

Work and Health in the Global Economy: Lessons from Developing and Industrialized Countries on the Impact of Work on Health

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Changes in the Global Economy

- Neoliberalism is the TINA (There Is No Alternative)
- GATT is now World Trade Org. (WTO)
- Role of IMF and World Bank
- New Trade Blocs (NAFTA, European Union, Mercosur, ASEAN, etc)

Neoliberalism

- Rule of the market (“free market” ?)
- Cuts in social programs such as health and education, reduction in safety net (reduction in size of government)
- Deregulation
- Privatization
- No more public good. Individual responsibility instead.

Impact of Globalization on Work (ILO, 1999)

- Some 1 billion workers (1/3 of the world's labor force) unemployed or under-employed (1998).
- 150 million unemployed (1999)
- 25 to 30 % of the world's workers (750 million to 900 million people) under-employed (i.e., either working substantially less than full-time, but wanting to work longer, or earning less than a living wage)

Impact of Globalization on Work

(2)

- Chronically high levels of unemployment and underemployment
- Social exclusion (limited employment opportunities for the young and the old, the less skilled, the disabled, and ethnic minority groups)
- Bias against women in all these categories

Impact of Globalization in the U.S.

- Increase in service sector (about 30% of workforce), decrease in manufacturing (less than 20% of workforce)
- Downsizing, contracting out or outsourcing
- “Lean and mean,” just in time (JIT)
- Growth of part-time, contingent, or “precarious” work
- Deregulation (OSHA enforcement)

Impact of Globalization in the U.S. (2)

- Roll-back of benefits to injured workers
- Privatization of social services such as education, health care, water treatment, garbage collection, and even prisons.

Impact of Privatization in Mexico

- Increasing unemployment and underemployment
- Lower wages, worse working conditions in agriculture
- Denationalization of entire sectors of the economy (e.g. telecommunications)
- Flexibilization of work

Impact of Privatization of Sugar Industry in Mexico on Work and Health (2)

- Concentration of capital, increase in productivity
- Lay-offs and intensification of work
- Weakening of unions
- Economic insecurity and stress at workplace and community levels
- Increased environmental pollution (respiratory ailments)

Impact of Privatization of Petrochemical Industry in Brazil on Work and Health

- Total restructuring of the industry
- Lay-offs, contracting out, importation of “Japanese model” of management (multiskilling, team work, just in time, total quality management), fragmentation of workforce, intensification of work, shifting of risks to contractors’ workforce (young and less skilled), and weakening of union.
- Increased risks of catastrophic explosions?

Conclusion

- Grassroots Globalization is building the international social movement's alternative to neoliberalism, as seen in the World Forum held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in the Year 2000.
- Alternative development must promote democracy, freedom, equality, social justice, citizenship, and peace.