditions also affected janitors’ physical and mental health as it exacerbated other problems such as work overload, and working while unwell. Reports included, heart attack symptoms and physical injuries incurred on the job. The comment below is from a janitor who fainted from work overload and stress.

*“They don’t care. . . from what I heard, he supposedly said to tell me that when I wasn’t feeling well, to go home, to not faint there. He was even upset because since the girl saw that I wasn’t well, she called the paramedics. (Next day) I continued with my job. He hasn’t asked me, how are you feeling now? Nothing. He doesn’t care. He doesn’t care.”*

Additionally, a few workers stated that the union did not adequately support them when they sought help for harassment at work. It was clear from participants’ descriptions of their mistreatment problems that they may not have fully grasped the distinctions of management and labor roles, and with immigrant status, this is understandable. It was also not always clear from their comments if their particular situation was one that did not fit into the union’s defined area of authorized support actions.

In some cases, the degree to which janitors were overwhelmed by their problems could not be met by the support they did receive from the union. The sexual harassment incidents were especially complex and difficult, leaving a sense in participants that there was no attainable justice or satisfaction. Support may not be available when a sexual harassment case is under investigation and there are restrictions on talking to other parties. Finally, the company managers tell the janitors that the union will not help them and this may shape their perceptions whether or not they received union support.

*“Yes, since the beginning when I started working there, the first thing that they told me was, ‘Hey, don’t go to the union. If anyone calls from the union don’t go because they don’t do anything for janitors. They don’t help. They don’t help. They are just bothering you and they take money away from your check and all of that.’”*

In sum, lack of support emerged as a strong theme. Although there were a small number of reports of company support actions, most reports indicated a lack of support from companies coupled with greater mistreatment. Among participants, a sense of injustice

was strong, not only for the harm endured but also for the insult added to the injury of mistreatment when companies failed to listen, to respond, to investigate, and to act according to the rule of law.

Janitors' health and safety is compromised under hostile work conditions, including mistreatment, discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment, workload assignments they cannot complete in the time allowed, or lack of fair compensation for hours worked. Despite difficult conditions, workers express that they want to work, and they need to work to support themselves and their families. Participants expressed their concerns and desires to safely report discriminatory and sexual harassment without retaliation, for reports to be properly heard and investigated, to be given a fair and reasonable workload for their shift, and to maintain their health and safety on the job.

## Study Strengths and Limitations

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The strengths of qualitative research methods employed for this study include discovery in a new or understudied area of research and the illumination of meaning and intensity of stressful mistreatment work conditions and incidents for janitorial workers. In *qualitative* research, the presentation of rich narrative descriptions of mistreatment stressors and related health strains humanize the research study findings of similar *quantitative* workplace mistreatment studies (Schonfeld & Mazzola, 2013). Qualitative research also has the value of setting a foundation for further hypothesis testing and corroboration of the initial qualitative findings in subsequent quantitative research through methods triangulation with survey research, for example.

In qualitative studies, limitations such as sample size adequacy and sample composition are often concerns as they are with the current study. We conducted a limited number of interviews as a preliminary formative phase of research. We focused on interviews with workers including janitors, janitor foremen, janitor shop stewards, and union representatives that assist janitors: a variety of positions, levels, and perspectives in the industry from a variety of large and small cleaning organizations that provide a broader view of the research topic. We initially planned to conduct interviews with a sample of forty participants. However, we underestimated how difficult it would be to locate and recruit this number of janitors into our study on what is a very sensitive topic.

Recruitment efforts met with many challenges. The greatest challenge was the hesitant response to the sensitive topic of workplace harassment, sexual harassment and violence; a reaction that we documented in our data collection field notes. Our notes reveal that due to the sensitive topic, janitors, especially non-union represented workers, expressed a reluctance to participate for fear of retaliation from their companies and risk of losing their jobs. It is also possible that we missed recruiting those janitors with the greatest levels of burnout, depression, and poor health from their work, making it difficult for them to participate.

Moreover, we found that even with our bilingual Latinx researchers in charge of recruitment efforts, immigration and language barriers made it difficult to reach janitors, particularly nonunion janitors. Working night shift meant there was limited time for janitors with busy lives to participate. Given more access, we would have interviewed more immigrant, non-union represented janitors, (in languages such as Amharic, Somali, and Vietnamese) the most difficult to reach. The study would benefit with the inclusion of other company employees with an additional focus of efforts toward reaching supervisors and managers for their perspectives.

Increasing the number of interviews would have allowed us to reach saturation or completeness in our data and would have improved our ability to do a more complex and comprehensive qualitative data analysis on the most sensitive themes. Even so, the janitors who participated in this research made a valuable contribution on an understudied topic in the janitorial industry and, for this reason, the study has been successful in its objectives to increase knowledge and pave the way for future actions that foster healthy and just work environments for janitors.

## Recommendations

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The following recommendations come from our research findings including the suggestions from the participants in response to a question asking for their ideas. We provide them as a guideline and starting place to address workplace mistreatment and harassment in the janitorial sector:

- Labor standards enforcement - increase effectiveness to better protect workers by strengthening Labor & Industries wage/hour and worker rights enforcement program.
- Sexual harassment policy revisions to include protection related to abusive supervision (See CA AB 2053; Sub Appendix C).
- Training for workers in worker protections and rights related to wage and hour violations, discrimination, sexual harassment, psychological harassment, and retaliation.
- Training applicable to employers that mirrors the training topics for workers.
- Address social support and resilience – strengthen social programs, labor policies, and union capacity for worker programs that support problem solving and education, and build resilience and health. Address janitors’ requests to be treated with equality, humanity, dignity and respect.

## Summary and Conclusion:

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This research contributes new knowledge regarding the mistreatment and harassment of janitor workers. The study findings are in alignment with previous research on workplace

mistreatment and confirm that it is a strong social stressor in the workplace. Our findings also suggest that janitors' health and well-being would benefit from interventions that reduce mistreatment and harassment, but also increase knowledge and social support.

Our findings present participants' perceptions that their health, safety, well-being and performance was harmed by mistreatment, harassment and retaliation mostly from managers, supervisors and less so from coworkers at their places of work. This research opens up an opportunity to address the occupational exposures and health and safety impairments janitors experience on the job. Toward that end, we have provided recommendations as suggestions to provide additional resources for janitors that seek recourse to limit these harms or prevent them in the first place.

Finally, janitorial workers in low wage, low control, and low support jobs experience individual combinations of stressors and subsequent mental and physical health decrements -- consequences of exposures to workplace abuses such as discriminatory harassment and abusive supervision. Future research analyses from our janitor survey quantitative data are needed to fully examine and potentially corroborate the findings from the qualitative research findings presented in this report.

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## Sub Appendix A: Glossary of Terms and Definitions

“Abusive Conduct” means behavior in a work setting that qualifies as workplace aggression, workplace assault, inappropriate sexual behavior, or sexual assault.

“Abusive Supervision” means subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which their managers or supervisors engage in the prolonged display of nonphysical hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors—such as public ridiculing and belittling, undermining subordinates’ work, giving subordinates the silent treatment, and invading subordinates’ privacy.

“Unlawful harassment” as stated in RCW 10.14.020 means a knowing and willful course of conduct directed at a specific person which seriously alarms, annoys, harasses, or is detrimental to such person, and which serves no legitimate or lawful purpose. The course of conduct shall be such as would cause a reasonable person to suffer substantial emotional distress, and shall actually cause substantial emotional distress to the person.

“Discrimination” means employment discrimination prohibited by Chapter 49.60 RCW including discriminatory harassment.

“Discriminatory harassment” is unwelcome conduct that is based on a protected class listed in RCW 49.60.030(1) where the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive. "Discriminatory harassment" includes sexual harassment.

“Sexual Harassment” is a specific type of workplace aggression. The research sexual harassment definition most widely known is that issued by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1980. The definition states that sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- 1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment,
- 2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or
- 3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance, or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

“Inappropriate sexual behavior” means nonphysical acts of a sexual nature that a reasonable person would consider offensive or intimidating, such as sexual comments, unwanted requests for dates or sexual favors, or leaving sexually explicit material in view. An act may be considered inappropriate sexual behavior independent of whether the act is severe or pervasive enough to be considered sexual harassment.

“Microaggression” refers to the negative actions or exclusions that constitute a subtle discrimination of targeted individuals. These include the everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that members of marginalized groups experience in their day-to-day interactions with individuals who consciously or unconsciously engage in racism and sexism in an offensive or demeaning way. Microaggressions are based on the assumptions about racial and gendered matters that are absorbed from culture.

"Sexual assault" means any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient.

"Sexual contact" has the same meaning as in RCW 9A.44.010.

"Sexual harassment" has the same meaning as in RCW 28A.640.020.

“Stalking” refers to intentional and repeated harassment or repeatedly following another person; that places the followed person in fear of intentional harm; with the feeling of fear being one that a reasonable person in the same situation would experience under all the circumstances.

"Workplace aggression" means acts of nonphysical hostility or threats of violence in the work setting, such as cornering an individual or slamming a door. "Workplace aggression" includes verbal aggression such as yelling, insulting, or belittling an individual.

"Workplace violence," "violence," or "violent act" means the occurrence of physical assault or physically threatening behavior in a work setting, such as hitting, kicking, biting, or bumping with intentional force. "Workplace violence," "violence," and "violent act" includes physical assault or verbal threat of physical assault involving the use of a weapon or a common object used as a weapon, regardless of whether the use of a weapon resulted in injury.

## Sub Appendix B: Harassment Interview Instrument - English

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The questions I am asking you today concern your work as a janitor.

1. How did you get started doing janitor work?
  - a. What was your first janitor job like?
  - b. Was there any harassment in that job?
2. In the past year or two, working as a janitor, have you been aware of someone being harassed or bullied on the job?
3. When someone is harassed or bullied what kinds of things can happen to them? You may tell your own story or the story of someone you know.
  - a. Probe for situations, location, time of shift, and specific behaviors
  - b. Probe for reactions, reporting, emotional reactions, support seeking, leaving job etc.
4. Have you or others been sexually harassed while working?
  - a. Probe for situations, location, time of shift, and specific behaviors
  - b. Probe for reactions, reporting, emotional reactions, support seeking, leaving job etc.
5. Another problem at work is physical assault, getting pushed or hit, or sexual assault where someone is touched inappropriately or forced to be sexual when they don't want to be. Do you know if this has happened in your workplace?
  - a. Probe for situations, location, time of shift, type of assault and specific behaviors
  - b. Probe for reactions, reporting, emotional reactions, support seeking, leaving a job etc.
6. Do you know if janitors report these incidents after they happen?
  - a. Probe: How do they make a report (to whom, what method, verbal written form)
  - b. Probe: If someone chooses not to report, what are the reasons why? (i.e., retaliation)
7. How does harassment affect you or janitors you work with?
  - a. Probe: Effects of physical or sexual assault
  - b. Probe: Effects on target's physical, mental well-being, work, safety behaviors
  - c. Probe: Effects on a witness observing or hearing about these incidents
8. How do people help each other when someone is in a threatening situation and could get hurt?

- a. Probe: What do coworkers say and do? Supervisors? Owners? Others?
- 9. What can be done to increase safety from harassment and violence?
  - a. Probe: By coworkers? By supervisors? By Owners? By unions? By others?
- 10. What is the biggest lesson we should learn about how to be safe from harassment or violence?

Las preguntas que le voy hacer son sobre su trabajo como empleado/a de limpieza- janitor.

