Young Worker Safety Research: Implications for Employers and Policy

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Introductory Remarks

- My journey researching young worker safety
Young Worker Employment in Saskatchewan (Employment Rate (%), Statistics Canada LFS, Table 282-0001)
Young Worker Employment in Saskatchewan (Employment Rate (%) by Age, Statistics Canada LFS, Table 282-0001)
Young Worker Employment in Saskatchewan (Annual Monthly Average by Sector, Statistics Canada LFS, Table 282-0007)
What Do Young People think about Occupational Injuries in Saskatchewan?

24,402 Responses Since 2015
“I believe workplace injuries are a normal part of life in Saskatchewan” (N = 24,402)
“I believe workplace injuries are a normal part of life in Saskatchewan”

% Responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” By Year

- 2015: 23.7%
- 2016: 24.7%
- 2017: 26.3%
“I believe workplace injuries are a normal part of life in Saskatchewan”

% Responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” By Gender

- Female: 22.4%
- Male: 26.9%
“I believe workplace injuries are a normal part of life in Saskatchewan”

% Responding “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” By Region

- Regina & Saskatoon: 22.5%
- All other areas: 26.8%
Young Workers and Risk taking
Social Predictors of Risk Taking and Injuries (Westaby & Lowe, 2005)

Supervisor Influence → Risk Taking Orientation

Co-worker Risk Taking → Risk Taking Orientation

Parental Risk Taking* → Risk Taking Orientation

Risk Taking Orientation → Injuries

* Pathway between parental risk taking and risk taking orientation is mediated by global risk taking.
## Personality versus Safety Climate as Predictors of Injuries (All Ages) (Christian et al., 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Situation (Shared perceptions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>Management commitment to safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Safety systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locus of control</td>
<td>Work pressure</td>
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<td>Job attitudes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk taking</td>
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</table>

* Weak/**Moderate relationship with injuries and accidents
Why is there a Higher Rate of Injuries among Young Workers? (Breslin & Smith, 2005)

“For men, adjusting for job characteristics substantially reduced, but did not eliminate the elevated risk status of adolescent and young adult workers. For women, only young adult women showed an elevated risk of work injury with job characteristics controlled.”

“The substantial reduction in age-work injury association in the fully adjusted model suggests that differences in the types of jobs young workers hold play a critical role in their high-risk status.”
Safety Climate/Culture

The extent to which employees perceive that safety and safe behaviour is genuinely valued and rewarded in an organization (Zohar, 2010)

Safety climate speaks to the *relative* importance of safety in a setting (Zohar, 2010) and is a leading indicator of safety performance.

Climates related to “psychological”, “physical”, and “inclusion,” for example.
Employer Espousals vs. Actions
Shercom Industries Decision (January 2018)

“[The fine I have assessed] I believe sends the message that safety in the workplace must be more than a set of “laminated instructions,” common sense, managerial admonishments respecting rules; it must be the creation of an attitude and culture where safety is paramount […].”

Judge Gray, SKPC 003, January 11, 2018
Overall, research shows that the work environment (e.g., quality of supervision, work pressure, priorities) is the strongest predictor of employee safety behaviour and injuries.

Implication for employers: More focus on improving the work environment rather than selecting “safe” workers.
Young Workers, Job Tenure, and Injuries

1st lost-time claim rate by age group and job tenure. Adjusted for occupation, industry and gender.

Source: Breslin & Smith, 2006
How do young people respond to unsafe working conditions over time?
Key Safety Behaviours

**Voice** (e.g., Tell my supervisor about hazardous work)

**Patience** (e.g., Adapt to safety conditions until the situation improves, find a way to protect myself from being hurt at work)

**Compliance** (e.g., Wear protective clothing/equipment)

**Neglect** (e.g., Take short cuts that threaten my personal safety)
Study 1: Responses to Unsafe Work

- When confronted with hazards most interviewees said they take a wait and see approach.
- May speak up about a hazard as a last resort or if there is a threat of a severe injury.
- Unlikely to quit a job due to unsafe conditions

Study 2 – Scenario With 3 Conditions

Same across scenarios:

One month into new job in a restaurant kitchen, not much effort by co-workers in keeping kitchen clean, newly hired employees received no work/safety-related training, spills rarely cleaned up in a timely way, co-workers never really talk about safety, several co-workers have been hurt in last month, most of these injuries occur often and occasionally require medical attention…
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One month into new job in a restaurant kitchen, not much effort by co-workers in keeping kitchen clean, newly hired employees received no work/safety-related training, spills rarely cleaned up in a timely way, co-workers never really talk about safety, several co-workers have been hurt in last month, most of these injuries occur often and occasionally require medical attention…

What differs across the three scenarios:

Supervisor has reputation for (1) caring about safety and open to suggestions; (2) not caring about safety and not open to suggestions; or (3) unclear whether they care about safety and unsure whether they are open to suggestions
Study 2 – Scenario with 3 Conditions

