



### 3. Taking Action

The purpose of Barefoot Research is to bring about change. By the time your research is completed, the process of turning the research into action will already be taking place! Because Barefoot Research is participatory in nature the workers who were involved will have demonstrated some commitment to the research along the way. This will provide you with a ready group to organise action based on the Barefoot Research results. Gaining group support for workplace change can be a difficult task, so pat yourself on the back and consider you have won half the battle by this point!

If workers are informed, interested and involved, a trade union or an organised group can be an effective means of protecting and improving workers' security. Some of the key elements of organising include:

- building on the interest of workers where it exists
- awakening interest where it does not exist
- involving workers from the beginning in identifying work security problems and possible solutions
- prioritising problems, on the basis that not all problems can be tackled at once
- choosing first those issues where workers' support can be won and there is a good chance of success and
- building the confidence of workers to tackle the more difficult problems later

***Good communication is essential in organising for change. The Barefoot Research process will have raised interest and hopes in the workers involved. Producing research results and reporting back to the workers that participated is an important part of the communication.***

#### Using and sharing the results of Barefoot Research

It is essential that you present the research findings to the workers as soon as possible. You will need to do the following:

- sort, compile and analyse the information that you have gathered. Do this collectively if you can. You may want to include some initial conclusions and recommendations at this point
- communicate the results in full or summary form, either verbally, by pictures, in writing, or by a combination of all these methods
- remember, in presenting the findings the issue of confidentiality is of utmost importance to protect the security of workers. Information that might identify an individual should not be used without the express prior consent of that individual

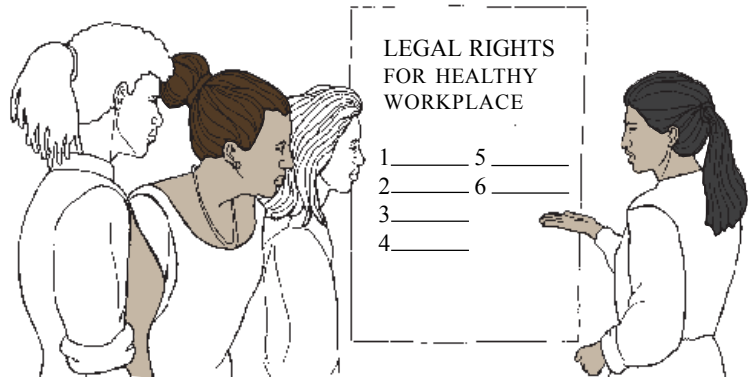


*Photo: courtesy of Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Sarnia, Canada.*

## Verbal report

A verbal report may be adequate to present the results of a quick poll.

*For example, a group of public service workers might be asked, through a simple ballot form, if a client has ever physically or verbally threatened or attacked them and if so, on how many occasions. The report may be as simple as stating how many of the workers experienced such a threat or attack once, on two occasions, or more than twice. Such simple findings could be presented at a workers' meeting. You could then collectively discuss strategies for change.*



Later you might produce a written report to present to the employer or government authorities.

## Report with maps or pictures

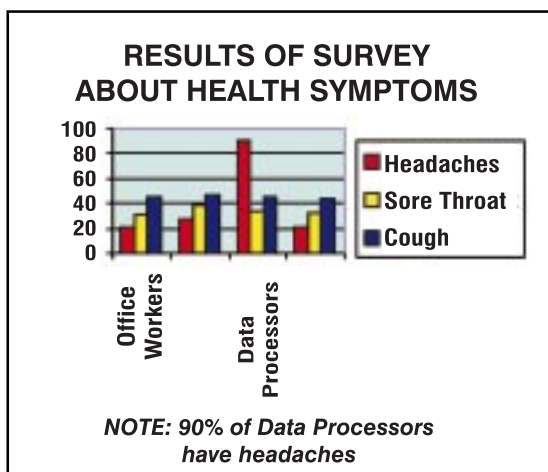
When preparing the report, it is important to consider the literacy level of workers you are presenting the report to. You could give a report based on mapping, using the actual maps that were created, with permission from the workers who created the maps. Be careful not to reveal the workers' identities. Reports based on mapping are a useful way to present results to workers who may not easily read a written report.

You can create:

- combined body maps using the maps from separate groups
- an overall map of the workplace using hazard maps of different departments in the workplace

You can add a written summary or analysis of the information gathered from the maps.

## Results of Survey Health About Symptoms



Numerical findings can be presented visually using diagrams such as pie charts, bar charts or pictograms. These can be hand-drawn or computer-generated.