1. ¿Cómo empezó a trabajar como empleado de limpieza- janitor?
  - a. ¿Cómo era su primer trabajo de empleado de limpieza- janitor?
  - b. ¿Hubo algún acoso en ese trabajo?
2. En el último año o dos, trabajando como empleado de limpieza- janitor, ¿ha estado al tanto de alguien acosado o acosada en el trabajo?
3. Cuando alguien es acosado o acosada en el trabajo, ¿qué tipo de cosas les pueden pasar? Puede contar su propia historia o la historia de alguien que conozca.
  - a. Incite para situaciones específicas, la hora del turno, y comportamientos.
  - b. Incite para reacciones, reportes, reacciones emocionales, búsqueda de apoyo, dejar el trabajo, etc.
4. Han sido acosadas/os sexualmente, usted u otras personas mientras trabajaban?
  - a. Incite para situaciones específicas, la hora del turno, y comportamientos.
  - b. Incite para reacciones, reportes, reacciones emocionales, búsqueda de apoyo, dejar el trabajo, etc.
5. Otro problema serio en el trabajo es el asalto físico, ser empujado o golpeado, o el abuso sexual donde alguien es tocado/a de una manera inapropiada o forzado/a ser sexual cuando no quiere serlo. ¿Sabes si esto ha sucedido en tu trabajo?
  - a. Incite para situaciones específicas, la hora del turno, y comportamientos.
  - b. Incite para reacciones, reportes, reacciones emocionales, búsqueda de apoyo, dejar el trabajo, etc.
6. ¿Sabe si empleados de limpieza- janitors, reportan o informan estos incidentes después de que suceden?
  - a. Incite: ¿Cómo hacen un informe? (¿A quién, de que manera, de forma verbal o escrita?)
  - b. Incite: si alguien elige no reportar, ¿Cuáles son las razones por que deciden eso? (por ejemplo, desquite o venganza)
7. ¿Cómo le afecta el acoso a usted y a otros empleados con quien trabaja?
  - a. Incite: efectos de agresión física o sexual más grave.
  - b. Incite: efectos en el bienestar físico, mental, laboral y riesgos de seguridad personales
  - c. Incite: efectos en la observación de testigos sobre estos incidentes.



8. ¿Cómo se ayudan entre ustedes cuando alguien se encuentra en una situación amenazadora y podría lastimarse?
  - a. Incite: ¿Qué dicen y hacen sus compañeros de trabajo? ¿Supervisores? ¿Dueños del edificio? ¿Otros?
9. ¿Qué se puede hacer para aumentar la seguridad y prevenir el acoso y la violencia?
  - a. ¿Por compañeros de trabajo? ¿Por supervisores? ¿Por dueños? ¿Por la unión? ¿Por otros?
10. Según su experiencia, ¿qué le recomendaría que haga a su empleador para ayudar a proteger a empleados contra el acoso y/o la violencia?

## Sub Appendix C: CA AB 2053 (2014)

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CA: Employment discrimination or harassment: education and training: abusive conduct.

### **Assembly Bill No. 2053**

#### CHAPTER 306

An act to amend Section 12950.1 of the Government Code, relating to employment.

[Approved by Governor September 9, 2014. Filed with Secretary of State September 9, 2014.]

#### Legislative Counsel's Digest

AB 2053, Gonzalez. Employment discrimination or harassment: education and training: abusive conduct.

Existing law makes specified employment practices unlawful, including the harassment of an employee directly by the employer or indirectly by agents of the employer with the employer's knowledge. Existing law further requires every employer to act to ensure a workplace free of sexual harassment by implementing certain minimum requirements, including posting sexual harassment information posters at the workplace and obtaining and making available an information sheet on sexual harassment.

Existing law also requires employers, as defined, with 50 or more employees to provide at least 2 hours of training and education regarding sexual harassment to all supervisory employees, as specified. Existing law requires each employer to provide that training and education to each supervisory employee once every 2 years.

This bill would additionally require that the above-described training and education include, as a component of the training and education, prevention of abusive conduct, as defined.

*The people of the State of California do enact as follows:*

SECTION 1. Section 12950.1 of the Government Code is amended to read:

12950.1. (a) An employer having 50 or more employees shall provide at least two hours of classroom or other effective interactive training and education regarding sexual harassment to all supervisory employees in California within six months of their assumption of a supervisory position. An employer covered by this section shall provide sexual harassment training and education to each supervisory employee in California once every two years. The training and education required by this section shall include information and practical guidance regarding the federal and state statutory provisions concerning the prohibition against and the prevention and correction of sexual harassment and the remedies available to victims of sexual harassment in employment. The training and education shall also include practical examples aimed at instructing supervisors in the prevention of harassment, discrimination, and retaliation, and shall be

presented by trainers or educators with knowledge and expertise in the prevention of harassment, discrimination, and retaliation.

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**Ch. 306**

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(b) An employer shall also include prevention of abusive conduct as a component of the training and education specified in subdivision (a).

(c) The state shall incorporate the training required by subdivision (a) into the 80 hours of training provided to all new supervisory employees pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 19995.4, using existing resources.

(d) Notwithstanding subdivisions (j) and (k) of Section 12940, a claim that the training and education required by this section did not reach a particular individual or individuals shall not in and of itself result in the liability of any employer to any present or former employee or applicant in any action alleging sexual harassment. Conversely, an employer's compliance with this section does not insulate the employer from liability for sexual harassment of any current or former employee or applicant.

(e) If an employer violates this section, the department may seek an order requiring the employer to comply with these requirements.

(f) The training and education required by this section is intended to establish a minimum threshold and should not discourage or relieve any employer from providing for longer, more frequent, or more elaborate training and education regarding workplace harassment or other forms of unlawful discrimination in order to meet its obligations to take all reasonable steps necessary to prevent and correct harassment and discrimination.

(g) (1) For purposes of this section only, "employer" means any person regularly employing 50 or more persons or regularly receiving the services of 50 or more persons providing services pursuant to a contract, or any person acting as an agent of an employer, directly or indirectly, the state, or any political or civil subdivision of the state, and cities.

(2) For purposes of this section, "abusive conduct" means conduct of an employer or employee in the workplace, with malice, that a reasonable person would find hostile, offensive, and unrelated to an employer's legitimate business interests. Abusive conduct may include repeated infliction of verbal abuse, such as the use of derogatory remarks, insults, and epithets, verbal or physical conduct that a reasonable person would find threatening, intimidating, or humiliating, or the gratuitous sabotage or undermining of a person's work performance. A single act shall not constitute abusive conduct, unless especially severe and egregious.

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# Appendix C:

# Economic Scan of the Janitorial Services Industry in Washington State

## Executive Summary

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The janitorial services industry in Washington State specializes in providing commercial cleaning services primarily to office buildings, public facilities such as restaurants, and healthcare facilities. In addition, in some districts, the cleaning of elementary and secondary schools is provided by contractors classified in this industry. In 2016, this industry had an annual payroll in Washington State of over \$400 million (County Business Patterns, 2016). Almost 70% of this payroll was employed in the King-Snohomish-Pierce county region. According to Washington State Employment Security Department records, over 18,000 individuals worked within this industry in the second quarter of 2017 (Washington State ESD, 2017).

The majority of commercial cleaning work is performed by workers employed by specialized janitorial services firms who contract either directly with clients, or with a building management firm that provides a range of building management services to clients. An example of such an arrangement would be when a large software

company—the “lead firm”—contracts with a building management firm to arrange for security, grounds keeping and cleaning services to be provided. In turn, the building management firm contracts with several separate vendors to supply these services. These vendors may be independent owner-operated firms or they may be franchised outlets of a large branded janitorial service company. In the latter case, the right to provide cleaning services to the lead firm’s premises is sold to a franchisee in exchange for an account purchase fee, a set percentage of the sales (i.e. royalties) as well as fees for management services (including marketing and contracting). In either case, it is only the janitorial services firm that hires and manages the workforce. They are also responsible for complying with all applicable wage/hour, occupational safety and health and environmental regulations.

The details of the cleaning contract, such as frequency, scope and performance standards to be met, are shaped first by negotiations between the lead firm and the building management firm before bids are solicited from vendors. Consequently, the firm that controls the worksite and determines the scope of the work—the lead firm—is separate from the firm that employs and supervises the workers.

This organizational structure, termed “fissured” or “outsourced”, became widespread in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of a broad set of organizational changes that saw large, multifunctional firms shed many “non-core” activities that had been performed in-house by the firm’s own employees. These activities included human resource management, food services, security, grounds keeping, and janitorial services. The aim of this shift was to allow the firm to focus on its core production and sales functions. The benefits to the lead firm included a better ability to vary its size in response to demand fluctuations,

to take advantage of scale economies in the purchase of services from specialized vendors, and to reduce labor costs for ongoing, non-core activities. The source of labor cost reduction arises from the fact that workers who are directly employed in a large multifunctional firm had both higher wages and better non-wage compensation than did their counterparts working for small, specialized contract cleaning firms. Janitors working for large multifunctional firms would receive the same health care and retirement packages as did “core function” workers. By shedding these activities, lead firms could exclude such workers from participation in such benefits programs and convert a compensation and supervision issue into a single price to be settled by contracting with a vendor in a competitive market (Boden, Spieler, & Wagner, 2016; Weil, 2014). They also shed responsibility for bearing the costs of worker recruitment/retention for payment of any increase in workers’ compensation insurance due to worker injuries on-site. Empirical estimates of the wage reduction realized by firms that outsource such non-core activities range from 4-7% (Dube & Kaplan, 2010) to 15-17% (Berlinski, 2008). These studies also found that outsourced janitorial workers were much less likely to receive employer-sponsored health insurance coverage.

Small janitorial services firms contracting with clients in a competitive market with low barriers to entry for new start-ups are under significant pressure to keep costs low. If they are franchisees, they also must control costs while still following the franchisor’s required standards of performance as well as paying fees for royalties, management and any interest payments on capital borrowed from the franchisor. Such constraints on their revenues may result in a focus on production at the expense of reduced attention to compliance with standards for occupational safety and health as well as wage and

hour rules. The purpose of this project will be to assess whether such pressures affect safety performance of janitorial services contractors, and how such performance may be improved.

The economic scan uses a variety of existing data sources to characterize the Janitorial Industry across Washington State. Descriptive demographic information was pulled from the American Community Survey of the U.S. Census Bureau. Industry and occupation classifications used throughout the scan were the Census Occupation code (4220), and the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code (56). Employment and earnings (including number of full-time equivalent employees (FTE) and headcount employment, number of firms, & hourly earnings for firms) were extracted for employers reporting hours in Washington Industrial Insurance Risk Class 6602-02 or 6602-03 and NAICS 561720. Where available, data were broken out geographically and reported for the following areas: Statewide, Puget Sound (Pierce, King, Snohomish, Thurston, Kitsap, Island, San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom and Mason counties), Metro (King, Snohomish, Pierce, Clark and Spokane counties) and for firms with Out-of-State headquarters. Additional employment and earnings data sources included the WA Dept. of Labor & Industries Workers' Compensation employer tables linked to earnings and headcount data from the Washington State Employment Security Department Quarterly Unemployment Insurance tables. Additional supporting data on hourly wages were extracted from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program. National data showing the shift of janitorial employment towards a concentration within the janitorial services industry derived from OES tables for years 1997 through 2017.

Additional metrics examined were:

- Output Per Hour: the value of output of the services that are produced by a janitorial worker in an hour of work; tracked by the Bureau of Labor Statistics Office of Productivity and Technology.
- Worker Turnover: the percentage of a given firm's workforce that is replaced by new workers when comparing one year with the following year; using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.
- Employer Survival: the percentage of employers active in a baseline year who are still active in the following year; using data from the WA Dept. of Labor and Industries industrial insurance databases for 2005 through 2018.
- Seattle-area Commercial Office Space Supply: information on the amount of office space was abstracted from market reports issued by a private commercial real estate brokerage for the Seattle regional market.

## Conclusions

The janitorial services industry employs over 18,000 individuals and has a payroll of over \$400 million in Washington State. Although janitorial work has always been low-wage, the outsourcing of janitorial work at firms across many industries has shifted most janitorial work to a large number of small, specialized janitorial contractors that compete to provide janitorial services to clients. This has led to a reduction in wages and benefits for janitorial workers. Janitorial work is precarious, with high turnover rates for both janitorial workers and janitorial service firms. Janitorial output per hour has been constant since 2002 and wage growth has tracked closely with the rate of inflation. The workforce is demographically diverse, with about 42% of individuals identifying as other than white/non-Latinx. Janitors working in the Puget Metro region earn higher wages than in rural regions. In recent years, the expansion of commercial office space in the Seattle area has outstripped the growth of the janitorial workforce. This may exert pressure to increase output per hour.





