

Report on Working Conditions in the Retail Laundromat Industry

New York City 2018



Empowering
Workers &
Communities

Empoderando
Trabajadores y
Comunidades

A photograph of a laundromat. In the foreground, a person is looking down at a piece of fabric. The background shows rows of washing machines and another person in the distance. The scene is brightly lit with large windows.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Laundry Workers Center would like to thank the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center for their guidance in developing this participatory research project. The Community Development Project (CDP) strengthens the impact of grassroots organizations in New York City's low-income and other excluded communities. They partner with community organizations to win legal cases, publish community-driven research reports, assist with the formation of new organizations and cooperatives, and provide technical and transactional assistance in support of their work towards social justice. Thank you to Erin Markman, Julia Sick, Diana Marin, Irene Linares, and Alexa Kasden for their support in the research, survey development, and writing.

A special thank you to the expertise and guidance of our advisory board members who offered invaluable feedback, insights, and resources to this project; thank you to Stephanie Luce (Murphy Institute for Worker Education at the CUNY School of Professional Studies), Nadia Marin (New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health), Jessica Garcia (Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union), and Daisy Chung (Formerly ALIGN).

Thank you to George Friedman-Jimenez, Acran Salmen-Navarro, and Honghong Lou at Bellevue/NYU Occupational and Environmental Medicine Clinic for their insight and expertise in recommendations on laundromat workers' occupational safety and health.

This project was especially made possible by the dedication of Laundry Workers Center's members and volunteers who helped to organize and conduct observations and surveys at retail laundromats throughout the city; thanks to members Maurilio O., Jorge L., Hilario C., Angel D., Demetrio L., and Silverio C.; and thanks to community volunteers: Yajaira Saavedra, Diego Palaguachi, Richard Mann, Chelsea Gelwarg, and Claudia Palacios. A special thanks to our interns Kimberly Lopez Castellanos and Yennifer Muriel, who also provided feedback, recommendations, and translation for the project.

A special thank you to all laundromat workers that participated in this project through surveys and interviews; special thanks to Leticia and Nicholas B.

This project would not have been possible without the support and dedication of Laundry Workers Center's team; thanks to Rosanna Rodriguez, Rebecca Stuart, and Mahoma López. Cover art concept by Mahoma López.



Author of Report
LAUNDRY WORKERS CENTER

Laundry Workers Center (LWC) is a not-for-profit organization that addresses the need for community-based leadership development to improve the living and working conditions of low-wage, immigrant workers in the laundromat and service industries of New York City. Our approach connects community and workplace justice organizing in order to support families, grow political consciousness, and build grassroots power that is socio-economically sustainable.

Exploitative, dangerous working conditions are endemic for low-income and immigrant communities. Nearly 1 in 5 workers in New York City earn less than minimum wage, with over half of those who work more than 40 hours a week being illegally denied overtime pay. Low-wage workers are also subjected to more dangerous working conditions and health hazards, including extreme temperatures, exposure to toxic substances, and improper safety equipment or training.¹

LWC seeks to challenge and transform the conditions of these low-wage industries. Through leadership development and collective action, we are training workers to organize their workplaces for dignity, justice, and safety.

¹ Bernhardt, Annette, Diana Polson, and James DeFilippis. "Working Without Laws: A Survey of Employment and Labor Law Violations in New York City." National Employment Law Survey, 2010. <http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/2015/03/WorkingWithoutLawsNYC.pdf>



INTRODUCTION

The retail laundromat industry has long flown under the radar of labor organizers. As a fragmented and often isolated workforce—with many employees working alone or with only one other person during their shift—laundromat workers face unique vulnerabilities and challenges when it comes to organizing or advocating for workplace rights and safety considerations.

In 2004, the *New York Times* exposed the low pay, health and safety hazards, and abusive conditions faced by the laundromat workers they profiled.²

A 2010 report found that laundromat and dry-cleaning workers in New York City faced minimum wage and overtime violations, worked off the clock without pay, and were deprived of appropriate meal and break times.³ But there are few existing studies of this workforce.

At what cost are laundry workers paying to keep New York City's clothes clean? Laundry Workers Center partnered with the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center to investigate the workplace challenges faced by retail laundromat workers. Together, we developed and conducted a participatory research project, combining observations at retail laundromats with worker surveys and interviews to document these workers' experiences in a too often overlooked industry.

The findings presented in this report shed light on the range of workplace violations and health and safety issues that retail laundromat workers continue to experience. The workers we surveyed for this project were overwhelmingly women of color, many of them immigrants, and many of whom had worked in laundromats for years.

What We Found

Workplace Hazards:

Nearly all workers surveyed reported that they were exposed to at least one workplace hazard—such as bleach, other chemicals, and extremely soiled clothing. One in five workers had paid out of pocket for the protective gear they felt they needed to do their job.

Workplace Harassment:

More than half of workers were subjected to harassing conduct in the workplace, ranging from racial slurs and insults to threats and intimidation, with much of this conduct coming from laundromat customers. Nearly a third of workers reported feeling that their personal safety was at risk while at work.

Minimum Wage and Overtime Violations:

One in five workers were paid \$10.00 per hour or less: a likely violation of New York's minimum wage requirements. Many workers also reported working overtime without appropriate compensation, as well as working off the clock (before or after their shifts) without pay.

METHODOLOGY

Background research. Legal research was conducted to inform the project, covering issues such as laundromat licensing requirements and wage and hour laws. In addition, a literature review was compiled from existing studies and news reports on the laundromat industry as well as related industries, such as industrial laundries and dry cleaners.

