This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30008220

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright: 2007, AIRAANZ
TEMPORARY AGENCY WORKERS AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF WORKPLACE UNFAMILIARITY TO WORKPLACE INJURIES

Elsa Underhill
Deakin University

Elsa.Underhill@deakin.edu.au

ABSTRACT
International and Australian research agrees that temporary agency workers have a higher incidence of workplace injury, and those injuries are more severe. Much less research has been undertaken upon the cause of those injuries. This paper explores one factor contributing to their poorer occupational health and safety through an examination of the role of unfamiliarity with the hosts’ tasks and workplace. The paper commences with a review of the temporary agency employment literature relevant to placing workers in unfamiliar workplaces, and the OHS literature related to timing of injuries. Archival research on investigated workers’ compensation claims for a sample of agency workers and direct hire workers in Victoria is then analysed to assess the importance of unfamiliarity, and training undertaken to overcome that unfamiliarity, for these injured workers. The analysis includes an examination of the timing of the injury in relation to the workers’ placement with the host, and regression analysis on a range of characteristics related to newness at a host’s workplace. The findings confirm that agency workers are especially vulnerable to injury early in their placement, and insufficient attention is given to accommodating unfamiliarity to counter workers’ vulnerability in new workplaces.

1 INTRODUCTION
International and Australian research agrees that temporary agency workers have a higher incidence of workplace injury, and those injuries are more severe (Virtanen et al. 2005; Underhill, 2002). Much less research has been undertaken upon the factors contributing to those injuries. This paper explores one aspect of why temporary agency workers experience poorer occupational health and safety outcomes through an examination of the role of unfamiliarity with the hosts’ tasks and workplace. Section two provides a review of the occupational health and safety (OHS) literature related to timing of injuries, and the temporary agency employment literature relevant to placing workers in unfamiliar workplaces, followed by an outline of the statutory obligations placed on labour hire employers and hosts to provide a safe workplace. Archival research on investigated workers’ compensation claims for a sample of agency workers and direct hire workers in Victoria is then analysed to assess the importance of unfamiliarity, and steps taken to counter that unfamiliarity, for these injured workers.
2 DISCUSSION

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Research points to several characteristics of agency employment likely to enhance the vulnerability of agency workers to workplace injuries. These include the level of experience with the 'new' workplace, their younger age distribution, their level of skill and training, and the quality of training provided at the host workplace. Each of these factors have been explored in the literature, although few researchers link these characteristics to the incidence of workplace injury.

Studies have repeatedly found that inexperienced workers have a higher risk of injury than more experienced workers (for a brief summary, see Breslin & Smith, 2006). This is of particular relevance to agency workers as one of their defining characteristics is temporary placements with different hosts. Francois and Lievin's (1995) study of agency workers found almost half of those injured received their injury in the first month of their placement, whilst agency workers in Morris's (1999) study expressed concerns with their lack of plant specific experience. McKnight, Elias and Wilson's (2001) study of self-reported injuries in the UK (1996/97) found once tenure of employment was controlled for, the statistically significant difference in injury rates between temporary and permanent workers was eliminated. Similar results were evident in Spain. Benavides et al.'s (2006) study of injured Spanish workers found the higher injury rate for temporary employees was significantly reduced once occupation and length of employment were controlled for.

Temporary agency workers are, on average, younger than direct hire employees, potentially conflating the relationship between experience and injury (Kochan et al., 1994; 2006; Productivity Commission, 2006). However Breslin and Smith (2006) found that workplace specific inexperience contributed to the risk of injury irrespective of age. Workers in their first month of employment were at greater risk of injury than more experienced workers, even after controlling for gender, age, industry and occupation. Also, being new to a job carried a higher risk of injury for older than younger workers. This increased risk for older workers, they speculated, "may reflect an inappropriate assumption that they can already handle hazardous conditions because of their previous work experience" (Breslin & Smith, 2006: 31; see also Butani, 1988). These findings led Breslin and Smith (2006) to make a number of recommendations, including improving the monitoring of the hazard exposures encountered by new workers. This is consistent with Kochan et al.'s (1994) findings in relation to contractor employees. They found that risks associated with a lack of familiarity and training may be reduced through closer supervision of contractor agency workers by the host.

Other factors may also compound the risk of injury associated with 'newness' of agency workers to a workplace. Allen, Sompayrac and White (2002) found agencies were lax in their screening of new employees, potentially resulting in an inappropriate matching of agency workers' skills and experience to the host's job requirements. Second, a number of studies have observed that a substantial minority of agency workers' immediate past labour market status, prior to commencing agency employment, was being unemployed (Kvasnicka & Werwatz, 2003; Segal & Sullivan, 1997). Their placements may be unrelated to past employment experience as their propensity to accept any job increases over time, compounding the risks associated with workplace specific inexperience; or their placements may occur after a significant time spent in unemployment, raising risks associated with a lack of work readiness.