Injured, Getting Compensation	
Injured, Not Getting Compensation	

## Written report

A written report may be:

- a one page flyer with a summary of the research findings
- a larger document with a full description of the Barefoot Research process, goals, information collection methods, the information gathered, analysis, recommendations and conclusions

You may want to include:

- quotes, drawings, maps and other descriptive information
- any tables and calculations, if you have created them

## Agreeing on action with workers

You should organise an action planning meeting with the workers where you:

- present the results of the research and
- collectively decide on what action should be taken next

The action planning meeting should aim to develop:

- a discussion about the findings of the research
- concrete plans for action
- counter arguments to an employer's likely response
- timeframes and deadlines
- the commitment of workers to implement agreed activities and action including who will do what

It may be helpful to note down these action plans in a visual way using a Priorities and Action Planning chart. Record on the chart the issues that workers are most concerned about and write down their ideas for making changes.

**PRIORITIES AND ACTION**

Problem	Solution	Barriers	Short-Term Action	Long-Term Action	Priority Vote

In preparation, create a blank chart on a large sheet of paper. Label the overall chart "PRIORITIES AND ACTION PLAN."

Create six columns and label them:

- **Problem**
- **Solution**
- **Barriers**
- **Short-Term Action**
- **Long-Term Action**
- **Priority Votes**

Then the workers can decide upon the priorities for action in two linked stages.

### **Stage 1: Drawing up a shortlist of priorities**

In the action planning meeting, present the results of the research, and then ask the workers to:

- think about the various problems identified by the research and
- individually choose a single issue or problem that she or he considers to be the most important or the most urgent

Fill in the first five columns of the chart by asking the workers one at a time, to:

- name their highest priority work security issue from the research findings
- give their suggestions for possible solutions to that problem
- state the potential barriers they think would be faced in tackling this priority issue
- give their ideas for short-term and long-term action

You should then ask the other workers to offer additional suggestions for the solutions and actions. If more than one person names the same problem, it need only be written down once, but additional solutions, barriers, or action plan ideas should be recorded.

### **Stage 2: Deciding upon a priority problem**

Ask each worker to indicate on the chart the one issue she or he thinks should be given highest priority. Using markers, each worker should put an **X** in the priority votes column next to the one issue they consider to be of highest priority. After the voting, count the **Xs** and you will all have a clear picture of what are the highest priorities for the workers and where to focus initial action.

There are other ways of deciding on priorities too. After you have given your report on the research findings, you can start a discussion with the workers using questions to stimulate the discussion. For each issue identified in the research findings, ask workers to consider:

- is this a serious concern for me personally?
- is this a serious concern for my co-workers?
- has this problem resulted in serious health problems?
- could this problem result in serious health problems?
- are many people affected by, or at risk of being affected by this problem?
- could this problem be corrected quickly and easily?
- is this an issue likely to win widespread support for the collective body?

Once you have decided collectively on the priority concern and your action plan, you will need to think about the way that you can get things done.

### **Getting things done**

Improvements to work security are made in the same ways as all worker gains — through education, solidarity, organisation and action. If there is a union in your workplace, union representatives and sometimes a local union committee are important parts of the mechanism for resolving work security concerns. It is the job of the union representative and a local union committee to represent rank and file workers on work security issues. If you do not have a trade union in your workplace, the Barefoot Research process may have given encouragement and confidence to workers to form a union that will speak on behalf of workers. But whatever your situation is, **“Don’t go it alone!”**

Without the support of workers, workers' representatives, union representatives or health and safety committee members can become isolated. This makes it difficult or even impossible to get things done. Employers are more likely to act if they know that workers are well informed, active and organised.

Here are some techniques that can help you get your employer to remedy the problems that have been uncovered by Barefoot Research:

