

**WOMEN WORKERS IN FACTORIES.
A STUDY OF WORKING
CONDITIONS IN 275 INDUSTRIAL
ESTABLISHMENTS IN CINCINNATI
AND ADJOINING TOWNS**

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Women Workers in Factories. A study of working conditions in 275 industrial establishments in Cincinnati and adjoining towns by Annette Mann

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MENTS IN CINCINNATI AND ADJOINING TOWNS

BY ANNETTE MANN

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FOREWORD.

Through the investigation of violations of the Labor Laws, the Consumers' League was brought into contact with working conditions in Cincinnati factories. From these casual visits it became apparent that there was need for a systematic study of industrial establishments. To make such a study possible and to give it a semi-official character, the Industrial Commission of Ohio, was asked to furnish credentials to investigators of the League which would enable them to enter factories for the purpose of inspection. In accordance with a provision of the Act creating the Commission, (Sec. 871-35 O. G. C.) giving it the power to appoint a competent person who is a resident of the State as agent for the purpose of making any investigations, the Industrial Commission appointed in November, 1916, three members of the League as an advisory board, and gave them the necessary credentials. A study of a large number of establishments was thus made possible.

The Consumers' League takes this opportunity to publicly acknowledge its indebtedness to the Industrial Commission of Ohio, and to Mr. T. P. Kearns, Chief Deputy of the Division of Workshops, Factories and Public Buildings, for the hearty co-operation and support extended it at all times during the progress of this study.

SEELEY K. TOMPKINS,

President.

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SCOPE AND METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The purpose of this study was to ascertain working conditions in factories and workshops employing women and girls. With this in view a general and welfare investigation was made of 25 establishments, representing 28 distinct industries, employing a total of 40,651 wage earners, 16,924 of whom were women and girls. The investigation extended over a period of 13 months, from April, 1917, to May, 1918. It concerned itself chiefly with the physical welfare of female employes. In most establishments, however, male employes are subject to the same conditions, except in the matter of sanitary conveniences and hours.

The study was not confined to any definite area nor were any special industries selected, except those studied for special processes. A 100% investigation was made of all the industries represented by not more than ten plants in this locality. In the larger industries it was not attempted to visit all local establishments, but merely to see as many in each as were necessary to form a fair judgment of the characteristics of the industry.*

A study of Home Workshops in the clothing trade was conducted simultaneously with the factory investigation. The results of this study are included in Part VI of this report.

CONDITIONS INVESTIGATED

In the *general* investigation, special attention was given the following subjects: Location and construction; fire protection; condition of work-rooms, halls and stairways; toilet accommodations; dressing rooms; washing facilities; lunch rooms; hours of labor; posture at work.

The *welfare* investigation covered the following: First-aid facilities; hospital rooms; rest rooms or couches in dressing rooms; rest periods; kind of drinking water; electric fans; employes organizations; vacations with pay; pay for legal holidays; pension and insurance features; bonus, premium and profit sharing plans. The question of wages was not entered into, as this would have required a study of pay rolls for which there was neither time nor sufficient authority. The minimum initial wage for women was reported, however, for establishments in which the day or time work system predominates, or both the time and piece work systems are in force.

*For the kind of industries included in this investigation and the number of plants in each see Table VII Appendix.

No attempt was made to study light, illumination or ventilation as adequate consideration could not be given these subjects without special training. The safeguarding of machinery was studied only in the new women-employing industries and in the industries selected for the study of special processes.

To determine working conditions in the establishments visited, each was graded on the subjects covered in the *general* investigation. The grades A, B, C, D, are used in this report to indicate the degree of cleanliness, adequacy of equipment, or general conditions, according to the text. The factors which determined the grading of the various topics considered will be explained under their respective heads. Table I shows conditions in the 275 plants investigated.

TABLE I.

SHOWING THE PHYSICAL CONDITION IN 275 INDUSTRIAL ESTABLISHMENTS INVESTIGATED

Grade	No. Plants	Per Cent
A—good	42	15.26%
B—fair	141	51.28%
C—bad	79	28.73%
D—very bad	13	4.73%
Total	275	100.00%

II.

