

Beyond Bad Tipping: Workplace Hazards of Food and Beverage Servers, 2003-08

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Food and beverage servers face many hazards on the job. Nonfatal injuries and illnesses among these workers tend to result directly from their normal job duties and include sprains, bruises, cuts, lacerations, overexertion, and heat burns. Fatal injuries, by contrast, are generally the result of workplace violence. Men are more likely to incur fatal work injuries than their share of employment; women are more likely to incur nonfatal injuries and illnesses.

The job market for food and beverage serving workers is expected to stay strong for the foreseeable future, so tracking trends in nonfatal and fatal injuries and illnesses incurred on the job by these workers is important for both job seekers and employers today. In 2008, there were 6,299,930 food and beverage serving workers (henceforth referred to as “food and beverage servers”) employed in the United States, with this number expected to increase by 10 percent by 2018.¹ Food and beverage servers included 503,420 bartenders; 2,708,840 combined food preparation and serving workers; 527,530 counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop workers; 2,371,750 waiters and waitresses; and 188,390 nonrestaurant food servers in 2008.² This occupation attracts many workers in their teens and twenties who may have never worked as food and beverage servers before.³ Food and beverage servers experience significant workplace hazards, as they usually work long shifts (often consecutive lunch and dinner shifts), are frequently on their feet, and carry heavy trays of hot food, breakable glassware, dishes, and utensils.

In the 6-year period from 2003 to 2008, 141 food and beverage servers were fatally injured on the job.⁴ There were 26,870 nonfatal injuries and illnesses involving days away from work to food and beverage servers in 2008 in private industry, a 29-percent decrease from the 37,860 reported in 2003.⁵ In comparison, there were 1,078,140 nonfatal injuries and illnesses to all occupations combined in 2008, down 18 percent from the 1,315,920 reported in 2003. Also, the incidence rate for nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses involving days away from work for food and beverage servers in 2008 was 70.6 cases per 10,000 full-time workers, compared with 113.3 for all workers combined.

The typical *nonfatal* injury or illness incurred by a food and beverage server is very different from the typical *fatal* injury suffered by one of these workers. Most nonfatal injuries and illnesses occur when food and beverage servers are performing their regular job duties, resulting in falls, overexertion, contact with dangerous equipment, and other incidents usually considered accidents. By contrast, as table 1 shows, most fatal injuries are homicides, which result from crime, interpersonal disputes, or other types of workplace violence.

Table 1. Fatal injuries to food and beverage servers by event or exposure, 2003-08

Event or exposure	Number of fatal injuries
Total	141
Transportation incidents	8
Highway	3
Nonhighway	3
Assaults and violent acts	97
Homicides	88
Hitting, kicking, beating	5
Shooting	64
Stabbing	14
Assaults and violent acts by person(s), n.e.c	5

Event or exposure	Number of fatal injuries
Suicide, self-inflicted injury	8
Falls	20
Fall to lower level	8
Fall down stairs or steps	3
Fall on same level	11
Fall to floor, walkway, or other surface	9
Exposure to harmful chemical or substance	14
Exposure to caustic, noxious, or allergenic substances	9
Ingestion of substance	6
Oxygen deficiency	4

Case And Worker Characteristics

Gender. In 2008, women accounted for 70 percent of employment among food and beverage workers, as well as 70 percent of the nonfatal injuries and illnesses.⁶ In contrast, women made up 41 percent of food and beverage workers who were fatally injured during the 2003-2008 period.

Age. Table 2 shows fatal injuries among private industry food and beverage servers by various age groups from 2003 to 2008, as well as nonfatal injuries and illnesses among these workers by age in 2008. In 2008, food and beverage servers age 16 to 19 incurred 3,710 nonfatal injuries and illnesses, or 14 percent of all injuries and illnesses in this occupation. In contrast, 16- to 19-year-olds incurred only 3 percent of injuries and illnesses in all occupations combined. Still, the proportion of injuries and illnesses incurred by food and beverage servers in this age group (14 percent) was lower than their proportion of employment (21 percent).⁷

Table 2. Fatal and nonfatal injuries and illnesses to food and beverage servers by age

