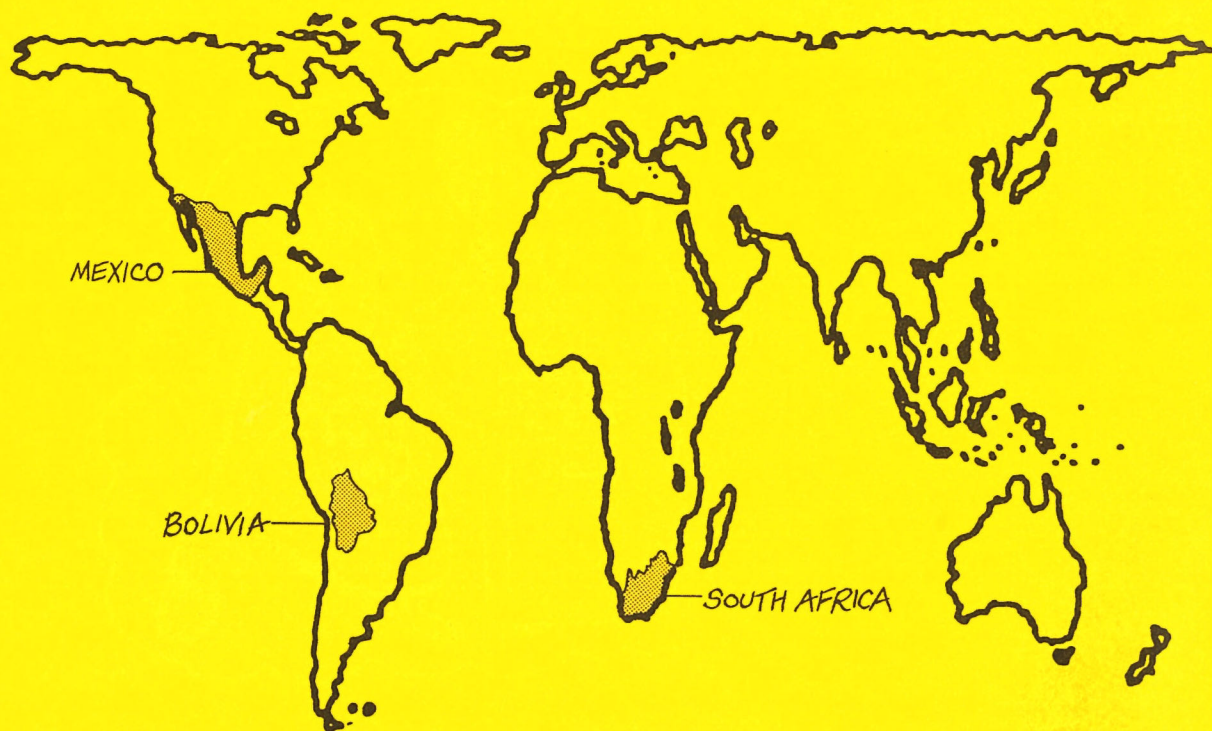




Working Conditions



This booklet is one in a series of eight. Together they make up a women's kit. Each booklet is made up of material about women's lives from the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa and England. The themes of the booklets are:

Women's Days	Finding Paid Work
Childcare	Working Conditions
Health	Violence in the Home
Housework	Women Working Together

The kit is intended for use by women in English as a Second Language classes, literacy groups and other women's groups. We hope the kit will help women to get together to think and talk about their lives.

The following women put together the kit: Gwen Davies, Amy Gottlieb, Jenny Horsman, Linzi Manicom. With help from: Rachel Epstein, Maureen Simpkins and Lynda Yanz.

