

The Health of Young Workers in the United States



IN THIS REPORT

What do we know about young workers in the US?

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Young workers are a large segment of the US workforce.¹ Over one third of US high school students work during the school year, and even more work during the summer.² In fact, by the time they finish high school, 80% of US youth will have worked at some point in their lives. The US has the highest percentage of young workers in any developed nation!³

Some studies show that working during youth can be both beneficial and risky, in both the short and long term. Work can teach a young person responsibility and independence, and provide skills and increased self-esteem; however, young workers are at increased risk for injury, illness and death compared to all other workers.^{1,2,4}

Each year in the US, over 200,000 youth experience work-related injuries, resulting in the deaths of at least 70 young workers.^{1,2,4} The vast majority of these deaths were in males (91%). Among industry groups, those working in the Agricultural sector made up 16% of all job-related fatalities.⁵

There are limited data on information relating to chronic disease status and other non-injury related health information for young workers. The objective of this report is to provide an overview of different aspects of the health of young US workers by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's (NIOSH) National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA) industry sector groups (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/nora/>).



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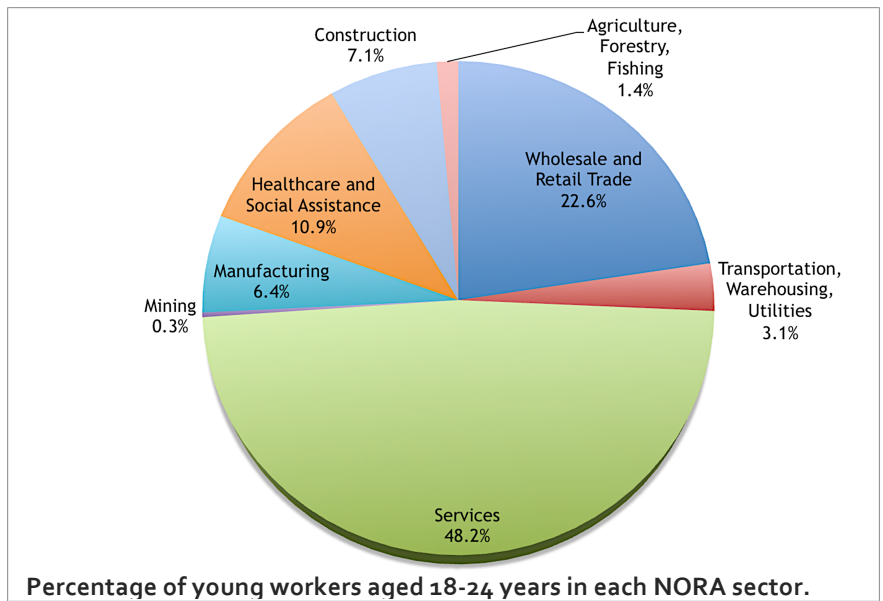
Demographic Characteristics

From 2004-2010, there was an average 16.9 million young workers aged 18-24 years in the US workforce.

To the right is a pie chart showing how young workers are distributed by industry sector groups. Almost half of all young workers were employed in the Services sector (e.g., food service workers, educational support jobs) and less than 1% worked in the Mining sector.

The graph below shows the percentage of young workers across a number of demographic characteristics.

There were approximately equal numbers of employed young men (49.0%) and women (51.0%).

