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# Have young workers more injuries than older ones? An international literature review

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#### **Abstract**

Problem: Two questions were posed in this global literature review: Do young workers have a higher occupational injury rate? Are the injuries of young workers more often fatal than those of older workers? Method: The studies of nonfatal and fatal injuries were collected based on the following criteria: (a) published in peer-reviewed journals; (b) the young workers were under 25 years of age; (c) the injury rate or fatality rate of young workers and the overall rate was published; and (d) description of the population and the number of injuries was presented. Results: The majority of 63 nonfatal studies reported showed that young workers had a higher injury rate than older workers. Twenty-nine out of 45 studies on fatal occupational injuries indicated that young workers had a lower fatality rate than older workers. These results are clearer for men than for women. Impact on industry: The results showed that young men were a risk group for occupational injuries. However, the injuries of young workers were reported as less often fatal than those of older workers. © 2004 National Safety Council and Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Occupational injuries; Fatalities; Age; Gender; Voting method

#### 1. Introduction

The aim of this review is to find the answers to two questions: Do young workers have a higher risk of occupational injuries? Are the injuries of young workers more often fatal than those of older workers?

Previous reviews (Rhodes, 1983; Laflamme & Menckel, 1995; Salminen, 1996) have shown that injury rates tend to decrease as age increases. The reviews have also shown that the injuries of young workers are less serious than those of older workers, because the fatality rate of young workers was lower than that of older workers. Compared to these earlier reviews, the strengths of this review are the larger number of studies and that the studies are from many different countries and industries.

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#### 2. Methods

For this literature review, the studies were collected based on the following criteria:

- (1) The studies were published, most of them in peerreviewed journals.
- (2) Workers under 25 years of age were classified as young workers.
- (3) There was information about the injury rate or fatality rate of young workers and older workers, or the overall injury rate regardless of age.
- There was enough information on the population and the number of injuries on which the calculations of injury rate were based.

The studies reviewed were published in English, as well as in Finnish, Swedish, German, and Dutch. This broadens the variety of the studies and also the universality of the

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Table 1
A review of studies on occupational accidents of young worker

	cidents of young workers		
Source	Data	Result	
Kossoris (1940)	26,058 workers at four companies, Wisconsin, 1937	Young men had a higher accident frequency than all age	
King (1955)	1991 agricultural injuries in Great Britain, 1948	groups  The proportion of young workers in injuries lower than in population	
Griew (1958)	268 injuries in a British engineering factory, 1953–1956	The injury rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate	
Fredin, Gerdman, and	303 construction injuries in Sweden,	The proportion of injuries among young workers was	
Thorson (1974)	1967	lower than that in the population	
Oi (1974)	BLS data in California, 1960 and 1968	The injury rate of young men was not different from the overall rate, but that of young women was lower	
Wigglesworth (1976)	85,100 occupational injuries in Australia, 1969–70	The proportion of injuries among young men and women was lower than that in the population	
Root & Hoefer (1979)	68,877 injuries in North Carolina and Iowa, 1977	The injury rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate	
Dillingham (1981)	Workmen's Compensation in New York State, 1970	The injury rate of young men was higher than the overall rate, but that of young women was lower	
Root (1981)	Bureau of Labor Statistics, USA, 1977	The injury rate of young workers was higher than that of older workers	
Siskind (1982)	705,440 injuries in USA, 1978	The injury rate of young men was lower than the overall rate, whereas that of young women was higher	
Coleman and	3,182,500 occupational injuries treated	The injury rate of young men and women was higher	
Sanderson (1983)	in U.S. hospitals, 1982	than the overall rate	
Broberg (1984)	113,922 injuries in Sweden, 1980	The injury rate of young women and men was higher than the overall rate	
Pines, Rohrmoser, and Pollak (1985)	792 hospital injuries in Israel, 1978–1980	The injury rate of young workers was higher than that of older workers	
Schelp and Svanström (1986)	717 injuries in Falköping, Sweden, 1978	The injury rate of young men and women was higher than the overall rate	
Jansson (1987)	163 injured farmers in Skaraborg, Sweden, 1983	The accident frequency of young men and women was lower than the overall frequency	
Smit (1987)	7234 injuries to Dutch metal workers, 1978–1981	The injury rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate	
Wilkinson (1987)	1988 injuries to American health care	The injury rate of young women and men was higher than the overall rate	
Butani (1988)	workers, 1982–1983 12,455 injuries in US coal mines, 1986	The proportion of young workers in injuries was the	
Jacobsson and Schelp (1988)	285 injuries in Falköping, Sweden,	same as in the workforce The injury rate of young women and men was higher	
Jensen and Sinkule (1988)	1981–1982 628 press operator amputations, USA,	than the overall rate  The injury rate of young women and men was higher	
Lorggon (1000)	1979–1981	than the overall rate	
Larsson (1988)	687 injuries among Swedish woodworkers, 1983	The injury rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate	
Reich and Frumkin (1988)	Occupational injuries in Japan, 1978 and 1982	The injury rate of young workers was not different from older workers	
Oleske, Brewer, Doan, and Hahn (1989)	146 injuries in a factory in Chicago, 1985	The injury rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate	
Tsai, Bernacki, and Dowd (1989)	20,705 workers at two Tenneco factories, 1986	The injury rate of young men was higher than the total injury rate, but the injury rate of young women was lower than the total injury rate	
Firth and Herbison (1990)	655 injuries in Dunedin, New Zealand, 1989	The injury rate of young men was higher than the overall rate	
Leigh, Mulder, Want, Farnsworth,	16,700 injuries in New South Wales	The proportion of young workers, among injured	
and Morgan (1990)	coal mines 1986-1988	workers was higher than that among the workforce	
Norrish and Cryer (1990)	307 fishermen's injuries from New Zealand, 1988	The injury rate of young men was the same as the overall rate	
Brison and Pickett (1991)	113 dairy and beef farms in Eastern Ontario, 1989–1990	Young workers had a higher injury rate than the total rate	
Heiskanen (1991)	A representative sample of Finns	Young workers were more often involved in accidents than older ones	
Brison and Pickett (1992)	( <i>n</i> =13,762), 1988 44 agricultural injuries in Ontario, 1989–1990	The injury rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate	
Pines, Lemesch, and Grafstein (1992)	150,700 injuries in Israel 1970 and 1980	The injury rate of young women and men was not different from that of older workers	

