

# Occupational Fatalities Among the Immigrant Population

BY JANICE WINDAU

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Immigrants come to the United States for a variety of reasons. Some come to study, but stay after finding work. Others move here to make money to send back home or they come to join friends or family already here. Still others emigrate to escape violence in their native country. But whatever their reason, most come to fulfill dreams of a better life. Unfortunately, some immigrants find these dreams shattered as a result of violence, highway traffic accidents, or other fatal incidents in the workplace.

## Profile of the foreign-born population in the United States

Foreign-born residents are both more educated and less educated than native-born Americans. Although foreign-born persons aged 25 or older are less likely to have graduated from high school, they are also more likely than natives to have a college or even graduate or professional degree.<sup>1</sup> As a result, jobs held by the foreign-born vary widely. Some immigrants are in the professional specialties such as medicine, engineering, and teaching. Others work in family run businesses, such as convenience stores and stationery shops. Many initially work as migrant farm laborers or taxi drivers and then move on to construction, poultry processing, or business once they have learned the culture and language.<sup>2</sup>

## Fatal work injuries of the foreign-born

Nearly 700 workers born in other countries were killed in the United States during 1994, accounting for a little over one-tenth of all fatally injured workers in the country.<sup>3</sup> Although this percentage is consistent with their share

of the employed in the United States, foreign-born workers suffered a disproportionate share of the victims of workplace homicide during 1994, comprising about one-fourth of the total. This variance in job-related homicide was even more pronounced for certain occupations. The foreign-born accounted for 42 percent of the sales supervisors and proprietors, 40 percent of the cashiers, and 29 percent of the taxicab drivers who were victims of workplace homicide in 1994.

Moreover, 40 percent of the foreign-born worker fatalities resulted from homicide, compared with 16 percent of the fatalities among all U.S. workers. (See table 1.) Highway traffic incidents, which resulted in 20 percent of the fatal work injuries of all workers, accounted for 13 percent of the fatalities among foreign-born workers. Falls accounted for 10 percent of fatal work injuries among both the foreign-born and all U.S. workers. Fatal work injuries among foreign-born workers were less likely to have resulted from being struck by falling objects and from nonhighway transportation incidents such as tractor rollovers than were fatalities among other workers.

## Worker characteristics

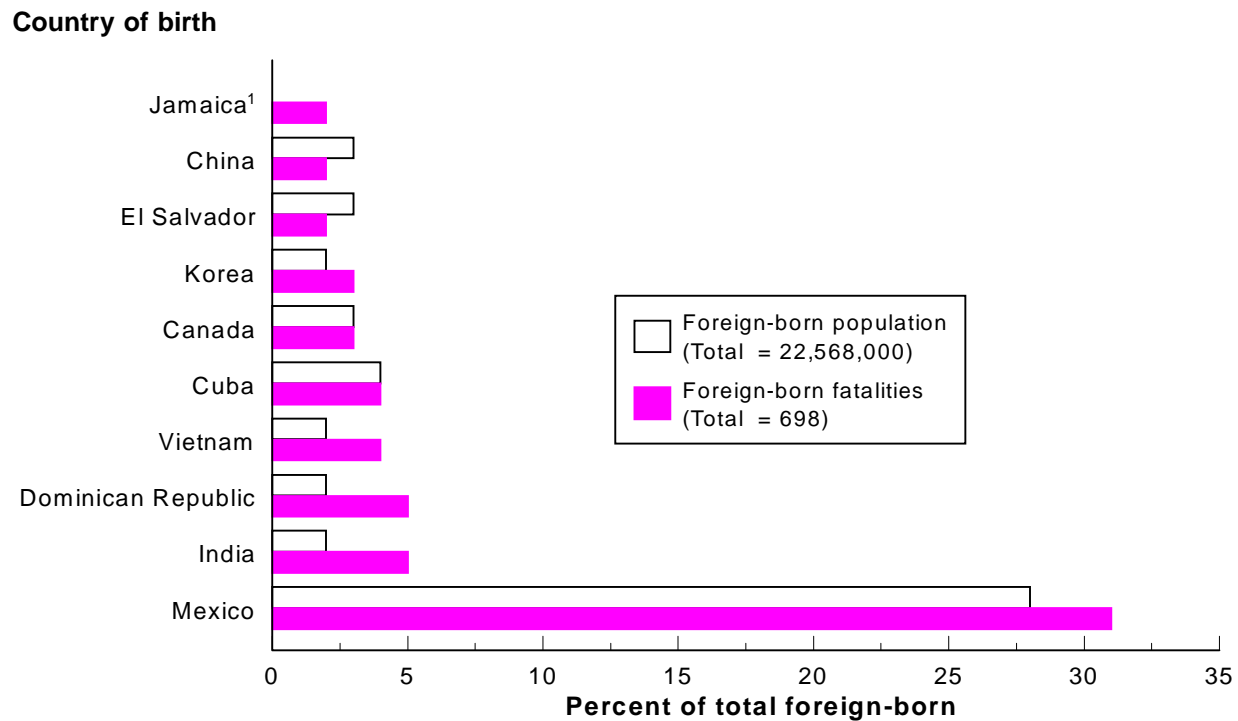
Almost one-third of the foreign-born workers killed on the job in 1994 worked in retail trade, such as grocery stores and eating and drinking establishments, compared with one-eighth of the Nation's native-born workers who died on the job that year. (See table 2.) Most of these deaths were the result of being shot during a robbery attempt. Moreover, the foreign-born accounted for almost half of all workers killed in food stores during 1994.