Observations at 100 laundromats. Laundry Workers Center members and organizers were trained to conduct observations at laundromats using a collaboratively developed observation guide. Background research informed the guide on observations regarding legal requirements. Observers posed as consumers and noted the physical layout of the laundromats, consumer postings, and observable health and safety issues. The target neighborhoods were those particularly dense with laundromats, as well as areas that were a priority for Laundry Workers Center given their membership base. Laundromats within these selected zip codes were then chosen at random from the Department of Consumer Affairs list of licensed laundromats.⁴ We over-sampled larger 24-hour laundromats due to the extended opportunities to observe at these laundromats, and because they are larger employers in the industry with bigger workforces.⁵

² Greenhouse, Steve. "Rewards of a 90-Hour Week: Poverty and Dirty Laundry." *The New York Times*, May 31, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/31/nyregion/31laundry.html>

³ Bernhardt, Annette, et al.

⁴ Laundromats identified using the Department of Consumer Affairs list of licensed laundromats

⁵ Researchers called laundromats in advance to confirm they were in operation and selected a new laundromat at random if the listed laundromat was closed. If a laundromat was found to be closed by observers in the field, a nearby laundromat was selected from the list.



Recommendations

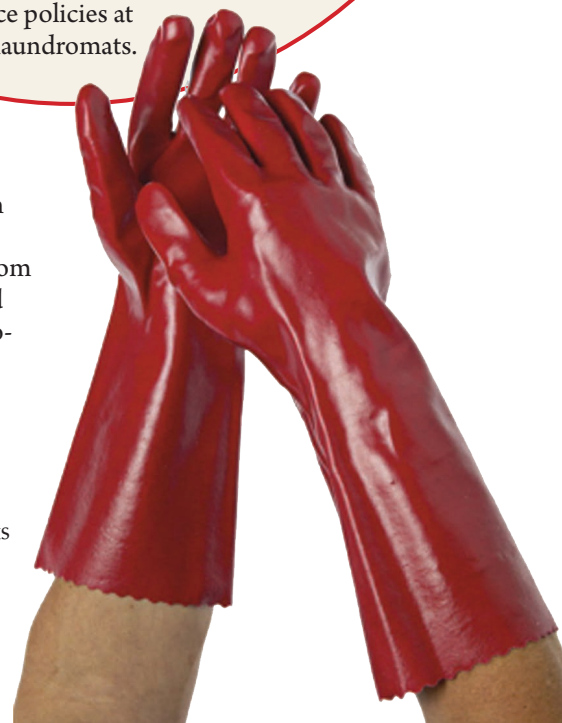
To ensure a safer, more equitable environment that all laundromat workers deserve, we offer the following recommendations based on the findings detailed in this report:


Safety and Health Trainings: Ensure that laundromat employers educate and train all employees on workplace safety hazards and how to effectively protect themselves.

Required Protective Gear: Create a city-wide policy to mandate that laundromat employers provide and maintain the necessary safety equipment to each and every employee **free of charge**.

Workplace Safety Plans and Violence Prevention Programs: Workplace violence affects a wide array of retail employers, especially those that operate late-night or 24-hour establishments. Although it may not be possible for laundromats to eliminate violent incidents, training all staff members in a violence prevention program can reduce the risk of harm.

Ergonomic Workspaces: Promote workers' physical wellbeing through ergonomic workplace policies at laundromats.





More than three-quarters (79%) of surveyed workers were born outside the U.S. and most (66%) reported Spanish as their primary language.

Many workers reported working overtime without appropriate compensation as well as working off the clock (before or after their shift) without pay.

Our research finds that laundromat workers are subjected to high levels of harassment, with more than half of workers (54%) reporting some form of harassment.

99 surveys, administered to workers at 78 unique laundromats.

Laundry Workers Center and the Community Development Project developed a survey designed to investigate the working conditions of retail laundromats. Laundry Workers Center members and organizers were trained to administer this survey to retail laundromat workers.

A total of 103 surveys were conducted, but four were excluded from analysis because the survey respondents were managers. Laundromats at which observations had been conducted were prioritized for conducting surveys, but due to the challenges of surveying this workforce (workers are often the only employee or are alone with a manager, and store hours vary) adjustments were made to identify additional laundromats where workers were available and willing to be surveyed.

Surveys were translated into Spanish and were administered both in English and Spanish. Because this research was undertaken by a grassroots community organization with limited resources, it was not possible to administer surveys in other languages. In the field, researchers encountered workers, particularly Asian workers, who they were not able to survey due to language barriers. As a result, Asian workers are underrepresented in our research sample.

Interviews to inform worker profiles.

Laundry Workers Center organizers conducted targeted interviews with laundromat workers to inform the profiles found in this report.



FINDINGS

Laundromat Workers and the Workplace

Surveyed Workers: A Demographic Profile

Workers surveyed were overwhelmingly women of color, most were immigrants, and most spoke a primary language other than English. Of surveyed workers, about half were between 35-44 years of age. Most had worked in the laundromat industry for more than two years, and many had been in the workforce long term. For the majority of workers, the laundromat was their only job.

- **86% of surveyed workers identified as female.** About one in ten (13%) identified as male, and 1% identified as a different gender identity.
- **99% of surveyed workers identified as people of color (99%).⁶ This includes:**
 - 74% who identified as Latina/o or Hispanic
 - 17% who identified as Black

⁶ Here it is important to note that our survey sample was impacted by the languages in which we were able to survey (Spanish and English). As a result, other racial and ethnic identities may be underrepresented.