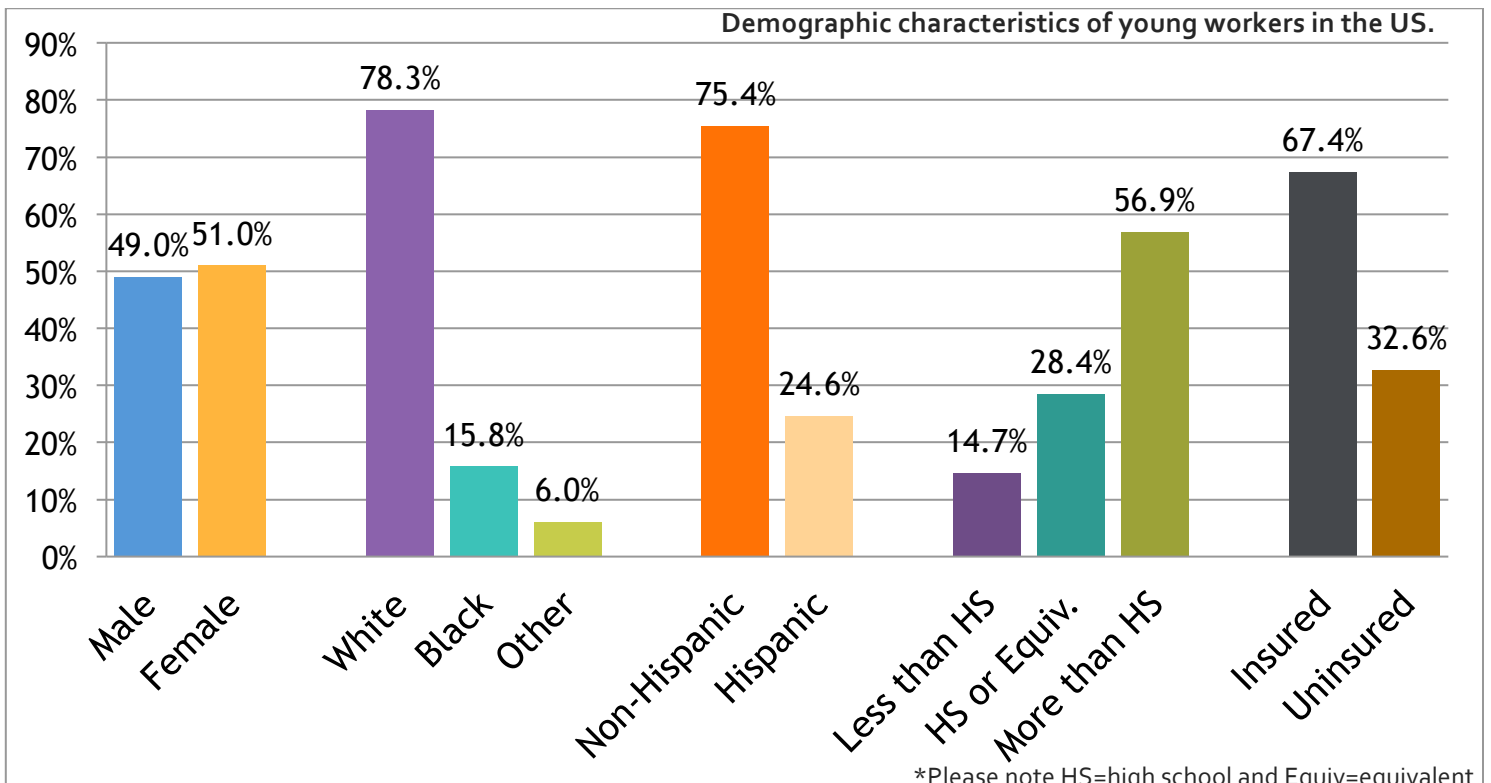


The majority of young workers self-identified as white (78.3%), while 15.8% identified as black and 6.0% “other” races.

Most (56.9%) young workers had more than a high school education, while 14.7% had less than a high school education.

About one quarter of all young workers identified as Hispanic.

Lastly, about two-thirds of all young workers reported having health insurance, while a third did not.



*Please note HS=high school and Equiv=equivalent



National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA)

Young workers are grouped by NORA industry sector. For more details on NORA, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/nora/>

- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing
- Construction
- Healthcare and Social Assistance
- Manufacturing
- Mining
- Services
- Transportation, Warehousing, Utilities
- Wholesale and Retail Trade

FAST FACTS

31%

of young workers in the Mining sector have asthma.

37%

of young workers in the Construction sector currently smoke cigarettes.

23%

of young workers in the Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities sector are obese.

Comparisons by Industry

Health Domains

We have grouped our findings into four broad categories:

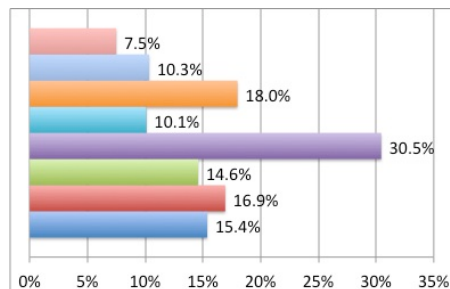
- Health Status
- Functional Health Capabilities
- Health Behavior
- Healthcare Utilization

Only certain measures from each health domain are shown in this report. You can find more information at the University of Miami Occupational Research Group (UMORG) website (see bottom of page 4).

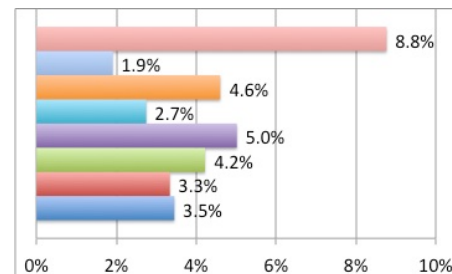
The table to the left describes the color that corresponds to each NORA sector industry group for the following graphs.

