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Arena Workers' Assessment of Their Job Quality & Recommendations for Change

*A Report for the Detroit Industry Standards
Board for Arena Workers*



WARRIOR STRONG

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“The establishment of the Industry Standards Board was a significant milestone, but the real impact lies in amplifying the voices of the workers...This work is crucial to building a stronger middle class.

Council President Mary Sheffield

This report helps to amplify the voices of Detroit’s arena workers by sharing the results of 2024 survey of workers at Little Caesar’s Arena, Ford Field, and Comerica Park to inform the inaugural Industry Standards Board in Detroit.

Overview

In 2021 Detroit passed an ordinance to create the first opportunity for Industry Standards Boards in the nation, and in May of 2023, the Detroit City Council unanimously voted to create an Industry Standards Board for Arena Workers at Little Caesars Arena, Ford Field and Comerica Park. The Arena sector is complex, employing union and non-union workers directly and through contractors as well as being both year round and seasonal. Moreover, arena workers represent a wide range of job types who maintain equipment and grounds, provide security, prepare and serve food, provide customer service, clean facilities, and prepare the arenas for various types of events, to name a few.

In Detroit, the number of employees potentially affected by the Board may be as many as 3,000 people. These workers have identified issues ranging from low wages, workplace health and safety risks, and limited opportunities for advancement and job security. In the Detroit context, these workers are likely to also be enduring a range of structural challenges, including limited city transit, lack of access to affordable and adequate housing, limited access to high quality childcare, and the environmental and health risks of living in a large, industrial urban area.

Scope and limitations

Anyone who worked in one of the three Detroit arenas in the 12 months preceding the survey was eligible to participate. With 320 respondents completing the survey, we conservatively estimate a response rate of 10% which is considered acceptable for a community style survey. These results under-represent workers at Ford Field and security guards and future work might be done to better engage these subgroups.

Methodology

This page describes the data collection methods, sample selection, and data analysis techniques used in this report. Our team has taken an evidence-based approach to ensure that the information presented is accurate and reliable.

This report summarizes findings from an anonymous and confidential survey for Detroit arena workers. The survey was made public from August 19-October 28, 2024. The survey was made available via a public

Overview of Methods

The survey was created based on consultation with arena workers, labor experts, ISB members, and local labor organizers who work with arena workers. The final survey was designed by researchers at Wayne State University School of Social Work with support from the ISB and created in Qualtrics, an online survey platform.

Data collection occurred between August and October 2024. The survey was provided in English, Arabic, and Spanish and was designed to take fewer than 10 minutes. While the survey was intended to be completed primarily online, a phone number was made available to potential participants where WSU SSW researchers would complete the survey over the phone. Fewer than five potential participants called but none had worked in an arena in the last 12 months.

The survey was advertised to the community by labor organizers and employers in the Detroit arena sector as well as through public meetings, a press release and press conference, and a public website (isbresearch@wayne.edu). No compensation was provided for participating.

Overview of Analysis

The current report provides descriptive analysis of the survey results. Data were downloaded in full and ineligible participants were removed, which primarily included people who completed less than 10% of the survey or reported working zero months over the last year in all the arenas.

First, frequency tables were reviewed to examine the demographics, job structure, job quality, wellbeing, and priorities for the overall sample. Second, these same domains by subgroups that we expected to have meaningful differences: by unionization status, by fulltime/part-time status, by work hour/week quartiles, by wage/hour quartiles, by main arena, by total number of arenas worked in in the last year, by working all year versus part of the year, by job, by employer, by parental status, by gender, by racial/ethnic group, and by union. Between group differences were assessed for significance using pooled t-tests or Pearson's tests depending on the variable type. Overall descriptives and statistics differing significantly by subgroup are presented in this report. Some significant findings were further explored through additional statistical analysis.

Who participated in the survey?

Any person working in Ford Field, Comerica Park, and/or Little Caesar's Arena in the last 12 months were eligible to complete the survey.