Once placed with a host, the question of skills and training come to the fore. International studies agree that the majority of agency workers possess lower educational qualifications, and receive less training than direct hire employees (Kochan et al., 1994; Rebitzer, 1995; Paoli and Merliié, 2001; Aronsson et al., 2002; Storrie, 2002; Nienhüser & Matiaske, 2006; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002). Only highly skilled agency
workers possess qualifications comparable to their direct hire counterparts (Albert & Bradley, 1998; Kunda, Barley, & Evans, 2002). Agency workers’ low levels of formal education are not offset by higher levels of on-the-job training. Feldman, Doerpinghaus and Turnley’s (1995) survey of agency workers in the USA, for example, which included a significant proportion (38%) of workers placed in light industrial or semi-skilled craft jobs, found poor levels of instruction and training were common. Some agency workers “did not receive clear instructions about their job duties or even cursory training in relevant procedures or equipment” (1995:139). In the EU, the 2000 Survey of Working Conditions found the proportion of temporary agency workers receiving training had doubled to 23% since 1995, yet was still well below the 35% of permanent workers who received training (Paoli and Merlié, 2001:19).

The absence of training may not be intentional; labour hire employees may simply not be at a workplace long enough to participate in firm specific training (Goudswaard, 2002). But low levels of training are also a function of the nature of jobs which agency workers fill, which usually require generic rather than firm specific skills (Foley, 1998; Davis-Blake & Uzzi, 1993; Autor, 2003). This dichotomy in job distribution is reflected in permanent employees performing the more interesting or challenging tasks, whilst agency workers are delivered “to employers as last minute hands to do any boring, low-skill task that the employers either cannot or will not give to their own employees” (McAllister, 1998:236). In this way, both agencies and hosts treat agency workers "as one of many interchangeable units, not as a resource to be developed" (McAllister, 1998: 227). In a context of relatively low levels of training and skill, the nature and quality of training can be critical. Rebitzer (1995) found that not only did contractors’ employees receive less training, but their training was less effective in reducing injuries than that provided by hosts to direct hire employees. Morris (1999) also identified problems with the nature of training which contributed to injuries to agency workers, especially insufficient time between on-the-job training and when employees were expected to work at full pace. In fact, evaluating the nature and quality of training received by temporary agency workers is methodologically difficult when the main provider of that training is co-workers (Smith, 1994; Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006). In itself, this practice suggests that training may be ad hoc, and potentially restricted to the immediate task at hand.

Research on the level of skill, education and training for agency workers in Australia is sparse, yet available data confirms similarities with overseas research. Agency workers in Australia have a low level of formal education, with only direct hire casual employees having less formal education (Productivity Commission, 2006: 64). This is consistent with the level of formal skills required for the occupations in which they predominate. In 2002, 17% of labour hire workers were employed as labourers, 12% as intermediate production and transport workers, and 18% as intermediate clerical, sales and service workers (Laplagne, Glover, & Fry, 2005: 22). Little is known about how labour hire employees in Australia acquire job specific skills and OHS training. As casual employees, they are less likely to receive training than permanent employees (ACIRRT, 1999:141; VandenHeuvel & Wooden, 1999). Also, when clients utilise labour hire firms as de facto recruitment agencies, they are generally unwilling to train workers until they have assessed their suitability for permanent hire (Gallagher et al., 2001). Brennan et al.’s (2003) survey of 150 host organisations and 436 labour hire agencies found just under half of the labour hire companies provided no training; whether hosts filled the training gap was not addressed (Brennan et al., 2003: 79). The provision of safety induction training was only slightly more common. Fifty-five percent of agencies always provided safety induction, whilst just under one quarter never or rarely did so (2003:80). A similar proportion of hosts provided safety inductions (2003: 34).

Yet training is important for reducing injury rates (Kaminski, 2001), with low levels of training potentially compounding other risks to which agencies workers are exposed. They will be less well-informed about the risks they are exposed to compared to direct
hire employees. Paoli and Merllié (2001) report such a result for 38% of agency workers in the EU (compared to 21% of on-going employees). They will also be poorly placed to know what steps are necessary to overcome such risks. Aronsson (1999) found 26% of temporary workers felt they had insufficient training to perform their tasks in a safe manner. Even when OHS training is provided, however, the motivation to comply with safety procedures and policies will be compromised when job insecurity promotes and rewards production over safe practices (Probst & Brubaker, 2001).