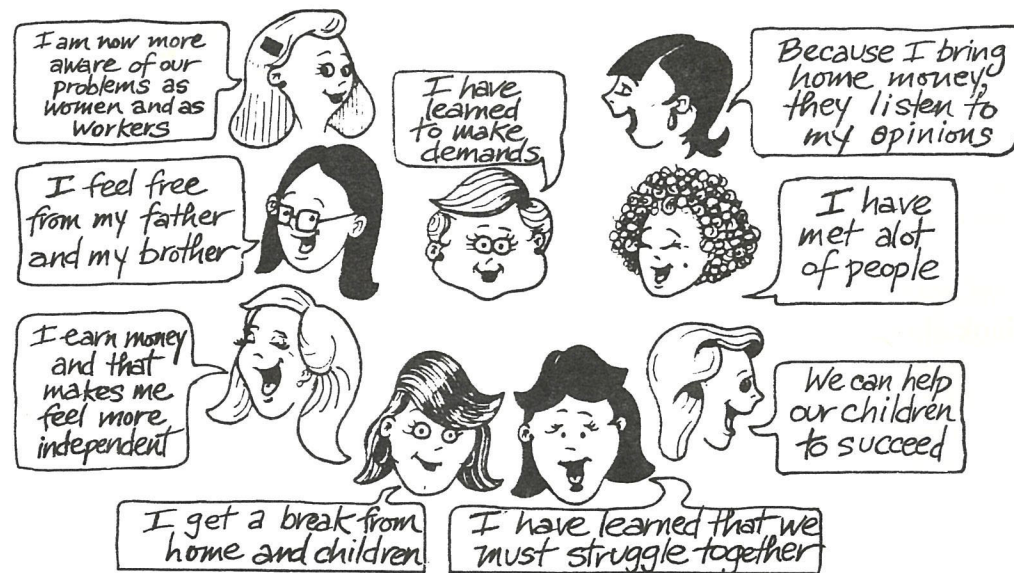
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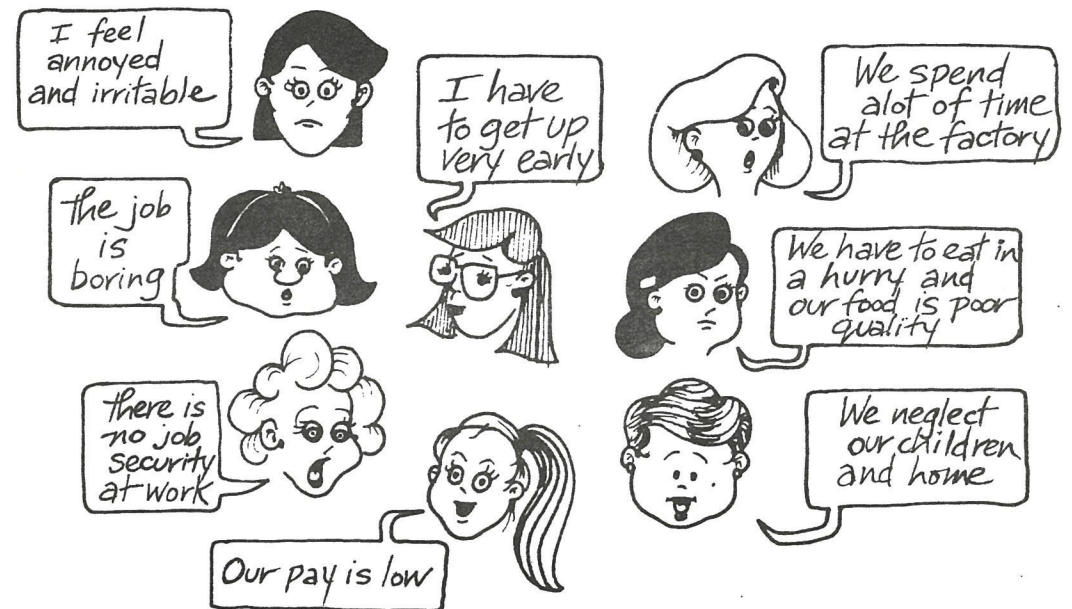
Most women who go out to work do not have much training. They often take boring jobs with low pay, or unsafe working conditions. They have no power to bargain for better pay and working conditions.

This book shows what some women from Mexico, Bolivia and South Africa think about working conditions for women.

When women work they find some good things and some bad things. These Mexican factory workers tell us about the good side...



...and the bad side...