## Introduction

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The purpose of this overview of the janitorial services market is to obtain an understanding of the broader economic factors that condition the environment within which businesses and workers within the janitorial service industry interact and which have consequences for occupational safety and health. Factors affecting the janitorial services market include the shift from the use of in-house janitorial workers to the use of outside janitorial services contractors, the growth of franchising and the rapid expansion of commercial office space entering the Seattle-area market in recent years. These changes have affected the labor market for janitorial work by shifting from integrated employment within multifunctional enterprises, with opportunities for internal promotion, toward a low-wage/high turnover model within an industry characterized by a large and ever-changing number of small enterprises competing for cleaning contracts. In addition, the demographic profile of the janitorial workforce may affect the capacity of this workforce to resist unsafe working conditions.

## Background

The janitorial services industry in Washington State specializes in providing commercial cleaning services primarily to office buildings, public facilities such as restaurants, and healthcare facilities. In addition, in some districts, the cleaning of elementary and secondary schools is provided by contractors classified in this industry. In 2016, this industry had an annual payroll in Washington State of over \$400 million (County Business Patterns, 2016). Almost 70% of this payroll was employed in the King-Snohomish-Pierce county region. According to Washington State Employment Security Department records, over 18,000 individuals worked within this industry in the second quarter of 2017 (Washington State ESD, 2017).

The majority of commercial cleaning work is performed by workers employed by specialized janitorial services firms who contract either directly with clients, or with a building management firm that provides a range of building management services to clients. An example of such an arrangement would be when a large software company—the “lead firm”—contracts with a building management firm to arrange for security, grounds keeping and cleaning services to be provided. In turn, the building management firm contracts with several separate vendors to supply these services. These vendors may be independent owner-operated firms or they may be franchised outlets of a large branded janitorial service company. In the latter case, the right to provide cleaning services to the lead firm’s premises is sold to a franchisee in exchange for an account purchase fee, a set percentage of the sales (i.e. royalties) as well as fees for management services (including marketing and contracting). In either case, it is only the janitorial services firm that hires and manages the workforce. They are also responsible for complying with all applicable wage/hour, occupational safety and health and environmental regulations.

The details of the cleaning contract, such as frequency, scope and performance standards to be met, are shaped first by negotiations between the lead firm and the building management firm before bids are solicited from vendors. Consequently, the firm that controls the worksite and determines the scope of the work—the lead firm—is separate from the firm that employs and supervises the workers.

This organizational structure, termed “fissured” or “outsourced”, became widespread in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as part of a broad set of organizational changes that saw large, multifunctional firms shed many “non-core” activities that had been performed in-house

by the firm's own employees. These activities included human resource management, food services, security, grounds keeping, and janitorial services. The aim of this shift was to allow the firm to focus on its core production and sales functions. The benefits to the lead firm included a better ability to vary its size in response to demand fluctuations, to take advantage of scale economies in the purchase of services from specialized vendors, and to reduce labor costs for ongoing, non-core activities. The source of labor cost reduction arises from the fact that workers who are directly employed in a large multifunctional firm had both higher wages and better non-wage compensation than did their counterparts working for small, specialized contract cleaning firms. Janitors working for large multifunctional firms would receive the same health care and retirement packages as did "core function" workers. By shedding these activities, lead firms could exclude such workers from participation in such benefits programs and convert a compensation and supervision issue into a single price to be settled by contracting with a vendor in a competitive market (Boden et al., 2016; Weil, 2014). They also shed responsibility for bearing the costs of worker recruitment/retention for payment of any increase in workers' compensation insurance due to worker injuries on-site. Empirical estimates of the wage reduction realized by firms that outsource such non-core activities range from 4-7% (Dube & Kaplan, 2010) to 15-17% (Berlinski, 2008). These studies also found that outsourced janitorial workers were much less likely to receive employer-sponsored health insurance coverage.

Small janitorial services firms contracting with clients in a competitive market with low barriers to entry for new start-ups are under significant pressure to keep costs low. If they are franchisees, they also must control costs while still following the franchisor's

required standards of performance as well as paying fees for royalties, management and any interest payments on capital borrowed from the franchisor. Such constraints on their revenues may result in a focus on production at the expense of reduced attention to compliance with standards for occupational safety and health as well as wage and hour rules. The purpose of this project will be to assess whether such pressures affect safety performance of janitorial services contractors, and how such performance may be improved.

## Sources & Methods

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### Demographics:

- Demographic information (share of employment by male/female, race/ethnicity, unionization, and age) is descriptive data extracted from the American Community Survey of the US Census Bureau.
- Occupational classification is by Census Occupation code (4220). Industry classification is by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code (56).

### Employment and Earnings:

- Employment and earnings data are descriptive data. Full-Time Equivalent employees (FTE) and headcount employment, number of firms, and hourly earnings were extracted for firms reporting hours in Washington Industrial Insurance Risk Class 6602-02 or 6602-03 and NAICS 561720.
  - Data were broken out geographically and reported for the following areas: Statewide, Puget Sound (Pierce, King, Snohomish, Thurston, Kitsap, Island, San Juan, Skagit, Whatcom and Mason counties), Metro (King, Snohomish, Pierce, Clark and Spokane counties) and for firms with Out-of-State headquarters.
- Primary data sources used were the WA Dept. of Labor and Industries (L&) workers' compensation (WC) employer data linked to earnings and headcount

data from Washington State Employment Security Department Quarterly Unemployment Insurance database.

- Additional supporting data on hourly wages were extracted from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program.
  - National data showing the shift of janitorial employment towards a concentration within the janitorial services industry was also derived from OES data tables for years 1997 through 2017.

### Output per Hour:

- Output per hour is defined as the value of output of the services that are produced by a janitorial worker in an hour of work. This is tracked by the Bureau of Labor Statistics Office of Productivity and Technology. Data are available at the national level for most NAICS industries, and we compare productivity trends in janitorial services to those in another labor-intensive and low-wage industry: full-service restaurants.

### Worker Turnover:

- Worker turnover is defined as the percentage of a given firm's workforce that is replaced by new workers when comparing one year with the following year. The formula used was adopted from that of the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, and applied to firms in the janitorial services industry at three different time periods: pre-Great Recession (2006-2007); Great Recession (2010-2011) and Post-Recession (2017-2018).
  - Eligible employers included any "active" firms reporting employment in BOTH industrial insurance risk class 6602-03/05 AND NAICS 561720.
  - "Active" is defined as employing at least 1 FTE and having total payroll greater than zero.
- We also compared worker turnover in the janitorial services industry, using the same definitions, to that in three other industries considered similar in terms of wage or educational requirements: Security Guards, Landscaping, and Residential Framing.

### Employer Survival:

- Defined similarly to worker turnover, this measure tracks the percentage of employers active in a baseline year who are still active in the following year. Data were extracted from the L&I industrial insurance databases for 2005 through 2018.
  - Eligible employers included any “active” firms reporting employment in BOTH industrial insurance risk class 6602-03/05 AND NAICS 561720.
  - "Active" is defined as employing at least 1 FTE and having total payroll greater than zero.
- As with worker turnover, we looked at survival rates for employers in landscaping, housekeeping services, and residential framing. We also compared survival rates across a variety of time intervals, from 1-year to 10-year intervals. Finally, we compared employer survival rates across time by employer size categories.

### Seattle-area Commercial Office Space Supply:

- Information on the amount of office space was abstracted from market reports issued by a private commercial real estate brokerage for the Seattle regional market—an area that encompasses King, Pierce and Snohomish counties—as well as for King County submarkets. The growth in this supply from 2013-2018 was calculated and compared to the growth of janitorial employment in the Seattle and regional markets, defined by FTE and headcount of workers.
- FTE data are drawn from the L&I industrial insurance databases and defined as employed in risk classes 6602-03 or 6602-05 and in NAICS industry 561720.
- Headcount data are drawn from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program and defined as total individuals employed in SOC 37-2011 in any NAICS industry.

## Results

### Demography

- Workers of Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity are over-represented amongst Janitorial Services.
- Janitorial Services workers have a lower average level of education than other occupations.

Table 1 describes the demographic profile of the janitorial services workforce across all industries in the US as a whole for 2017 as reported by respondents to the American Community Survey of the Census Bureau (American Community Survey, 2017). It also compares these characteristics with those of the workforce in all occupations combined. The contrast is evident; as compared to the workforce as a whole, the janitorial workforce is older, more likely to be male, and has a higher proportion of Black/African-American or Hispanic/Latinx workers than is the case for all occupations combined. Workers of Asian ethnicities are under-represented in janitorial services. Janitors are slightly less likely to be union members, but it is important to note that this data covers janitorial workers in all industries combined. Given the large fraction of public-sector workers covered by union contracts, we would expect a lower percentage of janitorial workers in the private sector would be represented by unions.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Janitorial Workforce vs All Occupations, United States, 2017.**

	Share of Employment (%)	
	Janitorial	All Occupations
Female	35.2	46.9
White	72.5	78.4
Black/African-American	18.6	12.1
Asian	3.8	6.2
Hispanic/Latinx	31.7	16.9



Union represented	10.1	11.9
Median Age	47.7	42.2

Source: American Community Survey, 2017. Census Occupation Code 4220, ANY industry

Table 2 presents a more detailed demographic profile for Washington State janitorial services workers as compared to the United States as a whole. This table also compares workers in janitorial services to workers in all occupations combined, both in Washington State and in the US as a whole.

Note that in Table 2 only janitorial workers in the Administrative and Support, Waste Management and Remediation Services sector (NAICS 56), are included. This excludes janitors in schools, hospitals and public administration, and is more representative of the workforce found in the contract janitorial services industry that has become predominant in the office-cleaning industry since the 1980s. As compared to workers in all occupations combined, the janitorial workforce is much more likely to be Hispanic/Latinx. It is also somewhat more likely to be Black/African-American. In Washington State, a higher proportion of janitors are Asian than in the workforce as a whole. As compared to the overall workforce, workers in the janitorial services industry

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Janitorial Workers vs All Occupations, Washington State vs United States, 2006-2010.**

	Share of Employment (%)			
	Washington State		United States	
	Janitors	All Occupations	Janitors	All Occupations
<b>Female</b>	45.1	46.6	46.0	47.2
<b>White, non-Hispanic/Latinx</b>	58.0	75.9	39.7	67.0

<b>Hispanic/Latinx (any race)</b>	23.9	9.3	40.1	14.6
<b>Asian</b>	8.3	7.3	2.4	4.8
<b>Black/African-American, non-Hispanic/Latinx</b>	5.4	3.2	15.9	11.3
<b>Other</b>	4.3	4.3	1.9	2.3
<b>Education</b>				
<b>Less than high school</b>	23.3	9.1	29.3	11.0
<b>High school</b>	38.8	22.3	43.3	26.6
<b>Some college/associate</b>	31.5	35.9	22.7	31.8
<b>Bachelor's degree</b>	5.4	21.1	3.9	19.7
<b>Graduate/Professional</b>	1.0	11.5	0.8	11.0

**Source: American Community Survey, Five-Year Tabulation, 2006-2010.** Occupation 4220 within NAICS 56. "Other" includes Native Hawaiian, American Indian/Native Alaskan, and individuals of two or more races/ethnicities.

have lower levels of educational attainment. Over 62% of such janitorial workers have a high school degree or less, as compared to 31% of workers overall.

In comparison with the United States as a whole, janitorial workers in Washington State are more likely to be white/non-Hispanic or Asian, and less likely to be Hispanic/Latinx or Black/African-American. They are also more likely to have a higher level of education: 38% of Washington State janitorial workers have at least some post-secondary education, as compared to only 27% of janitorial workers in the US as a whole.

### Employment and Earnings of Workers in Janitorial Services<sup>26</sup>

- Janitors working in the Puget Metro region earn higher wages than in rural regions.
- Over three-quarters of janitorial services firms employ fewer than 10 workers.

