



Latino Adult Education Services

LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

**INSTRUCTIONAL AREA: *Advancing Work and Career***

**Tierra de Oportunidad - Module2**

**Woman's Work Issues**

**Overview**

Immigrant women face special problems in their work lives because the jobs most commonly available to women are very likely to involve marginal working conditions, low wages, and a fair measure of job insecurity. "Home work" employment consisting of piece rate sewing or other similar work is particularly likely to entail exploitation and illegal working conditions. Other sorts of employment such as farm work or electronics may present special risks for pregnant women.

In the U.S. there are a number of legal provisions guaranteeing workers receive the minimum wage, equal treatment, and freedom from discrimination, but these legal provisions are seldom actively enforced. Women seeking redress for unfair or illegal treatment will need to prepare themselves for the reality that the process will be a long and tedious one. Nonetheless, seeking redress is often worthwhile as awards typically require an employer to pay substantial back wages.

Options available to workers experiencing problems include negotiation with supervisors and managers (perhaps after joining together with co-workers as a group to seek redress), seeking a new job assignment, or changing employers entirely. The benefits of earnings from work need to be weighed against the problems experienced at work.

Detailed, documented, and accurate information on treatment at work is an important ingredient in workers successfully standing up for their rights.

**Basic Skills Development**

<i>Legal Social Framework:</i>	Awareness of legal protections against discrimination on the basis of gender, protection against sexual harassment, minimum wage provisions, coverage of domestic workers
<i>Analysis and Problem-Solving:</i>	Weighing conflicting alternatives (filing legal complaint vs. continuing without complaint), seeking accurate information on rights, basic math for computing compliance with minimum wage and overtime provisions.
<i>Communication Skills:</i>	Discussing work conditions with co-workers, comparing and contrasting, communication with supervisors, managers, and enforcement agencies.

## Teaching Points

1. **Women's jobs are more likely to involve illegal treatment of workers than men's jobs, and women should prepare themselves ahead of time to protect their rights as workers.** Women should be aware of minimum wage provisions (\$4.25 per hour), overtime provisions (more than 8 hrs./day or 40 hours per week, except for farm workers). Keeping records of hours worked, keeping back pay stubs, and computing the hourly earnings from work paid by the piece are essential ingredients for pursuing legal remedies.
2. **There are usually more job opportunities than workers realize.** Women who need the earnings from a job may not feel they can change jobs easily but should be aware that they can look for other, better, work opportunities even as they continue to work with an employer who has inferior working conditions. Women workers may lack the self-esteem to recognize that the work they do is demanding and that other employers may provide them with better working conditions than their current employer.
3. **Live-In Domestic Workers have the same rights as other workers and some special rights regarding their situation.** These rights include the right to overtime for more than nine hours of work a day or more than five consecutive days of work a week. Women can get help even if they are undocumented. Immigrant rights advocates can give people details about their rights.
4. **Women have rights protecting them from sexual harassment.** The law about exactly what kind of behavior is legally considered harassment or not is complicated but generally responsive to women. Harassment, for example, doesn't mean only physical touching, but verbal behavior also, hinting that sex will be traded for access to a job, joking, and teasing. Women who experience sexual harassment should probably seek to find out if others of their co-workers have experienced the same problem and should, also, seek assistance from a legal services organization in seeking redress.
5. **Women have rights protecting them from sex-based discrimination.** Discrimination is not always easy to recognize, but involves one type of worker being treated differently than another. The law about sex-based discrimination, for example, protects the jobs of women who leave their employment briefly to give birth. Even women who are not employment-authorized have some legal protections.
6. **Women, who are legally authorized and who are not legally authorized to work, have begun organizing cooperatives to help themselves.** Women's cooperatives have been formed to assist domestic workers in finding employment; some groups are seeking to make street vending easier; new groups provide support for rape victims, for women who experience discrimination, and in general to address women's problems.
7. **Women, as well as men, can benefit economically from seeking ways to improve their employment options.** Women can no longer be relegated to a status as secondary wage earner. In most families, both husbands and wives need to maximize their earnings potential. Men and women immigrants may both underestimate their potential for career mobility, saying "I have no skills". The skills needed for career mobility and advancement now rest on communication ability (including English-language skills), a willingness to learn new skills, facilitating in learning new skills, the ability to work as a member of a team, and engage in problem-solving with co-workers more than on vocational skills. Night school, community college, ESL classes, or programs of self-directed learning can be worthwhile investments.
8. **There are special opportunities for women in a variety of human service occupations.** There will be a tremendous demand for bilingual human service workers in the near future. As California comes to be an increasingly multi-cultural society, demand for bilingual service and human service employees in jobs which are often filled by women will increase tremendously. Budget constraints will mean that many of these jobs will need to be filled by workers with minimal educational qualifications but substantial personal experience and ability. There will be expanding job opportunities in both the public sector e.g., instructional aides, health education outreach workers, and intake workers; and in the private sector e.g., receptionists, secretaries, store clerks, medical office clerks. Women should take this into account in weighing their options and deciding about taking the time to

continue their education.

