



V INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
WOMAN, WORK AND HEALTH
Towards decent and healthy jobs for women



O R G A N I Z A T I O N

Historical background

[Background meetings](#) [I. Barcelona](#) [II. Rio de Janeiro](#) [III. Estocolmo](#) [IV. Nueva Delhi](#) [Other](#)

Research on the health of female workers rose from a theoretical elaboration on gender relations (Brito, 19:199). In many countries more visible answers have been arising to specific situations related to the health of female workers. The existence of an important amount of research with this focus has allowed for the organization of four world congresses on the issue "Women, Work, Health" (1996 in Barcelona, España; 1999 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; 2002 in Stockholm, Sweden, and 2005 in New Delhi, India). The IV Congress Committee and the International Committee backed Mexico as the host for the next Congress and named PhD Leonor Cedillo Becerril as its General Secretary. The possibilities continue this path will become concrete in the Fifth event that will take place in Mexico on 2008, where an attempt will be made to make concrete the achievements of the prior events and strengthen a common line of knowledge and action.

It is under these terms that the Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas (UAZ), the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), the civil association Iniciativa Ciudadana y Desarrollo Social (INCIDE Social A.C.), El Colegio de Sonora (COLSON), the Centro de Investigación en Alimentación y Desarrollo, A.C. (CIAD) and Zanzana, Conocimiento y Expresión A.C. announce the **V International Congress on Women, Work, Health** that will take place in the City of Zacatecas, October 27 to 30, 2008.

The general objective of this V Congress is to give continuity to the four previous events, in respect to the discussion and creation of an agenda focused on women's work and health issues, as well as organizational issues. The following specific objectives have been considered:

- To make progress in the discussion on the main subjects related to women's work and health issues at the local, national, Latin American and international levels.
- To make progress in the organization of women for the improvement of paid and unpaid work conditions at the local and global levels.
- To propitiate / promote the coordination of efforts amongst all actors whose mission is a commitment towards women, focused on work and health issues.

Thus, one of the main objectives of this congress is to achieve the participation of decision makers in the areas of work, health and gender equity. We seek to insure the presence of women's studies researchers, as well as an international participation. In this sense we seek to insure the presence of civil society activists and organizations, grassroots workers and union members, so as to guarantee the merging of different social sectors and make progress in the organization of the different groups related with the axes of the congress. The idea is to place the issue of women's health in their work in the political agenda of the public, union and entrepreneurial sectors.



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Background

What follows is an account of the origin and progress of the congresses that have already taken place, so as to demonstrate the parting point for the organization of the V International Congress on Women, Work and Health.

Carmen Vals relates the origin of this initiative in the following words: "In 1990 the association called CAPS (Center for Analysis and Sanitary Programs) organized a first symposium named "Woman and Standard of Living" that, for the first time in Spain, posed that women's standard of living and health depends on social, living and work conditions, on their role as caregivers, on their work and social discrimination, as well as from biological differences in the diseases of women and men, which have not been well studied or understood, and the interaction between psychological, biological and social aspects. The group of researchers from CAPS decided to organize a line of work that, in the shape of a program, could research and teach about the differences between disease in women and men, analyzing the need to organize an international gathering that would consider the different work done by women. On November 12, 1993, we organized the first International Workshop Women, Health and Work, and decided to launch the International Congress on Women, Health and Work"

I Barcelona

Strategy: The Congress "Women, Health, Work" took place in Barcelona, Spain on April 1996, under the slogan: **"To live in Health making differences visible"**. In this Congress, three areas were thoroughly analyzed:

- Health and differences between women and men.
- Work conditions and differential labor health.
- Legislation and compensation for women's health problems.

Organizers: The summoning organization was **CAPS** with support obtained by the association.

Attendance: 54 countries participated, with over 616 attendants, including 51 speakers from 21 countries.

