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## Depressive symptoms among working women in rural North Carolina: A comparison of women in poultry processing and other low-wage jobs

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### Abstract

We report on the prevalence of self-reported depressive symptoms and associated factors among women employed in a poultry processing plant and a community comparison group of other employed women in northeastern North Carolina in the southern United States. The rural area is poor and sparsely populated with an African American majority. The largest employer of women in the area is a poultry processing plant. The goals of the analyses were 1) to evaluate whether women employed in poultry processing had a higher prevalence of depressive symptoms than other working women from the same geographic area, and 2) to evaluate factors which might be associated

with depression among all of these working women, including specific characteristics of their work environment.

Recruitment of participants ( $n = 590$ ) and data collection were by community-based staff who were also African American women. Depressive symptoms were measured using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). Work organization factors were measured with the Job Content Questionnaire (JCQ). Log-binomial regression was used to calculate crude and adjusted prevalence ratios.

The prevalence of depressive symptoms, based on a CES-D measure of sixteen or more, was 47.8% among the poultry workers and 19.7% among the other working women (prevalence ratio = 2.3). After adjusting for socioeconomic variables, health-related quality of life and coping style, the prevalence of depressive symptoms remained 80% higher among the poultry workers. The prevalence of symptoms was also higher among those who perceived low social support at work, hazardous work conditions, job insecurity, and high levels of isometric load. These factors were all more common among the women employed in the poultry plant. The concentration of this low-wage industry in economically depressed rural areas illuminates how class exploitation and racial discrimination may influence disparities in health among working women.



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## Keywords

Depression; Occupational health; Health disparities; Work organization; Poultry processing; Working women

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