320 ARENA WORKERS
Completed the Survey

Median age of the sample was
47 years

63%
of respondents were men

47%
Black or African American

37%
White

16%
multi-racial or part of another racial/ethnic group



37%

of respondents have a HS Diploma or GED

10%

have a 2-year degree

24%

have at least a bachelor's degree

38%
are parents of minor children

84%
are represented by a union

Respondents have worked for
6 years
on average in Detroit Arenas



Arenas and Employers

117

respondents worked
in
Ford Field
in the last 12 months

176

respondents worked
in
Little Caesar's Arena
in the last 12 months

202

respondents worked
in
Comerica Park
in the last 12 months

Half of respondents work all year in the arenas

Year Round Workers

- 53% of year round workers work in 1 arena
- 47% of year round workers work in 2-3 arenas

Partial Year Workers

- Work an average of 6.5 months per year
- Most partial year workers work in 1 arena
- 19% of partial year workers work in 2-3 arenas

Comparing Groups

- Year round workers (7.5 yrs) have longer average tenure than partial year workers (5.3 yrs)
- Workers working in multiple arenas (8.4 yrs) have longer average tenure than those working in one arena (5.4 yrs)
- Stage hands (94%) are more likely than other workers to work across all three arenas
- Cleaning (47%) and gameday (41%) staff are more likely to work in only one arena

Employer	#
Olympia Ent	81
Safe Mngmt	23
TPG-PBS	56
Barney Monk	13
Tigers	107
Levy	3
Del Nor	10
Other	27

Job Characteristics & Quality



Job Types

A wide range of jobs are necessary to the arena industry. We asked people what tasks best described their work and collapsed those tasks into four primary job types for the purposes of analysis.

- Maintenance ($n=19$): maintain grounds, maintain facilities, maintain equipment
- Cleaning ($n=105$): clean facilities
- Gameday ($n=102$): prepare and/or serve food, keep people safe/provide security, sell tickets/work in the ticket office, usher people in the arena
- Stagehands ($n=77$): set up or tear down stage/arena for games or concerts, rigging, lighting

Job Quality

Measuring Job Quality

Job quality is an important factor for both workers and employers. Workers with higher job quality tend to have better health, higher life satisfaction, and better family wellbeing. When workers have high job quality, they have longer tenure at their employers and do more and better quality work. We measured a number of key aspects of job quality to assess current job quality and help reveal areas for improvement. Job quality measures included: compensation, employer-provided benefits, paid time off, schedule satisfaction, workplace safety, and voice at work.

Job Characteristics by Job Type

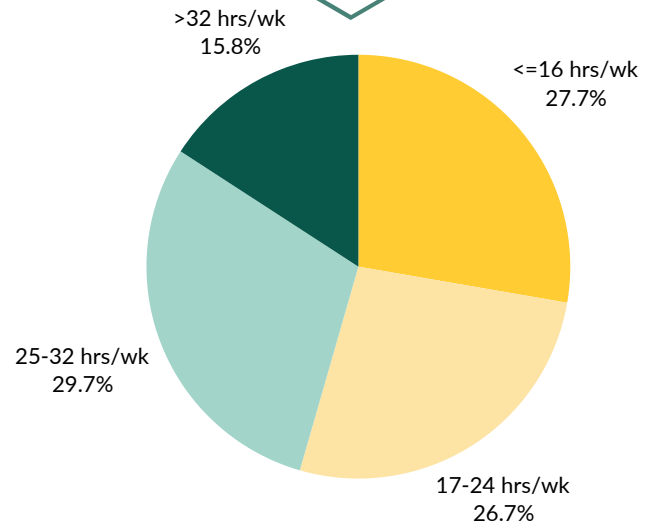
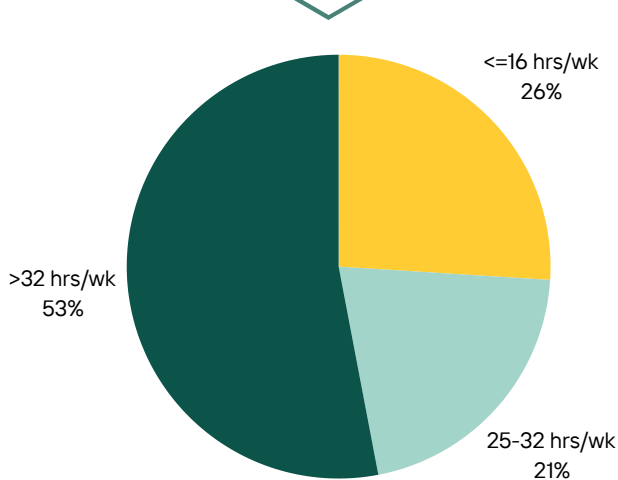
Maintenance

