

Immigration status and work disability duration

Do immigrant workers in British Columbia experience longer disability duration after a work injury than Canadian-born workers?

Background

Immigrant workers face unique challenges after a work injury. These workers, especially recent immigrants who may have lower English proficiency and a lack of familiarity with Canadian social programs, may not know their employment rights and may have trouble accessing, understanding, and navigating the workers' compensation system. While immigrant workers are known to experience higher work injury rates than non-immigrants, no prior Canadian research has examined immigrant workers' experiences after a work injury. This study investigated differences in disability duration between immigrant and Canadian-born injured workers with an accepted workers' compensation claim in British Columbia.

Approach

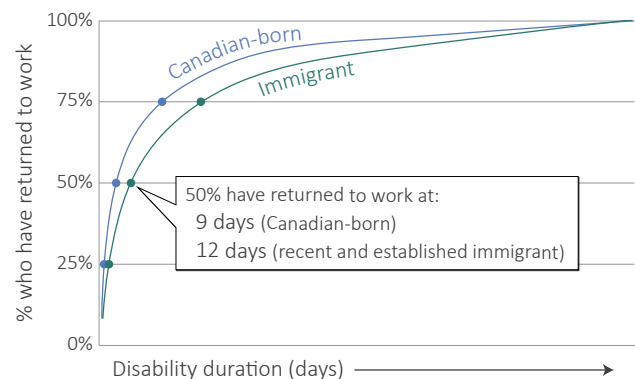
Workers in British Columbia with an accepted workers' compensation claim between 1995 and 2012 were linked to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (now Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) data on permanent residents. This is the first time that these data sources have been linked, providing a unique opportunity to identify any differences in work disability outcomes.

Injured workers were identified as **recent immigrants** (less than 10 years in Canada), **established immigrants** (10 years or more in Canada), and **Canadian-born**, at the date of injury. Disability duration was defined as the number of disability days paid in the year after injury.

Based on research presented in:

Saffari N. (2016). *Immigration and Work Disability Duration in British Columbia: A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science*. Vancouver, BC: The University of British Columbia.

Figure 1 | Diagram comparing distributions of disability days for immigrant and Canadian-born injured workers



Differences in disability duration were examined at the points on the distribution when 25, 50, and 75 percent of workers had returned to work (Fig. 1), using quantile regression. To better understand the effect of immigration status, models were adjusted for age, gender, occupation, injury year, injury type, and previous claims and were stratified by age and gender.

What we found

Recent and established immigrants had longer work disability durations than Canadian-born workers, after adjusting for demographic and occupational



characteristics. At the median disability duration (the point where 50 percent of workers had returned to work), recent and established immigrants, respectively, experienced 2.2 and 3.2 additional disability days compared to Canadian-born workers (Fig. 2a).

The relationship between immigration status and disability duration was greater for immigrant men than for immigrant women (Fig. 2b/c) and for younger (<35) immigrant workers than for older immigrant workers (Fig. 2d/e). The relationship was also greater for established immigrants than for recent immigrants, especially for women and those under age 35 (Fig. 2c/d).

What this means

Possible explanations for immigrants' longer disability durations overall include lower English proficiency, difficulties navigating Canadian social systems, shorter job tenure, and higher rates of serious injuries. Possible explanations for recent immigrants' shorter disability durations compared to established immigrants include higher levels of job insecurity and financial problems, which could motivate them to return to work faster.

Overall, results indicate that immigrants may face barriers to returning to work following a work-related injury, and that these barriers persist over time and are greatest for younger immigrant workers and recent immigrant men. Workers' compensation boards, other government agencies, and immigrant support groups may need to provide additional resources and services to injured immigrant workers.

More information

Please contact Chris McLeod, PWHs Co-Director, at chris.mcleod@ubc.ca with questions about the methods, results, or interpretation of this study. General enquiries should be directed to Suhail Marino, PWHs Director of Privacy and Operations, at suhail.marino@ubc.ca.

Figure 2 | Additional disability days (and 95% confidence intervals) for recent and established immigrant workers compared to Canadian-born workers, by gender and age, at the points where 25, 50, and 75 percent of injured workers have returned to work, 1995-2012