Age	Number of nonfatal injuries and illnesses, 2008	Percentage of total for food and beverage servers, nonfatal, 2008	Percentage of total for all workers combined, nonfatal, 2008	Fatal injuries, 2003-08	Percentage of total for food and beverage servers, fatal, 2003-08	Percentage of total for all workers combined, fatal, 2003-08
Total	26,870	100.0	100.0	141	100.0	100.0
16 to 19	3,710	14.0	3.0	15	11.0	2.0
20 to 24	3,830	14.0	10.0	24	17.0	7.0
25 to 34	5,330	20.0	22.0	28	20.0	18.0
35 to 44	4,730	18.0	23.0	30	21.0	22.0
45 to 54	5,160	19.0	24.0	20	14.0	24.0
55 to 64	2,820	10.0	13.0	14	10.0	16.0
65 and over	780	3.0	3.0	9	6.0	10.0

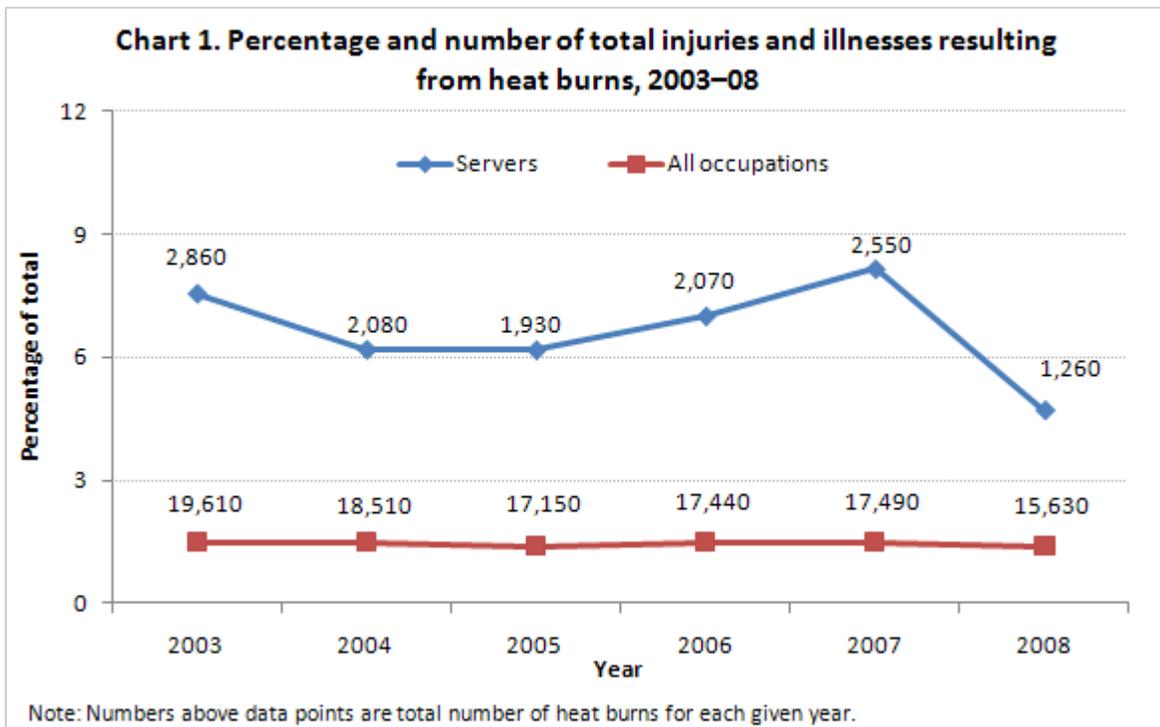
Length of service. Over 17 percent of the total injuries and illnesses to food and beverage servers in 2008 occurred to workers who had been with their current employer for less than 3 months. In contrast, for all workers, less than 11 percent of

injuries and illnesses occur to workers who have been with their employer for less than 3 months. Food and beverage servers tend to receive little job training, which may contribute to the difference. Food and beverage servers also tend to have less job tenure with their employers than other workers. In January 2008, the median years of tenure for food preparation and serving related occupations was 2 years, compared with 4.1 years for all occupations combined.⁸

Median days away from work. Nonfatal injuries and illnesses among food and beverage servers tend to be less severe than injuries and illnesses to other workers in private industry--the median days away from work for injured food and beverage servers in 2008 was 6 days, compared with 8 days for all occupations combined.