Health Status

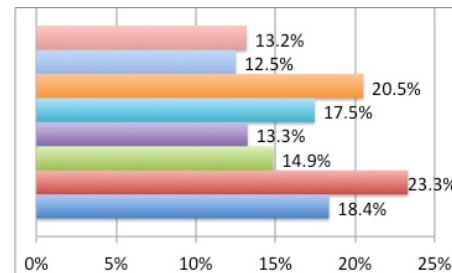
The Mining sector had the highest percentage of young workers with asthma (30.5%).



The highest percentage of having a non-HIV Sexually Transmitted Disease was among young workers in the Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing sector (8.8%).

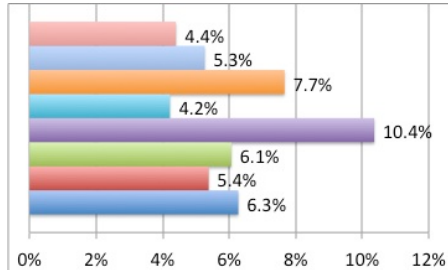


The Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities sector had the highest percentage of obese workers (23.3%) whereas Construction and Mining sector workers had the lowest (12.5% and 13.3%, respectively).



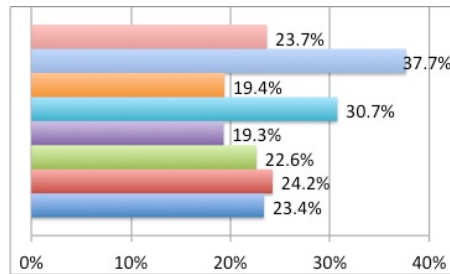
Functional Health Capabilities

Young workers in the Mining sector reported the highest percentage (10.4%) of having any functional limitation (e.g., difficulty walking, memory problems).

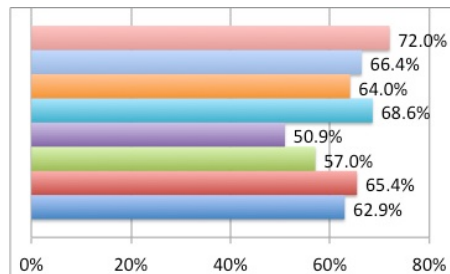


Health Behavior

The Construction sector had the highest percentage of young workers reporting to be current smokers (37.7%) followed by workers in the Manufacturing sector (30.7%).

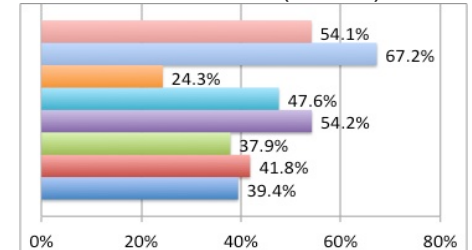


The majority (72.0%) of young workers in the Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing sector did not meet the recommended levels of physical activity.



Healthcare Utilization

The percentage of young workers who had not seen not a primary healthcare provider in the past year was highest in the Construction sector (67.2%).



Conclusion

This report shows that certain industry groups may be at increased risk for poor health. For example, young workers in the Construction sector have the highest percentage of smokers and of not having seen a primary healthcare provider in the past year compared to other sectors. The type of job one engages in may be an important consideration when prioritizing future public health efforts.

How can I find more information?



The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS):
<http://www.cdc.gov/NCHS/NHIS.htm>.

Florida Department of Health:
<http://www.doh.state.fl.us/>

References:

1. NRC. *Protecting Youth at Work: Health, Safety and Development of Working Children and Adolescents in the US*. 1999.
2. Rubenstein H, Sternbach MR, Pollack SH. Protecting the health and safety of working teenagers. *Am Fam Physician*. Aug 1999;60(2):575-580, 587-578.
3. Wegman DH, Davis LK. Protecting youth at work. *American journal of industrial medicine*. Nov 1999;36(5):579-583.
4. Castillo DN, Davis L, Wegman DH. Young workers. *Occup Med*. Jul-Sep 1999;14(3):519-536.
5. Derstine B. Job related fatalities involving youths, 1992-1995. *Compensation and Working Conditions* December 1996:1-3.



These data were prepared by the University of Miami Occupational Research Group (UMORG). We study a wide variety of health issues in the US workforce. Visit the UMORG website for more health information on US workers: www.umiamiorg.com and our sister site for information specifically on young workers: www.flye.co.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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