By contrast, foreign-born workers who were fatally injured were less likely than their native cohorts to have worked in agricultural production, construction, mining,

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**Chart 1. Foreign-born fatally injured at work versus foreign-born population, 1994**



<sup>1</sup> Foreign-born population not available for Jamaica.

SOURCE: US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1994

manufacturing, and public administration.

Sales occupations, such as supervisor and proprietor and cashier, accounted for almost one-fourth of the fatal work injuries among the foreign-born. Moreover, the foreign-born comprised about a third of the fatality victims employed in these occupations; a similar portion of taxicab drivers killed while at work were immigrants. (See table 3.)

Mexico was the native country of 31 percent of the foreign-born who were fatally injured at work, compared with 28 percent of the foreign-born in the general U.S. population.<sup>4</sup> (See chart 1.) Workers born in the Dominican Republic, India, and Vietnam also had larger shares of fatal work injuries than their share of the foreign-born population as a whole. By contrast, the Philippines, which is the country of birth for 5 percent of the foreign-born population in 1994, accounted for 2 percent of the foreign-born workers who were fatally injured.

Almost half the fatal work injury victims born in other countries were of Hispanic origin, and one-fifth were of Asian descent. (See table 4.) Asians were particularly hard hit by homicide at work, accounting for about one-third of the homicide victims among foreign-born workers and one-tenth of all workplace homicide victims. Foreign-born victims of fatal work injuries were slightly younger and were more likely to be men than other workers fatally injured on

the job during the year. The percent of workers who were self-employed or working for the family business was similar between the two groups.

#### State where fatal injury occurred

California, which has the largest number of residents born outside the United States, had the largest number of fatal work injuries among the foreign-born in 1994. The foreign born accounted for 28 percent of the fatal work injury victims in California, compared with 24 percent of the resident population. Foreign-born workers in New York and New Jersey also comprised large portions of occupational fatality victims in these States. The following table lists those States with 15 or more foreign-born worker fatalities.

State	Total work place fatalities	Foreign-born fatalities
California	639	180
New York	364	113
Texas	497	90
Florida	358	62
New Jersey	114	29
Pennsylvania	354	22
Illinois	247	24
Ohio	209	16
Virginia	164	15