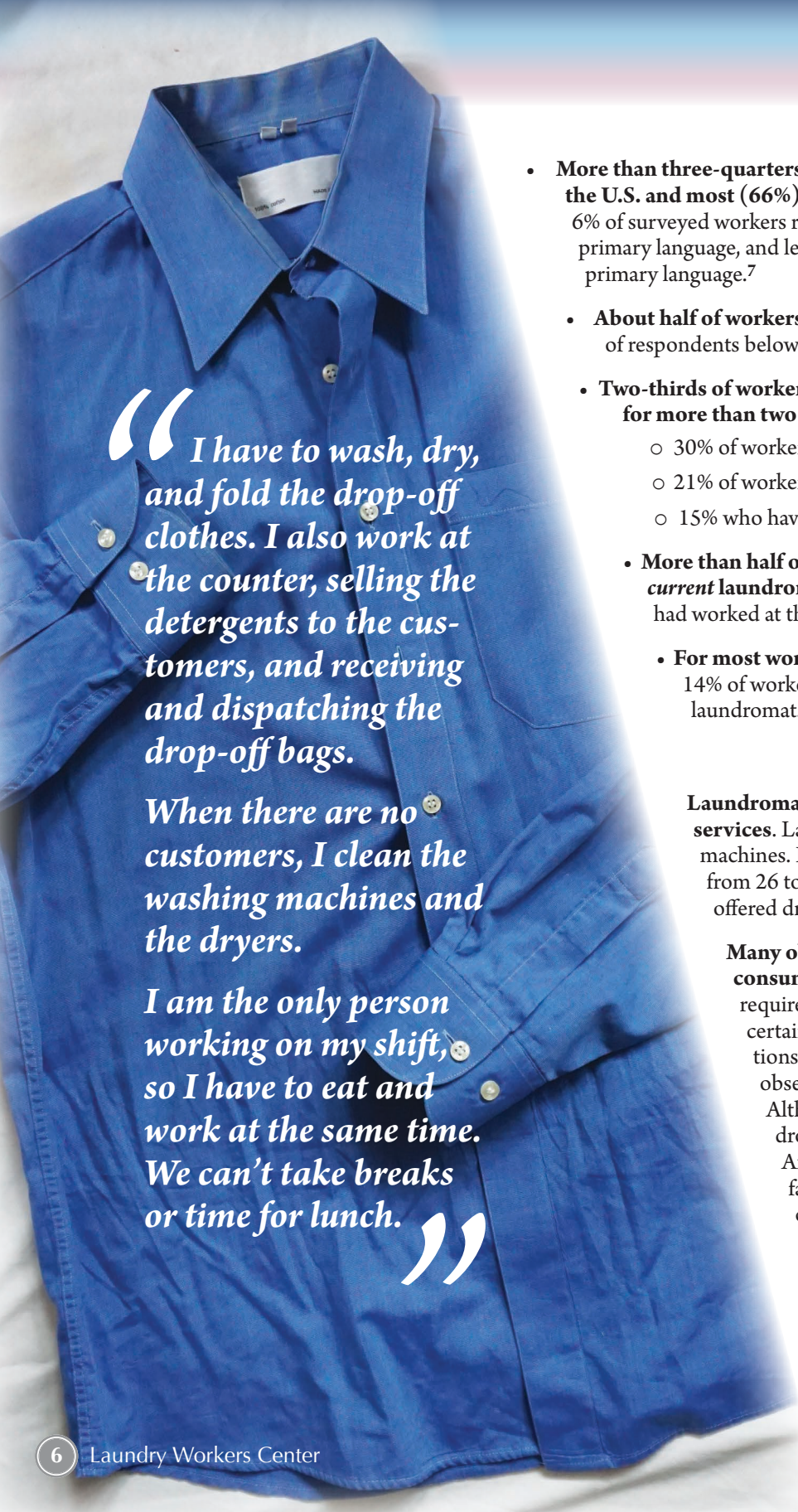
86% of laundromat workers are female

99% are people of color

79% are immigrants

66% Spanish is primary language





“ I have to wash, dry, and fold the drop-off clothes. I also work at the counter, selling the detergents to the customers, and receiving and dispatching the drop-off bags.

When there are no customers, I clean the washing machines and the dryers.

I am the only person working on my shift, so I have to eat and work at the same time. We can't take breaks or time for lunch. ”

- **More than three-quarters (79%) of surveyed workers were born outside the U.S. and most (66%) reported Spanish as their primary language.** 6% of surveyed workers reported a different non-English language as their primary language, and less than a third (28%) reported English as their primary language.⁷
- **About half of workers were between 35-44 years old (47%),** with 31% of respondents below the age of 35, and 22% age 45 or above.
- **Two-thirds of workers (66%) had worked in the laundromat industry for more than two years.** This includes:
 - 30% of workers who had been in the industry for 3-5 years.
 - 21% of workers who had been in the industry for 6-10 years.
 - 15% who have been in the industry for more than 10 years.
- **More than half of surveyed workers (56%) had worked at their current laundromat for more than two years.** A quarter of workers had worked at their current laundromat for more than 5 years.
- **For most workers (86%) the laundromat was their only job.** 14% of workers reported that they had another job outside the laundromat.

The Physical Workplace

Laundromats vary significantly in size and offer multiple services. Laundromats range significantly in size and number of machines. In our observations, the number of machines ranged from 26 to 201. Most (88%) of the laundromats we observed offered drop-off service in addition to self-service.

Many observed laundromats *did not* post the required consumer information. Licensed laundromats are required by the Department of Consumer Affairs to post certain consumer-facing information, and our observations assessed the extent to which these postings were observable. We found that many postings were lacking. Although it is required by law, 16% of observed laundromats failed to post the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) license. Almost 40% of laundromats failed to post prices, and only 38% had signs telling customers how to get a refund for coins or refillable cards that didn't work.

⁷ It is important to note that surveys were conducted only in English and Spanish due to capacity limitations, and other languages are likely underrepresented as a result.

Workplace Responsibilities

Workers undertake a wide range of job duties at the laundromats. Of workers we surveyed:

- Nearly all workers were responsible for washing/drying and folding clothes dropped off at the laundromat (96% and 95% respectively), as well as attending the counter or register (91%).
- More than half of workers were responsible for cleaning washers or dryers (58%), and two thirds were responsible for cleaning another part of the workplace.
- Nearly two-thirds of workers reported they were responsible for additional customer service duties (64%).