- Average hours per week: 34
- Average wage: \$20.02
- Average tenure: 4 years

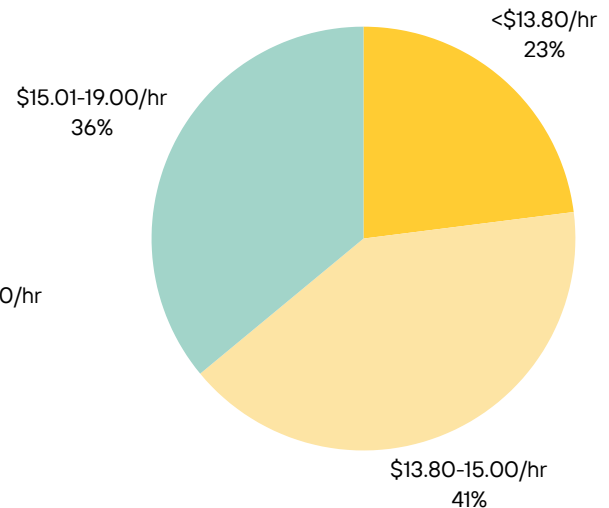
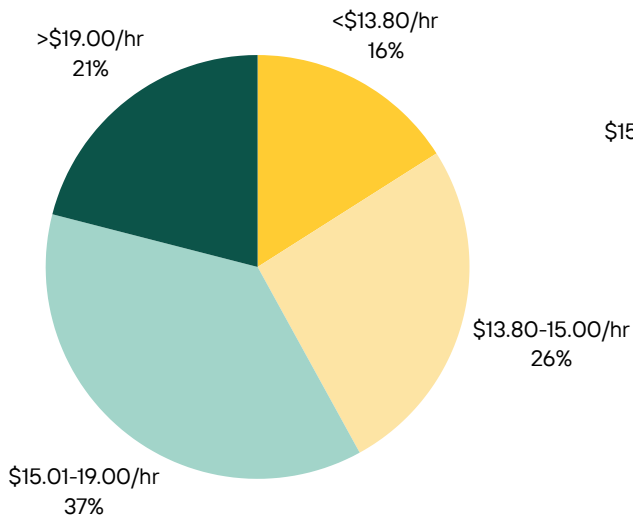
Cleaning

