

Work-related injuries in Janitorial Services workers in Washington State, 2003-2012

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Background

The National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) Services sector is a large and diverse proportion of the economy that faces a substantial burden of occupational injury in Washington State (WA). Previous work in WA has identified Services to Buildings and Dwellings (which includes extermination and pest control, janitorial services, landscaping services, carpet and upholstery cleaning services, and other services to buildings and dwellings) as an industry group within the NORA Services sector that remains at high risk for several common, high-cost, occupational injuries. In WA state, Janitorial Services workers (part of Services) have more than twice the rate of lost work-time injuries than all other occupations in the Services Sector. In this study we focus on Janitorial Services workers ("Janitors") for detailed analysis.

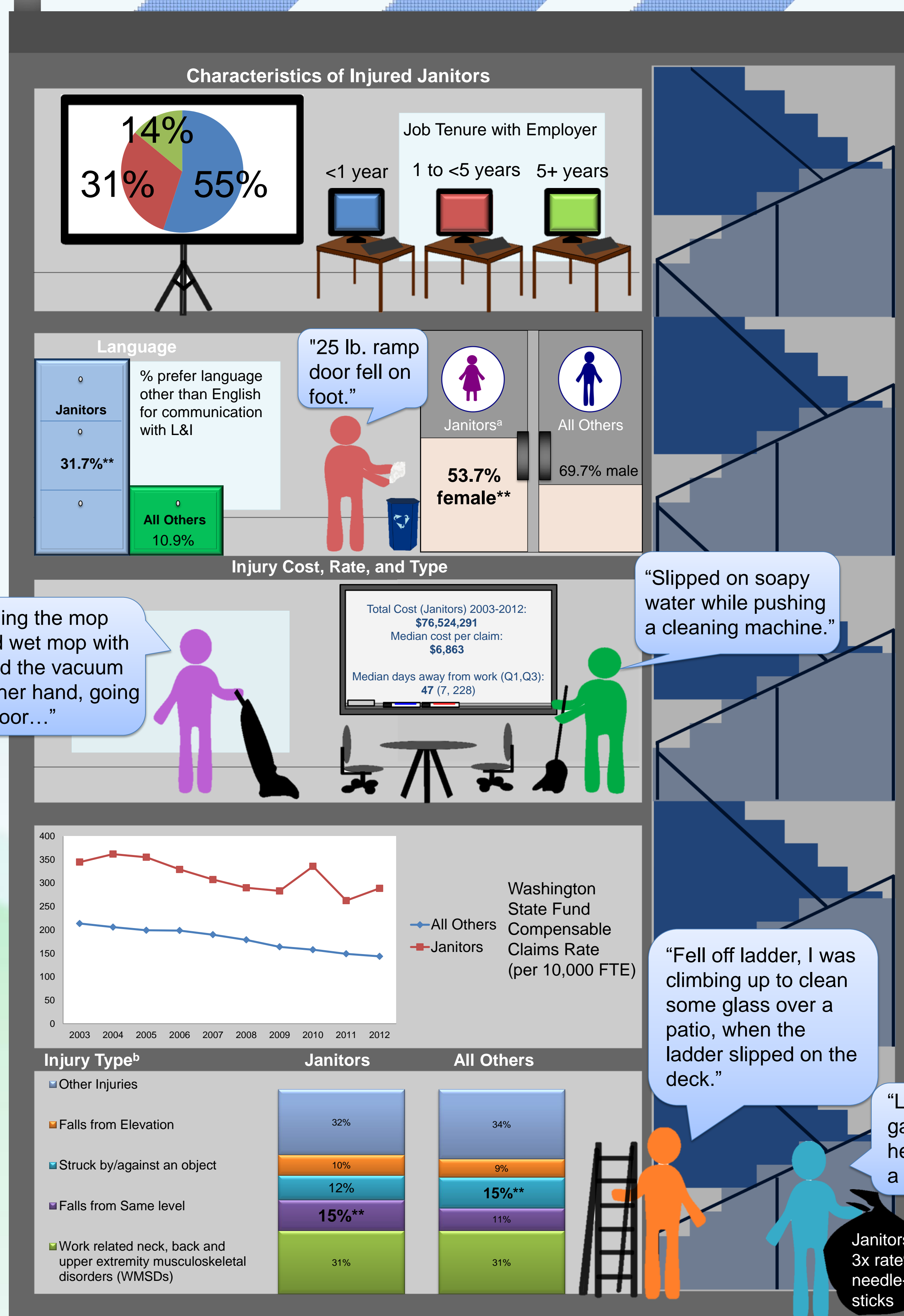
Methods

Janitorial Services includes workers in two WA risk classifications (insurance groupings designed to aggregate similar work activities): 6602-03 and 6602-05. We compare the demographics of Janitorial Services workers to those of All SF compensable claims minus Janitorial Services ('All Others').

We extracted compensable (lost work-time) Washington State workers' compensation (WC) State Fund (SF) claims in these risk classes for injuries with dates from 2003-2012. Information extracted includes: claim identification #, year, and status information; employer information; claimant demographics; cost data; injury nature and type; industry and occupation codes; and claim text (narrative description of injury from initial Report of Industrial Injury or Occupational Disease (RIIOD), filled out by the worker or their health care provider). Cost, time loss days and other information are taken at 24 months claim maturity.

Results

There were 2,450 SF compensable claims for Janitorial Services workers in WA between 2003-2012. Costs over the 10 year period averaged over \$7.6 million a year. The average age in years was 40, which was not significantly different than the average age of 'All Others'. Of Janitorial Services claimants, 53.7% were female, which was significantly higher than 'All Others' (30.3%). Although women are estimated to make up only 31% of Janitorial Services workers, they are significantly more likely to be injured with a time-loss injury (53.7%).



Over the ten year period, Janitorial Services workers had 1.8 times the rate of compensable claims per 10,000 FTE as compared to All Others. Compared to the NORA Services sector as a whole, Janitorial Services workers had 2.5 times the rate of compensable claims per 10,000 FTE (data not shown).