• Approximately 40 respondents to each scenario

• 58% female. Average age = 26 years (range 15 to 60 years)

• No differences in age composition, gender composition, or fear of injury among the three scenarios

• Manipulation ‘worked’: Condition 1 felt the supervisor cared more about safety than Conditions 2 or 3

• Equal sense across groups how “real” the scenarios seemed
I Feel “Safe” Speaking Up about Safety Concerns

- Supervisor cares about safety: 4
- Supervisor doesn't care about safety: 3.5
- Unclear if supervisor cares: 3
I’m Worried I Could Lose my Job if I Spoke Up about Safety Concerns
Worried I Could Lose Hours if I Spoke Up about Safety Concerns
Voice Intentions

Voice intentions to supervisor

- Supervisor cares about safety
- Supervisor doesn't care about safety
- Unclear if supervisor cares

- Young Workers
- Older Workers
Study 3: 15 Month Longitudinal Study

- Data collected from an average of ~160 teenaged workers in Manitoba over a 15 month period (June 2011 and September 2013) with a survey completed once a month.

- ~110 parents/guardians participated in Months 3, 7, and 11.

- Monthly survey options for youth: Employed (same job as previous month), Employed (new job), and Unemployed

15 Month Longitudinal Study

- We constructed a data set to understand participants' experience of injuries and safety behaviours from the first month of a new job onwards.
Topics Discussed During Hiring Process
(N = 189, 1 = No discussion to 5 = A lot of discussion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Discussion Topic</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My employer's expectation of my job performance</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Scheduling</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Weekly pay</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Job-related training</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My interest in the job</td>
<td>3.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Required clothing</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Duration of the job</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>My employer's expectation of my safety behaviour</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>My expectations of job-related training*</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>My expectation of the job</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Required tools/equipment</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>My expectations of workplace safety conditions</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Hourly pay</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>My performance at my previous jobs(s)</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Amount of Discussion an Employer has about their Expectations of New Employee’s Safety Behaviour at T0: Voice T0-T8

- High level of cint13 (>3.36)
- Low level of cint13 (<3.36)
Voice and Supervisor Openness Over time (T0-T4, N = Varies)
Voice and Supervisor Openness Over Time (T0-T4, N = Varies)
Amount of Discussion an Employer has about their Expectations of New Employee’s Safety Behaviour at T0: Compliance T0-T8

- High level of cint13 (>3.36)
- Low level of cint13 (<3.36)
Compliance By High and Low Levels of Supervisor Openness to Safety (Average at T1)

High level of so (>3.71)

Low level of so (<3.71)
Research shows that about 30-40% of eligible lost-time injuries are not reported to a WCB.

Studies and polling data reveal that 75-90% of incidents of workplace sexual harassment go unreported.
15 year Old Worker in the Service Sector

“I'll have to go check in the suites [in an entertainment complex] and normally – especially when it's during an event where it's typically mostly only guys in the building – they get drunk. I don't know, they're just all touchy. It's gross. No one else will go in [the suites], so I'm sent to go in. And I'm the youngest one that works in my section. I have had a guy actually lose his mind because he ran out of tonic for his gin. He was so furious and I [said] “okay, it's all right. I'll bring you some tonic, calm down.”
“Have you ever been sexually harassed in the workplace?”

Ipsos (December 2017 poll of 2,098 Canadians)

- **Female**
  - Yes, on multiple occasions: 15%
  - Yes, just once: 68%
  - No, never: 17%

- **Male**
  - Yes, on multiple occasions: 4%
  - Yes, just once: 89%
  - No, never: 7%
“In your working life, have you ever been subject to sexual harassment / non-consensual sexual touching?”

Angus Reid (February 2018 poll of 808 Canadian women)
“In your own company, have you witnessed or heard about sexual harassment?”

Gandalf Group (December 2017 poll of 153 executives)
Factors that Contribute to Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry (Johnson & Madera, 2018)

- Power imbalance (male supervisors-female employees)
- “Customer is always right” culture
- Dependence on tips
- Emphasis on appearance
Preventing Sexual Harassment (Johnson & Madera, 2018)

- Develop and enforce policies
- Reporting incidents to someone other than a manager
- Manager training
- Bystander intervention training
- Industry addresses customer-based sexual harassment
Preventing Sexual Harassment

- Training in accommodation and food services
  - 44% dealing with angry customers
  - 41% robbery
  - 37% sexual harassment
- Training in retail industry
  - 48% dealing with angry customers
  - 53% robbery
  - 44% sexual harassment

Implications for Employers

- The work setting and social influences are the most important influence on young worker safety behaviour and injuries.
- Critical role of high quality supervision.
- More and higher quality training.
- Importance of employers discussing expectations of behaviour and demonstrating support for safety.
- Walking the talk.
Implications for Policy

- Young worker prevention messages should focus on frontline supervisors and employers

- Amend legislation so that workers have the right to refuse dangerous work on behalf of young workers and new workers.