- Average hours per week: 23
- Average wage: \$14.95
- Average tenure: 4 years

Working Hour
Quartiles



Wage Quartiles

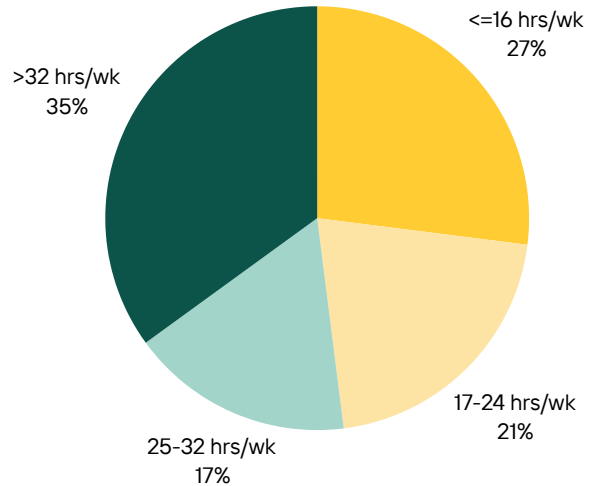
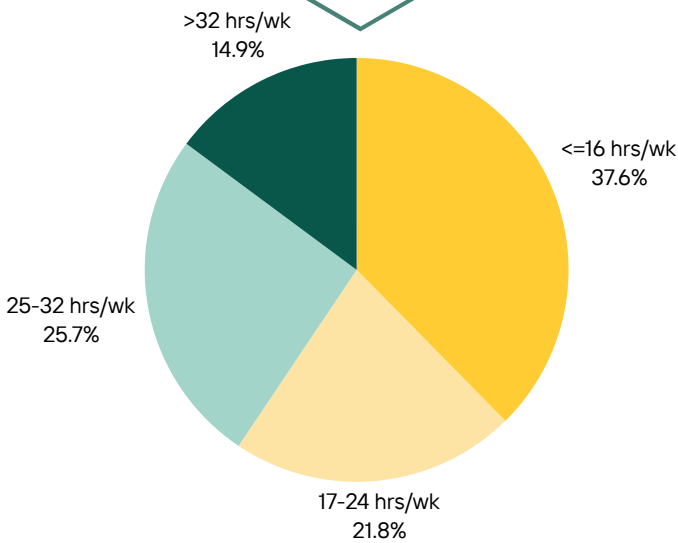


Gameday

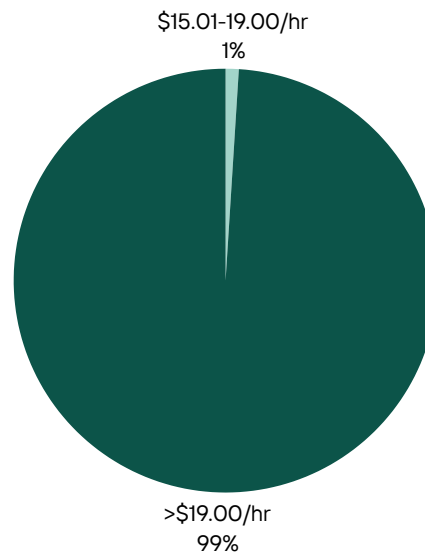
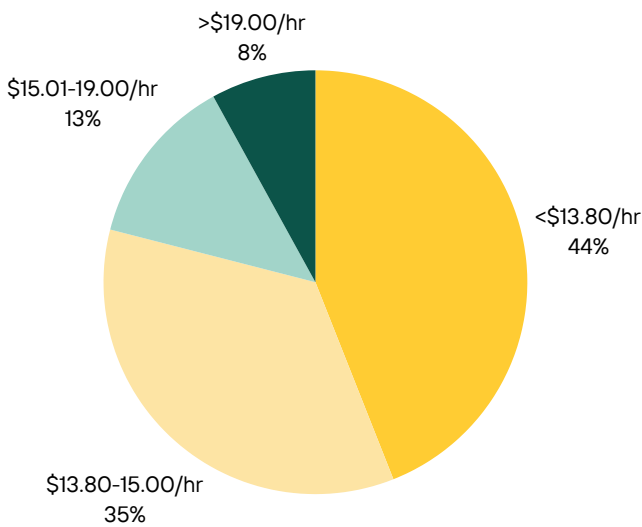
- Average hours per week: 22
- Average wage: \$14.11
- Average tenure: 7 years

Stage Hands

- Average hours per week: 28
- Average wage: \$25.98
- Average tenure: 10 years



Working Hour Quartiles



Wage Quartiles

Additional Aspects of Job Quality

Few arena workers have access to employer-provided benefits.

