

# **Mapping social relationships of older workers' employment: The meaning and organization of work, health and safety of aging workers in the home support sector**

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# Supervisory Committee

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- Dr. Sharon Buehler – Faculty of Medicine,  
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# Supportive Community Services

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- ❑ Increasing numbers of seniors / people with disabilities requiring formal home care
- ❑ Threat of labour shortages in this sector is increasing
- ❑ Need to focus on recruitment and retention of workers in this field



# Home Care Programs

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- Reportedly under-funded, undervalued, highly stressful and workers' exposure to numerous health and safety risks (Armstrong, 2003; Aronson, Denton & Zeytinoglu, 2004; Keefe & Legere, 2008)
- Issues with the recruitment and retention of workers in this field of work



# What do I want to know?

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- What influenced the decision to work and what is the meaning of work for them?
- What is it like to be an older worker in the home support sector, more specifically, what is the “work” that they are describing?
- What are the challenges / stressors as well as benefits of the work they do?
- How is their work constructed with and influenced by the work of others and coordinated with outside events, policies and regulations.



# Institutional Ethnography

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- Developed by Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith
- Concerned with the “work” involved in being an aging worker.....broader definition!
- Explains how things are socially organized, or put together so they happen as they do that may or may not be visible to those experiencing them

# Data Collection

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1. Interviews
2. Analysis of Texts





# Questions...

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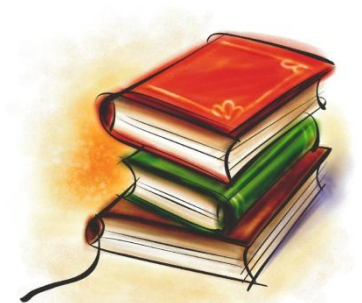
1. Why have you chosen to work? What influenced your decision?
2. Tell me about your typical daily schedule, your routines, responsibilities.
3. Was there a time that you may have been involved in “risky” behavior where you felt that your health and safety were jeopardized? What did you do?
4. Describe some of the challenges you encounter at your workplace.
5. Describe for me a ‘day in the life of ...’

# Texts

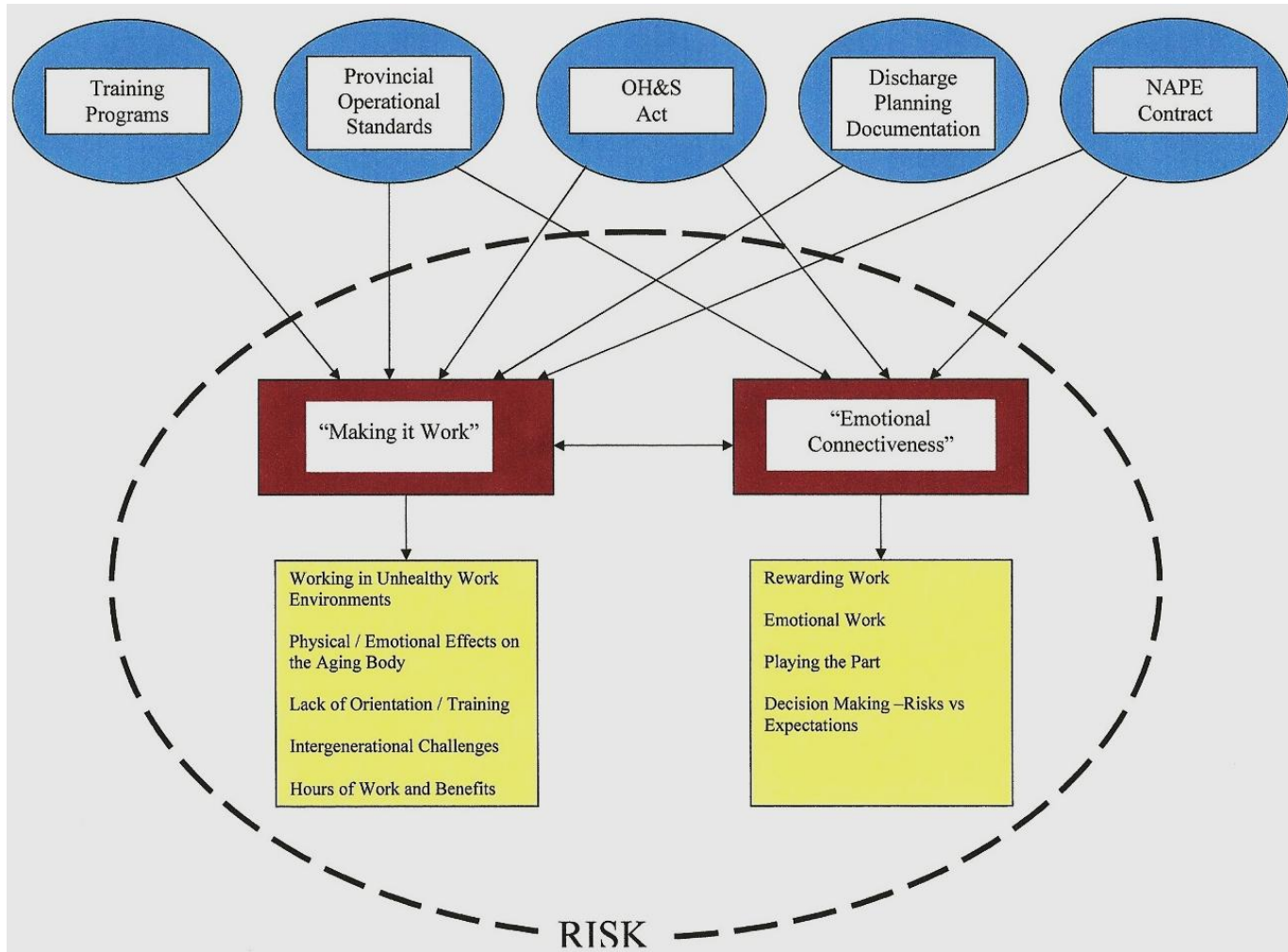
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Any material, document, or form that is used by different people at different times.....yet used and interpreted differently

