

Researchers examine construction accidents in Gulf region

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Inadequate training, limited use of safety equipment and a lack of government oversight contribute to deaths and injuries among construction workers in the rapidly developing Arabian Gulf region, also known as the Persian Gulf, a UT Dallas study found.

Three School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences researchers analyzed a sample of 519 incidents and interviewed safety experts to understand the types and causes of construction accidents in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The study was published online in the journal *Applied Ergonomics*.

UT Dallas researchers found that construction firms operate with limited safety regulations or enforcement in the region. The total volume of accidents was not available due to a lack of data, but enough accidents were described in the data analyzed in this study to allow the researchers to draw some conclusions.

The most common types of accidents involve workers falling or being hit by objects, which also are the most common types of construction accidents in other parts of the world. However, the causes are different.

"Construction is one of the most dangerous occupations in the world," said Dr. Simon Fass, associate professor of public policy and the lead author of the study. "In that part of the world, there's a confluence of several factors that likely make it worse."

The study found that nearly all the workers came from other countries, drawn by plentiful work in recent years due to the fast pace, high volume and large scale of construction on some of the world's tallest skyscrapers.

"They are working in groups that might have five or six nationalities and two or three languages, and they're supposed to be working as a cohesive team," Fass said. "But they cannot communicate effectively with a supervisor or each other, so that's really raising the risk of bad things happening."

In recent years, concern has grown for the risks these [construction workers](#) face, especially the treatment of migrants on construction projects with high external visibility, such as stadiums for international sports events.

Construction firms have had little incentive to make the job sites safer given the region's history of weak regulation and enforcement, Fass said. The mostly expatriate workforce has little political power and few means to seek recourse, such as litigation or unions.

"The money is good enough for them to come and send it back to their families, but they have no voice," Fass said. "They have no unions, no advocacy groups, no one to fight for stricter enforcement of safety regulations."

However, observers have recently reported small but positive changes in the direction of tighter regulations and stricter enforcement across the region. As this process expands, occupational health and safety of workers are likely to improve, Fass said.

More information: Simon Fass et al, Understanding causes of fall and struck-by incidents: What differentiates construction safety in the Arabian Gulf region?, *Applied Ergonomics* (2017). [DOI:](#)

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