72%

Have **no** benefits provided through their workplace

18%

Have employer-provided health insurance

12%

Have PTO

Only 12% of arena workers reported having paid time off, paid sick leave, and/or paid vacation leave through their employer

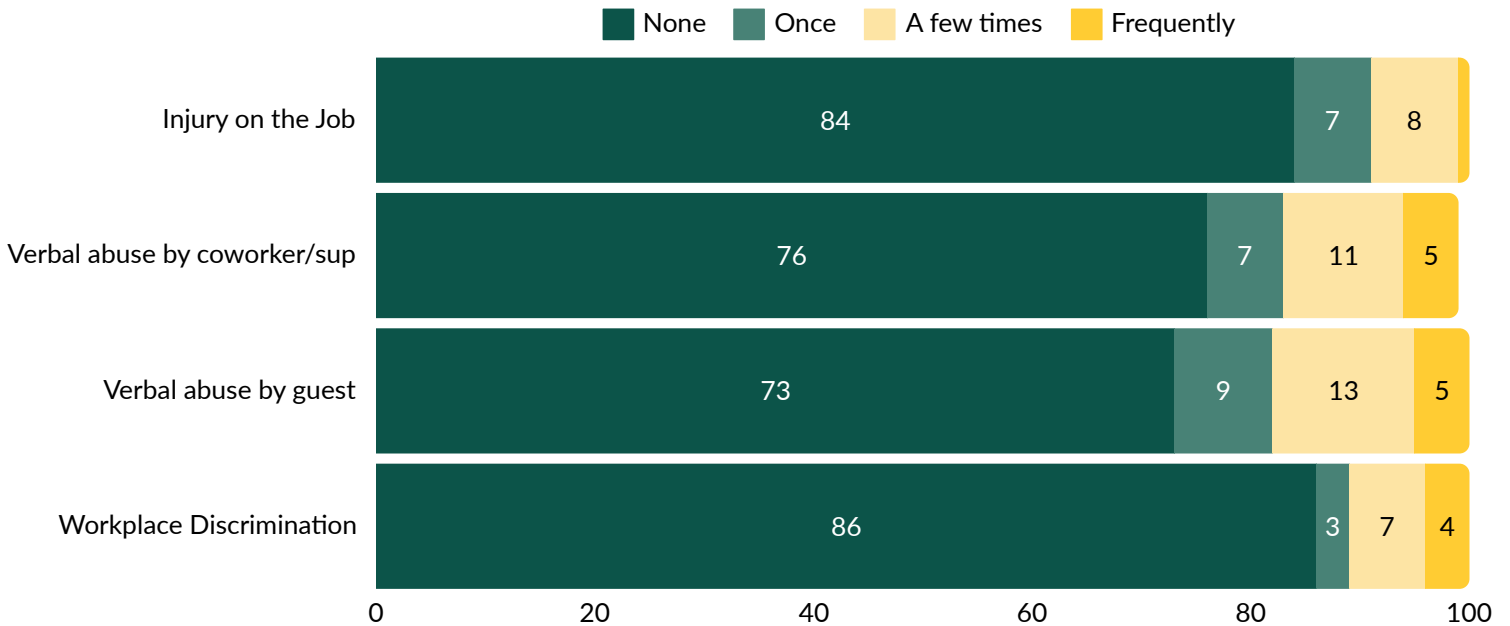
10%

Have an employer-provided retirement account



Additional Aspects of Job Quality

Workplace Safety in Last 12 Months



Most arena workers felt safe at work.

- Verbal abuse was the most commonly reported workplace safety hazard.
- Exploring between subgroups, stagehands most commonly experienced verbal abuse by coworkers or supervisors compared to any other subgroup, while cleaning staff reported the least.
- Unsurprisingly, gameday workers experienced the most verbal abuse from guests.
- Maintenance workers and stagehands report significantly more workplace injuries than cleaning or gameday staff



Employee Characteristics by Job

Employee Demographics by Job



This chart shows that demographic characteristics vary significantly by job type. Presented here are the most significantly distinct factors by job type, including gender, race, parental status, and highest level of education. The following are key takeaways from the figure above:

- Men exclusively do maintenance jobs
- Men are significantly less likely than women to have cleaning jobs
- White people are significantly less likely than people of color to do cleaning jobs
- Gameday workers are the least likely to be parents of all job types
- Stagehands are the best educated category, followed by gameday and maintenance workers, with cleaning staff overall being the least well educated. However, 32% have post-secondary education.

Job Quality Summary

Analyses showed significant differences in job quality by job title but overall needs to improve wages, access to benefits, and occupational health.

