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Women and Accidents: The Need to Separate Gender Database

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Abstract

As female's participation in the US labor force continues to grow, there is a need to separate workplace injuries suffered by men and women. Statistics showed that women faced different types of injuries compared to men, especially on workplace violence. For example, women faced more fatality from workplace violence, and murders by personal acquaintances than men. The authors' study shows that women faced different types of workplace hazards and the risks have been increasing over the past years. Some analysis suggests that some jobs better protect women and the others. The study also finds that there is a lack of understanding of the different safety issues each gender faces, and the lack of data or separation of data between genders. This paper focuses on the main events of fatal and nonfatal injuries among women in all industries, especially on homicides and assaults to shed lights on the gender gaps on safety issues and the need for more gender-specific research and data.

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Keywords: Gender equality, Safety, Health, Women, Construction

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1. Introduction

The number of women in the global labor force increased by 126% between 1960 and 1997 [1]. In 2014, women were accounted for 47% of the total labor force in the United States (U.S.), compared to 39% in 1974 [2]. This corresponds to 68.6 million of women employed in 2014 [2]. The U.S. Department of Labor projected that there will be 92 million women in the workforce by 2050 [3]. While women's share of the U.S. labor force in the present days is only three percentage points lower than men's, women are still underrepresented in certain industries and occupations.

Although both men and women are exposed to workplace safety and health hazards, the risks of exposure differ by the nature and characteristics of events, causes and agendas. The risks and exposures could be different between the genders, and thus the relevant preventive measures could be different. Although women suffered from different and unique workplace injuries, fatalities, and illnesses [4], there is a lack of comprehensive gender-specific data on this subject. There is also a lack of gender-specific policies to address the differences between the genders.

The most prominent example of gender inequality in workplace safety and health is workplace violence (WPV). WPV is one of the leading causes of fatal and nonfatal injuries among women in the U.S [6], but very few studies addressed this issue [7]. Although men also suffered from WPV, the cases reported by women did not share similar particularities than men. For instance, between 1997 and 2010, about 25% of incidents involving women were killed in the workplace by relatives or personal acquaintances compared to only 3% of male incidents involving male [6]. However, more than 70% of the U.S. workplaces did not have formal program or policy against WPV [8].

Gender-specific workplace safety and health data will especially be valuable for non-traditional occupations in which women are underrepresented since the currently available data are not representative of the female workers' population. Women accounted for less than ten percent of the workforce in the construction industry. Most of them worked in office and managerial positions while less than 3% of women were tradeswomen [9]. The incidents on site thus did not reflect actual female casualties. The types of risks and characteristics of injuries/illnesses that women suffered are not well-represented by the safety and health data for the Construction Industry. Very little data and information could be found on nonfatal injuries of tradeswomen, and their workplace challenges are still not properly addressed by owners, contractors, co-workers, and health and safety regulations.

This paper identifies the urgency for a more detailed gender-specific workplace injuries and illnesses data as a means of improving the current regulations to achieve an equally safe and healthy workplace for men and women. The study will first present an overview of past studies and data on women's workplace safety and health issues. The data analysis section presents data collected from the BLS and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The analysis focus in the followings: 1) nonfatal workplace injuries by different genders in all industries, 2) fatal workplace injuries by different genders in all industries, and 3) workplace violence against women in all industries, particularly homicides and physical assaults.

2. Objectives

This study aims to prove the that 1) women face unique challenges in workplace safety, and 2) the current published data on workplace injuries by industry often do not represent the women's reality due to their misrepresentation in several industries, such as Construction.

3. Background

The rise in the women's participation after the 1960s was the most prominent factor that contributed to the growth and development of the U.S. labor force [3]. Similar rise on female workforce also happened globally, as the World Bank estimated that the women's numbers in the workforce had increased by 126% between 1960 and 1997 [1]. According to the most recent World Bank data [12], women made up over 44% of the estimated global working population of the nonagricultural sector. The share of women varies from countries to countries, e.g. 13-14% (Qatar and Saudi Arabia) and 53-54% (Latvia and Moldova). The U.S. ranked 36th position among the 99 listed countries. In 2014, 68.6 million of women were employed in the U.S. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that this number will rise to 92 million by 2050, corresponding to 48 percent of the labor force [3]. Labor force participation rate