

White construction workers in Illinois get higher workers' comp settlements, study finds

October 12 2012

White non-Hispanic construction workers are awarded higher workers' compensation settlements in Illinois than Hispanic or black construction workers with similar injuries and disabilities, according to researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health.

The disparity amounted to approximately \$6,000 more for white non-Hispanic claimants compared to minority workers in the same industry, says Lee Friedman, assistant professor of environmental and occupational health sciences at UIC and lead author of the study, which was published in the October issue of the [Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine](#).

The researchers assessed [ethnic disparities](#) among construction workers injured on the job by linking medical records data from the Illinois Department of Public Health and workers' compensation data from the Illinois Workers' Compensation Commission between 2000 and 2005.

The researchers evaluated a total of 1,039 cases (68 black, 168 Hispanic, 724 white and 79 other ethnicities.)

The settlements for white workers were substantially higher, despite controlling for average weekly wage, type of injury, [injury severity](#), weeks of temporary disability, percent permanent partial disability, and whether or not the worker used an attorney—all factors that are known

to contribute to the final decision for [monetary compensation](#) in the claims process.

White non-Hispanic construction workers were consistently awarded higher monetary settlements despite the fact that the mean percent permanent partial disability was equivalent to or lower than that in black and Hispanic construction workers, according to the study's authors. This was true for amputations, torso injuries, open wounds of the upper extremity and [traumatic brain injury](#).

The most common types of injuries for all workers were fractures, internal injuries, and open wounds.

The study does not explain why white non-Hispanic construction workers would receive higher compensation, Friedman said.

"One explanation is that there is some systemic bias or prejudices occurring within the system," he said. "Or, it could be that the level of information and knowledge about how the system works—and what can actually be litigated, disputed, or requested for compensation—might vary by ethnic group."

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago

Citation: White construction workers in Illinois get higher workers' comp settlements, study finds (2012, October 12) retrieved 17 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-10-white-workers-illinois-higher-comp.html>

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