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Meatpacking: Most Dangerous Job for Immigrant Women

The meat packing industry has grown tremendously since the 19th century. The industry employs thousands of people, usually immigrants of both genders who offer cheap labor. Since the early 1990s, the majority of meat packing employees have been Latino immigrants, many of whom are very young in age. The industry “has been able to hire thousands of immigrants from Mexico and Central America because these workers and their families are willing to move to rural U.S. communities for the promise of jobs with steady wages that require little training or English skills, with paid vacations and health insurance” (Gaston, Maria Teresa and Harrison 59). However, when immigrants arrive and become employees of the meat packing industry, they find that the promise is not entirely true. In fact, men and women working as slaughterers and meat packers work under terrible conditions and mistreatment. Employees of the meatpacking industry are at higher risk of suffering injuries do to strenuous enforced tasks. For example, “even though a variety of power tools are used, most of the work is still performed with hand-held meat hooks and sharp knives. Many workers make a knife cut every two or three seconds, adding up to 10,000 cuts over an eight-hour shift” (Gaston, Maria Teresa and Harrison 57). This tedious and strenuous labor is done by both men and women. While working in the meat packing industry is dangerous for both men and women, the meat packing industry has a more negative effect on immigrant women due the following reasons: differences in physical

ability, a disparity in mental vulnerability among men and women, and the tendency of women to become victims of sexual and physical assault in the workforce.

Women working in the meat packing industry are expected to perform their job at the same rate and efficiency as their male counterparts. Working in slaughterhouses requires rapid hand motions in order to cut hundreds of cattle hanging from disassembly lines. An average full grown cow weighs approximately 1000 pounds, therefore, it requires an immense amount of physical force to be able to cut through the cattle hanging in the disassembly lines. Completing this task involves a risk of injuries for both males and females, but there is a significantly higher risk of injuries for women than there is for men. According to David Puts' work published in the journal called "Evolution and Human Behavior", the differences in muscularity between men and women "translate into large differences in strength and speed. Men have about 90% greater upper-body strength" and "about 65% greater lower body strength" (Puts 161). Analytically, men are physically built to be able to complete tasks that require a lot of physical strength, while women, on the other hand are physically more fragile. Despite this fact, men and women working in the disassembly lines of slaughterhouses are performing the exact same grueling job and are expected to do it at a rapid rate without interruptions. Therefore, we can deduce that the women working alongside their male counterparts are straining themselves more than the men are. This, in turn, makes them more susceptible to the risk of injuries.

The physical demands of the slaughterer job, specifically the gruesome and continuous hand motions required during meat packers' and slaughterers' long working shifts is agonizing and tedious. According to an article by Carey Biron where she documents the petition for regulatory changes by workers of the meatpacking industry, "the petitioners point to high processing speeds as leading directly to significant rates of worker injury, particularly repetitive

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