Nonfatal Injuries And Illnesses

The *nature* of injury or illness describes what type of injury or illness was sustained.⁹ From 2003 to 2008, sprains and strains, cuts and lacerations, and bruises and contusions were three of the four most frequently occurring injuries to food and beverage servers. Because they frequently handle hot items, food and beverage servers commonly incur heat burns, especially compared with other workers. In each year during the 2003-2008 period, heat burns accounted for less than 2 percent of injuries and illnesses to all private industry employees, but they ranged from 5 to 8 percent of all injuries and illnesses to food and beverage servers. (See chart 1.) In addition, food and beverage servers had an incidence rate of 3.3 cases per 10,000 full-time workers for heat burns in 2008, which was higher than the incidence rate of 1.6 for all occupations combined. However, the total number of heat burns involving days away from work for food and beverage servers fell from 2,550 in 2007 to 1,260 in 2008.



The *part of body* identifies the body part that was affected by the injury or illness. In the 5-year period from 2004 to 2008, injuries and illnesses to the upper extremities, which include hands, fingers, arms, and wrists, accounted for the most injuries and illnesses to food and beverage servers. In 2003, the trunk region and upper extremities of these workers were the two parts of the body most frequently injured. The number of injuries and illnesses to upper extremities was 9,760 in 2008 and 11,560 in 2003, with the estimates from 2004 to 2007 falling in between these two numbers. (There were 12,160 trunk injuries in 2003 as well.) More specifically, injuries to fingers among food and beverage servers increased relative to all occupations combined. In 2008, less than 9 percent of injuries and illnesses involved fingers for all occupations, whereas

more than 17 percent of injuries and illnesses among food and beverage servers were to their fingers, a number that has grown from 12 percent in 2003.

The *event or exposure* describes the circumstances of the injury or illness. Table 3 shows the numbers of injuries and illnesses to food and beverage servers that involved days away from work by event or exposure in total private industry from 2003 to 2008. During this period, *falls on the same level* were the leading event or exposure for injuries and illnesses to food and beverage servers. In 2008, these workers had an incidence rate of 18.6 cases per 10,000 full-time workers for falls on same level, while the incidence rate for all workers combined was 16.6. For all private industry, falls on same level made up less than 15 percent of total injuries and illnesses in 2008; however, the percentage was almost double that (over 26 percent) for food and beverage servers, as shown in chart 2. In 2004, falls on the same level accounted for nearly a third of all injuries and illnesses among food and beverage servers. Surprisingly, slips and trips, an event that would seem typical in a food and beverage servers work environment, occur about as frequently as such injuries occur among all occupations combined. In 2008, slips and trips accounted for 4 percent of total nonfatal injuries and illnesses among food and beverage servers, compared with 3 percent in all professions combined.

