

Employment of middle school students: Findings from the 2009 Massachusetts Youth Health Survey (MYHS)

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Background

- Official estimates of working teens only include 16– to 17-year-olds, although some data on 15-year-olds are available.
- In 2009, 19% of 15– to 17-year-olds in Massachusetts were employed at any given point in time. (Current Population Survey, 2009)
- Young people have about twice the rate of non-fatal occupational injury per hour worked than older workers. (Morbidity Mortality Weekly Report. 2010; 59(15):449-455)
- Most occupational health and safety interventions focus on high school students.
- Some studies indicate that younger youth are also working.

Objectives

- To learn more about how many and where MA middle school students are working and their injury experience
- To assess how well MA middle school students understood questions about work on the MYHS

Methods

- The MYHS is conducted every other year in conjunction with YRBS in a random sample of middle and high school classrooms throughout Commonwealth.

- MA middle school students in grades 6 through 8 were asked the following questions:

♦ **In the past 12 months, have you ever worked at a job for pay for someone other than your parent or guardian, NOT including babysitting or yard work?**

♦ **In the past 12 months, while you were working for pay, were you ever injured on the job badly enough that you needed to go to a nurse, doctor, or hospital?**

♦ **Which best describes the place you most recently worked at? (If you work in more than one place, choose the place you work the most hours.)**

- Restaurant (such as fast food, pizza places, coffee shops, ice cream shops)
- Grocery store or supermarket
- Other retail store (places where things are sold such as clothing stores, gas stations, pharmacies, pet stores)
- Health care facility (such as nursing homes, hospitals, clinics, doctors’ offices)
- Recreation or entertainment place (such as golf courses, camps, sports places, amusement parks, movie theaters)
- Construction site
- Landscaping company
- Other (describe that place: _____)

- Responses were weighted to be representative of all MA students.

- These questions were piloted with a sample of students prior to implementation.

- One author reviewed and coded responses on 479¹ ‘other’ narrative responses. These were further categorized into formal and freelance jobs.

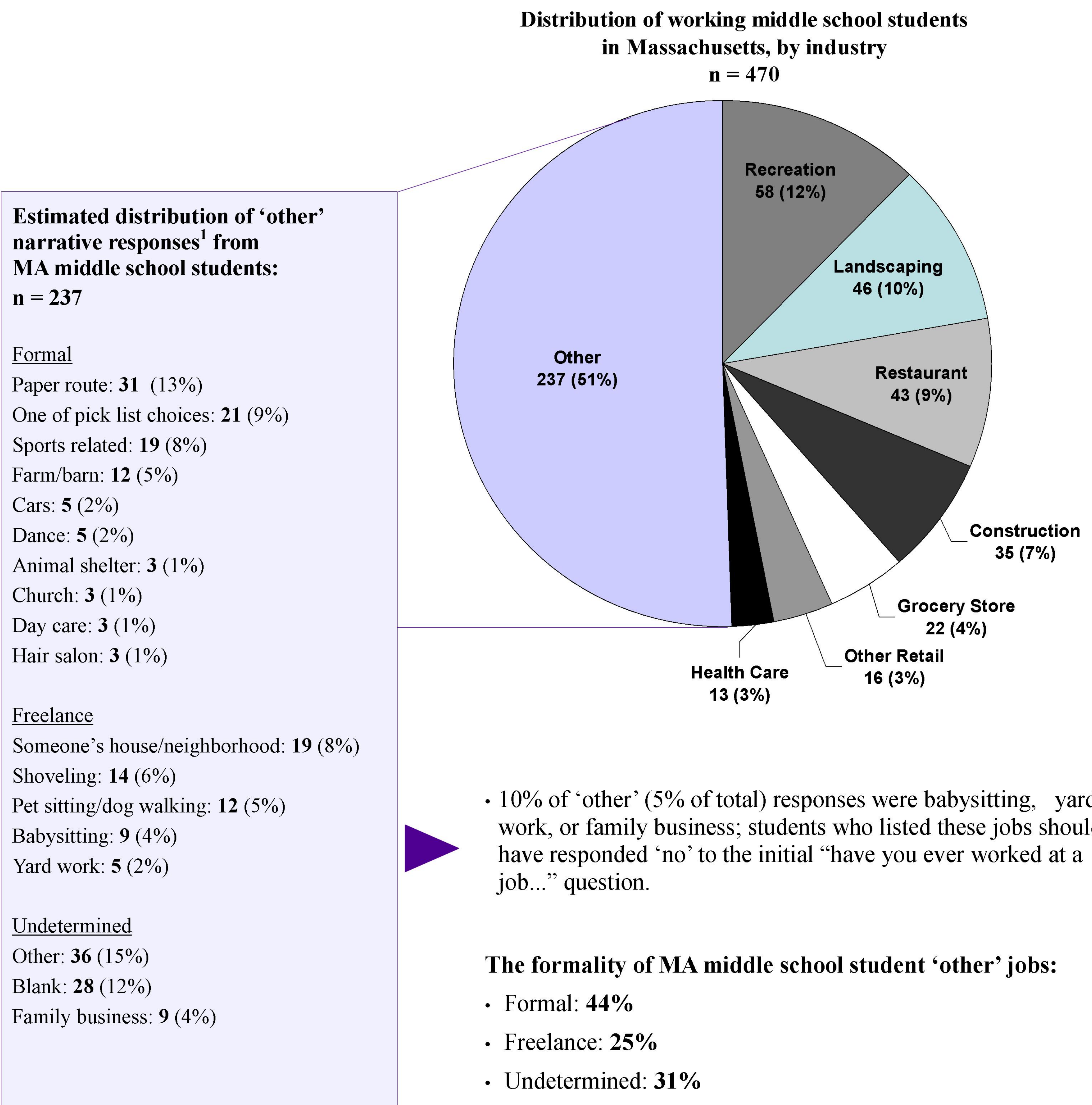
Results

Data were collected from 2,859 MA middle school students in grades 6 through 8, from 69 schools.