<sup>26</sup> Data on employment and earnings in this report include only those workers in a formal employment relationship. Therefore, janitorial workers classified as "self-employed", or who work in the underground economy, are excluded.

The number of firms active in janitorial services at any given time can vary depending upon how one defines the industry. We define the industry as including all businesses employing at least one FTE worker per quarter employed within the risk classes assigned to janitorial work.<sup>27</sup> Because we focus on the commercial cleaning industry, we include only the portion of the janitorial workforce that is employed for firms classified as belonging to the Janitorial Services industry (North American Industrial Classification System Code NAICS 561720). For the second quarter of 2017, the following table describes total employment, median employment per firm (FTE), earnings per FTE and earnings per hour for janitorial workers.

For the whole of Washington State, the median hourly wage was \$13.95 per hour, with half of all workers earnings between \$12.34 and \$17.08 per hour. Table 3 also shows that the typical firm in this industry is very small, with half of firms employing between 2 and 10 full-time-equivalent workers, and with total FTEs in these active firms at 7,750.

We expected that firm size, and worker earnings, would vary depending upon geographic location of the firm.

**Table 3: Washington State total FTE employment, number of active firms, employment per firm, and earnings, Janitorial Services, 2017Q2<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Account HQ</b>	<b>Total FTE Employment</b>	<b>Number of Firms</b>	<b>Median FTE employment per firm (Q1, Q3)</b>	<b>Median Hourly Earnings per FTE (Q1, Q3)</b>
<b>Statewide</b>	7,750	580	3.67 (2.0, 9.9)	\$13.95 (\$12.34, \$17.08)
<b>Puget</b>	4,615	350	3.53 (2.0, 9.8)	\$15.14 (\$12.86, \$18.50)

<sup>27</sup> Washington State's Industrial Insurance risk classification class 6602-02 or 6602-03.

<b>Metro</b>	4,655	345	3.76 (2.0, 10.0)	\$15.04 (\$12.76, \$18.19)
<b>Puget Metro</b>	4,173	281	3.71 (2.0, 10.5)	\$15.78 (\$13.23, \$19.17)
<b>Puget Non-metro</b>	443	69	3.32 (2.2, 7.2)	\$13.15 (\$11.78, \$15.26)
<b>Other Non-metro</b>	521	96	3.25 (2.0, 6.1)	\$12.85 (\$11.68, \$15.06)
<b>Out-of-state</b>	2,131	70	8.13 (2.6, 26.1)	\$13.74 (\$12.18, \$16.77)

<sup>1</sup> At firms with FTE greater  $\geq 1$  and total earnings  $> \$0$ . Q1 and Q3 are first and third quartiles. Data from L&I workers compensation database.

This expectation was borne out. As Table 3 shows, firms in the Metro region (King, Pierce, Snohomish, Clark and Spokane counties) were larger than firms outside these areas (*mean size=14.9 vs 6.3 FTE;  $p < 0.05$* ). Firms in counties bordering Puget Sound were also larger. Firms with account headquarters outside of the state ( $n=70$ ) were the largest of all. Their median size was 8.1 FTE vs 3.67 FTE for all in-state firms. This may reflect the presence of national-scope janitorial services firms with multiple branch locations in the state. The level of income paid to janitorial workers followed the same pattern: highest hourly wages were those paid in the Puget Metro area (King, Pierce and Snohomish counties), while the lowest hourly wages were those reported for non-metro counties outside the Puget Sound area. The hourly wage in the Puget Metro region was nearly 23% higher than that for the rural counties.

As the employment data shows, the number of FTEs working statewide in janitorial services in 2017, second quarter was 7,750 (see Table 3). However, this gives an incorrect impression of the total number of individual workers managed by the typical firm in that time period. This is due to the high rate of worker turnover and the low

number of hours worked per quarter by the typical worker. When we extracted all individual workers identified as employed for at least one hour of work during the quarter from the Employment Security Department database, the following picture emerges:

**Table 4: Washington State total headcount employment, number of active firms, employment per firm, and earnings, Janitorial Services, 2017Q2<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Total Headcount Employment</b>	<b>Number of Firms</b>	<b>Median headcount employment per firm (Q1, Q3)</b>	<b>Median Quarterly Earnings per Head (Q1, Q3)</b>	<b>Median Hourly Earnings per Head (Q1, Q3)</b>
<b>18,070</b>	1,417	4.33	\$4,228	--
		(2.0, 10.3)	(\$2,531, \$6,365)	--

<sup>1</sup> At firms with FTE greater  $\geq 1$  and total earnings  $> \$0$ . Q1 and Q3 are first and third quartiles. Data from ESD Quarterly Unemployment Insurance database. Earnings per head were not available in QUI data.

The number of individual workers who at some point in the second quarter of 2017 worked for a janitorial services firm was 18,070. This is almost triple the FTE-based estimate. Note as well that the number of firms with at least one individual working in the quarter is also much higher than when we used the FTE measure as a threshold to define “active firm”. Both of these differences highlight the amount of turnover both of workers and firms, especially among the very small-sized firms in the industry. Median headcount per active firm is 4.33. Once again the size of firms and the quarterly earnings per worker in the metro regions were statistically significantly greater than those in rural areas, with a difference in earnings of 25%. Janitorial workers in the Puget Metro counties received total earnings per worker nearly 38% greater than their peers working in the rural counties of the state.

Another view of the geographic variation in janitors' hourly wages can be seen from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics data for 2017 (BLS, 2017) (Table 5).

**Table 5: Wages Across Washington State Urban Geographic Regions, Janitors vs All Occupations**

	Median Hourly Wage		Janitors' Wage as % of All Occupations
	All Occupations	Janitors	
<b>National</b>	\$ 18.12	\$ 12.02	66%
<b>WA State</b>	\$ 21.36	\$ 15.08	71%
<b>Seattle/Bellevue/Everett</b>	\$ 24.30	\$ 15.07	62%
<b>Tacoma/Lakewood</b>	\$ 19.79	\$ 16.39	83%
<b>Spokane Valley<sup>28</sup></b>	\$ 18.03	\$ 14.11	78%
<b>Urban Regional Wage Variation, Janitors vs All Occupations</b>			
	All Occupations	Janitors	
<b>WA State</b>	100	100	
<b>Seattle/Bellevue/Everett</b>	114	100	
<b>Tacoma/Lakewood</b>	93	109	
<b>Spokane Valley</b>	84	94	

The first part of Table 5 shows median hourly wage by national, statewide and selected urban geographies. This shows that, at the national level, janitors' wages are about 66% of that of all occupations combined. In Washington State as a whole, janitors' wages are somewhat higher relative to all occupations, ranging from a low of 62% of all occupations in the Seattle/Bellevue/Everett region to a high of 83% of all occupations in the Tacoma/Lakewood region. These two endpoints reflect both the difference in

<sup>28</sup> Spokane Valley is defined as Spokane, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties.

occupational mix of these two regions, with Tacoma having a more working class character, and the perhaps surprising fact that janitors' median wages in the Tacoma/Lakewood area are higher than in the Seattle region. The second part of Table 5 shows how janitors' wages vary across the state as compared to all occupations. Median wages for all occupations combined show a regional range from a premium of 114% of the statewide median in the Seattle region to a low of 84% in the Spokane area. For janitors, this regional variation is more compressed, ranging from 109% in Tacoma to 94% of the median statewide wage in the Spokane area. Again, janitors in the Seattle region do not seem to share in that area's relatively high wages for other occupations.

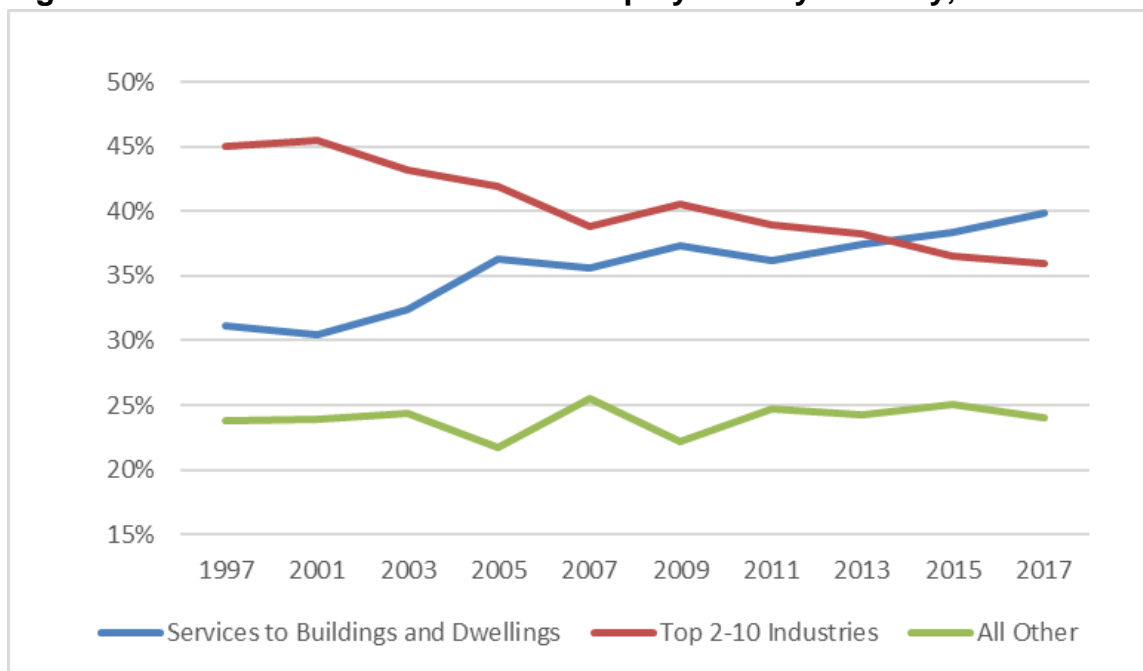
### National Data on Trends in Employment, Wages and Demographics in Janitorial Services.

- Janitorial work has become concentrated within the Janitorial Services industry.
- Local and state governments have outsourced janitorial work to the Janitorial Services industry.
- Private sector janitorial services workers are paid a substantially lower wage than public sector janitorial workers.

Weil (2014) and others have noted that janitorial work, along with landscaping, security and payroll administration, is among the functions that once were performed largely within firms across many industries. For example, employers in industries as diverse as manufacturing and retail once employed janitorial workers directly. The advantages of such arrangements, such as having the ability to deploy such workers directly, began to erode as the costs of transacting with outside firms for such staff decreased. At the same time, it became apparent that by doing so, the host firm could also exchange the allied costs of employment, such as human resource management, health insurance,

taxes and absenteeism losses, for a single price paid to an outside vendor. Frictionless adjustment in the labor force would allow for better alignment with shifting levels of demand for the firm's output. National data on the share of janitorial employment by industry supports the view that such an outsourcing away from integrated employment of janitors and toward the contract janitorial services industry has happened. Figure 1 shows the share of janitorial employment by three-digit NAICS industry since 1997. As the figure shows, the share of all janitorial employment accounted for by the janitorial services industry has grown steadily from 30% to 40% over the period from 1997 to 2017. This change has come largely at the expense of a declining share of janitorial employment in the next largest janitor-employing industries. Among these are Elementary/Secondary Schools, Real Estate, Local Government (excluding schools), Colleges, and General Medical/Surgical Hospitals. Note that the share of all janitorial employment outside of the top ten janitor-employing industries has been quite stable at 23-25%. As of 2017 more janitors were working for a contract janitorial services firm than at the next ten largest industries combined.