Many laundromats, particularly smaller laundromats, are staffed with only one or two workers at a time, an important factor when considering workplace safety and advocating for workplace rights. In our observations, 84% of observed laundromats had only 1 or 2 workers at a time. Over half (58%) of the smaller laundromats (40 machines or fewer) had only one worker observed, and none of these smaller laundromats had more than two workers. Of larger laundromats (101 machines or more) a smaller percentage (30%) had only one worker. In regard to issues of workplace safety or worker advocacy and organizing, the fact that workers are frequently isolated in the workplace is an important consideration.

Wages and Workplace Rights

More than three-quarters of surveyed workers work more than 30 hours a week at the laundromat, and nearly a third work more than 40 hours weekly on average.

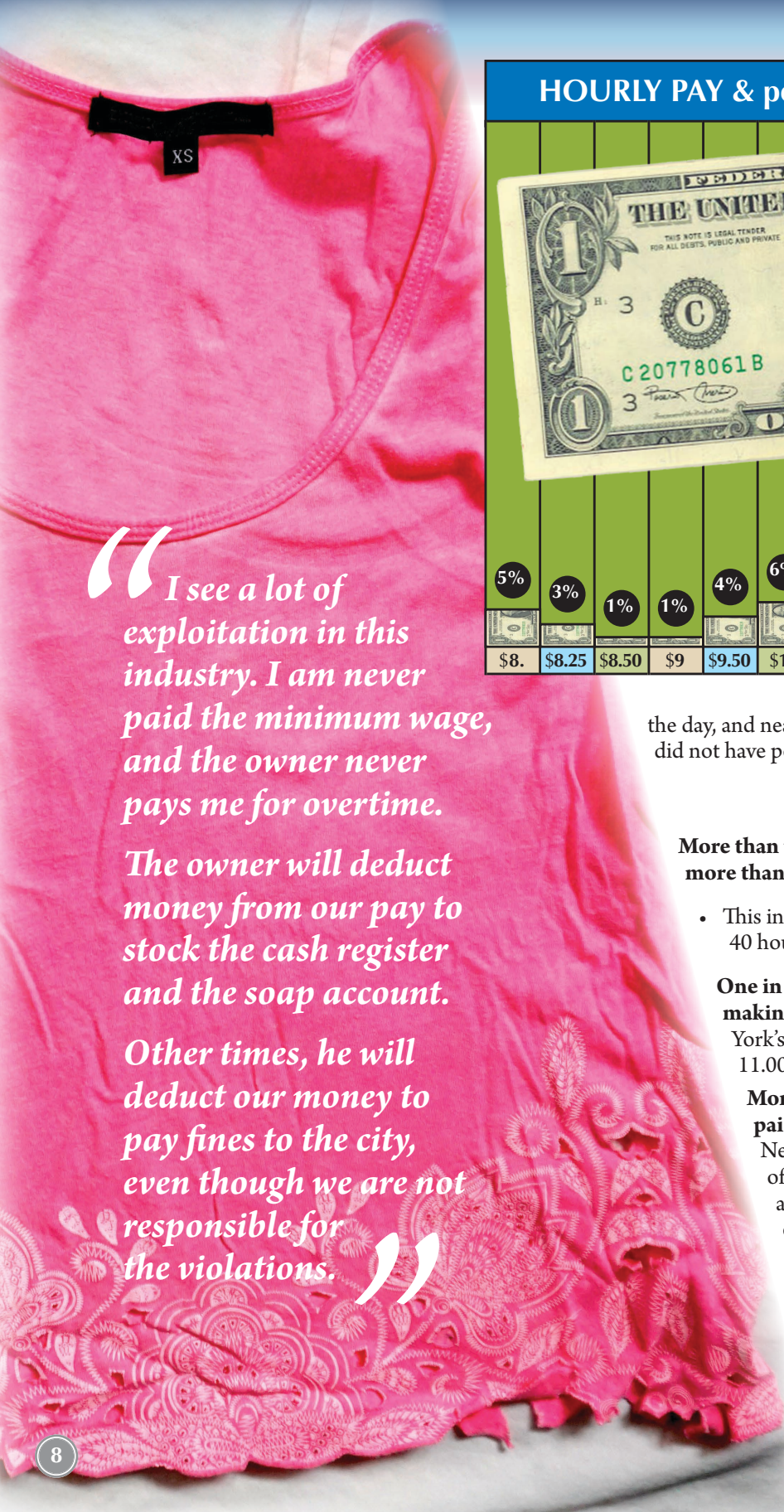
Our survey finds one in five workers were paid \$10.00 or less per hour, a likely violation of New York's minimum wage requirements.⁸ In addition, many workers reported working overtime without appropriate compensation as well as working off the clock (before or after their shift) without pay. Nearly a third of workers reported that they receive neither sick days nor other time off. 15% of workers were not allowed to take breaks during

⁸ New York's minimum wage at the time of surveying was \$11.00 per hour for large employers (11 employees or more) and \$10.50 per hour for smaller employers (10 or less). Through our survey we are not able to determine the size of the workforce at each laundromat, so we have used the lesser threshold of \$10.50, counting only workers who were paid *below* this amount. 22% of workers were paid at \$10.50 per hour, it is possible that some of these workers are not being paid minimum wage if they work for a large employer.