**Table 1. Fatal occupational injuries by event or exposure, 1994**

Event or exposure	All worker fatalities		Foreign-born worker fatalities	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total .....	6,632	100	698	100
Assaults and violent acts .....	1,321	20	297	43
Homicides .....	1,080	16	277	40
Shooting .....	934	14	247	35
Suicides .....	214	3	18	3
Transportation incidents .....	2,762	42	192	28
Highway .....	1,343	20	91	13
Nonhighway (farm, industrial) .....	409	6	16	2
Worker struck by vehicle .....	391	6	33	5
Aircraft incident .....	426	6	32	5
Water vehicle incident .....	94	1	16	2
Falls .....	665	10	72	10
Falls to lower level .....	580	9	68	10
Fall from roof .....	129	2	20	3
Contact with objects and equipment .....	1,017	15	65	9
Struck by object .....	590	9	33	5
Struck by falling object .....	372	6	21	3
Caught in equipment or objects .....	280	4	25	4
Caught in running equipment .....	147	2	17	2
Caught in collapsing materials .....	132	2	6	1
Exposure to harmful substances or environments .....	641	10	63	9
Contact with electric current .....	348	5	30	4
Contact with temperature extremes .....	50	1	7	1
Exposure to caustic, noxious, or allergenic substances .....	133	2	15	2
Drowning .....	89	1	9	1
Fires and explosions .....	202	3	9	1

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Percentages may not add to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1994, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, in cooperation with State and Federal agencies.

—Endnotes—

<sup>1</sup> Population data are from “The Foreign-Born Population: 1994” by Kristin A. Hansen and Amara Bachu, Current Population Report p.20-486, U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, August 1995. Educational and income levels vary among the foreign-born, particularly among naturalized citizens and noncitizen immigrants, as shown by the table below.

**Percent distribution of educational attainment for persons 25 and over, 1994**

Education	U.S. native citizen	Foreign-born		
		Total	Naturalized citizen	Not a citizen
Total .....	100	100	100	100
Not high school graduate ..	17	36	24	43
High school grad/some college .....	61	41	49	37
Bachelor's degree .....	15	15	17	13
Graduate or professional degree .....	7	8	9	7

Naturalized citizens even had a slightly higher median income in 1994 than did U.S. natives, \$16,103 compared with \$15,876 and \$12,179 for the total foreign born.

<sup>2</sup> See “Asian-Indian Americans,” by Marcia Mogelonsky in *American Demographics*, August 1995; “African Immigrants Who Aren’t Black,” by Tibbett Speer, *American Demographics*, January 1994; and “Migrant Labor: A World Apart, Following the Sun,” by Pamela Stallsmith in the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, November 10, 1996 for additional discussion of immigrants.

<sup>3</sup> Data on fatal work injuries are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1994. This program, which has collected occupational fatality data nationwide since 1992, uses diverse data sources to identify, verify, and profile fatal work injuries. Information about each workplace fatality (occupation and other worker characteristics, equipment being used, and circumstances of the event) is obtained by cross-referencing source documents, such as death certificates, workers’ compensation records, and reports to Federal and State agencies. This method assures counts are as complete and accurate as possible. For more information on the CFOI program, access the World Wide Web at ([stats.bls.gov/oshfat1.htm](http://stats.bls.gov/oshfat1.htm)) or e-mail ([cfoistaff@bls.gov](mailto:cfoistaff@bls.gov)).

<sup>4</sup> Differences may merely result from the use of population rather than employment data. The foreign-born population includes some persons not subject to fatal work injuries, such as those in the labor force but not employed as well as persons not in the labor force, such as young children and retired persons. The foreign-born population in this brief may include some undocumented immigrants, refugees, and temporary residents, such as students and temporary workers, as well as legally admitted immigrants. Besides these groups, fatality counts may include foreign-born natives because information on citizenship of parents is not available in the CFOI program. Fatality counts may also include nonresidents, such as workers in the United States temporarily on a business trip.