- Overall response rate (i.e., the school response rate multiplied by the student response rate): **56%**

- Students who responded they had been employed for pay in the past year: **18%**

- Of working students those who responded they had been injured badly enough at work to seek medical care: **5%**



Limitations

- Self-reported data and potential for recall bias.
- Small numbers did not allow for analysis by race, age, and gender.
- There was no external validation on questions about work or on the industry pick list.
- The results may not be generalizable to all middle school students in Massachusetts or the U.S.
- Confident analysis/interpretation of responses from students who reported working for a ‘family business’ was not possible (i.e. how many meant formal jobs in family business versus chores around the house).

Conclusions

- Many MA middle school students are working, and many in formal jobs that appear to violate MA child labor laws that prohibit most work for young people less than 14 years old.

- Survey questions appeared to perform well overall.

- The proportion of working middle school students who being injured was similar to that of high school students who worked in Massachusetts. (MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. 2009 Health & Risk Behaviors of MA Youth. February 2011, p.13)

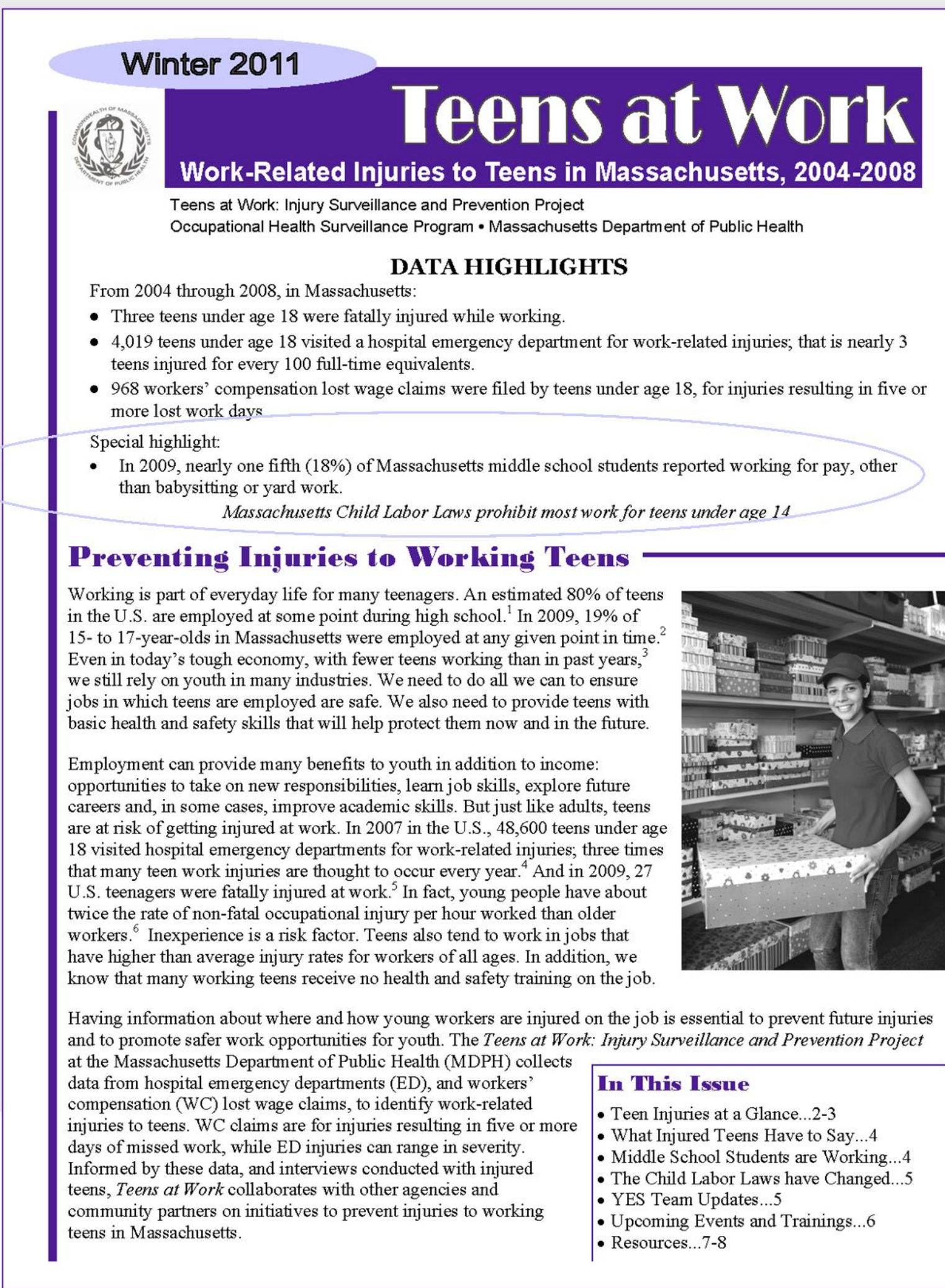
- Education about child labor laws and workplace health and safety for parents and students should begin before high school.

Future Directions

- Direct outreach to MA middle schools began in Spring 2011, for the first time.

- In the future, reword the survey questions in order to better distinguish between formal jobs, freelance jobs, and working in a family business versus working for a parent.

- Further analysis comparing work-related injuries to middle school students in formal jobs versus freelance jobs.



¹ These responses contain students not included in the final middle school YHS sample due to oversampling in some schools. The percentage of the 479 cases was used to extrapolate the distribution of ‘other’ in the final middle school YHS sample.