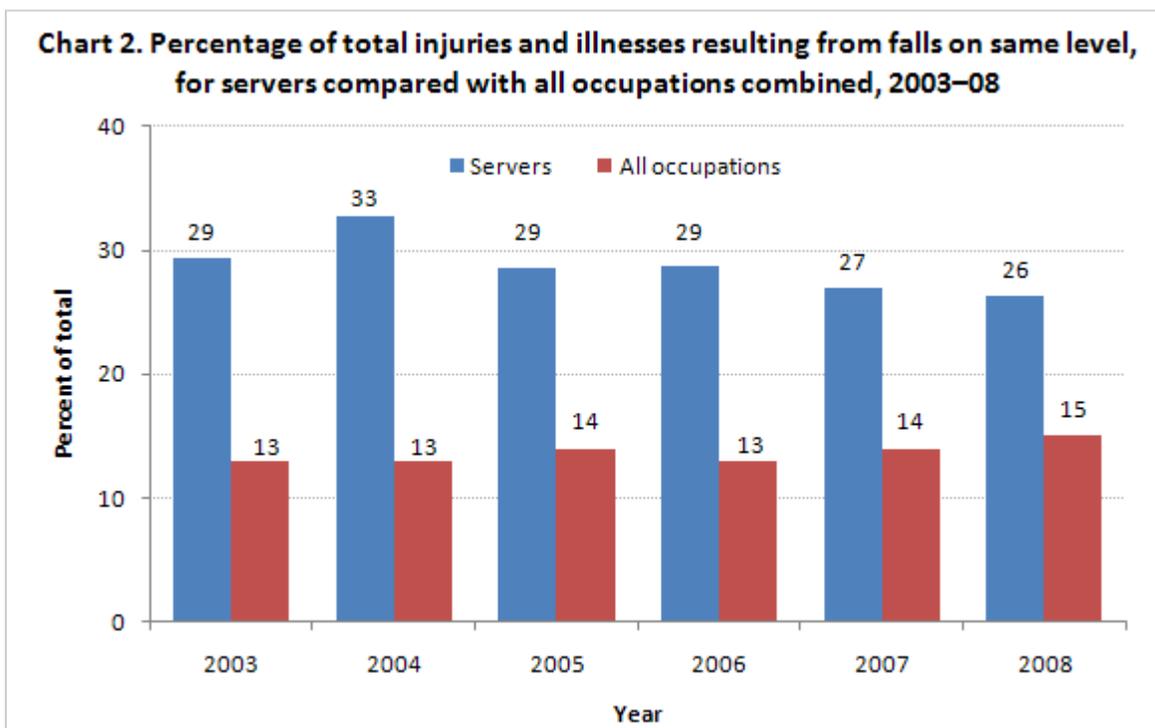


Table 3. Nonfatal injuries and illnesses to food and beverage servers involving days away from work by event or exposure, private industry, 2003-08

Event or exposure:	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Contact with object and equipment	10,080	9,450	10,220	9,040	9,920	8,920
Struck by object	4,710	4,880	5,160	4,980	5,000	5,050
Struck against object	3,690	2,990	3,460	2,620	3,170	2,560
Caught in object, equipment, or material	1,280	990	1,010	1,140	950	990

Note: Dashes indicate no injuries or illnesses of this type reported.

Event or exposure:	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Fall to lower level	920	900	600	670	890	590
Fall on same level	11,110	11,020	8,930	8,510	8,430	7,070
Slips and trips	1,830	1,230	1,460	1,770	1,820	1,190
Overexertion	6,290	4,540	4,210	4,200	3,800	4,260
Overexertion in lifting	4,310	2,970	2,770	2,790	2,680	3,090
Repetitive motion	1,130	810	600	520	740	350
Exposure to harmful substance	3,710	2,780	2,440	2,580	3,470	1,820
Transportation accidents	150	140	20	100	320	200
Fires and explosions	-	-	-	40	-	-
Assaults and violent acts	160	240	120	120	300	390
by person	160	240	120	110	260	390
by other	-	-	-	20	40	-
All other	2,480	2,550	2,700	2,020	1,580	2,040

Note: Dashes indicate no injuries or illnesses of this type reported.

While nature, part of body, source, and event or exposure can help paint a picture of how food and beverage servers typically are injured, it is also important to look at combinations of these characteristics to investigate how they interact to create an injury or illness.¹⁰ Food and beverage servers typically work at a very fast pace and experience nonfatal injuries and illnesses that are unique to this occupation. In 2008, sprains and strains and cuts and lacerations were the two most prevalent natures for food and beverage servers, so further examining these will give a more in-depth view of nonfatal injuries and illnesses in this occupation. Two examples, common for food and beverage servers, help to describe the inherent job risks to these workers. In 2008, there were 1,910 injuries and illnesses among food and beverage servers in which the nature was sprains or strains, the part of body was the trunk, the source was containers, and the event was overexertion (1,440 were overexertion in lifting). Straining or spraining the trunk region of the body while trying to lift a heavy container is a typical manner in which food and beverage servers are injured. Another typical injury or illness situation among food and beverage servers involves cutting themselves while handling sharp and dangerous utensils, such as knives. In 2008, these workers incurred 1,090 injuries and illnesses for which the nature was cuts or lacerations, the part of the body was a finger or fingernail, the source was knives, and the event was struck by slipping handheld object. Food and beverage servers often are cut on their fingers or fingernails by knives, which is a relatively uncommon injury in most other occupations.

Fatal Injuries

There were 141 fatal work-related injuries to food and beverage servers from 2003 to 2008, of which 59 percent occurred among men. This percentage is roughly twice mens share of employment in this occupation but still a smaller proportion than mens share of all fatal work injuries.¹¹ A look at detailed occupations shows that 42 fatal injuries occurred among bartenders during the 2003-2008 period, 59 occurred among fast food and counter workers, 36 occurred among waiters and waitresses, and 4 occurred among nonrestaurant food servers. Out of all the fatal injuries to food and beverage servers, about 59 percent were to white workers, 18 percent were to Hispanic or Latino workers, and 13 percent were to black workers.

