

## Janitorial Workload Survey Results

Work-related injury burden, workers' compensation claim filing, and barriers: Results from a statewide survey of janitors

*American Journal of Industrial Medicine, 2022*

Naomi J. Anderson, MPH; Caroline K. Smith, PhD, MPH; Michael P. Foley, MA

### Overview

Janitors are a low-wage, ethnically and linguistically diverse, hard-to-reach population of workers with a high burden of occupational injury and illness. We conducted a mail, phone, and web survey in eight languages with Washington State janitors from November 2019 to February 2020, to characterize their working conditions and occupational health experiences.

There were 620 complete interviews. Over half of respondents were female (57%), and made less than \$50,000 in annual household income (83%). Almost half (43%) were non-White. The majority of janitors responded via mail (63%) and in English (86%). The average age of respondents was 45. One-third of janitors (30%) reported they were members of a union.

Analyzing janitors' work experiences can help identify ways to reduce the burden of work-related injury and illnesses, suggest interventions, and inform policy change to protect the health and safety of janitors.

### Key Findings

- An elevated relative risk of work-related injury or illness (WRII) was seen in female janitors, whose WRII risk was 1.4 times greater than males; and in Latinos, whose risk of WRII was 1.7 times greater than Whites.
- Compared to male janitors, women reported having less union representation, reported more changing shifts on the job, more inadequate supplies, and more inability to take sick/vacation leave/breaks. This suggests poor working conditions and more fractured/precarious work, which may account for some of the elevated risk of injury.
- 21% of janitors reported that they had a work-related injury or health care provider diagnosed occupational illness in the past year, but only 52% of those injured or ill workers filed a workers' compensation (WC) claim for their injury or illness.
  - The most common reasons given for not filing a WC claim were employer suppression or fear of retaliation (29%), and lack of knowledge regarding eligibility for WC and/or the WC process (22%)

### Impact

To reduce the burden of injury on janitors (particularly women and non-White workers), efforts should be made to ensure that janitors have safe and equitable working conditions, appropriate workload and staffing, and increased access to benefits. For janitors that do get injured or made ill at work, improving protections against employer retaliation for using the WC system, and providing adequate benefits for janitors (and other low-wage workers) so that they can afford to live while recovering from their WRII are important steps.

Find the free article here:

<http://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.23319>

### Contact the author:

[Naomi.Anderson@Lni.wa.gov](mailto:Naomi.Anderson@Lni.wa.gov)

### Research for Safe Work

The SHARP Program at the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries partners with business and labor to develop sensible, effective solutions to identify and eliminate industry-wide hazards. Learn more at: [lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/about-sharp](http://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/about-sharp)

75-45-2022  
FY14-456 [05-2014]