Nearly a third (31.7%) of Janitorial Services workers indicated a language other than English in which to communicate with the workers' compensation agency (primarily Spanish). Workers who preferred communicating with the agency in a language other than English had significantly more falls from same level than English preferring claimants (20.7% vs. 13.8%), and significantly less (26.1% vs. 33.8%) WMSDs.

Needlestick injuries, while low in overall count, had an accepted injury rate that was 3 times higher than 'All Other' combined risk classes.

Discussion

Janitorial Service workers have significantly higher rates of injury than All Others and the Services sector; they also appear to differ in many individual characteristics compared to All Others. Training and safety materials need to be developed to accommodate the diversity of languages found in WA State's Janitorial Services risk class.

Janitorial Services are a large and integral group of workers in the growing service sector of the economy, nationally as well as globally. One limitation of this research is that it relies on workers' compensation data, which may be prone to underreporting. Further research using additional data sources is needed to supplement this descriptive summary, and to determine if the risk of injury and the differences in demographics hold for this occupation nationally as for Washington State.

Conclusions

Janitorial Services workers have a high burden of occupational injury, have different demographics than other State Fund claimants, and would benefit from increased research and prevention efforts that are targeted to their needs and to the hazards they face.

** Significant (p<0.05) differences between Janitors and 'All Other' SF risk classes are denoted by bold font and double asterisks.

a - Based on U.S. Census and Washington State Employment Security Department data.
 b - Only displaying those injury types making up at least 10% of compensable claims (in either category). 'Other Injuries' includes: Overexertion, Lower-extremity MSDs, Vehicle related, Bodily Reaction, Abraded, Caught In/Under/Between, Toxic, and Electrical.
 c - The needle-stick comparison looks at all accepted claims (not just compensable). Rate of accepted needle-stick injuries - 19.5 per 10,000 FTE, rate ratio vs. all other SF risk classes accepted needle-stick claims - 3.08. A needle-stick injury was defined as any OIICS code event Needle-stick, or OIICS code for source/associated source that was "needle/syringe". This does not include claims from Self-Insured employers (many healthcare employers are self-insured).
 Worker quotes are from the claim text, the injured worker's narrative description of the injury/event.

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