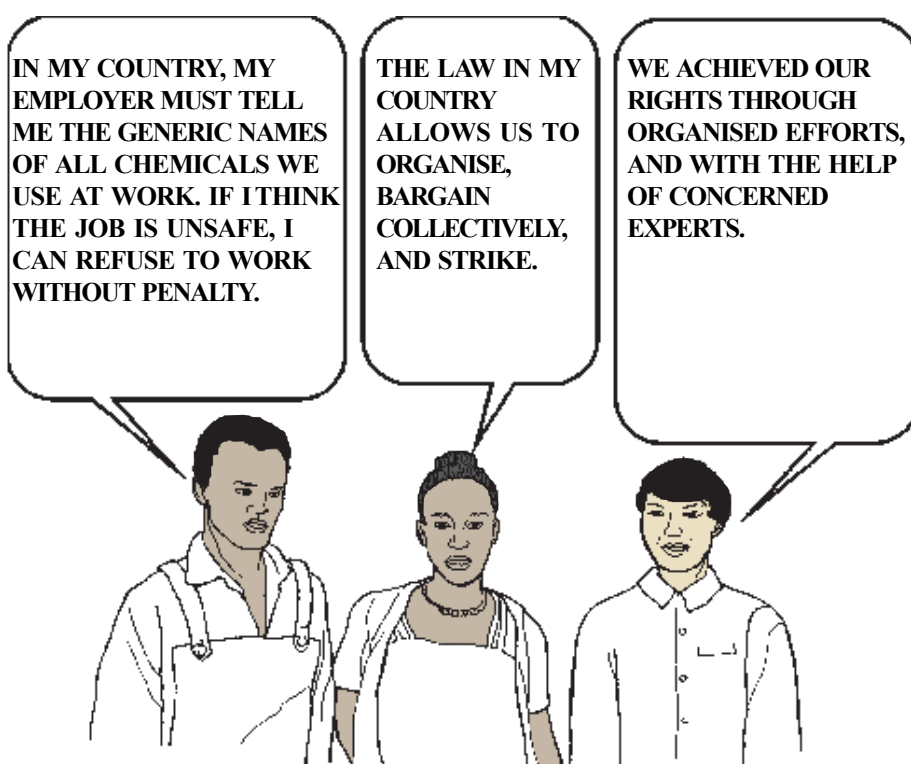
### **Get organised**

- prepare your work carefully
- put things in writing
- make reports
- use procedures
- negotiate with management
- use joint health and safety committees
- make health and safety agreements with your employer
- build wider alliances with worker friendly networks
- use the media where appropriate

### **Use the law**

- check if there are any laws in your country that help
- be clear about employer's duties and your legal rights
- check if ILO Conventions can help
- use Government inspectors if there are any

*(See also the section on Resources at the back of this manual).*



### ***Use the collective strength of workers***

- ensure good communication with them
- plan action and report back
- ensure that the employer knows how strongly workers feel about the issue

### ***Monitor, follow-up and don't give up!***

- making changes can be hard and can take time, but don't give up until you have achieved your goals
- build on your achievements, by using or adapting Barefoot Research tools to deal with new situations and new problems

### **Careful preparation**

We have studied the situation and now present you with our demands and suggestions for improvements. We expect your reply in one week, otherwise we will be forced to take more drastic action.



The need for careful preparation is critical and cannot be stressed strongly enough. You must be clear about:

- what you want to achieve as a result of your Barefoot Research findings
- how you will pursue the issue with management – in writing, in a meeting, in the joint labour-management health and safety committee?
- how you will keep workers involved throughout the process
- the strength of support that you have from workers

You will need to:

- decide on your minimum as well as maximum demands in advance. These should have been agreed with the workers during the priority and action planning meeting, when you reported back on the results of the Barefoot Research
- make sure you have the support of the workers who are involved
- talk to a more experienced representative to get advice, if you feel this will help
- ensure that you have all the information and facts you need from the Barefoot Research and from your action plan. Write things down so that you do not forget important points
- list the arguments you will use with the management, identifying which are your strong points and which are the weak ones
- think carefully about the different ways management may respond to your arguments and prepare some counter arguments. For example, your Barefoot Research uncovers headaches and a loss of appetite when workers are using Chemical “X”. Management may produce a data sheet that does not mention these symptoms and a scientific research paper saying that Chemical “X” is safe to use when following the manufacturer’s instructions. Furthermore they may say that your Barefoot Research is not scientific and is biased towards the workers. You can use ideas from this manual to help you to develop your counter arguments



### Negotiation with management

Negotiation is not a discussion — it is a collective bargaining session between workers and management. It is through the collective bargaining process that many changes in the workplace can be made. In many situations, management may try to “bury” workers with technical data and technical terminology. Workers and their union representatives must be prepared to deal competently and confidently with such strategies. After the Barefoot Research, workers and their representatives will find themselves much better informed about particular issues than management. There are large numbers of employers who know little, if anything, about the growing number of work-related health hazards. Some employers will be interested to learn from what you have discovered through Barefoot Research.