In the comments, many people mentioned enjoying the experience of working in the arenas but noted many areas for improvement. Some jobs have very high job quality, though this was primarily accomplished through union contracts, as evidenced by the relatively high job quality of the stagehands.

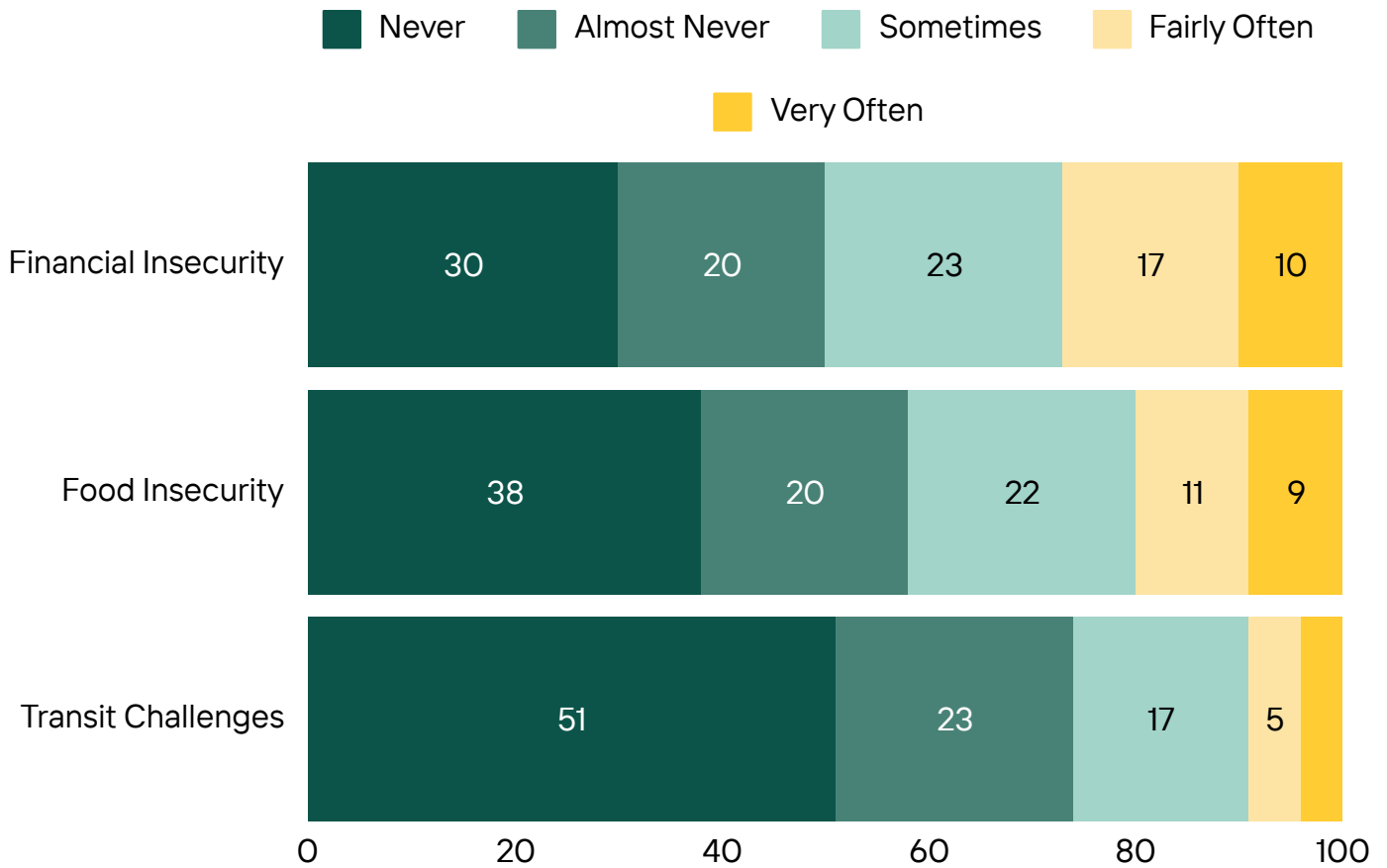
Needing a living wage was clear in the survey and also in the comments workers noted at the end of their surveys. As one worker explained, “I believe arena workers are grossly underpaid compared to the rising costs of living and the substantial increase in ticket prices in the past few years. Rent, groceries, gas, childcare all vastly increased in the last five years and my wages do not reflect that. I deserve a fair share of the fruits of my labor.” Overall compensation could be improved, as these jobs provide a very low rate of employer-provided benefits, which have serious negative implications for people’s health and their ultimate ability to retire.

