

2. Tools for Barefoot Research

Define your goals

One of the most effective means of improving workers' security is to involve workers in determining what problems exist and then collectively pressuring for improvements. There may well be many workers with individual work security problems that no one else is aware of. It can be very difficult to get an accurate picture of working conditions when we hear about problems in isolation from each other, one or two at a time. Barefoot Research helps you bring together the experiences of workers and the work security problems that they face, in order to develop a collective response.

Using Barefoot techniques, you will probably want to find out something and then use that information to make changes. "Finding out" is the first stage; "Making change" is second. This is what separates Barefoot Research from traditional research and is what makes it so worthwhile.

Defining the goals is one of the first activities that workers need to tackle. For example, two union representatives or a worker health and safety committee may wish to conduct Barefoot Research. They want to find out the priority work security concerns of workers in a large retail outlet in order to:

- better respond to the workers' needs
- gain the trust of the workers
- develop a collective approach amongst the workers
- take effective action to improve unsatisfactory conditions - with the full support and involvement of the workers

After establishing the goals, it is important to clearly **define the question you want to investigate**. Using the above example, which describes the goals of Barefoot Research in a retail outlet, the question could be "What are the workers' priority work security concerns and what are their recommendations for correcting the identified problems?"

Barefoot Research can involve:

- an entire workforce or a small group of workers
- research about health problems
- the collection of information about potential hazards
- asking workers for their opinions on what issues affect their basic security including their work security
- union representatives working with their members

The fundamental purpose of Barefoot Research is to improve the lives of people by taking action to bring about practical change. It is available and accessible, even to the less powerful groups in society. It can raise awareness and produce valuable information. Because of its participatory nature, it places an element of control in the hands of the participants.

The information that is gathered from the research can be used to negotiate improvements.

There are a number of Barefoot Research tools available for gathering specific information relevant to the workplace. These tools can be used alone or in combination with each other. Each tool has strengths and weaknesses. Decide which to use based on:

- which will best help you to achieve your goals
- the time that you and other workers have available
- the nature of the intended research

But whichever tool you choose **don't "go it alone"**:

- workers are stronger when they act together and are more likely to be listened to by an employer. When you are on your own there are greater risks to you of retaliation, reprisal, and even violence. If your workplace is unionised, work with another union representative
- carefully prepare before you begin your research. If your workplace is unionised, you should talk first to your members and other union representatives to get their views. Success will only be achieved by workers combining in collective activity
- look at the workplace, listen to the workers, value workers' opinions, and develop collective organisation to tackle work security problems





Inspections by Workers

What is an inspection?

An inspection of the workplace helps workers and their representatives to identify work security problems by:

- systematically checking on a particular aspect of work security, or part of the workplace, or the way work is organised
- talking to workers, management, other workers' representatives, safety committee members

Communication with workers is the key to finding out the information we need and to negotiating improvements. Ensure that workers are involved at all stages of an inspection and gain their support by:

- finding out their problems and complaints before inspecting
- talking to them during an inspection
- reporting back to them after an inspection
- deciding with them what action to take as a result of the information that was found during the inspection

There are a number of different types of inspection which include:

- general inspections, where you routinely check numerous aspects of work security and compare them with the standards that you think should apply
- special inspections, where you concentrate in more detail on a particular aspect of work security. For example, whether work equipment is suitable for women workers to use, or whether workers required to work at night have the same protections as those working day shifts
- inspections after an accident or ill health
- inspections of documents

Inspection checklists

Some workers and their representatives find it helpful to use a checklist when carrying out an inspection. A checklist can give you more confidence and help you remember all the questions you want answered. Checklists can be particularly useful for special inspections on specific hazards (see the example shown on next page).

However, not everything can be included in a checklist. The most important things in an inspection are to:

- talk to workers and find out their views
- observe what is really going on and how people are actually working
- make notes and drawings to help make a report
- use other methods for recording evidence, such as taking photographs, if you have access to such equipment
- take action as a result of what you have found out