Achievements: The congress decided to continue working as a network so as to preserve the information gathered from the research done by the different groups, and to make a special effort to introduce on gender issues and differences in disease for women and men in Universities and at all teaching levels in Health Sciences.

Statement:

- To introduce the gender perspective in the research of the health problems of men and women in general, as well as in the research of labor health, creating indexes, measuring instruments for health research methods in teaching curricula, particularly at the university level, as well as health attention.
- To abolish any form of negative gender-based discrimination or violence, both in the access to jobs and in health services.
- To render all jobs performed by women and men visible and valued.
- To change working conditions and schedules, basing them on real human needs.
- To generate individual, social and legislative resources to strengthen women's personal autonomy and standards of living.

II Rio de Janeiro

Strategy: The second congress took place on 1999 on Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, under the slogan **"Gender Equity and Standard of Living: Challenges for the new social times"**. The different dimensions of the relationship between women, work and health were discussed: environmental, economic, organizational, subjective, ethical, generation and others. The focus was on issues relevant in Latin America rural areas, domestic labor and child work. Many oral presentations were given in the congress, as well as posters and videos, and the attendants participated in group work and round tables. Poster sessions allowed the authors to participate actively with the attendants and a prize was granted to the one that received the best evaluation from the technical committee. Eight books were presented as well.

Organizers: Five committees participated in the organization of the congress:

Directive Committee, National Counseling Committee, International Counseling Committee, Scientific Committee and Reports Committee. The former included scientific institutions (CUT, CGT and Força Sindical) and the Brazilian Feminist Network for health and reproductive rights. The Scientific Committee included the following institutions: the Asociación Brasileña de Posgraduación en Salud Colectiva (ABRASCO), Universidad Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP), Universidad Federal de Bahia (UFBA), the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), Universidad Pontificia Católica de Minas Gerais (PUC/MG), Facultad de Ciencias Médicas da Santa Casa (São Paulo), Universidad Estatal de Campinas (UNICAMP), Universidad Estatal de São Paulo (UNESP). The following institutions financed the event: Ford Foundation; Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego – Brazil; Canadian International Development Agency; Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) – Brazil; Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) – Brazil; Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ), Mamacash; Ministério da Saúde – Brazil; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Attendance: The attendance exceeded all expectations with over 700 participants from 32 countries, with academic, professionals, union and activist from diverse social movements, particularly feminist and pro-women. 150 speakers came from Latin America and the Caribbean, 42 speakers from European Countries and Canada, 6 from Africa and 3 from India.

Achievements: There was a wide variety of approaches, experiences and proposals. From the scientific point of view the most important subjects were verified and new issues added about the relationship between gender, work and health. There was widespread participation from Latin American, Canadian and French Post-graduate students, who exchanged points of view. Also agreements were made for the research of the different issues.

Statement: A consensual document was discussed and approved, including the following main points:

- To introduce the gender perspective in the research of the health problems of men and women in general, as well as in the research of labor health, creating indexes, measuring instruments for health research methods in teaching curricula, particularly at the university level, as well as health attention.
- To abolish any form of negative gender-based discrimination or violence, both in the access to jobs and in health services. To render all jobs performed by women and men visible and valued. To change working conditions and scheduling basing them on real human needs.
- To generate individual, social and legislative resources to strengthen women's personal autonomy and standards of living.

III Stockholm

Strategy: The main subjects in Barcelona and Rio de Janeiro were gender, equity and standard of living. These were acknowledged and accepted as the main issues, and in Stockholm an effort was made to go beyond that to initiate actions for change. The main areas included the reiteration of the double effort of women in work and the derived health issues, the slogan was: **"In action to improve women's work and health"**. As Inge Ohlsson pointed out: "It was very pleasing to see the communication between researchers and activists during that warm June in Stockholm. We heard and saw many examples about how well directed research can render benefit, and how people can put scientific knowledge into practice. Women from all over the world and in different languages talked about their life conditions, and we were able to learn from each other and understand different modes of living in the world, but I was impressed by the similarity in the problems".