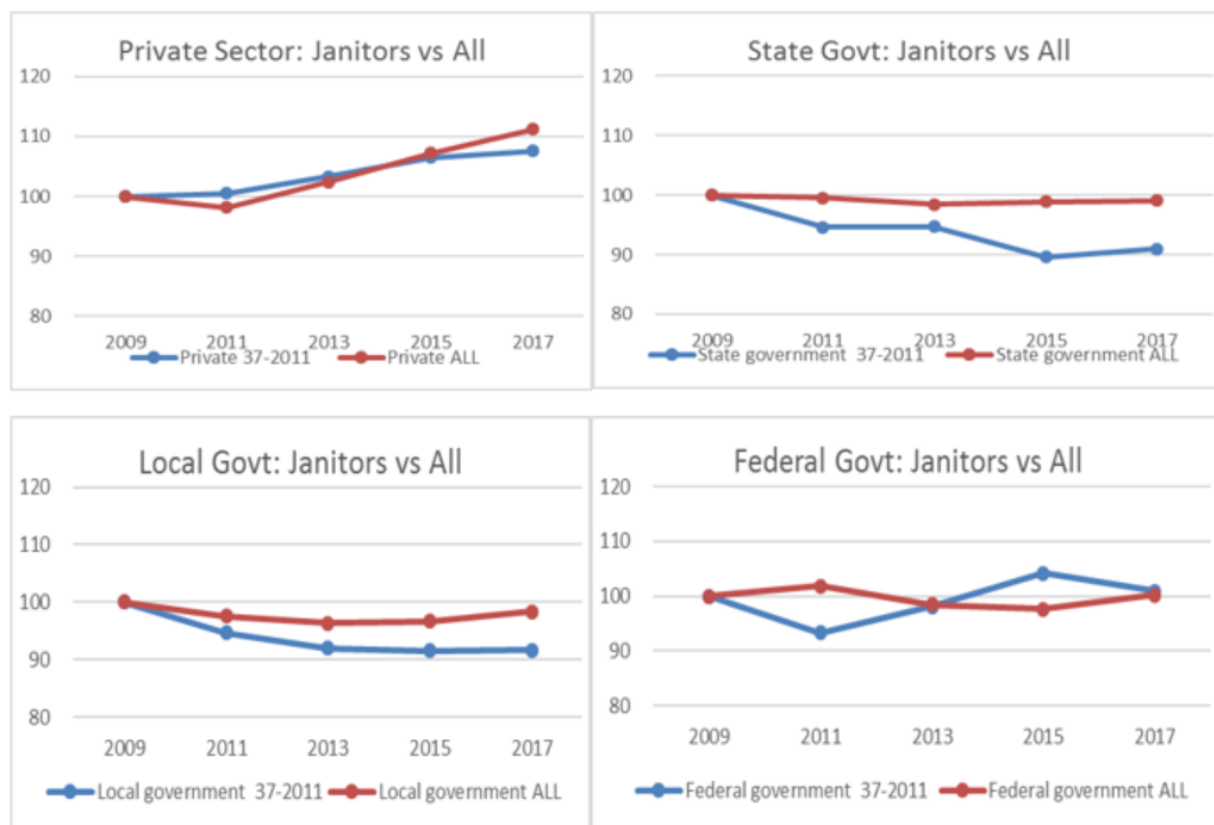


**Figure 1: Share of National Janitorial Employment by Industry, 1997-2017**

Source: Occupational Employment Statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics). SOC 37-2011 employment share by 3-digit NAICS industry.

Since the second largest employer of janitorial workers is Elementary/Secondary Schools, a public sector industry, the trend seen in Figure 1 should lead us to expect that there would also be a decreasing level of employment of janitors in the public sector and a rising level of employment in the private sector. This is in fact the case, as can be seen in Figure 2. Within both state and local government we see a decreasing level of janitorial employment over this time period, even though overall employment was constant. It should be borne in mind that in many of these public sector jurisdictions, the workforce is unionized. As janitorial work is outsourced to private sector vendors in a competitive market, workers' opportunity to affect working conditions, including safety and health, may be reduced.

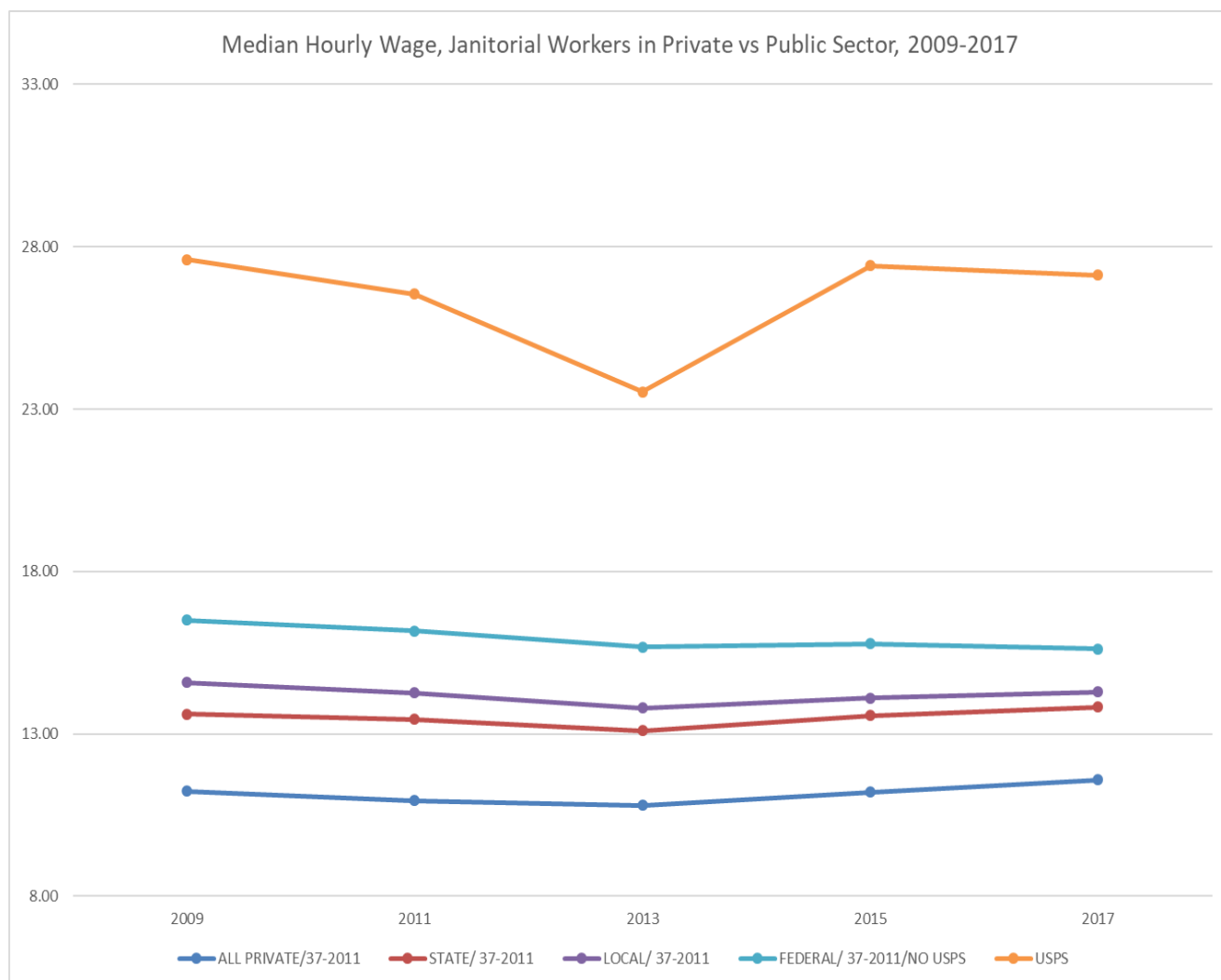
**Figure 2: Time trend of janitorial employment vs overall employment, by employer status**



Source: Occupational Employment Statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

It is certainly the case that outsourcing peripheral functions such as janitorial work can be a cost-saving decision for large public-sector agencies such as public school districts and local governments.

**Figure 3: Time trend of janitorial wage rates in private versus public sector entities, 2009-2017**



Source: Occupational Employment Statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Figure 3 shows median wage rates at the national level for janitorial workers in the private versus all three levels of the public sector from 2009 through 2017, with the federal sector broken out between United States Postal Service (USPS) workers and all other federal agencies. Workers employed directly by the federal government apart from the USPS as part of the federal civil service earn a median hourly wage of almost \$16 per hour (2017 \$). Workers doing janitorial tasks for the USPS, with a separate union contract, earn a substantially higher median wage of about \$27 per hour. State and

local government janitorial workers earn roughly \$14 per hour. This is in contrast to private sector janitorial wage rates of less than \$12 per hour. This gap in earnings is an underestimate of the true difference in compensation levels between public- and private-sector janitorial workers since private sector janitorial workers are much less likely to receive benefits such as paid sick leave, health insurance or retirement benefits from their employer. All of these benefits are commonly offered for public sector workers. In addition, levels of union representation are much higher among public sector janitorial workers than for their peers in the private sector, which may give such workers greater voice in setting working conditions such as work schedules and safety.

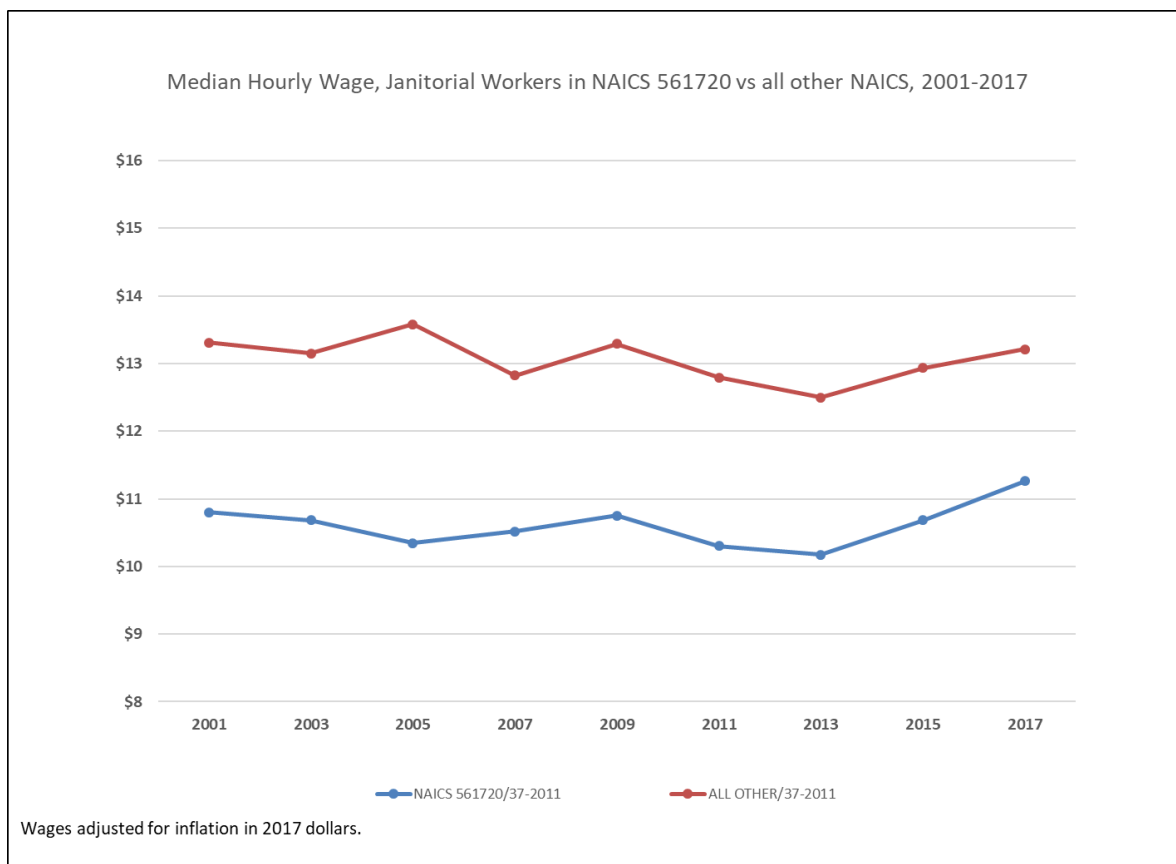
### Wage Deficit in Contract Janitorial Services Industry vs Janitors in other Industries

- Median hourly wages for janitorial workers in NAICS 561720 are lower than for janitorial workers in all other NAICS industries.
- Causes: shared gains in integrated firms; lack of union representation in janitorial services

The effect of wage compression inside a large, integrated firm would imply that wage levels for janitorial workers in industries other than the contract janitorial services industry should be higher. Within an organization, concerns over equity and morale across different segments of the workforce often lead to a flattening of differences in pay levels across job categories. For example, if technological change in one job category within an integrated manufacturing firm leads to an increase in productivity, that does not mean that the benefits of the gain are confined to wage increases for workers only in that job category. Such gains tend to be shared across the organization. Over time, this can result in janitorial workers inside an integrated manufacturing firm being paid a substantial premium over the wage levels of janitorial workers in a

specialized janitorial contract firm where productivity increases are slow. As this premium grows, it creates an incentive among the large integrated firms to shed these non-core functions to outside vendors in order to reduce costs, and to be able to raise wages of their core workers in step with productivity increases (Dube and Kaplan, 2010). To test the degree to which outsourcing of janitorial work could result in labor cost reduction we analyze median wage data for janitors working in the janitorial services industry (NAICS 561720) as compared to janitors working within establishments in other industries such as education, retail, manufacturing or healthcare.