Here are some basic principles to follow when negotiating with management following your Barefoot Research:

- try to avoid meeting alone with the management unless it is on a one-to-one basis
- if other representatives are involved in the meeting/negotiation, prepare a united case
- stay calm, do not lose your temper – you may forget your argument and aims
- try to steer the discussion to your strong points and away from the weaker ones
- look for management offers of a compromise but do not go below the minimum goals that you have agreed collectively with the workers. Remember that if both sides feel they have gained something from a negotiation often it will be easier to reach a settlement
- if you can reach a settlement that you are happy with, make sure that everyone is clear on the precise nature of the agreement reached
- keep a written record which both sides agree on
- always inform workers about the outcome of negotiations and decide on your next steps collectively

### **Joint labour-management health and safety committee**

In many workplaces, collective agreements have already established joint labour-management health and safety committees. In some countries, the law provides for the establishment of these joint committees.

The joint labour-management health and safety committee has great potential to improve working conditions following Barefoot Research. The committee involves both management and workers in the process of identifying, eliminating, and controlling hazards. This is important because ultimately, it is management who must implement the necessary changes in the workplace - with the agreement of the workers.

The effectiveness of a joint committee is primarily determined by the support that workers, the trade union members and the local union committee (if there is a trade union) give to the worker members who are on the committee. Without strong support, worker representatives will be in a position of isolation — and therefore weakness — no matter how strong, determined, or well-prepared they are individually. Management will know whether the issue is of concern to one or two people or a lot of workers, and their reaction is likely to vary accordingly.

When you have conducted Barefoot Research, management will know that workers themselves have generated the information and demands, and it will be difficult for them to ignore this. Management will also know that workers might refuse to do any job that would endanger their health or safety. (In some countries there is a legal right to refuse to do dangerous work).

In some cases, workers have timed their research findings to be released at the same time contract negotiations begin, with the joint health and safety committee playing an important role.

#### **Barefoot Research Success**

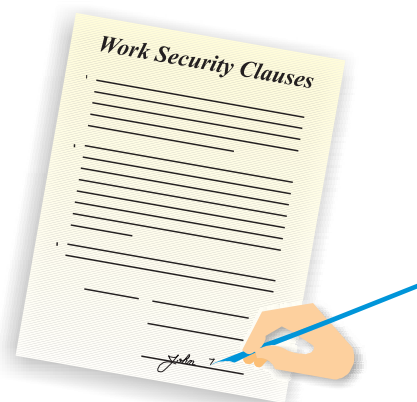
The research conducted by the casino gaming workers in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, was directly acknowledged in their collective agreement and it was agreed that the findings and recommendations would be addressed, item by item, by the joint union management health and safety committee.

*[Keith M, et al, 2001]*

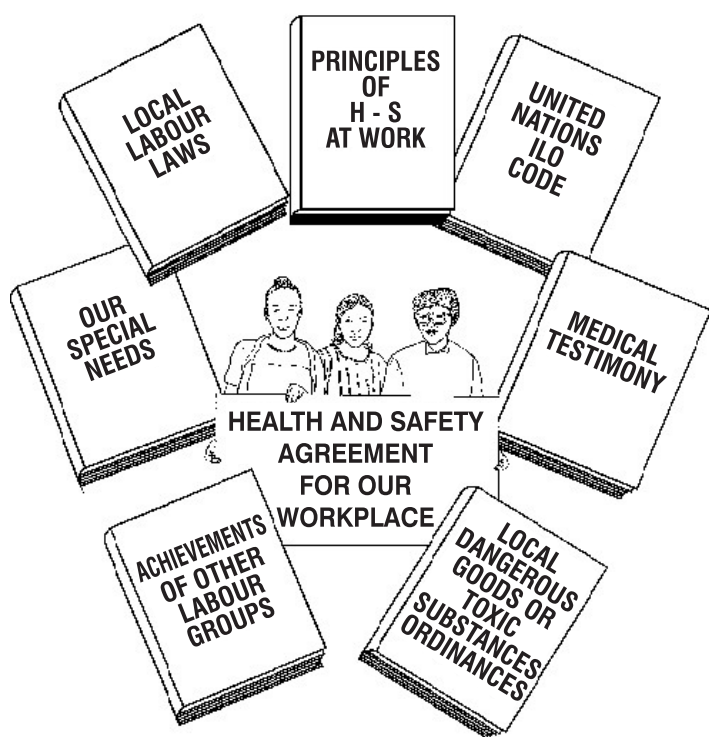


## Collective agreements

Workers' rights, basic security and health and safety should not be negotiable. But where there is no adequate legislation and enforcement these rights often have to be won through the collective bargaining process. The results of a Barefoot Research project, along with the support generated among the workers through the participatory process, can provide leverage for negotiating improvements.