While most workers felt safe, there are still safety concerns that need to be addressed. In the comments, workers expanded on this. One worker noted that performers backstage had concealed weapons that appeared during an argument. Others mentioned that there is often violence by guests in the area surrounding the arenas that they must traverse to get to work. Moreover, safety needs differ by job type. Stagehands and maintenance workers experience worse physical safety and cleaning/gameday experience more emotional strain. Thus, some division or department-level changes may best address safety concerns. However, in their comments, workers reported repeatedly that supervisors need more training based on their experiences of verbal harassment and favoritism. As one worker put it, “Managers need proper training in order to properly prepare and train the team members. Don’t use the word team if we are not a team.” This suggests overall management training and support may improve holistic occupational safety.

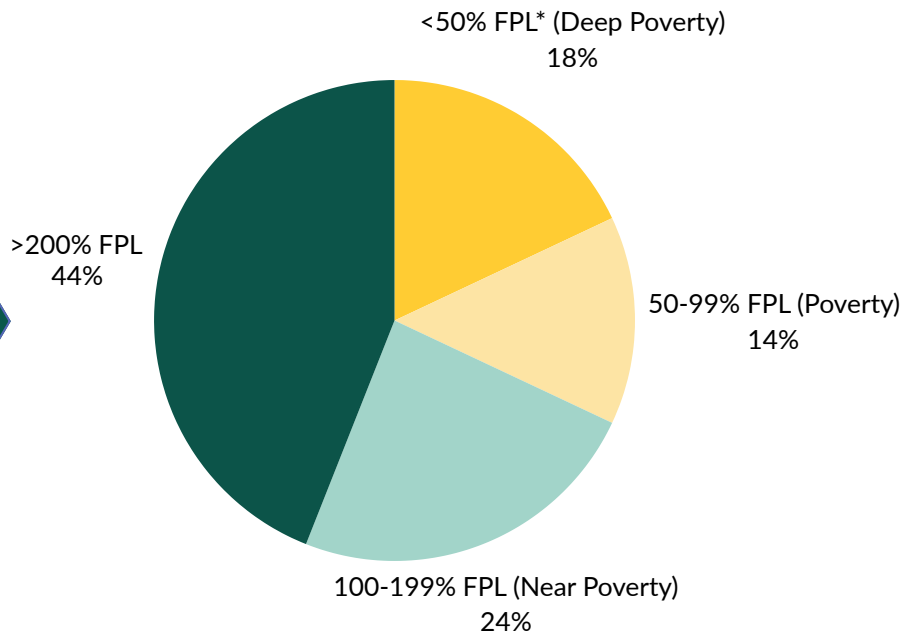
Union workers had better job quality on average than nonunion. In an open-ended survey question, nonrepresented workers repeatedly mentioned that being in a union is beneficial. As one worker put it “I have learned that only those coworkers with a union contract were paid a fair rate of pay. This also equates with the lowest turnover rate in those with a union contract.”

Finally, some basic changes may benefit workers’ daily work experiences. Parking and transit were commonly mentioned in the comments. Stagehands who most commonly work across all three arenas, reported needing parking to be easier across the three venues. Others mentioned that parking should simply be free for employees. Workers also mentioned that food might be made available to employees during their shifts.

