

A Literature Review of Migrant Workers' Health and Safety

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ABSTRACT

Aims: To explore information regarding health and safety issues among migrant workers that represent substantial fraction of workforce in developed countries

Design/methodology/approach: A systematic search was conducted through PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct and Google Scholar using terms of interest in a logic grid from 1994 to 2018.

Findings: Many studies have found that numerous factors contribute to high number of work related accidents and injuries among this group. Lack of language, educational background and culture, exploitation, racism, discrimination and harassments and duration of residence are the main important factors that associated with accidents and injuries of this working population group.

Research limitations/implications: Number of publications might be not captured in this literature review. However, the findings range of studies have been analyzed and highlight the important to develop intervention among migrant workers to improve their health and safety conditions.

Originality/value: This paper supports the argument that migrant workers are in highly risk to experience accidents, injuries and fatalities in the workplace.

Keywords: Migrant Workers, Health and Safety, Accidents and Injuries

INTRODUCTION

As a subpopulation of the workforce, the number of migrant workers is growing in some developed countries. The growth has produced a new mix of ethnicities in worker communities around the world. The potential impact of the growth to the work-related injuries and illness has been presented through some research. In the United States, McCauley (2005) reported that immigrant workers experience more accidents and injuries and worse severe

outcomes than other groups of the whole working population.

There was a significant increase of the number of foreign-born workers' fatality rate in the US between 1998 and 2001 (Loh & Richardson, 2004), as illustrated in Figure 1. In 1998, the fatality rate among migrant workers was below 4.5 fatalities per 100.000 and it increased to more than 5.5 fatal accidents per 100.000 employed in 2001. Otherwise, for native born workers and the overall population of workers, there was a decrease during the period of observation.

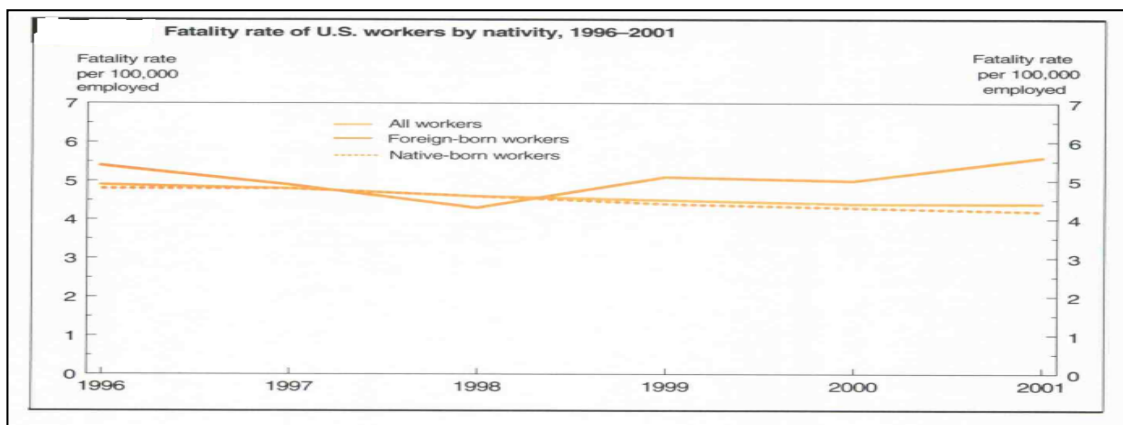


Figure 1. Fatality rate of US workers by nativity, 1996-2001 (Loh & Richardson, 2004)

As a developed country with growing economy Australia is one of the main destinations of migrant workers from all over the world, particularly those from Asian countries (Thamrin, 2016). In November 2010, more than 1.4 million people came to Australia as immigrants. Around 1.2 million of them stayed as temporary residents and recent migrants. About 410,900 of them were categorised as permanent visa migrants, and approximately 308,700 of these immigrants obtained Australian

citizenship. The largest component of this group was temporary migrants, including international students (approximately 477,800 people). Hawthorne (2005) claimed that in order to prevent the escalation of the number of migrant workers, the Australian Government has started a substantial review of policy related to migration in 1997 by gradually reducing the pathways for unskilled workers.

A similar pattern found in the US about work related fatalities has been reported in Australia. According to Corvalan et al. (1994), the standardised mortality ratio was significantly different between workers from a Non-English Speaking

Background (NESB) and employees (ESB).
from an English Speaking Background

Table 1. Standardised mortality ratio* (SMR) for overseas-born persons and language group, by duration of residence

Duration of residence (years)	Overseas-born persons		English-speaking		Non-English-speaking	
	SMR	95% CI	SMR	95% CI	SMR	95% CI
0-1	220	147-328	124	64-239	391	237-643
2-4	167	114-243	167	99-285	165	97-281
5-9	63	41-099	105	64-172	25	9-065
10-14	84	63-113	74	48-114	94	65-138
15-19	97	71-131	117	79-171	76	47-124
≥ 20	100	82-122	97	69-135	102	81-128

*Standardised by occupation to Australian-born population fatality rates (95% CI = 95% Confidence Interval).