Example of a Workers' Inspection Checklist for Job Design

Question	Yes	No	Action Required Yes / No
<i>Difficult work positions</i>			
1. Can the time spent in one position be reduced by: redesigning the job, providing rest breaks, rotating workers, or providing chairs or stools?			
2. Can the work height be adjusted?			
3. Can adjustable chairs be provided?			
4. Can machine controls or materials be placed so workers can reach them more easily?			
<i>Mental stress</i>			
5. Can workers who must maintain close concentration be given extra breaks?			
6. Can workers who work alone be rotated to other jobs for part of the shift to lessen feelings of isolation?			
7. Can workers who deal with the public spend part of their day doing other kinds of work?			
8. Can workers have more control over the pace of work?			
9. Can the quota of work for each person be adjusted to a more realistic level?			
<i>Work environment stress</i>			
10. Can sources of noise and vibration be removed or controlled?			
11. Can chemical hazards that cause headaches or minor irritations be controlled?			
12. Can lighting be improved?			
13. Can workers be given control over the temperature in their work environment?			
<i>Tools and machine design</i>			
14. Can tools be designed to eliminate twisting of the hand or wrist?			
15. Can trucks or other machinery be designed so the driver or operator has a clearer view?			
16. Can gauges be made easier to read?			
17. Can machinery be used to lift heavy loads instead of moving them by hand?			

Source: Adapted from United Auto Workers' Union, USA

Action after an inspection



Safety Representative

The result of an inspection will be a list of points where you believe your employer should act, or about which you need more information. Remember: inspections are only useful if action is taken about the work security problems that you and other workers have identified.

So be sure to:

- point out defects found during the inspection
- inform management in writing about the problems that you have found, using a report form, a letter, or a report that you construct yourself
- obtain a management response
- keep workers informed about what management is going to do (see *Section 3 of this manual for more details*)



Surveys

What are surveys and why do them?

Surveys are amongst the most commonly used Barefoot Research tools for gathering information. A carefully designed survey can be a powerful tool for finding out about workers' work security concerns or gathering information about ill health or hazards.

Workload Surveys

Surveys help inform the union of how our members are experiencing and coping with heavy workloads. A survey can provide input from a large number of union members, including voices we don't otherwise hear from. It can be an important way to reach out and get input from workers of colour, Aboriginal workers, workers with disabilities, gays and lesbians, women and youth.

The results can provide valuable information and help the union develop more effective strategies to tackle workload problems. A survey can gather ammunition for a campaign for more staff, demonstrating how public services decline even as union members work harder and longer trying to fill the gap.

Source: Canadian Union of Public Employees

A survey may:

- be as simple as posing a single question to a number of individuals, asking “yes” or “no”
- involve a show of hands from workers when they are taking a break from work
- comprise numerous questions which require detailed analysis

Generally, the simpler the survey the better, but your particular research needs will determine its scope and complexity. Surveys are quite adaptable and can be used to gather:

- quantitative, numerical data, such as the number of workers on the afternoon shift who are suffering from headaches or
- qualitative, descriptive data, such as ideas for reducing the risk of back and neck strain among bricklayers

Deciding on whether to use a survey



Before choosing whether or not a survey is the right tool for your particular research needs, there are a number of issues for you to consider, including:

- the size of the target group
- the amount of information to be gathered
- the number of workers or workers’ representatives that are needed to carry out the survey

Once it has been decided that a survey is the right tool, there are a number of other decisions to make:

- should it be conducted verbally?
- should it be written?
- if a written questionnaire is chosen, should it be distributed and returned in person; at a meeting; by mail; over the internet; by other means that you might think of?

Preparing a Survey

When preparing a survey, it is important to be very clear about the objectives and emphasis. Ask yourself the following questions to help define the scope of the survey:

- What is the purpose of the survey?
- Who will be asked to respond to the survey?
- What information do you want to have when the survey is complete? Be very specific in answering this.
- How will you use the information you gather?
- What is your plan and timeframe for getting surveys completed and results analysed?
- What resources do you need to do this?

Source: Canadian Union of Public Employees

Putting together a survey

The more questions asked in a survey and the more individuals being asked the questions, the more data there is to analyse. You may simply want to know, for example, *whether men and women are experiencing symptoms in similar numbers*. In this case, it's just a matter of counting and comparing symptoms reported by men and symptoms reported by women. But you may want to know, for example, *whether men and/or women in a particular department are more likely to report symptoms than men and/or women in another department*. This requires more analysis and will involve more time.

What sort of questions should you ask?

You can gather descriptive data through “open-ended” questions, where workers write in answers in their own words. They do not tick a box, in the way that they would do for a “closed” question.

