

The Cost of Hand Injuries to Illegal Immigrant Manual Laborers

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Background: Undocumented Latino manual laborers experience a high incidence of work-related hand injuries due to hazardous occupational conditions. This study hypothesizes that these injuries result in significant financial burdens and disparities in access to care, impacting return-to-work rates and economic stability.

Methods: A retrospective review of 3,979 charts from University Medical Center New Orleans (UMCNO) (2016-2024) identified 68 undocumented manual laborers with work-related hand injuries meeting inclusion criteria. Data collected included demographic information, injury type, treatment modality, total medical costs, and return-to-work status. Patients were stratified by insurance status: free care, self-pay, or workers' compensation. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze trends in injury outcomes and economic impact.

Results: The cohort had a male predominance (90%) with an average age of 38.1. Most patients (67.6%) were employed in construction, with others in similar manual labor roles or undocumented occupations. Insurance coverage varied: 39.71% received free care, 38.24% were self-pay, and 22.06% had workers' compensation. Among patients with available follow-up, 73.81% returned to work, while 26.19% did not. The total medical cost for these injuries in this population at our institution was approximately \$4.48 million. Average costs were highest for workers' compensation patients (\$102,122.59), followed by free care (\$94,877.37) and self-pay patients (\$33,803.66).

Conclusions: Undocumented Latino manual laborers face substantial financial and occupational consequences following work-related hand injuries. The highest medical costs were incurred by workers' compensation and free care patients, highlighting disparities in healthcare access. A significant portion (26.19%) of injured workers did not return to work, indicating potential long-term socioeconomic consequences. Findings emphasize the need for policy interventions to improve workplace safety, healthcare accessibility, and financial protections for undocumented laborers. This study underscores the critical economic and healthcare challenges faced by undocumented manual laborers, providing data to support policy reforms aimed at reducing workplace injury risks and improving access to equitable care.