**Figure 4: Difference between Hourly Earnings of Janitorial Workers in NAICS 561720 vs All Other NAICS, 2001-2017**



Source: BLS Occupational Employment Statistics program

The results, in Figure 4, show that janitorial workers in the contract janitorial services industry earn a median hourly wage that varies between 76% and 85% of the wage of their counterparts working in all other industries. A large part of this difference is driven by the existence of substantially higher wages in the public sector NAICS industries, as Figure 3 showed. However, even when we compare the contract janitorial services sector with private sector establishments in all other industries, a difference of about 5-8% remains.

### Trends in Labor Productivity in Janitorial Services

- Output per hour for janitorial services workers has not grown since 2002.
- Wage growth has kept pace with inflation

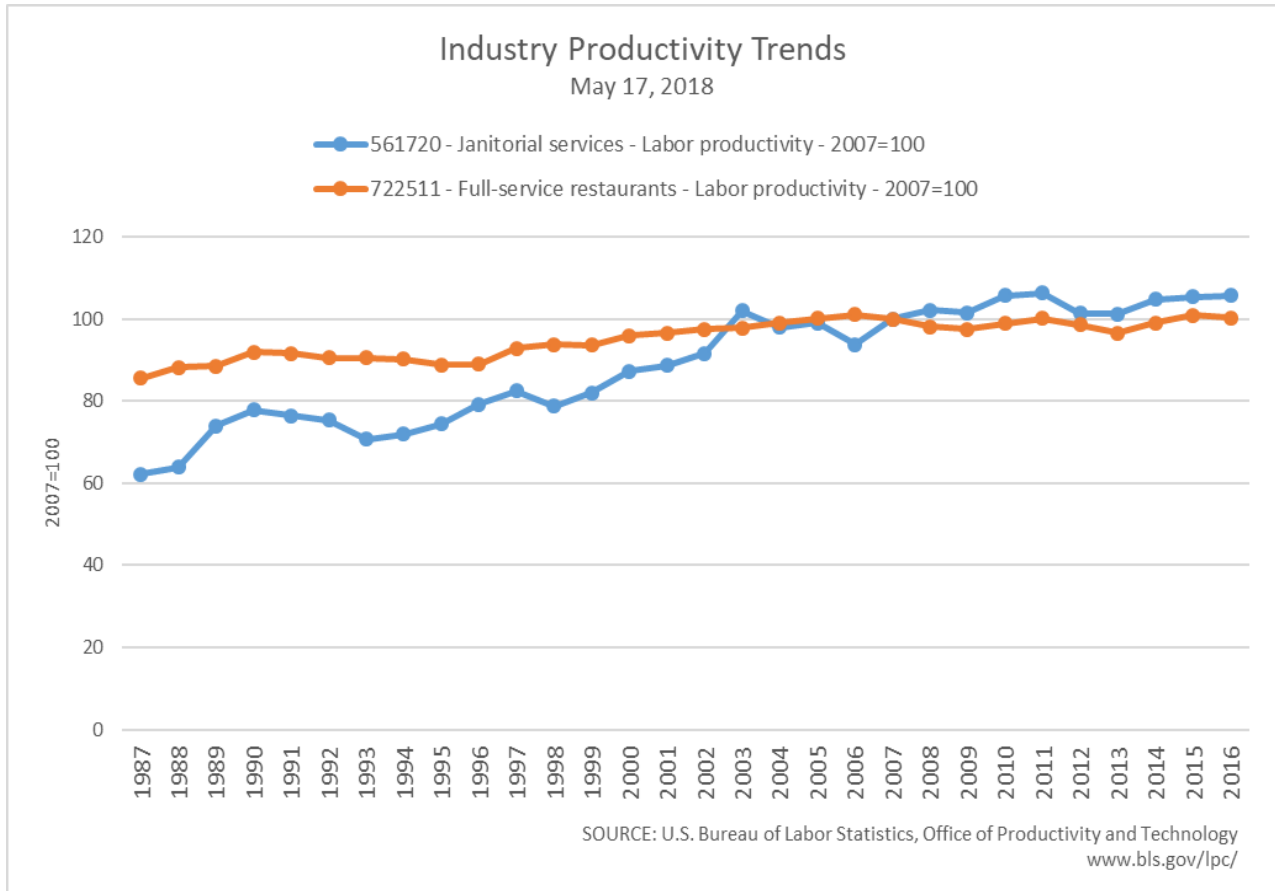
One way to measure the change in the overall pace of work in an industry, at a very aggregate level, is to simply track the value of output of the goods or services that are produced by a worker in an hour of work. This is one of several measures gathered by the BLS/BEA productivity program. Data are available at the national level for most NAICS industries apart from construction and the public sector. Figure 5 and Figure 6 show, respectively, labor productivity (indexed at 2007=100) in janitorial services as compared to full-service restaurants, and labor productivity as compared to hourly earnings for janitorial workers.

The trend in productivity for janitorial workers was increasing fairly rapidly in the period from 1987 through 2003, after which the value of output per hour of work has remained flat (Figure 5). This is in contrast to the profile for restaurant work, which has a much more gradual rise in productivity.

Compensation for janitors has tracked closely the rate of the rise in productivity, though with a more rapid rise in the years of economic recovery from the Great Recession (Figure 6).

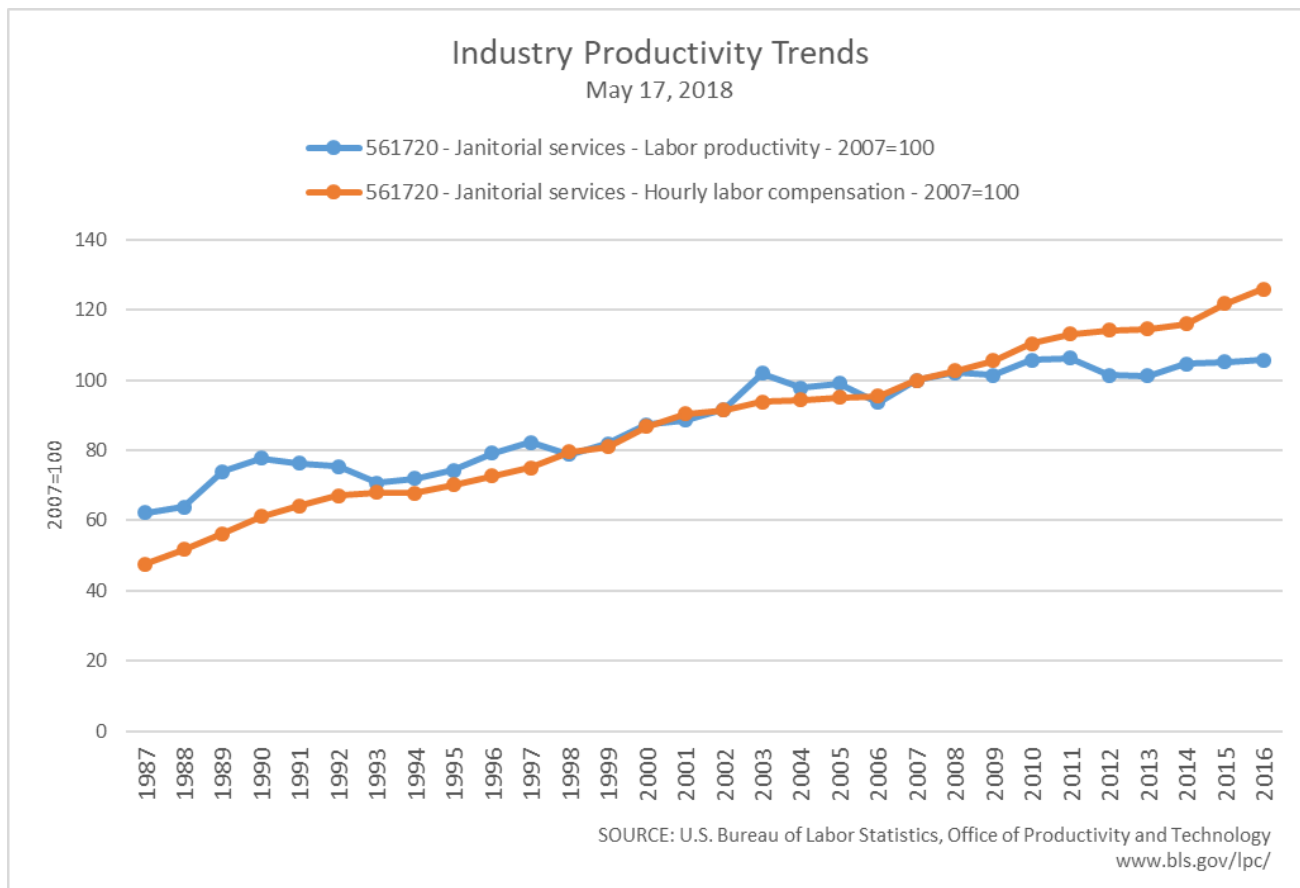
It is impossible to judge, given only the data here, whether the increase in productivity is a by-product of the outsourcing of janitorial work to competitive contract janitorial firms. It is possible that such a change could have resulted in an increase in worker load as represented by an increase in output per hour of work. On the other hand, if technological change occurs in the sense that janitors are being equipped with more efficient tools, output per hour could rise without a rise in physical load for the janitor.

**Figure 5: Output per hour Worked, Janitorial Services vs Restaurants, 1987-2016**



**Figure 6: Trends in Janitorial Labor Earnings as Compared to Output per Hour, 1987-2016**





This question lies at the heart of the current research project and will require close observation and measurement of janitorial work as well as interviews and focus groups with janitorial workers. Another possibility is that greater usage of human resource management techniques such as “flexible” scheduling, part-time, and on-call shift-work might mean that a given amount of janitorial output is being achieved with a lower level of paid work-hours. In this way, janitorial service firms shift the uncertainty of market demand onto workers, only deploying them just when they are needed for a job.

In 2008, the growth rates for hourly compensation and productivity began to diverge and continue to do so through 2016. In standard economic models of labor markets, productivity increases tend to be linked closely with compensation increases. But in periods of excess unemployment, workers lose the leverage to bargain for higher

wages. Recent years have seen levels of unemployment reaching postwar lows even for jobs at the lower end of the wage rate. So it is unsurprising that compensation for janitorial workers has begun to rise, even beyond rates expected given the rise in productivity.

## Worker Turnover

- Worker turnover among janitors is high at nearly 50% per year.
- Turnover rate is similar to that of other low-wage occupations.