Worker Wellbeing



32%
of arena workers report living below the poverty line



*FPL: 2024 Federal Poverty Line, calculated by household income and structure

Worker Wellbeing



66%

of arena workers report
living
paycheck-to-paycheck

Among arena workers overall, 27% report often experiencing financial insecurity, 20% often experience food insecurity, and 9% often experience transit challenges. Two thirds of arena workers reported living paycheck-to-paycheck. Of most concern, we assessed that nearly one third of surveyed arena workers are living below the poverty line. On average workers living below the poverty line worked 23 hours per week, though 7% worked full time.

It should be noted that, within this broad group, workers experienced challenges to their wellbeing differently. Workers of color, female workers, and workers working as cleaning staff reported significantly worse wellbeing than their counterparts across measures. Parenting workers also reported worse wellbeing, which suggests implications for their children's wellbeing as well. In contrast, workers working all year, earning higher wages, and workers in other job types (gameday, maintenance, stagehands) reported significantly and consistently better wellbeing.

Worker Recommendations

Workers were asked to identify the top three most important things that would improve their job at the Detroit arenas. Options were determined through preliminary data collected from workers and consultation with ISB members and labor organizations who represent Detroit arena workers.

Percentage of Respondents Identifying Item as a Top 3 Priority

85%	Wages (e.g., fair wages, cost of living adjustments, regular raises)
33%	Health Insurance (e.g., better healthcare, cheaper healthcare, insurance access)
25%	Job Security (e.g., training, career ladder, opportunities for promotion)
24%	Transportation (e.g., discounted/free parking, shuttles, improved public transit)
23%	Scheduling (e.g., flexible schedule, more hours, choose your shifts)
19%	Adequate Supports (e.g., adequate supplies, high quality management)
16%	Staffing (e.g., more workers are needed to do the job)
14%	Time Off (e.g., more time off, paid time off)
12%	Job-related Training
4%	Parent Benefits (e.g., paid parent leave, discounted childcare)

Overall, across subgroups, workers ranked priorities in similar ways. However, there were a few meaningful exceptions.

- Compared to part-time workers, full-time workers ranked time off as their fourth most important priority, while ranking staffing and adequate supports equally.
- Stagehands and maintenance workers were the more likely than cleaning and gameday staff to identify training as a top 3 priority. Workers who work across all three arenas were also more likely to rate training as a top 3 priority than those working in one or two arenas.
- Workers earning less than \$15/hr were more likely to rate improving transportation and scheduling as a top three priority than workers earning more than \$15/hr.

Key Findings & Additional Recommendations

Key Finding #1: Our analysis of job quality and wellbeing aligns well with workers' own assessment of the changes that are necessary to improved job quality, which will have direct implications on workers' quality of life. We found that many workers are living paycheck-to-paycheck and a troubling number are living below or near the poverty line. Thus, its not surprising that workers identified wages and employer-provided benefits among their highest priorities.

Recommendation: Considering ways to improve total compensation through potential changes to wages, hours and scheduling, and/or employer-provided benefits will have powerful implications for improving job quality and worker outcomes.

Key Finding #2: While overall workers agreed on their top priorities, a few prioritizations varied significantly by subgroup.

Recommendation: Considering the ordering of the top priorities both overall and for specific subgroups may support the Industry Standards Board in most effectively meeting the needs of workers in a highly diverse labor sector.

Key Finding #3: A primary driver of job quality appears to be job type. Since women and people of color are significantly less likely to work in the better quality arena jobs – stagehands and maintenance workers of color and/or women are working lower quality jobs for less pay and, thereby, experiencing greater hardship. This finding further suggests that an Industry Standards Board, intended to make industry-wide recommendations, may significantly benefit these workers by improving job quality among jobs that are lagging behind.

Recommendation: Job training programs and career ladders or pay schedules that reward experience and loyalty could help workers of color and/or women to access higher paying jobs that would help address disparities hardships experienced across workers.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all of the arena workers who took this survey. This report would not be possible without you! Thank you also to the arena workers, governmental staff, journalists, and organizers who helped spread the word and ensure many people were aware they could participate in the survey. Finally, we thank Wayne State University School of Social Work and Labor@Wayne for supporting this research.

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