Table 1 (continued)

Table 1 (continued)			
Source	Data	Result	
Pratt et al. (1992)	600 farm workers in Otsego County, New York, 1986	The injury rate of young workers was the same as the overall rate	
Webb, Redman, and	1740 injuries at a metal plant,	The injury rate of young workers was not different	
Sanson-Fisher (1992) Wilkinson et al. (1992)	Australia, 1985–1986 1513 injuries to American health	from that of older workers  The injury rate of young workers was higher than the	
Lee, Anderson, and Kraus (1993)	care workers, 1983–1985 3442 injuries in US coal mines, 1986	overall rate  The injury rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate	
Sorock, Smith, and Hall (1993)	1250 finger amputations in	The injury rate of young men was higher than the overall	
Hammer (1994)	New Jersey, 1985–1986 24,084 injuries around Hannover,	rate, but that of young women was lower Young men had a higher injury rate than older men,	
Kisner and Fosbroke (1994)	Germany, 1979–1985 702,867 U.S. construction workers, 1981–1986	but there was no age difference among women The injury rate of young workers was not different from that of older workers	
Rossignol (1994)	30,581 injuries in Quebec,	The injury rate of young workers was the same as the	
Skov (1994)	1986–1988 1022 hand injuries in Odense,	overall rate  The injury rate of young men was higher than the overall	
Callian Famalla and	Denmark, 1991	rate, whereas that of young women was not higher	
Cellier, Eyrolle, and Bertrand (1995)	877 injuries to agro-food workers in France	The injury rate of young workers was higher than that of older workers	
Pickett, Brison, Niezgoda,	236 agricultural injuries in	The injury rate of young women and men was the	
and Chipman (1995)	Ontario, 1991	same as the overall rate	
Jensen (1996)	128 injured fishermen from	The injury rate of young men was higher than the	
(-5,5,0)	Denmark, 1993	overall rate	
Kelsh and Sahl (1996)	31,438 electric utility injuries in California, 1980–1992	The injury rate of young women and men was higher than the overall rate	
Laflamme (1996a)	942 injuries to Swedish female assemblers, 1980–1991	The injury rate of young women was higher than the overall rate	
Laflamme (1996b)	5782 injuries to Swedish male assemblers, 1980–1991	The injury rate of young men was higher than the overall rate	
Laflamme and Menckel (1996)	919 injuries to Swedish ore miners, 1980–1991	The injury rate of young workers was not different from that of older workers	
Laflamme, Menckel, and Lundholm (1996)	1035 injuries of Swedish iron-ore miners, 1980–1991	The injury rate of young workers was not different from that of older workers	
Lipscomb, Kalat, and Dement (1996)	7135 injuries of carpenters Washington State, 1989–1992	The injury rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate	
Rabi, Al-Homran, AbuDhaise, and Alwash (1996)	898 permanent disabilities in Jordan, 1992	The injury rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate	
Salminen (1996)	99 serious injuries in Southern Finland, 1988–1989	The injury rate of young workers was higher than the	
Cloutier, David, and	6316 injuries to female Quebec nurses	overall rate The injury of young women was higher than the	
Duguay (1998) Lowery et al. (1998)	and food service workers, 1987–1991 4458 injuries at an airport construction	overall rate  The injury rate of young workers was lower than that	
	site, 1990–1994	of older workers	
McCaig, Burt, and Stussman (1998)	4,350,000 injuries in the United States, 1995–1996	The injury rate of young men was higher than the overall rate, whereas that of young women was the same	
Bull, Riise, and Moen (1999)	7459 injuries in Norway, 1991–1996	The injury rate of young women and men was lower than the overall rate	
Schoemaker, Barreto, Swerdlow, Higgins, and Carpenter (2000)	14,972 injuries in a steel plant in Brazil, 1977–1990	The injury rate of young workers was higher than that of older workers	
Cloutier and Champoux (2000)	1041 accidents to Quebec firefighters, 1992	The injury rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate	
Xiang et al. (2000)	1358 Chinese farmers in Hubei province, 1997	Young farmers were less often injured than middle-aged farmers	
Bull, Riise, and Moen (2001)	446 fishing injuries Norway, 1995–1996	The injury rate of young workers in was higher than the	
Chi, Chen, and Lin (2001)	5710 injuries in Taiwan, 1999	overall rate The injury rate of young workers was lower than the	
Jackson (2001)	3.6 million occupational injuries treated	overall rate The injury rate of young men was higher than the	
Findley and Bennett (2002)	in U.S. hospitals, 1982–1998 214 injuries in a large plant in	overall rate, but that of young women was not higher The injury rate of young workers was higher than the	
Hansan Nielson and	Tennessee, 1999–2000 1279 injuries to Danish seafarers,	overall rate  The injury rate of young workers was same as that of	
Hansen, Nielsen, and Frydenberg (2002)	12/9 injuries to Danish seafarers, 1993–1997	The injury rate of young workers was same as that of older workers	
Trydenoeig (2002)	1//3-1///	Older WOIRCIS	