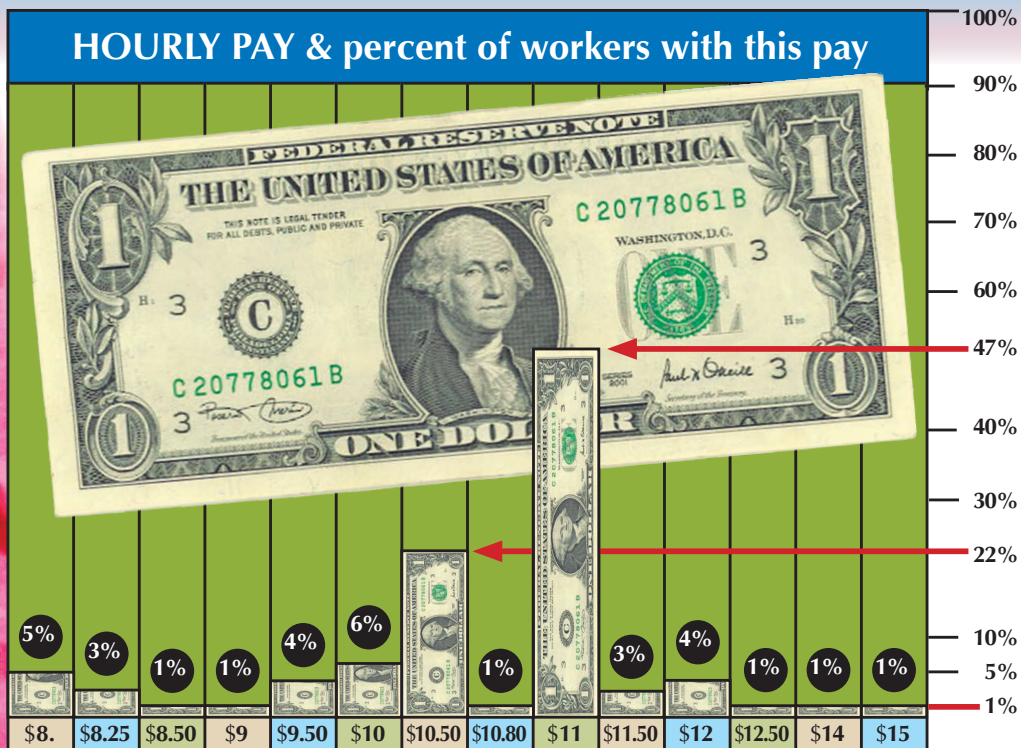
See: <https://www.ny.gov/new-york-states-minimum-wage/new-york-states-minimum-wage>
It is also important to note that if workers receive and keep tips, there may be an impact on minimum wage pay requirements. As a result, we cannot say definitively that all of these workers are experiencing minimum wage violations.



JOB DUTY	Percent who had this duty
Washing/drying clothes that are dropped off	96%
Folding clothes that are dropped off	95%
Attending the counter/register	91%
Cleaning other parts of the workplace	66%
Other customer service	64%
Cleaning washers or dryers	58%
Overseeing/maintaining the parking lot	12%
Other key duties	17%



“ I see a lot of exploitation in this industry. I am never paid the minimum wage, and the owner never pays me for overtime. The owner will deduct money from our pay to stock the cash register and the soap account. Other times, he will deduct our money to pay fines to the city, even though we are not responsible for the violations. ”



the day, and nearly a third of workers reported that their workplace did not have postings detailing workers' rights.

Hours, Wages and Overtime

More than three-quarters (77%) of surveyed workers work more than 30 hours per week at the laundromat, on average.

- This includes 30% of surveyed workers who work more than 40 hours per week, on average.

One in five workers who reported an hourly wage are making \$10.00 per hour or less: a likely violation of New York's minimum wage. Most workers are being paid \$10.50-11.00, and only 3% of workers were paid above \$12.00.

More than a third of workers report being underpaid, or not paid at all, for overtime work (36%). New York State overtime laws require the payment of overtime (over 40 hours in a pay week) at one and one-half the regular "straight time" hourly rate, except for certain exempted employees.⁹

⁹ See New York State Department of Labor "What are the rules for overtime?": <https://labor.ny.gov/workerprotection/laborstandards/faq.shtm#5>
 Note that through a survey we cannot know whether employers are attempting to claim that workers are exempt from these overtime rules.

Of workers who reported that, in the past year, they had worked over 40 hours in a week at the laundromat:

- 22% were paid only at their ordinary rate
- 14% were not paid for overtime.

In addition, a quarter of workers report working “off the clock” before or after their shifts, without pay (25%).

Time Off, Breaks and Workplace Rights Notifications

“I started working in the coin laundromat industry in 2009. I’ve been in the laundromat industry for 8 years, working 7 days a week — I do not have a day off.”

Nearly a third of workers report they receive neither sick time nor other time off (31%).

- **45% of respondents report that their job does not provide them sick days.** 13% of respondents did not know whether or not their job provided them with sick days.
- **Of those whose job does provide sick days:**
 - **60% receive paid sick days, while 30% receive unpaid sick days.** 8% did not know whether their sick days were paid or unpaid.

Other time off:

- More than half of respondents (48%) do not receive other time off.
- Of those who do receive other time off:
 - About half receive paid time (49%) while half receive unpaid time (47%).

Breaks during the day:

- 15% of surveyed workers reported they were not allowed to take breaks during the work day.
- More than three-quarters of surveyed workers reported their workplace does not have a break room for employees to use (78%).

“I’ve been working in the same laundromat for 10 years. When I started, I worked 46-48 hours a week, and never got paid overtime. For 7 years I had a second job to cover my expenses. Now I am working 40 hours and six days week. Throughout this whole time, my salary only increased when the city increased the minimum wage.”

Notifications of Workplace Rights

Workers were asked if their workplace had up workplace rights posters, such as minimum wage or workers comp postings, which are required. Nearly a third of respondents (30%) reported that their workplace does not have posters up about workplace rights. In addition, during our observations, observers noted that some workplace rights posters that were visible were out of date or otherwise inaccurate.