The end result of the bargaining process should be a Collective Agreement. For example, Barefoot Research may have revealed that workers are suffering from headaches as a result of exposure to a toxic chemical. To prevent these health effects in the future, the joint labour-management health and safety committee might agree that:



- the toxic chemical will be removed from use and a safer substitute will be found
- processes that create dusts, vapours or mists will be isolated and enclosed
- no new chemical substances will be introduced without the consent of the worker members of the committee
- a joint sub committee will be elected to develop a chemicals policy, plan and co-ordinate activities on chemical safety
- hazard data sheets will be compiled on all chemicals used in the workplace

## Grievance and disputes procedures

In some workplaces, unions and management have agreed a special procedure for dealing with grievances and disputes. These include problems that are not resolved regarding health and safety, basic security as well as other issues.

The procedure will normally identify the steps that the union must take to raise the problem formally through the levels of the management structure. Grievance or disputes procedures normally have stages and time limits. If a question is not settled (this is sometimes called a failure to agree), or a time limit is exhausted, the problem is considered at the next stage of the procedure.

## Example of a disputes procedure

**Stage 1:** member raises problem with supervisor

*-if no agreement within 24 hours*

**Stage 2:** union representative discusses problems with supervisor

*-if no agreement within two working days*

**Stage 3:** union representative meets departmental manager

*-if no agreement within four working days*

**Stage 4:** union representative and convenor meet senior managers

*-if no agreement, procedure deemed to be exhausted and **action** may follow*

If management will not agree to proposals from the Barefoot Research, unions and workers should insist on the right to use the normal grievance or disputes procedure.

## Building support outside the workplace

***It is best to use internal procedures to try to make the changes that are needed following Barefoot Research.*** Sometimes though, the employer will be reluctant to make the changes that are being demanded by workers. In these circumstances it can help if the research has been made public and allies created in the local community. This will place additional pressure on the employer to respond to the workers' demands.

## Government inspectors

Government inspectors may be able to place pressure on an employer to tackle problems identified through Barefoot Research. Government inspectors are needed to inspect, monitor and enforce the law in workplaces. These inspectors are known as health and safety inspectors or factory inspectors and are under the authority of the Ministry of Labour or the equivalent.

Inspectors should make sure that employers comply with the minimum legal standards governing the workplace. Common problems with the enforcement of legislation protecting workers' rights, including health and safety, in many countries include:

- not enough inspectors
- many inspectors have only limited training
- many inspectors have to do their job with virtually no equipment or sources of information
- inspectors can enforce only existing legislation, but the legislation itself may not be strong or protective, giving inspectors little authority, and resulting in little or no action to improve working conditions

Because of the serious problems in enforcing health and safety laws, it is better to use your negotiations as the first line of attack against poor working conditions. But if you think your Barefoot Research clearly shows that the law is being broken, then an inspector may help. Sometimes, just the threat of bringing in an outside body may ensure that your employer takes your Barefoot Research findings more seriously.

### **The media**

If you are considering using the media, ***make sure that you discuss it thoroughly with your co-workers and other union representatives, if you have a union.*** You should agree on a strategy that protects individuals who may be victimised for “going public”.

You could consider holding a press conference to release the results of your Barefoot Research. News of research findings will be seen as an event and will be more likely to receive coverage. Media coverage of your research will give it more importance. Public attention and sympathy might have some influence on employers or policy-makers. It may also add to the solidarity and confidence of the workers whose problems are being publicly acknowledged for the first time.

Here are some tips for working with the media:

- issue a press release to the media several days before the event. It should announce the date, time and place of the press conference, include a brief description of the Barefoot Research, and provide the name and telephone number of someone who can be contacted for more information. There should be something in the press release that will attract the media’s interest, such as a surprising finding or a unique aspect of the research
- make sure that you protect individuals and respect the confidential details of your research findings
- prepare a small panel to speak at the press conference. It can include worker-facilitators, workers who participated in the research, and union representatives, with perhaps an ally or two from the community. If possible, you should display visual items such as maps or charts showing results
- prepare a press statement highlighting the points you want to make publicly
- have copies of the press statement and the research findings available for the media to take away with them





## **Case Study:** **Brazilian Asbestos Workers Networking World-wide**

Brazil is one of the five largest producers of asbestos in the world. It also uses asbestos in thousands of products. It was not until 1991 that the Brazilian government introduced a law for medical surveillance for workers exposed to asbestos. Like Canada, the world's second largest asbestos producer, Brazil has not maintained a registry to document the extent of cancer and respiratory disease found among asbestos-exposed workers.