Table 2 A review of studies on fatal occupational accidents of young workers

Workmen's Compensation in New York State, 1970	The fatality rate of young men was lower than the overall		
New York State. 1970			
	rate, whereas that of young women was higher		
Bureau of Labor Statistics USA, 1977	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than that of older workers		
148 fatalities in Maryland, 1978	The proportion of young workers in fatalities was lower		
	than among the workforce		
_	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the		
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	overall rate  The fatality rate of young workers was not different		
	from the overall rate		
348 female fatalities in Texas, 1975–1984	The fatality rate of young women was lower than the overall rate		
2483 fatalities in California 1972–1983	The fatality rate of young men was higher than the		
2 too manies in Cantornia, 1772 1765	overall rate		
1738 fatalities in Australia, 1982–1984	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate		
42.000 fatalities in USA, 1980-1985	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than that		
,	of older workers		
83 fatalities among Canadian	The fatality rate of young men was higher than that of		
fishermen, 1975–1983	older men		
	The fatality rate of young men was higher than the		
	overall rate		
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	The fatality rate of young workers was not different		
	from older workers		
986 fatalities in Finland, 1980–1989	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate		
108 fatalities among seamen in Iceland	The mortality rate of young men was not different from		
e ,	the overall rate		
	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the		
1982–1984	overall rate		
3709 fatalities in the Nordic countries, 1980–1989	The fatality rate of young women and men was lower than the overall rate		
1180 male fatalities in Quebec, Canada,	The fatality rate of young men was lower than the		
1981–1988	overall rate		
470 fatalities in Ontario, Canada,	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the		
	overall rate		
,	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate		
3821 female fatalities in USA, 1980–1989	The fatality rate of young women was about the same as the overall rate		
11,417 fatalities at U.S. construction sites,	The fatality rate of young workers was the same as that		
1980–1989	of older workers		
70 fatalities in Quebec, 1986–1988	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate		
6271 fatalities in the United States, 1993	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate		
6727 agricultural fatalities in the United States, 1980–1989	The fatality rate of young men was lower than the overall rate, whereas that of young women was the same		
146 fatalities in a Brazilian steel plant,	The fatality rate of young workers was not different from the overall rate		
264 deaths in Australian and 4158 in	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate in both countries		
8502 machinery fatalities in	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the		
5700 fatalities in the United States, 1989	overall rate  The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the		
15,571 fatalities in the United States,	overall rate The fatality rate of young workers was lower than that		
1990–1992 1230 fatalities in Taiwan, 1989–1992	of older workers  The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the		
2000 64-14: ' N. 4. C. 4'	overall rate		
2098 fatalities in North Carolina,	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the		
	208 fatalities in Washington State construction, 1973–1983 952 male fatalities in New Zealand, 1975–1984 348 female fatalities in Texas, 1975–1984 2483 fatalities in California, 1972–1983 1738 fatalities in Australia, 1982–1984 42,000 fatalities in USA, 1980–1985 83 fatalities among Canadian fishermen, 1975–1983 79 fatalities among New Zealand fishermen, 1975–1984 19,367 fatalities in Australia and United States, 1982–1984 986 fatalities in Finland, 1980–1989 108 fatalities among seamen in Iceland, 1966–1986 233 agricultural fatalities in Australia, 1982–1984 3709 fatalities in the Nordic countries, 1980–1989 1180 male fatalities in Quebec, Canada, 1981–1988 470 fatalities in Ontario, Canada, 1986–1989 6083 fatalities in the United States, 1992 3821 female fatalities in USA, 1980–1989 11,417 fatalities at U.S. construction sites, 1980–1989 70 fatalities in Quebec, 1986–1988 6271 fatalities in the United States, 1993 6727 agricultural fatalities in the United States, 1993 6727 agricultural fatalities in the United States, 1993 6727 agricultural fatalities in the United States, 1980–1989 146 fatalities in a Brazilian steel plant, 1977–1992 264 deaths in Australian and 4158 in U.S. construction industries, 1988–1991 8502 machinery fatalities in United States, 1980–1989 5700 fatalities in the United States, 1989 15,571 fatalities in the United States, 1989 15,571 fatalities in Taiwan, 1989–1992		