2.2 OHS STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS ON LABOUR HIRE EMPLOYERS AND HOSTS

In Victoria, labour hire employers and hosts both have responsibility for the OHS of labour hire employees. Labour hire employers have the same general duty of care towards their employees as do other employers. At the time the data for this research was collected, section 21 (1) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (Victoria) 1985 specified that “an employer shall provide and maintain, so far as is practicable for employees a working environment that is safe and without risks to health”\(^1\). Section 21 (2) listed specific duties necessary to fulfil the general duty. These included providing and maintaining safe plant and systems of work (such as regulating the pace and frequency of work); providing a safe working environment (such as controlling noise or vibration levels); providing adequate facilities for employees welfare; and providing information, instruction, training and supervision (VWA, 1996: 8)\(^2\).

Hosts also have a duty of care towards labour hire workers through their responsibility to non-employees. In Victoria, Section 22 of the OHS Act 1985 specified that employers and self employed persons “shall ensure so far as is practicable that persons (other than the employees of the employer or self-employed persons) are not exposed to risks to their health or safety arising from the conduct of the undertaking of the employer or self-employed person”\(^3\). There is clearly overlap in the obligations of labour hire employers and hosts towards labour hire employees. This may give the impression labour hire employees are twice as well protected than direct hire employees. In reality, however, significant gaps in protection have arisen and the overlap of obligations is said to create confusion and encourage blame shifting between the agency and the host (Economic Development Committee, 2005). Labour hire employers have also pointed to the impracticality of taking a pro-active approach at another employer’s workplace, and controlling and managing a dispersed workforce (Economic Development Committee, 2005; Johnstone & Quinlan, 2006).

Employee participation in OHS provides an effective mechanism for reducing workplace risks (Walters & Frick, 2000) and the Victorian OHS Act provides for employee OHS representatives and OHS committees to participate in consultations about OHS matters. However, with low levels of unionisation, few OHS representatives amongst labour hire employees, and evidence that labour hire employees may jeopardise their employment should they raise OHS concerns with either their employer or their host (Underhill, 2005; Economic Development Committee, 2005), these provisions have only limited relevance in the labour hire sector.

To overcome compliance shortfalls, State OHS agencies have developed guidelines for labour hire employers, hosts and agency workers which outline the steps necessary to comply with their statutory obligations. In Victoria, labour hire agencies are advised to provide OHS induction training prior to placements, conduct risk assessments at the host employer’s workplace; and if necessary, negotiate improvements in hosts’ OHS controls.

---

\(^1\) In 2004, the revised OHS Act 2004 was introduced. The employers’ general duties under s.21 (1) of 2004 act were qualified by the wording “so far as is reasonably practicable”.

\(^2\) The current Section 21 (2) is modified by the inclusion of the term ‘reasonably practicable’.

\(^3\) Section 23 of the 2004 Act.
2.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Archival research on the experience of injured agency workers who have lodged a workers’ compensation claim in Victoria offers a mechanism for exploring these issues in relation to labour hire employees. This paper draws upon a sample of workers’ compensation claims lodged by injured labour hire and direct hire employees (July 1994 - June 2001). Claims agents do not automatically accept all workers’ compensation claims. Some are investigated to verify compliance with the Workers’ Compensation Act, and the sample analysed in this paper draws upon those investigated claims. Claims are usually investigated when the employer of the injured worker expresses concern that the claim may not be legitimate or is sufficiently unusual and unexpected that they would like the circumstances explained. Suspicion concerning the legitimacy of a claim is often associated with the employers’ belief that the injury was caused by a non-work factor; that the injury is related to an earlier injury sustained with another employer; that the injury was genuine but the employee is malingering; and that the injury does not exist at all. Claims are also investigated when the injury potentially involves a common law negligence suit or the claim involves a permanent disability. Investigations usually involve interviews with a number of parties, including the injured worker, their supervisor, their employer (for labour hire workers) and workers who witnessed the incident. A detailed history of the claimant’s employment may be collected, and surveillance of the injured worker may be conducted. The claimant’s workers’ compensation file also includes medical reports, conciliation reports, and correspondence on the rehabilitation and return to work processes. The information in these files was collated quantitatively and qualitatively for analysis.