“Open-ended” questions can reveal rich information because answers are not limited. A question such as, *“What do you think can be done to prevent back injuries on the loading bay?”* may result in ideas that only someone who has experienced work in that area can provide. “Open-ended” questions are best used when:

- your questionnaire is short
- you have a small sample size
- you are doing face to face interviews
- you are having a “practice run”, to find out the best way of getting responses to different questions

The main disadvantages of “open-ended” questions are:

- the time it takes for a worker to complete their answers
- the questions may be more difficult to respond to, especially if the researcher is not there to explain the question
- developing a system for analysing the data may be time consuming
- deciding what information to use from the responses can be difficult

“Open-ended” questions are not recommended:

- if your questionnaire is long
- if workers are filling in their responses alone

“Closed” questions are normally quicker and simpler to answer, but the responses are limited to those that are allowed for in the questionnaire. For “closed” questions, workers tick a box, choosing from one of several predetermined answer choices.

Your survey should produce the information you need to know, so be sure to design it so that it can answer your question or questions. For example, if you are using a health questionnaire to find out whether workers are experiencing symptoms of toluene exposure, you need to know what the possible symptoms are from exposure to this chemical. If a reliable fact sheet on toluene tells us that exposure can cause *headaches, dizziness, sore throat, numbness or tingling in the fingers, central nervous system damage, and cancer*, your survey should probably ask about these symptoms. A survey that is designed specifically for symptoms of particular exposure will provide more concise and meaningful information.

How you select and word questions can strongly influence the responses.

Here is some advice to guide you:

- give clear instructions about how to complete the survey
- avoid biased or emotionally-loaded questions
- avoid negative questions that can be confusing, such as, “Do you disagree that the ventilation system should be shut off after hours?”
- limit the number of possible multiple choice answers for any given question to four or five or, alternatively, consider making it an open-ended question
- borrow the wording and format from established surveys. You may even be able to use them as they are, or adapt them to your circumstances with just a few changes or substitutions
- after constructing the survey, be sure to test it with a few workers to make sure the instructions are clear and the questions are worded properly
- make any necessary changes before distributing it

Developing a Questionnaire

When putting together a questionnaire it is important to balance the goal of creating a clear, short, “to the point” questionnaire with the need to make sure the survey collects all the necessary information.

Consider the following:

- *“Is this an opportunity to obtain information from groups you don’t often hear from, such as women workers, or those working at night?”* Does the issue you are investigating affect them in a different way, which might require different questions or solutions?
- Are there issues like language or literacy that need to be taken into account?
- Are the objectives of the survey clearly presented to the respondent? *(The more workers understand how the information will be used the more likely they are to respond.)*
- Do you need information about: Gender? Age? Job class? Employment status? Ethnicity? Why do you need this information?
- Will the responses to the questions provide background information to help interpret the results?
- Are the questions and the options for answers clear?
- Can the questionnaire be answered in 10-15 minutes?
- Will the results be easy to tabulate and provide the information you are looking for?

Source: Canadian Union of Public Employees

Keeping questions objective

It is important for Barefoot Researchers not to get put down or discouraged by critics when releasing the results of their survey. Therefore, it is important to avoid bias, and you should be careful to not make statements or use questions that could be perceived as being leading or influencing the respondents. For example:

- you might be accused of influencing the results, if you were to say, *“Following numerous reports of nose bleeds and shortness of breath, this survey is being done by the union to try to convince the employer that we are suffering from sick building syndrome and need better ventilation”*
- it would, however, be acceptable to say, *“This survey is being done by the union to gather data regarding the health of its members in this department”*

A brief statement of purpose should include assurances of confidentiality, plans for release of findings, and an explanation of the importance of everyone's co-operation. It should stress that this is worker-based research, in other words, it is the workers' own research, and is being done to reflect their reality.



Case Study: An Equal Approach for Women and Men

A union health and safety representative constructed a questionnaire and distributed it to a cross section of women members. Many problems were identified in their replies including:

- ergonomic problems
- flour dust
- women feeling that they are discriminated against and ignored
- stress caused by low staffing levels, long hours, shift work and verbal abuse
- poor welfare facilities with a lack of seats and privacy in the changing rooms

As a result, the union representative:

- submitted a report to the general manager. A positive response was given, and a meeting arranged to address the issues
- identified a female member who was recommended by the other women, who is willing to stand for the position of union health and safety representative at the next union branch meeting
- feels that awareness of women's health, safety and welfare needs has been raised, and steps will now be taken to address the problems

Adapted from: The Impact of Trade Union Education and Training in Health and Safety on the Workplace Activity of Health and Safety Representatives, HSE UK 2001