Table 2 (continued)

Source	Data	Result  The fatality rate of young workers was lower than that of older workers	
Bailer, Stayner, Stout, Reed, and Gilbert (1998)	51,964 fatalities in the United States, 1983–1992		
Chen and Fosbroke (1998)	4659 construction fatalities in the United States, 1990–1994	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate	
Ore (1998)	139 female construction fatalities in the USA, 1980–1992	The fatality rate of young women was not different from that of older women	
Rabi, Jamous, AbuDhaise, and Alwash (1998)	705 fatalities in Jordan, 1980–1993	The fatality rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate	
Ruser (1998)	12,548 fatalities in the USA, 1992-1993	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than that of older workers	
Castillo, Adekoya, and Myers (1999)	3531 agricultural fatalities in the United States, 1992–1996	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate	
Collins et al. (1999)	1021 forklift fatalities in the United States, 1980–1994	The fatality rate of young men was higher than that of older men	
Day (1999)	98 farm fatalities in Victoria, Australia, 1985–1996	The proportion of young farmers was lower than in the population	
Peek-Asa, Erickson, and Kraus (1999)	3692 fatalities in the retail industry, USA, 1992–1996	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate	
Schieche, Schmeling, Strauch, 141 fatalities in Berlin, 1990–1995 and Geserick (2000)		The fatality rate of young workers was not different from that of older workers	
Driscoll et al. (2001)	2413 fatalities in Australia, 1989–1992	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate	
Feyer et al. (2001)	709 work-related fatalities in New Zealand, 1985–1994	The fatality rate of young workers was lower than the overall rate	
Jackson and Loomis (2002)	525 construction fatalities in North Carolina, 1978–1994	The fatality rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate	
Thelin (2002) 150 farming and forestry fatalities in Sweden, 1988–1997		The proportion of young workers in fatalities was higher than in the workforce	

The results of the review are presented separately for fatalities versus less serious injuries. This is done because the previous review (Salminen, 1996) has shown that the effect of age is different for fatality rate and for injury rate. Usually, the injury or fatality rate of young workers was compared to the overall rate of injuries or fatalities, although this rate included also the rate for young workers. It was not possible to find the single rate for older workers in most of the studies.

The analysis of the results is based on the voting method in which every study is given one vote. Some articles presented results on both nonfatal and fatal injuries and they were calculated on both votes.

## 3. Results

With the abovementioned criteria, 63 studies on nonfatal injuries were found (see Table 1). The oldest one was Kossiris's study published in 1940 and the most recent one was from 2002. For 45 studies on fatalities, the time period was 21 years (1981 to 2002).

The studies on nonfatal injuries were from 18 countries (see Table 2). The three most often mentioned countries were the United States (22 studies), Sweden (9), and Canada (5). The studies on fatal injuries were from 13 countries. Most of the studies were from the United States (25 studies), Australia (5), and Sweden (3).