Between July 1994 and June 2001, almost four thousand (3,941) workers’ compensation claims were lodged by labour hire employees in Victoria, and 571 (14.4%) of these were investigated by the claims agent. The claims in the most common occupational/industry groupings for labour hire claims were sampled in this study: white collar occupations; maintenance trades (primarily in manufacturing); building and construction workers; stores, warehouse and transport workers; and process and assembly workers. One hundred and ninety-eight files were included in the sample. A stratified random sample of direct hire employees’ claims, matched to the labour hire files by occupational/industry group and year was also undertaken. A total of 214 direct hire files were examined. This sampling process was underpinned by the assumption that workers with a similar occupation and industry location should encounter similar risk, unless their mode of employment intervenes in the injury process.

2.4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The timing of the injury in relation to commencement at the workplace was analysed first. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the months at the workplace prior to injury. Labour hire claimants were more likely to be injured early in a placement ($M=6.49$, $SD=11.38$), compared to the timing of injuries to direct hire claimants ($M=62.45$, $SD=68.39$), and the difference was significant, $t(389)=-11.020$, $p<.01$. The minimum time at the workplace prior to an injury was the first day of placement for labour hire claimants, and 5 days for direct hire claimants. Table 1 details
the distribution of the timing of injury for both groups of claimants, whilst Charts 1 and 2 illustrate the differing distributions.

Table 1: Time at workplace prior to injury

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Injury date</th>
<th>Number &amp; Proportion of claimants</th>
<th>Labour hire (n=186)</th>
<th>Direct hire (n=205)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st week at workplace</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within 1st month (&gt;1 week)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within 3 months (&gt;1 month)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 3 months, up to 2 yrs</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 2 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \chi^2 = 159.765, \text{ DF 4, } p < .001 \]

Chart 1: Labour hire claimants

Months at workplace prior to injury

Months at workplace

Chart 2: Direct hire claimants

Months at workplace prior to injury

Months at workplace
Consistent with the findings of Francois and Lievin (1995) in relation to agency workers in France, agency workers in this sample were more likely to be injured early in their placement. One third of labour hire claimants were injured in the first month of their placement at the workplace, compared to just under 5% of direct hire claimants. Labour hire claims were dispersed over a much shorter time frame, with the median average occurring within the first 3 months of placement, compared to just under 3 years for direct hire claimants.

Both qualifications and amount of experience provide an indication of how readily agency workers may adapt to tasks at the host workplace. The level of formal qualifications, however, was similar amongst the sample of labour hire and direct hire claimants (a result of the sample selection criteria). The level of experience, on the other hand, differed significantly between the claimant groups.

Table 2: Prior work experience of Labour hire and Direct hire claimants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior work experience</th>
<th>Labour hire Claimants (n=191)</th>
<th>Direct hire Claimants (n=211)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 2 years experience in same or similar work</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SR-2.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 2 years work experience in same or similar work</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SR-7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience in same or similar work, time period unspecified</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SR-7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous work experience unrelated to current position</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SR-4.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No work experience</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SR-1.7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience not stated</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(SR-1.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[\chi^2 = 58.331, \ DF 5, p < .001\]

Table 2 shows the level of experience, measured in relation to the task performed at the time of their injury, for labour hire and direct hire claimants. Whilst just over half of the labour hire claimants had more than two years experience performing similar tasks, this was significantly less than that of direct hire claimants. Almost one-third of labour hire claimants were working in placements unrelated to their past work experience. This may point to weaknesses in the screening process for selecting agency workers for specific placements, consistent with the research findings of Allen et al. (2002). It also suggests an assumption by placement agencies that low skilled workers can readily perform a range of low skill tasks.

Task specific training may overcome problems of lack of prior experience, and enhance ability to adapt general skills to workplace specific requirements. Claims were analysed to determine the level of training received by agency workers, but gaps in the claims' investigative process limits the extent to which the receipt of training can be meaningfully evaluated. On the one hand, investigators often did not raise the issue of task training, so no data was available. On the other hand, when the issue was raised, it was often paid scant attention. In many cases, the information available was insufficient to distinguish between those who had received less than one hour of training and those who received more comprehensive training, such as their performance being monitored over several days by a work colleague. Table 3 provides the comparative data on whether task-related training was received by labour hire and direct hire claimants.
Table 3: Whether task-related training was received at the workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Whether task-related training was received</th>
<th>Labour hire Claimants (n=191)</th>
<th>Direct hire Claimants (n=213)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>42.4% (SR.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20.4% (SR.1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>33.3% (SR.2.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated, but &gt; 2 years experience</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.7% (SR.4.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \chi^2 = 54.250, \text{DF 3, p < .01} \)

A similar proportion of both labour hire and direct hire claimants (42%) definitely received task-related training. Differences arose for those who definitely did not receive training, although these were not significant. Twenty per cent of labour hire claimants did not receive training, compared to only 11% of direct hire claimants. The number of cases where the information was not available is substantial, and differs significantly between labour hire and direct hire claimants. This appears to reflect an administrative bias in the practice of claims investigators, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper. The significant difference between those with more than 2 years work experience, and for whom the issue of training was not investigated, reflects the greater proportion of direct hire claimants with more than two years experience (as well, prime facie, as investigators’ assumptions concerning the unimportance of training for workers with longer time in the job).