HARASSMENT

“I remember when I started at work, I was being discriminated against because I didn’t speak English. Customers would make fun of me.”

Our research finds that laundromat workers are subjected to high levels of harassment, with more than half of workers (54%) reporting some form of harassment.¹⁰

Harassing conduct reported by workers included insults and put-downs, racial slurs, offensive jokes, and, in some cases, physical assaults or sexual harassment.

RESPONSE	Percent of total
Offensive jokes	23%
Physical assaults	6%
Threats or intimidation	16%
Insults or put-downs	44%
Racial slurs	25%
Sexual harassment	6%
Other harassment conduct	2%
None of the above	46%

Of those who reported harassing conduct, the majority (86%) identified customers as the source of the conduct.

Of the remaining responses, 5% identified the laundromat owner as the source of the conduct, 4% a manager or supervisor, and 5% a coworker.

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Health and Safety

“Since I started the job, I’ve noticed differences in my health. I started suffering allergies because of the soap we use and the dust in the machines. Now, I have a lot of muscle pain, back pain, varicose veins in my legs from standing all the time, and lack of appetite because of stress at work. Every time I have to clean the dryers, I get allergies because there is so much dust. I never knew I had to use a mask, and I don’t have access to health insurance either.”

¹⁰ Given the sensitive nature of the questions about harassment, we consider these reported numbers to be a minimum, with a likelihood that respondents under-reported such conduct.



54% About half of respondents experienced muscle pain

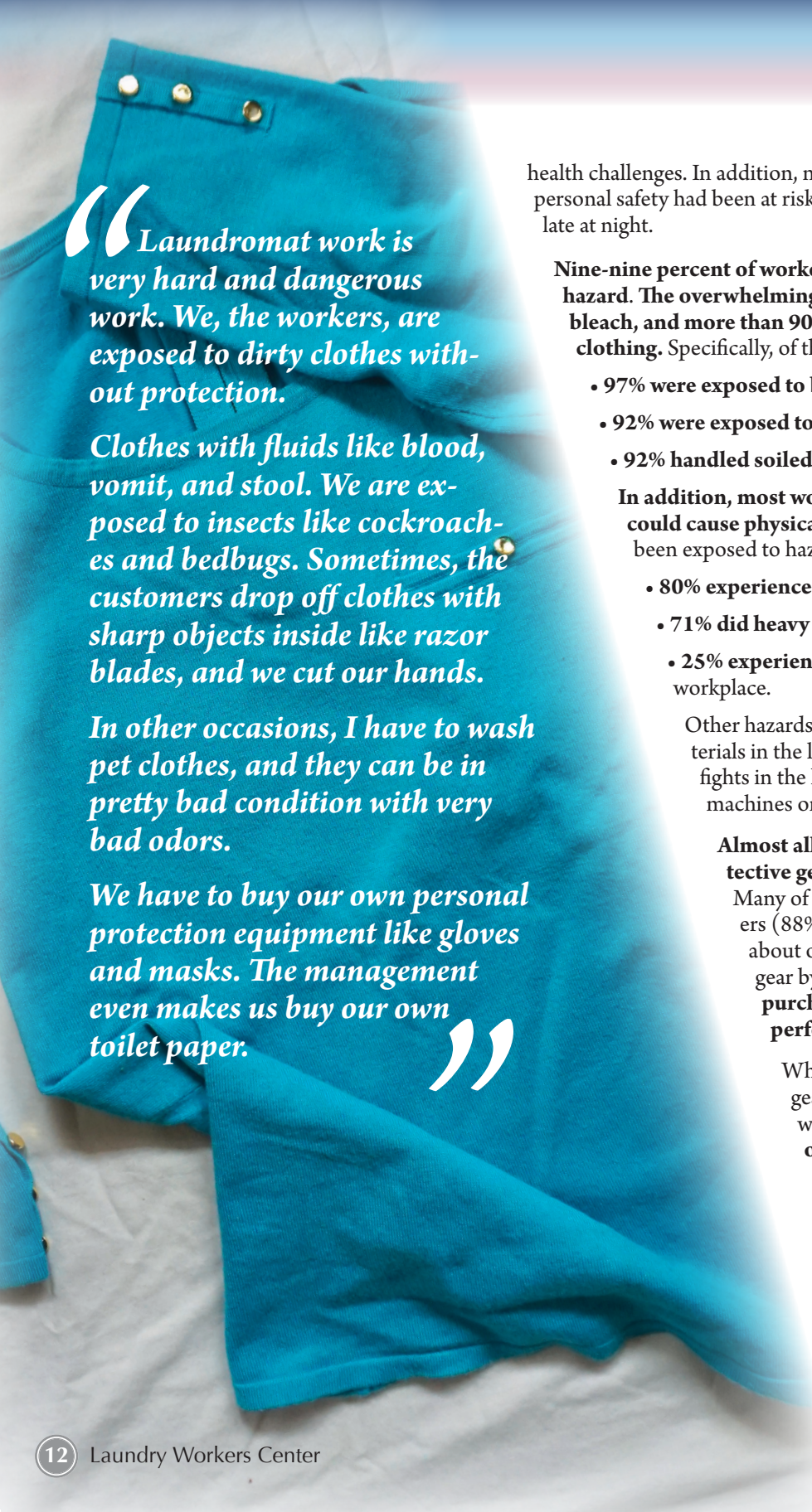
27% More than a quarter experienced allergies as a result of their job duties.

“I’ve never heard before that my boss had to provide me with personal equipment. He never gave me gloves or masks to work in the laundromat. We never got training on how to handle the chemicals that we use to wash the clothes, like Clorox bleach or the industrial soap Aura. Part of my job is to mix up the fabric softener with water, which I do without protection.”