- Employer hiring policies / recruitment
- Regional Health Authority Home Support Operational Standards
- Job orientation and training programs
- Workers Compensation Policies
- Health & safety training practices



# TEXTUAL MAP of WORKERS' EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES





# “Making it Work”

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- ❑ Working in Unhealthy Work Environments
- ❑ Physical Effects
- ❑ Lack of Orientation / Preparation
- ❑ Intergenerational Challenges
- ❑ Meaning of Work, Hours and Work and Benefits

# Working in Unsafe Work Environments

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*“And when I went in, this time I did hurt myself, it was because I could transfer the man, but because I was new, he said no. I said ‘yes we can’. So we stood up and we had the belt around him to transfer and then he said ‘no you can't do it’ and went right limp. Instead of saying ‘I want to sit down’, he, and of course he almost missed the wheelchair so then I hurt my shoulder trying to keep him so he wouldn't”*



# Physical Effects on the Aging Body

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*“Well, like I said, my legs and feet hurt more at the end of a shift...– we had a lady a while ago who was quite heavy, who had a broken pelvis – and just repositioning her in the bed with a draw sheet – you know – moving her, shifting her up in the bed and all that – my back would hurt”*



# Lack of Orientation / Preparation

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*“If somebody’s already been in there and they know something about it, I get a lot of information. Other times, I go in and all I know is the name and address. And what’s written on the paper is not the same.... When I go in and then come back, they say, ‘we didn’t know that. That wasn’t on the referral from the hospital.’ And that happens a lot. The referral from the hospital does not give enough information”*



# Intergenerational Challenges

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*“It adds extra to my day. I find that when I’m working with some of them it’s more like I’m their supervisor”. To me, my job is to look after these people and give them the best quality care that I can give them, and I expect the girls that work with me to do the same”*



# Intergenerational Challenges

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*“The younger ones, the young ones that’s employed in this field are only there until they get another job, and as I say, I don’t blame them. They come from school, they got their education, can’t get a job, and they’ll stay at that work until something else comes up”*



# Hours of Work and Benefits

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*“Because I can remember one time I did 156 hours for Agency “X” in one week ... Straight pay, and I asked for my overtime, she said, ‘we don’t give overtime. We don’t pay overtime.’ I said, ‘don’t call me no more then.’”*



# Hours of Work and Benefits

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*“But since the union, we’re not allowed to work over 80 hours...you can’t get time and a half, because we’re not allowed to do it. The boss is not going to give it to us, unless there’s an emergency”.*



# “Emotional Connectiveness”

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- Rewarding Work
- Emotional Work
- Playing the Part
- Risk Taking vs Client Needs

# Rewarding Work

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*“You explain to me how I can cut back. I love them both, it’s very rewarding to go and look after them, it’s very rewarding to know that I’m making “P” ’s day easier and his mother and father, because they don’t have worries about “P” ’s care while I’m there. And I make his day easier.’ So it’s very rewarding to go home like a wet rag at the end of a twelve hour shift, especially when you’ve done four or five of them in a row”*

# Emotional Work

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*“You build such a rapport with them that, you know ... I had this client, and he died there in March. He had fallen down, he was up in his late years, and he had fallen down the week before, his face was all beat up and everything, and anyway, I went to the door looking for him and this gentleman came down and said he was rushed to the hospital...”*



# Emotional Work

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*... and a couple of weeks after that I noticed in the paper that he had passed away. Didn't have that time of saying goodbye. (crying) You build a relationship....But when you don't get that closure. That's hard"*



# Emotional Work

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*“...But if the gentleman is there and he’s dying, and he’s got to have his painkiller every four hours, there’s no nurse going to come in every four hours and do that. Someone’s got to do it, and there’s nobody there”*

# Playing the Part

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*“I find that when you walk in through that door, the first time, you can’t demand things of them, right? Because they’re just going to back away from you. But I find if I take an easy approach with them, let them set the course, what they want, after a couple of visits they’ll start coming around”*



# Playing the Part

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*“ So you got to kind of go with the flow. And every homemaker no matter what house they go in, they're an actress, or an actor, because you've got to have a different personality for each client. Because every client is different, and I'm one of the ones that's always joking and carrying on, but never until I get to know them....*



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*....sometimes as soon as they open their mouth you can tell what way you can act with them. Some people you can't tell a joke to but others people, they want to ...and have a few laughs..."*



# Risk Taking vs Client Needs

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*“Probably when I was younger I would have, but no, not anymore. My health is important too”.*

*“ Just burnt out, because I can't say 'no'. The office keep telling me 'you know, if you want, say no', but it's not the office I can't say no to, it's thinking about the client...that you know, needing help”*



# Risk Taking vs Client Needs

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*“I fell over the steps at a house, bringing up a load of laundry...I went on to work...because what was the good of trying to come off and get Workers Compensation. I wasn't going to get it...I couldn't afford not to get paid, so I just strapped it up and went on to work”*



# Next Steps...

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- Second Level Interviews
- Textual Analysis
  - HSW training program
  - OH&S Act
  - Workers Compensation Policies



Questions???

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# Acknowledgements

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