Source: Corvalan, 1994

The data provided in Table 1 shows that the mortality ratio was particularly elevated for people of NESB who had resided in Australia for less than five years. In other words, the highest incidence of work related fatalities was found among migrant workers who are relatively recent arrivals in Australia (Corvalan et al., 1994).

METHODS

A systematic search was conducted through PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Science Direct and Google Scholar using terms of interest in a logic grid with key words: Migrant worker OR Immigrant worker OR Migrant

employee OR Migrant employment OR Migrant workers and health and safety. The articles in this search were limited to those published that relevant to the topic between 1994 and 2018.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents studies focusing on the health and safety of migrant workers. A systematic review about the immigrant population by Ahonen et al. (2007) revealed that developed countries had experienced an increased number of migrant workers, which had brought many social and economic problems for the host countries.

Table 2. A summary of the literature about migrant workers' health and safety

Category of literature	Authors; Country	Title	Main Findings
Systematic review	Ahonen et al. (2007); International	Immigrant populations, work and health - a	This paper reviewed the literature on immigrant occupational health available from recent studies. A systematic investigation was performed in the PubMed

		systematic literature review	journal database with a focus on terms such as immigration, migrant, occupational health, occupational injury, and workers. Only articles in English and Spanish were reviewed in this study. This study demonstrated that migration has escalated in developed countries and has had political, social, and economic consequences for migrating groups, and also for their sending and host societies. Improving the health of immigrant workers requires more reliable data, targeted appropriate interventions, and enforcement of existing regulations.
Annual review	Moyce and Schenker (2018); United States	Migrant workers and their occupational health and safety	Immigrant workers face high risk of occupational health and safety problems in the workplace that leads to high number of injury and fatalities. The main causes are lack of OHS training and protections. Environmental exposure, working conditions, physical hazards, workplace demands, lack of safety standards and workplace abuse are contributing factors to the high number of accidents and injury among immigrant. Language and cultural barriers, access to health care, female gender, documentation status, and political climates are the predictive factors of injury.
General review	Hansen and Donohoe (2003); United States	Health issues of migrant and seasonal farm workers	This study observed the socio-economic conditions of migrant and seasonal farm-workers (MSFWs) in the United States. The observation revealed that MSFWs form an under-served population with many socio-economic and health problems. MSFWs' health problems are the result of occupational hazards, poverty, substandard living conditions, migrancy, and language and cultural barriers. These barriers also affect MSFWs' access to health care.

			Specific health challenges faced by MSFWs include infectious diseases, chemical and pesticide-related illnesses, dermatitis, heat-related illnesses, respiratory conditions, musculoskeletal disorders, traumatic injuries, reproductive and child health problems, social and mental health problems, cancer, dental diseases and inadequate preventive care. This study suggested increasing attention, resources, education, and preventive services for MSFWs and families, as well as those who serve them.
General review	Loh and Richardson (2004); United States	Foreign-born workers: Trends in fatal occupational injuries, 1996-2001	This research identified trends in fatal work injury among foreign-born workers in the United States from 1996-2001 using Bureau of Labour Statistics surveillance data. The upward trend in workplace fatalities among foreign-born workers over the 1996-2001 period reflects the large influx of foreign-born workers, many of whom obtained employment in occupations and industries with inherently higher risk of fatal injury. Several factors are relevant to this observation, including lower level of education, low level of English proficiency, and the concentration of the foreign-born population in the metropolitan areas.
General review	Smith and Mustard (2009); Canada	Comparing the risk of work-related injuries between immigrants to Canada and Canadian-born labour market	The research examined the burden of work-related injuries among immigrants to Canada compared to Canadian-born labour force participants. The results of the study revealed that male immigrants in their first 5 years in Canada are at increased risk of work-related severe injuries. This research also proposed the need to study the barriers faced by immigrants in obtaining safe employment, the types of injuries that immigrants experienced while working and

		participants	the effect of injuries.
Empirical study	Corvalan et al. (1994); Australia	Role of migrant factors in work-related fatalities in Australia	This research investigated the role of workers' language and migration characteristics regarding the incidents of work-related fatalities occurring in Australia during the period 1982-1984 were studied in this research. This research found that migrant workers had a similar fatality rate to that of Australian-born workers in the employed civilian labor force. However, these groups had different injury incidents in rural and mining occupations. Overseas-born workers had a higher incident of injuries compared to Australian-born workers. This study also revealed that the mortality rate of persons with non-English speaking background with a duration of residence of less than five years increased significantly during this period. These values contributed to the Australian rate with increasing duration of residence. This study concluded that factors related to origin country (such as language) and migrant workers' duration of residence are significant determinants of safety at work in Australia.
Empirical study	Bell et al. (2004); Ireland	Migrant workers in Northern Ireland	The research argues that there is a continuing debate about the difference between immigrant and migrant workers. Long term integration or settlement is associated with the term of immigrant. On the other hand, the term "migrant workers" implies the possibility of returning to the home country after migration or that the move is temporary. Furthermore, it is reported that in Northern Ireland migrant workers face a range of problems related to low salary, exploitation, harassment, racism, poor