We find that laundromat workers face significant health and safety issues. Nearly all respondents reported exposure to at least one potential workplace hazard, with upwards of 90% reporting exposure to bleach, other chemicals or excessively soiled clothing.

Many workers also undertook heavy lifting or work that required repetitive movements. Nearly all workers noted that they felt they needed protective equipment for their work, and one in five reported that they had purchased protective gear out of pocket. About two-thirds of workers reported at least one health issue resulting from their job duties, including issues such as muscle pain, allergies, skin conditions, and emotional or mental





“Laundromat work is very hard and dangerous work. We, the workers, are exposed to dirty clothes without protection.

Clothes with fluids like blood, vomit, and stool. We are exposed to insects like cockroaches and bedbugs. Sometimes, the customers drop off clothes with sharp objects inside like razor blades, and we cut our hands.

In other occasions, I have to wash pet clothes, and they can be in pretty bad condition with very bad odors.

We have to buy our own personal protection equipment like gloves and masks. The management even makes us buy our own toilet paper.”

health challenges. In addition, nearly a third of workers reported feeling that their personal safety had been at risk while at the workplace, primarily due to working late at night.

Nine-nine percent of workers reported exposure to at least one workplace hazard. The overwhelming majority of workers experienced exposure to bleach, and more than 90% were exposed to other chemicals and soiled clothing. Specifically, of those who had been exposed to hazards:

- **97% were exposed to bleach**
- **92% were exposed to other chemicals or detergents**
- **92% handled soiled clothing.**

In addition, most workers experienced other job conditions that could cause physical harm. Specifically, of the 98 workers who had been exposed to hazards:

- **80% experienced repetitive movements** as part of their work
- **71% did heavy lifting**
- **25% experienced slippery or hazardous floors** in the workplace.

Other hazards reported by respondents included hazardous materials in the laundry (such as razor blades, needles, or lighters), fights in the laundromats, dangerous conditions when servicing machines or moving clothes, and exposure to bedbugs.

Almost all workers reported they felt they needed protective gear to safely carry out their jobs in the past year.

Many of these workers were provided gear by their employers (88%, with 83% being provided free of charge), but about one in ten workers were not provided protective gear by their employer (12%). **One in five workers had purchased protective gear out of pocket to use while performing their job duties in the past year (20%).**

While most workers report they have used protective gear in the past year, our observations reveal that workers may not use gear consistently or routinely: **only 6% of our observations noted workers wearing protective gear.** More investigation is warranted here, but it is possible that workers only use gear in certain circumstances and not for routine tasks such as removing clothes from washers and dryers or cleaning machines, despite the fact that there are potential hazards.

About two-thirds of workers reported at least one health issue resulting from their job duties (65%). This includes:

- **About half of respondents experienced muscle pain** (54%).
- **More than a quarter experienced allergies** as a result of their job duties (27%).
- **One in 5 experienced skin conditions** as a result of their job duties (21%).
- **16% experienced emotional or mental health challenges**
- **About one in ten experienced respiratory problems** (12%).
- **10% of workers reported other health issues**, including exposure to bed bugs, cuts and burns, and hair falling out.

In addition, **nearly a third of workers reported feeling that their personal safety was at risk while at the workplace** (31%). This includes:

- 19% who felt their safety was at risk because they worked late at night.
- 18% because they were the only employee at the workplace.
- 15% because of another aspect of their job, including safety risks posed by customers or people in the neighborhood, as well as dangerous items in the drop off laundry.

Recommendations

The retail laundromat industry has been scrubbing away more than stained shirts and soiled jeans; it has been diluting the rights and safety of its workforce. The laundromat workforce of New York City, composed predominately of women and immigrants of color, faces significant challenges against exploitation, harassment, and dangerous working conditions. Despite the industry violations uncovered in previous exposés, little has been done to protect the rights of laundromat workers or improve their workplace conditions. To ensure a safer, more equitable environment that all laundromat workers deserve, we offer the following recommendations based on the findings of this report:

1. **Safety and Health Trainings:** Ensure that laundromat employers educate and train all employees on workplace safety hazards and how to effectively protect themselves.

Trainings may include:

- Proper handling of common chemicals such as detergents, chlorine, ammonia, and bleach; and how to effectively control substances to minimize dangers, such as pouring techniques to prevent splashing.
- Safely mixing and diluting



“My employer should provide the adequate protection equipment to do our work without putting our health in danger. They should not discount money from our salary to provide this equipment, and they should provide trainings on how to safely do the work to keep our physical and mental health.”



REQUIRED PROTECTIVE GEAR:

Create a city-wide policy to mandate that laundromat employers provide and maintain the necessary safety equipment to each and every employee free of charge.

detergents in high quantities, and training on how to effectively use safety gear such as masks, gloves, and goggles. Laundromats may need to set up mixing stations that are sufficiently ventilated if using liquids such as chlorine bleach.

- Ladder safety.
- 2. **Required Protective Gear:** Create a city-wide policy to mandate that laundromat employers provide and maintain the necessary safety equipment to each and every employee **free of charge.**

Suggestions:

- Appropriate waterproof and detergent-proof vinyl or rubber gloves to protect the skin from exposure to chemicals and allergens. Long gloves that go to the elbow or higher, an apron, and facial protection such as goggles should be used for handling liquid detergents or bleach.
- N95 respirators to filter fine particles and guard against the inhalation of dusts when cleaning dryer lint traps or using powder detergents.
- Vacuums used to regularly clean the laundromat should have a HEPA filter on the exhaust to prevent the inhalation of dusts and allergens.
- 3. **Workplace Safety Plans and Violence Prevention Programs:** Workplace violence affects a wide array of retail employers, especially those that operate late-night or 24-hour establishments. Although it may not be possible for laundromats to eliminate violent incidents, the risk of harm can be reduced by committing

to and training all staff members in a violence prevention program that:

- Compels employers and management to commit equally to the safety and health of both their employees and their patrons.
- Establishes clear policy in the event of workplace violence and trains employees to identify and de-escalate or manage hostile and aggressive behavior.¹¹

¹¹ Occupational Health and Safety Administration "Recommendations for Workplace Violence Prevention Programs in Late Night Retail Establishments". *US Department of Labor*, 2009.