A group of ill workers from a large multinational corporation, formed an organisation in 1995 called the Brazilian Association of the Asbestos Exposed (ABREA). These workers established clear goals. They wanted to:

- publicise the dangers of asbestos
- document the medical condition of exposed workers
- promote safe substitutes
- have the use of asbestos banned

ABREA members began to record cases of workers with asbestos disease. They teamed up with a government health and safety inspector and a medical expert. Out of 960 former employees, they documented:

- 20 cases of cancer
- more than 100 cases of asbestosis
- nearly 200 cases of lung scarring and
- another 220 cases of impaired respiratory function

In a very short period of time ABREA has grown into an organisation of over 1000 members. It has created strong voice representation for workers who had been marginalised because of work-related illness and disability. It has been instrumental in achieving the agreement by four Brazilian states to ban the use of asbestos by 2005. These four states represent 70% of the asbestos use in Brazil.

The Brazilians are also very active in building an international network, called the Ban Asbestos Network. Through the use of the internet, videoconferences, discussion lists, homepages, newsletters and emails an international movement emerged. This grassroots movement has been a significant force in having the use and importation of asbestos stopped throughout the European Union, Australia, and Chile.

*Adapted from: Scanove, L, Giannasi, F, Thebaud-Mony, A. 2001. Asbestos Disease in Brazil and the Building of Counter-Powers: A Study in Health, Work and Gender. (This article is one of the results of the research project "Asbestos and Its Social and Familial Consequences: A Comparative Franco-Brazilian Study.")*

*And: Giannasi, F. 2001. The movement for a ban on asbestos in Brazil: Globalization from below. Paper at Asbestos and Public Health - The International Dimension Activities towards a global ban and the role of the World Trade Organisation.*

### Worker friendly networks

You should use your Barefoot Research findings to make connections with and gain support from:

- worker-friendly individuals in the medical, legal, social science, and scientific communities
- natural allies such as environmental groups, women's organisations, anti-poverty groups, human rights or injured workers' organisations
- sympathetic policy-makers
- international allies, perhaps linking with a workers' group in another country



*Poster Images: courtesy of Hazards Publications, UK.*

Share your results with other groups of workers and employers in similar workplaces or industries. They will benefit from your research and may be inspired to conduct their own. This may in turn strengthen your findings and add more credibility to your arguments for change, perhaps even on an industry-wide basis.

You can join into existing worker and trade union based networks, which are building around the world. Some of these networks have achieved great successes in protecting workers' security. Look at the Hazards Campaigns web page <http://www.hazards.org/campaigns/index.htm> to see examples of successful trade union health and safety campaigns around the world. You could contact some of these groups to share ideas about building a campaign around your own research findings.



## Gaining a Voice

*Workers know their own workplaces best. By relying on their own experience and the collective knowledge of their colleagues, workers often have gathered the necessary information to change the work environment. It is workers who first identified such diseases as miners' pneumoconiosis and chronic bronchitis; asbestos-related diseases; industrial deafness; vibration white finger; occupational asthma, repetitive strain injuries; and workplace stress.*

*From: O'Neill, R. 2000.  
"Surveying the Damage".  
Hazards, July-September 16-17, 2000*

Worker participation in decision-making and economic democracy are essential to all forms of basic security including work security. Without a voice in how work is organised and all the factors that contribute to working conditions, workers will continue to face work environments that threaten their health, safety, security, dignity and livelihood.

Workers need a voice in the workplace, through union representation, participation on workplace committees, or any other effective group mechanism that can be formed where there is no union. They need a voice in the decisions made in communities where they live and work. Workers need a voice in legislative, regulatory and policy decisions.

Barefoot Research is one way that workers can use their voice to communicate:

- their experience of work
- the limitations of protective measures
- the impact those limitations have upon workers' lives and
- the changes that are necessary to protect their health and well-being

Organising around work security provides workers with greater strength for bargaining to make changes and increase their level of basic security. If workers have the tools to organise they can:

- improve their basic socio-economic security
- gain power through organisation to tackle income and employment issues
- improve working conditions
- increase their voice representation

As workers around the world have repeatedly shown, Barefoot Research is a powerful mechanism for learning, understanding, organising and change.