			housing, and safety problems.
Empirical study	Schubert and Dijkstra (2009); Netherland	Working safely with foreign contractors and personnel	This research investigated the common problems and best practices experienced by multinational companies in the agricultural, gas, and chemical industries in the Netherlands when working with foreign contractors and personnel. The study identified five problematic areas: communication/ language, uncertainty about qualifications, safety culture, specific employment situations, and cooperation between principal and contractor. The solutions and critical success factors named by individual companies are examined and best practice examples are given.
Empirical study	Guldenmund et al. (2013); Denmark, Netherlands and United Kingdom	An explanatory study of migrant workers and safety in three European countries	This study reported some reasons why migrant workers are claimed as a vulnerable group in the workforce; they generally have insufficient language competency to understand safety instructions in the country in where they are engaged to work. Furthermore, migrant workers are often reliant on the experience from their origin country. Moreover, the research reveals that migrant workers are also likely to be predominantly concerned about making as much money as possible in their seasonal jobs, such as in the agriculture and construction industries. Hence, even though they face a less than optimal working environment, they will not complain. And finally, the study revealed that there is a substantial amount of migrant workers who stay unregistered, which impacts on the difficulties of determining the magnitude of migrant workers' safety problems.

Commentary paper	Underhill (2010); Australia	Should host employers have greater responsibility for temporary agency workers' employment rights?	In order to protect temporary agency workers' rights, the paper proposed sharing responsibilities between both agency employers and host employers. The author believed that these shared responsibilities may fill the gap between direct hire employment conditions and their agency. The study identified that on the one side the employer agencies likely to provide less support towards employment issues on the work site that supposed to be shared with host employers. On the other side, host employers tend to decrease their responsibility upon workers whom do not directly work for them.
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DISCUSSIONS

There are many publications suggest that migrant workers are in highly risk to experience accidents and injuries in the workplaces. Furthermore, some studies have identified factors that associated with the high number of incidents and injuries among this subgroup of working populations.

The studies in the United States, Canada, Netherlands, Denmark and United Kingdom claimed that language, educational background, and cultural barriers are the most determinant factors for health and safety problems of migrant workers (Guldenmund et al., 2013; Hansen & Donohoe, 2003; Loh & Richardson, 2004; Smith & Mustard, 2009). Migrant workers experienced higher risk of fatal injuries because they do not always understand safety instructions well due to their low level of education and low level of the host

country's language. Migrant workers prefer to utilize the safety knowledge and culture of their origin countries, but this is not always applicable in the host countries. Hawthorne (2005) claimed that in order to prevent the escalation of the number of migrant workers, the Australian Government has started a substantial review of policy related to migration in 1997 by gradually reducing the pathways for unskilled workers.

Lack of language skills also presents difficulties for migrant workers when attempting to communicate their needs or problems in the workplace to their employee. However, language and cultural problems can be solved by a proper approach to workers. Schubert and Dijkstra (2009) reported that three multinational companies in the agricultural, gas, and chemical industries in the Netherlands had successfully applied appropriate interventions to overcome the problems

of culture and language when working with foreign contractors and personnel. Besides language, educational background and culture, another factor that determined the safety in the workplace for migrant workers is duration of residence. Corvalan et al. (1994) stated that the mortality rate of migrant workers with a duration of residence of less than five years increased significantly during 1982-1984. This finding is supported by (Smith & Mustard, 2009) who stated that immigrants in their first five years in Canada were at increased risk of work-related severe injuries.

In addition, migrant workers in European countries face a range of problems in the workplace such as low salary, exploitation, harassment, and racism, which in turn had a significant influence on the health and safety of migrant workers (Bell et al., 2004; Guldenmund et al., 2013). However, there was usually no complaint about their less than optimal working environment because they were focused on making money.

CONCLUSIONS

Migrant workers represent a significant number of working population in developed countries. A substantial number of studies have been conducted to explore the potential impact of the growing number of this sub-group regarding health and safety in the workplace. Many studies have found that numerous factors contribute to high number of work related accidents and injuries among this group. Lack of language, educational background and culture, access to health care, low safety standard, working conditions and

duration of residence are the main important factors that associated with accidents and injuries of migrant workers. Moreover, this group also experiences exploitation, racism, discrimination and harassments that contribute as well to their health and safety status. To reduce the risks there are some ways to do such as safety training, improving working conditions and safety standards, better access to health care, and policy changes.

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