In order to develop a fuller understanding of factors contributing to early injuries to labour hire employees, a regression analysis was conducted upon their claims. The model used months with the host prior to injury as the dependent variable, and includes a range of variables indicative of factors which may reduce injury risk related to unfamiliarity. Task, induction and OHS training are included, but because of ambiguities in the data concerning the extent and quality of training received, these variables are defined according to whether training was definitely not received. The nature of supervision could not be evaluated from the claim files. Whether the worker worked alone, or felt they could draw upon the assistance of others, however, is used as a proxy. The tendency for agencies to place workers in jobs with which they have no prior experience, or are unsuitable for other reasons, is likely to also contribute to early injuries. Such placements are less likely to occur as the agency becomes more familiar with the worker's skills, strengths and weaknesses. The variable ‘months employed by the labour hire company’ provides a proxy for the depth of knowledge the agency has of the worker. A number of early injury claims involved muscular strain injuries resulting from the worker being unaccustomed to physically demanding heavy lifting tasks. The variable ‘heavy lifting (>25kg)’ identifies those performing such tasks. Finally, age was included as a continuous variable, based upon the well established relationship between younger workers and injury rates. The results are presented in Table 4.
Table 4: Regression analysis of months employed prior to injury for labour hire claimants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Regression Coefficient</th>
<th>Std Error</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Months employed by labour hire company</td>
<td>.470</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No task training</td>
<td>-.142</td>
<td>2.101</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No induction training</td>
<td>-.046</td>
<td>3.207</td>
<td>.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No OHS training from host</td>
<td>-.036</td>
<td>2.818</td>
<td>.737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No OHS training from labour hire</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>2.024</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy lifting (25 kg+)</td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>2.120</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working alone</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>1.612</td>
<td>.362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.503</td>
<td>2.426</td>
<td>.836</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=192; R²=0.291; Adj R²=0.257; Standard error of estimate = 9.8134

The model produced three significant variables. First, months employed by the labour hire agency varied directly with the timing of the injury. New employees with the agency were at greater risk than those employed for longer periods. Second, an absence of task training was associated with early injuries. Third, age showed older workers were more likely to be injured after a longer period at the workplace. The level of experience was tested in earlier models, with unrelated previous experience initially being significant but its significance was eliminated once months employed by the agency was controlled for. The other variables showed a relationship in the expected direction, but were not significant. The exception was when the labour hire company did not provide OHS training. This, unexpectedly, was associated with injuries occurring after a longer period at the host workplace. Two explanations are possible here. First, if the agency has not provided OHS training, then hosts may fill the gap. The poor quality of the training received variable prevents testing this. Second, the quality of OHS training sighted by the researcher in claims files was generally of disturbingly poor quality. Labour hire employees who have received OHS training from agencies may have false confidence in their OHS knowledge, whilst those without such training may be more cautious. Again, the quality of the training received variable prevents more indepth analysis. Finally, the highly significant relationship between newly recruited agency workers and early injuries needs to be set in the context of a low level of trust between the agency and workers with whom they are unfamiliar. New workers lodging a workers’ compensation claim may be more likely to have their claim investigated, and in turn, be more likely to come within the population from which this sample was taken.

3 CONCLUSIONS

A significant proportion of temporary agency workers are injured early in their placement, suggesting lack of familiarity plays an important role in increasing their risk of injury. This analysis found the absence of task training contributed significantly to the likelihood of agency workers being injured early in a placement. Unless host employers offer sufficient and appropriate on-the-job training, these risks can only be overcome through a process of osmosis, but too often the worker is injured too early in their placement for this occur. Also, both labour hire agencies and hosts may also be acting upon incorrect assumptions concerning the adaptability and suitability of agency workers. Relatively new recruits of agencies were significantly more likely to be injured early than those employed by the agency for longer periods of time. Poor screening by agencies may play a role in this outcome. Whilst further research is needed, the results presented in this paper point to problems in the process of selecting workers for placements, and the steps taken to overcome unfamiliarity with the tasks once placed with a host.
4 REFERENCES