Although the fatal injuries of many occupations directly result from the employees work activities, most fatal injuries that occur among food and beverage servers are the result of workplace violence. (See table 1.) Out of the 141 fatal injuries that occurred from 2003 to 2008, 97 were homicides, of which 64 were shootings and 14 were stabbings. There also were 8 cases of suicide or self-inflicted wounds. Still, some fatal injuries are directly related to the food and beverage servers job duties. For example, 20 fatal injuries that occurred during the period were the result of falls and 14 were the result of exposure to harmful substances or environments.¹² The secondary source of the majority of these fatal injuries--defined as the object, substance, or person that generated the source of injury or illness or that contributed to the event or exposure--is

of great interest because it describes the fatal work risk.¹³ In 27 of the fatal injuries, the secondary source was a robber; in 7 instances, it was a relative of the fatally injured worker; in 10 instances, it was a coworker or former coworker of the fatally injured worker; and in 3 instances, it was a motorized highway vehicle.

Conclusion

There are many workplace hazards for food and beverage servers, and many of these workers are young and have minimal work experience. However, nonfatal injuries and illnesses tend to arise from a completely different set of circumstances than fatal injuries. Most fatal injuries are homicides and thus are a result of workplace violence. Most nonfatal injuries are a result of job duties and typically result in sprains, bruises, cuts, lacerations, and an overrepresentation of heat burns. Also, food and beverage servers have to be especially careful when lifting heavy containers and handling sharp knives. Thus, data show that food and beverage servers are injured in different ways than other occupations. They are also nonfatally injured in very different ways than they are fatally injured. Men are more likely to incur fatal work injuries than their share of employment; women are more likely to incur nonfatal injuries and illnesses.

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End Notes

- 1 Employment projections for 2018 are from the [National Employment Matrix](http://data.bls.gov/oepl/nioem/empiohm.jsp), available at <http://data.bls.gov/oepl/nioem/empiohm.jsp>.
- 2 Employment statistics by occupation are from the [Occupational Employment Statistics \(OES\)](http://www.bls.gov/oes/2008/may/oes_nat.htm#(1)) program, “[May 2008 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, United States](http://www.bls.gov/oes/2008/may/oes_nat.htm#(1)),” available at [http://www.bls.gov/oes/2008/may/oes_nat.htm#\(1\)](http://www.bls.gov/oes/2008/may/oes_nat.htm#(1)).
- 3 Information about the work environment and typical work duties for food and beverage servers is from the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos162.htm), “[Food and Beverage Serving and Related Workers](http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos162.htm),” available at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos162.htm>.
- 4 Fatal injury data are from the BLS [Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries \(CFOI\)](http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshcfoi1.htm), available at <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshcfoi1.htm>.
- 5 All data on nonfatal incidents involving days away from work are from the BLS [Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses \(SOII\)](http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshcdnew.htm), available at <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshcdnew.htm>.
- 6 Data on employment by gender are from the BLS [Current Population Survey \(CPS\)](ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aa2008/aat11.txt), “[Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2008](ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aa2008/aat11.txt),” table 11, annual averages, 2008, available at <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aa2008/aat11.txt>.
- 7 Data on employment by age are from the BLS [Current Population Survey \(CPS\)](ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aa2008/aat15.txt), “[Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, and age](ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aa2008/aat15.txt),” table 15, annual averages, 2008, available at <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aa2008/aat15.txt>.
- 8 Data on median years of tenure are from the BLS [Current Population Survey \(CPS\)](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.t06.htm), “[Median years of tenure with current employer for employed wage and salary workers by occupation, selected years, 2000-10](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.t06.htm),” table 6, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.t06.htm>.
- 9 Case characteristics are categorized and defined in the coding system from the [Occupational Injury and Illness Classification Manual](http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshoiics.htm), available at <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshoiics.htm>.
- 10 The *source* identifies what directly caused the injury or illness.
- 11 During the 2003-08 period, about 93 percent of all fatal occupational injuries occurred to men.
- 12 These injuries include exposure to a caustic, noxious, or allergenic substance, or to an oxygen deficiency.
- 13 The secondary source is not always reported.

Data for Chart 1. Percentage of total injuries and illnesses resulting from heat burns, 2003-08

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Servers	7.6	6.2	6.2	7.0	8.2	4.7
All occupations	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.4

Data for Chart 2. Percentage of total Injuries and illnesses resulting from falls on same level, for servers compared with all occupations combined, 2003-08

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Servers	29	33	29	29	27	26
All occupations	13	13	14	13	14	15

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