From: Our Laws: ...and when you return, no one will care for you,
CIDEM/Gregoria Apaza Women's Centre, Bolivia

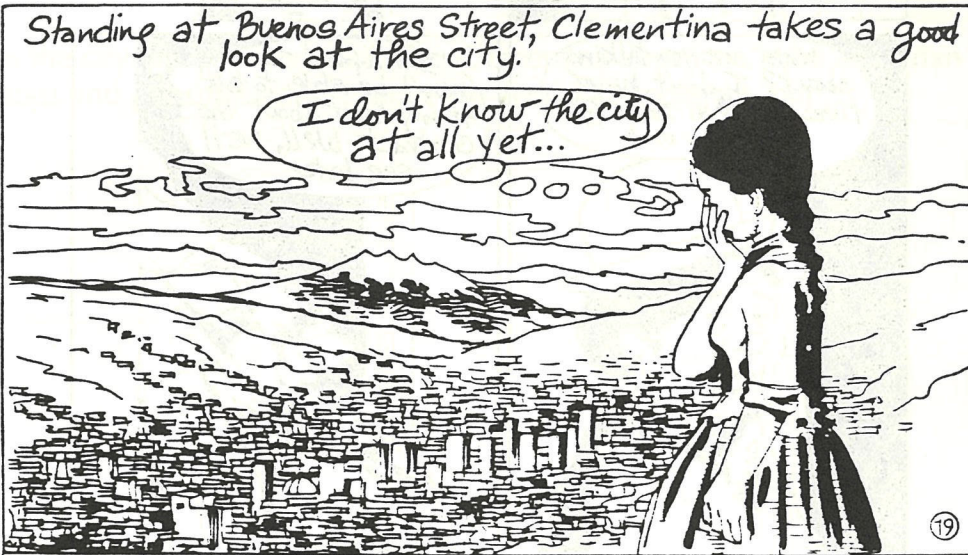


Women without training often have to take work as housekeepers or servants.

Here is Clementina's story. She is from Bolivia. She is from the country and has come to the city of La Paz to work as a housekeeper.

In Bolivia there are only two laws to protect domestic workers like Clementina. The law says that out of every 24 hours she must be allowed eight hours to rest. She must also be given one day off a week.

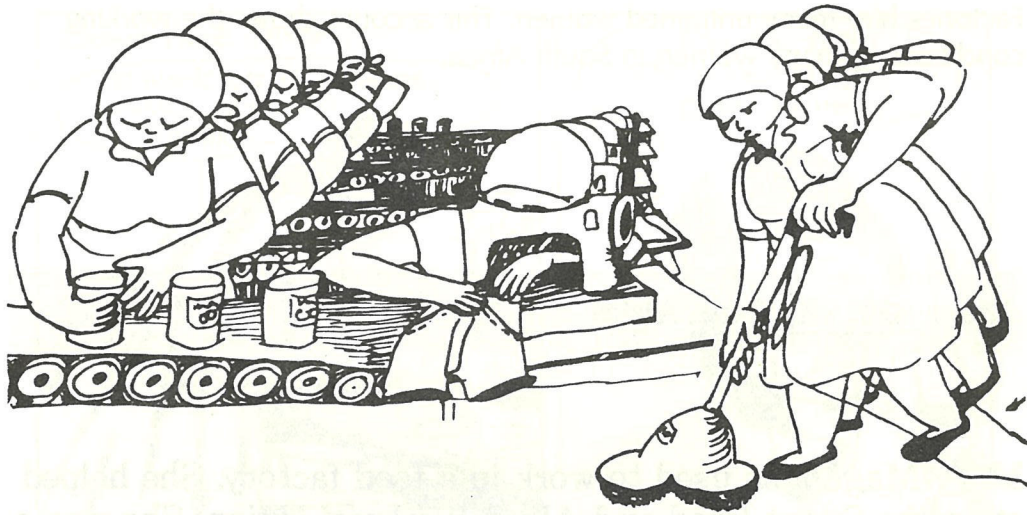
In the city at first no one will give Clementina directions, then a woman stops and gives her advice about the need for a contract, but...



Factories hire many untrained women. This account shows the working conditions of many women in South Africa.

From: SPEAK, South Africa

Mary Magubane used to work in a food factory. She helped start the Sweet Food and Allied Workers' Union. She was a shop steward and is now an organiser for the Sweet Food and Allied Workers' Union. She has one child and she lives with her parents who are both pensioners. She speaks about the problems of women workers in South Africa.



“More and more women are going out to work. Women now make up more than one quarter of the work force. Many of these women are domestic and office workers. But most of them are in the food and clothing industry.

Often working class women in South Africa start off in the most boring, tiring jobs. These jobs need no certificate. They are the worst paid and the least secure.

Most women are unskilled. They are easy to replace. They can not bargain with their bosses, especially when unemployment is high.