Sample Survey about Workers' Health Complaints
WHOLE-BODY VIBRATION

Personal information (optional)

Name _____

Age _____ Male _____ Female _____

Job description

Present job title _____

When did you start on this job? _____

What vibrating equipment do you use? _____

For how long each day? _____

Other machines or tools used? _____

Past jobs where vibration was a factor _____

Length of time employed at this workplace _____

Health description

If you are exposed to mainly whole-body vibration (near machines, concrete vibrators, buses, trucks, tractors, etc.), please indicate if you are suffering, or if you have suffered in the past, from any of the problems listed below. For each item below that is, or has been a problem, please indicate:

“A” if you have/had the problem “All the time”

“R” if you have/had the problem “Regularly”

“O” if you have/had the problem “Occasionally”

back pain <input type="text"/>	difficulty sleeping <input type="text"/>
arthritis <input type="text"/>	irritability <input type="text"/>
varicose veins <input type="text"/>	giddiness <input type="text"/>
piles <input type="text"/>	blurred eyesight <input type="text"/>
groin trouble <input type="text"/>	fatigue <input type="text"/>
indigestion <input type="text"/>	impotence or loss of sexual interest <input type="text"/>
high blood pressure <input type="text"/>	difficulty breathing <input type="text"/>
heart trouble <input type="text"/>	aching muscles <input type="text"/>

Did you suffer from any of these complaints before you started your present job? If yes, please give details: _____

Any other comments? _____

Source: Guidelines on hazards of vibration, Australian Council of Trade Unions

Conducting the survey and obtaining a good response

Not every worker feels comfortable participating in a survey. Some workers may:

- feel imposed upon when asked to participate
- be unfamiliar with being asked for their views
- fear reprisal
- be unsure about the purpose of the survey
- be concerned about how much time it will take

In order to re-assure workers, be responsive to their feelings. To get a good response:

- make an effort to accommodate schedules or particular needs
- try to get some input from workers regarding convenient times for them
- ensure anonymity and confidentiality
- arrange a meeting with workers or issue a letter to explain the goals and purpose of the survey and to offer assurances of protection for them
- confirm that completed surveys will be stored in a secure location
- confirm that you will report back to them and collectively decide on the next steps

A survey that is conducted face to face with workers will result in a better response rate because of the personal, interactive nature of the information collection. If literacy is likely to pose a problem, a verbal survey is better than a written questionnaire that workers have to fill out on their own. With a *verbal survey* the Barefoot Researcher asks the questions and writes down the responses. It may, however, not be an appropriate method for gathering confidential or sensitive information. For confidential or sensitive information it is best to use a written survey that workers fill out by themselves. Workers should not put their names on surveys asking confidential or sensitive information. In fact, workers should not be *required* to put their names on any survey they complete if they do not wish to be identified. If literacy is a problem for confidential or sensitive information gathering, you will probably still have to ask the questions verbally, one-to-one, ensuring complete confidentiality of all information.

The main *advantage* of a written questionnaire that workers complete themselves is that it requires fewer people to collect the data. It also gives workers more time to consider their responses. The main *disadvantage* is you may get a lower response rate than with a verbal survey. Written questionnaires require some time and effort from the worker. The response rate for written questionnaires can be higher if workers have some help with the questionnaire. The return will be much better if workers are asked to:

- complete the questionnaires on-site
- complete the questionnaires at a meeting, for example, and return the forms immediately

Once workers have taken the forms away with them, there is less likelihood they will return them unless they are very motivated.

Analysis and action

Unfortunately, the world is full of completed questionnaires that were never tallied, analysed, reported on, or acted upon. So it is essential that you now take action to complete the process. It is important not to jump to immediate conclusions. First, carefully analyse the information that you have gathered and then see if the results point to a problem.

The results of the survey should be reported back to the workers who have participated. Methods of reporting back include:

- a verbal report at a meeting or by going around the workplace
- a newsletter
- a written report

Once the report back has been given, discussions should take place to decide what action needs to be taken as a result of the survey (see *Section 3 of this manual for more details*).

Analysing the Results

The method of putting together the results depends on the type of questions asked, the number of responses and the purpose of the survey. For a small survey you can put together the results by hand, or with a simple data base program. For a large, more detailed survey with many respondents it is best to use a computer program designed for analysing survey results.