Similar to many physically challenging, low-wage occupations, janitorial services work is characterized by significant levels of worker turnover. This is defined as the percentage of a given firm's workforce that is replaced by new workers when comparing one year with the following year. It is measured as the sum of worker separations and worker hires divided by the sum of the total workforce in the two years being compared:

$$\text{Turnover} = (\text{Hires} + \text{Separations}) / (\text{Year 1 Workforce} + \text{Year 2 Workforce})^{29}$$

We measure turnover at three different periods in the past dozen years. First, just prior to the Great Recession of 2008-2010 when unemployment was low and opportunities to switch jobs were plentiful. Then during the early stages of the recovery from the recession, 2010-2011, when unemployment rates were still over 9%. Finally, we look at 2017-2018, when once again job market conditions had improved for workers.

YEARS COMPARED	CONTINUING WORKERS (headcount)	SEPARATED WORKERS (headcount)	HIRED WORKERS (headcount)	TURNOVER (Active Firm)	TURNOVER (INDUSTRY) <sup>4</sup>
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<sup>29</sup> Formula adopted from Bureau of Labor Statistics JOLTS Survey Technical Note located at <http://www.bls.gov./news.release/jolts.htm>.

2006-2007	3882	5112	4854	56.2%	53.6%
2010-2011	5455	4856	4280	45.6%	43.1%
2017-2018	6981	6495	6527	48.3%	42.2%

1. Janitorial Services Industry= appears in BOTH industrial insurance risk class 660 03/05 AND NAICS 561720
2. "Active" means employing at least 1 FTE and payroll greater than zero.
3. Workers with earnings in bottom 1% or Top 1% of distribution were dropped.
4. Turnover measured at industry level.

**Table 6. Washington State Janitorial Services Worker Turnover<sup>1,3</sup>, 2006-2018.**

Source: Washington State ESD, Quarterly unemployment insurance wage tables.

One limitation of this metric is that if we wish to know the turnover rate at each firm it requires that only firms that survive from one year through the next can be used. If a firm goes out of business, obviously, all of its workers are “separated” as well. Similarly, if a new firm opens in the second year of the comparison, all of its workers would be “hires”. In neither case can we compare such firms to those that operate continuously throughout the period. As we discuss in the next section, there is a substantial degree of turnover among janitorial firms. Therefore, our measurement of worker turnover will be an underestimate of the true level. Nevertheless, the trend over time is a good measure of the overall attractiveness of janitorial work relative to other occupations available to workers at this level of the labor market.

As Table 6 shows, just prior to the Great Recession of 2008-2010, turnover in janitorial services is about 56% per year when measured at the firm-level, and 54% at the industry level. By the late stages of the recession turnover had fallen by roughly 10 percentage points, reflecting the reduced opportunities for workers to leave an employer in order to find a better job. As business conditions decline, quit rates and hiring rates

fall. By 2017-2018, labor market demand in many industries had greatly improved. In the janitorial services industry, turnover rates of workers at the firm level had recovered some of the way back to pre-recession levels but continue to be lower than their historic levels, though still between 42% and 48% per year. This lower turnover may reflect several factors: a delay in workers' re-evaluation of their labor market prospects, an expansion of overall employment in janitorial services accompanied by a decline in layoffs, or a rise in janitors' wage rates as compared to comparable occupations outside of janitorial services. Another possibility is that the relatively high and growing proportion of immigrant workers in the industry may reduce their ability to move out of this industry. By themselves, these turnover rates may raise concerns about levels of job satisfaction among workers in this industry. Such rates of departure mean that employers must be constantly engaged in recruitment of replacement workers. This in turn raises concerns with how well-trained these new workers could be to cope with safety and health risks. On the other hand, it is important to bear in mind that leaving one job usually means starting another, and that therefore it is important to compare the turnover rates in janitorial services with those in other low-wage/low-skilled sectors of the workforce which would provide alternatives for workers considering leaving their janitorial work. As examples, we calculated turnover rates for workers in the Security Services, Landscaping, and Residential Framing industries for 2017-2018. These are shown in Table 7:

Industry	CONTINUING WORKERS (headcount)	SEPARATED WORKERS (headcount)	HIRED WORKERS (headcount)	TURNOVER (Active Firm)	TURNOVER (INDUSTRY) <sup>3</sup>
Janitorial Workers	<b>6981</b>	<b>6495</b>	<b>6527</b>	<b>48.3%</b>	<b>42.2%</b>

Security Guards <sup>4</sup>	5776	6118	5881	50.4%	43.8%
Landscaping Services	5435	5263	5029	48.6%	43.0%
Residential Framing <sup>4</sup>	2368	2554	2753	52.8%	45.4%

**Table 7. Washington State Worker Turnover<sup>1,2</sup>, Landscaping and Security Services, 2017-2018**

1. "Active" means employing at least 1 FTE and payroll greater than zero.
  2. Workers with earnings in bottom 1% or Top 1% of distribution were dropped.
  3. Turnover measured at industry level.
  4. Industry definitions: "security guards" = NAICS 561612 and risk class 6601-01/02; "landscaping" = NAICS 561730 and risk class 030801; residential framing = NAICS 238130 and risk class 05100.
- Source: Washington State ESD, Quarterly unemployment insurance wage tables.

Worker turnover rates in these industries are very similar to those in janitorial services.

As with janitorial services, these occupations are lower wage and lower-skilled in nature, without any prerequisite educational credentialing. This suggests that across this level of the workforce, the attachment of workers to particular employers is usually short-term, and therefore investments made by employers in their workers' skills, including safety behaviors, is low.

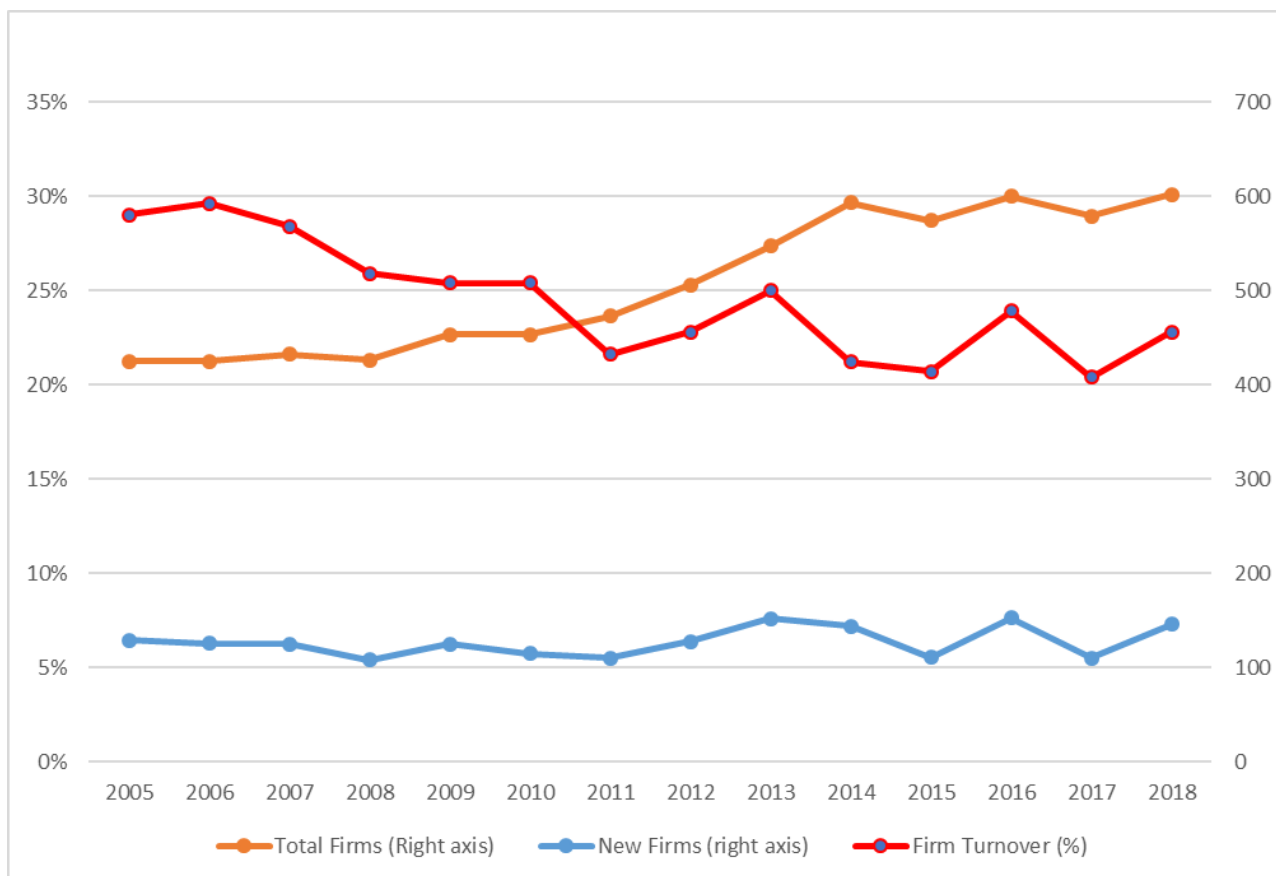
### Employer Turnover

- Turnover rates for janitorial services firms average 20-25% per year
- Survival rates are lower than those for landscaping or house-keeping.
- Small firms have much higher turnover rates than medium or large firms.

Another factor that may lead to increased injury rates is the length of time an employer has been in business. Unfamiliarity with the hazards of the industry can mean that hazard controls may take time to be put in place. Therefore, a high rate of new employer entry, and turnover, may be a cause of concern. Figure 7 shows that the total employment in janitorial services in Washington State rose sharply along with the total number of active firms following the end of the Great Recession. At the same time, the

rate of turnover of firms in janitorial services decreased from 29% in 2004-2005 to 20-23% after 2014.

**Figure 7: Washington State Janitorial Services Industry: Active Employers, New Employers, and Annual Firm Turnover, 2005-2018**

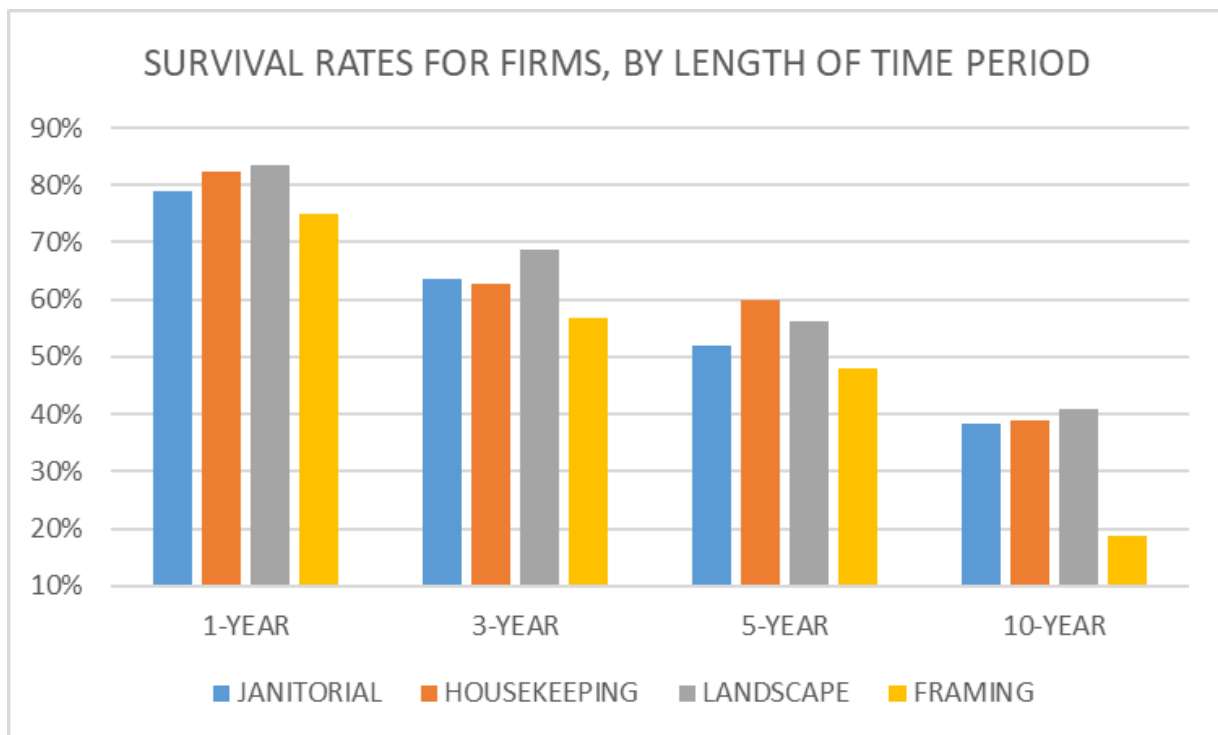


Janitorial Services Industry= firm appears in BOTH industrial insurance risk class 6602-03/05 AND NAICS 561720. Number of Employers and Workers in Q2 of each year. "Active" means employing at least 1 FTE and payroll greater than zero. Employers extracted from WA L&I data. Workers extracted from ESD wage files of firms matched to L&I accounts.

