

Minas Gerais: Waste Picker Health & Safety

An exploratory health risk mapping in five waste picker cooperatives in Brazil considers waste pickers' work routines and workplace conditions, and highlights the specific risks faced, which are often exacerbated by the exclusion from labour and social protection measures.

Lack of proper infrastructure and equipment can lead to the intensification of ergonomic problems, repetitive movements and interpersonal tensions.

These also negatively impact the ability to provide for more hygienic workplaces and more efficient work routines.



Waste pickers expressed concern over:

- Emotional well-being

- Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension

- Gender-based vulnerabilities

- Community-based violence and socio-economic vulnerabilities

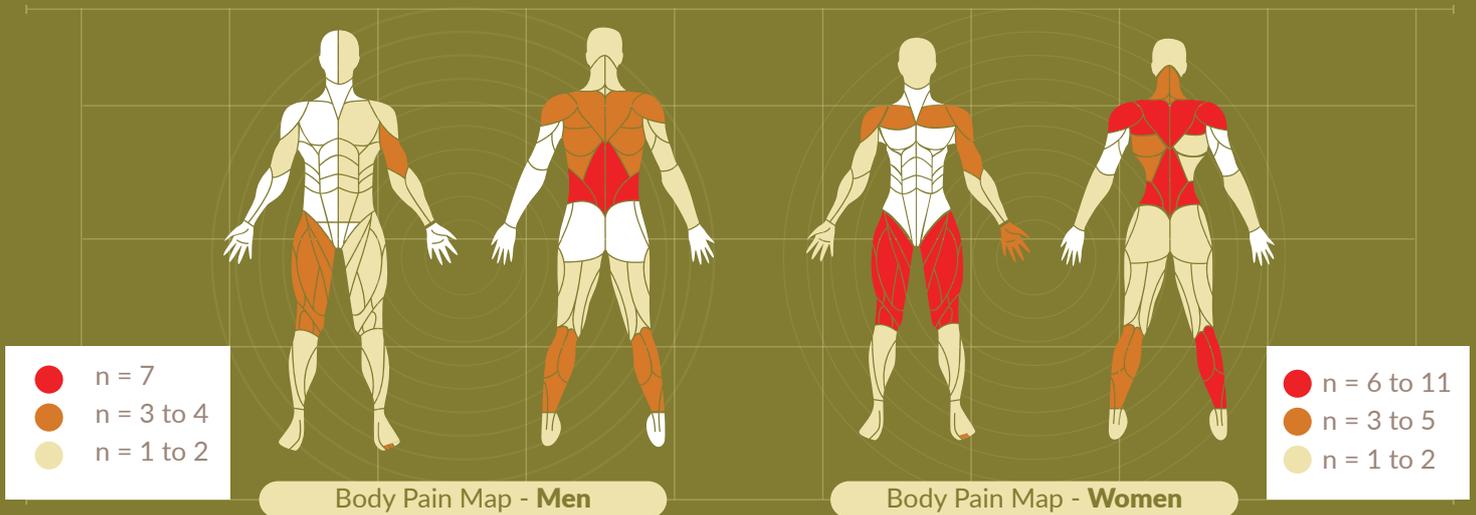
More information

<http://www.wiego.org/cuidar-project>



Activities involving the handling and processing of recyclable materials affect waste pickers' bodies in different ways. The most frequently mentioned pains are highlighted in red, orange and beige. The sexual division of labour in cooperatives also brings distinct body pains for men and women, particularly depending on the degree of repetitive movements and static posture often associated with women's sorting tasks. Holding leadership responsibilities has additional impacts on waste pickers' stress levels and emotional well-being.

Source: Cuidar Project Health Risk Mapping, Survey data (2017) (n=48)



Body Pain Map, by Gender

Policy Recommendations:

- 1 Environmental education for better source segregation
- 2 Avoid mixing medical waste in household waste
- 3 Better planning processes with and for waste pickers on adequate infrastructure and equipment
- 4 Commitment to improve workplace infrastructure
- 5 Increased recognition from community and local authorities for waste pickers' environmental and public services
- 6 Increased sensitivity from health professionals regarding risks faced by informal workers

Improvements to waste pickers' overall health, emotional well-being and workplace conditions involve:

- Easy access to information on healthy nutritional practices and on vaccinations for tetanus, hepatitis B, and yellow fever
- Access to simple health exams and preventive health services
- Access to training on adequate, durable and comfortable protective equipment
- Training on proper ergonomic exercises

A broader framing of OHS research can increase the visibility of the specific needs of informal workers and informal workplaces.

Cooperatives are in a unique position to protect informal workers' livelihoods. Support from governments and stakeholders, commitments to decent work conditions and a favourable policy and regulatory environment can improve the overall health and well-being of workers. These are central to addressing sustainable development agenda goals such as decent work, gender equality and sustainable cities (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) and communities (SDG 11).