The subjects were:

- Society and work organization
- Work conditions and their impact in women's health
- Development of models and methods for science and practice

Organizers: It was organized by the Institute of Working Life.

Attendance: 840 women from 70 countries attended the third WWH congress. Researchers and activists from all over the world got together to discuss women's health and work issues. Over 500 speeches were given, in over 100 workshops, symposiums and poster sessions.

Achievements: Communication between researchers and activists is difficult, but we achieved it at the 2002 WWH. One of the main successes of the congress was the creation of different working networks on women's health and work, but there were also reports on the implementation of research that favors the people. Issues such as schedules for paid and domestic work that will not lead to stress and wear because of the daily performance of the two tasks; showing how many women who live in extreme poverty, apart from standing great weight and pressure, also need to find a global perspective that may combine research with practice. Our problems are universal, but we shall solve them in different ways according to our resources.

Statement: Work must have a human rights, reality-based perspective. This congress showed that academic knowledge must aid the work of organizations dedicated to health at work. The plan to achieve this is:

- The creation of networks to continue with the exchange of experiences.
- To give power and support so that the women can make decisions about their own bodies and lives, in all levels of society.
- To identify strategies for the prevention of risk and damage at work.
- Work to improve the attention of medical services.
- To develop multidisciplinary research at different levels.

In regard to action, the priority is to bring the issues of gender and health to the legal and political agendas. Also, we must identify global inequities and problems, and achieve integration between practice and research, filling up any knowledge gaps.

IV New Delhi

Strategy: In India, as in other developing countries, women have always worked in unorganized sectors, and their work is not acknowledged as such. In the developed world women also have to face this double demand that affects their health. This has been studied in-depth, particularly in relation to health and security at work, both at work and at home. However, the work of women is still ignored in the agendas of countries such as India, as well as their security and health, including their reproductive health. To this we must add environmental issues that become occupational hazards. In the light of what has been already demonstrated, the IV congress focused on issues of security, health and the environment. Traditionally patriarchal cultures have not granted much space to preoccupations about women; thus, the focus of this Congress was the integration of gender as the central perspective in the world of Work and Health. The discussions were conducted within the frame of the three main subjects of the congress:

- Gender, paid and unpaid work
- The changing world of work
- Scientific health practiced in development

Organizers: The Association "Society for Life in Work", with the support of civil associations, as well as national and international institutions.

Attendance: The IV Congress "Women, Health, Work" attracted 600 delegates from 61 countries. Decision makers, researchers, academicians, social activists, health workers and union members, amongst others, deliberated about research findings, the tendencies of the work market, intervention strategies, public policies and other experiences related to this issue.

Achievements: An initiative called "**Woman, health and work for Asia**" was created for the advancement of the research findings linked to the reality experienced by women, so as to have a positive impact in their lives and work conditions. The previous led to the following statements:

- To acknowledge the work of women in all their spheres, organized, unorganized and domestic.
- To develop gender related definitions (such as formal / informal work, health, organized or unorganized workers, migrant workers), as well as specific parameters for the situations experienced by women (occupational

exposure, access to health services, information, double shift, lack of acknowledgement of girls, etc.).

- To generate information about an evidence-based medicine, work statistics for development and the evaluation of government policies.

Statement: The IV Congress generated the **Women, Health and Work for Asia Initiative**, which is working towards the improvement of women's work conditions and health in Asian countries. Also, a proposal was issued for the V International Congress in Mexico to achieve a widespread participation of Latin American Women, whose countries suffer from extreme poverty and enormous inequalities.

Other women related meetings

[Pottern, L. et al., Occupational Cancer Among Woman: A conference overview](#)

[Gunnarsdottir, K. et al., Women's Health: Occupation, Cancer & Reproduction: A conference overview](#)

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[National Committee](#) [Zacatecas Local Committee](#) [Selection Process](#) [Adressbook](#) [Historical background](#)

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