4. Ergonomic Workspaces: Promote workers' physical wellbeing through ergonomic workplace policies at laundromats. Policies should be designed to limit the common ergonomic risk factors to laundromat workers such as: manual handling of heavy laundry bags, prolonged standing, forceful repetitive movements, and awkward postures.

Suggestions:

- Conduct workplace ergonomic assessments to assess resources and hazards in each laundromat. Develop industry-wide ergonomic recommendations.
- Develop weight and size limits for laundry bags brought by customers. These limits should incorporate NIOSH general lifting weight recommendations;¹² frequency of lifts by workers; lifting by both female and male workers; and physical layout of laundromat, including height of lifts, position required in lift, need for step-stools, and other ergonomic factors.¹³
- Provide training in safe manual material handling¹⁴ (“back school”), basic ergonomics, and a core muscle strength-training program for all employees.¹⁵ A micro-breaks program should be developed to prevent overexertion.
- Laundromats should provide an adequate number of appropriately sized wall-mounted cubicles for storage of laundry bags (dirty and clean clothes in separate locations), with attention paid to ergonomic factors including weight of bags, height of cubicles, location, and obstructions that limit safe lifting techniques. Place lighter items on top and bottom shelves and heavier items in middle shelves.



The laundromat should provide training in safe manual material handling (“back school”), basic ergonomics, and a core muscle strength-training program for all employees. A micro-breaks program should be developed to prevent overexertion.

¹² Cal/OSHA, the California Department of Industrial Relations. (2007) Ergonomic Guidelines for Manual Material Handling. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2007-131/pdfs/2007-131.pdf> Accessed April 6, 2018.

¹³ ISO 11228-1:2007 (en). Ergonomics — Manual handling — Part 1: Lifting and carrying. Part 3: Ergonomics — Manual handling — Part 3: Handling of low loads at high frequency.

¹⁴ NIOSH, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health — Ergonomic Guidelines for Manual Material Handling. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2007-131/>

¹⁵ Yang E, Park W, Shin H, Lim J, et al: The Effect of Back School Integrated with Core Strengthening in Patients with Chronic Back Pain. *Am. J. Phys. Med. Rehabil.* • Vol. 89, No. 9, September 2010



Laundromat workers know best what they need to create a safe, equitable work environment. As a worker center, Laundry Workers Center is rooted in the principal that social change is built from the bottom up.

CALL TO ACTION

The findings of this report highlight the dangerous conditions and wage violations experienced by workers in the laundromat industry. While our recommendations may serve to alleviate these conditions, recommendations can only extend as far as we are willing to stand up and fight for them.

Organize!

Laundromat workers know best what they need to create a safe, equitable work environment. As a worker center, Laundry Workers Center is rooted in the principal that social change is built from the bottom up. We are providing the training and resources so that laundromat workers can take a stand and organize together for small or large-scale solutions. Together, laundromat workers are raising their voices to transform their industry for the better.

While retail laundromats may subject workers to unfair, illegal or unsafe working conditions, they are also inherently social places that bring together diverse community members. Laundromats contain a huge potential not only for worker organizing, but also for fostering community dialogue and growing the awareness of workers' rights and how they are inextricably linked with community struggles. With over two thousand licensed laundromats in New York City, the potential—and the need—for worker and community power is significant.¹⁶

¹⁶ New York City Department of Consumer Affairs data shows 2,304 business licensed as “Laundry” (Retrieved October 2017). <https://a858-elpaca.nyc.gov/CitizenAccess/>



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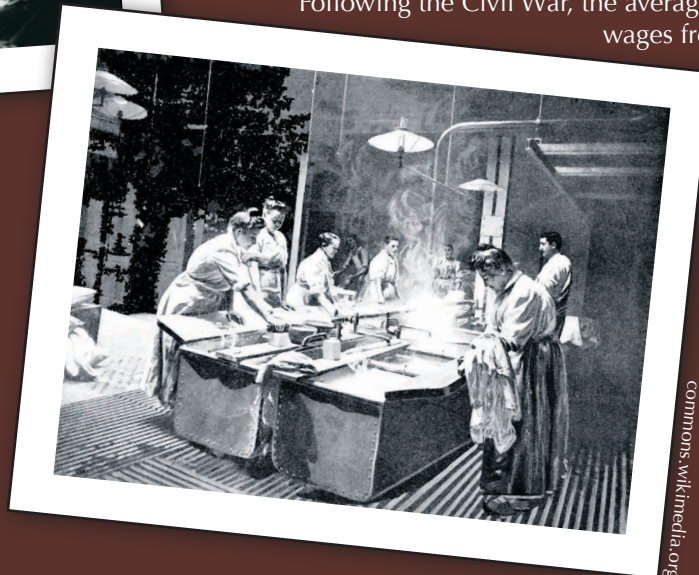
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Following the Civil War, the average Black laundress earned wages from \$4 to \$8 a month.

In 1881, twenty African American laundresses formed the Washing Society in Atlanta, Georgia. They organized 3,000 Black laundresses to strike and successfully were able to set their wages at \$1 per dozen



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Top, Margaret Hinchey, head of Laundry Workers Union of N.Y. and suffrage leader is shown carrying banner in parade with other women in 1914.

Above, laundry workers in wartime London, 1944.

Right, laundry workers in Paris, 1901.

