What can Workers’ Compensation data tell us about the mechanisms of occupational falls in Western Australia?

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1. Introduction

Occupational slips, trips and falls (STFs) are priority hazards in Australia and Western Australia (WA), as it has been estimated that 20% of work place injuries are due to these mechanisms of injury. Strategies and policies developed by Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) authorities in Australia have been based primarily on worker’s compensation claims. Legislation and practical guidance available through OSH authorities have primarily focused on falls from height. However there has been no published analysis of existing worker’s compensation data about occupational STFs in WA. Therefore the aim of this study is to compare the frequency and severity of falls from the same level with falls from a height.

2. Method

This study used 4 years’ worth of de-identified and accepted Western Australian (WA) WC claims for falls. Frequencies, proportions and incidence rates were calculated following mechanism, gender, age and industry stratification. The natures of injury and bodily locations affected were compared between mechanisms of fall. Industry incidence rates were ranked and their corresponding proportions reported. Incapacity level, cost and lost time were described and compared between fall mechanisms.

3. Results

This study showed that the gender, age and industry groups that appear to be at highest risk vary depending on the measure used to forecast risk and mechanism of injury. Falls on the same level showed higher levels of various burden types compared to falls from a height.

4. Discussion

The discussion of the findings focuses on whether current legislation and practical guidance reflect a balanced response to the resultant risk based on the frequency and severity of outcomes from these mechanisms of injury. The discussion will also highlight the limitations of solely relying on Worker’s Compensation data to provide a complete picture of work-related injuries and the potential advantage of complimenting these data with health administrative by using data linkage.

References


Yeoh HT, Lockhart TE and Woo X. Non-fatal occupational falls on the same level. 2013. Ergonomics. 56: 2,153-165.