Source: Canadian Union of Public Employees





Case Study: Textile Workers Conduct RSI Research

Repetitive strain injuries (RSI) are common in the clothing and textile industry. UNITE, the union representing 200 workers at a sequins manufacturing plant in New York City, USA, responded to workers' concerns about ergonomic problems by circulating a confidential survey asking workers about health complaints.

The survey showed an alarming number of injuries among workers rolling sequins onto a spool with a manual crank. A union health and safety specialist found that almost 75% of the workers were experiencing serious pain of one form or another.

The union took the results of the survey to management and began a joint investigation to evaluate the various workstations. With the workers' permission, the union video taped individual jobs to document any awkward postures and difficult motions. A number of workstations were then ergonomically re-designed, including the spooling machine which was fitted with a foot pedal. Padded, adjustable chairs were purchased. Jobs were rotated. The union ran an educational programme involving workers and managers to develop awareness about the prevention of RSI.

The year before the programme began there were 18 cases of carpal tunnel syndrome, a potentially disabling wrist disorder. In the following year, after implementing many of the recommendations from the research, there were only 5 compensation cases, none of which were for carpal tunnel syndrome. Plant management reported that, due to this joint undertaking, their compensation costs were cut in half. More importantly, workers' risk of injury was greatly reduced.

Adapted from: Video. 1998. Ergonomic Programs That Work. US Department of Labor/Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Photo source: Video capture from Ergonomic Programs That Work.





Case Study: Brazilian Workers in Chocolate Industry Tackle RSI

Workers in Brazil's chocolate industry are doing their own research on repetitive strain injuries. Their goal is to use the results to develop a concrete action plan to support the cases of injured workers in the chocolate industry and to prevent further injuries. The union began their study by collecting data using questionnaires distributed at the plant gates. About 15% of the workers responded, returning the questionnaires via the union letterbox.

Workers were asked about:

- the kind of pain they are experiencing
- the problems they are confronted with at the workplace
- opinions about the union's activities related to these problems
- ideas for proposals to prevent the problems

The next phase of the research is being done together with a local university. The union intends to use the results to help them in planning action to reduce stress factors and injuries. Solutions will be based on developing demands for collective bargaining and gaining the right to intervene in the factory directly.

Information provided by: Mara Lira, union leader, Espirito Santo, Brazil and Research Student from Federal University of Espirito Santo. Adapted from: Translation by Heiner Koehnen





Case Study: Barefoot Research with Women Workers in Italy

The Environment and Labour Association of Tuscany and the Italian General Workers' Confederation (CGIL) Women's Committee of Tuscany carried out an investigation about women workers' health through a set of guided questions. The questions focused on risks perceived by individual workers. Women workers in different industrial sectors (*shoe factories, food and catering, communication and telephone companies, banking, kindergarten, police and social research*) filled in 233 questionnaires.

Results showed:

- 90% of women reported suffering from stress-related health problems
- 80% of women reported heavy manual lifting
- 60% of women reported repetitive hand use
- 12% of women reported reproductive ill-health including irregular periods, temporary sterility, unexpected abortion and premature birth

Stress is believed to be responsible for a general loss of sexual interest and causes changes in female menstruation. Stress can also be the consequence of workload, providing evidence once again of the existing pressures on working women, particularly due to the double work duty of home and employment responsibilities compounded by the level of performance required of the workers.

From its women-specific surveys, the CGIL Women's Committee of Tuscany and the Environment and Labour Association of Tuscany gained tremendous insight from their Barefoot Research on women workers. The need to assess all risks to women workers emerged as a priority. The usual and "official" means of evaluating risks rarely take into consideration the presence of women at work and the differences between male and female workers. The process also revealed widespread resistance to understanding gender differences when providing information and training for both workers and their representatives.

Armed with the results of this Barefoot Research, the Union and the Association are working together to prevent these problems and to improve work security for women workers in Tuscany, Italy.

Adapted from: The Italian General Workers' Confederation (CGIL), Women's Committee of Tuscany and the Associazione Ambiente e Lavoro Toscana (Environment and Labour Association of Tuscany) Tuscany, Italy, (2000)

Small group discussions

Small group discussions with workers can be used as a Barefoot Research tool. Trained worker-researchers, worker educators or experienced worker representatives can facilitate the discussions. The worker-facilitator's role is to prompt workers in the small group with questions about a particular topic or topics. The discussions that follow become the source for the research data, or information. Workers' attitudes, beliefs, feelings, reactions, and experiences are drawn out in a way that would not be possible using other research methods. It is the small group interaction in a supportive environment that encourages this.