**Table 2. Fatal occupational injuries by industry, 1994**

Industry	SIC code <sup>1</sup>	All workers		Foreign-born workers	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total .....		6,632	100	698	100
<b>Private industry</b> .....		5,959	90	670	96
<b>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</b> .....		852	13	68	10
Agricultural production - crops .....	01	443	7	28	4
Agricultural production - livestock .....	02	172	3	11	2
Agricultural services .....	07	163	2	20	3
<b>Mining</b> .....		180	3	7	1
<b>Construction</b> .....		1,028	16	91	13
General building contractors .....	15	190	3	19	3
Heavy construction, except building .....	16	246	4	14	2
Special trades contractors .....	17	592	9	58	8
<b>Manufacturing</b> .....		789	12	54	8
<b>Transportation and public utilities</b> .....		949	14	108	15
Local and interurban passenger transportation ...	41	114	2	32	5
Taxicabs .....	4121	102	2	31	4
Trucking and warehousing .....	42	505	8	38	5
Water transportation .....	44	48	1	12	2
Transportation by air .....	45	99	1	11	2
<b>Wholesale trade</b> .....		271	4	23	3
<b>Retail trade</b> .....		808	12	215	31
Food stores .....	54	237	4	107	15
Automotive dealers and service stations .....	55	123	2	12	2
Eating and drinking places .....	58	184	3	38	5
<b>Finance, insurance, and real estate</b> .....		113	2	7	1
<b>Services</b> .....		853	13	84	12
Business services .....	73	255	4	21	3
Automotive repair, services, and parking .....	75	91	1	13	2
<b>Government</b> <sup>2</sup> .....		673	10	28	4
Federal (including resident armed forces) .....		211	3	7	1
State .....		114	2	5	1
Local .....		338	5	14	2

<sup>1</sup> Standard Industrial Classification Manual, 1987 Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Includes fatalities to workers employed by governmental organizations regardless of industry.

shown separately. Percentages may not add to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1994, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, in cooperation with State and Federal agencies.

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not

**Table 3. Fatal occupational injuries of foreign-born workers by occupation, 1994**

Occupation	Number	Percent
Total .....	698	100
Managerial and professional specialty .....	68	10
Executive, administrative, and managerial .....	47	7
Managers, food serving, lodging .....	14	2
Professional specialty .....	21	3
Technical, sales, and administrative support .....	185	27
Airplane pilots .....	12	2
Sales occupations .....	163	23
Supervisors and proprietors .....	79	11
Sales workers, retail and personal service .....	81	12
Cashier .....	47	7
Service occupations .....	62	9
Protective service .....	19	3
Cleaning and building service .....	13	2
Personal service .....	12	2
Farming, forestry, and fishing .....	73	10
Farm workers .....	40	6
Groundskeepers, gardeners .....	17	2
Precision production, craft, repair .....	84	12
Mechanics and repairers .....	26	3
Construction trades .....	52	7
Operators, fabricators, laborers .....	215	31
Machine operators .....	19	3
Transportation and material moving .....	104	15
Motor vehicle operators .....	86	12
Truck drivers .....	50	7
Taxicab drivers, chauffeurs .....	33	5
Water transportation occupations .....	11	2
Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, laborers .....	92	13
Construction laborers .....	36	5
Laborers, excluding construction .....	35	5
Military .....	5	1
Other or unspecified .....	6	1

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Percentages may not add to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1994, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, in cooperation with State and Federal agencies.

**Table 4. Fatal occupational injuries by selected worker characteristics, 1994**

Characteristics	All worker fatalities		Foreign-born workers fatalities		Foreign-born population (in thousands)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total .....	6,632	100	698	100	22,568	100
<b>Employee status</b>						
Wage and salary workers .....	5,370	81	562	81	-	-
Self-employed .....	1,262	19	136	19	-	-
<b>Age</b>						
Less than 25 .....	726	11	91	13	5,124	23
25-34 .....	1,567	24	210	30	5,269	23
35-44 .....	1,619	24	193	28	4,522	20
45-64 .....	2,176	33	183	26	5,014	22
65 and over .....	525	8	21	3	2,640	12
<b>Sex</b>						
Men .....	6,104	92	658	94	11,132	49
Women .....	528	8	40	6	11,436	51
<b>Race</b>						
White .....	5,460	82	410	59	15,428	68
Black .....	707	11	69	10	1,596	7
Asian or Pacific Islander .....	183	3	142	20	4,630	21
Other or unspecified .....	282	4	77	11	-	-
<b>Hispanic origin</b>						
Hispanic .....	624	9	336	48	10,270	46

- Dash indicates data not available.

NOTE: Totals for major categories may include subcategories not shown separately. Percentages may not add to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1994, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, in cooperation with State and Federal agencies.