GENERAL CONDITIONS

LOCATION AND CONSTRUCTION

There are two classes of establishments, those located in loft buildings and those located in special factory buildings. Of the 275 factories visited, 79 are in loft buildings and 196 in special factory buildings. In

the loft buildings are housed chiefly establishments in the needle trades, also a few printing shops. The special buildings house larger factories requiring more floor space. The physical conditions in loft buildings are good, as most of them are fairly modern structures. The worst features of loft shops are the toilet accommodations, which are very poor in several of the loft buildings.

Five of the 275 plants are of frame construction. These are small establishments employing comparatively few workers. The remaining 270 are either brick or concrete structures, 90 being fireproof and 40 semi-fire-proof, of the type known as mill construction.

FIRE PROTECTION

In grading for fire protection consideration was given to (a) construction and height of building; (b) nature of material handled in process of manufacture; (c) kind of stairways and exits; (d) automatic sprinklers and fire extinguishing devices; (e) overcrowding of workrooms; (f) passenger elevators; (g) compliance with requirements of the State law (Sec. 1028-1 App.)

By far the best conditions are found in establishments in the fire-proof buildings, included those housed in loft buildings, although in the latter there are some instances of overcrowded workrooms. The worst conditions exist in buildings converted to factory use in the older sections of the city. Among these are several plants 3 and 4 stories high which had no fire escapes when first visited in this investigation, but on which escapes have since been built. There are also a few that have very old, rusty fire escapes, one of the ladder type. Violations of the law, however, are found in some of the very best buildings. In a number of factories the windows leading to the fire escape are more than 2 feet above the floor, the maximum set by the Ohio State Building Code, and no steps are provided to reach these. Instances of blocked exits are numerous. In one large plant the investigator found a heap of rubbish before one of the exits and in another there was a row of refuse cans in front of an exit. Windows are frequently locked and exits otherwise obstructed. The most common violation is the temporary blocking of exits by packing cases and loaded trucks. In some plants with limited floor space, machinery is placed too close to exits to permit of easy access. The legal requirements for marking exits and providing doors that open outward are complied with in very few establishments. Marked exits are the exception rather than the rule. Fire drills are practiced regularly in only two plants. Several employers stated that they would gladly introduce fire drills if they knew what kind of drills were suitable. Very few establishments provide passenger elevators.

The grades A, B, C, D, are used to designate the kind of fire protection provided by the concerns visited. There are a number of plants which are but two stories high and do not require any special fire protection. Table II shows the grading on fire protection given the plants investigated.

TABLE II.**SHOWING KIND OF FIRE PROTECTION FOUND IN 275
ESTABLISHMENTS INVESTIGATED**

Grade	No. Plants	Per Cent
A—good	87	31.64%
B—fairly good	81	29.46%
C—poor	64	23.27%
D—very poor	12	4.36%
None needed	31	11.27%
Total	275	100.00%

CONDITION OF WORKROOMS, HALLS AND STAIRWAYS

In the average industrial plant the workroom is a much neglected place. If the nature of the industry is such that it can be kept fairly clean without too much effort, well and good. But if the work is dirty little attempt is made to keep the premises clean. Walls and ceilings are almost never cleaned and factory windows are rarely washed. Clean windows were a cause for special comment on the schedule blanks. Poorly lighted workrooms in many instances are made darker by a thick coating of dirt on the window panes. Floors are as a rule swept daily but they are rarely scrubbed. There are a number of establishments, however, especially those in the outlying districts, which are an exception to the rule. In these floors are clean, windows are washed regularly, walls and ceilings, usually painted in light colors, are kept in good condition. In some window boxes decorate the workrooms. But it was evident throughout this investigation that in most factories little thought is given to the care of workrooms. And this notwithstanding the fact that both the health and efficiency of employes are determined to a great extent by their environment. Girls are especially susceptible to their surroundings and frequently complain of the dinginess in which they are compelled to spend the greater part of their waking hours.

In 37 establishments work rooms are crowded with machinery and workroom floors littered with material. In 9 outer garments hang in workrooms. Sixteen concerns have dark or semi-dark workrooms which are artificially lighted in daytime. Windows are improperly shaded in many plants, some among the best in the city. In a few old newspapers and rags are hung on the windows to keep out the glare of the sun. Employes frequently work at machines facing a strong light instead of having the