Small group discussion is a very good method to use for researching an issue such as work security, where there can be many concerns about:

- possible job losses
- income security
- poor representation
- personal injuries and ill health

In addition, workers will have plenty of ideas about solutions!

Why use small group discussions?

A small group discussion with workers can:

- allow information to be gathered quickly about a clearly defined topic
- encourage working collectively
- encourage workers to become involved in discussions
- provide an informal and effective way of structuring discussion
- allow workers to investigate, discuss and provide solutions to work security problems that they and their co-workers face
- develop worker organisation for work security

How can small group discussions work effectively?

For a small group discussion to work, certain elements should be present. The key elements include:

- ensuring that the workers invited to the small group discussion have experience of, or opinions about, the subject being researched, and that they are representative of the workforce as a whole. For example, a small group discussion which is organised to find out how women in a workplace feel about the issue of sexual harassment at work, should include women whose age groups, occupations, or other characteristics are roughly within the same ratio as exists in the workplace
- keeping the group size manageable, with a maximum of 6 –10 workers
- making the timing convenient for the workers involved
- agreeing with workers about where the meeting should take place. It can be at the workplace or outside. But wherever it is located, it is highly recommended that it is somewhere that workers can comfortably speak up about issues
- organising in advance by preparing questions or activities, so that the small group has the opportunity to share their subjective experiences
- allowing the small group of workers to interact. This ensures that workers can comfortably express their values and beliefs, ask questions of each other, and reflect upon their own understanding of their specific experiences

- understanding that small group discussion is a forum for change. Where trust is established and where workers work effectively with one another, the group approach to examining a problem may result in solutions. These solutions may not have been obvious to the individual
- having a good group facilitator who can draw out contributions from every person in the group
- ensuring that the discussions and conclusions are recorded. These notes will be useful to you in taking action
- setting realistic time limits for discussion. Between one and two hours will normally be sufficient
- at the end of the discussion, encouraging workers to reflect upon what has been said and what action is necessary
- agreeing the time and date of the next small group discussion and the agenda

The facilitator and the workers

The facilitator plays a very important role in making the small group discussion a success. She or he may be trained in the gathering of information, may be an experienced union official, or an experienced worker educator. The facilitator helps to guide the discussion, and helps workers to feel comfortable and respected. She or he has to believe in and value what the workers are saying. Active listening, showing empathy, consideration and affirmation will foster good communication and yield better results. If workers are to share their thoughts, they must feel that the facilitator is open and honest and that she or he will respect confidentiality. The workers should not feel that they are lacking control in any way.

Worker guidelines for small group discussions

To be sure the small group discussion is a positive and safe experience, workers should agree to:

- keep an open mind
- respect each other's opinions and comments. Everyone's questions or answers are important
- participate as fully as possible. Everyone's thoughts and opinions are equally important
- feel free to leave the group at any time. Participation is voluntary
- avoid monopolising conversation. Everyone should have an equal opportunity to speak
- express honest opinions. In order to carry out accurate, meaningful Barefoot Research, workers must provide honest, accurate information
- resist interrupting or carrying on side conversations while another person is speaking
- express disagreements without attacking others
- maintain a sense of humour
- maintain confidentiality

Facilitator guidelines for small group discussions

Here are some suggested guidelines to help facilitate small group discussions:

- the facilitator's job is to foster broad active participation, to focus and guide the dialogue
- ground rules for the operation of the small group should be agreed, for example, all participants agree to respect confidentiality
- everybody should feel included. Some workers need an invitation to speak, but an invitation that leaves them feeling free and not threatened
- some workers talk too much and need to be gently but firmly reminded that others have not had the chance to speak much, or that someone was interrupted before they finished their contribution
- everyone's ideas should be respected. Although this does not mean that everyone has to agree. Exploring disagreements can be fruitful
- invite people to develop further what they said. Help workers to connect what one person says to what others have already said: "Didn't Maria say something like that?" Try to deepen the discussion by building on what has been said already
- every now and then, give a brief summary of the basic ideas touched on so far. Then offer a question that can give the discussion some focus and direction
- if it is time to move on, say so
- one person should speak at a time. If three people want to speak, order the responses: "Okay, how about Regina first, then Alberto then Selim?"
- be interested in and positive towards the workers
- be a moderator, not a participant
- try not to intervene with your own opinions or biases
- be ready to hear unpleasant views
- accept that you may not be able to moderate all groups
- use your own unique talents
- thank the workers for their contribution to the research and action process

Adapted from: South Bronx People for Change. 1984

And: Morgan, DL and Krueger, RA. 1998. The Focus Group Kit

Problem trees

A problem tree exercise is one example of how a small group discussion can be used to gather information regarding workers' concerns. It provides workers with an opportunity to collectively explore and analyse the fundamental causes and effects of identified problems.