Table 3 Results of the review

Type of injury	Result			
	Young had a higher rate (%)	No difference (%)	Young had a lower rate (%)	
Nonfatal	56	27	17	63
Fatalities	16	20	64	45
Nonfatal				
Men	70	15	15	26
Women	44	26	30	23
Fatalities				
Men	44	12	44	9
Women	17	50	33	6

The majority (56%) of nonfatal studies showed that young workers had a higher injury rate than older workers (Table 3). Only 17% of the studies showed an opposite result. The remaining 27% of these studies showed no difference between young and older workers.

There were 45 studies on fatal occupational injuries (see Table 3). The majority of them (64%) showed that young workers had a lower fatality rate than older workers. On the other hand, young workers had a higher fatality rate than older workers in 16% of these studies. One out of five studies found no difference in the fatality rate between young and older workers.

There may be gender differences in the injury rate, however. For nonfatal injuries, two out of three studies (70%) showed that young men had a higher injury rate than older men, whereas four studies found a negative result or no difference. Forty-four percent of the studies showed that young women had a higher injury rate than older women, whereas 30% of the studies indicated that young women had a lower injury rate.

In the case of fatalities, the results are more contradictory. Four studies showed that young men had a higher fatality rate than older men, and four other studies showed that young men had a lower rate. For women, half of the studies found no difference in fatality rate between young and older women. Two studies showed that young women had a lower fatality rate, and one showed a higher rate than older women.

### 4. Discussion

Before we discuss the results of this review, we must present some caveats. In most studies, the injury rate or fatality rate is based on the number of workers assuming full-time working. However, at least in Finland, many young people worked in part-time jobs. Secondly, young workers are less experienced in work than older workers, so that increases their injury risk (Root & Hoefer, 1979; Siskind, 1982). Thirdly, young workers should work on more dangerous jobs, although, for example, in Finland, the law of young workers prohibited dangerous jobs for young workers.

The first research question was: Do young workers have a higher risk of occupational injuries? The answer from this review is yes. The majority of studies on nonfatal injuries showed that young workers had a higher injury rate than the overall rate. This result is in line with previous reviews (Rhodes, 1983; Laflamme & Menckel, 1995; Salminen, 1996).

The second question was: Are the injuries of young workers more often fatal than those of older workers? The answer is no. The majority of studies on fatal occupational injuries showed that young workers had a lower fatality rate than older workers. This result is in line with previous reviews (Rhodes, 1983; Laflamme & Menckel, 1995;

Salminen, 1996). One explanation for this result is that young workers have a better impact resistance than older workers (Brorsson, 1989), so that the same impact that could kill an old worker would only injure a young worker. Young workers also recover from trauma better than older workers.

For industries, the highest number of studies (15) was done in agriculture. Mostly, they showed that young farmers had fewer accidents than older farmers. The second most popular industry was construction, with 10 studies. The results were divided more evenly, because two studies showed that young construction workers had a lower fatality rate than older ones, whereas two others showed contradictory results and yet two others found no difference between age groups.

The results of this review (see Table 3) showed consistently that young men had a higher injury rate than older men, as compared to young women versus older women. This result is in line with the earlier reviews showing that men had a three times higher injury rate than women (Salminen, Saari, Saarela, and Räsänen, 1992; Messing, Courville, Boucher, Dumais, and Seifert, 1994). This review thus confirmed that young men are a risk group for occupational safety.

The strength of this review is that it is based on a larger number of studies than previous reviews (Rhodes, 1983; Laflamme & Menckel, 1995; Salminen, 1996). Thus, the results of this review can be considered to be rather universal: it covers a time period of 62 years, 18 countries, and 5 languages. Most of the studies in this review were also peer-reviewed and published in well-respected journals.

The major problem of this review is related to the voting method. As every study has only one vote, the number of subjects and injuries in the study is ignored. This is unfair especially for the largest data set of this study (Jackson, 2001). In addition, the factor describing how much higher the injury rate of young workers was compared to that of older workers was not included in the measurement.

An interesting contradiction was found between general data set (Bull et al., 1999) and fisheries (Bull et al., 2001). The general data set showed that the injury rate of young men and women was lower than that of older workers, whereas in the fishing industry, the injury rate of young workers was higher than the overall rate. However, the data set from the fishing industry was subdata of the general data set. The small number of fishing injuries compared to the number of all injuries explained this contradictory, because the opposite results of the fishing industry disappeared into the general results.

For the industry, this review showed that young workers and especially young men were a higher risk group for occupational injuries. On the other hand, the injuries of young workers were less often fatal than those of older workers, because young workers resisted impacts better than older workers.

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