## Suggested Learning Activities

1. Ask women to list the kinds of unfair treatment they have experienced at work in the past. Discuss whether the examples given are of illegal treatment or just bad supervision or management. Brainstorm possible strategies for effecting change.
2. Ask women in the class to rate the different employers they are aware of in a given industry or occupation e.g. garment manufacturers, grape growers, processing plants, electronics firms and discuss whether all working conditions and wages are more or less the same or if there are employers who are significantly better than others. If some employers are better, why is that?
3. Ask women to share their strategies for dealing with the problems experienced in domestic work.
4. Invite a local female community worker employed as a paraprofessional in a community organization, school, health clinic, training program, or other human service organization to discuss how she became involved in that kind of work and what advice she would have for others who are interested in the same kind of work.
5. Review, with the class, the basic job qualifications for readily available jobs and compare the qualifications with class participants skills. Discuss what kinds of educational investments, including self-directed study, might allow them to develop the skills they need.
6. Invite a local immigrant employment rights group representative, public interest lawyer or labor lawyer to discuss discrimination complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), to the Fair Employment and Housing Commission (FEHC), and to the Office of the Special Council, Department of Justice (OSC).
7. Invite women from grassroots cooperative organizations such as Mujeres Unidas y Activas in the San Francisco Bay Area or the Red De Defensa Laboral in the Los Angeles area to talk to the class about their organizations and their personal experiences in resolving the problems they face.
8. Role play a negotiation with a supervisor about workers wanting better working conditions -- e.g. more time for breaks, better explanations of tasks, less favoritism. Explore "good" and "bad" strategies for negotiation.
9. Discuss as a group what workers most want to change in their work situation. Is it better pay? better working conditions? better opportunities for promotion? or more equitable treatment? Describe how a good supervisor or manager should interact with workers and prepare a checklist for women in the group to use in deciding on jobs.

## Resource List:

CHIRLA  
c/o United Way  
621 South Virgil Ave.  
Los Angeles, CA 90005  
(213) 736-1324

- CHIRLA Domestic Workers' Committee/Workers' Rights Committee contact is Nancy Cervantes (213) 736-1300 Extension 231

CIRRS (Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services)  
995 Market St., Suite 1108  
San Francisco, CA 94103

- CIRRS Employment/Labor/Legal Services contact is Lina Avidan at (415) 243-8215
- CIRRS Immigrant Assistance Line is (415) 2444 [assistance available in Spanish]
- CIRRS/ Mujeres Unidas y Activas phone is (415) 621-8140

## Commercial ESL Textbooks

- Business Watch, Prentice Hall Regents  
Segment 10, Flexibility of Companies to Workers' Family Care Needs  
Book and Videotape
- Consider the Issues, Longman  
Unit 8, Women Caught in the Middle of Two Generations  
Book and Audio tape
- Culture Watch, Prentice Hall Regents  
Segment 9, PG&E Trains Women for Construction and "Men's" Jobs
- ESL for Action, Addison-Wesley  
Unit 7, Moving Toward Equality
- Faces of the USA, Longman  
Chapter 4, Americans at Work, Changing Industries, Doreen Fairbairn--The "Brain Drain"
- Mastering English with Life and Times, KCET  
#14, Belmont Soccer: The Ultimate Goal  
#15, Chicanas in Tune  
Videotape, Student Handout and Teacher's Guide
- Life Skills for Today's World, Steck-Vaughn  
Chapter 4, Discrimination
- More Than a Job, Readings on Work and Society, New Readers Press  
Just a Housewife  
Book, Audio tape and Teacher's Guide
- People at Work, Pro Lingua Associates  
Lesson 2, Dolores Silva, Co-Owner of a Small Business  
Lesson 8, Rebecca Kraus, Assistant Dean of Students  
Lesson 10, Connie Snow, Building Contractor  
Book and Audio tape
- React-Interact, Situations for Communication, Prentice Hall Regents  
Unit 8, The Ideal Secretary; Unit 24, Careers
- Reader's Choice, Book 3: Discoveries, Contemporary Books  
Lesson 7, That's Illegal!
- Work Tales, Globe-Fearon/Janus  
"The Saw that Talked"
- Worker Rights, Cambridge, The Adult Education Company  
Lesson 1, Equal Employment Opportunity  
Lesson 2, Equal Employment Opportunity Laws  
Lesson 3, Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action  
Lesson 4, Dealing with Job Discrimination  
Lesson 5, Taking Legal Action
- The Working Experience 1, New Readers Press  
Unit 5, Women's Work
- Workplace Dynamics, SLRC Library  
Unit 13, Men and Women
- Work-Wise, Tactics for Job Success, Contemporary Books  
Unit 9, Protecting Your Rights

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