As with employee turnover, however, it is difficult to interpret these turnover data without some benchmark comparison to other industries. For this we looked at turnover rates in landscaping, housekeeping services, and residential framing. We chose the first two because, as with janitorial services, there is little in the way of fixed capital investment required to open a firm in these industries. We chose the latter because it is more

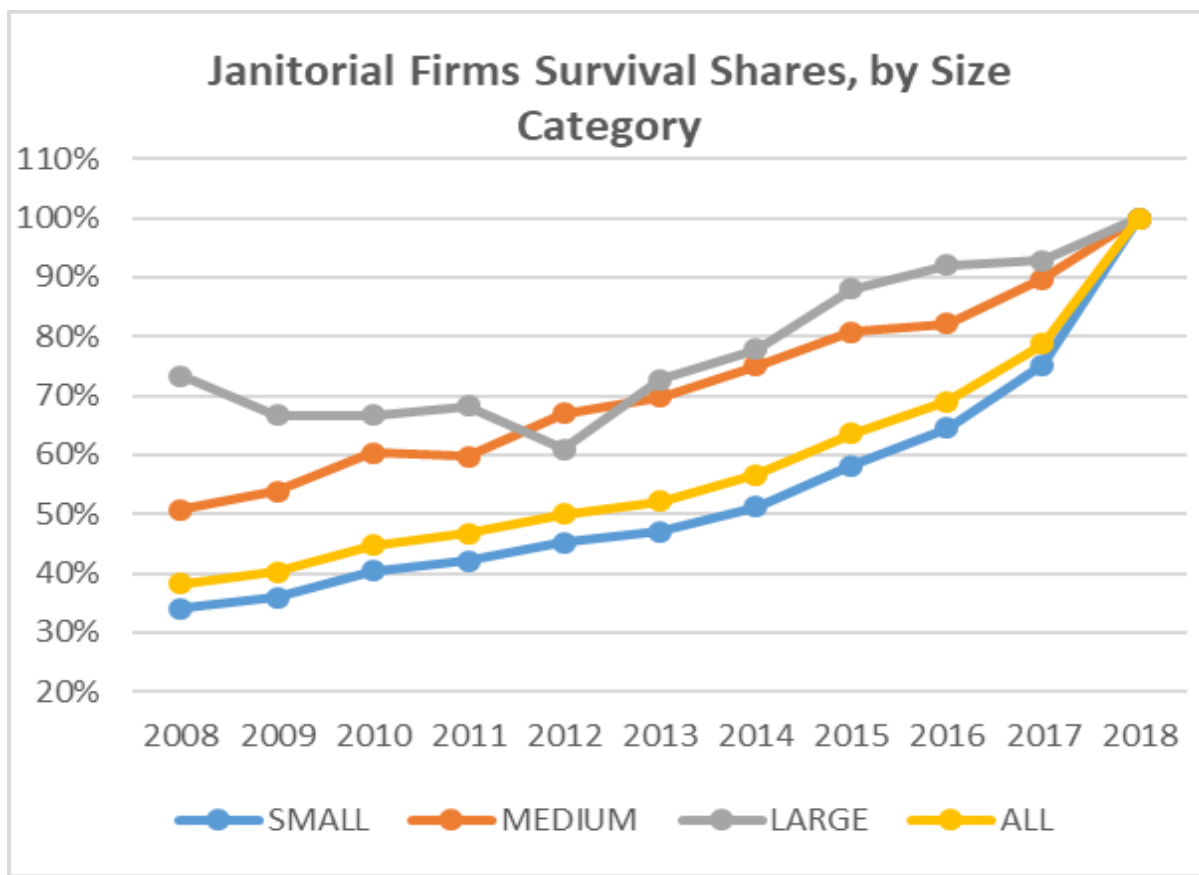
influenced by swings in the business cycle and so may serve as a standard for high turnover. We compare establishment turnover rates across industries at 1, 3, 5 and 10 year intervals in order to see if the pattern of survival is similar across industries. Figure 8 has the results:

**Figure 8: Survival Rates over 1- 3 and 5-year periods for firms in Janitorial Services compared to Housekeeping, Landscaping, and Residential Framing.**



We also considered that the size of the business itself could well affect the rate of turnover: with larger businesses more likely to survive than small. One way to depict firm survival is to measure it as a function the length of the historical lookback and the size of the firm. This is shown for Janitorial Services in Figure 9.

**Figure 9: Firm Survival by Year and Size Category**



This figure shows the role that size plays in determining the length of time a firm stays in business and, therefore, the average tenure of the firm. Large firms (50 or more workers) are more than twice as likely to survive for ten years as small firms. The typical small firm in janitorial services has been in business for less than five years. This chart also shows that, up to five years, there is little difference in survival probability between large firms and medium firms. So the extent that firm size plays a role in worker safety and injury prevention, it is the small firms which make up 78% of the industry that should be of greatest concern.

### Trends in Seattle-area office space supply as compared to janitorial labor supply.

- Growth in office space area within the Seattle Central Business District is outpacing the growth in the area's supply of janitorial services workers.



Comparing the growth of occupied office space relative to the growth in the janitorial labor supply available is a convenient method to measure the productivity of janitorial workers as well as the burden they face. If there has been no introduction of labor-saving technologies, the growth of square footage of office space requiring cleaning should require a similar growth in janitorial labor to absorb the additional work. Absent this, the burden of work for each janitor grows. Information on the amount of office space is available from private commercial real estate brokerages for the Seattle regional market—an area that encompasses King, Pierce and Snohomish counties. Within King County, data for total square feet of office space is available for several submarkets—such as the Seattle central business district (CBD) and its adjacent cities; the Eastside (Bellevue, Redmond and Kirkland); and South King County (Kidder Mathews, 2018-2019).

We obtain janitorial labor supply in the region from two separate sources. One is the Occupational Employment Statistics program of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which is a headcount of individual janitorial workers in the Seattle-Bellevue-Tacoma region; and the other is the number of hours worked in the janitorial services risk class to the workers' compensation database of the Department of Labor and Industries. In the latter case, employer-level data allows us to match more exactly the geographic area covered by the office space market data. The results are in Table 8:

**Table 8. Office Space Market Supply and Janitorial Workforce, Seattle Region, 2013-2018.**

Year	Office Supply (Region)	Office Supply (Seattle)*	Janitors Headcount SEA/BELL/TAC (OES)	Janitors FTE KING/PIERCE/SNOHOMISH (L&I)	Janitors FTE KING (L&I)	Janitors FTE Seattle* (L&I)	Janitors FTE Seattle† (L&I)
<b>2018</b>	192.9	85.7	25990	4354	3210	3177	7263
<b>2017</b>	184.7	79.1	25530	4376	3179	3150	7032
<b>2016</b>	177.2	72.7	23880	4045	2931	2900	6887
<b>2015</b>	171.9	67.0	21510	3978	2927	2899	7341
<b>2014</b>	164.9	63.3	22370	3830	2811	2782	6797
<b>2013</b>	156.7	57.1	20190	3484	2589	2559	6230
<b>Annual % Growth</b>	4.0	7.9	5.0	4.3	4.1	4.1	2.2

\* “Seattle\*” market is defined as Seattle city plus immediate neighbors (Burien, Seatac, Tukwila, Shoreline and Renton).

“Office Supply” is defined as total stock minus vacancies in millions of square feet.

OES: total individuals employed in SOC 37-2011 in any NAICS industry.

L&I: Total FTEs employed in risk classes 6602-03 or 6602-05 and in NAICS industry 561720.

† “Seattle†” market includes Seattle\* plus all out-of-state employers with employees in WA. Several of the largest janitorial services companies are in this category.

At the regional level—including all of King, Pierce and Snohomish counties, the growth of the stock of occupied office space roughly matches the growth in the labor supply in the janitorial services industry. However, the growth of office space in the Seattle CBD and its close-in neighbors is exceeding the growth of janitorial labor supply by a wide margin. This would indicate that pressure on the available janitorial workforce to handle the work required by the occupied office space is likely growing in the Seattle CBD and close-in areas.

## Conclusion

Although janitorial work has always been a lower wage occupation, the outsourcing of janitorial work has shifted this work to a large number of small, specialized janitorial contractors that compete to provide janitorial services to clients. Small janitorial services

firms contracting with clients in a competitive market with low barriers to entry for new start-ups are under significant pressure to keep costs low. This has led to a reduction in wages and benefits for janitorial workers. In addition, janitorial work is precarious, with high turnover rates for both janitorial workers and janitorial service firms. The workforce is demographically diverse. And the demographic profile of the janitorial workforce may affect the capacity of this workforce to resist unsafe working conditions. All these factors may result in a focus on production at the expense of reduced attention to compliance with standards for occupational safety and health as well as wage and hour rules. The purpose of this project will be to assess whether such pressures affect safety performance of janitorial services contractors, and how such performance may be improved.

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# Appendix D: Questionnaire



This interview should take about 40 minutes, and if you complete this survey, you will receive a \$15 prepaid Visa reward card (by mail). Participation in this research is voluntary. There will be no penalties for refusing to participate, or if you wish to skip questions. All of the information you share will be confidential. The only exception to this is that Washington State Agency Policy requires reporting of threats of harm to self or others. None of the information you provide will be shared with your employer. Our survey may make you uncomfortable or feel stress in discussing your work, however, many workers don't experience this and enjoy talking about their work experiences with us.

You may call the Washington State Institutional Review Board if you have questions about your rights or concerns/complaints about the research. The Washington State Institutional Review Board oversees this study to make sure that the rights of people who take part are protected. You can call at 1-800-583-8488. You don't have to give your name if you call. You can also call the SHARP program 1-888-667-4277 if you have additional questions about this survey.

- Q1. First, we'd like to know if you are employed as a janitor or a custodian? *Check one.*
- Yes, currently employed as a janitor or custodian – *Please continue the survey.*
- Yes, in past year, not currently – *Information on your experience is helpful. While not always worded as such, please answer all questions about your most recent janitorial position.*
- No, not in the past year or never worked as a janitor – *Thank you for your interest in our survey, we are only including current or recent janitorial workers in this study, please recycle this survey, do not return it.*
- Q2. What kind of building do/did you MOST OFTEN work in as a janitor? *Check one.*
- Commercial office building
- Educational Facility (e.g. school, university, daycare)
- Medical Facility (e.g. hospital, nursing home)
- Other, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- Residential Apartment
- Industrial (e.g. warehouse, manufacturing)
- Hospitality (restaurants, hotels; excluding housekeepers)
- Q3. Who is your employer? If not currently employed as a janitor what is the name of your last employer in that role. *[Company Name]:* \_\_\_\_\_
- Q4. How long have you worked as a janitor, overall, for any employer(s)? \_\_\_\_\_ (years)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (months)
- Q5. How long have you worked for your current employer? If not currently employed as a janitor, how long were you employed with your most recent employer in that role? \_\_\_\_\_ (years)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (months)
- Q6. How long have you worked with your current supervisor? If not currently employed as a janitor, how long did you work with your last supervisor as a janitor? \_\_\_\_\_ (years)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (months)
- No supervisor
- Q7. If you have a supervisor, what gender is your current supervisor? If not currently employed as a janitor, please record the gender of your last supervisor. *Check one.*
- Male     Female     No supervisor