Draw a simple outline of a tree on a flip chart or large sheet of paper and post it on the wall. The drawing should include roots, a trunk and branches.

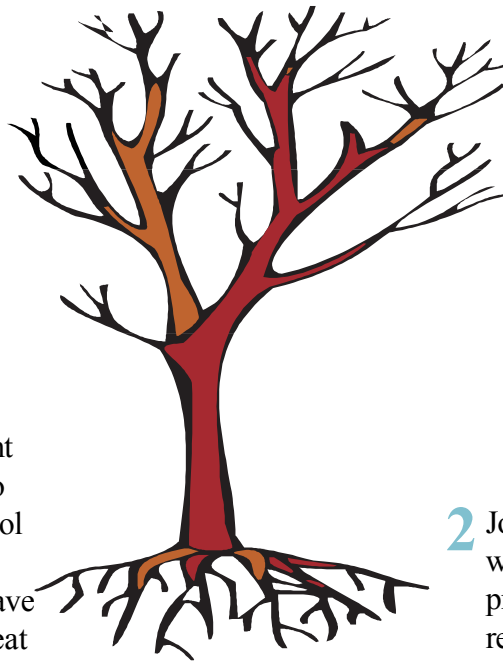
Ask workers:

- **WHAT** hazards and ill health problems exist in their workplaces? Number the problems and write them beside the branches of the tree
- **WHAT** are the immediate causes of these problems? Give these answers the *same number* as the problems to which they refer and write these alongside the trunk of the tree
- **WHAT** are the root causes of the problems? Give the root causes the same number as the problems to which they refer. Write these next to the roots of the tree

1 Workers and their children have rashes on their hands

1 Pesticide exposure; no protective equipment; no labels on pesticide containers

1 No minimum wage; payment based on crops sprayed; no child care provision or school on the plantation; basic pay rate so poor that children have to work to earn enough to eat



2 Aching backs

2 Lifting heavy loads, no lifting aids

2 Jobs assigned mainly to women workers on precarious contracts; pregnant workers fired; no regulations on lifting; no union

Adapted from: Ferreira, EC and Ferreira, JC. 1997. Making Sense of the Media; A handbook of popular education techniques. (New York, USA: Monthly review Press)

This exercise is ideal for collecting information regarding the full range of workers' concerns. It has the added benefit of raising awareness about the fundamental causes of identified problems. Workers and their families may suffer from poor health caused by a combination of factors all related to a lack of basic security. Daily realities for many workers include:

- poor nutrition
- lack of access to clean water
- lack of medicines and medical services

Even where medicine and health services are available, an insufficient income often means that workers cannot buy medicine or get medical treatment when needed. A poor general state of health due to a lack of basic securities makes the health effects of exposure to work-related hazards much worse.

In conducting Barefoot Research, workers may speak about a variety of problems in their daily life outside work. At first, you may think these are not related to health complaints reported in the workplace. But by listening to and recording these problems, often you discover that problems outside work are directly linked to health problems related to exposures at work. For example, workers struggling to provide their children with enough food to eat each day may not give priority to the effects on their own health from working with chemicals, dangerous machines, or unsafe construction practices. The lack of basic security in a worker's life may explain why he or she does not take any action to improve their working conditions, even if they are suffering from hazardous exposures.

Barefoot Research allows you to investigate all of the causes that may contribute to workers' health problems. And Barefoot Research can help you decide collectively which area to take action on first. You may be surprised, for example, if workers choose to take collective action on their insecure employment status before wanting to take action on chemical exposures, even if they have no protection at all from the hazards. As Barefoot Researchers, it is important to respect the collective choices, even if you do not agree personally.

Analysis and action

Workers should agree that notes can be kept that record key points arising from the small group discussion. The notes will help to tackle the work security problems that have been identified by:

- collective discussion
- collective analysis and
- development of action plans (see Section 3 of this manual for more details)