

Do immigrants improve the health of native workers?

Immigration crowds native workers out of risky jobs and into less strenuous work, with consequent benefits to their health

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ELEVATOR PITCH

Public debate on immigration focuses on its effects on wages and employment, yet the discussion typically fails to consider the effects of immigration on working conditions that affect workers' health. There is growing evidence that immigrants are more likely than natives to work in risky jobs, as they are more inclined to take on physically intensive tasks. Recent studies show that as immigration rises, native workers are pushed into less demanding jobs. Such market adjustments have positive impacts on the health of the native workers.

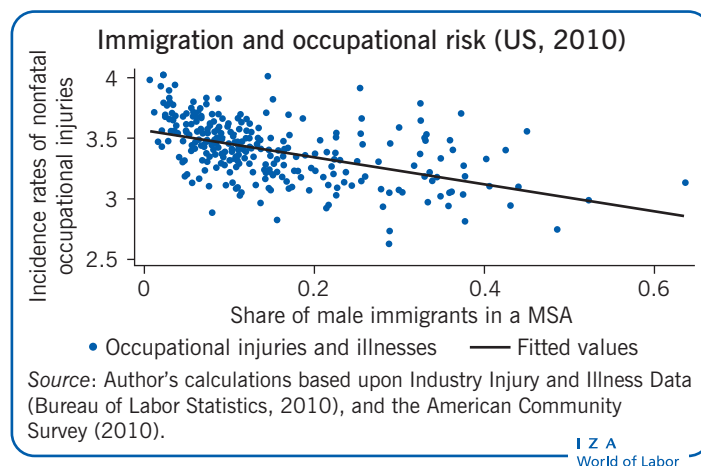
KEY FINDINGS

Pros

- ⊕ Immigrants are more likely to work in risky, physically intensive jobs.
- ⊕ Immigration can push native workers into jobs that involve better schedules, lower injury and fatality rates, and which are less physically intensive.
- ⊕ There is evidence of positive effects on native workers' health and subjective well-being. Improvements in natives' average working conditions and workloads help to explain the effect of immigration on health.
- ⊕ These effects are concentrated on the most vulnerable individuals, i.e., low-skilled, blue-collar workers.
- ⊕ On balance, evidence does not indicate significant detrimental effects on the average wage of native workers.

Cons

- ⊖ The self-selection of immigrants into riskier jobs contributes to their health deterioration.
- ⊖ Immigration increases safety-related costs due to language barriers and different standards of job safety.
- ⊖ If immigrants perceive their jobs more positively than natives, they may take excessive risks.
- ⊖ There is some evidence of short-term negative effects on low-skilled wages and employment.
- ⊖ The short-term negative effects on wages and employment may have negative effects on health.



AUTHOR'S MAIN MESSAGE

While the public debate usually focuses on the effects of immigration on native workers' wages and employment issues, recent evidence suggests that immigration may also have non-trivial effects on other working conditions that are known to affect individual health and well-being. More open immigration policies that allow for a balanced entry of immigrants of different education and skill levels may therefore have positive effects on productivity, with no detrimental effects on wages. They are also likely to have positive effects on job quality and the health of native workers.