Then again, management does not like to train women. They do not want to hire women in many jobs, or to promote them. They say women go off to have children. That's their argument. That's their excuse for paying women low wages.





The maternity benefits* that exist are very low. The unions have to fight for paid maternity leave. The bosses don't think they should protect the jobs of pregnant women. This is one reason why women feel forced to take contraceptives such as depo provera* injections, but it is unsafe.

*maternity benefits mean paid time off from work given to a woman when she has a baby.

*Depo Provera is a chemical contraceptive with many dangerous side effects.

There are other health problems. Women suffer from miscarriages or the birth of a handicapped child. This can be caused by a number of things — carrying heavy articles, or working with food colouring, sugar, spices, salt and salt dust.



Women in the food industry work in very cold places with no warm clothing.

Many women in the service industry work night shifts. They go home and look after their families. In the end, they get sick from the stress. Women are also sexually abused and harassed at work and at home.



In many ways, working class women face the worst conditions at work.



Many women suffer sexual violence at work.

This description is from Peru.

From: Talking about Sexual Harassment at Work, Flora Tristan, Peru

Sexual violence at work is often hard to see. It is even harder to prove our stories are true. It costs a lot to charge someone in court, so women don't do it very often.

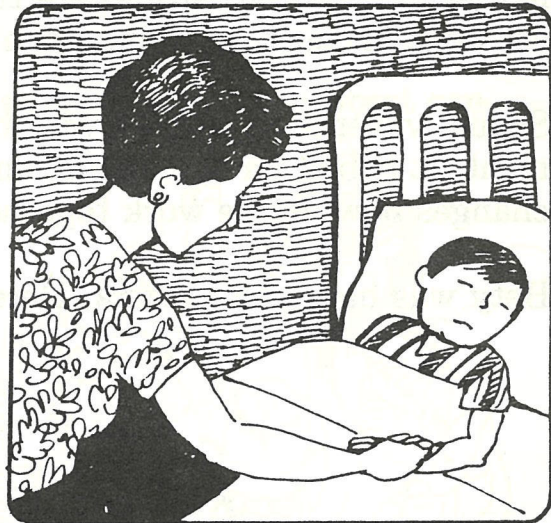
Sexual violence at work is very harmful. It is called harassment. It is bad for the victim, and also for the workplace. It changes how people work together.

Bety was harassed at work. Here is her story.

Bety: a woman with a husband and children



- husband's job not secure
- worked many years in the garment factory
- child suddenly very sick, with meningitis
- needs money for treatment
- needs time with child in hospital



Bety is a good worker. She asks the boss for time off. He says yes, and gives her time off every day. He also begins to touch her, to call her to chat, to talk about her life and his. Bety is uncomfortable. Others talk, but she needs her time off and pay.

When is a good time to talk about sexual harassment?

At work, we depend on the owner, the boss, the supervisor — people with power.

Bety was harassed by a man with power over her.

If a worker had the power to fire her boss, she would not let him harass her. Like most of us, Bety has an unskilled job. She can not choose where she will work, how she will work, or how much she will get paid. Workers in these jobs do not make these decisions. They are the most open to sexual harassment.



In Canada many women work in jobs that have low pay and poor working conditions. The majority of women do not have the protection of a union.

Many women work in offices where new technology is decreasing their control of their work. Employers use computer technology to make more money. Technology is used to speed up the women's work. They are expected to work even harder than before. Sometimes their jobs are replaced by computers.

Many unions are trying to protect workers against the harmful effects of new technology. Women have convinced some unions to look at sexual harassment as a serious problem for women.





THANK YOU

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ABOUT US

The Participatory Research Group (PRG) is a collective of activists, educators and researchers working for social change. Since 1976 we have produced a range of materials, including booklets, bibliographies and slide shows. We also produce a bi-annual newsletter, organize workshops and conferences and have a resource centre for public use. We work with literacy, women's and community groups, labour and native people.

The International Council for Adult Education, Women's Program is presently coordinated from the office of the Participatory Research Group, in consultation with representatives from various regions.

The Women's Program works with individuals and groups in different regions of the world who are exploring and developing popular forms of education which reflect and address women's issues. Our aim is to contribute to the development of a feminist popular education that makes connections between broad social struggles, and the personal issues and oppression women face daily.

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